

Elected Mayor's Report- July 2019

It has been a busy few months. Since May 2018, I have helped over 2000 local residents and have been visiting many of our fantastic local community groups. I have been making progress delivering my mayoral manifesto to make Watford a great town for everyone.

Partnership Work

Everyone Active

I am pleased that our leisure centres continue to go from strength to strength, offering first class facilities. One thing I am particularly pleased about is the way that Everyone Active works to make our leisure centres accessible to everyone in our town. They have put on free swim and gym sessions for under 19's, offering cheap family friendly activities for the school holidays and encouraging local young people to get active. The sessions for the school summer holidays will start from 29 July-29 August.

I would also like to thank Everyone Active for providing free activities for local Armed Forces personnel as part of Armed Forces week. Watford Borough Council, along with Everyone Active, has invested £1.8 million into our local leisure centres delivering new first class facilities.

Veolia

We had another highly successful free compost giveaway at Wiggshall Depot on 11 May, with ten tonnes being given away to hundreds of local residents.

Becoming a greener planet is rightly high on people's agenda at the moment. I am pleased that both parties are today proposing that we declare a Climate Emergency. I am determined to do all I can to increase our levels of recycling. That is why we have launched a new waste collection survey, getting residents views about how we can deliver a service that increases our recycling rate and provides excellent value for money.

Community Events

Over the last few months I have been to many different community events. I am 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 was really proud of the way our town came together to support Watford Football Club before and during their FA Cup Final against Manchester City at Wembley. Local people,

community organisations and businesses all came together to paint the town yellow to mark the first time that the Hornets had made the Final since 1984 under Graham Taylor. I would like to thank Roy Moore, in particular, and the volunteers from 1881 Movement who decorated the High Street with one mile worth of bunting, as well as supplying flags to local businesses. We also put on a free big screen for the game, which meant that thousands of local residents could watch the match in Cassiobury Park for free. Despite the result, the reaction of the fans and the town showed what a wonderful community Watford is.

We have opened nominations for my first Audentior Awards as Mayor. These awards recognise and celebrate hard work, dedication and personal achievement. Watford has so many people who regularly do wonderful things for our community. These unsung heroes do so much for our town. The Audentior Awards are a chance to say thank you to people who deserve to be recognised. We are changing the format of the awards this year, with the introduction of a Mayor's Award that can be voted on by the general public. You can nominate someone for an Audentior Award here: <https://www.audentiorawards.co.uk/> and the awards will be presented on 11 October.

It was lovely to meet volunteers from DRUM Watford at the Town Hall to help promote their wonderful art exhibition which is currently on display in the Customer Service Centre as part of the Enrich Festival. The Enrich Festival took place from 8 June - 10 June in Watford Town Centre, and was supported by Watford Palace Theatre and the Arts Council England. The Enrich Festival helped celebrate artists with additional needs, helping the arts become more inclusive and give vulnerable people in our town a place to perform.

I was joined by members of the Royal British Legion in Watford on 6 June to help commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the D Day Landings, and remember those who took part in them from our town. The war generation went through events that we can hardly imagine and we must never forget their sacrifice, which helped liberate Europe and guarantee the freedoms that we still enjoy today.

I joined local faith groups at an Interfaith Prayer Vigil for the atrocities in New Zealand and in Sri Lanka over the Easter period. It is sad that these events are necessary but it does show how in Watford we have a strong diverse community that can come together to support one another. We should never take this for granted.

I welcomed pupils from the Chater School into Watford Town Hall for a tour of the building, my office and the council chamber. Since becoming Mayor, I have worked with Watford Museum to set up a monthly slot for schools to come to the Town Hall to understand more about the history of the building and the role the council has in the town. If you know of a local school who is interested in coming to visit the Town Hall, please do get in touch at

themayor@watford.gov.uk .

I visited a great local charity on 14 June, Herts Musical Memories, who run sessions at Stanborough Church. Herts Musical Memories provide music therapy for those living with Dementia. Research shows that for many people with advanced stages of Dementia can still remember music and can often find it a good way of being able to express themselves. I would also like to thank Herts Musical Memories for supporting my plans to make Watford a Dementia Friendly Town.

I joined local resident Dave Rusher at the Callowland Allotments to see the work he does keeping bees on the site and got the chance to sample some of his fantastic honey! Bees perform such a key role in our eco system and need protecting. It is important that we can use our parks and green spaces to help facilitate this.

I welcomed the national women's Oman cricket team to Watford Town Cricket Club with Cllr Karen Collett for their first ever international tour of the UK. They played three games between 19-26 May in Watford and were hosted by the Town Cricket Club.

I have been in discussions with various schools and local churches about how we can all work together to tackle the problem of holiday hunger. A report conducted by End Hunger UK found that 23% of parents with a child under the age of 18 had skipped a meal because of being unable to afford the cost of groceries. This is sadly a growing problem and I want to work with partners to help tackle it.

I helped open the new Entertainer Store on 20 April and the fantastic new Florist cocktail bar on 18 April which has opened on Watford High Street. It is good that at a time where many town centres are struggling that ours is thriving with a diverse range of offers.

Finally, I celebrated the 60th birthday of the beloved Cassiobury Miniature Railway with volunteers. There was a weekend worth of events that included live music, food and drink as well as an exhibition charting the history of the railway. It's great to see that the railway is still going strong and to come across so many generations of Watfordians who have enjoyed using this over the years.

Delivering my Manifesto and Working for the Town

North Hub Town Centre Consultation

Watford has a successful and vibrant High Street, which has been boosted by the opening of

the rejuvenated into Watford that has brought an outstanding offer in term of retail, entertainment and food and drink to the town centre.

We want to ensure that this success extends throughout the town centre so that it continues to be 'a welcoming and vibrant town centre for everyone'.

We are now ready to think about how to improve the top of the High Street and the Town Hall area, which we are calling the 'North Hub'.

We want to attract more people to the area, give it a sense of its own identity whilst ensuring it connects well with the rest of the town centre. There are lots of ideas about how we could do this, such as:

- how we protect our Town Hall building which is such a landmark for Watford but which is in need of significant investment
- how we can bring together some key cultural facilities and activities in the town – our much-loved Museum and Heritage service and Central Library so that they could work together to create a modern and engaging hub for culture in this part of the town
- how we can make the area more pedestrian and cycle friendly – opening up new routes and generally making the Town Hall less car dominated

We have some very early ideas on how we could improve the top of the town but we want our residents, businesses and communities to help shape the vision so that we get it right for Watford.

This is a long-term project, which will take at least 10 years, so it is really important that people have their say and share their views on what will deliver future success and prosperity for the town.

Backing our hospital

A final decision about hospital options will be made on 11 July. All four of the Trust's options commit to keeping acute services at Watford and invest in improved facilities, with £300 million of improvements to Watford being proposed. This would result in new hospital buildings, greater capacity at the site and improved clinical facilities. We have worked hard for a number of years to make sure that local people and hospital staff have facilities fit for the 21st century. This has included providing a new access road, Thomas Sawyer, providing the Trust with the land for new buildings and giving planning permission for a new multi-storey car park. Despite a vociferous campaign for health facilities to leave our town, we are on the cusp of some really good news for Watford.

The time for talking is now over. We have all got to work together get the best for our town.

Alternatives to the Metropolitan Line Extension

Working with TfL and Herts County Council, a report is being undertaken to look into the alternatives to the Metropolitan Line Extension and what could be able to run on the Croxley Rail Link Land. When the report is published we will be looking at all the feasible options to make sure we can still benefit from the scrapped tube line extension and provide our town with more jobs and better transport infrastructure.

When I was elected, I committed to returning unspent funds that had been committed by this council to the Metropolitan Line Extension. After meeting with TfL in June of last year, they promised this would be returned to Watford and I'm pleased to confirm that Watford Borough Council has been returned £2.3 million and so have been refunded in full.

Improving Watford Junction

Last month I had a meeting with the Leader and new Chief Executive of Herts County Council to discuss the need to make progress on improvements at Watford Junction. This includes improving the station, the forecourt and the need for a pick up and drop off. They are now keen to work with us and Network Rail to make these improvements. A lack of drop off at the station and issues with the look and feel of Watford Junction are issues that are regularly raised by commuters who use the station. With passenger numbers continuing to rise, it is important to make progress in these areas to get an improved gateway to our town.

Cycle Share Scheme

Work continues on this important project and the scheme will be launched in the spring next year, with the announcement of a provider in October. As well as working on a new cycle share scheme, we are doing other positive work involving cycling in the town. We have now held several successful Cycle Forums with the local cycling community, with the last Forum taking place on 26 March. These help make sure cyclists voices are heard in the town. As a result of this, we are looking into making Cassiobury Park a friendlier place for both cyclists and pedestrians. I have been in discussions with Cycling England about hosting one of the first ever street cycling festivals in Watford, similar to that in other towns and cities. We are also in discussions about having dedicated cycling facilities in the new Woodside Masterplan. As part of our plans to improve Clarendon Road, we are making new 'quiet' ways from Watford Junction station to the town centre. These are cycle friendly routes that will initially run along Westland Road, meaning cyclists will not have to use Clarendon Road and will make the journey time to the town centre quicker.

On Demand Bus Service

Similar to our Cycling Scheme, we have opted for a launch next year, with the provider announced in October. Several successful versions of this scheme are now running in different parts of the country, including Liberal Democrat run Sutton, who are hosting TfL's

first pilot On Demand Bus Service. We will be learning from these to make sure our scheme can go as well as possible.

Delivering a Transport App

My plans for a Transport App, where local residents could get all reports about local transport available in one place, is progressing well. We have chosen a preferred developer with a track record of delivery in this area and once all the legal checks have been confirmed we are looking to launch the App at end of this year. I'm hoping this App will help local residents and public transport providers provide quick and easy to access information about public transport available in our town.

Other Transport Improvements

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

I met with London Overground with Cllr Maggie Parker to discuss Bushey Station. We raised the lack of step free access at the station, improving the facilities at the platform and increasing the frequency of services into Euston. Cllr Parker is working on setting up a Friends of Bushey Station organisation, which run successfully in places such as Kentish Town and Alexandra Palace.

London Northwestern have introduced a new timetable in May, which provided additional trains at rush hour and extra seats for commuters. This is part of changes the franchises are making every year until 2021. However, the consequence of these changes did mean some disruption to passengers in Bushey and some shorter trains running at other trains. I have met with London Northwestern management to raise passengers' concerns with them about these changes.

Clarendon Road Improvements

We have just completed phase two of a £4.8 million project to improve Clarendon Road, in conjunction with Hertfordshire LEP and local businesses. This has resulted in improvements to the junction of Beechen Grove and Clarendon Road, including a green area, more trees and the removal of the previous subway. A whole host of major improvements will take place until March 2025, to help create a sense of arrival for the millions coming through Watford Junction every year. I am really pleased that we are able to work with others to invest in our town.

St Albans Road Scheme

Thanks to the work of Cllr Ian Stotesbury, we are currently running a public engagement about improvements to the 'Callowland' stretch of St Albans Road. We want to work with all

local residents and businesses about how we can make this an even more attractive and friendly place in our town. Residents can give their views and suggestions as well as find out more about the scheme by following this link: <https://www.stalbansroad.co.uk/>.

Building new social housing

We are making good progress with the Hart Homes schemes. 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 Centrepont 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 will 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 of nearly a half, 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.

Watford Big Events

I am pleased that we are embarking on another summer of award-winning free events. This was kicked off by our successful Imagine Watford festival, with a whole weekend's worth of free on street entertainment. This was one of our biggest Imagine Watford festivals ever and coincided with the hottest weekend of the year so far. We will then run our Big Screen from 29 July-8 August followed by Big Beach event from 16- 30 August.

I am really pleased that at a time when we have had a 70% reduction in our funding from central government that we are still able to put on these brilliant events for residents free of charge.

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 should start on this very soon with support from the Environment Agency and the facilities will be ready to use in spring 2020. This will be a first-class facility and I am looking forward to seeing how the work progresses.

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 have bought 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.

Dementia Friendly Town

My plans to make Watford a more Dementia Friendly Town are progressing well. We have set up an active steering group made up of people from across the community, and delivered our first ever 'Dementia Action Week' between 20-27 May. These included a carers reception at Watford Football Club, a virtual reality 'Dementia hub' at the Intu Centre for people to experience the symptoms of the condition and a singing session put on by local charity Herts Musical Memories, similar to Singing for the Brain therapy designed to help people living with Dementia. Over the next year our priorities are providing better information about the services available, launching a dementia café in central Watford and making more local organisations more dementia-friendly. We will be applying for Dementia Friendly Community status from the Alzheimer's Society by the end of the year.