

## **Mayor's Annual Report 2021 for Virtual Town Meeting 6<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

The year began in the continuing lockdown as a result of Covid-19 pandemic; accordingly, the programme of events at which the mayor would normally take part was severely curtailed. Nevertheless, I undertook a solitary commemoration of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE-Day on 8<sup>th</sup> May at the War Memorial by laying a wreath and speaking the accustomed poem and Burma Epitaph on behalf of the Royal British Legion and the people of Faringdon. I also recorded an address to mark the end of the war in Europe which was posted on the Town Council website.

During the summer relaxation of lockdown, my first public event was the Saturday Market on 1<sup>st</sup> August followed by the commemoration of VJ-Day on 15<sup>th</sup> August. As before, I laid a wreath and said the address accompanied by representatives of the Burma Star and the Far East Prisoner of War Associations. I then gave a short address to mark the formal end of the Second World War.

Saturday markets continued until the beginning of October and it was a joy to see the efforts made by local people to provide entertainment and create some sense of normality, albeit masked and suitably distanced, in the fine summer weather. My thanks to Al Cane, David Reynolds and all those who provided music and collected for charity.

The end of August saw the closure of Faringdon Viral Kindness and it was my pleasure on 4<sup>th</sup> September to present awards to the team of volunteers who had provided this essential lifeline to residents who had been enduring self-isolation during the first period of lockdown. I subsequently nominated Al Sylvester and his team for a High Sheriff's Award.

On 12<sup>th</sup> September, a 'normal' mayoral activity: I was delighted to cut a ribbon to open the new nets at Faringdon Cricket Club. The next Saturday saw the first of several 'business-as-usual' Annual General Meetings when I 'attended' the AGM of the Oxfordshire Scout Council using the Zoom virtual platform. This was followed later in the year with virtual AGMs for Citizens Advice, The Place, Faringdon Community Bus and the Annual Lord Lieutenant's Presentation of Awards to members of the South East Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association.

On Monday 5<sup>th</sup> October the Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk and I met the High Sheriff of Oxfordshire, Mrs Amanda Ponsonby who, unable to welcome mayors and chairs to an event of her own, decided instead to visit all of the towns and larger communities in the county. We showed the High Sheriff some of the success stories of the Town Council including the Food Bank, the Information Centre, the Museum and Berners Exhibition in the Pump House, the Corn Exchange and the newly renovated space for The Place. We then walked to the Cycle Park to see the training facility created by Farcycles. She was suitably impressed!

Lockdown meant that we could not hold our usual Remembrance Day Ceremony, but I recorded a Bible reading for the All-Saints' Service on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> November and laid a wreath on 11<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 a.m. on behalf of the Royal British Legion and the people of Faringdon.

Just before Christmas it was my pleasure to sign 90 cards on behalf of 'Flowers from Molly' for the 'Boxes of Joy' distributed to deserving residents. I subsequently nominated Rebekah Pugh and 'Flowers from Molly' for a High Sheriff's Award.

In February, I attended the opening of Home Bargains performed by Councillor Judith Heathcoat on the Faringdon Retail Park and we were shown around the new Travelodge which will open this summer. Later in the month I took part in a virtual meeting with senior USAF officers regarding future developments at RAF Fairford. The base will be expanded with new buildings and an increase in US personnel most of whom will require accommodation off-base. It will create 124 local jobs.

At the end of February, I took part in the Lord Mayor of Oxford's virtual European Reception where 71 participants from across Europe and Oxfordshire celebrated Oxford's European links.

At the end of March, I was delighted to welcome the High Sheriff back to Faringdon where she presented her High Sheriff's Awards to Al Sylvester and Faringdon Viral Kindness, and Rebekah Pugh and Flowers from Molly. Mrs Ponsonby also visited the market and the Farcycles Pop-up Shop and congratulated Faringdon for its enterprise.

On 8<sup>th</sup> April it was my privilege to witness the virtual swearing-in of the new High Sheriff of Oxfordshire, Imam Monowar Hussein, for his year of office. Then on 13<sup>th</sup> April I took the opportunity of being the first customer for the long-awaited re-opening of the library as lockdown restrictions began to ease, and then visited the market which was well attended. Congratulations to the Town Centre Regeneration Working Party and Facilities Committee for the installation of the seats around the Old Town Hall which have been so well used throughout the year.

Despite lockdown the Town Council has carried on with its normal functions as far as Covid-19 restrictions have permitted. Meetings of the Council, its Committees and Working Parties took place virtually using MS Teams.

I'd like to express my gratitude to the volunteers and health professionals who have taken part in the Covid-19 vaccination programme organised by the White Horse Practice. The efficient way in which this has been expedited has been universally praised. Thanks to all who are taking part in this continuing operation.

Finally, I'd acknowledge the life and work of former District and Town Councillor Roger Cox who died on 27<sup>th</sup> March. Roger made a huge contribution to the people of Faringdon and the Vale of White Horse from his election in 2003 to his retirement as Leader of the District Council in 2019. He was always a reassuring presence and his knowledge and experience on council matters will be greatly missed not least for his singing in the Cotswold Voices choir. I would like to convey our condolences to Jess and to Roger's family for their loss.

### **Council highlights this year**

**The Foodbank**, run by Churches Together, relocated to the Jubilee Room and continued to function using Council staff. Christmas food parcels, in partnership with Rotary and The Place, were given to 75 residents. Gift parcels were given to many families thanks to the generosity of residents. Working in partnership with the Foodbank, the Place, Sovereign and SOFEA we are investigating a Community Larder where residents can buy a membership to access surplus food. It is hoped this will be launched in September 2021.

With the demise of the Faringdon Branch of the Women's Institute a rota was arranged for charitable and other bodies to place **flowers on the War Memorial** to honour the fallen.

The ground floor offices in the Corn Exchange were redesigned and constructed as a permanent base for **The Place Family Centre**. Although completed last year, lockdown restrictions had prevented opening but the first groups were able to access the new facilities on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> April to much acclaim. Congratulations to Carole Gough and her team and to all who made this possible.

**Christmas lights and the light trail.** Despite the restrictions not allowing our annual switch-on, the Christmas lights shone brightly in the town centre. The residents of Faringdon also excelled themselves in lighting their houses. Our Projects Officer developed a Christmas light trail around the town so everyone could enjoy them. We hope to replicate this annually.

**The Wilderness** is a designated wildlife area in a triangle of land adjacent to the Hobble footpath. Volunteer days were planned in March 2020 which couldn't go ahead. However; the Town Council staff have got on with cutting paths and replenishing hedges. Our first volunteer day will, we hope, take place this month.

**The Footpath and Snow Warden scheme** was launched this year with a few residents signing up, if you would like to know more or to get involved, please get in touch with the Town Council.

Town centre properties can apply for a **painting and planting bursary**. So far one business and one resident have taken advantage of the scheme, so please get in touch if you would like to know more.

In our **community survey** in 2021 you told us that the Town Centre Regeneration and Saturday markets were a high priority for residents. The Town Centre Regeneration Working Party has been extremely busy on your behalf, projects include:

- Installation of the Town Centre benches
- Replacement of the bollards on the OTH apron
- Installing Town Centre Planters
- Working with the Meanwhile Project to fill empty shops
- Making Saturday Markets weekly
- Preserving retail space in the Town Centre by working with developers

Our Projects Officer is working with Oxfordshire Community Learning and Abingdon and Witney College to bring a **Learning hub** to Faringdon. This will be run by residents for residents. A pilot course 'Knowing Me' launches on 10<sup>th</sup> May – so sign up NOW!

I'm thrilled that the **renovation of the Old Town Hall** has begun. Works will continue until August. This will include full refurbishment inside and out, with repainting and a new lift. A grant of £66,050 was received from FCC Communities Foundation, a not-for-profit business that awards grants for community through the Landfill Communities Fund. The remaining funds came from s106 developer contributions, the Faringdon War Memorial Trust and the Town Council.

A **CIL working party** has been launched to investigate how the town would like to see contributions to community infrastructure spent. You can find out how to apply for funds for your project on our website or by getting in touch with the Town Council.

A **Town Park fitness project** has been launched this month. Free fitness classes will take place on Saturday mornings throughout May. We are investigating

**improvements to Town Park;** outdoor classrooms and reflection spaces are being investigated. Is there anything you would like to see in the park? Get in touch and let us know.

**20 mph zone:** working with OCC Highways, the Planning and Highways Committee are bringing a pilot 20 mph zone to the centre of Faringdon.

A reminder to residents: **Civil parking enforcement** will be coming the Faringdon in 2021. We have a Parking Working party who can receive residents' concerns and raise them with the principal authorities who will be administering the enforcement. The WP are also investigating solutions to parking issues that they can then take forward to the Highways Authority so please get in touch if you have any suggestions.

Our **Information centre** has worked throughout the pandemic dealing with resident's enquiries; online, during lockdown, and in person when we could. They have developed new town centre leaflets and walks and a welcome pack for new residents. They have also recycled 1,000s of crisp packets raising funds for The Place. Please pop in and see our friendly staff. The centre is open mornings only at the moment but hopes to return to full days as restrictions are lifted.