

# ISLE OF WIGHT

*News from and about members*



## Old School Project brings new ideas

**Above:** With some of 'team Rouse', the High Sheriff's colleagues holding the fort during his year: Andrew White, Ben Silk, Lisa Butler, Linda Thorne and Paul McDine

THIS TIME last year I was fretting about whether there might be an ex-High Sheriff who was 6'7", from whom I could borrow some of the uniform. I now know there wasn't but, six months in, I realise that – while a significant symbol of the importance and history of the Office – clothes, in a very real sense here, do not maketh the man (or woman).

Having tried from the start to involve myself with the many volunteers, charities and community support groups that exist on the Island, the position has become less about the individual in the hot seat and more about how having such a platform can help the wider community.

One of my key aims for the year was to bring the charity 'The Old School Project' to the Island. It was originally featured in a BBC 2 programme last year, fronted by the Hairy Bikers. The programme showed the project being piloted by the Oxford Academy School. Its aim is to pair young with old and offers them time together in a safe environment to get to know each other and to learn from and support each other. The project recognises that some issues cross age boundaries and its intention is to look at benefits for both sides. Our communities are becoming

fractured and The Old School Project has at its heart an old African saying: it takes a whole village to raise a child. For the child who wants to talk to someone after school or the senior citizen who needs company or is feeling detached from the modern digital world, it provides access to new friends and opportunities. It is about community cohesion.

I'm happy to say that with the help of Age UK IW, the support of the team at The Old School Project at the Oxford Academy, and an Island-based charity called Independent Arts, two schools on the Island (Cowes Enterprise College and Christ the King College) have already signed up to the project. I am very grateful to the team leaders at the schools that they have been so open and enthusiastic about this project. I'm hoping that enthusiasm will infect the other secondary schools on the Island and we will gradually roll it out to all of them.

Having already met quite a few of our wonderful volunteers here I have seen first-hand the difference the kindness of others can make – without which some lives undoubtedly would be immeasurably worse. The Island is a mixed bag, being home to some of the most privileged people as well as some



of the most disadvantaged. But as a group of people living on a small island there is a unique sense of togetherness, despite the huge disparities.

My predecessor launched a new event in his year (Isle of Wight Day) that we will continue to celebrate annually to help gel that community spirit. By the same token, I am collaborating with the next two High Sheriffs in nomination in order to focus on projects that bring businesses and schools together. The projects will offer young people further advancement towards employment by using the support and resources a school can provide, together with the knowledge and opportunities of the business community.

I approached the role with some trepidation but now, halfway through, I'm thoroughly enjoying all the opportunities it offers. So much achieved yet still so much to do – a year is gone in the blink of an eye!

### ◆ Ben Rouse

*High Sheriff of the Isle of Wight 2017-18*



Left: With Mary Montagu-Scott, High Sheriff of Hampshire, on a marine police launch