

TOWN MAYOR'S ANNUAL REPORT TO THE ELECTORS MEETING - 25 MARCH 2009

As Town Mayor of Alton, it gives me great pleasure to report on what I and the council have been doing in the past year.

An Altonian since the 1970's, I have sensed that Alton has a certain character that makes it the town it is today; to me, that characteristic is its community spirit. Having the privileged opportunity to visit so many local organisations, charities and businesses, all of which speak highly of the character and community spirit that Alton has to give, just shows how we as Altonians have made this the thriving town it is today.

When I took office back in May 2008, I knew that the year ahead of me was to be a busy one and so it was, with my first appointment being a trip to our twin town of Pertuis in Southern France. The trip was over four days, and across those days I started to realise that our partnership with other towns in Europe is an essential part of the town's identity. I was also personally delighted to have some students from our Italian twin of Montecchio as guests in my home during an exchange visit last year and I am now looking forward to visiting Montecchio myself in the near future.

Whilst every engagement for the Town Mayor is special, particularly for those groups and organisations that are celebrating or commemorating an important occasion, some are extra special, in that they are unique to Alton and help define where we have come from and where we are going. For example, helping judge the Alton Society's Ambrose Award which was won by Alton College's Burkoff Performing Arts Building, opening the Hutcheson's Whisky Shop in Westbrook Walk, switching on the Christmas lights, meeting people at the Yuletide Festival and representing Alton at the regional In Bloom Awards ceremony where Alton scored so well.

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However, even from this impressive list, one appointment stands out, and that was the laying of the wreath at Lord Mayor Treloar's grave in Shirley, Croydon. For me, this appointment was the most memorable because it made me think about how lucky we were to have benefitted from this unique man's foresight and hard work to bring an idea to fruition that would benefit thousands of people.

Throughout the year as businesses grow and seasons change I was pleased to have the chance to visit local schools to see their landscape projects, learn of their plans for the future, and opening the new Austen Building at Alton College. Projects which invest in youth today are sure to leave a positive mark on our town tomorrow.

Here at the Town Council, it's been another busy year, not only carrying out our day to day activities but trying to champion Alton issues at District or County Council level or with other more distant organisations, such as the owners of the former Post Office site in the High Street. As usual we have a host of projects either ongoing or coming to fruition soon. An order has now been placed for a brand new playground on Greenfields Amenity Land and we will be consulting shortly on plans for new allotments close by. Our application to Sport England for help with rebuilding the Finnimore Pavilion in Anstey Park has been submitted this month and we await their decision with fingers crossed.

In 2007 we started on the long road towards installing CCTV in the town centre at a cost of over £80,000. Work has now started and the Town Council is also taking on the annual maintenance and monitoring costs. I sincerely hope that townsfolk will appreciate that CCTV is now the only means of monitoring and making the public feel at ease. On a personal note, although I believe

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that CCTV will bring great benefits, we must also be ever vigilant that valued civil liberties are not given up lightly.

One sad note of my term of office is the imminent loss of yet more landmark and prominent trees in the Public Gardens and also at the Butts due to disease and resulting safety concerns. Another low point was the demise of Woolworths which seemed to be the high point of conversation over the Christmas and New Year period. That said, they say that as one door shuts another opens, and we are now looking forward to the arrival of Iceland there this July.

Finally I would like to thank the Town Hall and Ground Staff and my fellow councillors for their hard work and commitment during my term of office and no doubt into the future.

I would like also like to thank all those that have made me feel so welcome over the past year on so many occasions; it has been a real pleasure to serve my adopted home town and hopefully give something back to the community which has given so much to me and my family.

Councillor Atul Patel

Town Mayor of Alton

March 2009