

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON TOWN COUNCIL

SPECIAL TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

22 February, 2022

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Present: The Mayor (Councillor Taylor) in the Chair

Councillors:

Cleeve	How
Coles	Jackson
I Fradgley	Mackenzie
J Fradgley	Vos

Clerk: Having succumbed to Covid, the Town Clerk's attendance was via Zoom

Press: None present

Public: None present

113) Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Alcock, Lee, and Rolfe and were accepted for the reasons given.

Councillors Curtis, Dowling and Wall was absent from the meeting.

114) Declarations of Interest

There were no declaration of interest.

115) Conferring Freedom of the Town of Stratford-upon-Avon Upon Judith Olivia Dench, CH, DBE, FRSA and Kenneth Branagh, KB

The Mayor explained the reason for the Special Meeting of Stratford-upon-Avon Town Council and called upon Councillor Cleeve whose proposal and reasoning is as follows:

'We are here today to consider something very similar to that which was considered by the Town Council of 1769. Two-hundred and fifty years ago, David Garrick was the most celebrated actor of his time. It was he that gifted the John Cheere statue of Shakespeare to the town. In return the Town Council bestowed upon him the Freedom of the Borough, as you can see from the honours board here in the Council Chamber.

Sir Kenneth Branagh, is the David Garrick of our own age. He's one of the world's highest acclaimed actors and filmmakers and has loved Stratford-upon-Avon and William Shakespeare nearly all his life. He has devoted himself to the popularisation of Shakespeare on stage, and especially on screen.

He first began his long associations with Stratford-upon-Avon in his teens, when he would hitchhike here to see plays at the theatre. He first appeared with the Royal Shakespeare Company in Adrian Noble's production of Henry V, and since appeared in Love's Labour's Lost and Hamlet.

In 2001 The Shakespeare Institute, based in Stratford-upon-Avon (and part of the University of Birmingham), made him an Honorary Doctor of Literature. He came to Stratford-upon-Avon for the graduation ceremony, furthering the link between him and the town, and affirming an important collaboration: since the 1980s Professor Russell Jackson of The Shakespeare Institute has served as Branagh's textual consultant for all of his Shakespeare films and stage projects. The Shakespeare Institute Library is home to the archives for Branagh's Renaissance Theatre Company and Renaissance Films.

He directed and starred as Shakespeare in the critically acclaimed film All is True, written by Ben Elton and also starring Dame Judi Dench and Sir Ian McKellen; the Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust's Dr Paul Edmondson served as historical consultant on the production. Branagh came to Stratford-upon-Avon to research the project, and fully intended to film part of it here. The film follows the final years of Shakespeare's life in Stratford-upon-Avon. He recorded Shakespeare's Sonnets in 2021 for Cambridge University Press.

Branagh was awarded the Pragnell Prize in 2015, but his many film and stage credits reach far beyond Shakespeare. He is an important international star who has many deep and proud associations and connections with Stratford-upon-Avon.

To receive the Freedom of the Town is a great honour. He was given the Freedom of the City of Belfast (where he was born) in 2018. Mr Mayor, may I Propose, that Sir Kenneth Branagh now receives the Freedom of the Town of Stratford-upon-Avon.

Receiving the Freedom would not only be a great honour for him personally, the Town Council and the whole community will be equally honoured, if not more so, and I have no doubt it will give pleasure to his millions of admirers worldwide’.

The motion was Seconded by Councillor Coles and put to the vote, whereby it was unanimously

RESOLVED: That the Council do hereby confer upon Kenneth Branagh KB, Honorary Freedom of the Town in recognition of their eminent service to the Town and do admit the said Kenneth Branagh to be an Honorary Freeman of the Town.

Further, that the Certificate of Freedom be engrossed under the Common Seal and presented at a meeting of the Town Council on the twenty-second day of April 2022 and that the name of Kenneth Branagh KB, be entered upon the Roll of Freeman of the Town.

The Mayor then called upon Councillor How whose Proposal was as follows:

‘I would heartedly concur that Kenneth Branagh is the David Garrick of our time but equally, there is another great actor that I propose should also receive the Freedom of the Town concurrently with Ken.

Dame Judi Dench, Companion of Honour, is globally recognised as one of the finest and most versatile actors ever to have graced the British stage and to have performed on film and on television.

A onetime resident of Stratford-upon-Avon and of nearby Charlecote, she has frequently undertaken leading roles in plays by Shakespeare and other classic and modern dramatists with the Royal Shakespeare Company and has performed here in poetry readings organised by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. She was awarded the Pragnell prize in the year 2000.

She has acted to acclaim at the National Theatre, at the Chichester Festival Theatre, and frequently in the West End of London and on television. Her career as a film actor has brought her numerous prestigious awards including an Oscar for her performance as Queen Elizabeth I in Shakespeare in Love and nominations for eight other Academy awards.

She holds honorary degrees from the University of York (where she was born) and ten other British universities as well as Harvard University in America. She has been awarded the Freedom of the cities of York and London. The generous and unfailingly modest patron of numerous charitable organisations, she is renowned for her humanitarian generosity.

I think we owe her nothing less than the Freedom of this Town'.

The motion was Seconded by Councillor J Fradgley and put to the vote, whereby it was unanimously

RESOLVED: That the Council do hereby confer upon Judith Olivia Dench, CH, BE, FRSA, MBE, Honorary Freedom of the Town in recognition of their eminent service to the Town and do admit the said Judith Olivia Dench, CH, BE, FRSA, MBE to be an Honorary Freewoman of the Town.

Further, that the Certificate of Freedom be engrossed under the Common Seal and presented at a meeting of the Town Council on the twenty-second day of April 2022 and that

the name of, Judith Olivia Dench, CH, BE, FRSA, MBE be entered upon the Roll of Freeman of the Town.

The Mayor declared the meeting closed at 6:38pm