

CHICHESTER



CITY COUNCIL

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Mayor of Chichester : Councillor Richard Plowman

An Open Letter from the Mayor – 15 July 2020

Thank goodness both The Wife and I have managed a visit to the socially distanced hairdressers. A great weight has been lifted from our minds as well as from our heads.

In February, my elder son, Japanese daughter-in-law and much-loved grandson emigrated to live and work in Tokyo. The first cases of Coronavirus had just been reported there and we were worried, as the UK had yet to be affected. Six months on and how the world has changed. Japan has one of the lowest death rates: about 1,000, compared with 45,000 in the UK. How can that be?

Tokyo has a population of 37 million; hard-hit London has nine million. Japan has one of the world's largest proportions of elderly, and therefore most vulnerable, people. Unlike New Zealand, Japan had no mandatory lockdown or border closures. Restaurants, shops, attractions and workplaces remained open. So, what did the Japanese do differently and are there lessons to learn for us here in Chichester?

Japan's culture is very different from ours. There are no handshakes or open shows of affection. The Japanese are scrupulous about hygiene. They have a strong sense of collective community responsibility. The wearing of face masks is a way of life, to stop the spread of germs. Crime rates are very low and Japanese obey the rules and laws. The government asked people to take care, stay away from crowded places, wear masks and wash their hands – and, by and large, that is exactly what most people have done. Other suggestions of genetic or special immunity factors have been largely ruled out.

Japan announced a pandemic crisis early and its call for a voluntary lockdown proved extremely effective. One of the first measures was to close the schools. My grandson has not attended classes since February and, despite the nation's low levels of infection, will not return until September. In the UK, mainly to protect the economy, schools were last to close down. We now know that children and young people can be the vectors for spreading the disease, even though they show no, or mild, symptoms.

Like the UK, Japan did not do much testing by comparison with Germany and South Korea. However, since the tuberculosis outbreak in 1950, Japan has had a highly sophisticated track-and-trace system. Most sources of infection, originating in indoor environments with close contact and people shouting or singing, were quickly identified. After 8pm all entertainment, bars, nightclubs and restaurants are closed.

The Japanese authorities warn people to avoid crowded places, enclosed spaces without adequate ventilation, and close-contact situations such as face-to-face conversation. Finally, they suggest the wearing of a mask to protect others from infection.

Twinned with Chartres, France and Ravenna, Italy



I think that as far as advice on avoiding the Coronavirus is concerned we shall, like the 1980 song, be *Turning Japanese*.


Chichester, in common with Japan, has done well, with low infection rates. However, the virus remains ready and waiting for the right conditions to return and there is deep concern about a possible second peak once autumn arrives. We must remain vigilant, use common sense and keep our distance.

The **Mayor's Hardship Fund** (Telephone: **07740-621812**) has now helped many who, as a consequence of the virus, were left with nothing. If anyone reading this needs help, please do not be too proud to call. We believe the demand may increase soon, as the economic effects of the pandemic bite hard.

Full details of the Chichester Community Network scheme will be launched soon. You can help by donating your old smartphones, tablets and laptops. These will be re-conditioned and the Rotary Club of Chichester will arrange collection and distribution to those in need.

Remember, for information or advice, do contact the **WSCC HUB** (Telephone: **03302-227980**).

Please stay safe, well and strong.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Plowman', with a horizontal line underneath.

Richard Plowman
The Mayor of Chichester