



MAYOR'S BLOG

May 2023 - May 2024

10 April 2024 - HMS Loch Fada Reunion

The evening was fantastic. It started with us having the honour of meeting Frankie Cooper, he was the youngest member of the first crew of HMS Loch Fada. The ship was adopted by the town of

Eastleigh in May 1944. He is now 98 years old, and he demonstrated that he still had the ability to consume navy strength rum, certainly more than I could! Frankie recalled that the first deployment of the ship was for operation Neptune, this is the naval part of operation Overlord, D-Day landings.

Frankie told us that the ship was sent to the bay of Biscay to prevent U Boats from attacking the invasion fleet. During that time he saw a torpedo heading straight at them. Perfectly aimed and destined to hit amidship. He was very relieved when the waves heaved HMS Loch Fada high into the air at the exact moment the torpedo would have hit, and the torpedo whet under the keel and the ship was spared. The U Boat had a less happy ending, having revealed its location, it was attacked and sunk by the surrounding frigates.

This was the last formal reunion and the memorabilia will be sent to Chatham and distributed to members of the fraternity, with some items being presented to Eastleigh Borough Council for permanent display at the Civic Offices. They will delay the distribution long enough for there to be a display at the commemoration of D Day at Hamble on June 6th.

The ship was the first of its class to be commissioned into the Royal Navy and when she was finally paid off, was the only one left still commissioned. The ship sailed the globe representing the UK after the end of WW2.

The evening consisted of a formal dinner but we had the opportunity to meet everyone present. The hospitality was second to none, although, as I found out, the naval rum was way stronger than I am used to. Luckily the Mayoress was wise enough to sip her drink and was able to take charge of the car keys.

February 2024 - Chinese New Year Celebration Lantern festival

Knowing little about Chinese traditional celebrations we didn't know what to expect. What a treat it was! The first thing we became aware of is the vibrant colours and energetic dances. The show had many highlights, traditional dance, demonstration of martial arts, poetry, formal dress, musical performances, and singing.

This year is the year of the Dragon.

There were so many fantastic performances that it is hard to pick on any one, although the Guzheng, this is an instrument similar to a harp was entrancing, the music was beautiful and the many players were so precise they sounded as one instrument. The youngest of the players was just 4 years old! She played the hole piece, playing without music, it was beautiful.

The whole performance was recorded and will be available on-line.

January 2024 - Bishopstoke Players Pantomime

This was a wonderful evening's entertainment. The cast was a mixture of adults and youngsters down to 8 years old. The script was written by the Director, Adrian Barrett.

The production was entitled Dick Whittington, but any resemblance to a known children's storey ends there. The script was hilarious, the performers were outstanding, both in dialogue and performance. There were times the cast had to wait for the audience to recover before they could continue!

We were also treated to the birthday celebrations of an audience member, congratulations to Jean on her 100th birthday.

The group raise money for the "Action for Children" charity. They have been supporting the charity since 1947 and is now the oldest continuous supporter after the Methodist Church.

They have a Website WWW.bishopstokeplayers.uk New members are always welcomed.

This was a brilliant performance and one that all children and adults would love.

December 2023 - Browsholme Close Christmas Street Party

When I arrived, I could instantly tell that this was no ordinary street party, this was a real party. The road was decorated everywhere. Light from house to house across the close. Front gardens transformed into a winter wonderland.

The residents do all this to raise money for the Friends of Shakespeare Infant School, and they raised a staggering £257.56. Considering they sell nothing, have no games or activities any rely entirely on donations on the day, it is a huge sum.

The event was triggered by Covid: during lock down close residents were allowed to stand on their driveways but not meet anyone or go anywhere. At this time, it became necessary for some residents to assist their neighbours when they went down with Covid. This caused the close to become much closer, they knew of each other at the start, and now the whole close are best of friends and the result is the street party. I understand Halloween and Christmas events are already in the diary.

I have to tell you about the Flash Bomb. At 6pm, the residents grouped together and performed a dance down the road. It was fantastic. All in fancy dress, completely uninhibited, they gave it their all. I do wonder what they will do next year.

If you feel motivated to do something similar, please contact your local Councillor who will be happy to help with road closure process.

December 2023 - Cubes4Fun Winter Wonderland

The Deputy Mayoress, Jean Pragnell was invited to represent Eastleigh Borough Council at the Cubes4fun Winter Wonderland dinner and Christmas party at Hilton Ageas. The group is an exclusive professional/business women fun group. The aim of the group is to make time, despite busy lifestyles, to nurture, support and celebrate each other, irrespective of ethnicity, or status.

They support each other with mentoring, counselling, personal support and promoting business opportunities for Women. During the evening there were awards for services to the community and for support within the group.

The evening was a mix of dining, music, games, fashion show, singing, and dancing.

December 2023 - Southampton Wind Bands' Pyramid Concert with guests Studio Band

This was an intriguing concert. We really didn't know what to expect. But the evening was really good.

We started by listening to the youngest players who have learned to master their instruments, read music, and play in time under the direction of a conductor. The music was indeed music, well-rehearsed and beautifully performed.

As the evening progressed, we were treated to more advanced performers, they were able to tackle some quite complex pieces of music, many of the players were so good and confident, they performed solos during the performance.

Finally, we were treated to the experts, and these musicians were spectacular. The music was precise, beautiful, and performed with total confidence, and so it should be because they are very good.

If you get the chance to see them, grab the opportunity.

December 2023 - Eastleigh Christmas Market

On Saturday 2 December I was invited to attend the Eastleigh Christmas Market. The day was bitterly cold, but the reception was warm and welcoming. The Deputy Mayoress and I were pleased to see the market full of people. The Christmas gifts were selling well, and the food vendors were doing a roaring trade.

We met the organisers who were grateful for our attendance and felt that the recognition from Eastleigh Borough Council was as important as the shoppers visiting the stalls.

We met and spoke to several stall holders' and they reported successful days' trading.

November 2023 - Remembrance Service in Villeneuve St Georges

The Deputy Mayoress and I had the honour of representing the Borough of Eastleigh at the Remembrance ceremony on 11 November. We flew from Eastleigh Airport, using the runway extension, direct to Orly Airport, which is only a mile from Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, and were met at the airport by our hosts.

We were treated to an escorted walking tour around some of the Parisian highlights before we navigated our way to a restaurant where we were joined by the representatives of Kornwestheim.

We had a few minutes down time after being delivered to our apartment before we were chauffeured to the Villeneuve-Saint-Georges Conservatoire, where we attended a reception where we were treated to French poetry put to music, which was spectacular. We then exchanged gifts with both the French and German delegations.

On the morning of the 11th we attended the Villeneuve-Saint-Georges Cemetery. The service started with a moving ceremony to pay respects at the war memorial. Here all parties laid flowers to honour the war dead. The next part of the ceremony was to walk through the cemetery, past graves of allied servicemen, to a memorial to the French Resistance. Here we paid our respects, and the three Mayors, French, German, and English jointly laid a spray of flowers as a mark of our joint respect. From there we were guided to the final part where we were led to an area that is given over to the allied dead, Many headstones record indecently premature deaths of brave young men. I noted that there was scarcely a dry eye at this part of the service.

We withdrew to a community hall where we gathered ourselves and had refreshments.

That evening we were entertained at a restaurant that has a Brazilian theme. We came together as strangers and ended the weekend as friends. This is fitting because the weekend's ceremony was very much to celebrate that, after all our past conflicts, we are now firm international friends.

October 2023 - Hampshire in Harmony

A most enjoyable event at Thornden Hall. Four male voice choirs gave individual and joint renditions of traditional and fringe numbers. The standard was incredible. They were the Romsey, The Police, The Basingstoke, and the Rushmoor Male Voice Choirs.

The purpose of the evening is to recruit regular donors to the Hampshire Air Ambulance. For the sake of clarity, the Air Ambulance's primary task is to get a doctor to a scene as quick as possible, if the patient is stable enough, they then take the patient to hospital. However, all too often the patient is so poorly, that the need to be worked on during the trip so need to be taken by ambulance. The average cost of each flight is £3,000.

After the concert, I spoke to many of the performers and there was a frequent theme that explained why they continue to take part.

Firstly, they need to leave their house to attend rehearsals, many live alone or are retired and, were it not for this pastime, would go shopping, tend to gardens, and watch TV. Incidentally, there is no age barrier, or the need to be able bodied to join a choir.

Secondly, they now have a vast amount of close friends with whom they share experiences and concerns. They find that the bond formed by singing removes the barriers that many men have when discussing their problems. The network of friends extends across the whole country and even overseas for some.

Then there is the mental exercise necessary to learn and perform the complex musical pieces. Learning is recognised as an important factor in keeping the brain healthy.

Lastly, the fitness that results from the disciplined singing ensures that the heart and lungs get a thorough work out during the practice sessions and the performances.

Following the performance we gathered in the bar area and then the night's entertainment came to a crescendo, in what is referred to as the "after glow", at this time fuelled by refreshing beverages they harmonised and let rip with a variety of numbers, at this point the need to be male to participate was abandoned, all those that remained joined in and we rounded off the evening in a very pleasant and memorable way.

October 2023 - Opening of the refurbished Coop, Chandler's Ford

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October 2023 - Opening of the refurbished Coop, Chandler's Ford

I represented the Mayor at my local Coop in Chandler's Ford on 19 October to formally open the refurbished store. Whilst there I was introduced to various members of the team, and the changes to the market positioning explained.

All lighting is LED and the Coop expect the power consumption of the store to be a fraction of that prior to the upgrade. Every aspect of the refurb has had land fill waste reduction as the most important criteria, both during the works and as an ongoing operating strategy.

I also discovered that the store has long established links with local a food bank. They try to remove foods nearing the "best by" or "use by" dates and donate these, any that cannot be removed from the shelf or are missed, are discounted to shoppers. Food wastage from the store less than 1%.

We had a formal ceremony where I was handed the biggest scissors I have ever held and, with the help of staff , I was able to formally open the refurbished store. I spoke to several customers and they all approved the refreshed interior appearance.

October 2023 - 14th Eastleigh Spitfires Scout & Guide Band Concert

On the 14 October I was invited to attend the Scouts Band at United Reform Church in Chandler's Ford. The music was a mixture of old favourites and some not so well know. The tempo was constantly changing, and the concert kept me entertained for the whole time. The concert was scheduled to end at 9 pm, we all agreed at 10 pm that should probably call it a night.

During the evening I had the honour of presenting John Weeks with a Local Hero award. John has just stepped down as District Commissioner for the area. I say the area because after Covid there were a lot of holes in the leadership to be filled, and it ended up with John filling many of them himself. Eastleigh and Chandler's Ford are now one Scouting district, they called "The Arrows". I think it fair to say that without John many Beaver, Cub and Scouting groups would have closed. Indeed, not only did he prevent closures, he recruited leaders and even has set up a new tier of scouting - Squirrels - for the youngest of our community.

John received a standing ovation as he made his way from his seat to the front to collect his award. His only comment was "I was just doing what anyone would have done".

September 2023 - Fernhill Court Coffee Morning

I had the pleasure of being invited to Fernhill coffee morning. This was a fundraising event to enable the Friends of Fernhill to fund events to encourage residents to socialise and take part in group exercise.

The Covid lockdown has left a legacy of loss of confidence and fear. Many of the residents are reluctant to attend functions and stay alone within their flats. This is having an effect on mental health and fitness implications. I guess this will be same across the Borough.

The Chairman, Tom Webber, and the rest of the committee were all there and they were delighted to see members of the public drop in to visit. All the committee are volunteers, the day of my visit was Tom's 85th birthday. A group of long-term residents refer to him as "our kid".

February 2023 - Thanking supporters of people from Ukraine

As Mayor, one of the greatest honours for me has to be an event shortly before Christmas to recognise the wonderful contribution of families and individuals in our Borough in supporting people from Ukraine. Many of them have opened their homes to those fleeing the Russian invasion of their country, and I was delighted to be part of an event to celebrate the hosts' kindness in doing so.

The hosts are providing desperately needed shelter and stability to people who have gone through so much. Their generosity is inspiring, and an uplifting example of the character and spirit of the people of Eastleigh.