

It's been a very strange experience sitting at home writing my Mayor's opening address whilst the world moves in a different direction to a normal Mayoral handover period. The Covid-19 pandemic has affected everyone, with no exception for age, occupation or location. However, the operation of the Town Council continues, a new Mayor's year begins and I'd like to set out my thoughts accordingly.

Firstly, I'd like to thank Cllr Gill Millner for her amazing two years as our Mayor since May 2018 and I'm really sorry she couldn't end that period in public with the usual thanks and a celebratory meal with us all. As she's said, we will get together once this current crisis is over and things return to some degree of normality. The 'new' normal, as it will be.

I'd also like to thank our Council staff at both The Paramount and The Community Centre for the marvellous way in which they've supported The Council and for the way that they've risen to the occasion as the crisis has unfolded. All of our staff have done their best to try to keep our facilities open and operational and they've all had to make sacrifices, some more than others, in the past few weeks.

It would be wrong not to express my gratitude to our departing Town Clerk, Keith Coulton who unfortunately had to leave his position early due to family health reasons, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Keith has been with us for 12 years, has provided a sterling service to The Council and has supported all Councillors, past & present, equally and impartially, as his role demanded. I'm sure we all wish Keith the very best in his retirement and, once this crisis is over and we're able to, we will meet up with him to reflect on his time with The Council.

The Covid-19 pandemic has decimated the programme of public events that were scheduled to take place this summer and this has been felt throughout our community, no more so for me than with the cancellation of the Mayors Parade & Gala. Planning for this year's proposed Gala started at the end of 2019 and an incredible amount of background work has been done by The Round Table here in Penistone readying for the gala weekend. All of us know that without the dedication, hard work and organisation – all carried out voluntarily – of these members of our local community, combined with that of other committed volunteer groups such as the Scouts, Ladies Circle and the like, none of these community events would happen.

The cancellation of the Gala also means that the start of my charity fund raising year has been delayed and such activities before May 2021 will be compressed. However, I'm determined that these results will not be minimised and I will make every effort to achieve as full a year of fund-raising as possible. This year my principal charity will be BIADS – Barnsley Independent Alzheimers & Dementia Support – who as part of their work actively support sufferers & their carers living in the Penistone area. I hope that as the situation improves we can arrange for The Council to meet with BIADS members and clients, to better understand the challenges that they face.

Speaking of challenges, I was Mayor of Penistone from 2011-2012 and described Penistone then as 'going through change'. This has continued and even without the issues posed by the Covid-19 pandemic our town has experienced what feels

like rapid change, from the changing face of our town centre shops, to newly built (and planned) housing and increasing pressure on our creaking infrastructure.

The style of our town has been slowly moving away from a local shopping destination to more of a social environment, which I think reflects the evolving world of business, commerce and the way people now live & work. It will undoubtedly continue for many years to come and will be coupled with the social distancing challenges that lie ahead. However, I hope people continue to support our local retailers, the small shopkeepers who form the backbone of our High Street and who have themselves supported this Town throughout years past.

Whilst we'll keep changing as time passes, Penistone retains its key focal community buildings of St Johns Church, St Johns Community Centre, the brilliant Paramount Cinema and, love it or loath it, the Market Barn. The Town Council will do what it can to keep our key focal points accessible, relevant and up to date in what they offer. We will have to learn to operate our facilities under new guidelines & procedures but this Council will do its utmost to support our staff and continue to safely serve our community.

Penistone remains a fantastic rural community - full of character and individuality in the local communities & villages that make up the Parish. It has, and always will have, a strong sense of community engagement & care for others. That was highlighted in the amazing social reaction to the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic, with support groups such as Lovethypenistone coming together so people could help their neighbours & our most vulnerable residents.

The challenges we all face in the near future are huge but I know that Penistone will always retain the amazing resilience of the people who live here and that, together, we will return to the new normal with a spirit of confidence in the future. Thank you all.