

## **Elected Mayor's Report- January 2019**

*Given this is my first Mayor's Report for 2019, I'd like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a very Happy New Year. This year should be a fantastic one for our town and one which will see the delivery of a number of my key commitments to the people of Watford. That includes a new cycle hire scheme, a new on-demand bus service and major improvements to Oxhey Park. You can find out more about these developments in my report below.*

### **Partnership Work**

#### **Everyone Active**

I was delighted to open the newly improved facilities at Woodside and Central Leisure Centres this month, with the help of Watford Football Club legend Jon Barnes and former Olympic sprinter Colin Jackson.

The improvements have been the culmination of a £1.25 million investment from Everyone Active and Watford Borough Council. They deliver an extended gym area, new fitness studios, a new toning suite, new gym equipment and a new sauna and steam area.

I'm happy that at a time where councils are having to cut back on services that we can continue to provide first class facilities for residents.

#### **Veolia**

We continue to work well with Veolia. In particular, we've worked together along with local County Councillors to provide deep cleans to a number of streets in Watford. We've had very positive feedback about these from residents but will work with Veolia to look at ways to make these even better for next year.

I'd also like to express my thanks to all Veolia workers who worked through the Christmas period to make sure waste was still collected on time and people in our town were provided with an excellent service. Over the festive period there was a 12% increase in the amount of recycling collected by our crews.

## Community Events

Over the last few months I've been to many different community events. I'm always struck by the dedication of people in Watford who do things big and small to make our town an even better place to live and work in.

I've attended not one but two 104 birthday events for local residents. I met Josephine Malarkey and her family in her care home in Lancaster Court, where staff had laid on a big party for her. I met Jean Lambert still in her home on Briar Road.

I was really privileged to attend the Polish community's Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity Event with Cllr Aga Dychton at the Holywell Community Centre. Each year the event raises lots of money for many worthwhile causes. I'm really proud to be a Mayor of a diverse and welcoming town.

I enjoyed visiting Watford Boys Grammar School, where I was grilled by sixth form pupils on anything from our improved town centre all the way to the present Brexit related crisis! It is always really enjoyable to visit Watford Boys Grammar School. The pupils were clearly very engaged with politics – both locally and nationally – and asked lots of very good questions.

Before Christmas I was pleased to accept a portrait from well-known artist Barry Laden MBE. Barry, who is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and a Freeman of the City of London, has painted a really vibrant crowd scene of Vicarage Road. He chose Watford because his family, who live locally, are massive hornet's fans. The portrait is currently being displayed in the Customer Service Centre in the Town Hall.

I joined supporters of the Watford Muslim Youth Centre for a brick laying event for their new Community Centre on Tolpits Lane. Work is progressing well on the centre and I can't wait to see it completed. It will be of huge benefit to the diverse communities in our town and I'm really pleased that we have been able to support it as a council.

I helped celebrate Watford Central Library's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday with local library staff and volunteers. There were displays about the library's history and its continuing role in the town across many decades. It's also good to see the new Mencap Café and improved facilities being well used.

I was pleased to attend Laurence Haines School this month to raise their new Green Flag. They have been working to become a more Eco-Friendly school for the past year and they

have now been recognised with an international Eco-School award which is real testament to their hard work.

I was delighted to open Corona Energy's new offices on the Croxley Business Park. Corona, who were previously based on Clarendon Road, have moved to help expand their business and continue providing jobs locally. It's really good to see major employers wanting to stay in our town and is a testament to what an attractive place Watford is for employers to do business in.

It was great to be able to present local homelessness charity New Hope with a cheque for £5,000 from my Christmas Card Appeal this year. The Christmas card was sponsored by a number of local Watford businesses and was designed by six year old Minnie, from St John's Primary School.

I was happy to help open the new Everett Rovers Clubhouse. These are fantastic new facilities for the club, who play such an important role in our town. I was pleased we were able to support the club with this and help them protect their club from the traveller incursions that had been taking place in the summer.

I went to visit members and volunteers at the ABC Boxing Club at Woodside with local Cllr Stephen Cavinder to find out more about what they do. I'm really pleased that they will get new and improved facilities as a result of our improvements to Woodside Playing Fields.

Finally, it was an honour to take a role in so many Remembrance services in November, culminating in a Beacon lighting at Watford Museum. 2018 marked the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War One, and as part of Watford Museum's We Will Remember project, there were events and exhibitions to remember the part our town played in the war effort and the sacrifice many made. I would also like to pay tribute in particular to Darren Norris, a local resident, who did a huge amount of research into those who lost their lives in World War One and helped fund a plaque which was unveiled at the Hammer in Hand Pub. It was a privilege to be at the ceremony, along with local Woodside Councillors.

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

### **Cycle Hire Scheme**

Work is progressing well with this scheme since approval by Full Council and Cabinet.

We've been looking to see how these schemes have worked successfully in both Milton Keynes and Cardiff and what lessons can be taken on board for our Watford scheme. A feasibility study has been completed and we have been looking at what model may work

well for Watford. We are now looking at setting up a procurement process to find a suitable provider for the scheme. I'm hoping that the first bikes for hire will be in place for the Autumn, in time for students returning for school and residents returning to work after the summer break.

The delivery of a new cycle hire scheme was a key election promise of mine and so I'm really pleased to see the progress that has been made so far.

### **On Demand Bus Service**

Work is well underway on this to make sure we are in a place where this service can be used by residents later this year.

We've been carefully reviewing how this has worked for other authority areas, including in Oxford and Liverpool, and how this might transfer to a council area like Watford. A procurement process is underway to find a suitable provider for the service.

I hope both these developments will help to keep people in our town moving and make Watford more sustainable.

### **Transport App**

During the election, I spoke about introducing a 'one-stop' transport app for people living in the town. This would contain live information about the location of bus stops, bus services, taxi information and train times, and also give residents the opportunity to book trains and taxis.

We're now looking at sourcing an App Developer for the project and we're hoping to launch the App next year.

### **Other Transport Improvements**

When I was elected, I promised to deliver not just a new Bike Hire Scheme and On Demand Bus Service but to work to try and improve all our public transport in Watford.

After meeting with Station Managers at London Underground, we've agreed to look at increasing the provision of cycle parking at Watford Metropolitan station from 48 to nearly 100, hopefully encouraging more people to cycle to the station. We've also worked with London Northwestern to get new signage put in place at Watford Junction to advertise the council's bike parking facilities.

I held my first ever Watford wide Cycle Forum with around 40 local cyclists in December, looking at how we improve cycling provision in the town to encourage more people to use their bike. There were a lot of positive outcomes from the meeting and we are currently working on looking at all our cycling routes in the town with the County Council. Our next meeting will be on 5 March at 7:00 PM, and all cyclists are invited, please contact the Mayor's office if you are interested in attending.

I've been working closely with London Northwestern, Homes England, Network Rail and others on an ambitious set of long awaited improvement works to Watford Junction. This will begin by redeveloping the station concourse, with work due to start later this year, creating new retail space and changing the station frontage. Negotiations are ongoing about changes to the parking and platform access. Many residents complain about issues at Watford Junction and at the moment it is a tired entrance to the town, so I'm really excited to see how these improvements progress.

I've met with both ABFLY, the passenger user group for the Abbey Flyer, and the Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership, which this council helps to fund, to see how we can support usage on the line and help with their attempts to produce a feasibility study about a passing loop at Bricket Wood.

As Sadiq Khan and Transport for London (TfL) have made clear that they think the tube extension is 'dead', we have been working at looking at what is feasible as an alternative to the Metropolitan Line Extension. This could be a guided bus way or a light rail link, such as a tram.

Working with Herts County and Transport for London, we've commissioned a feasibility study looking at the alternatives. This is due to be published in June.

We've also been fighting to get the unspent money owed to us by Transport for London returned to Watford.

I've been campaigning against potential ticket office closures at Watford High Street station and potential reduction in hours at Bushey Stations. Any reduction in staffing at ticket offices will only make it harder for vulnerable people in our town to access public transport. I was pleased that this has been taken seriously by London Travelwatch who will formally object to the closure of Watford High Street ticket office as part of the TfL consultation on closures because of our campaign. I'm also looking forward to meeting with London Underground next month to express my concerns about these changes in our town and those of thousands of others who have signed petitions locally about them.

### **Building new council housing**

I'm delighted to be working with Watford Community Housing on our joint council housebuilding company Hart Homes. Hart Homes will provide local families currently in Temporary Accommodation with much needed permanent homes.

We have just finished an engagement process on our joint partnership site with Watford Community House at Centrepoint and we'll be taking on board resident's suggestions, including expanding the space available in the site for community groups to use. The plans will currently give 17 local families a new three bed home. It's really important we can help out those in our town who need it the most.

### **Oxhey Park North Update**

We've been making good progress on delivering major improvements to Oxhey Park. This will include a new riverside café, a new play area and facilities for BMX bikes, skateboarding, scooters and rollerblading.

Work will start on this in April this year and should be open for residents to use in 2020. This should be a first class facility and I'm looking forward to seeing how the work progresses.

### **Clarendon Road Improvements**

I'm delighted to announce that our plans to improve Clarendon Road have had a major boost, with £4.5 million worth of additional funding from the Hertfordshire LEP. This as well as the £5 million committed by this council, our local BID and the County Council.

Planned improvements include resurfacing of the carriageway and footways, upgrading the traffic lights, lamp columns and street furniture and enhancing the overall look and feel of the junction to create an improved 'gateway' to the town centre.

Work started on 7 January and is due to be completed by April.

Clarendon Road is one of the town's most important hubs for business and visitors. With national and international businesses basing their headquarters there, it is important we ensure that our town's infrastructure matches the ambitions they have for their business. We know that over 9 million people travel through Watford Junction each year and Clarendon Road is one of the first impressions they get of the town. That's why it is so

important to create a really appealing area and a better link from the station to the town centre.

### **Dementia Friendly Town**

We've set up a new Dementia Action Group, made up of local businesses, community organisations and carers to take this scheme forward. The group is chaired by myself and met on 14 January for the first time.

All council staff will be offered training to become Dementia Friends in February and sessions have also been set up with Watford Football Club, Herts Police and London Northwestern Railway. We're looking for more businesses and organisations to take part. I am meeting with TfL in February to see how they might support the scheme. One of things that we will be working on is running an engagement with carers about what we can do to help make Watford an easier place for people living with Dementia.

I'm passionate to do all I can to make Watford a more dementia friendly town.

### **Big Events**

Our annual fireworks display in Cassiobury Park was very popular, with thousands of people attending, making it one of the biggest free fireworks events in the country. We also raised over £10,000 for the Watford Women's Centre, Signpost and the Peace Hospice.

Our annual Big Skate was a great success. This year, we improved the décor and introduced a bar and saw an increase in attendees.

I'm really pleased that at a time where many councils are having to make cuts to services that we're still able to provide this big events for residents.

### **Tackling Rough Sleeping**

Tackling rough sleeping in our town is one of my key priorities as Mayor.

That's why I am pleased we've been able to fund an emergency cold weather shelter, SWEP+. SWEP only typically gets used when the weather dips below freezing but in Watford we have been able to provide shelter every night throughout December and January. This has been supported by New Hope and local churches. I've been happy to volunteer to help at a number of these sessions.

We're now extending SWEP+ throughout February and March, meaning that someone sleeping rough in Watford has somewhere warm and safe to stay at night.

However, it's not just over the winter months that rough sleepers are given support. New Hope works every single day of the year to try and transform the lives of those people experiencing homelessness in our town and give them the support they truly deserve.

We take all cases of anti-social behaviour across Watford seriously. As part of this, I've brought together the Police, New Hope, the BID and other partners to form a Town Centre Task Group. This is designed to see what we can do to make our High Street a safer and more welcoming place for everyone. I was pleased that after speaking with Herts Police that five new dedicated police officers have been appointed to our Town Centre.

### **Improving our High Street and working with businesses**

I was delighted to be able to help open the new 9 screen Imax cinema in the fantastic £180 million Intu Extension. This is the first town centre cinema that we've had in Watford for 30 years and accompanies H and M, Debenhams, Superdry and other flagship High Street stores. Since the Intu Extension has opened, we've seen a 27% increase in visitors to our town centre, putting us into the Premier League of shopping destinations in the UK.

It's clear that this would not have been able to have been delivered without the tough decisions made by this council and in particular my predecessor Baroness Dorothy Thornhill.

We have also taken the proactive decision as a council to introduce Article 4 directions on our local business spaces. This means that any move to change office space to flats will now require planning permission. We've also objected to government plans to allow more permitted development on local high streets, making it easier to turn shops into residential units without having to seek planning permission. There is unprecedented pressure from the government to provide more homes but we should always be looking to protect our local office space which provides jobs locally.