

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

APRIL 2021

EVENTS COMMITTEE REPORT

Due to the pandemic, we did not have an Annual Parish Meeting, however throughout 2019 the Events Committee did deliver a bonfire and firework display, unfortunately due to horrendous weather, the attendance was very well down on previous years, we also staged the Christmas Festival in the town centre which accompanies the Christmas light switch on. This was a successful event and further proved the decision to move the event to the last Friday in November was the right one. The Yorkshire Day held in August of 2019 on the Thursday market was also a great success.

Moving onto 2020 we had many exciting events in the diary not least the 75th anniversary of VE Day and VJ Day in May and August respectively. In July of 2020 we made the difficult decision to cancel the 2020 bonfire and firework display as it seemed highly unlikely that COVID restrictions would be lifted to allow thousands of people to congregate together, even if it was outside. In addition, our plans for a church service and other celebrations to mark VE Day also fell by the wayside, as did the visit to France by myself and Cllr Paul Rounding to attend the ceremony to mark the reburial of an English RAF crew from RAF Driffield who had crashed and been killed in 1940 in the small French town.

Despite restrictions however the Events Committee did mark both VE and VJ Day and staged a scaled down ceremony in our Remembrance Gardens to the RAF crew, mirroring a sunrise and sunset ceremony run simultaneously with an equally scaled down ceremony in the French town.

Our Mayor Cllr Amanda Croft was present at all these ceremonies, along with representatives of Royal British Legion and Luke Gledhill, who played the Last Post, and they were recorded and played on line via our social media platforms.

As November and December approached it became clear that our Christmas Festival could not go ahead as normal. The council anxious to lift the people and the town centre after months of lockdown decided to spend the money saved on staging the Christmas Festival on improving and adding to our Christmas light displays. We purchased 58 Christmas trees illuminated with LED lights to be placed throughout the town centre and replaced thousands of coloured light bulbs with blue/white LED lights. The Christmas lights were switched on in a very low-key ceremony broadcast on Great Driffield Radio by the Mayor, however whilst the switch on was a quiet and under the radar, the reaction to the new lights was certainly not! Everyone loved the new additions and once again Driffield proved itself a forerunner in the Christmas light stakes.

Earlier in the Autumn the council had established a new committee, The Town Centre Steering Group, made up of councillors and local town centre business owners. Keen to make the most of the last remaining shopping weeks to Christmas after the November lockdown, the Town Council in partnership with the Group, launched Driffield Christmas Saturdays and almost by accident the now fantastically successful Discover Driffield Gift Voucher Scheme. The Town Council sponsored £1000 worth of gift vouchers and shoppers were given free entry to the draw over the 3 Saturdays on production of a receipt from a local independent business. This proved incredibly successful, and I would like to thank the support we received from Great Driffield Radio, Driffield & Wolds Weekly and also the volunteers who manned the stall over the Saturdays taking entries.

From this came the Gift Voucher Scheme, and to date we have sold over £12,000 worth of vouchers to be spent in over 80 participating local businesses.

Despite the pandemic and the limitations we have faced, the Town Council have risen to the challenge and ensured that our most important of days – VE and VJ Day were acknowledged and that the people of Driffield did remember the immeasurable contribution and efforts made 75 years ago to ensure our freedom, that Driffield did have a Christmas and at the same time we helped our struggling town centre businesses and that we have a future legacy – the great new lights and the Discover Driffield Gift Voucher Scheme.

On a poignant note, it was decided after 26 years that for the time being at least, the Town Council cease to organise the Bonfire and Firework Display. In the absence of the Town Council a local firm staged their own incredibly successful drive-in event and have a lot of fantastic ideas for future firework displays at the Showground that they will run on a commercial footing and will have no need of public subsidy.

Whilst it was a sad decision that was not made lightly, we are confident that the tradition started in 1994 of a firework display for the people of Driffield will continue and get bigger and better in the hands of the private company. In turn this enables us to concentrate in the coming year with the emphasis of bounce back and helping our town centre recover after the effects of the pandemic. Working with partners, we hope to help deliver a range of town centre events that can revitalise and attract more visitors and shoppers to the town.

In addition, the Town Council agreed to take on the organisation and administration of the Remembrance events, after many years of service RBL member John Forrester hung up his boots, but will take an advisory role this year assisting the Clerk and the Council and ensuring we deliver a truly memorable and poignant Remembrance Service.

Cllr Simon Starrett

Chairman