

Mayor's Report – July 2014

Here is my report on information, news and updates relating to the town and my activities as Elected Mayor.

Town Centre

Big Events launch

A big thanks to those of you that turned out for the launch of our Big Events programme. The sun came out and the atmosphere was brilliant, and Mary Portas was a real pleasure to have as our star guest, sharing tales of her memories of Watford from her youth. We've now also held the Big Dance and the Big Family Sports Day, which have been really successful and are gearing up for the classic movies and family favourites on the Big Screen. Behind all of the theatrics and the fun events we have planned for the rest of the year, lies our solid determination to keep our high street thriving and not let it suffer the fate that some have elsewhere in the country.

Parade improvements

The Parade area makeover is now complete and after some initial teething problems the pond is functioning properly. I am very pleased with how it looks and am getting very positive responses from residents. The redevelopment is just another piece of the jigsaw in our plan to upgrade the whole town centre, which started last year with the redevelopment of the Lower High Street / Kings Street block. It will continue with the launch of our new covered market in Autumn in the grounds of the TJ Hughes building, and the plans in place with Intu to completely renovate and improve Charter Place.

Licence fees waived for pavement café

We wanted local cafés, bars and restaurants to have the best chance to capitalise on the opportunities the Big Events will bring to increase their revenues, so have decided to waive the fees for having pavement licences, so more will take advantage of the additional space and spill out onto The Parade. You can already see how much busier the top of the town feels, and those places with outdoor tables had a real buzz about them during the most recent event, The Big Family Sports Day. It's about creating that café culture feel that residents have always told us was missing from this part of town.

Imagine Watford - feedback

We've had some really excellent feedback on this year's Imagine Watford festival. Hundreds of people have commented about how 'magical' Watford felt, how proud they feel of our town and just how much they enjoyed it. This is really reassuring as it's exactly why, together with the Palace Theatre, we have put it on for the past four years.

The visitor survey data shows that this year's festival reached an audience of 92,811 people, compared with 88,532 last year and 49,902 audience members the year

before. So it's an upward trend, that I hope will keep on rising as the word gets out that this really is a great event that it is worth putting in the diary. It also showed that 73% of people had attended the festival before and 72% rated the performances as 'excellent' and a further 24% rated them as 'good'.

Jobs & the economy

£200 million boost for Hertfordshire

I recently met with representatives from the Herts Local Enterprise Partnership to hear about all the activities they are involved in that are designed to promote growth and prosperity across the county. So, I was very pleased to hear in the week after that they had successfully secured £200 million investment for infrastructure, businesses and skills, which will help deliver new homes and jobs, and significantly support our Croxley Rail Link plans.

Positive jobs news

Figures released this month by Office of National Stats have shown that unemployment in Watford has fallen by 30% in the last year. It is now just 1.9%. 1,164 people in the borough claimed job seekers allowance, which is 519 fewer than a year ago. This is very good news for the town and demonstrates the importance of the work we have been doing on economic development, to attract and retain businesses in our town, and plan for long term jobs growth.

Parks & green spaces

Heritage Lottery Fund success

Members will undoubtedly be aware that we have been successful in securing £4.5 million of lottery money for restoring Cassiobury Park. Council officers worked really hard to prepare our bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund, and I thank those of you that worked with them to help shape the proposals. All the hard work has really paid off and we can now restore much of the history to the park and further improve the facilities we offer our residents.

River Colne Sculptures

I was delighted to unveil the new sculptures we had commissioned for the Colne River Corridor. There is one sculpture in Timberlake car park (Radlett Road), one sculpture in Radlett Road Playing Fields, two sculptures in Waterfields Recreation Ground and one sculpture in Water Lane. The artist Luke Perry drew his inspiration from the history, traditions and interests of the local community, to create sculptures inspired by the heritage or natural history of the river.

Health Campus

Link Road plans

Earlier this month I met with the MP, along with the chief executive of the West Herts Hospitals Trust and senior representatives from Herts County Council and Kier, to clarify the position regarding the proposed link road. Mr Harrington had mistakenly believed that the link road was going to be a private road and was campaigning to have it widened, with turnings off into West Watford. However, the hospital confirmed it would not wish to have a main road running right through the middle of their site and Hertfordshire Highways would not be in a position to spend the millions of additional pounds required to build such a road, which they maintain would worsen the traffic conditions in West Watford and Oxhey. The road proposals will remain as they were agreed, many years ago now, through massive consultation and compromise.

Farm Terrace – allotment holders compensation

The compensation package for allotment holders at the Farm Terrace site, is set to be formally agreed at Cabinet on 23rd July. Subject to agreement, they will be served with a 12 month notice in line with the 1922 Allotments Act with a view to closing Farm Terrace in September 2015. We have engaged with willing tenants individually and as groups, to understand their needs and support them in a move to the new site at Paddock Road or one of the other Watford sites, including the relocation of existing plants, and structures such as sheds and greenhouses. They have also been offered free rent on their new plot if they move early and compensation, proposed at three levels, depending on whether they relocate voluntarily, give up completely or whether they remain in situ until the notice is served in September.

Meeting the community

New Hope Trust: community market garden

I spent some time last month with the New Hope Trust, who invited me to come and see their Community Market Garden. It's an excellent initiative and I was pleased to see that their business sponsors, Affinity Water and Amey, had been really closely involved in getting it off the ground.

DRUM

Disabled charity DRUM is a well respected and much valued charity in our town. Every year they invite me to their annual BBQ and this year's was a celebration of their latest project, which was themed around movies. They presented me with a pair of red 'Dorothy' shoes like those in the Wizard of Oz.

Queens Road Summer Market

Councillor Lynch and her colleagues on the Queens Road Action Group invited me to open the 2014 Queens Road Summer Market earlier this month. It was great to watch the jive dancing demonstration, in which local residents enjoyed taking part. I

would encourage all members to go along to check out the stalls and entertainment, and to show your support for what they are trying to achieve. The next market is on the 9th August. It was also good to see yet another new shop has opened up in this part of town. Queens Furnishings stocks an interesting range, everything from ethnic jewellery to antique china!

Schools talks

I always enjoy the opportunity to meet with and talk to our younger residents. Most recently I gave an assembly at Coates way school about the importance of taking pride in your town, and how everyone can do their bit to make a difference. They were lovely young people and a pleasure to spend time with. I also recently visited Kingsway junior school, where pupils presented oral reports to me about local community issues they were affected by. I also spent an evening at Bushey Meads school where I was a guest speaker at one of their events, and went to Holy Rood school to present prizes for a spelling competition.

World War One Commemorations

Earlier this month I joined the Leavesden Green Community Group in their commemorating of the centenary of World War One and the unveiling of the new War Memorial outside Dale Court. A number of special commemoration events are being held in Watford: on Sunday 3 August a special commemoration service will take place at St Mary's Church, which starts with a civic procession at 10.15am, followed by a service at the church, at which I've been asked to do a reading. On Monday 4 August between 10pm to 11pm, for 'LIGHTS OUT' there will be a vigil at the Peace Memorial, or services at St Mary's Church and at Christ Church.

Watford Museum will also be hosting a new exhibition, 'The Great War: Watford 1914', from Thursday 7 August to 27 September, as well as working on an online roll of honour. Museum volunteers are cross referencing newspapers from the period with the roll of honour in order to provide some background to those listed using obituaries.

Get your Audentior nominations in

And finally, we are once again looking for nominations for the Audentior Awards, so please have a think about the people or groups within your communities that always go the extra mile to help or support others. Contact Democratic Services for information on how to nominate.