

TOWN MEETING SPEECH

It's not often I give you the chance to boo the mayor, but tonight you can:

Warwick is a dying town.

(boo!)

I second your boos and raise you a

The Courier ran a story about a store in Warwick that was closing down, wherein the comment was given that the town was dying.

I want to begin this town meeting by echoing what District Councillor Noel Butler's said to that: There were 1.9 million inward trips in the most recently audited annual figures of which 135,000 were overnight staying a total of 398,000 nights, with a total visitor spend of £130 million. And the last figures we have for vacancy rates in the town was October last year when it was 4.43% against a national average of 12%.

We are a vibrant town with a great reputation, and we remain a true market town. Our streets have a difference – they're not packed with the same retail chains that make up the familiar identikit façade of other towns – we have a wealth of inspirational independent retailers, hospitality providers, and businesses who offer something different, something unique, and a level of service that simply is not available in those identikit towns.

During this civic year, I have celebrated many new store and hospitality openings in the town -- Rigsbys, Quilters Den, Peeli, Happy Pucia, Serin, the refurbishments at Globe and The 4 Penny Shop Hotel, Moores of Warwick's Gin distillery & tasting rooms, 1Mb Tech, Olo Pets, Lavelle Bridal Couture and new restaurants including Vivaanta on West St, and Masala Knights in the Square – both very delicious!

We should be proud, and proud to support our local independents and see them thrive.

Last year, Warwick Town Council launched the #Buyin2Warwick campaign which is highlighting everything that Warwick has to offer. You may have seen

those stickers across the shop fronts or the promotions on social media, and this will be expanded during this year with further online and local promotions.

Also, after our trial in 2018 the town council will be employing four 'town ambassadors' in the summer to be out on the streets, assisting and selling Warwick's benefits to our visitors.

Now, Warwick's benefits are not something I need to be sold on – I practically get the heebie jeebies when I find myself in other towns and cities – and it has truly been an honour to serve as mayor for the 2018-2019 civic year. I have loved every minute of it.

No civic year could have begun better than launching straight into Warwick's summer of festivals.

Warwick is very much a community driven town and our summer of festivals sees members of our community pulling together to stage these festivals for the benefit of the wider community and our town's deserving causes.

The lip-smacking 2018 Warwick Food Festival with more than 100 culinary, brewing and distillery specialists and thousands of visitors packing the streets

The inaugural Guy of Warwick Day at Whitsun held by the Guy of Warwick Society, our annual Thai Festival, and the Warwick Summer Beer Festival from The Warwick Court Leet. This year, the Court Leet has already helped a successful winter beer festival, and even better news – this summer's beer festival will be brought right up into the heart of the town and hosted here in Pageant Garden.

At the heart of our summer of festivals is the weekend when Warwick's at its best. The [Warwick Folk Festival](#) brightens and lightens the town, from the festival site to the fringe performances throughout the town.

The same weekend, we also celebrated our independent retailers on Smith Street with the Smith Street Party. Warwick Castle added to the festival feel of the summer with its contribution to remembering Guy of Warwick in its 3D projection mapped evening event Dragon Slayer.

Our festivals also dived into more recent history, with the Warwick Court Leet bringing the Classic Car Show back into the square, and of course the Warwick

Words History Festival offering a wonderfully curated programme of talks and events.

Throughout the summer, the town was in full bloom – both from community spirit and another stunning summer of Warwick in Bloom, with planters, baskets, and tubs lining the streets.

I was delighted the town looked in fine fettle this summer as it was also the year we welcomed the mayors and civic officials and representatives of our twin towns of Ville de Saumur (in France) and Verden (in Germany), along with friendship towns of Havelberg (in Germany) and Comune Di Formigine (in Italy) for the annual international partnership meeting.

Over the years, the bonds we share, the work we can do together, and the friendships we can build through our partnerships, are all immensely valuable as the European landscape shifts. This is especially important for young people and was a theme in the productive partnership meeting.

Unlike a certain other bunch of politicians brought together to agree one thing about Europe, we are making things happen for our young adults both here in Warwick and from partner towns in Europe. Our EuroCamp project is one of the things I am most proud to be part of – it's where we send a group of young adults from each partner town to one of our towns to work and play together, with a two-week long community project at the heart of their experience.

The camp, which rotates between participating towns, facilitates our young adults building lasting links across Europe and Eurocamp 2018 saw Cora-Laine, Jessica, Oliver and Rowan from Warwick spend 2 weeks in Saumur taking part in a number of community activities.

Cora-Laine put it best when, on her return, said, "Eurocamp was an unforgettable experience. I met so many amazing people that I hope I will never lose contact with and with them created something beautiful in which we could share with the local community. I have never connected with a group of people in such a short time and I am proud to have been on Eurocamp and I hope many more young people continue to go on it in the future."

Despite whatever Brexit may bring, we hope through EuroCamp that we have built a bridge for our young people to stay connected with friends and their counterparts in our European partner towns.

2018 also gave us a real reason to reflect on less happier times in Europe and beyond as we commemorated the centenary of the end of the first world war.

In October we welcomed the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers as they exercised the privilege of the Freedom of Warwick and paraded through the town and presented the town with this trophy.

Warwick is proud of its association with the Regiment and last year was especially poignant.

In the first World War, the Regiment has 31 battalions of some forty-seven thousand and five hundred (47,500) men, serving in France, Italy, Gallipoli and Mesopotamia. Sadly, by the end of the war, 11,610 soldiers from the Royal Warwickshire Regiment had given their lives.

We are familiar with the phrase We Will Remember Them and last year, more than ever, Warwick remembered those who fell fighting for our future in that period in the most magnificent and memorable way.

Through the work of Warwick Poppies, and the display in St Mary's church, everyone in or visiting Warwick will remember each of the 11,610 soldiers from the Royal Warwickshire Regiment who gave their lives serving in World War One.

The Warwick Poppies project was the perfect demonstration our community's passionate and heartfelt support for the armed forces and put this town on the map during the centenary commemorations.

Our town's Armistice Centenary Remembrance Sunday was additionally special this year and I thank everyone who contributed to the events we held during the day. From the lone piper at the memorial at 6.00am and all those who rose early to attend, to the Service of Remembrance at St Mary's, and the wreath laying and parade at the War Memorial and also thanks to the Castle who hosted our beacon lighting at 7.00pm as we joined with 1000 other Beacons of Light, all lit simultaneous, to mark that passing of a century since the guns fell silent.

As well as commemoration the autumn also brought celebration with the Victorian Evening, bigger and better again. Thank you all on the Chamber of

Trade, and all organisations and the businesses who get involved in this highlight in our community calendar.

As we headed into Christmas, we were delighted to offer an increase in the The Mayor's Christmas Vouchers, which are available to Warwick residents over the age of 75 from the Town Council. For this I thank the Trustees of Henry VIII Endowed Trust and the participating businesses, which also increased this year, making vouchers redeemable at Claridge's; CJ's Food stalls on Saturday Market; Rowley's Butchers; Mel Broom Butchers and Warwick Visitor Centre.

We cannot pass through the Christmas period without recognising the second Warwick Christmas Lunch, which was led by Terry Morris and Liz, and offered a full Christmas day experience and lunch here in the ballroom to those in our community for whom the 25th of December may not have been a day of coming together and celebration as much as it is for most of us. Congratulations and we will wish you every success for this year and the addition of a Summer Afternoon tea event too.

2019 has been, for me, been a whirlwind of engagements, both here in town attending events, opening more new businesses, hosting civic dignitaries at the recent Warwick Civic Dinner, and representing our town at events in our neighbouring towns and cities.

It is not long now to go until the local elections on May 2nd. This year will see some of our town councillors retire from their civic duties, and they shall be sadly missed given their contribution and love for the town and its communities.

The results of the ballot box will see some new councillors appear on the scene and I hope they are full of vim and vigour as I was four years ago and remain so today.

Some of us may not remain on the council, but we hope we do – the work is never fully done, and there is always something more we want to turn our attention to.

Certainly, one of my highlights of this administration are the grants we as a town council have been able to provide — grants that empower community

leaders to execute on their vision – be it running events, launching initiatives, progressing projects, or supporting our local charitable causes.

We all – all of us – do this for the betterment of those with whom we share our community here in Warwick and that is what we celebrate tonight.

On our display boards, we can see the work of the Warwick Horticultural and Allotment Society, The charity Evelyn's Gift, Warwickshire Police and our wonderful team that brings Warwick's history alive - Unlocking Warwick.

We will hear from:

Warwick Town Christmas Lunch

Warwick Ambulance Association

2nd Warwick Sea Scouts

The Gap

Warwick District Council Events Team

Da Capo Choir

Warwick Poppies

Leamington Music

Warwick Words

Classic Car Show

Warwick Folk Festival

Citizens Advice

Playbox Theatre

Friends of Warwick Station

Kenilworth Helping Hands

We have reports from Warwickshire County Council, Warwick District Council, the Court Leet, the Chamber of Trade, The Lord Leycester Hospital, Warwickshire Yeomanry Museum, Unlocking Warwick, Buyin2Warwick and Plastic Free Warwick, and we will also hear from our town councillors on any outside charities they are involved in.

We have much to celebrate so let's get on with showing that far from being a dying town, we are a town that is full of life, one that champions community spirit and those who make things happen.

We begin tonight with welcoming (item 1)