

Chairman's Report May 2015

I think everyone is aware that I had reservations about taking on the role of Chairman. Contrary to all expectations I thoroughly enjoyed it and it has been great fun. The year has just flown by.

I have been supported ably by a small team of officers, under Pat Smith, who have managed my appointments and the electronic administration that is a vital part of communication with outside organisations these days. George Lewis, with help from Charlotte Sinclair, has shouldered the burden of the work while continuing his 'day job' in Democratic Services.

My intention for the year was to raise the profile of our District to encourage our major industry, tourism. By October I had built up a network of other civic dignitaries by reciprocal visits to invite them to Chartwell for the day. Acceptances came from as far apart as Redbridge and Thanet. A surprising number had never been to Chartwell and were impressed by the displays and also by the very knowledgeable volunteer guides. Not to mention the delicious lunch prepared to recipes used by Churchill's housekeeper to satisfy the great man.

In the spring, before Easter, we organised another civic visit, this time to Chiddingstone Castle. Again Mayors and Chairmen came from far and wide and were fascinated by the eclectic collections. Yet again a major talking point was the superb standard of the afternoon tea provided. We in Sevenoaks do not want anyone to go away hungry!

A third visit, this time to Coolings, the massive garden centre in Knockholt will take place in May, as a final flourish to my year.

The duties I have carried out have been very varied. A recent weekend showed just how diverse these can be. On Friday I attended the consecration of a new burial site in Edenbridge and on Sunday went to a Motocross Championship meeting!

I have visited many primary schools, some of whom have made return visits to the Council offices and I am grateful to officers for their forbearance, particularly the Control Centre. One school I have visited on many occasions is the Knole Academy. Drama performances and their Art and Design work are outstanding. Visits to the New School at West Heath, Walthamstow Hall and Coombe Bank were memorable.

I have enjoyed visiting our holiday play schemes. Sticky biscuits [plain biscuit coated with icing sugar and small sweets] have become a feature of my twitter reports on the schemes.

At the other end of the age spectrum we have enjoyed visiting White Oak Court, Hollybush Court and Stangrove Lodge, particularly around Christmas. On Christmas Day we visited our local hospitals.

Voluntary organisations play a major part in supporting the more vulnerable of our residents and I have visited many during the year. Mind is very active and I was particularly pleased to help judge the mini essay competition they ran based on a picture of umbrellas drawn by one of their clients. Guide Dogs for the Blind gave me an insight into what it is like [with the aid of a blindfold] to negotiate central Sevenoaks when you cannot see. A visit to DAVSS showed just how much hidden cruelty there is in our society. One group which has made me very welcome is the Avenues group of Community Futures. I have made some good friends with the group who I often see around town.

With Great War commemoration services, the British Legion has featured frequently in my diary, together with other service support groups.

During the summer we visited many parish fetes and this spring I have been made very welcome at Annual Parish meetings.

There is a massive amount of musical talent in the District. We have enjoyed many musical evenings, from the Young Musician of the Year, the Lydian Orchestra and the Sevenoaks Philharmonic to Kent Opera and the youngsters of the Hextable Wind Ensemble.

We have enjoyed many out of District occasions, particularly memorable have been the Lord Lieutenant's Reception and the installation of the High Sheriff. We have supported the Civic events of other Mayors and Chairmen, which are usually charity fund-raisers. The commemorative Service at Capel le Ferne was moving. The Blessing of the Seas in Margate was fascinating if very cold – it is held in the first week of January. The Red Arrows at Biggin Hill was great fun.

Of course the biggest occasion has to be the Queen's Garden Party. To be within feet of the Queen and Prince Philip is a memory to cherish.

At the time I am writing this, I am on schedule to complete 299 activities by the end of my year, shame if I do not reach 300!

I would like to thank all those who have helped to make this a memorable year – my husband, Richard, all the officers and members who have eased my path and everyone across the District and beyond who have made us so welcome.

Jill Davison