

## An open letter from the Mayor – 16<sup>th</sup> November 2020

I think the reality of another lockdown took all of us here by surprise. The infection rate in Chichester was low and although it had started to creep up, there seemed little justification for a drastic action which leads to despair among City Centre businesses.

Are we back to square one with the pandemic? The answer to that is no. The first lockdown worked. The infection rates and deaths did fall. It bought us time and gave us a valuable respite during the long summer days: time to find out more about the virus; how it spreads; who is most vulnerable and what clinical treatments and drugs work best. Time to develop that all-important vaccine.

There is no doubt another lockdown will save lives, buy further time and perhaps allow another respite at Christmas. The festive period is so important for our friends, our families and our own wellbeing.

The crucial difference this time is that the schools, colleges and universities remain open. Inevitably, therefore, the slowing of the virus will take longer. Our University, College and schools here in Chichester made stringent preparations for Covid-19 and acted quickly to prevent any spread of the few infections that were found. St Richard's and the NHS are far better equipped this time and a new testing station has sprung up in the Northgate car park.

The great community support is in place. We are ready, but I expect the Government's end-of-term school report will have a similar entry to one I had for PE (Physical Education). It read: 'C-. Tries hard but lacks any ability in this subject.'

We know from our initial experience of lockdown that, strangely enough, it gives a kind of reassurance. You know exactly what is expected of you, without the plethora of different rules and regulations. When locked down you know no one can infect you and you cannot pass on the virus.

Now, however, it is winter, which means less time in the garden or allotment if you are lucky enough to have one. We still need to take daily exercise and, with reduced sunlight, I shall be taking those vitamin D tablets to help boost the immune system. None the less I can think of no better exercise on a cold winter evening than to stroll into Chichester with its streets and Christmas tree all brightly lit and sparkling in the crisp air. Where else would one rather be? OK - on a beach in the Bahamas might do, but that will have to wait for now.

As I said in my introduction, this second lockdown will seriously affect the businesses who are struggling to keep going. There is the real prospect that many will not survive after losing the opportunity to trade during so much of the all-important run-up to Christmas. So, I urge you to shop locally however and whenever you can. Without our help I genuinely fear for the future of the city centre.

Also do seek out those special gifts from our self-employed local artists and craftsmen. Unfortunately, I couldn't stretch the finances to buy one of the exquisite sculptures by Philip Jackson which were on show at the Oxmarket Gallery at the end of October, but a wealth of wonderful work, suiting every pocket, is being produced in the studios which proliferate in the Chichester area.

I would just like to say thank you for all those in Chichester who remembered the fallen from home. I was thinking of you as I laid wreaths at the three war memorials at Portfield Cemetery, West Street with the lovely poppy display from Central School and the main war memorial in Litten gardens. This was a very different Remembrance Sunday but equally moving. There was great uncertainty but in the end around 200 were there in Litten garden and all socially distanced. I was glad to have Rodney Duggua, the Clerk at my side. Thank you all for your support and we did remember them.

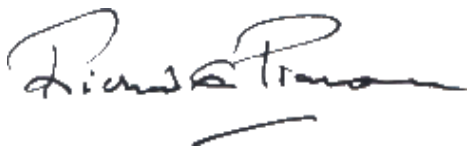
I would also like to thank film maker Clive Hand and Gareth Bowen of the City Council for the excellent and moving film of the full service now available on the Chichester City Council Web site.

Finally, I believe there is light at the end of this distressingly dark tunnel and soon the vaccine will be rolling out. I am still working on that party-to-end-all-parties when this pandemic is finally over. However, it is critical for all our sakes that we stick to the rules and support each other.

**The Mayor's Hardship Fund** (Telephone: **07740 621812**) has now helped many who, as a consequence of the virus, were left with nothing. The need is increasing and we are actively seeking further funds.

For now, please stay safe, well and strong.

Yours sincerely,

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

Councillor Richard Plowman  
**The Mayor of Chichester**