

Sport for Good initiatives throughout Hertfordshire



With winners of Sport for Good High Sheriff's Awards at the University of Hertfordshire

Annie Brewster JP

High Sheriff of Hertfordshire 2024-25

I had a simple ambition: to raise awareness of this historic and invariably unknown role; to celebrate the outstanding individuals and organisations making a difference in our communities; and to inspire future generations to become High Sheriffs.

Having previously served as the Chairman of Hertfordshire County Council, I had a helpful head start in receiving invitations to visit all our towns and villages. My answer, 'I will if I can.' I was privileged to attend almost 640 engagements, made possible with the help of my exceptional PA who masterfully controlled my diary and, when not on a horse, those all-important plum parking spaces.

Engagements split almost equally into thirds: our traditional shrieval duties (involving the judiciary, police, citizenship ceremonies, civic events, etc.); engagement with the county's vast number of charitable organisations; and, my chosen theme, Sport

for Good.

My theme highlighted remarkable initiatives across Hertfordshire which use sport and physical activity as vehicles for social transformation, be it through crime reduction, educational achievement, community cohesion, improved mental health or tackling social isolation.

Again and again, I heard how many struggles, including addiction, so often stem from childhood trauma and then saw how structured, active pursuits had changed lives. I have loved offering my support to help break down barriers to participation by connecting people, suggesting funding avenues and amplifying great projects through various High Sheriff's social media platforms.

The support I have received has been truly wonderful. Oaklands College, one of the UK's leading sports colleges, hosted my garden party, where students shared powerful personal stories of how sport was shaping their lives and futures.

With help from the Herts Sports &

Physical Activity Partnership, I visited all our 35 parkruns, an excellent opportunity to speak directly to thousands of Lycra-clad residents about the role of the High Sheriff.

I also visited Hertfordshire County Council's extensive Health Walks network, together with other community organisations, presenting nearly 100 High Sheriff's Recognition Awards to dedicated volunteers whose tireless work is allowing huge participation.

The Partnership also supported my High Sheriff's Awards ceremony at the University of Hertfordshire where all Recognition Award recipients were invited and further competing groups received a financial award with some additional personal awards made for outstanding service.

The awards ceremony showcased an eclectic mix of projects from prison-based triathlons and boxing programmes building teen resilience, to initiatives distributing preloved sports shoes, providing exercise-based cancer rehabilitation, promoting inclusive disability sports and offering daily activity-led rehabilitation for ex-offenders. One former offender has qualified as an LTA tennis coach and another has launched a fishing business.

The university's School of Law also hosted my High Sheriff's Lecture, where Murray Rosen KC, a renowned barrister and sports arbitrator, delivered a compelling address titled 'Is Sport Worth Regulating?'. His insights left the audience with a new understanding of the role law plays in sport and its broader societal implications.

In terms of inspiring the next generation, I was heartened to hear from young girls who, upon hearing from a female High Sheriff with a ceremonial sword, decided they would like to take on the role themselves one day. My sword was mentioned in *The Telegraph's* Peterborough Diary.

This year has taught me the immense power of recognition. In a time when so many voluntary organisations are calling out for more hands and hearts, a simple 'thank you' has never been more powerful, or more necessary, and demonstrated how vital our role is.

My favourite moment arose when, coming out of an ancient alleyway in St Albans, a young man strode past me, touched his cap and simply said, 'Sheriff.' The Shrievalty felt seen!



At the opening of new blue running track made from old training shoes at a primary school near Hertford



On a visit to GRIT (Growing Resilience in Teens) in Hitchin which supports young people to improve their mental health through group boxing programmes, workshops and one-to-one coaching