

Mayor's Report – October 2017

Partnership working

Parks

Watford had its best ever result in this year's Green Flag Awards, winning eleven of the prestigious awards for the quality of our parks and open spaces.

Hertfordshire's ceremony was hosted at the new Cassiobury Park Hub, and for a second year running Watford won the most Green Flag awards in the county – a great achievement and testament to the hard work of both our parks staff and the dozens of volunteers who help make our parks such fantastic places to enjoy throughout the year.

2017 has been a great year for Cassiobury Park, with the £6.6m lottery funded improvement project reaching its completion. The new hub building was officially opened earlier this summer, and the paddling pools re-opened after a refurbishment and have already been enjoyed by thousands of visitors this year. A new Café, changing rooms and toilets including a fully inclusive 'changing places' facility are all part of the new Hub which also provides space for educational activities.

Watford BID

Watford BID hosted Watford's first Food and Drink Festival showcasing the town centre's range of bars, cafes, shops and restaurants. Councillor Taylor joined the judging panel for 'The Great Watford Bake-Off' to raise money for the Peace Hospice.

I am grateful to Watford BID for once again providing floral displays in the town centre throughout the summer months, and for providing the fantastic graphics which have brightened up the hoarding around the former One Bell pub.

I recently had a meeting with representatives from the owners of the One Bell site and I am delighted that plans are progressing to turn the derelict pub into a high quality restaurant. Many residents have often remarked that the High Street would benefit from a higher quality restaurant and I know that the owners will do justice to this historic building.

Everyone Active

Our two leisure centres have recently been judged to be among the best in the country. Both Central and Woodside won the QUEST 'excellent' rating, the highest

award possible. Congratulations to all the staff who make our leisure centres such fantastic places to get fit.

Arts and Theatre

'Own the Stage' – a programme of live performances in the town centre – has successfully been showcasing upcoming talent from local musicians and dancers. If you have a talent you would like to show off, you can contact events@watford.gov.uk or call 07970 837939.

Emergency Services

Watford Football Club hosted a training exercise for the emergency services on October 7th, which involved a simulated firearms incident. Our emergency services and local authorities work closely to ensure we have robust emergency plans in place. These plans are constantly reviewed and regularly tested in real-life exercises such as this. I would like to thank Watford FC for offering the use of Vicarage Road to allow an important exercise to take place. As a town with a Premier League football team, a large regional shopping centre and a major transport interchange it is important that our emergency services are prepared for all eventualities. I would urge residents to be vigilant and report any suspicious behaviour to the police.

We have also been working closely with the police and County Council to deal with a series of traveller incursions in the town. We have seen a spike in the number of illegal incursions on both council and private land. Working together we have acted swiftly to ensure groups of travellers moved on as quickly as possible, despite having to wait for court hearings on several occasions.

County Council

A consultation has taken place on plans to improve the High Street including making the section from Clarendon Road to Market Street more pedestrian friendly. The responses to the consultation will now be considered and if agreed the improvements will be completed in time for the opening of the intu extension in time for Christmas next year.

I met with Herts County Council's Cabinet Member for Highways, Ralph Sangster, to discuss transport issues in the town and the wider South West Herts region, and I also recently met with HCC's Cabinet Member for Education and Community, Terry Douris.

Neighbouring Authorities

I have met with leaders of the neighbouring district councils to discuss our duty to cooperate regarding planning policy. This is a particularly difficult matter for all councils, especially those in the South East as the housing crisis continues. The Government has taken away many powers councils used to have to control developments, and they are forcing higher and higher targets on local authorities. In Watford we are on target, and are working with Watford Community Housing to build new social and affordable homes – but it is imperative that neighbouring councils work together as this problem is too big for individual authorities to tackle alone.

Community

Audentior Awards

This year's Audentior Awards took place on Friday 6th October and once again honoured the people and organisations who have made an outstanding contribution to the life of the town. This year's ceremony was my last as Mayor as I will be standing down next May after sixteen years in the role. I would like to offer my congratulations to this year's winners and runners up – they should all be very proud to have won and very proud of the town. This ceremony always shows Watford at its best and demonstrates just how many unsung heroes give up their time to help make our town a great place to live.

Community Events

I have also enjoyed visiting many of our fantastic community organisations across the town, to join in and celebrate their contribution to Watford. Here are just some of the celebrations and engagements which have taken place across the town recently:

Watford Community Housing have recently celebrated their tenth anniversary and I enjoyed attending their celebrations at the Meriden Community Centre with council colleagues, community housing staff and local residents.

Kingswood Early Years celebrated their 75th Anniversary in September, and Deputy Mayor Councillor Peter Taylor joined ward councillors and members of the local community to join in the celebrations.

9th North Watford Scouts celebrated their Diamond Jubilee in September, celebrating 60 years of making a valuable contribution to the local area and giving young people the opportunity to explore the great outdoors.

I attended a thanksgiving service to celebrate the merger of North Watford Methodist Church and St Thomas United Reformed Church, and welcomed their new minister.

I held a very positive meeting with the new CEO of Age UK to discuss their work with older people across the Town.

I was pleased to open the Older Persons Day event at Holywell Community Centre in September.

Big Events

Big Screen on the Beach

Big Screen on the Beach returned to the top of the town for another summer season, with plenty of children's activities on a real beach, classic movies and recent releases on the big screen, funfair rides and food and drink stalls.

Unfortunately this year's summer didn't quite bring the weather we were all hoping for, but that didn't stop thousands of people enjoying the seaside experience without having to leave Watford.

Big Bandstand

Now in its second year, 'Big Bandstand' at Cassiobury Park had another successful summer, welcoming both local musicians and international performers including Voyageurs Ambassadors of Music from the USA. We also hosted the Big JiveSwing Festival, one of the biggest jazz and swing festivals in the UK.

Big Sports Day

Big Sports Day took place in September along the Parade, and residents had the opportunity to try a range of new sports from cycling to climbing, and tennis to trampolining.

Free Fireworks

Our next big event is the free fireworks display in Cassiobury Park on Saturday 4th November at 6pm, featuring entertainment from Vibe FM and a large bonfire before the free fireworks display at 7.30pm.

Major Projects

Intu

I visited the intu extension site for a tour of the new shopping centre which is set to open by Christmas of next year. Work is progressing well and the site is definitely now taking shape. When complete the new extension will mean Watford is a top 20 retail destination according to independent experts – on par with big cities such as Bristol and Edinburgh.

Watford General Hospital

West Herts Hospitals Trust have confirmed that plans for a new multi storey car park will go ahead by 2019. This will be the first stage in a redevelopment which will deliver new clinical facilities at Watford General. This follows WHHT's decisions to make Watford the main acute services hospital in West Hertfordshire.

I met with Steve Barnett, Chair of West Herts Hospitals Trust in September and received a positive update on the state of the hospital and I was thanked for the support that Watford Borough Council have provided to the Hospital.

Trade City Watford

Trade City Watford has welcomed its first tenants, the DIY store Screwfix. Trade City is a new development of business units at the junction of Thomas Sawyer Way and Wiggshall Road. The project is set to provide space for 12 companies and will provide up to 180 new jobs.