

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

APRIL 2021

THE MAYORS REPORT – CLLR AMANDA CROFT

I have found myself breaking two records at Driffield Town Council, firstly when I was elected in 2019, I was the youngest ever Mayor, and then in May 2020 due to the pandemic, I was the first councillor to be Mayor for two concurrent terms.

During my first Mayoral year of 2019 up to March 2020, I had really enjoyed my time visiting neighbouring towns and meeting my fellow Mayors throughout the East Riding. This was a real eye opener and I loved telling anybody who would listen how fab our town is and why they should visit. It was also really interesting to hear about the ways and workings of other places. I felt lucky to be able to visit so many organisations within Driffield ranging from the schools and care homes to riverboats and stately homes – with so much more in between. With the help of my family and friends, I threw myself into a programme of fundraising for my chosen charity The Hull and East Riding, Children and Young People's Mental Health Impatient Unit, with events ranging from race nights in the town hall to numerous raffles on the freezing cold market . (Thanks again to my mum who has helped at every single raffle in rain, sunshine or snow!)

At this point the town council had completed their new Skerne Park depot and there were exciting times ahead, with lots of projects in the offer for us to get on with. However in mid-March 2020 all that stopped, and the council and indeed, the country, found themselves in a position never experienced or expected.

My civic function planned for April 2020 at The Highfield was ‘postponed’, and eventually cancelled. We were given sanction by government to not hold an AGM if we chose not to and the council agreed that I should carry on for another year as Mayor. After battling COVID in late March I fortunately recovered and worked with Clerk (who was now working from home) and other councillors to co-ordinate our response to this unprecedented situation. I am very proud of the fact that as we went into lockdown, we immediately established links with the volunteer group Helping Driffield COVID 19, and refused to allow bureaucracy to get in the way of immediate and effective assistance where needed, providing cash, phone lines, websites, high vis jackets, volunteer databases, laptops and general support where necessary to this fantastic group of ladies.

The town council embarked on their first ever remote meeting and whilst it took us bit of time to get used to it, and repeats of ‘you’re on mute’, this way of working has proved incredibly effective, especially with our committees, as during the last year we have had not one instance of a committee not being quorate and the amount of work that has been achieved due to this is outstanding. We hope that our committees can continue to work remotely.

As outlined by the committee chairmen, big decisions had to be made as we moved through lockdown, events that had become part of our regular calendar had to be cancelled, and our operational services also had to make changes, with no summer hanging basket scheme and staggered working practices to protect our team. The Town Council did not use this time to sit on their laurels, money saved from the summer hanging baskets was diverted to the purchase of a much-needed defibrillator with 24/7 access in Cross Hill car park, and as our town centre buckled under the strain of lockdown, we got to work to establish ways of helping our businesses. Our social media platforms and website promoted local businesses who were finding new ways to trade as their shops were shut, and we then established the Town Centre Steering Group. After years of

trying to engage local town centre businesses, we finally succeeded in creating a group, which since their inception, working with town councillors and the clerk, have achieved great things. The Driffield Showground, having had to cancel their Driffield show, the first time since the war, set up a campsite and the Town Council produced a welcome leaflet outlining all that was on offer in the town centre, to encourage visitors.

Original plans to recruit a third Tidy Team member and an External Funding Officer in the April of 2020 were put on hold and eventually in September we welcomed Fiona Turner to our team and in October, Rob Flake as our third Tidy Team member. What an incredible difference these two staff members have brought to our team. Fiona set to work immediately identifying possible funding pots – a highly challenging feat during the pandemic, with most funding organisations closed. After three months she had secured over £12,000 worth of grants for various projects and more than justifying our faith and belief that the council desperately needed a person in this role. The arrival of Rob has enabled the Tidy Team to completely revitalise their operations meaning we can provide a bespoke town centre street cleansing service that in these times where we need to instil confidence into the public that the town centre is safe to return to has been essential. In addition, his arrival has meant we are able to provide so much more ourselves, in house, such as street furniture etc.

The Town Council also partnered ERYC in the production of a Town Centre Action Plan on how to ensure Driffield's future economic vitality, and we have been working closely with colleagues at the East Riding to deliver on the recommendations, more of which will come to fruition we hope over the coming months, we are also pleased to announce our support of the free town centre wi fi.

As Mayor during the pandemic, I have had to think outside the box on various levels, and the Pumpkin Trail over Halloween was one such example. We were delighted with the success of this COVID friendly trail, and it was very well received and is the forerunner we feel of future similar initiatives. Usual events carried out by the Mayor, such as VE and VJ day were much quieter affairs than in the past. I am proud that we managed to still acknowledge the memory of those who served in the Second World War, despite the COVID restrictions; even if it did mean getting up at 4am! The Christmas light switch on was also a very low key affair – which is a shame as the Event's committee have really built this into something special over the last few years. Driffield did have a wonderful Christmas, with the fantastic new lights and I am confident that this event will thrive again in the future.

Whilst we gained two new members of staff, our Deputy Town Clerk of 12 years left us to have a baby, William Robin. Rachael has been a great member of staff and during my first year as mayor was my 'right hand woman'. I would often give her a call or text to double check where I was meant to be and what for. I wouldn't have had the confidence to attend so many civic functions and meet so many new people without her pep-talks. As a council we will miss her but all wish her well on her role as mum to William and thank her for her hard work over the years.

After an unprecedented year for Driffield Town Council, I feel extremely proud of what we have achieved. We adapted and evolved at pace to meet the challenges presented to us, took brave decisions and forged ahead into new and unexplored territory. All this was generally alien to our way of going on, but it is what was required at the time. If there must be some good that has come from the pandemic it is that Driffield Town Council has shown we can be flexible, be creative rather than reactive and rise to new challenges. We have made brave decisions and established ourselves as real force of change in the fortunes of the town, achieving more impact and making more of a real difference than ever before.

It has been a pleasure to see Driffield through this difficult time and very much look forward to the future for our town!

Cllr Amanda Croft

Mayor of Driffield