



# A hyperconnected city

**FROM THE day of my Declaration in our dining room, it was pretty obvious that I should start making other plans.**

As my diary emptied, it began to fill with virtual events and meetings. By end of the year there were over 800 entries. How did that happen?

A High Sheriff can do three things: thank and support, connect, and convene. All work very well in the virtual world. Sitting remotely with judges and virtual police awards ceremonies were natural alternatives. Some things required more thought. We did manage one judge's dinner, but after that I took visiting judges on walking tours of Clifton instead – described by Betjeman as the 'handsomest suburb of Europe', as well as the home of the Bristol lodgings.

High Sheriffs come to the role with a broad knowledge of the organisations and communities in their counties. During the year many hundreds of new relationships are formed. This gives a High Sheriff the unique ability to make connections – a lasting and powerful legacy. The number of possible connections and the value of the role of High Sheriff increases non-

linearly with the number of organisations/individuals known.

City of Bristol is the smallest county, just forty square miles. We have a population of 460,000 in a diverse and edgy city. A 'virtual' High Sheriff has the opportunity to explore that rich diversity in greater depth – faith groups, the country-based groups (we have several Consuls and over 95 languages spoken in schools), the 90 'villages' of the city and all the charities and voluntary/community groups. The pressing question was: how can the High Sheriff create lasting and significant value at a time of great stress?

I recalled a remark by the Chief Constable of Leicestershire at Burghley in 2019: 'take part of your life into the lives of those you meet'. Initially I discussed cybercrime and big data analytics with the police and military intelligence. But then through some chance events in the voluntary sector I saw an opportunity to apply 40 years of experience in large-/massive-scale systems research to the world of asking and giving. From that came AskingBristol.

AskingBristol's ambitions are to lubricate and democratise asking and

giving in Bristol. There may be as many as 10,000 charities and voluntary/community groups in (Greater) Bristol. All have asks (things given, things lent, spaces lent, volunteering, expertise and advice, cash). Democratising means treating the smallest with one part-time volunteer equally to the largest with an income of £40 million.

AskingBristol is completely bottom-up. It gives each group a 'buddy' to own their asks and uses the super-connectivity of Bristol to route asks to individuals/organisations/businesses able to match them. We are just starting a second scaled-up experiment with 110 diverse charities. We expect to have about 400 asks to work with, many of which are transformational for their charities.

Every successful match creates an engaging story – they will appear on [www.askingbristol.org](http://www.askingbristol.org) together with AskingBristol's High Sheriff's legacy.

Three early stories to appear are:

- The donation of 800 new cardboard boxes from Accolade Wines in Avonmouth (Europe's largest wine-bottling plant) to the North West Bristol Foodbank for making up family packages.
- Storage space for 30 pallets for six months at the DHL warehouse in Severn Beach for Children's Scrapstore to allow the delivery of new high-value surplus materials from regional businesses.
- Pro bono legal advice by the University of Bristol Law Clinic on the publisher's contract for a book of recipes and back stories from some of Bristol's 91+ language communities for 91 Ways to Build a Global City. All profits will be gifted to 91 Ways.

The big ambition is to make Bristol the world's first hyperconnected city with consequent implications for social cohesion and equality. And then to franchise the ideas... AskingMilan, AskingBrisbane. Without a year as 'virtual' High Sheriff this would not have happened.

**◆ Dr John Manley**

*High Sheriff of the City of Bristol 2020-21*



Visit to a summer holiday activity funded by the High Sheriff of Bristol's Fund, which makes grants to charities and community groups that provide physical and creative activity classes for 8- to 12-year-olds in areas of Bristol of greatest need during nine weeks of school holidays. This year we supported 20 groups with some additional funding for another 18 groups identified by Avon and Somerset Neighbourhood Policing. The children come from Stockwood, Whitchurch and Brislington Credit: Anne-Marie Rogers, Quartet Community Foundation