A very good afternoon to you all and thank you for accepting your invitations to join me today here at the wonderful Brooklands Museum. It is traditional for the High Sheriff to hold a garden party or summer celebration during their Shrieval year as a way of acknowledging individuals and groups who contribute to the community through public service, charity work and voluntary efforts and I am delighted, as the 804th High Sheriff of Surrey, to be continuing that tradition. I am immensely grateful to Alex Patterson and everyone here at the Brooklands Museum for hosting us today; especially Frankie, who together with the Under Sheriff, Caroline Breckell, has done a wonderful job arranging this event for us.

The annual Summer Celebration also provides an opportunity for the High Sheriff to raise awareness of their Shrieval theme or a particular cause that they are highlighting during their time in office; It is no co-incidence therefore that I have invited you to Brooklands today as they share a vision which aligns closely with my theme, which as many of you will know, is helping to prevent young people in Surrey from becoming NEET (that is Not in Education, Employment or Training).

Although we perform better than many other parts of the Country, we still on average have some 1,500 16-18 year olds every year in Surrey either becoming NEET or their status is unknown; due to a combination of inter-related factors associated with their home life, education, social circumstances and health and wellbeing.

Before the age of 16 relatively little in the way of public money is dedicated to help those young people who are at risk of becoming NEET. Instead funding is mainly focussed on when they reach employment age and are already out of Education and not in Employment or Training; by which time their hearts and minds may have been lost and the social and economic cost of regaining their trust and engaging them in academic or employment pursuits is considerably higher. Alternative and earlier interventions, I believe, are necessary to change possible future pathways.

I have been a trustee of the Community Foundation for Surrey for over eight years and the Chair of one of its underlying funds, Guildford Philanthropy, for a similar time period, through which I have gained some knowledge of the NEET situation in Surrey. However, I always regard myself, pretty accurately for the most part, as the least knowledgeable person in the room and proposing solutions before a problem is fully understood is an easy mistake to make.

I therefore commissioned the Centre for Britain and Europe at the University of Surrey, ahead of my Shrieval year, to undertake some discovery work and analyse the composition of the different cohorts that make up the NEET population in Surrey; as it will look very different to that from other areas of the Country. With SCC and Surrey Police providing access to their data and widespread contributions from schools, colleges, mentoring charities, vocational training providers and most importantly young people themselves, on the day I was installed as High Sheriff in March this year, the resulting Report was published.

Tim Oliver, the Leader of SCC then joined me in addressing a major conference at the University in May, which discussed the report’s findings. A follow-up event in July then moved the discussion from insight to action, proposing a number of next steps, some inevitably requiring funding, others just a more collaborative and co-operative mindset.

You will hopefully have received in your goodie-bag today a flyer which refers to my Shrieval theme and contains three QR codes relating to the initial research report and the two conference summaries, the most recent detailing the planned next steps.

Three particular areas of activity have been identified:-

* Firstly, to create a Community of Practice involving representatives from local government, education providers, businesses and charities all sharing their knowledge, data, experience and ideas specifically to tackle the root causes of young people becoming NEET and preventing disengagement from occurring; through both pro-active collaboration and bespoke interventions.
* Secondly, to investigate the creation of a single on-line front door system for mentoring and trusted adults so that young people do not have to repeatedly relate their sometimes traumatic lived experiences and referrals are handled in a co-ordinated way no matter from where the referral came, and

* Thirdly, to establish a pilot scheme in a local neighbourhood, where local schools work with vocational trainers, mental health supporters, further education colleges and local employers to identify those young people at risk of becoming NEET at an early age. Recent research has shown that NEET tendencies can be observed in children as young as 5 years old and I would argue even earlier. Then, to ensure that no one gets left behind, opportunities are to be provided outside of the strict curriculum to support those where a more hands-on and creative approach would ensure their full potential can be reached, with the intention of guaranteeing employment on leaving school. Hopefully this pilot scheme, which will be based in North Leatherhead, once up and running could then be replicated in another local neighbourhood, with all parts of that local neighbourhood joining together to look after their own young people at risk of becoming NEET.

I am delighted with what has been achieved within the first 5 months of my Shrieval year, but it only illustrates what a complex issue this is, and highlights the pressing need for greater collaboration and funding to help prevent young people from becoming NEET and I would be delighted to hear from anyone who would like to become involved.

And this brings me back to why I am so excited to be here today. The Brooklands Museum does so much to encourage creative thinkers, risk takers and innovators who may remain hidden in the conventional classroom. They promote interest in the STEM subject fields through their wonderful Innovation Academy involving local businesses and vocational training providers; as well as holding numerous summer events and educational visits. Their partnership with the Bourne Education Trust called Learning Without Borders particularly resonates with me being that it focuses on creating opportunities beyond the curriculum to give students better life outcomes and connects schools with their local areas. By creating more opportunities for pupils they are helping to break the cycle of under-achievement in disadvantaged communities.

I am also delighted to say that joining us today are two vocational training providers, well-known to many of you, SATRO and GASP, who have worked with The Brooklands Museum and have been supported over the years by the Community Foundation for Surrey. You may have passed them outside on your way in but please do engage with them and hear about their structured programmes that have switched on a light bulb in many a young person leading to more positive outcomes.

Also when you arrived hopefully you will have passed by the information stands manned by some of last year’s 15 recipients of grants from the High Sheriff Youth Awards. These grants are provided to sustain local charities that encourage young people to get involved in activities providing structure, focus or enjoyment in their life that may have been previously lacking; and which may as a consequence lead to a reduction in anti-social behaviour and perhaps NEET tendencies. I had the pleasure before you arrived of personally handing each of them a Certificate commending their work. I would encourage you, if you have not already, to visit their stands and learn more about the vital role they play in supporting young people across the County. I would particularly like to thank Ron Enticott from the HSYA for co-ordinating the involvement of the grantees today.

Being High Sheriff, is an honour and a privilege. I have already met so many people across the County diligently carrying out their public duty, upholding the King’s Peace or undertaking vital charitable or voluntary activities, for the benefit of our local community. By the end of this month, the half-way point of my Shrieval year I will have undertaken with Suzanne, over 160 engagements; all of which to date have enlightened me as to the various issues facing numerous people in Surrey, and have amazed me with regard to the tremendous, often unrecognised, work that is being performed each and every day by charities and volunteers across the length and breadth of our County. All of whom I would like to publicly thank and acclaim today for their dedication and compassion.

I hope you enjoy the rest of your evening here at Brooklands Museum, it is truly an historic place, a powerhouse of British engineering and innovation, with plenty of exciting sights to see and experiences to be had and with that I will hand you back to Alex to tell you more.