

Freedom of the Town Speech

1st December, 2023

I would like to thank The Mayor and the Town Council for this great honour of being given the Freedom of our Town. I have been lucky enough to inherit many things in my life, but it is those things that I have earned that matter most and the Freedom of Arundel is very special indeed. I would also like to thank the children for their comments. I don't think I have ever received so many accolades from the young in one day in my entire life!

And thank you all for coming. I'm not quite sure if it's me or the Christmas tree which has been the main draw tonight, but it's wonderful to see so many of you here all the same.

The late Queen's Funeral and The Coronation of King Charles were two enormous moments in our national life, which we had to get right. I used to joke that if I had got them wrong, I would have to emigrate to Australia. I had an incredible team working with me and so this honour is for them also, I gladly accept it on behalf of the many thousands of people who were involved in delivering both events on the day.

The thing about a Funeral is you never know when it is going to take place. It's rather like studying for a Physics 'A' Level, but not knowing the date. And, of course, our late Queen was one of the greatest Heads of State, and revered throughout the world.

We started planning for Her Funeral 20 years ago. Initially there were just twelve of us, but before she died this number had grown to 286. We had to plan for death in every possible location and in every circumstance. Covid presented enormous problems.

The Coronation followed soon after, and one aspect of which I am particularly proud is that for the first time in history we organised a Royal Salute in the Gardens of Buckingham Palace for all the 4000 troops marching, so everyone actually got to see The King and Queen. This involved a very complicated manoeuvre of 12 troops abreast reducing to six to get through the Garden Gate, without slowing the procession down. It worked. The King was also very moved that he got to see all 4000 troops.

The Funeral and the Coronation were an opportunity to remind each one of us what a Great Country we still are and help restore our National pride. We didn't make any great Government announcements with a fanfare, we just got on with the job and performed. I like to think we also earned the admiration and respect of the world.

The Nature Restoration project up at Peppering is a different story. We live in a troubled world. This planet in all its beauty is under threat as never before. Global warming is a massive problem which thankfully we are now taking very seriously, and there are signs we can halt the temperature increase to 1.5°C, - no one is quite sure. But alongside this it is nature's complete collapse which is the real threat to mankind, and this will kill all of us off long before global warming does. The world will survive, it's we humans who won't like the dinosaurs before us.

The recent State of Nature Report concludes that here in the UK we have lost 70% of our wildlife since 1970, and one in 6 of our species are now in danger of extinction in Britain. At the same time it's estimated that Global Population will increase from 8 billion up to 11 billion, that's roughly half as many mouths to feed again during my grandchildren's lifetime.

In parts of China and in Southern California natural insect pollination is already failing because they are running out of insects. In China they have tried to pollinate by hand, it doesn't work. Here in the UK we are the worst performer for restoring Nature amongst all the G10 nations globally.

And so up at Peppering over twenty years we have developed a middle way to reverse nature's decline but we still farm to produce food in the normal way. We have grey partridges, skylarks, cornbuntings, linnets, lapwings, raptors and owls, all on the increase again, and soon we may have the curlew breeding again on the South Downs for the first time in 100 years.

In the field margins, next to the 30 miles of newly planted hedgerows and beetle banks you will see over 100 different types of arable flowers, including many red-listed ones like the cornflower, prickly poppy, night flowering catchfly, venus looking glass and the fumitories. And living on these flowers you will see 680 different species of insect, 10% of which are Nationally rare, including 50 different types of pollinating bees.

At night you will hear the nightingale, and at dawn the cuckoo and the turtle dove. You will also see hares, dormice, harvest mice, hedgehogs and water voles. To be completely honest, Peppering is the most successful Nature Revival project anywhere in arable England by a country mile and it is talked about as a beacon of hope throughout Europe.

And so, I would like to thank The Mayor for also honouring our Nature Revival project tonight. It gives me and all the Estate Team great pleasure to see many of you walking up at Peppering and enjoying the wildlife with a smile on your face.

In this troubled world, there is still a corner of this globe that we know and love. A land which generations before us have fought for so hard. A land which against all the odds has remained free for 1,000 years. This land we call England.

And here in the southern part of England, nestled amongst the Sussex Downs lies our small town of Arundel, which can trace its origins right back to the Norman Conquest. And throughout those 1,000 years, Arundel has always played its full part in our National Life. A Market Town which continues to this day. A town which welcomes visitors from all around the world and which embraces people from all walks of life, all faiths and freedom of speech. A proud Town with a strong sense of community.

All of us here tonight who live in and around Arundel are lucky people, and I am indeed fortunate to be given the Freedom of this Town tonight and thank you all for giving me this great honour.

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