

Part A

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: Monday, 10 July 2023

Report author: Director of Performance

Title: Telling Watford's compelling story:
A place brand and narrative for Watford

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 Watford has a lot to shout about and an exciting story to tell. As the town looks to continue to build a strong and sustainable future, which includes and benefits everyone within the Watford community, an inspiring place vision, purpose and narrative is critical to its success.
- 1.2 Through engagement with partners and stakeholders across Watford, particularly those representing the business community, a gap in how the town is telling and amplifying its story was clearly recognised and has been cited as one of the most important areas to address in terms of our offer to businesses, visitors, residents and our community overall. Comparing Watford to other towns and smaller cities, our offer is just as strong, if not stronger, but we are not presenting it as successfully as others.
- 1.3 Over the last year, the council has been continuing this place dialogue with partners and working on developing a place brand strategy for Watford, including a strong place narrative and visual identity. Our Council Plan 2022-26 and Delivery Plan 2022-24 recognises the importance of addressing how the town is presented and promoted and has identified as a key commitment and priority area for action during this delivery cycle.
- 1.4 This report sets out this strategy, the work taken to date and the key next steps for delivering Watford's place brand.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to:
- 2.2 Note the report and work undertaken to date on Watford's place brand strategy.

- 2.3 Approve the place brand strategy (Appendix 1) and note the current elements that are contributing to delivery (Appendices 2,3 and 4).
- 2.4 Approve the Director of Performance continuing to develop the brand strategy, including the brand narratives and visuals, with the key elements in place over the summer for launching in September 2023.
- 2.5 Note the place brand strategy will be integrated into other key areas of the council work (such as Economic Development, communications, engagement, strategic planning).
- 2.6 Note the brand strategy will be shared with partners and stakeholders to build wider interest and involvement so that it becomes a clear and consistent voice for Watford.

3.0 Report pathway

- 3.1 Final review body: Cabinet

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4.0 Detailed proposal

4.1 A place brand and narrative for Watford

As Watford emerged from the first impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the council engaged with businesses and organisations across the town, the issue of developing an inspiring vision, purpose and narrative for Watford was cited as critical to a strong and sustained renewal and longer-term, future success.

- 4.2 Everyone who engaged in discussions, recognised Watford has a lot to shout about and an exciting story to tell. The view expressed was that, compared to other towns and smaller cities, the town's offer is just as strong, if not stronger, but we were not presenting it as consistently and successfully as others. This was seen as real missed opportunity.
- 4.3 Another feature that came over strongly through this engagement was that those who were new or relatively new to Watford consistently discovered far more going on in the town and more impressive facilities and activities than expected – this was

both from a business and resident perspective. A recurring theme was 'you've got it all here, but I didn't know'. Living or working in Watford had come as a pleasant surprise.

- 4.4 To address this feedback and taking learning from good practice (such as the [LGA guidance](#) on place brand and marketing and from towns and cities across the country and beyond) Watford launched a place brand initiative. The aim was to progress developing an authentic and compelling narrative for Watford, underpinned by a shared vision and purpose, supported by a clear and persuasive brand strategy that harnessed the enthusiasm of partners and stakeholders so that a range of voices contributed to the work and there is shared ownership and commitment to the outcomes.
- 4.5 The importance of the place brand was identified as Council Plan 2022-26 commitment - *Tell Watford's story as a great location for businesses where they can invest, grow and succeed as part of our flourishing business community and networks that connect people* - and Delivery Plan 2022-24 action - *Promote what makes Watford a great location for business, connecting to building pride in the town and our profile as a great place to visit by working with partners to shape our place narrative and brand, sharing what is great about Watford, attracting more visitors and supporting our local economy, putting the town on the map as a great place for business.*
- 4.6 **The approach to developing a brand strategy for Watford**
- 4.7 The initial work on the brand strategy focused on 'discovery' so that the place brand was grounded in Watford and was an authentic 'voice' for the town, its residents, businesses and community. This involved research, conversations and exploration in, around and beyond Watford and focused on building a shared understanding of who Watford is, what it can be and how it can tell an ownable story, focusing around:
- Place purpose** - what is it that Watford can become famous for that creates value for people, place and the wider world.
- Aspirations** - what does Watford want to achieve for itself, its businesses and communities over the next five, 10, 20 years.
- Character** - the character that drives Watford and makes it different from other places.
- 4.8 This has provided the platform for our brand strategy, narrative and visual identity and has given a clear understanding that will underpin the way forward.

4.9 **What we found**

Given the original impetus for the place brand, unsurprisingly a range of views and experiences emerged during discovery.

4.10 If you ask most people beyond the town, they have heard of Watford and have an experience or image of what it is like as a place, but this does not guarantee why it is a great choice to invest, make a home or simply spend time. Even those who know Watford well have something different to say about the town and, whilst everyone's story is unique, it was recognised that building and sharing a collective story is even more powerful. This was reflected in the range of visual branding associated with Watford, which, whilst many of the individual brands are strong and successful, did mean there was no clear look or feel of the town for people to identify with.

4.11 **Building a strategy**

A brand strategy is designed to differentiate a town, city, region or country. It highlights our unique positioning and distinguishing features, benefits and strengths to potential business, investors, residents and visitors. Launching a strong place brand supported by our authentic narrative will set Watford apart, making us more memorable and recognisable.

See Appendix 1 for the place brand strategy.

4.12 The components of the brand strategy:

BRAND HEART - the core of Watford's brand, its purpose, vision, values, and unique identity

BRAND MESSAGING – how we talk about Watford, developing our narrative, voice, tone, personality and messages, including to our key audiences:

- Business
- Visitors
- Community

BRAND IDENTITY – the visual expression of the brand, logo, colour, imagery and typography.

4.13 **BRAND HEART**

Through the strategy we have developed the heart of our brand, identifying what makes Watford special and different from other places and our brand purpose, vision and value.

Our place brand vision

Watford is unique and so are our people. Entrepreneurial and bold, creative and diverse – we are a place with big ideas for today and tomorrow, plus the collective skills and will to make things happen. Together we are building a prosperous and

sustainable future that celebrates everyone.

The vision is not something we would necessarily expect to see reproduced in its entirety across the town or, for example, on partner websites but it provides the essence of Watford to build other messaging and narratives around.

4.14 **BRAND MESSAGING**

Our messaging is developing around a strong and consistent narrative, built on three main components that will evolve and grow over time:

- Our why - the motivation behind our town and what we want to achieve
- Our how - the actions we value and focus on to achieve our purpose
- Our what – the attributes that create our character and the ambitions that shape our plans,

with supporting themes:

- We continually strive to deliver big ideas that make us stand out.
- We collaborate to create a shared, prosperous + sustainable future.
- We love to celebrate our roots + bring people together.
- We champion bold values + free thinking.

An outline of our narrative (boilerplate) is at Appendix 2.

4.15 **Who is our audience?**

As we develop the brand, we are focusing on three main audiences: business, community and visitors. In terms of embracing and using the place brand, it belongs to everyone: all local organisations, businesses, community groups, faith groups, cultural and creatives, politicians, and influencers can integrate the brand and narrative into their thoughts and messages.

4.16 **BRAND IDENTITY**

Bringing together our brand vision and narrative we are developing a visual identity for Watford's place brand, based on the concept of 'Watford Actually' highlighting the sense of discovery people expressed on getting to know the town and all it has to offer. This is being developed to create clear 'proof of concept' – what it is about Watford and our offer that would illicit the response – 'that's Watford Actually' The visual is at Appendix 3. This will be adapted across a number of channels including a dedicated place brand website, social media channels and through place marketing campaigns. Appendix 4 sets out an implementation plan for these elements on the strategy.

4.17 NEXT STEPS

The following work is already underway as part of implementing the brand strategy:

- Develop narratives for the three main audiences, collaborating with Watford's partners and stakeholders to test and refine the key messages and overarching narrative
Delivery: August 2023
- Adapt the narratives for different channels (e.g. website) so it is engaging, tells Watford's story and raises Watford's profile across key audiences
Delivery August 2023 (website September 2023)
- Alongside the brand strategy, develop a marketing strategy for the place brand
Delivery August 2023
- Create effective links across wider work being undertaken to develop a long term, place based vision for Watford, working with partners, stakeholders and the community

5. Implications

5.1 Financial

5.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that delivering the place brand will be met within existing budgets.

5.2 Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)

5.2.1 The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that there are no legal implications in this report

5.3 Risks

Nature of risk	Consequence	Suggested control measure	Response (treat, tolerate, terminate, transfer)	Risk rating (combination of severity and likelihood)
Place brand does not reflect an authentic	Place brand fails to achieve its objectives of building a	In-depth discovery phase, collecting information,	Treat	3x2=6

voice for Watford or what gives the town its character and identity	consistent, collective story of Watford	views and information about Watford. Test the narrative with key partners and stakeholders as it develops, particularly with the target audiences.		
Place brand does not embed successfully and develop as the town moves forward	Missed opportunity to promote the town and ensure Watford stands out from other places to gain competitive brand equity (value).	A strong, effective brand strategy with the right vision, messaging and visual identity	Treat	3x2=6

5.4 Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection

5.4.1 Under s149 (1) of the Equality Act the council must have due regard, in the exercise of its functions, to the need to –

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share them
- foster good relations between persons who share relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share them.

As this is a new initiative an equalities impact analysis has been undertaken. The analysis is attached as Appendix 5 to this report.

Data Protection Impact Assessment

Having had regard to the council's obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018, it is considered that officers are not required to undertake a Data Processing Impact Assessment (DPIA) for this report.

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Watford place brand Strategy
- Appendix 2: Watford overarching place narrative
- Appendix 3: Watford place brand visual
- Appendix 4: Watford place brand implementation plan
- Appendix 5: Watford place brand EIA

Background papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.