

Mayor of Chichester: Councillor Richard Plowman

An open letter from the Mayor – 2 June 2020

I concluded my last open letter by saying: ‘**Use Common Sense and Keep Your Distance.** That is what I shall be doing, while remaining at home as much as possible.’ Now, as several lockdown measures end and the top scientific advisers warn that is a dangerous and risky time, we all have to take just as much care to protect ourselves.

So, it was very gratifying to visit a busier-than-ever Priory Park, bathed in sunshine, and to find those who had arrived on foot were behaving well and keeping their social distance. All showed great common sense.

After so many weeks I can only describe it as a joy to have a takeaway coffee latte from Fenwick’s café and talk in person to a good friend in the lovely surroundings of the Rotary sensory garden - socially distanced, of course.

However, I was disappointed to see the no-cycling rule being widely flouted, presenting a real risk in a crowded park, particularly to the toddlers. The same runs true for the city centre.

The Government’s promotion of cycling is welcome, but there are consequences. Bicycle sales have risen a massive 40% and even with the drop to 1950s levels of traffic on the roads during lockdown, cyclists’ accidents, particularly fatalities, have doubled. Road traffic is returning to pre-pandemic levels and construction traffic on St Paul’s Road, Orchard Road and Lavant Road has increased as building at White House Farm is under way again. I heard recently of a gentleman who had not ridden a bicycle for many decades. He bought a brand-new one, set off down his drive, wobbled, crashed into the gate, fell off and broke his shoulder. Hardly a help to the NHS!

There are initiatives for so called ‘pop-up cycle ways’, but the overriding issue is one of safety. There are now many cyclists who are inexperienced. Children are often seen on two-wheelers that are too big for them. How many riders will stop cycling to work when the weather is cold, wet and miserable, especially when social distancing will mean few spaces at work for changing? The City Council is heavily involved in this matter, and advice and training will be available soon to keep road users and pedestrians safe.

It was wonderful to see my friend and former fellow City Councillor, Trevor Tupper OBE, recover against all odds from the virus. He could not praise enough the staff at St Richard’s. Trevor was unaware he had Covid-19 until he was tested in hospital: he had thought it was the recurrence of an earlier pneumonia. I asked where he might have caught it and he put it down to a work meeting with a London-based manager. Trevor’s

case is rare and we are fortunate that the levels of the virus in Chichester are some of the lowest in the country. This has to be due in large part to the way the people in Chichester have faithfully observed the social distancing rules, with our community working together. The patient queues outside the shops in the city centre are good evidence of this.

The reopening of further retail outlets will make the distancing more difficult, so it is wise to wear a face covering while shopping. I prefer a face shield (cost £8), so I can smile at people – a tricky proposition when using my home-made mask. The face covering is not so much for your own protection, but rather to reduce the risk that you might unknowingly spread the virus to others.

Now that everyone may make day-trips anywhere in the country, the greatest risk for Chichester lies in its attraction as a tourist destination. Visitors may unknowingly bring infection into the area. We are all aware how easy it is to become infected. Fifteen minutes with an infected person at a distance of less than two metres in a confined space will probably result in your catching the virus. Picking it up from a contaminated surface and then touching the face is also a principal form of transmission. The thorough washing of hands is still the best way to protect yourself. For information or advice, do contact the **WSCC HUB** (Telephone: **033022 27980**).

The **Mayor's Hardship Fund** (Telephone: **07740621812**) has now helped many who were left with nothing as a consequence of the virus. There are some heartbreaking stories. If you need help, please do not be too proud to call: we are all in this together. If you wish to donate to the fund, there is an opportunity at GoFundMe:

mayorshardshipfund.chichestercity.gov.uk

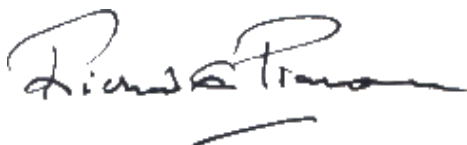
Finally, a big thank you to the residents' associations, churches and other community organisations, particularly the new Chichester Community Network chaired by Ash Pal, for their great work in making sure no one in Chichester falls through the gaps.

Stepping up also to the challenge have been the Clerk, officers and staff of the City Council. Despite new ways of remote working, the introduction of video conferencing and personal difficulties, they have managed to achieve and execute a good strategy for dealing with the Coronavirus crisis and kept the Council's business going. Their support to me as Mayor has been outstanding.

We will see at the end of this month whether **common sense and keeping your distance** has worked, or the brake has been eased too soon. Whatever the outcome, it will still be a long haul until a cure or vaccine comes along.

So please stay strong, safe and well.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Richard Plowman
The Mayor of Chichester