



Thanks to those who jab

AS MY High Sheriff's year approached, plans for my Declaration ceremony would adapt with each government announcement until it became clear that it would not be at a venue, celebrating with family and friends but instead via Zoom, albeit joined remotely by even more guests.

However, the vaccination programme offered hope of some normality, and indeed, it's where I started my year in earnest. I decided to visit all of the mass vaccination sites across Cheshire, Warrington and Halton to meet and thank the groups who had come together to offer us some protection against COVID. A few weeks later, after many calls and emails to a myriad of NHS groups, I reached those given the responsibility for operating the different sites and my idea was welcomed and seen as a timely morale booster for the staff.

By the end of April, vaccinators had been relentlessly jabbing arms for months with the prospect of many more to come. Volunteers had been manning car parks and directing traffic throughout the winter in all weather and it was felt that it was a perfect time to visit and express gratitude to them all.

The sites chosen had to be of a certain scale, with parking and space allowing people to move through while maintaining social distancing, so it was no surprise that a number of sports clubs were identified, and as a result of great partnership work between the public,

private and voluntary sectors, they were fully operational within weeks.

I visited Warrington and Widnes rugby clubs, Chester Racecourse and Alderley Science Park, along with a number of smaller venues. BBC North West news filmed my visit to the Warrington Islamic Centre in a community where take-up had been slower but also to recognise that the centre was fully operated by volunteers.

Meeting and thanking all of the teams carrying out this lifesaving work has been a humbling experience. The brilliant NHS staff have been supported by volunteers from many organisations including St John Ambulance and the Royal Voluntary Service. Cheshire Fire and Rescue staff volunteering on their days off have given nearly 100,000 jabs.

At Alderley Science Park, I also visited one of three Lighthouse Labs in the UK, commissioned by the government to process the millions of PCR tests that so many of us have taken and where COVID variants of concern are identified – critical work that again is helping to save lives.

Thanks to the relaxations enabled by the vaccines, I have now been able to meet many of our superb first responders who have risked their own health throughout the pandemic to help us all. More about this in a future article, together with stories of our amazing charities and the volunteers who support them.

Finally, in early September we received the terribly sad news that my

Presenting a High Sheriff's Award to (above left) Suzanne Edwards, Director Cheshire and Wirral NHS Trust and volunteers at the Chester Race Course mass vaccination centre; (above) NHS Halton Clinical Commissioning Group vaccination team at Widnes Vikings rugby stadium



With Mark Wigglesworth, Site Director, Alderley Park Lighthouse Lab



Presenting a High Sheriff's Award to NHS Warrington Primary Care team at the Warrington Wolves rugby stadium

predecessor, Nick (Hoppy) Hopkinson, had died following a short illness. Hoppy was a philanthropist, an ideas man and an incredible fundraiser who affected so many lives for the better and will be greatly missed.

◆ Robert Mee DL
High Sheriff of Cheshire 2021-22