

Mayor of Chichester: Councillor Richard Plowman

An open letter from the Mayor – 22 June 2020

Let me start by offering warmest thanks to all those who wrote saying how they find my open letters to be honest, reassuring and helpful. In this I take inspiration from the very personal style of the late Alistair Cooke and his weekly 'Letter from America' on the radio. It seems that listening figures for radio have increased dramatically during the pandemic – further justification for our fight to save the local station, Spirit FM.

My early-morning companion during lockdown has been Classic FM. One day Alexander Armstrong asked listeners about their experience of losing access to a hairdresser. This is a real issue affecting us all, but particularly the ladies, as demonstrated by the female presenters on television. Some of Armstrong's listeners said they had taken matters into their own hands and, for 2020, several new styles have emerged: the highland cattle; the urchin, for those who didn't know when and where to stop; and, for gentlemen slightly thin on top, the 'Albert Einstein' or 'Ken Dodd' is all the fashion. Unfortunately, there is still a little time to wait for that elusive professional coiffure so pig-tails, hair-slides and Alice bands have been making a comeback; as has the all-concealing headscarf.

I am afraid my last letter was considered by some cyclists to be adversarial. That was not the intention: my priority is the safety of all. It did, however, prompt a useful discussion with the Chairman of the Chichester Cycling Forum and we shall be working closely together on cycling schemes and training.

Long before the coronavirus struck, one of the great attractions of Chichester for those moving here was that they felt safe. People from London and other cities were amazed to see the Mayor, with his resplendent chain, walking unprotected and unconcerned through the streets. Avoiding the virus by strictly adhering to the Government rules on lockdown has protected others as well as ourselves. Indeed, many of us only really feel secure behind our own front door. Maybe it is true that an Englishman's home is his castle.

Some of us have now enjoyed the first taste of freedom in meeting other members of our family or friends, and I have witnessed many joyous reunions between grandparents and grandchildren in Priory Park, where social distancing and litter-removal have been admirably observed.

The city centre has opened up for non-essential retail and the shops have made a real effort to ensure you are safe from the virus. The windows are attractive, with many good offers, but the early evidence suggests we customers are reluctant to return. Why? The data shows that Chichester is probably one of the safest cities, thanks to the community obeying the guidelines and looking after the most vulnerable; but some, especially the

elderly, have had their confidence eroded by the Government advice and actions, which they find confusing.

The truth is we will probably not feel 100 per cent confident until there is a cure or vaccine. That is completely understandable. However, it remains vital to observe the advice on social distancing and follow any advice and guidance given to you, especially in the shops, to minimise risk and to keep it that way.

It is imperative that we return to our fine, historic city centre and support local businesses, especially the independents, which were having a rough time even before the coronavirus hit. To wear a face-covering while shopping is wise and is now compulsory on public transport. At the market cross, Rotary has 'planted' a tree of colourful homemade masks which are available for a voluntary donation to the **Mayor's Hardship Fund** (Telephone: **07740621812**).

The fund has now helped many who were left with nothing as a consequence of the virus. If you need help, please do not be too proud to call: we are all in this together. And if you wish to donate, there is an opportunity at GoFundMe:

<http://mayorshardshipfund.chichestercity.gov.uk>

Remember, for information or advice, do contact the **WSCC HUB** (Telephone: **033022 27980**). The new Chichester Community Network has identified people of all ages who are excluded because they lack access to the internet, so a scheme is being set up where you can help by donating your old smartphones, tablets, laptops. These will be refurbished and distributed to those in need. I have at least two old tablets and a smartphone in the cupboard . . .

Please stay strong, safe and well. With luck, it won't be long before I join you in the patient, socially-distanced queue for the hairdresser.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Richard Plowman
The Mayor of Chichester