

AWARD OF TITLE OF HONORARY FREEMAN
FOR CLLR NEVILLE JAMES CHARD

PROPOSAL BY Cllr J HERON

The Council has felt for some years that there ought to be a legal provision to allow Town and Parish Councils to grant some form of honorary status to those individuals who have made an immense contribution to the town or community. I think everyone here will be able to think of people who have lived in the town and are now sadly no longer with us, and also some who are still contributing to community life and who we ought to be able to grant this type of award to. We tried to get other Councils interested in making these awards. But our proposals did not appear to have received much support nationally and we thought that that was the end of the matter.

You can imagine how surprised and delighted we were when, earlier this year, we were advised that we would now have the authority to grant the title of Honorary Freeman or Honorary Freewoman to those persons who had given long and meritorious service to the community.

Amongst us we have one such person. I am delighted to formally propose that Cllr Neville James Chard be the first person to be awarded the title of Honorary Freeman of Ringwood Town.

Neville's service to the community dates back to the second World War when he was an Army Cadet attached to the Home Guard and based at the Bridge House Hotel which is now know as Armfield Tech in West

Street. Amongst his duties he was required to sit in the observation post on the roof of this building watching out for air raids and making sure that notifications to Central Control at Winchester were undertaken expeditiously. Neville is looked upon as the father of the Council, although it is not true that he was a Member when Caesar invaded! As a result of his war time duties, Neville has actually been involved in community activities, starting on the roof of this building, for over sixty five years; an astonishing record.

But Neville is mostly associated with two things. Firstly, his beloved Bisterne Football Club which he joined in the 1948/49 season, then simply as a player. And, just a few years later in 1957, he became Secretary of that Club and is still Secretary a mere fifty three years later. It is not just the paperwork that Neville does at Bisterne, but he is also the grounds man, head cook and bottle washer. As grounds man, he has gained many awards of 'Grounds man of the Year' for Hampshire, South and South West England, including the Channel Islands and also came third in the England and Wales Nationals competition for the best pitches.

Not content with his football activities, Neville joined the former Ringwood & Fordingbridge Rural District Council in about 1970 and, subsequently, in 1973, became one of the first Members of the newly formed New Forest District Council, a Council on which he served until 1987. And, as you might imagine, Neville served on the Recreation Committee of that Council. Neville joined the Town Council in about 1972. He has multiple entries of his name on the Roll of Honour at the Town Council, having served as Chairman of the Council in 1982/83 and then for three years from 1986 to 1989 and, latterly, in 1999/2000. In

addition to all of those roles, Neville has been Chairman of virtually every Committee of the Council and I am sure that he will tell me at the end if I have got that wrong.

So, in conclusion, I have the great honour and privilege to formally propose that in recognition of his long and meritorious service to the community, Neville James Chard be the first person in the town to be granted the title of Honorary Freeman of the Town of Ringwood.