

A letter from...

Greg Clark MP

As spring breaks out, so does the prospect that the months ahead will see us put the worst of Covid behind us.

The last twelve months have been the hardest in most of our lifetimes. Many of us have lost family and friends to Covid. Our NHS and care workers have seen us through heart-breaking and draining experiences with dedication, professionalism, and compassion. Jobs and businesses have been hit hard, and children and students have had their education disrupted.

Looking back on the pandemic, our community has much to be proud of. Thousands of people – health and care workers, shop workers and people in the food industry, our emergency services, post office, Royal Mail and delivery drivers, teachers, bin men and women and so many others – put their health on the line to keep us safe.

In this magazine, I want to pay particular tribute to the staff and members of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Kent County Council and our parish councils, who rose to the challenge of aiding the community from the very first days of, and all through, the pandemic.

The Town Hall Team even in the last few weeks, have been working flat out booking vaccination appointments for patients in our rural villages.

We can be proud of the response of our community. In every ward and village of the borough neighbours got together to look out for each other, and to give help and support to people who needed it. We're still doing it. One morning when I called at the vaccination centre in Tunbridge Wells, it was thrilling to see it abuzz with volunteers – from the freemasons in Hi Viz jackets marshalling the traffic, to members of the Rusthall Walking Club checking patients in.

So many people I have spoken to have told me how, during the last year, they discovered things about our area they had taken for granted. The amazing abundance of natural beauty all around us – whether it is the countryside enveloping all our towns and villages (surely one of the best kept secrets in Britain?), to the range of local shops that have proved a lifeline and a delight during the lockdowns.

I am optimistic that our borough will recover strongly from the effects of the pandemic. I know that many people are yearning to enjoy again the pleasures that have been placed out of reach for most of the past year – with many of our local small businesses providing them.



A pint in the pub on the way home from work. A coffee and a chat with friends on a shopping trip into town. Family celebrations over a meal in a local restaurant. Jazz on the Pantiles on a summer Thursday night. An evening at the theatre at Trinity or the Assembly Hall, or a gig at The Forum.

Soon our community groups will be able to meet in person once again – with a year's worth of catching up to do at coffee mornings and the clubs and societies that fill the diaries of our village halls. Cricket back on our beautiful village greens, sports clubs for young and old springing back into life.

Many people have realised that communities like ours are special places to be in and out of lockdown. The quality of life that we have through neighbours that you can get to know, lots going on, natural and architectural beauty all around us – we are privileged to live where we do.

I am conscious that for many people the months ahead will still be tough – especially those whose job or business didn't make it through the pandemic. I know that for all our charms and beauty, we're an expensive area to live in, especially when money is scarce. So we must, at every level – government, council and personal – carry forward our determination to support everyone who needs it, as has been so evident during the pandemic.

Covid has not gone away yet. We will need to keep our guard. But I hope that the spring and summer ahead can be a time of relief and recovery. The last year has been one we never want to repeat. But I am thankful – for our health service, our strong communities, our effective council and public services, our resourceful and resilient businesses and our beautiful environment – and that I was able to spend it in our borough.

The Rt Hon Greg Clark MP

Member of Parliament for Tunbridge Wells