

Celebrating the rich diversity

Russell Beard

High Sheriff of Bedfordshire 2023-24

Final fitting of robes with Mr Golding ✓
 Transfer of High Sheriff email address ✓
 Pricked by His Majesty King Charles III ✓
 Installed as High Sheriff ✓

What an honour it is to be appointed High Sheriff – I am eagerly awaiting my first engagement. Tea at the Palace? A function at Windsor? My first appointment request has arrived – surely it must be from the Lord Chamberlain's Office? No – it's Mandy from the Mile Road Allotments Association who wants me to open their new composting toilet at 11.00 am on 1 April. Apart from the obvious fear of a wind-up given the date, any ideas of grandeur were erased very early on!

Bedfordshire is a small county in which I have lived the entirety of my life, but I soon came to realise that we have some fantastic volunteers, communities and charities – they all do so much to help make life better. We enjoy a great multi-cultural, diverse life across the county, especially in Bedford and Luton, and it has been a huge privilege to be invited to so many events that embrace ethnicity.

I joined 1,500 Muslims in Bedford Corn Exchange for Iftar, the fast-breaking evening meal during Ramadan, which was an amazing experience. I have enjoyed meeting the high-energy Kenyan communities and the Curry Kitchen project in Luton, and attending Eid festivals and Windrush commemorations – such a rich diversity which adds so much to life in the country.

The coronation celebrations which took place across the county engendered a

lovely sense of pride in both the monarchy and the nation.

The range of appointments that I have attended has raised so many emotions/feelings:

Privilege – lunch with judges at the Old Bailey

Tears – discovering Azalea, a Bedfordshire charity serving Herts/Beds/Bucks which supports girls and women who are being trafficked

Laughter – the eccentric Flitton potato race

Fun – charity auction of Lord-Lieutenants' hats

Nerves – reading the results of the Mid Bedfordshire by-election

Amazement – watching Indian classical dance

Fulfilment – raising charitable funds through golf and tennis events

Hope – visiting schools and colleges

Realisation – community benefits from Luton in Bloom competitions

Honour – royal visit to Bedfordshire by HRH The Princess Royal

Clearly the role requires close contact with those overseeing law and order in the county. I enjoyed a tour of Bedfordshire Police headquarters that included an inspection of the Cyber Crime Unit which was simply incredible. The duty officer in the custody suite did ask my host to make sure that future guests arrived without a sword or any other form of armoury!

The advancement of technology in locating persons in distress was another eye-opening experience. 'What three words', alongside external access to individual mobile devices and GPS technology, is at the forefront of air



With the winners of the mixed doubles and Ken Borneo, President of Riverside Tennis Club; funds raised went to support disability tennis

ambulance, police and fire rescue operations, giving vital information before and during the missions – fascinating to witness in real time.

As I reach the halfway point of my term, it has been the most incredible experience and something which you cannot fully prepare for. I am lucky to have excellent support from a first-class Under Sheriff, the local Bedfordshire Shrievalty Group and East of England Region High Sheriffs.

Below left: Flitton potato race
 Below right: At the High Sheriff's garden party

