

# The Rotary Club of Lincoln

## January 2026 Newsletter



### Rotary Club Meeting 12<sup>th</sup> January 2026

#### **Speaker: Councillor Biff Bean, Former Mayor of Lincoln, Independent Councillor for the Hartsholme Ward**

As his career evolved, Biff moved to Manhattan, New York, in 1982, where he worked for IKEA. For a 19-year-old who had grown up in quiet, provincial Lincolnshire, it was a culture shock. However, the experience was identity-shaping—living and working alongside a diverse range of nationalities and having to rise at 4:00 a.m. to get to work on time.

When he returned to New York 30 years later, he was very upset to be pulled over at customs by armed officers and interrogated as if he were a criminal and threat to national security. The experience left him deeply saddened by how much a place he had once loved had changed, and he vowed never to return.



As a councillor, Biff has been involved in setting up the Hartsholme Community Trust—a charity formed to transform an area of wasteland in Hartsholme into a multi-use playground for young people. Through this Trust, he has supported initiatives in the Hartsholme ward to rehabilitate young offenders and has also been involved in a range of local dementia projects.

Currently, Biff serves as one of the directors of Lincoln City FC's charity, the Red Imps Community Trust. He sees the football club as an essential part of bringing the city's community together and is a strong advocate for investing money locally to support communities.

Through his footballing connections, Biff was approached by Mick Hazard, a former Tottenham Hotspur player, to start a suicide prevention initiative in Lincoln—a city known as a suicide hotspot. Biff negotiated and managed the installation of three suicide prevention benches around the city: one in Hartsholme, one in the Bailgate

area, and another near the football ground. These benches are fitted with solar-powered lights so they can be seen 24 hours a day and include QR codes that direct distressed individuals to support services.

In closing, Biff shared a moving story from his time as Mayor while attending a graduation ceremony at the cathedral. During the reception afterward, he was approached by a woman in tears. Her son had been a young offender who, with Biff's support, had turned his life around. Overcome with gratitude, she hugged Biff tightly. That moment, he said, made all his community work worthwhile. He called on the Rotary Club to unite with him for the good of lasting change in the community.

Giving the **Vote of Thanks**, President-Elect John H thanked Biff for coming to speak to the club about his very worthwhile community work.

## Rotary Club Meeting 26<sup>th</sup> January 2026

Speaker: Rotarian Dennis

Dennis the Intrepid Rotarian Traveller – A Turkmenistan Experience

Dennis's latest journey took him far off the usual tourist map to Turkmenistan, a country he soon discovered was full of contrasts. Even obtaining a visa was an experience in itself, involving careful checks, social-media vetting, and the usual assortment of fees and forms.



On arrival, the checks continued, and Dennis was introduced to a nation rich in natural gas but with surprisingly little

local production apart from cotton, which historically supplied the Soviet Union. Although Turkmenistan claims a neutral international status, it is also known for a difficult human-rights situation and strong government control.

His small group of five travellers was provided with a guide—who quickly revealed himself to be more of a government minder than a traditional tour leader. Rarely seen without a phone to his ear, he appeared to be in regular contact with the authorities, updating them on the group's movements. This constant background communication went some way towards explaining why certain topics were quietly avoided and why passports were requested by officials at almost every destination.

Partway through his talk to Rotary, Dennis paused to give the audience a short quiz on Turkmenistan—its location, population, capital, and currency. This interactive moment helped everyone appreciate just how little most people know about this lesser-visited part of the world, and it provided a useful backdrop to the rest of his story.



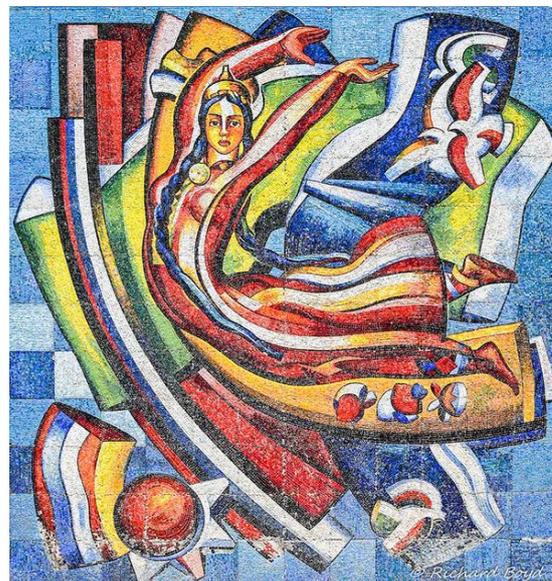
Much of the country is desert, and water is scarce. What grows naturally is mostly suited for camels. Land is state-owned and leased to farmers on the condition that they grow cotton—a system that, in the past, has involved forced labour and even the closing of schools during cotton-picking season.



Although Turkmenistan is officially secular, around 95% of the population is Muslim, and women are expected to wear the hijab. The country operates as a presidential republic, though in practice the political system is extremely centralised.

Travelling around the country involved long drives on poor quality roads to reach some striking sights: the dramatic “Gate of Hell” gas crater, the country’s own version of the Grand Canyon, the impressive 1,000-step mosque, and the world’s largest indoor Ferris wheel.

Turkmens have a deep cultural pride in their horses, with the most prized animals valued at very high sums. With summer temperatures reaching 40°C, the streets were often empty during the day, yet Dennis found the people warm and welcoming, with many locals keen to take photos with visiting foreigners.



Modern shopping malls stood shining but nearly deserted, filled with brand-name goods whose authenticity could sometimes be questioned. There were still traces of the Soviet era in the form of murals and architecture. The capital was brightly

illuminated throughout the night—thanks to plentiful cheap gas—and petrol cost less than 20p per litre. Currency exchange remained unpredictable, with unofficial traders offering much better rates than the banks.

For Dennis, the trip was a genuine adventure: challenging, eye-opening, and full of unexpected insights into a tightly managed society. Combined with the friendliness of the people and the unusual role of his ever-present minder, it made for a memorable journey and a compelling story to bring back to Rotary.

**Vote of Thanks:** Martin and fellow Rotarians gave a vote of thanks to Dennis for his fascinating talk, and for bringing an International perspective to our meeting

## **Minutes of Council Meeting 09/02/2026**

**Present:** Patrick FR David M, John H Neil C Dennis B Malcom M, Peter H, Lochan M

**Apologies:** Barry D

**Declarations of Interest** – none

**Minutes of Last Meeting:** (08/12/2025) Approved

### **President's Report:**

The President has finished the review of the safeguarding rules linked to – Santas Sleigh at Waitrose

The President intends to send our safeguarding document, after it is internally agreed, the District officers to seek their approval

He intends to invite a safeguarding office from District to come and talk to the club

**Secretary Report:** Nothing to report

### **Treasurer's report:**

24/25 Accounts now with accountant

Waitrose charities money discussed, proposed donations to St Andrews and Age Uk approved by committee

Room hire fees – payment pending awaiting invoices

Funding for Disability games and Kidsout ring fenced

Whiskey Tasking Funds – ring fenced

Agree per member donation to Foundation

**Projects:**

- 1) Disability games – 12<sup>th</sup> April 2026 - invitations out

Held at Ratcliffe College

Dennis might need member support to help taxi attendees to the coach

- 2) Kids out – Sundown Pet Corner -mProvisional date 10<sup>th</sup> June (subject to confirmation)

Malcom to attend

- 3) Park bench – location of bench discussed, options consider Lincoln Hospital Stroke Unit, Canwick Churchyard. No final decision made

**Public Relations Officer and Membership:** It was agreed that should we get any inquiries through the Rotary Facebook page the interested parties ought to be invited to a free lunch at one of our meetings

**Next Meeting:** 23<sup>rd</sup> March



# Rotary Children's Fun Day is back for 2026!

Wednesday 10th June 2026

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