

Blog 21

Stepping out, stepping in, stepping up

Here we go again, a second lockdown starts tomorrow (5 November). But it will be, and will feel, quite different from the first. The rules will be different, especially with educational institutions and child care continuing to function, and the readiness to make individual sacrifices for the greater good seems to be reduced. How can we rekindle the community-mindedness that appeared to pervade the first lockdown?

Perhaps we kid ourselves that we were all so unselfish the first time around. One rough measure my wife and I have used is the extent to which other walkers have kept out of the way when walking our dog along the many footpaths in this coastal part of Devon. Over the summer once lockdown was relaxed it was easy to blame visitors from towns who “knew no better”, but in fact from the start, when visitors were absent, by no means everyone took social distancing seriously when outside. Frequently my wife and I would have to step out into the road to keep even one metre apart from on-coming walkers. Rarely would a walker do the same for us.

But I suppose some empathy is in order. I recently had to undergo a hospital procedure. I had to have a Covid test and then self-isolate for two days before going into hospital. Stepping into self-isolation even for that period was not easy – not going for the daily paper, only walking the dog in the dark when no-one else was around – trivial inconveniences compared with the plight of those who have had to shield at home for months, yet still tiresome. And as I write this I am in the middle of a further week of self-isolation after the procedure. It is really bugging me!

But if we are going to stifle the spread of the virus we must all step up to the mark and obey the rules, whatever we think of them. Suggestions that we will just have to live with Covid as we live with flu’ fail to recognise the much greater virulence of Covid and its harshly unequal effect on different regions of the UK and on different segments of the population. We need to remind ourselves of the energy and determination of our forebears who took such herculean steps to improve environmental and social conditions, and develop vaccines and treatments that virtually eliminated killers such as cholera. We must not allow ourselves to be swayed by the siren voices of those who are taken in by fake news, conspiracy theories and bad science and seek to diminish the scale of the problem – or those who despair of any remedy being found. As the first time around, we are all in this together.