

Christmas Message from The Worshipful Town Mayor of Folkestone Councillor Belinda Walker

I always love Christmas – choirs singing Christmas carols, decorations, wrapped gifts under the tree and lots of elves and Santas. It's a great time of getting together with friends and with family to celebrate, to take stock of the old year and to look forward to what is to come.

The past few years have been difficult for everyone. First covid, then sharp price increases have not given us much reason for hope of late. But Folkestone is a wonderful, vibrant town full of hope. There is a really strong community spirit here and I know of so many voluntary organisations who will be out and about at Christmas time bringing festive neighbourliness to those who could easily feel left out – the homeless community, those in substandard accommodation, those older people whose family have moved away and whose friendship circle has diminished over the years.

The charities I am supporting this year, Shepway Spectrum Arts, The Rainbow Centre, and Age UK's Marigold Centre all do their bit to alleviate loneliness and need – not just at Christmas but all year round. And there are others too – United Response in Cheriton, Touchbase, the Community Fridge, Mind, Sunflower House, and the Royal British Legion, to name a few. And we have groups helping those who have come here seeking asylum to integrate into the community through English lessons and gardening projects.

I chose the theme 'Light in Winter, Hope at Christmas' for the mayoral Christmas card this year. The theme of Light in Winter is one that everyone can relate to as the theme of light bringing hope in darkness is an old one common to many cultures. For me and many others the heart of the nativity is the Hope at Christmas, too. Christmas, when all the tinsel and glitz are swept away, remains a sign of hope.

Folkestone is a place where community spirit is alive and well. When all is said and done, this is the real meaning of Christmas - it's about giving, about sharing joy, and about a sense of belonging. Folkestone does just that all year round.

Merry Christmas!

