

Civic Pride column - May 2021

by Charlie Birks, Mayor of Abingdon

Across the world this last year saw everyone's lives disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, and we found ourselves suddenly in the middle of some incredibly challenging times.

In Abingdon, amid the difficult restrictions and worrying times, it was a peculiar time to be Mayor, no social engagements, or events to attend, but endless opportunities to engage with the grass roots of our town, and witness time and time again remarkable acts of kindness and generosity of spirit. Abingdon saw a really heart-warming response to this crisis in the number of volunteers coming forward to form essential community groups and going out of their way to help protect our most vulnerable.

As we slowly emerge from the Lockdown this community spirit and kindness will be as important as ever to help get our town back to the thriving, busy and inclusive place we know and love. I look forward to seeing the Market Place used for events again, and we hope later in the year to hold our biannual clubs and societies day which will provide residents with further opportunities to get involved in the life of the town.

Abingdon has a terrific community spirit; so much is gained as a result of a desire to make things happen. To bear witness to many of the diverse groups across the length and breadth of our town is an inspiration.

As we slowly move on to a life that may in many ways be different, joining one of the many terrific groups and societies can be very rewarding. It doesn't always place a colossal demand on your valuable free time. Not only can you contribute to making the town a more enjoyable place to live, but you will gain a great deal of satisfaction.

It has been my immense pleasure to meet many of the fantastic people who make things happen in the town: Cadet units, Scouts, Cubs, Guides, Brownies, Civic Society, Friends of the Museum. All need members and volunteers, sometimes only in a small way.

Great examples of how working together in the community to make things happen include the support for the Carousel children's centre and the Kingfisher Canoe Club's new facilities.

We should forever be grateful for the spontaneous actions of over 400 volunteers in the Coronavirus Community Response Group, the Abimeds team who delivered prescriptions by cycle in our darkest times. Also the Foodbank and Community Fridge, who continue to help those in greatest need and to ensure food is not shared, not wasted.

The Town Council supports many of our wonderful organisations with grants through our Community Services Committee. As does Christ Hospital of Abingdon, Oxfordshire's oldest charity. And of course all we councillors give our service voluntarily so I feel confident in saying how fulfilling it can be to volunteer in the community.

I want to finish this by extending my thanks to everyone who played their part in battling this virus by staying at home and adhering to the regulations and guidelines.