



Southfields House, Towcester, Northamptonshire, NN12 8EA

3rd of April 2020

I made my Declaration today to the Lord Lieutenant, James Saunders Watson, and appointed my Under Sheriff, Dominic Hopkins who then made his Declaration, each of us based at our respective homes courtesy of the video conferencing provider, Zoom. The Declarations are essentially the promises the High Sheriff and Under Sheriff have to make to Her Majesty the Queen on formally taking office. Separately, at his rectory in Northampton, Fr. Oliver Coss my chaplain said the prayers we would have used had the Declarations been made at All Saints. I think we can say with some confidence that this year will have been the first time in the long history of the Shrievalty that the Declarations have been made electronically (a departure from the norm having been approved by the Queen's Remembrancer who administers the legal requirements for the offices). Dependant on technology, I hope that some or all of the occasion may be posted online later.

With the removal of my Declaration service from All Saints in your company to Southfields with only some family in support I have been spared from making a speech as have you from listening to one - undoubtedly a modest silver lining for all concerned. However, had we been together I had hoped, however inexpertly, to be able to share some thoughts with you about my year as High Sheriff and so I would now like to do that instead by this letter, very conscious that the 'delete' button is only one click away...

The once very extensive powers of the High Sheriff in his or her county are now largely limited to ceremonial duties but, as with so many of our constitutional arrangements, it is an institution which through evolution has been able to endure so that the modern role can be a force for real good. Supporting the Crown and the Judiciary remain central elements of that role today together with providing active support and encouragement to the police, the emergency services, to other agencies involved within the criminal justice system including the Probation and Prison Services and the Youth Offending Service as well as to those in the voluntary sector who play such an important role in our society. By engaging with individuals and organisations, listening to them and offering encouragement and thanks we, hopefully, make them feel valued. What could be more relevant in these times of crisis?

The societal impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic will be many and varied but it is almost a given that most of society's underlying problems will be exacerbated by it. Significant amongst these will be the potential that greater numbers will come into contact with the criminal justice system due to higher levels of domestic abuse, substance abuse, the results of mental illness and the list goes on. That being so, I aim to focus on charities and organisations working in these fields as well as those whose work supports social cohesion. Whilst current restrictions remain in place, meeting face to face is off the cards but whether by old fashioned 'phone, Skype, WhatsApp or whatever other wizardry technology has to offer we can and still should communicate with each other. That I hope to do with

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individuals and organisations addressing these issues but I will in part be reliant on your help and input.

If you know of individuals, public bodies, charities or other organisations that might welcome contact and support from the High Sheriff, please let me have their details. You will all know of people doing wonderful work in the County and both individuals and organisations who have gone the extra mile during this crisis. Please also send me their details, not forgetting those foot soldiers who all too often go unrecognised.

I look forward to hearing from you and, when normality returns, to your company. In the meantime, do feel free to forward this e-mail to others if you think they might be able to give input.

With my very best wishes,

Paul Parsons

Paul Parsons
High Sheriff of Northamptonshire