

Just a thank you



With Dr Caroline Pryer (Lord-Lieutenant), her cadet and mayors



Her Majesty The Queen greeting excited crowds at Hexham Abbey
Photo: Helen Smith

George Farr

High Sheriff of Northumberland 2025-26

Beautiful Northumberland is a massive 1,936 square miles; 405 of those are designated as Northumberland National Park. With a population of only around 320,000, it is the least densely populated county in England. Ninety-seven per cent of the area is officially classed as rural. At the other extreme, urban South East Northumberland accommodates 50 per cent of the county's population in three per cent of its land area.

So, Northumberland is beset by entirely different concerns. In the rural areas, we have issues with isolation and loneliness, compounded by an aging population. In the south-east corner – which, as it happens, is also one of the poorest areas in England – we are dealing with drug and alcohol abuse, and related crime. But for every worry, there are brilliant organisations and their outstanding volunteers and professionals counteracting the problem.

I and the more recent Northumberland High Sheriffs have focussed on supporting youth projects, mainly in South East Northumberland, on the understanding that it is much better to steer youngsters away from starting a life of crime and then channelling their considerable energy into contributing to society. We have a High Sheriff's Fund which donates to projects that focus entirely on creating the best habitats to help young people become the very best person they can be. These youth clubs help them learn things, how to interact and make great friends, and they rise to the challenge every day. But of course the Cubs, Scouts and the many facets of the armed forces and police cadets have been doing this all along and

I have been privileged to join them on many an occasion around a camp fire, on a training exercise or on a parade ground.

To help with youth engagement, I have been working with Northumberland Cricket to provide a chance for young people to learn how to coach the game. At the moment there is virtually no provision for young cricket leaders in Northumberland and I was delighted by the full-to-bursting attendance of the inaugural/pilot coaching session. So much so, that we will roll out this shrieval initiative across the county.

Another project I have been privileged to be part of is the inauguration of a new help group in one of the most rural parts of the county. We hope to help the elderly and less mobile get out and meet people, go shopping or just provide them with a more constant connection to the outside world.

To be honest, so far this shrieval year has been a delightful and extraordinary blur. I have visited HMP Northumberland and our underground RAF base; I have lined up to meet Her Majesty The Queen in Hexham Abbey; I welcomed the Coldstream Guards to receive the

freedom of Berwick upon Tweed; and I have enjoyed many an agricultural show. But what has been so incredibly humbling was the enormous effort the county made in order to make sure that all of the many well-attended VE and VJ Day commemorations ran like clockwork.

In my travels I have been so lucky to meet utterly committed and selfless volunteers who nearly always have a wonderful sense of humour. This engenders an informal camaraderie. So, often when I offer my thanks, I am met with a smile, perhaps a joke; but for most of them, that's all they want – just a thank you.



With the Northumbria branch of the Dry Stone Walling Association

One of many youth groups making the most of Northumberland National Park

