



Impressive commitment

AFTER A start that was delayed due to Covid lockdown restrictions, I attended the Special Commendation Awards at Leicestershire Police headquarters at Enderby. Our police spend a great deal of their time supporting and helping the community, not just fighting crime, and I was humbled to see how police officers undertake real acts of bravery and treat it as just part of their job. On asking the Chief Constable why he joined the police, he said simply, 'I wanted to help people.'

I made 12 visits to the Crown, family and magistrates' courts. I found their workings fascinating – particularly the time the judge or magistrate took to explain the sentencing to a defendant.

Not many people understand what goes on in court, but we should realise we have the finest justice system in the world which we need to value and support.

What was impressive was the commitment of the court staff who kept the courts going through lockdown. I was pleased to give High Sheriff's Awards to the staff in both the Crown Court and the magistrates' court.

The judges and magistrates gave me a great deal of their time and made me very welcome; at the end of my term, they kindly presented me with a fine limited-edition map of Rutland.

I persuaded the magistrates to organise mock trials for four schools in Oakham Castle – the oldest court in England – to give the students a taste of



Above: Presenting a High Sheriff's Award to Peppers, an excellent local charity providing a safe place for those struggling with their mental health

Above right: Mock trial in Oakham Castle

the real atmosphere of a courtroom. These worked really well, with lots of debate and questions and there is interest from the schools to continue them in future years.

Another initiative was to visit all 52 villages in Rutland. I thought it particularly important as we came out of lockdown to see how communities had managed and to thank people for all their efforts to support others. I was impressed how people looked after one another. If there has been any benefit to be derived from Covid, it is that it has pulled communities together.

An added bonus was learning the history of each village: the origins, the old families, how life has changed, and listening to the longer-standing residents and their fascinating stories and experiences. We have some enthusiastic



historians in Rutland, and I now have a large library of material on the history of Rutland, written by residents.

Usually over tea and cakes in the village hall people would ask 'What does a High Sheriff do?' and then 'How do you get selected?' We still have work to do here!

In the towns, I spent valuable time with our police team, the fire service, visiting almshouses and charities, and stores, particularly the charity shops with their excellent staff – mostly volunteers.

As I went along I gave High Sheriff's Awards to individuals who contributed to their community, and to several charities and voluntary organisations. It was great to present an award to someone in front of their own peer group – usually taking them by surprise. I learnt just how powerful it is to take the time to say 'Thank you'. Any funds raised went to smaller local charities.

The high point of the year was the Justice Service – we had great support from Crown Court Judges and JPs, a reading from Magna Carta and the Human Rights Act 1998, and a really excellent sermon from the Bishop of Peterborough's chaplain reminding us of the three key points set out by the Prophet Micah in the Old Testament: Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly.

The Justice Service was followed the next week by a very special event, a brilliant concert by members of the Bach Choir in All Saints' Church, Oakham.

It has been an excellent year – a year spent meeting a great many people in our wonderful county of Rutland.



Declaration at home L-R: Revd Dr Pippa Madgwick, High Sheriff's chaplain; Mrs Kate Blank, Under Sheriff; Cllr Andrew Brown JP (High Sheriff 2015-16); Richard Cole, immediate past High Sheriff; Dr Sarah Furness, Lord-Lieutenant of Rutland; David Wood, High Sheriff

David Wood

High Sheriff of Rutland 2021-22