

Mayor's Report – October 2016

Big Events

Big Screen on the Beach

This year we combined the 'Big Screen' and 'Big Beach' summer events into one, running throughout the school holidays from July 30th to August 29th.

The event was very popular with footfall increasing in the town and lots of positive feedback from families. As well as a variety of films, the Rio Olympics were also shown on the screen and during the daytime the beach hosted children's games and activities.

Other attractions included trampolines, a helter-skelter, an outdoor bar and food outlets.

Big Sports Day

Hundreds braved the rain to take part in our third Big Sport Day in the town centre. Members of the public had the opportunity to try their hand at dozens of sports from football thanks to Watford FC's Community Sports and Education Trust, to golf courtesy of TopGolf to athletics and lots more.

Big Fireworks

Our popular fireworks display returns to Cassiobury Park again this year on Saturday 5th November with entertainment beginning at 6pm and the fireworks display taking place at 7.30pm.

Independent local radio station Vibe FM will compere the event with a charity collection organised by Watford Lions.

Entrance is free.

Big Skate

Our next big event is the Big Skate which returns to the Parade in November. The events space will be transformed into an outdoor ice rink from November 26th throughout December and the Christmas Holiday period.

Audentior Awards

Our annual civic ceremony to celebrate outstanding voluntary contributions to the life of our town, the Audentior Awards, will be hosted in the Colosseum on Friday 7th October. This year's nominations were all of a very high standard and I am looking forward to hosting the event along with the Chairman of Watford Borough Council.

Major Projects Update

Cassiobury Park

I joined Council colleagues and site contractors for a tour of the Cassiobury Hub construction site. I was impressed by the progress which has been made and the building is certainly now taking shape.

This building will provide changing facilities, a café, and teaching and learning space.

At the Rickmansworth Road entrance to the park, work is currently taking place to improve this frontage to provide an impressive entrance for those arriving on foot or by bicycle from the Town Centre.

The work taking place includes the planting of new trees and shrubs, landscaping works, footpath improvements and the replacement of bollards with a painted metal railing.

The Bandstand

I was delighted to officially open the Watford Bandstand on Sunday September 4th. Hundreds of people turned up to celebrate the restoration of our historic bandstand with an afternoon of great music from local groups including the Watford Brass Band, and dance performances (with plenty of audience participation!) from the Jive Swing dance group.

The bandstand has been restored back to its original condition and painted in the colours of the Capel Family.

Next spring and summer there will be a full programme of entertainment but in the off season local performers are able to book the bandstand free of charge. This can be done by emailing cassiobury@watford.gov.uk.

The Cha Café officially reopened on the 4th September following a refurbishment, and the fountain which formerly stood in front of the café has been replaced.

Metropolitan Line Extension

Work to reroute utilities continues in the Croxley area in preparation for the construction of the viaduct which will carry the Metropolitan line over the Gade and Grand Union Canal.

Plans to improve Watford Junction and the Ascot Road area, where the new Cassiobridge Station will be constructed have been out to consultation recently.

Watford Health Campus

Work has began on the first business units on the Health Campus site which will provide hundreds of new permanent jobs when complete, and much needed additional space for businesses who are looking to invest in Watford.

Work on the new road is progressing well and will officially open on November 15th.

The road will be named 'Thomas Sawyer Way' in honour of Captain Thomas Sawyer who died while serving with the Royal Artillery in Afghanistan. We have worked with Tom's family to produce special road signs for the development which will commemorate his life and display the badge of his regiment.

Digital Watford

Our town centre Wi-Fi service, provided and managed by intechologyWIFI now has over 20,000 registered users. The scheme is free to use and operates at no cost to the council.

The Digital Watford Board has met and is working collaboratively with digital specialists including local firm Freedom Communications and web content management platform Jadu.

Partnership Working

Watford BID

Watford BID installed floral displays throughout the town centre which have received a large amount of positive feedback from residents.

The BID also held their first 'Watford Weekender' event which saw retailers in the town centre offer discounts, competitions, special offers and children's activities over the weekend of October 1st and 2nd.

Hertfordshire Constabulary

I took part in a community litter pick organised by the franchisee at McDonalds St Albans Road (Longspring) with Hertfordshire Constabulary PCs and PCSOs as well as restaurant staff and a team of local volunteers.

Hertfordshire Constabulary held a successful Police Station open day, and will be running a bicycle security event on 15TH October on the Broadway Queens Road. Security marking will be offered free of charge and officers will be on hand to give advice about safe cycling and ensuring bikes are locked securely.

Following the reported spike in racially aggravated incidents after the EU referendum result, I liaised closely with the police regarding community safety in Watford. The Chief Inspector reassured me that there had been no year-on-year rise in hate crimes following the vote. The police have been issuing advice to call 101 if you have witnessed racially aggravated crime.

Cultural Leaders

I recently visited the Harry Potter Studios at Leavesden with the Association of Leading Tourist Attractions. I visited the Hogwarts Great Hall and discussed the benefits to Watford of having such a large attraction on the outskirts of our town.

Herts County Council and Hertsmere Borough Council

I liaised with both the County Council and Hertsmere Borough Council to ensure Stephenson Way was litter picked at the same time as road repairs were taking place. The poor condition of this road has been remarked on by so many visitors to Watford, and people are often surprised to find that it isn't actually in our borough.

I am grateful to staff from both councils for coordinating this work and smartening up a major route into our town.

Supporting Local Organisations

Watford Ahmadiyya Muslim Community

I attended the annual Jalsa Salaana celebrations in Hampshire with members of Watford's Ahmadiyya community. I was invited to address the assembly and I spoke of the outstanding contribution Watford's Ahmadiyya community make to our town – from local charity work to fundraising for international causes and the provision of education.

The event is one of the biggest Muslim gatherings in the country and I was very impressed with the way the event was managed and for the hospitality I received.

Dragon's Apprentice

Entrants to Watford and Three Rivers Trust's 'Dragons Apprentice' competition visited the Town Hall where I spoke to them about the competition and their ideas.

Jewish Cultural Event

I visited Watford Synagogue for a Jewish cultural celebration organised by the Five Plus One group of Synagogues. The event features traditional music, an 'ask a Rabbi' session and keynote speakers including the president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

Wellspring Church

I attended the first 'Favour Lunch' at the Wellspring Church, the first in a series of events for women in the Church community to come together. The event was hosted by Rev. Helen Roberts and the church have similar events planned over the coming weeks.

Disability Association

I hosted the annual Watford Disability Association quiz night in the Colosseum which raised funds for the vital work the association does to help disabled people all over Watford.

Watford Town Cricket Club

I met with young cricketers from Watford Town CC to congratulate them on finding a new shirt sponsor. Kaspas desserts on St Albans Road have generously agreed to sponsor the club.

St John's School

St Johns School has now opened and has accepted its first intake of pupils for the start of the 2016/17 academic year. I was pleased to attend an opening ceremony and blessing with the Bishop of St Albans, Rt Revd Dr Alan Smith.

I have been a supporter of this project from the start and I am delighted to see the school taking its first pupils. I wish staff, governors and pupils the very best of luck for the years ahead.

Community relations and the European Referendum

I attended an event at the Watford Town and Country Club with Hertfordshire Constabulary, Central Ward councillors and anti-racism charity "Hope Not Hate" to deal with concerns residents had about the reported rise in racism across the country following the vote to leave the EU. I spoke of the immense contribution our European citizens bring to Watford.

I am pleased that our town has not seen the spike in hate crime reported elsewhere. Councillors, the police, schools, religious groups and community groups have all

worked together closely to foster a sense of cohesion in our town and I am pleased to see this continue.

I have also written to community groups and religious organisations following the referendum to express my thanks for their important work in our town, to celebrate the contribution our different faith and ethnic communities bring to the town, and to encourage the reporting of any racially aggravated crime to Herts Police immediately.

Business News

High Street Footpath Widening

The pavement at the lower end of the High Street has now been widened to make it easier for pedestrians to get between High Street Station and the town centre. It's the latest stage in a project aimed at improving access to the town by public transport and by bicycle.

Bus stops for routes 142 and 258 have been relocated to King Street and services 8, 306, 306b, 346, 398, 602, W19 and W20 now stop further up the High Street outside McDonalds.

Cabinet was presented with a range of options to provide new disabled parking bays and loading areas in the town centre. The proposals were agreed and I am hopeful that over the coming months work will be able to begin on constructing these new parking spaces.

New arrivals

I cut the ribbon to open two news shops which have joined our expanding range of town centre business. A new Fishmongers has opened in Market Street and Poundworld has relocated to the former Multiyork building next to the flyover.

I am also pleased to welcome Waterstones back to the Town Centre. I had previously written to Waterstones head office back in 2013 asking for them to consider returning to Watford. As one of my favourite high street stores I'm very glad to see them return!

Elsewhere Wilkinsons have expanded, Five Guys Burgers and Fries have taken over the old Que Pasa building and the intu Centre has welcomed Cath Kidston. MAC makeup will be opening a store in intu this Autumn too.

Our town continues to attract a large variety of established brand names and independent traders. The extension of the intu centre is under construction and will add an even greater range of businesses to our town's retail offer.

Engaging the Community

Public Mayor's Surgery

I held another successful 'Meet the Mayor' public surgery in North Watford recently with Cllr Robbie Laird. The event at Coffee Bros café on St Albans Road was an opportunity for residents to raise local issues with me, which I have then taken up on their behalf.

I will continue to hold public surgeries and 'Meet the Mayor' sessions in different locations across the town.

Watford Met Station

I am continuing to press the case for a peak time service to be retained at Watford Met Station to serve Cassiobury residents once the new Metropolitan Line Extension is open.

I have written to Mayor Khan to outline what I believe is a compelling argument for the retention of a peak hours service to and from Watford Met. London Underground's most recent plans for the station include using the Met Station site to reverse trains. Recently retired Cllr George Derbyshire has regularly attended meetings with London Underground management and has pushed the case for these reversing trains to accept passengers at peak times.

This could be a cost effective way to retain a service for commuters in the Cassiobury area and for Watford Boys Grammar pupils who currently use the line to get to school.

I will keep Council informed of any further developments.

Watford Junction Rezone Campaign

I have written London Transport Committee Caroline Pidgeon to put forward the case for re-zoning Watford Junction Station in line with TfL's pricing structure.

Caroline has formally raised the matter as a written question to Mayor of London Sadiq Khan. Unfortunately the Mayor showed no interest in working with us to bring Watford Junction into the Zone system despite the significant benefits this would bring to many of his constituents in North and West London.

The extension of the Metropolitan Line will make Watford Junction an important interchange between the Metropolitan Line and the West Coast Main Line opening us new commuting options for residents who currently live on the Met Line route. It also provides residents on this route with an alternative to travelling via Zone 1 and Euston when travelling longer distances to Birmingham, the Midlands and the North.

I will continue to lead the campaign for the station to be rezoned as part of the Metropolitan Line Extension to encourage rail passenger growth and offer an affordable alternative to car use to cut congestion.

Council News

Green Flags

I was delighted that Watford was awarded eight Green Flags at this year's presentation ceremony in Rickmansworth. We now have the most Green Flag awards in Hertfordshire. The awards, given by Keep Britain Tidy for outstanding parks and open spaces were presented for the following parks:

- Callowland Rec
- Waterfields Rec
- St Mary's Churchyard
- Cheslyn Gardens
- Cassiobury Park
- North Watford Playing Fields
- Oxhey Park
- Woodside

These awards are testament to the successful partnership between Watford Borough Council and Veolia. My thanks go to all of our parks staff and dozens of volunteers who work tirelessly to maintain and improve our town's wonderful green spaces.

Traveller Incursions

Several incursions onto Council owned and privately owned land in Watford have occurred over the past 6 months, including three in Oxhey Park.

Ward Councillors have conducted a residents' survey to gauge support for erecting a barrier to prevent further incursions. Residents responded favourably to a metal railing being installed. The railing has now been ordered and I hope this will prevent further incursions on this site.

We have worked closely with the police and landowners to respond to traveller incursions onto private land in our borough quickly and effectively.

Investing in Watford's playgrounds

Cabinet was presented with plans to transform the Harebreaks and Harwoods Playgrounds with £1.4m of investment to rebuild the sites with new play equipment which would be unsupervised and open at all hours, compared with the restricted opening hours at the current supervised sites. Since this meeting a legal challenge has been made. Whilst the Council completely disagrees with a number of the claims made in the legal challenge to its decision to transform Watford's adventure playgrounds, Council officers have taken the view that it would be prudent to ask Cabinet to consider the matter afresh in October.

As before, Cabinet members will consider all the information that is presented to them very carefully before reaching their decision

Temporary Accommodation

Watford Borough Council and Watford Community Housing Trust are working in partnership to deliver additional housing at Croxley View. A planning application was submitted on the 15th September 2016 for phase 1, for 40 temporary accommodation units and 36 residential apartments.

Members of the public have the opportunity to comment on the proposal through the statutory planning process, up until Friday 21st October 2016.

A public meeting and drop-in session will take place on Wednesday 19th October at Holywell Community Centre.

The drop-in session will take place between 3.30pm - 6.00pm
The public meeting begins at 7.30pm

Housing is a top priority for this Council, as set out in our corporate plan. We take our duty to provide accommodation for homeless residents very seriously and I hope this scheme will allow us to house more residents in Watford and reduce out-of-borough placements.