

Mayor Making speech

Cllr Joan Henry

Deputy Lieutenant Mr Chris Cotton, fellow councillors, distinguished guests, family and friends, good evening.

I am delighted and privileged to be before you, as the Mayor, the First Citizen of the London Borough of Merton for the year 2022 to 2023. To outgoing Mayor Councillor Mike Brunt I thank you for your guidance and congratulate you on an outstanding year.

It has been a journey to be now holding this great office, and to be able to represent our wonderful borough of Merton, and I look forward to engaging with the local community.

Coming from the beautiful island of Jamaica, I arrived in the UK **43** years ago with my 3 children. I first lived in Wandsworth with my parents and siblings before moving to Merton 32 years ago.

My grandparents, parents and siblings have always been in one way or another serving the community and giving back.

As the eldest, no one was surprised when I became a councillor in 2014 and it has been my most rewarding experience serving the community of Pollards Hill and contributing to Merton being a great borough to live, work and enjoy.

None of my achievements would be possible without the people of Pollards Hill, who re-elected me for a 3rd term on May 5th 2022, because they know what a special place they occupy in my life.

I want to thank my ward colleagues Martin Whelton and Aidan Mundy for all their support. I also would like to say a very special thank you to my colleague Councillor Brenda Fraser, who has been like a soft pillow to rest my head on when I am in need.

My Deputy, our Consorts and I are pleased to be elected in the year of our Queen's 70th Jubilee Anniversary, and are looking forward to an exciting, engaging and memorable year.

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of community spirit and togetherness, and so I am pleased to announce my charities for the year being Dons Local Action Group and Jimmy Asher Foundation.

Formed in response to the pandemic the Dons Local Action Group is a local network of volunteers offering support and helping those in our community to fight poverty. The group provides food parcels, household goods, furniture and appliances. They also provide laptops for children to access online learning through their Keep Kids Connected Initiative. The groups work covers Merton, Wandsworth and Kingston.

The Jimmy Asher Foundation offers support to young people from diverse backgrounds who wish to make positive life choices and develop into responsible young adults, further impacting on the wider community. They offer a variety of programmes including Sport, Drama, Music, Media and Healthy Cooking as a core part of the work they do. Based in Pollards Hill, the group also works in Lambeth, Kensington and Chelsea, Hackney, among several other boroughs and has international projects in Gambia, Sierra Leone and Jamaica.

I am delighted that representatives from both charities have joined us here tonight and there will be an opportunity to speak to them at the reception after this meeting if you would like to know more.

In closing, I promise that I will value the huge responsibility I have taken on and work together with my deputy and our consorts to represent our wonderful, beautiful and vibrant borough of Merton and those who live and work here.

Thank You.