

Mayor's Report - January 2015

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

Town Centre

Town Centre Anti-Social Behaviour

Watford Town Centre had a quiet Christmas period in terms of anti-social behaviour, with no major incidents. Anti-social behaviour went down by 7% or 45 fewer incidents than in the same period last year.

The local authority now has the power to define an area as being under special protection from listed activities that are deemed persistent anti-social or negative to the wider community. This can include naming individuals or all members of the public from engaging in specified activities within the defined area by the order (an example would be creating an area in which it is an offence to consume alcohol). The area around Sainsbury's car park in the town centre has been given one such order keeping the roads clear so that people can disperse more easily at the end of the night.

Big Skate: The First Ever Outdoor Rink in Watford

The ice rink was a tremendous success. We could have had a few more people on the ice but we have not had a bad Christmas. It was a popular addition to our Big Events programme, with thousands of visitors and several of the sessions sold out. The start of the event was hampered by several days of unseasonably warm weather.

We've had some great feedback about how to make it even better should we run it again - people have suggested more music and transparent barriers so that spectators could watch. There was also a demand for more of the orange skating aids for young children to use.

Keep Safe Watford Re-launch

I helped to re-launch 'Keep Safe', a community safety scheme aimed at vulnerable people that enables them to obtain help and support when out and about in our town. Any premises displaying the 'Keep Safe' sticker will offer them a refuge from which they can make a phone call to any of the

Emergency Services, a support service or to a parent or carer if they need help.

Vulnerable members of the community who are involved in the scheme will carry a 'Keep Safe' card or key ring with their name and emergency contact telephone numbers on it. They may also have a small Keep Safe sticker on a personal contact card or on a mobile phone.

Many local shops have already stepped up and are displaying the orange sticker in their window. Staff from intu Watford and the library have also received training about the scheme. This is essential part of making sure that our town is a welcoming and safe place for everyone to enjoy. It was clear from the vulnerable residents present that the scheme helped them to feel safer.

Watford Museum's Bronze Age Bowl

A Bronze Age bowl from Watford Museum has sparked international interest after the discovery that it could be worth up to £100,000. The piece was passed into the care of Watford Museum after being discovered with a hoard of Bronze Age items including arrows and axe heads in 1968. The discovery came from an archaeological excavation during the construction of Watford Industrial Estate in the Holywell area.

The bowl, thought to date from the Bronze Age, has been flown to a museum in Mainz, Germany, for in-depth analysis. It is thought that the piece of crockery could be a really early example of international trading between Europe and other continents.

We often forget that there have been settlements around Watford for thousands of years. We tend to think of Watford as a product of the Victorian era, but there was clearly a Bronze Age settlement here.

Archaeologists and experts at the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum (RGZM) in Mainz will now undertake a full analysis and attempt to recreate the bowl using methods and materials dating back thousands of years. The replica and the bowl itself will then return to Watford Museum so that local residents can view it again.

Health Campus

Samantha Jones is to stand down as Chief Executive of West Hertfordshire NHS Hospitals Trust, to be replaced with interim chief executive Jacqueline

Kelly. I am pleased for Sam but disappointed for Watford, as she had a firm hand on the tiller and was steering us in the right direction – so I'm not surprised she has been headhunted for this prestigious role.

I have been assured of continuity with Jac Kelly and by the summer the hospital should have a clearer strategy – it can't come soon enough. It is a crucial time with the Health Campus project and we want to make sure there is a smooth transition. I look forward to working with Jac to ensure that Watford continues to get much needed investment and that local residents continue to get the health care they deserve.

Local Economy and Jobs

Watford Workshop Big Breakfast with Watford Chamber of Commerce

I was delighted to attend the Watford Workshop Big Breakfast with Watford Chamber of Commerce.

Watford Workshop provides invaluable work experience, skills, training and employment for disabled people. This helps them to achieve greater independence, become more integrated into the community and where possible move them on to mainstream employment.

Watford Workshop is available to hire for a large variety of customer requirements. Projects vary from complex mechanical/electrical assembly to simple packing for organisations of all sizes. Please go to www.watfordworkshop.co.uk/services for more information.

It was also a pleasure to meet again with Paralympian Derek Derenalagi who gave a very motivating speech about his life story.

Aspire Achieve Advance (3aaa) Apprenticeships

It was inspirational to meet with the 3aaa team following their recently awarded Grade 1 outstanding Ofsted rating from their first ever Ofsted inspection. 3aaa recruit and train young people who join some of the most innovative technology companies in the country as well as companies who know that exploiting technology will help their businesses grow.

Young people in Watford who are passionate about technology have the opportunity to receive excellent technical training IT, Accounting and Social Media, giving them the tools they need to succeed in the modern

workplace, and the skills that Watford needs to stay a competitive place for business.

Skills Show Experience Event

The Skills Show Experience Event which aimed to promote options and careers to young people was a great success. It inspired young people to think about careers and areas they haven't considered and looking at what they need to achieve this. There were employer and educational exhibitions, "have-a-go" sessions, workshops and seminars in a range of sectors including engineering, mechanics, hospitality and catering, health and social care and construction. Young people could learn about apprenticeships and starting their own businesses as well as about interview techniques and what employers are looking for.

We have good employment rates in Watford, but we need to work hard to ensure that every young person without exception has the skills and opportunities they need to flourish. There was tremendous support for this event from local employers who have shown that they are willing to invest in the next generation.

Sports and Parks

Watford Boxing Club

I am delighted that we have been able to find Watford Boxing Club new premises after its 10-year lease ran out and they were not able to renew it. The club's new home is in an old council-owned storage facility in Woodside Depot, which has been massively renovated.

It's fantastic that we have been able to save a boxing club that was struggling to find a new home and great that so many different people – including Council officer Caroline Roche, Veolia and the community – have come together to make this happen. I hope Watford Boxing Club has a successful future. Possibly we could even see another future Olympian rising up through their ranks!

Watford Boxing Club runs boxing classes for all ages and abilities from 6pm to 7.30pm on Sundays. The club hosts all-ability sessions for 10- to 16-year-olds from 6.30pm to 7.30pm and for those aged 17 and older from 7.30pm to 9pm on Mondays and Wednesdays. It is run by unpaid volunteer coaches, who are now trying to raise money to buy new equipment for the gym.

For more information on Watford Boxing Club, visit www.watfordboxingclub.co.uk

Watford's New Green Gym

Residents who want to burn calories and learn helpful gardening and conservation techniques will benefit from a new Green Gym that was recently launched in Cassiobury Park. The free, weekly sessions will be run by The Conservation Volunteers (TCV), who have already had great success with a Green Gym in Colne River Park. The project is supported by Watford Council.

Over the course of the next three years those residents who volunteer to work out with the Cassiobury Park Green Gym will develop a wildlife friendly orchard, sow wildflower meadows, and create new wildlife habitats.

The Green Gym project has really taken off in Watford - I know the volunteers at Colne River Park have done some great work. I am sure it will do just as well in Cassiobury Park. Already you can see the results here - the insect wall is a brilliant idea and looks fantastic!

The free sessions take place every Wednesday between 10am and 1pm. They are open to all regardless of experience, ability or fitness, and run by an experienced leader; giving volunteers the chance to help transform the Cassiobury Park, learn new skills and improve their health and fitness. Contact GG-watford@tcv.org.uk or visit <http://www.tcv.org.uk/watford>

Christmas and Festivals

Christmas Spirit

I was pleased to join in a half-century tradition of the Toy Service at Stanborough Park Church as the congregation donated hundreds of new toys for needy children in the Watford area. The toys are collected from the church at the Annual Toy Service and distributed to needy families by social workers who know where the toys will find good homes.

Volunteers with Christians Across Watford also donated their time and money for the organisation's annual Operation Rudolph hamper pack. I visited them as they assembled 350 boxes of food and Christmas treats at Soul Survivor, and it was great to see such Christmas cheer. These

were delivered to people and families facing a difficult time over the festive period.

Mayor's Charity Christmas Card

I continued the tradition of contacting local businesses asking them to sponsor my Mayor's charity Christmas card in order to raise money for a local charity. This year the cards were designed by Angelica Sullano of Francis Combe School and raised £2,600 for the charity DEMAND.

DEMAND is dedicated to helping people with disabilities by providing bespoke equipment to make their daily lives easier and more enjoyable. DEMAND is a wonderful charity and I am really pleased to be able to help them in this small way. Their work - designing, manufacturing and modifying equipment - transforms the lives of people of all ages and with all types of disability.

Thank you to Humphrey's International Removals and Storage, Warner Bros Studios Leavesden, Watford FC, intu Watford, Sigma Pharmaceuticals, West Herts Golf Club, The Langley Banqueting and Conference Suites, and West Herts Golf Club for their generous support which will make a big difference to DEMAND.

Milad un Nabi - Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad

On 11th January Muslim residents held a process to celebrate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. It was a well run and enjoyable event. I was proud to see that our town hosts diverse festivals to celebrate the beliefs of all Watford residents.

Schools

Ascot Road School Topping Out

I joined head teacher Helen Lockham and pupil Ali Hanif at the topping out ceremony for the new Ascot Road School building next to Morrisons. We're all looking forward to the school building opening in May, especially the school's 60 new pupils started at the Lanchester building, on the West Herts College site.

School Visits

I was pleased to join Westfield Academy in honouring their past and present students' achievements at their prize evening. It was

especially enjoyable to talk with the young people about their successes and their plans for the future. It's great to showcase good things when all too often we only hear the bad.

I also had the privilege of addressing morning assembly at the Grove Academy, and celebrate an Art Mark Award win with Kingsway Infant School.

Billy's Wish

It was a pleasure to attend the launch of Billy's Wish education programme at Kingsway Junior School. The charity was set up following the death of a victim of knife crime and offers age specific films tackling the dangers of knife crime. There are three films, aimed at Year 6s, Year 7s and Year 8s. The aim is to reach children before they reach the age that they would realistically consider carrying a knife. We have a good record on crime in Watford, and Billy's Wish education programme will work with young people to help ensure this continues.

Around the Community

I've enjoyed getting out to meet as many groups and residents as possible, including visiting the Al-Zahra stall that was in the town centre and several churches.

I was particularly thrilled to attend the My Watford Local Heroes Awards, where hundreds of people gathered to celebrate some inspirational local residents while raising money for Peace Hospice Care and DRUM, a local disabilities charity. We have people of such incredible talent, kindness and perseverance in Watford and the surrounding areas. I'm very grateful for their contributions, and for the hard work of the organisers of the Local Heroes Awards who gave us an opportunity to pause for a moment to honour them.

Staff Excellence Awards

I was proud to give out excellence awards to a number of Watford Council employees and that their hard work has been recognised. They make a real difference to our town. A good time was had by all!