

Mayor's Address

Town Meeting 10 April 2017

Ladies and Gentlemen, I'm pleased to report on some of the activities that I have undertaken since our last Town Meeting on April 11th last year, some 164 events from which I'll pick out just a few items

Last April saw the start of the celebrations for Her Majesty the Queen's actual 90th birthday, with entertainment in the market place. It also marked the 125th anniversary of the first season of Buscot Cricket Club, which was pleased to attend.

June saw the celebrations for the Queen's Official 90th birthday with an indoor street party in the Corn Exchange, entertainment in the market place, despite the rain, and a tea dance.

July started with the commemoration of the centenary of the start of the Battle of the Somme and ended with another successful FollyFest. Private Henry Blake who fell on the first day of the battle is now commemorated with the naming of Henry Blake Way on the new retail park. For me, the most spectacular event of FollyFest was the exhibition of 2,000 crocheted flowers, plants, birds, animals and insects made as part of the Pump House Project's Community Café involving 2,500 hours of work by 68 ladies with contributions from children who made clay animals and the 'Men in Sheds' who made the containers.

FollyFest itself was a great success; I was very proud to receive accolades from visitors to the town who have made the weekend of FollyFest an annual excursion to Faringdon.

In August I was very proud to present a basket of those flowers to our twin town of Le Mêle-sur-Sarthe on our bi-annual visit and explain that, although the project had produced such a wonderful display of flowers, the real significance was the friendship and community spirit that had been developed among those ladies some of whom, before taking part in the project, had been lonely, isolated and without a sense of purpose in their lives and how it had brought to them a new confidence and joie de vivre as well as a new skill. Well done the Pump House Project.

We also had our first outdoor cinema experience with a showing of Grease on Tucker Park, with some 600 people attending. Oh, those summer nights. Thanks to Sally and her staff.

November saw the referendum for the Neighbourhood Plan, thank you to those who voted and also a well-attended Remembrance Day.

In December, Festive Faringdon was also a great success with many people attending.

January to March saw the progressive opening of the retail outlets on Faringdon Park. This has changed the shopping opportunities for Faringdon from two stores in 2013 to five now. However, we are concerned about the impact on the town centre so we have employed a marketing consultant as part of the S106 planning gain from this site to promote the town. We had a stall on Faringdon Park for the three days after the opening of Aldi to encourage people to visit the town centre. Our observation was that many of the people visiting the retail park were from outside Faringdon.

The Town Team has done well in promoting the monthly Saturday markets that have increased the footfall and vitality of the town. It was particularly pleasing to welcome our friends from Le Mêle-sur-Sarthe who ran a stall at the December market entirely with their own funding. This was great success in raising funds for the Twinning Association.

The relocation of the Council Offices to the Pump House has proved to be successful; the Corn Exchange offices have been rented out to the Folly Newspaper to raise revenue for the

town.

We now have the Abingdon Citizen's Advice Bureau offering a weekly surgery in the Pump House on Wednesdays and this has been complemented by the Wantage Independent Advice Centre who have a fortnightly session on Thursdays.

The Pump House Project goes from strength to strength. I am a regular attender at the Wednesday morning Community Café and thrilled to see the range of activities that go on then and throughout out the week, including projects for people of all ages and abilities and especially those with difficulties. I was delighted that in February Lou Smith was acknowledged with a High Sheriff's Award for her work with the Pump House Project.

Throughout the year, we have seen consultations on the restructuring of Health Services, with the Part 2 plan affecting our part of the County still to be received. I have participated in these discussions on your behalf.

We have also seen the various proposals for unitary authorities with the latest being a county wide unitary supported by the County Council and the Vale and South Oxfordshire District Councils. Our view is that while we welcome the removal of unnecessary barriers to decision making, the reduction in the number of Councillors could exclude those who can't commit to what would be a full-time job.

As a result of the reduction in central government funding we have seen the County Council remove funding from children's universal services (i.e. non-statutory services) and the closure of Children's Centres. We felt very strongly about this as there is a need to support families who may have difficulties in their early years especially in providing the bridge with the statutory services for those in need. Accordingly, we have co-ordinated all the likely agencies and funding bodies to provide what will be known as 'the Place', Faringdon Children's project. This will not replace the Children's Centre, but will provide some support and activities for both parents, children and families and will be located in the Pump House Project.

M L H Wise
10-4-17