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COUNCIL

15 SEPTEMBER 2021

(7.00 pm - 7.20 pm)

PRESENT

(in the Chair), Councillor Michael Brunt, Councillor Edith Macauley, Councillor Agatha Mary Akyigyina, Councillor Stephen Alambritis, Councillor Mark Allison, Councillor Laxmi Attawar, Councillor Eloise Bailey, Councillor Thomas Barlow, Councillor Nigel Benbow, Councillor Hina Bokhari, Councillor Michael Brunt, Councillor Adam Bush, Councillor Omar Bush, Councillor Ben Butler, Councillor Tobin Byers, Councillor Billy Christie, Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Councillor Pauline Cowper, Councillor Stephen Crowe, Councillor Mary Curtin, Councillor David Dean, Councillor John Dehaney, Councillor Nick Draper, Councillor Anthony Fairclough, Councillor Edward Foley, Councillor Brenda Fraser, Councillor Jenifer Gould, Councillor Edward Gretton, Councillor Joan Henry, Councillor Daniel Holden, Councillor James Holmes, Councillor Andrew Howard, Councillor Janice Howard, Councillor Natasha Irons, Councillor Sally Kenny, Councillor Linda Kirby, Councillor Paul Kohler, Councillor Rebecca Lanning, Councillor Najeeb Latif, Councillor Edith Macauley, Councillor Russell Makin, Councillor Peter McCabe, Councillor Simon McGrath, Councillor Nick McLean, Councillor Oonagh Moulton, Councillor Aidan Mundy, Councillor Hayley Ormrod, Councillor Dennis Pearce, Councillor Owen Pritchard, Councillor David Simpson, Councillor Peter Southgate, Councillor Geraldine Stanford, Councillor Eleanor Stringer, Councillor Dave Ward, Councillor Martin Whelton, Councillor Dickie Wilkinson, Councillor David Williams and Councillor Helena Dollimore

ATTENDING REMOTELY

Councillor Stan Anderson, Councillor Mary Curtin and Councillor David Chung

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Marsie Skeete and Carl Quilliam.

Councillors Stan Anderson, Mary Curtin and David Chung attended remotely.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

3 FREEDOM OF THE BOROUGH (Agenda Item 3)

The motion was moved by Councillor Allison, Leader of the Council and seconded by Councillor Nick McLean, Leader of the Opposition. Councillor Alambritis also spoke on the motion.

Councillor Mark Allison

Thank you Mr Mayor. I just want to say what an honour it is for me, that the first Freedom of the Borough being given in Merton, in my time as Leader of the Council is to Dickie and how proud I am of helping to make it happen. As Stephen has said, Dickie is eminently well qualified for this honour and the whole community around Merton and AFC Wimbledon knows only too well what a great man he is. A great goalkeeper, but even more than that a great community man. But I also want to say that this honour will be shared, the sense of pride in it will be shared, by everyone associated with AFC Wimbledon.

Now, I was elected 20 years ago, nearly 20 years ago, and within weeks of my election the FA said Wimbledon FC could move to Buckinghamshire. They said it would not be in the wider interests of football for a new team run by Wimbledon fans to succeed. Well it is thanks to people like Dickie that we have well and truly put matters right. Now, I know that many fans cannot forget that long before I was elected the Council let them down by letting the club move out of Plough Lane. But, my goodness, thanks to this generation's Council and the hard work and commitment, more importantly of fans who are personified by Dickie, they are back at Plough Lane now and it is wonderful.

Dickie is used to saving penalties, but thanks to him and people like him, we have saved a football club and new generations of Merton residents can enjoy their football again. So thank you Dickie. This council salutes you and through you we salute everyone involved in AFC Wimbledon. Thank you for all you've done for your community, not just in football but in all your community work. We appreciate it and we wish you all the very best as you receive your Freedom of the Borough of Merton. Thank you.

Cllr Nick McLean

Thank you Mr Mayor,

We are here tonight to confer the freedom of the borough on Dickie Guy; as has already been said Dickie has given a lifetime of service to our local community and especially to football here in Merton.

We all know of Dickie's fantastic save to stop Peter Lorimer's penalty in the famous FA cup run in 1975; and of course his years of work as AFC Wimbledon rose from the ashes to return to Plough Lane.

So I thought what lessons has Dickie shown us that can be used to inspire our next generation of Dons at the player development centre.

Well first of all, Dickie has always worked hard, he played in two hundred and seventy five consecutive games and only missed one match out of four hundred and forty nine in seven years.

Second, if you believe in yourself you can achieve great things. I'm sure many Burnley fans thought that a non-league team would be push overs; but not Dickie and the Dons, who believed in themselves and became the first non-league team to beat a First Division team away from home in fifty four years!

And third, be proud of our community and where you come from; as Dickie and all those who worked so tirelessly to see AFC Wimbledon return to the borough and to Plough Lane showed, when we all work together we can achieve great things and improve our community.

Dickie the motto of Merton truly applies to you 'Stand fast in honour and strength'. The freedom of the London Borough of Merton is greatly deserved – congratulations! Mr Mayor – it is a privilege to second this motion tonight.

Cllr Stephen Alambritis

Mr Mayor,

2021 has seen many people approaching me to put forward former Wimbledon FC goalkeeper, Mr Richard John Guy for Freedom of the Borough.

I was reminded that freedom of the borough is the highest award we can give and is an honour bestowed on few people.

It is awarded to people who have provided outstanding service in the borough.

So, to be sure Mr Mayor, I looked up the nomination form for freedom of the borough.

And there it was staring me in the face and it read:

“Candidates should have made a substantial contribution to the borough in any area of activity, which can include sports activities”

I knew then I was home and dry

But the first mention of such an award was made much earlier than this year

Many are aware of the famous FA Cup tie of 25/01/1975 when non-league Wimbledon were playing Leeds United at Elland Road.

There was a penalty. Lorimer (nicknamed “Lash” because of his hard shot) stepped up to take it and Guy saved it.

Keith Macklin of Yorkshire TV was the commentator and he famously said “Dick Guy can have the freedom of Wimbledon this weekend. They can make him the freeman of the borough”

And so 46 years later here we all are

But Mr Mayor

It is not just about that moment.

Dickie has stayed loyal to the club since that famous match and has an outstanding list of achievements in Merton

In his early years Dickie worked on the docks in East London before Millwall recognised his sporting talents between the sticks

In fact, Dickie was initially tried out as a centre forward but he quickly sussed out that being a striker involved far too much of that running about business

From Millwall Dickie went to Tooting & Mitcham in 1965 another club steeped in Merton and in 1967 he joined Wimbledon

He made nearly 600 first-team appearances in goal over the following 11 years.

At one point he played in 275 consecutive games - and only missed one game in a run of 449 matches between January 1970 and August 1977.

To this day, the Leeds cup tie remains one of the tournament's most-cherished moments.

In the previous round, Dickie also kept a clean sheet as The Dons beat First Division Burnley 1-0, becoming the first non-League team for 54 years to defeat a top-flight team away from home.

He was part of the Wimbledon team that won promotion into the Football League and continued playing at that level.

He eventually left the club but his heart and soul remained at Plough Lane.

He carried on supporting the club and stood shoulder to shoulder with fans when they launched AFC Wimbledon in 2002.

In recognition of his loyalty and service, Dickie was invited to become club president two years later in 2004.

In a recent interview in the club's official history, We Are Home, he said on being asked to be President: "I fell quiet for a few seconds; I honestly felt humbled to have been asked. It remains a deep honour for me to still be in the role."

He has been described by the fans as the Best Football Club President in the world

Now then Mr Mayor

Presidents can either get in the way, rub people up the wrong way

or use their position to allow good things to happen

and this is what Dickie has been doing as President since 2004 and more recently and during this awful pandemic

He has overseen the success of the Dons Local Action Group

That is:

1500 volunteers, 150,000 food boxes 1,850 laptops and tablets

He has also overseen the success of the AFC Wimbledon Foundation in working with local Merton Schools

Mr Mayor and on a personal note, Dickie is married to Josie

Last year they celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary

He has been through two heart attacks, three bouts of cancer of the larynx and speaks through a voice box and no one can shut him up when it comes to speaking up for AFC Wimbledon

And yes Mr Mayor, despite all those difficulties,

Dickie is still to this day President of the club

and joins other local sporting heroes including Andy Murray and Virginia Wade

In having the award of Freedom of the Borough bestowed on them here in Merton, Home to Plough Lane and now and in the wider interests of football home to AFC Wimbledon

The Mayor then called for a vote on the Motion and reminded the Council that under Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972, it requires more than a two thirds majority of Members passing the motion for the Honorary Freeman to be bestowed.

The vote was carried, unanimously.

The substantive resolution was agreed.

RESOLVED:

That, by virtue of the power vested in it by Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council does admit Richard John Guy as Freeman of the London Borough of Merton.

This honour is bestowed upon Richard John Guy in recognition of his sporting achievements and continuing work within the community.