

A CONSERVATIVE PLAN FOR WATFORD

An ambitious fresh start for our town

SPRING 2022



Watford Conservatives

Foreword by Binita Mehta-Parmar, the Conservative nominee for Watford Borough Mayor

I am Watford born and bred and am very proud of our town and its wonderful diversity. But I am increasingly worried about the direction Watford is taking under its current local leadership. The Liberal Democrats in both the Borough Council and the neighbouring Three Rivers District are making mistakes that will blight our town and the surrounding area for years to come. Our pleasant historic market town is being increasingly urbanised. Without determined action, we will just be absorbed into the sprawl of greater London. Working with my colleagues in both the Borough and the District, we have a plan to stop the damage before it is too late. We must defend our green belt and stop the blighting of our skyline with towering new high rise flats and offices.



OUR KEY SIX POINTS ARE:

✓ **Appropriate development, not over-development**

✓ **Making Watford a Centre of Health Excellence**

✓ **Safeguarding and improving the local environment**

✓ **Taxing less; spending better**

✓ **Excellent policing and safer streets**

✓ **Backing local businesses**

This report sets out how we plan to do it.

As Mayor of Watford, I would work closely with Watford MP Dean Russell and also with Gagan Mohindra MP in next door South West Herts, with our Councillors in Hertfordshire County Council, and with our Police and Crime Commissioner David Lloyd. By uniting our efforts and cooperating closely together I am confident that we can offer our area a fresh start. I hope you will back this Plan on 5 May by supporting your Conservative Candidates in the Three Rivers District and myself and my colleagues in the Watford Borough. It is not too late to save our town and local area.

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APPROPRIATE DEVELOPMENT NOT OVER-DEVELOPMENT

The Lib Dem Over-Development Disaster:

Let's protect the character of our area



Some local development is necessary and can serve the needs of local people. Affordable new homes are required, but any development needs to be appropriate and in keeping with the local area.

The Liberal Democrat Council is determined to build more and more high rise flats and tall offices from the High street, up Clarendon Road past Watford Junction station and along St Albans Road. This chain of 'Taylor's Towers' will dramatically change the skyline of the town and have been attacked by some as a 'mini-Manhattan'.

All too often, huge developments of small flats are approved with little or no provision for car parking. The Liberal Democrats' excuse is that a train station is close by! As many young couples in these flats will have children, what provision for family accommodation is being made?

Where will their visitors, friends and family park? Where will they go to the doctors, dentists or school?

Planning would be easier to manage, and over-development easier to resist, if Watford's local plan had been up to date.



But it is seven years late, making the Council vulnerable to planning appeals.

Watford's planning incompetence is leading to disaster and needs to be stopped before it is too late.

The same is true in Three Rivers District where repeated delays in publishing the local plan gave rise to suspicions of a cover-up.

When it was finally published, we could see why. It was a full-scale attack on our Green Belt around Carpenders Park and in Abbots Langley.

The District Council is so desperate to attract developers into the South Oxhey area that it 'let them off' paying the amount that should really have been due to the local community in Watford Rural Parish area, including Carpenders Park and Oxhey Hall.

It is not good enough for these local Liberal Democrat administrations to just blame central government targets.

Have you noticed that on the one hand the Liberal Democrats say they have no power to control local planning and everything is the government's fault but then campaign against any changes to national planning laws as they don't want to lose local control?

Which one do you think it really is?

Yes, we've now reached the point where:



**Liberal Democrats =
Local Developers**

They allow inappropriate development and wash their hands of the consequences of their decisions. But they cannot simply shirk their responsibilities this way.

We need a plan for Watford and the surrounding district that focuses on making good use of brownfield sites so we can protect our green belt and stop urban sprawl. We need 'joined-up' thinking to ensure Infrastructure keeps pace with development in order to protect our quality of life.

We need better plans for Watford and the surrounding district.



Watford Conservatives say:

-  We need better town and district plans – that conserve the character of Watford with its rich and unique history, and its surrounding areas.
-  We oppose high-rise developments.
-  We must prioritise the protection and expansion of our green spaces.
-  Development must be well organised hand-in-hand with appropriate infrastructure.
-  Our ambition must be to enhance quality of life for all local residents.

Affordable Housing Shortage:

Let's take a new approach

We need to make sure our children can live nearby in good quality affordable housing.

This should be our development priority.

Yet when the Liberal Democrat administration gave planning permission for the proposed Watford Junction development, out of over 1,000 new homes, just 107 will fulfil the criteria of affordable housing.

We believe that accommodation can be constructed to meet local needs while fitting the character of the local area and blending in with community housing.

Watford Conservatives say:



Watford needs new small-scale developments to deliver affordable local housing – so our children have the chance to stay in the area.



Parking Neglect:

Let's plan better for our local needs



WHY WAR WITH CAR-OWNERS?

Some political parties act as if the invention of the car can be reversed. Whilst we all want to ensure there are better facilities for cyclists and to encourage people to make greater use of improved public transport facilities and walking around town, the car is not going to disappear. And as we move into an era of electric vehicles, the environmental impact will be reduced.

But some are just at war with car-owners.

Nowhere is this seen more clearly than the attitude of the Lib Dem council to parking facilities. In new developments around Watford Junction station, 1,214 homes have been built but with barely 200 parking places – for possibly as many as 2,000 new cars!

It is hardly surprising that it is getting harder and harder to park across the town with such planning policies, which leads to difficulties for local shop-owners.

Watford Conservatives say:

- ✓ We must tackle the parking shortage crisis.
- ✓ Residents should be able to park near their homes.
- ✓ Parking needs must be taken seriously when planning developments.
- ✓ Local businesses and shops should be considered when it comes to parking plans.

Services Crisis:

Let's make sure we have the doctors and schools we need



We must make sure that developments have the necessary infrastructure in place alongside construction. If we are to welcome more residents, we need more GP surgeries and schools to cope with this increased demand.

Existing residents should not have to struggle with obtaining a local school place or an appointment with their GP due to irresponsible development which has not been scrutinised correctly. There are too many instances of planning permission being granted without the site being deemed future-proofed.

Watford Conservatives say:



Let's develop our local infrastructure in step with housing developments.



Any new housing development on St Albans Road must comprise a new primary school and doctors' surgery to relieve the pressure on practices in Nascot, Central and Callowland.

Poor Transport Infrastructure:

Let's improve public transport and planning



Whether buses, roads, or trains, local transport infrastructure is just not good enough.

Whilst Watford has grown with more residents and more shopping facilities, the transport system has not kept up. Every day we face traffic problems that just get worse and worse. When planning local developments, more consideration needs to be given to the implications for traffic – and simply wishing for owners of new properties not to own cars, is clearly no longer good enough.

We need better facilities for cyclists. We strongly support making cycling easier around town and back measures to make it safer. But unlike the Liberal Democrats, we are not at war with car owners.

Many of us use our cars, especially when we have to transport children significant distances or fetch heavy shopping.

They are a popular way to do things quickly and independently. So rather than just attacking people for wanting to use their cars, we need to take a balanced approach. The Liberal Democrat knee-jerk response to every transport problem is to attack cars: this needs to end.

Of course we need traffic calming measures – but too frequently these seem to show little concern for the needs of car owners resulting in damage

to their vehicles – whether from road humps or width restrictions. We will campaign for well-planned traffic calming measures, in consultation with local residents, such as speed control platforms which slow cars down without causing damage.

Watford Junction station is simply not good enough to deal with increasing local needs.

The railway service must be improved.

A zone 1-9 travel-card costs £4,008 a year, yet commuters are not receiving anywhere near value for their money. Too many commuters are arriving late to work through no fault of their own, and too many are arriving home much later than planned

in the evening.

There are delays, cancellations and too many instances in which passengers are not able to board services due to overcrowding.

The Metropolitan line extension should not be used by the Labour Mayor of London as a political football. The extension to the centre of Watford could bring benefits for many residents but this need not be at the expense of others. It would be wrong to turn the existing Watford Metropolitan station into a noisy workshop.

We must back our local taxi drivers. They offer a vital service and need facilities at local stations to drop off and pick up passengers easily.

Watford Conservatives say:



Watford Junction station needs more investment and comprehensive redevelopment.



We back MP Dean Russell's efforts to hold London Northwestern Railway to account and to improve its services.



The existing Watford Metropolitan station must be kept open: plans for any future Metropolitan line extension way must make this clear.



We must work with Herts County Council to assess the phasing of traffic lights at the Ring Road and the Dome Roundabout.



Traffic calming measures should be well planned and consider the needs of car-owners too.



We must give the town's taxi drivers the support they need to serve passengers better.

MAKING WATFORD A CENTRE OF HEALTH EXCELLENCE

Opportunities For Local Health Services:

Let's back the Watford General Hospital redevelopment plan

Funding for the West Herts Hospital Trust – which includes a major rebuild at Watford General Hospital – has been announced by the Conservative Government. We will get behind the efforts of our local MP, Dean Russell, to ensure that every penny of investment in Watford by West Herts Hospital Trust is spent well and that work begins without delay on new facilities that benefit the whole area.

Watford Conservatives say:



Let's make Watford a centre of health excellence.

We back the investment in Watford General 100% as the best way to improve the health service for residents in our town and the wider area as effectively and as quickly as possible.



We will campaign to make sure that the new multi-storey car parks adopt a pay-on-exit scheme and a range of flexible payment options. Patients and visitors should not have to worry about topping up their parking.



The Hidden Health Crisis:

Let's focus on mental health support



No resident in the Watford area should ever feel alone and without support.

Loneliness is one of the greatest injustices of our time. We need an urgent review of mental health services and to make access to adult social care quicker and easier.

Nobody should be left without the care that they need and are entitled to.

We must ensure that mental illness is viewed in the same way as physical illness.

Watford Conservatives say:



We back MP Dean Russell's local campaigns to improve mental health care.



We are pleased to support his 'mental health first aiders' training initiative – where he is working with some excellent local partners to train 1,000 local mental health first aiders in Watford. The target is to make sure that nobody has to wait more than two weeks to access specialist mental health treatment.

SAFEGUARDING AND IMPROVING THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

Protecting Our Local Environment:

Let's act locally to improve our quality of life

The UK has played a world-leading role in tackling climate change and the transition to Clean Growth – but what more can we do locally?

It is our duty to make sure our children and grandchildren grow up in a country that is cleaner and greener than the one we grew up in.

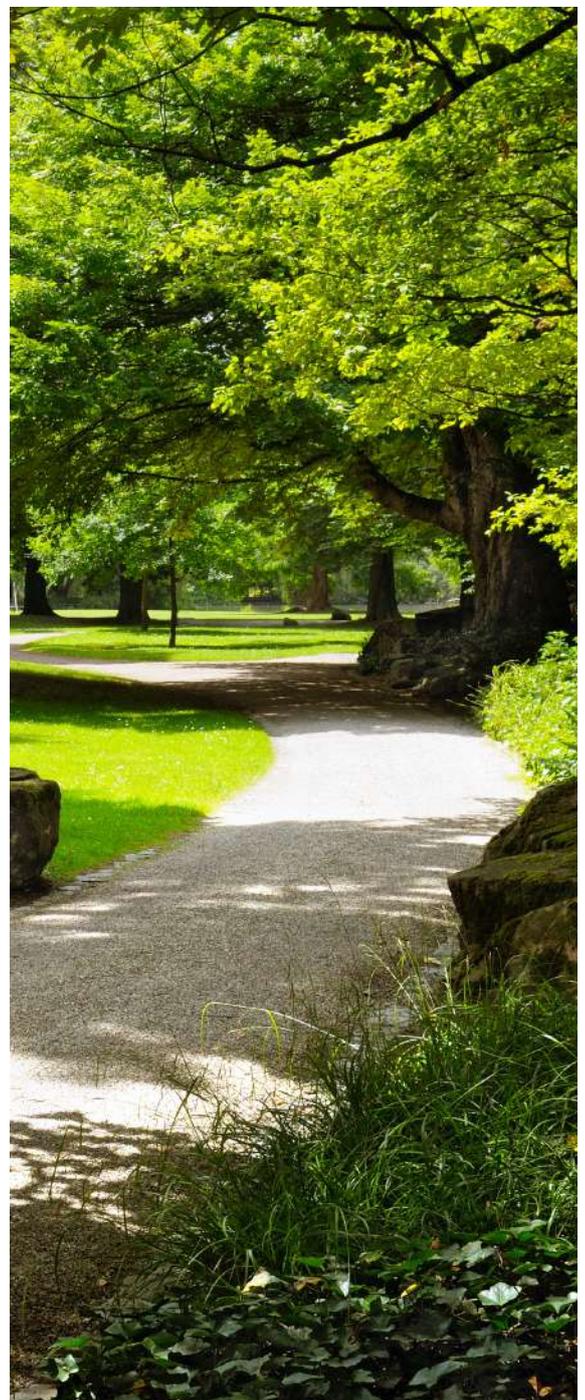
We need to protect our precious green spaces and avoid over-development.

We need to work with local businesses to encourage them to play their part in this great national effort.

Watford Conservatives say:

✓ We back MP Dean Russell's work to encourage local businesses to end single-use plastic and to reduce emissions so we can have cleaner air.

✓ We must work to protect the parks and open spaces that we are lucky to have in the area.



TAXING LESS; SPENDING BETTER

No More Tax Increases

Let's design a better budget



The Councils in Watford and Three Rivers prefer to increase taxes and invent new 'stealth taxes' – on things like gardening and parking – to spend on vanity projects to provide photo opportunities rather than getting the basics right at an affordable cost.

Stealth taxes are a great way to hide what is really happening.

Both the Watford Borough and Three Rivers District are too expensive. Watford is the second most expensive council in the County. Three Rivers isn't far behind.

They need to get back to basics. They should focus on getting core services right. We need a budget that gives us all value for money.

Watford Conservatives say:

- ✔ Let's bring down local taxes in both the Borough and District – enough is enough.
- ✔ No new stealth taxes – we oppose the tax on gardening.
- ✔ Let's get back to basics: a quality service at a price we can afford.

Waste Collection Crisis:

Let's get the basics right



Surely it is the first duty of a local Council to organise an efficient and effective waste collection system?

Yet the current Liberal Democrat administrations in Watford and Three Rivers just don't deliver. Both Councils have abandoned the concept of weekly general waste collections.

Shouldn't a weekly rubbish collection be a basic service guaranteed by your local council?

To add insult to injury, both Liberal Democrat Councils have imposed a new 'gardening tax': we have to pay to have our green waste removed. Aren't we already paying for waste to be collected through our Council Tax? This is a regressive tax.

As the basic charge is the same for everyone, it hurts hard working families with modest gardens in the same way as it hurts those with much larger properties.

Watford Conservatives say:



We must have a general rubbish collection every week.



No 'gardening tax' and no extra charges for collecting our rubbish.

Wasting Money:

Let's look after our resources



The Liberal Democrat administrations in the Watford Borough and Three Rivers District Councils should have looked after our capital better.

And yet, they have all too often wasted money on unnecessary schemes. The pond at the top of the town has been redone twice in six years, adding a bridge to nowhere. They should have got it right the first time.

The Three Rivers District sold its social housing stock and has since blown the windfall – £35 million – gone.

And they have missed opportunities to secure financial benefits for local communities from developers. The South Oxhey development should have brought in thousands of pounds for the local community – but instead the Liberal Democrats refused to make the local developers pay up.

Watford Conservatives say:

✓ We would manage the funds provided by local taxpayers with meticulous care. Your hard-earned cash should not be blown on councillors' vanity projects.

✓ We would protect local capital and focus on investments that add real value for the town and surrounding areas.

EXCELLENT POLICING AND SAFE STREETS

Our Streets:

Let's make safety a top priority



No-one wants to waste energy keeping lights on all night, but using the flexibility of the new LED lighting systems in many parts of the area should mean residents can walk home late safely. Ensuring a dimmer light for longer hours is something we propose.

The hours when the streetlights are switched off must be determined by local needs – especially public transport timetables.

Residents must be able to walk our streets without any concerns.

Making sure potholes are fixed quickly and broken lights are mended urgently should be a top priority.

Watford Conservatives say:



Let's get the basics right: good pavements and safe streets.



Let's work together with the County Council and Police & Crime Commissioner, instead of creating artificial arguments and playing the blame-game.

Our Police:

Let's help them help us more



The police deserve our full support and not be undermined by local political factions advancing narrow interests of their own.

We are all concerned about crimes that seem to go unpunished and criminals left uncaught.

We will work with our County Police and Crime Commissioner to strengthen local policing.

Areas on the edge of the town such as Carpenders Park and Abbots Langley must not play

second fiddle to the policing needs of central Watford during the evenings and late at night: the whole area must be fully served at all times.

Police officers must spend their time out and about not bogged down in bureaucracy. Having custody arrangements in the town – and not some distance away – could help.

We would assess what more could be done to free time up for our police officers to spend out in the community.

Watford Conservatives say:



We back our police without hesitation.



Let's invest in our police and improve local safety.

BACKING LOCAL BUSINESSES

Local Businesses Under Pressure:

Let's support small businesses who create jobs and prosperity locally

Too often local businesses are simply forgotten, despite being key employers and often delivering local services. Shopkeepers are vital to building strong communities, providing jobs, and creating prosperity.

They have done an amazing job throughout the COVID-19 crisis. Our local shops have proved once again their worth to their local communities.

We also need to keep our town centre alive. The Liberal Democrats must face the fact that they will forever be known as the “administration that lost John Lewis”. We hoped this disaster could be avoided but their reaction was too little, too late.

And whilst we need to encourage people to use the shops on the High Street, what have the Liberal Democrats done? Placed giant flower pots on the roads to stop access for people with reduced mobility. It is symptomatic of the way the town is run.

The Watford Market that was once the very heart of the town – we even had a proper 'Market Place' – has been

pushed aside despite its Royal Charter.

It should be a way to attract people into the shopping district but it has been tucked away and neglected. The Market should be restored to a central place in the life of a lively town centre. We have reached a point where barely half the available units are even in active use.

Watford Conservatives say:



Let's get behind efforts of local MP Dean Russell to expand the jobs fair and create a year-round digital hub to offer practical guidance for job seekers, apprentices, and entrepreneurs.



We must back our local retailers and small shop-owners.



The Town Market deserves better support to be an attractive feature of the town's shopping experience.

YOUR LOCAL CONSERVATIVE CAMPAIGN TEAM

WE HAVE BEEN PLEASED TO SHARE THESE IDEAS ABOUT OUR TOWN AND SURROUNDING AREA WITH YOU. WE ARE CAMPAIGNING TO RESTORE PRIDE AND HOPE IN WATFORD.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO KNOW MORE OR WOULD LIKE TO JOIN US, PLEASE CONTACT US AT:



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