

Mayor's Report March 2015

My report this month is an update on major issues in the town.

New Watford Market

I have continued to work with stallholders, Town and Country Markets (TCM) and council officers to ensure that New Watford Market becomes a thriving shopping venue and a real draw to our town.

Whilst the new market was never envisioned to be fully enclosed, we accept that the new public seating area has been more impacted by wind and weather than anticipated. TCM has therefore identified a heating option and I am informed that all food court traders have been consulted and have endorsed the location, number and type of heaters.

The contractors have met with TCM and WBC on site to establish the best installation. We have now ordered the heaters and they should be installed by the end of the month.

We will introduce some short term proposals including banners at the Beechen grove entrance, signage above the lift entrance advertising the food traders on the food court, a banner including a map on the fire escape on the entrance area and additional banners around the pillars of the flyover.

We have also agreed to undertake a further review of the market and capture some of the proposals in a design brief to examine the viability of side panels to the first floor seating area to address wind tunnel effect on the ground floor.

The steps outlined above will take some time but it is important that we get this right. A project plan is being developed and TCM will keep stall holders informed of any consultation planned when the information is available.

The primary aim of the proposals is to increase the footfall into and the dwell time in the market. The newly installed footfall counters will enable us to monitor trends in the coming months.

New Watford Market is a new venture and it will take some time to get the market to where we all want it to be. Key to the long term success of New Watford Market will be establishing the right trader mix. TCM is working hard to attract the right businesses into the market that will be both sustainable and that will attract shoppers to the market. This may take some time but we are confident that together with the physical enhancements we can increase footfall into the market and ensure that it is vibrant and successful.

New Watford Market events continue to bring variety and activity. Look out for the Italian market on 20th and 21st March and the Easter Egg Hunt and Petting Zoo on 4th April (Easter Saturday).

Dome Roundabout

It is clear to all that turning off the lights during the current works on the cycle lanes at the Dome Roundabout has improved traffic flows in the area.

I do feel that the County Council must act. The Deputy Mayor and I have been pressing them to examine proposals that would ease traffic and protect cyclists and pedestrians.

Whilst the lights were put into improve pedestrian and cyclists safety, it has the downside of stopping cars when there are no pedestrians or cyclists. I, like many residents, think the roundabout is over-engineered and this has increased traffic congestion.

Clearly, safety - for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists - remains paramount, but I feel both needs can be met. It should be possible to have lights only being used when called upon.

Anti-Social Behaviour

Whilst anti-social behaviour linked to the night time economy has fallen again this year, and generally across the borough figures for reported anti-social behaviour are down, there will be this year, for the first time in eight years, a slight upturn in the overall number of reported cases.

This increase is because of a handful of vexatious repeat callers misusing the non-emergency 101 telephone line to report issues which, upon investigation, were not actual anti-social behaviour.

Watford Junction Station Forecourt

I have been working with WBC, Network Rail, London Midland, Transport for London, and Hertfordshire County Council to produce proposals which will improve segregation between the various transport modes at the interchange, increase bus station, taxi rank and cycle parking capacity, reduce congestion (particularly on the car park access road) and safeguard access routes for pedestrians and cyclists.

As part of this, we are examining the possibility of the opening of a secondary access to the station car park from St Albans Road. It is envisaged that this may enable improvements to the access/ egress to the station car parks and present options for improved taxi ranking and passenger drop off and pick up.

The final report is now with HCC and they are seeking a budget estimate from their Consultants of the cost of works and for undertaking Stage 1 safety audit assessments of the issues that are considered need investigating.

What is clear is that "sticking plaster" solutions are not enough - we need to ensure that improvements take into account all modes of transport and make sure that the elements of the scheme work together.

Health Campus Road

Anyone driving down Wiggenhall Road cannot fail to have noticed that work has begun.

Site Clearance works have now started in preparation for the construction of the new road serving the Hospital and the wider Health Campus area. This has involved tree clearance, rubbish removal, demolition and site preparation works in anticipation of construction works starting in the early Summer. Funding for the new road has come from the Department of Health, Hertfordshire LEP and investment from Kier and WBC who form the LABV undertaking the development.

It is worth reminding ourselves that this will take traffic off Vicarage Road and improve ambulance times. It is not a through road as the hospital, quite rightly, do not want a major road through their site.

Big Events

Watford's Big Events will be returning this year after a successful 2014. These include:

- Big Summer Sounds, 15-17 May
- Big Festival, 19 June – 5 July
- Big Beach, 25-26 July
- Big Screen on The Parade, 20-23 August
- Big Sports Day, 19 September
- Diwali on The Parade, 24 October
- The Big Skate, 28 November 2015 – 10 January 2016

Cassiobury Parkrun

I was pleased to open the first Cassiobury parkrun this month, with an amazing 157 runners taking part. The 5km timed run is free to enter and open to people of all ages and abilities. Parkrun takes place at 9am every Saturday, meeting outside the Cafe Cha. You can find out more information at www.parkrun.org.uk/cassiobury.