

## **Elected Mayor's Report- October 2018**

*It's been a busy time settling into my role as Elected Mayor of Watford. I've been working to deliver my manifesto commitments, visiting some of our local community groups and I have also had the privilege of helping 838 local residents with their issues since May.*

*Here is a summary of what I have been doing as Elected Mayor of Watford.*

### **Partnership Work**

#### **Everyone Active**

I was very pleased to see how successful Everyone Active's Free Swim and Gym programme was over the summer, with a large number of Watford families taking advantage of free swimming sessions for children. I hope to see this rolled out more regularly at Woodside and Central Leisure Centres.

I saw the finished improvement works at Woodside last week, which includes new studios and changing facilities. They look fantastic and I can't wait for residents to try them out.

#### **Veolia**

As part of my role as Mayor, I've been shadowing different service areas in the council, to see more first-hand what the frontline services do on a day to day basis in our council. I've been to meet the crews at Veolia and followed round the grounds maintenance teams to see the good work they do day to day keeping our town clean and tidy.

I would also like to place on record my thanks to Veolia for supporting and helping to fund improvements to facilities at the Meriden Community Centre.

### **Community Events**

One of the best parts of my job is meeting so many of our fantastic community groups. We're lucky in Watford to have such a diverse voluntary sector, representing all sections of our community.

I had the real privilege of meeting local resident Joyce Lambert on her 104<sup>th</sup> birthday. Joyce is a remarkable woman who is so positive and healthy. She has always walked a lot, never owned a car, drinks an occasional glass of wine and has lived on the same road in Watford

for over 80 years.

I also visited WRAP (Watford Recycling Arts Project) who do a great job recycling and repurposing commercial waste for artistic use. They work with our local businesses encouraging them to recycle more waste and try and make Watford a more sustainable town.

I joined Shopmobility when they celebrated their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. Shopmobility was set up 25 years ago by Caroline Bagley, who originally started the organisation with just four volunteers, including her late Mum and Dad.

Together with Joint Manager Marilyn and Assistant Manager Maureen, they now have 38 volunteers, are open seven days a week and are the biggest Shopmobility in the south east of England. I'm so pleased that Watford Borough Council continues to support this important service. Shopmobility allows those who may otherwise be housebound and isolated to explore our thriving town centre.

I helped start the Alzheimer's Society Memory Walk in Cassiobury Park, attended by over 1,000 walkers. The walk raised much needed funds to help those living with Dementia and their carers in the town. It was good to see so many people coming together to get involved.

I had a great time at the Hare Krishna Bhaktivedanta Manor Temple in Bushey as part of their Janmashtami Festival, which has already had over 30,000 visitors. It was a wonderful celebration, we're lucky to be next door to such a beautiful place and have such a diverse community on our doorstep.

I met with members and took questions from our local Citizens Advice Bureau about my role as Mayor, and what we can do as a council to support private renters and those in receipt housing benefit in our town.

It was good to see how successful our Big Events were this summer. Our Big Beach was one of our busiest yet, with residents out to enjoy the good weather whilst it lasted! I'm proud that we're able to put on these events free of charge whilst other councils are having to make swingeing cuts to services.

I recently attended a cookery demonstration by the Grove's Head Chef, Stephen Wheeler, in Cassiobury Park as part of the Grow Your Own Watford initiative. This was a great chance for residents to learn more about how to grow their own produce and then use it in their cooking.

I was proud to raise the LGBT Flag outside the Town Hall, and for Watford Borough Council to be able to support the recent Herts Pride event. It's really important that everyone feels welcome in our town, irrespective of background.

Lastly, I'd like to congratulate two Watford born sportsmen for some terrific achievements. Firstly, to Gareth Southgate for England's incredible World Cup run which gripped the nation! Secondly, to local lad Anthony Joshua, for retaining his IBF, WBO, and IBO heavyweight titles, making him arguably one of Britain's most successful boxers of modern times.

## **Delivering my Manifesto and Working for the Town**

### **Cycle Hire Scheme and Hop on Hop off Bus**

Plans have now gone to Cabinet last Monday (8<sup>th</sup> October) to design a business case for both the On Demand Bus Service and the Cycle Hire Scheme and for the schemes to go out to a consultation.

If Cabinet agrees this, we can investigate the business case further, before exploring the procurement options. The aim is to have both schemes up and running by September 2019.

### **Working for better Transport**

I've not just been working on delivering new transport schemes such as the Cycle Hire Scheme and a Hop on Hop off Bus but I've also been working on improving our existing transport.

I've surveyed hundreds of regular Watford commuters about how they feel their train service could be improved ahead of a meeting with London Northwestern bosses. I will be following up on improvements, which include better facilities at Watford Junction, at a meeting with bosses next week.

Along with Cllr Ian Stotesbury, I presented a petition with nearly 6,000 signatures to the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, to rezone Watford stations. I'll also be writing to the Department of Transport to review all zoning arrangements for areas like Watford.

I've successfully lobbied the County Council alongside Cllr Amanda Grimston and other local councillors to ensure a bus service continued to run to the Meriden Estate since Arriva announced their intention to withdraw the 324. I'll be closely monitoring this service in its first six months to see if it can become commercially viable again.

I've been contacted by a number of residents with concerns about Arriva's general reliability on other commercial routes in Watford, with frequent reports of missing or late running buses. I've asked Arriva bosses to publish their bus reliability over time online, in the same way that train franchises do, so residents and councils can see which routes are more reliable than others.

I've got meetings coming up with London Underground managers in Watford to ensure better bike parking facilities.

I'll be hosting my first Cycle Forum, bringing together cycle groups across the town, later this year.

I've been engaging with our taxi trade, and held my first Borough wide Taxi Forum in September to listen to their concerns and discuss new opportunities for the trade.

### **Making Watford a town for all**

We have been working in close partnership with Watford Community Housing, particularly in relation to our joint house building company, Hart Homes, supplying the town with much needed council housing.

The site at Croxley View has the first residents moving in, with more sites in the pipeline. I'm really proud to already be delivering upon a key manifesto commitment and to provide local people with permanent long term accommodation. I'm also proud that Watford is one of the only local authorities in the south east or London to see a drop of a third in the numbers of those living in temporary accommodation.

### **Dementia Friendly Town**

I held Watford's first ever Dementia Forum supported by the Alzheimer's Society at the BRE Centre in Bricket Wood, which is the first step for Watford to become a Dementia Friendly Town. A number of local businesses, community organisations and interested individuals attended and we looked at ways that we can make Watford a more welcoming place for those living with Dementia and their carers.

Over the coming months we'll be working with different organisations across the town about practical steps that can be taken to support people living with Dementia.

### **Metropolitan Line Extension**

It's really important that we keep pushing for an alternative to the Metropolitan Line Extension. At the moment, we are working with TfL and Herts County Council to produce a

feasibility study to see what would be possible to achieve on the existing rail corridor and findings will be published later next year.

This scheme is just too important for our town to fall by the wayside.

### **Tackling Rough Sleeping**

Tackling rough sleeping is one of my key priorities as Mayor. I've been working closely with New Hope and other partners in helping them with their Operation SWEP. In partnership with local churches and Watford Borough Council, New Hope will be providing emergency shelter every night in December and January with the addition of up to 15 beds away from the wind, rain, cold and dangers of the street.

I'm joining the CEO Sleepout in November to raise funds for New Hope. We all want to live in a town where nobody sleeps rough.

### **Improving our High Street**

It was great to see Debenhams move into the new Intu Extension on 28 September. Debenhams have opened a new flagship store in the town, and are being joined by other well-known brands such as Superdry, Jack Wills, H and M and of course a 9 screen Imax cinema. I'm delighted that, at a time when High Streets are struggling in other parts of the country, we can have this extension right in the heart of the town.

I'm proud that we have been able to take the tough decisions to make this happen.

We've been making improvements to our High Street. These have included changes to shop frontages, the widening of pavements, new bike facilities and restricting access to the High Street to most cars. I appreciate the works have caused some disruption to residents and businesses but it will be worth it later this year.

As many of you know, the council stepped in in August to secure the long term future of Watford Market after operator TCM experienced financial difficulties, a move that was welcomed by many traders. Since then, alongside new operator MAM, I'm very keen to improve the market for traders and visitors alike, including new décor.

### **Working with businesses**

I'm really keen that as a council we continue to create an environment where businesses of all sizes want to operate and create jobs here. In particular, I'm looking to engage with our

small and medium sized businesses to see how we can engage and support them as a council, and will be hosting a reception event for small business owners later this year.

### **Tackling anti-social behaviour**

I continue to work closely with the police and local councillors to tackle anti-social behaviour issues in the town particularly in relation to drugs. I have joined the police, with Deputy Mayor Cllr Karen Collett, on high visibility patrols in some of the problem parts of Watford. Herts Police have also obtained the country's first Drug Dealing Restriction Order, enabling them to shut down mobile phone numbers connected to illegal drug taking.

### **Listening to Watford**

One of my key manifesto commitments at the election was to make sure that listening to residents views was at the heart of all that I do as Mayor. I've been hosting regular pop up stalls in different parts of Watford to talk to residents and find out how they feel Watford could be an even better place to live and work. I've been engaging with residents across all social media platforms, including hosting Facebook Live Q and A events. As well as this, we have been running a borough wide consultation on the Local Plan, giving residents a chance to give their views about how they want the future of Watford to look like.