

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

*I'd like to welcome you to my March Mayor's Report. It's been a busy few months. Since being elected, I've helped nearly 1600 local residents with their issues and visited some of our many community groups. I've also been implementing my key manifesto commitments, such as improving our public transport, making Watford a more Dementia Friendly Town and improving our parks and leisure centres.*

### **Partnership Work**

#### **Everyone Active**

I'm pleased that we've been able to deliver fantastic new leisure facilities at both Central and Woodside Leisure Centres, which have benefited from a £1.8 million cash injection. This has provided new toning suites, saunas and extended gym spaces, among many other improvements.

I'm also pleased that Everyone Active is supporting my new Dementia Friendly Town initiative. They have recently extended their Dementia Friends training programme to cover more staff in both their Central and Woodside Leisure Centres.

#### **Veolia**

We continue to work well with Veolia. This includes working with them to introduce more water fountains across our parks to cut down the use of harmful single-use plastics. I'm also in discussions with London Overground to potential introduce new water fountains to Bushey Station.

One of my key manifesto commitments at the last election was to work to increase the number of green flag parks we have in our town. At the moment, we've worked hard to make sure we have the highest number of green flag parks in the County; Watford has 12 green flag parks and open spaces, a great achievement for one of the smallest geographic council areas outside of London. I'm looking to bring this number up to 16. Work on this is progressing well, with Cllr Amanda Grimston and our parks teams working on improvements to Garston Park, including new plant bedding, a wild meadow, new play equipment in the park and a new Friends of Garston Park group being set up. These improvements are on track for submission to Green Flag judges in 2020/21.

We will be partnering with Veolia again to help run our free compost giveaway later this year.

## 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.

I visited the fantastic local Prince Michael of Kent Court to see their wonderful facilities and find out more about the very generous donation they have received to build a new orangery at the care home.

I visited the local Watford Croquet Club in Cassiobury Park to help find out more about what they do and support their plans to build a new pavilion. The Croquet Club are one of the biggest in the region and have an active membership of over 100 people.

I was lucky enough to welcome members of the Ascot Road Primary School to the Town Hall to test out their debating skills and get grilled about my role as Mayor. I also welcomed the Friends of Watford Museum with Cllr Jackie Connal for a reception in my office and to talk to them more about the history of the building.

I joined local Central ward councillors and the local police at their regular Central Ward Forum. I answered residents' questions about my recent budget and my plans for the town.

I joined Cllr Rabi Martins in helping to open Home Start's newly refurbished shop on Lord Street. Home Start are a wonderful charity who do so much to help those children and families in our town who need it the most. Do get along to their shop and grab yourself a bargain!

I celebrated Chinese New Year with staff, families and residents of Greenbanks Care Home. There was great food on offer and a really welcoming atmosphere.

I joined volunteers and staff at Watford General Hospital for the relaunching of their West Herts Hospital Multicultural Staff Network, supporting staff members across the Trust from a BME background. I'm really proud of the work the hospital does and the role our BME community play in our town.

I met with staff at Camelot, the organisation who administers the National Lottery, at their West Watford head office. I also met with one of our biggest local employers, TJX, to discuss how we can support them more as a council. It's great that organisations like Camelot

choose Watford so often to be their national headquarters, helping to support our local economy and provide local jobs.

I joined local Care Provider, Home Instead to help promote their Caring week; nationally, there's a shortage of carers, and I'm keen to help encourage more to get involved with the profession that can make such a difference to so many vulnerable people's lives. I also opened a new branch of the care provider, Helping Hands on Market Street.

I joined councillors, local voluntary organisations and community heroes at Chairman Cllr Rabi Martin's Chairman's Dinner at Watford Football Club. The evening was a great success and raised much needed funds for local charities.

I joined Cllr Aga Dychton and the New Europeans Association to help host a Brexit information evening for local EU Citizens. Watford has one of the largest communities of EU nationals in Hertfordshire and its important they understand what exiting the European Union may mean for them and their families. They play a huge part in our town and I'm looking to do more work in the future helping them understand what Brexit may mean for them.

I'm keen to work with others across our town to help support our elderly community. That's why I was pleased that we hosted our first ever Pensioners Forum at the Town Hall, on conjunction with W3RT. This was a chance to bring pensioners together and hear their concerns about how we may be able to help them as a local council.

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

### **Standing up for our local hospital**

I welcome the news that once again the West Herts Hospital Trust have reaffirmed their commitment to investing in Watford General with plans for a £350 million investment. Once again, the idea of building a new hospital out of the town has been rejected on cost and feasibility grounds. I also am delighted that after a long campaign, a much need multi-storey car park has been given planning permission by this council. The new hospital option may sound attractive but has been ruled out time and time again by experts and if built would result in the loss of services in our town and the slow death of Watford General.

I could not be clearer. The time for arguing and debate is over. We must now all work in the interests of our residents to deliver the first class hospital facilities we know patients and staff deserve. I will be doing all I can to make sure this can happen.

### **Cycle Hire Scheme**

We are due to be launching the cycle hire scheme for the town in September/October and are on schedule to launch it for this date. We are looking at different models of this scheme across the country. We are in discussions with local train operators about having pick up spots for the bikes based at local stations.

More widely, we are making good progress with improving cycling provision across the town. We are in discussions with TfL about doubling the cycling parking at Watford Metropolitan Station, something a number of residents have been calling for. I have held my first ever Cycle Forum in December and will be holding my next one on the 26th March. This is a chance to bring together cycling groups from across our town to share their thoughts on current cycling provision and what could be improved. This will be held at West Herts College.

### **On Demand Bus Service**

This is also due to be launched later this year, to coincide with College students and others going back to work. Capital funds were allocated to this scheme in our budget passed in January, despite opposition from some. At the moment, we are still running a procurement process to find a suitable provider to run the scheme and are examining how this has worked in other parts of the country.

More widely, I have had a significant number of concerns from residents about the reliability of Arriva bus services in the town, in particularly regarding the Number 10 service. If you have had similar complaints, please do pass them through to my office. I am arranging a meeting with Arriva to raise some of these issues with them directly. I would like to welcome the news that the temporary replacement to the Meriden Estate Service will now become permanent as the route returns to being run commercially.

### **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.

I have been working to extend our E-Car Club for local residents. Watford has the highest usage of electric vehicles in the County and I want it to be easier and cheaper for people to use electric cars in our town. We have got new cars for hire that are only £6 an hour and can travel for over 200 miles on one charge. The cars can be booked from <https://ecarclub.co.uk/> and are available from the Avenue and Town Hall Car Park. I am also working with the County Council to get more on street electric car charging points in Watford.

I recently met with management from London Overground to discuss improvements at Bushey Station with Cllr Maggie Parker. These included improving the frequency of services, improving shelters on the platforms, improving planting at the station, inviting community adoption in Bushey and getting more facilities at the station. London Overground are also supporting my Dementia Friendly Town campaign by providing training to their staff in both Bushey and Watford High Street station. I also used the opportunity to raise the concerns noted by thousands of residents and this council about the closure of ticket offices in some Watford stations.

I meet regularly with London NorthWestern to discuss long term improvements at Watford Junction. A frequent issue that has been raised with me is the issues there have been for some residents exiting the long stay car park at Watford Junction, with some passengers being stuck for a number of hours during road works on Clarendon Road. I've raised as a matter of urgency with Network Rail and the County Council the prospect of opening the St Albans Road exit to the long stay car park to try and ease congestion in the car park area. Watford Junction is a key gateway to our town and I will do all I can to work for improvements to the site. This will start with the opening of extended platforms at the station to accommodate more 12 carriage trains. This new timetable will come into place in May.

A number of residents have expressed their concerns about potential expansion to Heathrow Airport. Out of four options of new flight paths, one of them includes up to 50 flights an hour over our town, with the potential over increase noise and night flights. These plans are concerning and I'm encouraging residents to get involved with the consultation about the changes [here](#). Heathrow must provide more information about what this means for our town, and in particular more information regarding night flights over Watford.

Finally, a number of residents living in Leggatts ward have contacted me about their concerns relating to speeding and other traffic issues on their roads in the Cherry Tree area. I'm concerned about near misses and other issues that have been reported in that area. I've been talking with residents to get their views about how they'd like to see the problem resolved.

### **Building new social housing**

We're making good progress with the Hart Homes scheme. Residents have already moved into accommodation at Croxley View, with more local families moving in over the course of May. We have finished an engagement around the Centrepoint site, and we are looking to expand the community space available for residents in the plans. This will provide a

permanent home for 17 local families. I'll be working with Watford Community Housing to find more sites for local people.

In the last year, Watford has seen a reduction in those in temporary accommodation by a third, bucking the trend of many other councils in London and the South East. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our fantastic local housing team, who work hard to make sure that residents can avoid going into temporary accommodation and can find a housing solution that works for them. I want to make sure that Watford is a town for everyone.

### **Oxhey Park North Update**

We have 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.

### **St Albans Road Scheme**

I am really pleased that we have been able to commit £400,000 to improvements to St Albans Road in my budget in January. Plans here are progressing well. We have launched a website, [www.stalbansroad.co.uk](http://www.stalbansroad.co.uk). It includes a full timeline featured for the improvements, a mailing list and it gives an opportunity for residents and businesses to give us their views about what they would like to see changes. Planned changes include new trees, new parking bays and better provision for cyclists.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Callowland team of councillors, particularly Cllr Ian Stotesbury who I know has been working hard to make this project a reality.

### **Dementia Friendly Town**

This is a project that has been progressing well during the first year of my Mayoralty. I held my first Dementia Action Group meeting, made up of local community organisations, businesses and carers, in January and we're due to meet again at the end of March. Watford Football Club, Transport for London, London Northwestern Railway, London Overground staff in Watford and Herts Police have all received Dementia Friends training.

Last month, over 60 Watford council staff became Dementia Friends, myself included, and I would like to see these training sessions extended to other key groups in the town. We have worked with the Chamber of Commerce to set up a reception for Carers at Watford Football

Club in April and we will be running an engagement with those living with Dementia and their carers about how we can improve things for them in the town.

### **Watford Market**

We have been working with our new market operator, MAM, to engage with traders and begin to make improvements at this site. We have introduced a transparent and fair fees system for our traders, making sure our fees system is standardised for all traders. We have a large waiting list of traders wanting to operate at the market and we have given approval for changes to the lighting in the market. We will be working on other changes to the decor over the coming months.

### **Tackling Rough Sleeping**

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

Watford is now one of 42 local authorities to have become eligible for funding from the government's new fund to tackle rough sleeping. This has gone towards funding five new full time support and outreach workers for our fantastic local homeless charity New Hope. These workers will work direct with some of the most vulnerable people in our town to make sure they get the support they need to transform their lives.

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.