Town Mayor’s Report to Full Council

27th June 2022

**18th May – Youth in Mind Conference, Reading**

The conference, discussing mental health in young people, was jointly presented by MIND (Berkshire and Oxfordshire) and by Berkshire Youth, with our friend Dave Seward taking a prominent part. I attended several sessions, mostly in the company of Garry Poulson, and managed to network with many local support organisations including Time to talk, No. 5, Samaritans, Kooth and Get Berkshire Active. Some or all of these may be able to contribute to any youth initiatives we come up with in the future. Literature on all of these is now held at the town hall for anyone interested.

**22nd May – Memorial Tree Dedication, St. Mary’s, Shaw**

Three cherry trees were planted and dedicated to (a) the 75th anniversary of VE Day, (b) the memory of those who suffered because of Covid-19 and (c) the celebration of the Platinum Jubilee. I was asked to plant the plaque for the latter. This was followed by Evensong and then tea and cake in the church hall. Spoke to everyone there and was given warm wishes for my Mayoral year.

**25th May – Tour of the Corn Exchange**

I was given a private tour of the Corn Exchange along with the Lady Mayoress and the Civic Manager. I was particularly impressed by the technical space behind the stage and by the tiny cinema up in the rafters behind the skylight in the top of the façade. I was invited to attend the memory café for a few minutes. The café is designed to stimulate the minds of people who are experiencing various forms of dementia. I took part in some music therapy where I was asked to perform a solo on some chime bars whilst sitting at a table with the cafe guests. Smiles and laughter followed, I can’t think why.

**26th May – Change of Command, RAF Welford**

I was invited, with other local civic functionaries, to attend the change-of-command of the base for the US 420th Munitions Squadron, to Major Preston G Smith. It was a fascinating ceremony with speeches and prayers and quite a lot of shouting. Apparently, they look after in excess of 8,000 “pineapples” at the base. None were featured in the refreshments, however, which consisted entirely of cake, which is becoming a theme.

**2nd June – Jubilee Party, Fairclose Day Centre**

I attended the Fairclose Day Centre for over three hours with the Lady Mayoress and the Mayor’s Attendant (or “Chain Attendant” as it said on his placename, which he thought sounded slightly lavatorial). We had a fantastic time where we were entertained by a steel band as well as by Winston Churchill and Lady Churchill lookalikes. The refreshments were excellent (especially the cakes). I managed to speak to everyone there, all of which were wonderfully impressed with Fairclose and what they do. I was also asked to judge the best hat. A bit of a thankless task this, as after I made my decision, at least two people wanted

me to explain why they didn’t win. Resolved to delegate judging decisions to the Deputy Mayor in future.

**2nd June – Jubilee Beacon Lighting Ceremony, Victoria Park**

A wonderful event and much credit should go to the entire civic team, but especially to Elisa, and to Brendon who braved the pond in order to light the beacon. I spent much of my time posing for photographs and handing out pin badges. Indeed, it took me more than an hour to walk half-way round the pond. My speech seems to have gone down well as I received an email from a member of the public saying they liked the tone and balance of it, which is encouraging. I felt uncomfortable being so much in the spotlight whilst my fellow councillors were mostly picking up litter. However, I will be there on litter duty next year for civic events. Also, the local sea cadets managed to collect a lot of money for the Mayor’s charities.

**3rd June – Jubilee Party, Winchcombe Place Care Home**

I attended this with the Lady Mayoress. Spent the time sitting (and dancing) with the residents and joining in with the entertainer singing wartime songs. Cake was particularly good.

**6th June – Jubilee Party, Newbury Speakability**

I attended the Speakability Monday morning meeting in full robes and chain with the attendant and the Lady Mayoress. My thanks to Barry for stepping in as attendant for the day so this could happen, and for going around the room speaking to all of the members. Got some delightful feedback from the members who were made to feel very special by the event.

**6th June – Castle School Photographic Exhibition, WBCH**

Unveiled a photographic exhibition at WBCH, the work of Dover Class at the Castle School for Students with a variety of learning difficulties. This was the culmination of some fantastic work organised by the Thatcham Photographic Society, particularly Ray Buckland, working with the kids. I handed out certificates to each of the kids individually and discussed each of their photos with them. After group photos with the class, we all went home happy.

**7th June – Armed Forces Briefing, Sandhurst Military Academy**

The briefing was for local civic leaders in Berkshire and Surrey. The Mayor of Thatcham and of Hungerford were also in attendance. We were briefed on the roles of the Army locally with special emphasis on the reserves and on cadets. Everyone in the room was either in uniform or wearing a pendant or chain. Made several useful contacts which the Town Council may find helpful in the future.

**9th June – Primary Schools’ Production “What Makes a Town?”, Trinity School**

I was invited to attend a performance about Newbury arranged by the Watermill Theatre Outreach department. Four individual plays were performed by Whitelands Park, Speenhamland, Robert Sandilands and Firtree. They were all a genuine delight and included a scene in the last play where the Mayor of Newbury flanked by his Deputy and Deputy’s deputy came out with such catchphrases as “Don’t you know how important I am?” and “I’m the Mayor of the best town in Berkshire”. I don’t intend to adopt these

phrases, but I did enjoy meeting the three kids for a photograph afterwards.

**11th June – SEWA Indian Charity Coffee Morning, Town Hall**

I have never seen such a large crowd for a coffee morning in the town hall, nor such a variety of ages from children to elderly. A large percentage were from the Indian Community but there were a significant amount of people there from other backgrounds. The home-made Indian food was fantastic and it was a delight to see such an inclusive event. The money raised went to the Castle school.

**11th June – Interview with Kennet radio**

I was interviewed for about 20 minutes on who I was and what the Mayor does, as well as being asked to select a track to play (which has always been an ambition of mine). I think I got across what we are trying to achieve and have had some good feedback since. The interview is still available on the Kennet Radio website.

**12th June – Family Fun Day in Victoria Park**

Thanks to the officers, especially Caroline and David, for all the work they put in to organise this event and to all the Councillors who volunteered to help out. I think it was a roaring success and we got great coverage in the NWN afterwards. I spent most of the day posing for photographs and making unprepared speeches, as well as presenting the prizes for the tennis competition and taking part in the Kennet Radio Yes/No game. The most common question I was asked was “Aren’t you hot?” and “Is that chain heavy?” Answer yes to both. The Deputy Mayor managed to get a photo of me queueing for ice-cream, which I’m sure will be used in the future. A small amount of money was raised for the Mayor’s Benevolent Fund.

**13th June – Talk on “Long Covid” Organised by West Berkshire Fibromyalgia Support Group, Shaw House**

I attended a talk on Long Covid where I learnt a lot of things in an hour that I had no idea about. I was asked to make a speech of thanks at the end for the main speaker Dr Dipak who presented a difficult and technical subject in an entertaining way without dumbing-down in any way. Main lesson: there is no correlation between the severity of symptoms suffered when contracting Covid and the severity of symptoms of Long Covid.

**15th June – Visit to Ukrainian Support Group, Newbury Baptists’ Church**

I visited the Ukrainian Refugee support group that meets every week at the Baptist Church, at the invitation of Gillian Durrant of Newbury Twin Towns. I spoke to a variety of Ukrainian people with various stories to tell. Without exception, they were all overwhelmed by the support they are receiving from their host families and by the warm welcome they have received from the town. One particular little boy was very impressed with the custard creams on offer. I gave them all the best wishes of Newbury town council and intend to go back in the future.

Cllr Gary Norman, Mayor of Newbury