



## Important to add value... creatively

**WHAT DOES it really mean to be High Sheriff? As the COVID-19 crisis struck and I found my diary emptied of visits and appointments for the last few weeks of my year of office, I found myself reflecting on what the role can really offer, and how that might look in a changing world.**

The responsibilities of the modern High Sheriff extend beyond the traditional support for those who administer justice and maintain law and order to a much wider support for those in the charitable and voluntary sector as well. Of course, much of that work impacts very directly on the criminal justice system and all of it on the broader aim for social justice. I have been warmly welcomed everywhere, my opinion valued, my interest appreciated and my contacts and connections gratefully received. All this because I held this office, and it is so important that the role of High Sheriff continues to be seen to be adding value, and to support, encourage and, above all, thank all those who work in these areas.

This is much more important than any personal legacy and can be done in a number of ways. If it is not possible to get out and about and make visits, social media channels are a good way of keeping connected and offering encouragement. They also provide continuity as a new sheriff takes over, showing that the office of High Sheriff remains active and interested.

The police and fire services are very active on social media and need special support at this time. 'Liking' or forwarding a post shows appreciation and interest. In Hertfordshire we have an excellent online watch link, OWL messaging, which provides updates on crime and scams as well as initiatives to help maintain the safety and welfare of local communities. Signing up for this can be encouraged through a High Sheriff's network.

And of course, this is a very difficult time for our judges and magistrates who continue to work in ever-changing circumstances, aware that they will face a huge backlog of work that will need to be managed somehow. Perhaps there will



**Above:** Bidding farewell to social media

be some silver linings as new working practices and the use of technology assist much-needed changes, but our justice system is already under considerable strain and the challenges will be great. The prison and probation services face enormous and stressful difficulties. It is hard to know how a High Sheriff might support them, but it is still possible to send an email of encouragement, to pick up the telephone for a chat, to send a handwritten note to anyone who needs an extra thank you at this time, and these small gestures can show people that their work is greatly valued and that the High Sheriff continues to be interested.

Many small charities supporting the vulnerable are struggling and need extra help. Working closely with the Community Foundation to raise funds for disaster relief work and linking this with others who do similar work to share resources and

processes will be vital. The need for High Sheriffs to work closely with their local foundations has never been greater, and we are very fortunate in Hertfordshire that my successor Henry Holland-Hibbert is also chair of our Foundation. The synergies between these two roles will be invaluable at this time.

High Sheriffs will continue to support, encourage and thank. They will need to become increasingly creative about how they do this but I hope that this will result in new and better relationships and in unexpected connections, born of a desire to make a contribution to the determination, hard work, positivity and kindness that will get us through this crisis.

**◆ Sarah Beazley**  
*High Sheriff of Hertfordshire 2019-20*