

Mayor Making 2016 – Councillor Tim Harries Speech

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, assembled mayors, fellow councillors, friends and family, thank you so much for being here tonight.

I would like to thank my proposer and seconder, along with the whole council, for supporting me in this my third mayoral year. A special thanks also to the Town Council staff who do a prodigious job both professionally and with good humour.

Robin and Val have done a tremendous job over the past twelve months and I only hope myself and Anita can do half as well. I know Robin will be a supportive deputy, despite some inner turmoil. I recall in his speech last year he mentioned the plight of his beloved Sunderland Football Club. Well, we are with you in spirit, Robin And once again the theme tune from the Great Escape rings out!

Dorchester is a vibrant, resilient town which is still growing. Poundbury will soon house the relocated Damers First School and in addition to lots of new housing there are plenty of interesting shops and cafes to explore. Brewery Square is another jewel in our increasingly expanding crown, a development which has utterly transformed the town, especially the night-time economy. Add into the mix the prison site which will, I am sure, be developed sensitively, and you can see our town has a lot going for it.

The office of Mayor is non-political and I shall of course respect that during my year in office. However, I trust you will forgive me for sounding off a little something completely alien to me! – on several matters I know exercise many people, because they tell me. Then it is done and we shall all move on in the spirit of reconciliation and common humanity.

I mentioned resilience, and of course two of these developments result from the closure of, in our terms, very large employers namely the prison and the brewery. Hopefully we can at long last see some light at the end of a very long tunnel as regards the Charles Street saga, a saga that began about the time my son Roland was born – and he is now 44!! With the District Council now under new leadership, a spirit of co-operation has broken out and we can but hope for a better future. The South West Audit Partnership, reporting on the latest Simons fiasco, found there was a lack of clarity, transparency and communication. It was felt there was little reporting to members and oversight decisions appeared to “arrive” rather than through discussion and consultation. The previous leader of West Dorset District Council said there has never been any suggestion it has been badly or inappropriately handled. In the words of Martin Luther King Jnr: “Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.” No more need be said.

However, on May 5th we had our own West Dorset referendum to change the current system of governance, a change which would make the District Council more accountable. Not only did 64% vote in favour of change, a 32% turnout was achieved. Given the only other election taking place was for the Police and Crime Commissioner, this is truly outstanding. Well done to “People First”, an indication that democracy lives and tenacity works.

The District Council, to its credit is, along with most other Councils and many, many members of the public, ready and willing to provide succour to distressed refugees from war-torn countries. We all just await some humanity and leadership from Government. In late April it was announced that this country would take in up to 3,000 refugees from the Syrian region by 2020. This computes to 750 a year or two a day. However, on April 26th the House of Commons voted not to allow any of the 3,000 unaccompanied children already in Europe into this country. The MP's for West Dorset and South Dorset were amongst the “no's”. They have their explanations – don't they always? We can only hope they have a conscience. Thank heavens the Government has been shamed into a u-turn of sorts. There still appear to be gravely inadequate resources put aside, and – the first children will not

arrive until December! The matter is urgent, these children are alone, local councils are ready, albeit underfunded, so why the delay? I have to say I personally find the response so far from the Government craven and shameful. Only those who see the eyes of small children in the refugee centres will be able to recognise the bankruptcy of humanity, a remark made by a United Nations Aid Worker distressed by their plight. They cannot help themselves, yet still we turn our backs on them

You can't fail to notice that local government is in a greater state of flux than normal at the moment and with the future not certain, town councils, of which obviously we are one, are preparing where possible to try and keep vital services functioning. Dorchester, to give two examples, has put money towards the local Youth Club, which was under threat, and facilitated a management structure, with partners, to hopefully keep it viable. We are also in the early stages of identifying Town Council land where housing could be provided for local young people. All this work, and more, is thanks to our excellent Town Clerk, supported by his equally excellent staff. Council staff have even provided hedgehog houses which meet, I am reliably informed the British Hedgehog Society's highest standards. They are affordable as well, apparently!

This year sees a number of anniversaries. Her Majesty was 90 this year and also became our longest serving monarch. I know we all congratulate her and wish her well. 2016 marks the 100th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, with appalling loss of life. A lesser known centenary is that of the Battle of Kut, in Mesopotamia, which involved the 2nd Battalion Dorset Regiment, and included the first air-drop of relief supplies in history by 30 Squadron the Royal Flying Corps. It is also 50 years since England won the World Cup a feat I fear may not be repeated in my lifetime. More locally, we are celebrating 50 years of Ridgeway Radio, an anniversary which may pop up during my year in office, and 100 years of Dorchester's Chamber of Trade and Commerce.

Anita and I will be supporting three local charities this year. This does not mean that we won't do our level best to help others as much as we can, and of course try our hardest to respond positively to every invitation. If we are done the honour of receiving an invitation we'll do our utmost to repay that courtesy. One of our three charities is the Dorchester Social Stroke Club, which does tremendous work with stroke survivors, their families and carers, creating a friendly atmosphere in which they can socialise, enjoy various activities and take part in outings and coffee mornings. Started eight years ago by Anita and Jackie Sherfield, it goes from strength to strength. The Dorchester Poverty Action Group seeks out causes of poverty and finds ways to tackle them. Grants of up to £150 are made on request from agencies such as health workers, social workers and other care agencies, and go to local people in urgent need of financial assistance. The third charity is The Keep Military Museum, dedicated to our local regiment, one of the jewels in the crown of Dorchester and definitely worth a visit. It not only provides a fascinating and informative insight into the history of the regiment, from the 39th and 54th of Foot to the Dorsets, the Devon and Dorsets and more recently the Rifles, but also supports in many ways current and past service personnel.

I have appointed a Mayor's chaplain, the Reverend Thomas Woodhouse, who very graciously accepted the post, and will be holding a Mayor's Service on October 9th in St. Mary's Church. This service will encompass members of all faiths, and indeed none, and I hope will be a small effort on our behalf at mutual understanding and reconciliation. Many of us are not religious in a formal way, and that includes myself, but I feel a service is an opportunity for people from all walks of life to meet and give thanks for the many charities and other organisations who work tirelessly on behalf of others. We are the county town, a town which prides itself in its achievements, and this will bring everyone together in recognition of this. We have a number of other events planned in support of our charities, so do keep your eyes peeled and give them your support. We both hope they will be fun – and there will definitely be a few surprises!

Finally may I offer, sincerely and humbly, a few words which I trust may help in one of the great historic decisions of our time, a decision to be made on 23rd June.

“We are prepared to consider and, if convinced, to accept the abrogation of national sovereignty, provided that we are satisfied with the conditions and the safeguards national sovereignty is not inviolable, and it may be resolutely diminished for the sake of all men in all the lands finding their way home together.”

The words of Winston Spencer Churchill And perhaps I should take the opportunity to end with a few more words from the great man. “A good speech should be like a woman’s skirt. Long enough to cover the subject and short enough to create interest.” Thank you.