

An open letter from the Mayor – 3rd December 2020

There is a saying that the darkest hour is the one before dawn. It seems like this at the moment. As predicted, the second lockdown did not lead to the sharp decline in infections and deaths achieved by the first. The Tier 1 precautions did not work, so Chichester, along with most of the UK, finds itself in Tier 2. Strictly on the criteria, we should be in Tier 1.

We also have the dilemma now about what to do at Christmas. My instincts are telling me at my age to stay safe just for this year, yet I long to see my family and grandchildren again. Many happy memories are from these joyful gatherings. I remember in particular one Christmas when I was young. Presents would be delivered to the end of the bed. My younger sister's present was a doll's house fully fitted out with furniture, figures and household items, all carefully arranged. Unfortunately, Father Christmas had already helped himself to several sherries and mince pies. This meant he failed to negotiate the top of the stairs and the doll's house went flying. Until that moment I had not known the extent of his vocabulary. I peeped round the door to see my father sitting on the floor, trying with great difficulty in his inebriated state to put the myriad little objects back in their proper place. It took him nearly until dawn to complete the task.

So, what to do this Covid Christmas? I keep harking back to the words of the senior microbiologist at St Richard's Hospital: if you are in a confined space for more than 15 minutes with someone who has the virus you will probably catch it. Christmas is the ideal opportunity for the virus to spread, so caution is needed. What, though, about seeing the family? What about everybody's emotional health? A problem indeed.

Those over 70, like me, are in the most vulnerable category and have to take the greatest care. My elder son and family are in Japan, so that decision was easy. My younger son is now on his own and in need of our support after a difficult year. But he lives in Leicestershire, which is firmly in Tier 3 and has been more or less locked down for months. The scales have tipped in favour of the emotional need and he will make a short visit on Christmas Day. I am sure many of you are taking similar difficult decisions. It will be beef for Christmas dinner this year, not turkey or chicken nuggets.

Whatever you decide about visitors, it is important for our own wellbeing that we keep Christmas. If you are able, do put up the tree and decorate it. String it – and the house - with lights. Have a splendid festive meal, indulge yourself and try to forget for a short while the

sacrifice we all have made because of COVID-19. Think about the true seasonal message: one of hope and salvation. It has seldom been more appropriate. I did hear a lady remark: 'I am not adding this year to my age as I didn't use it!' How true.

One easy choice for me will be to have the vaccine. On social media there has been a lot of misinformation, but we need as many people as possible to be inoculated. When I worked at ICI I dealt with the regulators and, believe me, the vaccines will not be allowed unless the authorities are absolutely sure they are effective and safe. AstraZeneca has its roots in ICI Pharmaceuticals, so I am doubly reassured.

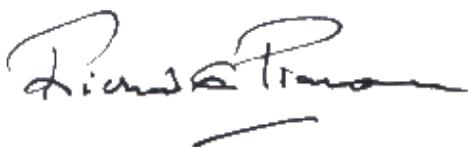
The Mayoress and I are still reluctant to venture out much, but, whenever possible, will go shopping in the City Centre. Drapers' Yard in the Hornet is well worth a visit and do look out for unique presents produced by Chichester's talented artists and crafts people.

Thanks to the scientists, the NHS, other frontline workers and the Community of Chichester, an end is in sight. Next Christmas we will surely be back to normal and I will have that annual game of Monopoly with the boys. Before that, however, we must all negotiate the dark winter days of January and February. I expect the news will continue to show more deaths for some time to come. Behind every statistic there is a person and a tragic loss to their nearest and dearest. It remains even more critical that we stick to the rules and support each other. For it would be a disaster for us to fall now, with that promised dawn beginning to break on the horizon.

Finally, thank you to all who generously supported **The Mayor's Hardship Fund** (Telephone: **07740 621812**). This has now helped many who, as a consequence of the virus, were left with nothing. The need is still increasing and we are actively seeking further funds.

For now, please stay safe, well and strong.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Plowman', with a horizontal line underneath.

Councillor Richard Plowman
The Mayor of Chichester