

**CHICHESTER**



**CITY COUNCIL**

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Mayor of Chichester: Councillor Richard Plowman

## An open letter from the Mayor – 9 March 2021

In an earlier letter, I described the pandemic as a runaway train. The vaccines seem to be applying the brakes and working well, even if Chichester did not have the best of starts and we had to fight for a central city site. The engine driver, the Government, has decided on a very cautious approach. The train is slowing, but the big dilemma is when to get off.

Having once had to jump from a moving Orient Express at Paris Austerlitz station (it's a long story), I can confirm that the only safe time to disembark is when the train has come to a complete halt. We still have some way to go, as the infection is still out there. So, once again, we must continue to follow the rules.

Thanks to all your efforts we in Chichester are nearly there. Current rates of infection are very low and St Richard's is no longer under pressure. The light at the end of the tunnel is growing brighter. Strangely enough, although I feel relief and protected after receiving the first jab, I do not yet feel *safe*. By the time I have my booster, more will be known about how effective the vaccines are proving and whether we are immune from infection, new variants and spreading the infection to others.

Many of you have contacted me with concerns about your second jab, partly because of the parallel systems of GP practice centres and NHS mass-vaccination units. If you chose to go to the latter, such as Brighton or Portsmouth, or were invited to go to St Richard's, you should already have your second appointment.

The same applies at Chichester's Westgate Centre, which has been set up as a mass vaccination centre, administering the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine.

Many of those in the first four priority groups, particularly the over 80s living in the city, found the journey to the centres in Selsey and Tangmere quite challenging. I have been working with the NHS to see if the second dose – mainly of the Pfizer vaccine - can be given in Chichester itself. Although we await confirmation, the Tangmere centre will close at the end of March and its activity will move to a central GP practice.

I also understand the vaccination roll-out has been going so well that you may be called by your surgery to report after a nine-week interval rather than the original 12 weeks.

This is all good news and, after a slow and less-than-satisfactory start, Chichester is now ahead of the game. Our thanks should go to the staff and volunteers at the centres for the great work they are doing.

Twinned with Chartres, France and Ravenna, Italy



I know many of you are disappointed with the 1% pay award for the frontline NHS staff. After all they have endured, putting their own lives on the line, they deserve better. Although the Government scored heavily with vaccine procurement, the brunt of poor decision-making in other areas has had to be borne by the NHS. At the beginning, when we knew nothing about Covid-19, it was inappropriate to criticise the Government. A year on, the mistakes have compounded themselves and the death toll is one of the highest in the world.

My eldest son's family is in Tokyo, so I have been following closely the pandemic in Japan. The contrast is startling.

Japan's population is 126million, of whom 38% are aged 65+ and therefore in the most vulnerable category. Covid-19 deaths (at the time of writing): **8,000**.

The UK population is 66million, of whom 19% are 65+. Covid-19 deaths: **124,000**.

Scientists have concluded there is nothing to suggest that the Japanese are inherently more immune to the virus. The low figure is the result of their government's strategy. The main factors seem to be a highly effective track-and-trace system run at a local level and a people accustomed not only to wearing facemasks but also to following rules.

My son and daughter-in-law continue to work from home and my grandson, Yuji, went back to school last September. I have little doubt that many parents and grandparents will welcome the return to England's classrooms on Monday. I am looking forward to meeting up with a friend for a socially-distanced *latte* in Priory Park.

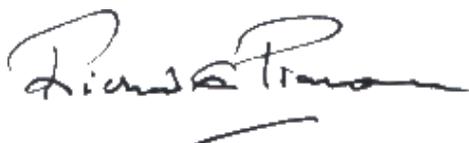
Finally, I wonder what the legacy of the pandemic will be. I hope the altruism, and the community working together, will persist. The lockdowns have highlighted how important family and friends are to us. Perhaps, too, our priorities towards the environment have changed, along with a clearer perception of the need to protect those special areas, such as the Harbour, which are in decline.

Meanwhile the **Mayor's Hardship Fund** (Telephone: **07740 621812**) continues to recognise those on whom the pandemic has had a devastating financial impact. Fundraising has been stepped up and if you can contribute, or need help yourself, please contact me.

I remain optimistic for the future. We now have a date of 30th September for that party I promised: it will be called 'Over the Rainbow'.

For now, please stay safe, well and strong.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Richard Plowman  
**The Mayor of Chichester**