

Parish meeting of Abingdon-on-Thames

Report of the Mayor

2 March 2023

It's something of a tradition that Mayors begin their report with a comment about what an exceptional year it has been. If only a handful of years could lay claim to such a title, then 2022-23 should certainly be one of them. We have not only had the joys of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee with our own Meadow Festival and traditional Bun Throwing but also the sombre season of the passing of the Queen, marked by opening our Book of Remembrance, a moment of reflection and a Civic service, followed by the Proclamation of King Charles III. And we are to round off this civic year with His Highness's Coronation, Fun in the Park and a further Bun Throwing. Truly a year like no other!

As I have spent this year representing not just the Town Council, but the whole community of Abingdon, I have been able to speak with people in similar roles not just in surrounding parts of Oxfordshire but across the UK. It's easy to think that a community of our size is bound to have a great community spirit, but that isn't necessarily the case. So as I've represented you at groups of Scouts and Guides and the local Air Cadets, at meetings of our vibrant Town Twinning group, and with small local charities and newly established businesses, I've been able to thank them for making Abingdon such a community-focused place, where people feel that they truly belong.

But we should never take this for granted, and so I chose that the theme of my year as "belonging" and have been delighted to work with two wonderful charities that work with people that can so often find themselves marginalised in our society. The Archway Foundation celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2022 works with people damaged by loneliness – who may find (because of infirmity, mental health or another issue) that they don't see anyone other than an Archway volunteer or at an Archway group from one week to the next. Yellow Submarine is a newer organisation that works with teenagers and young adults with learning disabilities or autism and not only puts on activities and holidays but runs training schemes to provide ways into employment for their young people. Their cafes in Oxford and Witney are truly excellent and are highly recommended!

Your Town Council has made it a priority to address the climate emergency and it's great to see the community at the heart of our work on this, with the One Planet Abingdon Climate Emergency Centre in the basement of the County Hall museum and work on a community woodland. Our support for children and young people through the Carousel Children's Centre and our partners in the integrated youth project, the Abingdon Bridge and Damascus is such that they tell me that what we have set up is now held up at national conferences as an example of how things can be achieved. Through 2022 we have welcomed a number of refugees from the war in Ukraine and other conflicts, and again the community has stepped up to welcome them and meet their needs.

These are just a few examples of working in partnership across our town, but there are so many more organisations that we should be thankful for – Christ's Hospital, the Civic Society, the friends of Abingdon Abbey Buildings, and the ATOM festival, our drama clubs as well as the energetic Park Run and cycling clubs, to name but a few.

So as I conclude, can I take a moment to thank each of you and everyone in our town for all that you do to make Abingdon a place where people feel they belong – whether they have lived here for decades or moved here only a month ago. You make Abingdon the inclusive place it is.

Cllr Andy Foulsham
Mayor of Abingdon