

Fiona Bruce MP attends 230 (Congleton) Squadron Air Training Corps Dining In Night at Chimney House Hotel, Sandbach

Fiona Bruce MP was a guest speaker at the annual 230 Squadron ATC Dining In & Cadet Presentation Night on 22nd January.

The event was also attended by Congleton Town Mayor, David Brown, and M.C. was Flight Lieutenant Rod Goodier, who has been actively working with the Congleton Air Cadets for some 30 years including as a former Commanding Officer. On the night he was presented with the Staff Member of the Year Trophy – by the Squadron's current Commanding Officer, Flight Lieutenant Colin Hingley. The award for Cadet of the Year was presented to Corporal Scott Corbishley by Fiona Bruce MP.

Speaking after the meal at the Chimney House Hotel, which was also attended by many of the Squadron's sixty cadets, their parents and Flight Lieutenant Diane Sinclair representing Sandbach ATC and Flight Lieutenant Emma Williams representing Biddulph ATC, Fiona Bruce MP said:

'I spent an evening last week at the Squadron's headquarters at Rope Walk, Congleton and was enormously impressed with so much that I saw – I thought I would be there an hour; in fact I stayed about three!

I was impressed with the commitment and dedication of the leaders, most of whom have served the group for many years'.

Fiona praised *'the inspiration, leadership and encouragement'* of the Commanding Officer Colin Hingley who she said *'has a real gift of making everyone feel special'*, and the wide variety of activities offered, several of which she saw during her visit – developing an understanding of aeronautics by making model planes which fly – and not just from kits, but from scratch – learning flying skills using simulators, becoming radio operators under the guidance of former Commanding Officer Eric Westwood, and planning raft expeditions. She continued, *'what particularly impressed me was the polite manner, and smart appearance of every cadet – and even more so when I learnt they iron their own uniforms before coming out!'*

During her visit, several cadets had made presentations about their activities, which she described as *'articulate, descriptive, enthusiastic and appreciative showing enormous pride in their Squadron and with great team spirit'*.

Corporal Bostock, who won a Commendation at the Dining In Night had made a presentation about the Squadron's canoeing activities, explaining that several staff and one cadet have become qualified instructors under the Foundation Safety

Resource Programme for Instructors, said *'we have a committed team. I'd like to say thank you to the staff for all they do'*.

Cadet Sgt Alec Whitmore who won two awards, told how every member of the Squadron was encouraged to work to a Duke of Edinburgh Award - and currently the Squadron has 21 working to Bronze, 16 to Silver and 6 to the Gold Award. He said *'it gives you confidence, skills, a sense of achievement, motivation and independence'*. Sargeant Player has learnt to fly solo and obtained a flying scholarship – he described how exciting it was:- *'on my solo, I had a FlyBe Turbo Prop coming in behind me – it was scary'*.

Flight Sergeant Heathcote spoke with real pride about the aircraft modelling skills saying *'I believe we are the best Squadron for modelling'* – and acknowledging the support and inspiration of staff member, Andy Whitmore, he said *'if you're going to crash, Mr Whitmore can take over'*!

Corporal Scott Corbishley, Cadet of the Year, described enthusiastically the eight different sports the group participates in including rugby, football, netball, athletics and swimming to a high level, with several members representing *'at wing a regional level'* and the Squadron will have several teams in the Congleton Swimathon next month. He said *'sport is the best thing we do here; we all love it'*.

The average length of time a Cadet stays with the Squadron is 5 years, compared with the national average to 2 years.

Fiona said:

'The Congleton ATC offers character, skills and confidence building in so many ways; boys and girls who come in their early teens leave several years later as accomplished young men and women'. She concluded by saying to all who attended the Dining In Night *'if anyone ever talks to me negatively about the youth of today, I shall point them in the direction of the remarkable young people of the 230 (Congleton) Squadron ATC. With them in our society, we can have real hope for the future'*.