**MAYOR’S ANNUAL REPORT – APRIL 2020**

This has been a very busy but very rewarding year.

The hard work of my predecessor, Councillor Roger Coleman, is acknowledged; particularly for the excellent relationships forged with Mayors and Chairs of neighbouring Councils.

Before my year was prematurely brought to an end by the COVID-19 pandemic, I, too, had established firm links with Chains from all over Worcestershire, as well as Bridgnorth and Ludlow, in an ongoing effort to promote Bewdley.

My Civic Sunday did not, in fact, take place until October 2019. However, it enjoyed a magnificent turnout from visiting Chains and local dignitaries, whose support was much appreciated.

During my first month in office, we were honoured by a visit from The Mayor of Vellmar – our twin town in Germany. Bürgermeister Manfred Ludwig was accompanied by his wife and a number of his colleagues. Thanks are extended to the Twinning Committee for organising this visit and arranging a number a lively and interesting events throughout the period of their stay.

Among many memorable highlights this past year, two in particular stand out. Both were ‘firsts’ for Bewdley and were able to take place due to the hard work and preparation of the people involved. In October, the Bewdley Festival this year included the first of what will, hopefully, be many ‘themed weekends’. This was devoted to American ‘Roots’ Music and broader American themes. It was a pleasure to see how many local traders participated in the window dressing competition and the ‘American Epic’ theme – Bewdley was uniquely transported into ‘Main Street USA’. I particularly enjoyed the music evenings in St. George’s Hall, as did many others.

The second ‘first’ for Bewdley, was the ‘Global Happiness’ Conference which I was privileged to open.

This was organised by The Bewdley School and took place over five days in November. It brought together children and teachers from across the globe – Africa, the Middle East, India, the Far East, as well as Ireland and Scotland. Bewdley School was featured on BBC TV, Midlands News, and, more importantly, many friendships were forged and greater understanding of each other’s cultures and challenges generated.

The Council year was in many ways transitional. Following local elections in May, virtually half of the Council was newly elected and our officers newly in post too. Everyone has worked conscientiously to do their best for the town and the people whom they represent.

Christmas Lights ‘switch on’ (November 30th) was a resounding success and the small group of councillors involved, together with town council staff, worked hard to ensure its success. Welcome support was received on the day from visiting Chains and our Member of Parliament.

Sadly, we will all remember this year’s floods as they hit the town in mid-February particularly badly and a considerable number of homes and businesses suffered as a consequence. Close liaison with the Environment Agency and the Rescue Services took place and daily contact was maintained to enable current information to be relayed. Agreement has been reached with the Environment Agency to attend a meeting to plan for the future, with the aim of seeking a permanent solution.

The Committee system within the Town Council continues to run smoothly and my thanks go to the Chairs of Finance & General Purposes, Planning, and Staffing, as well as the Chairs of Sub-Committees.

My charities this year were Guide Dogs for the Blind and Age UK. Before coronavirus struck, around £2,000 had been raised. To the people who helped me achieved this – ‘THANK YOU’. The Mayor’s Ball, which would have added to this figure, was a casualty of lockdown - my thanks to those who kindly donated their ticket proceeds.

I have tried to represent the Town to the best of my ability, attending in excess of 100 Mayoral events and meetings up to the year’s premature end in March this year. Special thanks go to my wife, Barbara, for her indefatigable support as Mayoress. I also wish to thank Chairs and Members of Bewdley Civic Society, Bewdley Rotary Club and all others clubs and societies that made me welcome in a year that the Petanque and Chess Club made their debuts and subsequently established themselves, as well as new businesses that have opened in Bewdley. We are fortunate that Bewdley possesses so many people who work tirelessly ensuring the success of clubs, societies, businesses and organisations within the town.

The Town Clerk, Administrative Assistant, and my PA have been incredibly supportive, as have my colleagues on the Town Council. My thanks also go to my two deputies – former Councillor Lawrence Kearns and, current Deputy, Councillor Dan Morehead.

Thank you, Bewdley, for making this year special and I hope everyone remains safe and well during these unprecedented and unforeseen times.

Councillor John Byng

20th April 2020