

Mayor's report to the Annual Town Meeting held on Monday 15th April 2019

My tenure as Mayor has been an uplifting experience but also a very busy time. So far throughout the year myself, or my deputy Cllr Radley, have attended over 40 civic events in addition to the large number of general meetings necessary to chair the Town Council and help steer ship Halstead in the right direction.

I would like to thank all the staff and Council members for their help and support during the year, especially our Town Clerk, who has been instrumental in guiding this Town Council to successfully achieve the Foundation Level of the Local Council Award scheme.

As a town we have had much to celebrate this last year, despite the uncertainty of change, growth of house building, ongoing causeway discussions, and changes seen in our high street shops.

We have, for the 10th year in a row, achieved the Anglia in Bloom Gold award and Best Town award. It was a proud moment for me join the Halstead In Bloom Team at the award ceremony in Bury St Edmunds to celebrate their success. The Bloom team does a fantastic job to ensure that our Town looks beautiful all year round and this Council supports and thanks them for their continued effort in achieving this.

We have a thriving Twinning Association. It was an honour to be able to present a gift to the Mayor of Haubordin, in France, for 35 continuous years of Twinning, although I'm not sure if my French speech was up to much!

The Empire Theatre is going from strength to strength, this last year expanding its portfolio of activities to now include dementia friendly films, whilst continuing to bring to our community bingo, varied cinema and theatre productions, bands and gigs...all manner of entertainment for both young and old alike.

Our fantastic public gardens are used throughout the year to run events, which have this year included Guys in the Park, May Day celebrations, and Bands in the Park to name but a few.

We had another brilliant Torchlight procession, albeit a little damper than in previous years, but over 800 people still came out and enjoyed this unique event. We also had a fantastic carol service and switch-on of the Xmas lights, again very well attended despite the unkind weather.

The Shops, despite a difficult economic picture nationally, continue to breathe life into the Town and without whom we would have to travel further for those things we need to buy. I'd like to thank those traders that supported various events this year with their generous donations, and to thank the chamber of trade who did an excellent job of organising, alongside many other volunteers, another successful Xmas Fayre.

I am very pleased that the HAPPY Team (Halstead Action Promoting Positive Youth), formerly known as the Halstead Youth Council, has seen an increase in membership and has become actively involved in helping with many of the events held in town this year. Attending their dementia awareness training was eventful and am pleased to say they all passed. They are now looking at more ways to help bring a positive message about Youth into our Town.

In my civic duties I have been very fortunate to be able to visit, see and be part of the wide-ranging variety of clubs, associations, groups and organisations that this Town has to offer. Our Town is blessed with an army of volunteers that freely give up their time and effort to make the Halstead

community so strong. The list is too long to name them all, but without them our Town would be a very different place to be. My thanks go to all of them for their support during this year.

It has been an important year full of remembrance, as a Town we celebrated those that gave their ultimate sacrifice for our country. The Royal British Legion and Churches Together made our Town proud with the services, events and commemorations they held. I want to thank HIB for dedicating an end of WW1 flowerbed in the public gardens and to thank those that helped with, and celebrated, the public gardens becoming a dedicated centenary field. I cannot forget the visually stunning poppy displays of both Trinity Church and the Library steps which brought together Schools, the Adult learning Group, rainbows, brownies, guides and the local nurseries, with many other volunteers, to create these amazing spectacles.

Throughout my time as Mayor and Chairman of Halstead Town Council I have represented Halstead in many civic events and meetings, strengthening our ties with our nearby Towns, as well as with our District and County Councils. I would like to thank the many Chairs, Mayors and elected officers I have met and dealt with for their guidance and support.

I would like to thank the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Finance committee, Cllrs Radley and Gronland, and Planning Committee, Cllrs Hume and Pell, for their hard work during the year. It is no easy task understanding and presenting to voluntary Council members the complexities of the finances of the Council, which are in good shape as a result of their efforts, nor is it easy to steer members through the myriad of planning applications that we see each year. We as a Council are only Consultees to Braintree and whilst we try to do the best for Halstead it is Braintree who make the final decision on all planning matters.

Before I finish, I'd like to say a few words about the hard work that has gone into the recent release of the Halstead Town Plan. The results of a survey sent to all households took a great deal of time and effort to analyse, work out an action plan, and formalise into a brochure ready for its release. In thanking all Councillors for their involvement, as well as The Colchester Institute on the design, I would like to acknowledge Cllrs Gronland and Radley for being the principal Cllrs in bringing this document to fruition. It is available from the Town Council office, online on the Council website, as well as copies that have been distributed to public places in Town such as the Library, Hospital and various shops.

Halstead will see changes as the years progress, but the Town Council, its members and staff, care deeply about this Town, and will continue with the best of their ability to do the right thing for the Town wherever possible.

As my closing remark, let's all continue to be proud of what we have and all do our best to keep our community together and our Town a wonderful place to be. It has been a privilege to serve the Town as Mayor and I would like to thank everyone again for their support. Thank you.