

Combine, collaborate, convene

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High Sheriff of Essex 2023-24

I am writing this just after the Justice Service. In my speech, I explained that it was my last big organisational effort, and I could now concentrate on doing what High Sheriffs do. Of course, that begs the question, doesn't it? Well, in my case, I have chosen to 'Celebrate Essex!' as one of my themes.

Celebrating Essex is a great cause, but it involves a lot of travelling. I am trying to get to every corner of the county. It has been a rich pleasure to discover parts I have never been to before, despite living here for most of my life. My wife comes with me on nearly every visit as it helps in preparation, photography, after-meeting discussion and making sure we can 'work the room' when there are a lot of people. It also gives a greater sense of what we can do, what we have done and what we need to do.

I have a large map in my office showing the full area of Essex; it is a big county measuring nearly 1,500 square miles with reputedly 10,000 charities. Controversially, I have heard it claimed that we have the longest coastline... at low tide – I can't fathom that one. We have the longest pier in the country, the oldest recorded town (now a city), and we boast of John Constable and the oldest wooden church in the world. There's much to see and I haven't even mentioned some of great commercial companies whose roots are here (Tiptree Jam, Musto clothing, and a growing number of wineries). As part of our travels, we are walking the Essex Way, an 82-mile romp from Epping to Harwich.



Above: With the Right Reverend Roger Morris, Bishop of Colchester, 'making a din' as part of the annual Blessing and Reclaiming of the Waters ceremony in Brightlingsea

Below: My wife and I have embarked on the Essex Way from Epping to Harwich and will be delighted if others choose to join us. Details of each section attempt will appear on Instagram @essexhighsheriff



'Combine, collaborate, convene': it's not a theme per se, but there have been many occasions when I have had the opportunity to introduce (by email or in person) one charity leader to another or, say, probation services to a charity needing unpaid labour, or the prison governor to a Crown Court judge. As I travel the county meeting people, I find I have a near unparalleled opportunity to see where connections can be made; possibly the Lord-Lieutenant and Chairman of Essex County Council would claim the same but not many others.

What would I advise an incoming High Sheriff in nomination now that I have experienced half a year in the role? First: it is immensely good fun and even more interesting than I had imagined. Second: you can pace yourself. Yes, the invitations build throughout the year as you get known, but you really do have the ability to say no. Third: you do need to seek out new places to visit, so do your research. Many charities and organisations have become used to the publicity, possible funding, and general sense of 'magic dust' that a visit from a High Sheriff brings. I have quite often found previous High Sheriffs' certificates plastering the walls. It is much more fun to really engage with new charities and community groups who perhaps have never heard of a High Sheriff before I ask to visit; invariably they say yes. Last: keep fit. It is a marathon not a sprint and you only have one year to do it. Make sure you give it your best shot by remaining energetic and well. Oh, and good luck!

Below: In July, we entertained nearly every former High Sheriff of Essex and their consort since 2002 to celebrate the retirement of His Honour Judge Gratwicke (centre)

