

## **LEADER'S SPEECH TO COUNCIL FOLLOWING ELECTION**

Mr. Mayor, fellow Councillors, it is an honour for me to continue to serve as Leader of the Council and I assure you that I will do my best to lead the Council in the interests of the residents and businesses of Woking.

The Borough elections are over, at least for another 23 months, and it is important that we put behind us the arguments we had during the election campaign and work as one Council. I am of course delighted that the Conservatives increased their majority on the Council but now we should move on and work together in the interests of the community; they will expect no less and we should not let them down.

The Executive for 2012/13 will be reduced from 8 Members to 7, and will comprise Cllr Bittleston as Deputy Leader, plus Cllrs. Cundy, Elson, Hunwicks, Thomson and Whitehand. I would like to thank Cllrs. Murray and Wilson for their contributions to the Executive and wish Cllr. Murray well in her role as Mayoress of Woking and Cllr. Wilson in his role as Vice Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Whilst the elections are fresh in our minds I would like the Council to consider again whether or not we should move to "all out" elections every four years; I favour it but it will be for the Council to decide. I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to arrange for the Executive to consider this matter in 2012 and recommend thereon to the Council so that the Council can determine the electoral arrangements later this year and hopefully bring any changes into effect for the Local Elections in May 2014.

Now let me turn to our main business. We have done very well so far in maintaining services, improving value for money and investing in the future needs of the Borough. However it is clear that we have much more to do and nothing could have brought this into greater focus than the recent announcement by the Governor of the Bank of England on the outlook for the UK Economy. My priority is to ensure that we do all we can to enhance the economy of Woking and that we deliver upon the manifesto promises that secured this Conservative administration.

### **Low Council Tax**

Through continuing to secure value for money in all that we do, we will do our utmost to keep any Council Tax increase as low as possible and do so without cutting services. We achieved a zero increase in Woking's share of Council Tax for the last two years and, with the continued support of officers, I believe we can ensure that any increase for 2013/14 is both modest and affordable.

## **Woking's Economy**

The Council recently approved its Economic Development Strategy; now we must deliver upon it. As I have already said it is essential that we maintain our focus of attracting new business and jobs, particularly for young people. Some of this will require capital investment, for example our proposals for the Town Centre and for Sheerwater. However not everything needs more capital investment.

The work we have done in building business networks is about spending staff time on creating and supporting business networks; the recent "Ambassador" event run by C2i has already enabled McLaren to link with local technology businesses and develop local supply chains which will strengthen local innovative business.

Similarly the work we have done with schools through our "Invest in Your Success" initiative is already showing positive outcomes with young people achieving better qualifications than forecast and either going on to further education or securing local jobs.

We will continue these programmes to ensure all businesses and young people in the Borough have the opportunity to share in our success.

Whilst saying what we plan to do, it is perhaps worth reminding ourselves of the achievements we have already made, either directly through our own efforts or through working with others.

- McLaren; a major Borough success with the opening of its state of the art production centre to complement its technology centre. This is 60,000 square metres of high tech engineering. We have also agreed proposals for a further 60,000 square metres to enhance the McLaren Park to become a World Class High Technology Centre of Excellence employing some 2,500 people in future years.
- Wolsey Place and Peacocks; our investment in the acquisition of Wolsey Place and the improvement of both shopping centres has already secured new employers such as H&M and Superdry, the imminent arrival of Café Rouge, Pret a Manger and Jane Norman, with an enlarged JD Sports and a state of the art Library which will be the best in Surrey. All this set in

new high quality public space shortly to be renamed Jubilee Square.

- Hoe Valley a brilliant scheme which has employed many people during the construction phase and now provides excellent facilities for youth organisations and a great public space. Equally importantly it will provide for some 150 new family homes and has taken some 200 homes out of the risk of flooding.
- Our progress on the Moor Lane and Brookwood Farm sites should, subject to planning approval, see the development in 2013 of some 700 family homes across the two sites.
- New Central a major redevelopment by Barratt which will provide 445 apartments available to buy or to rent together with 17,000 square feet of commercial space and 50,000 square feet of office space.

All this activity and much more adds to the economic vitality of the Borough. The New Homes Bonus which will reach some £1million per annum in 2013/14 will enable us to do much more to support the people of Woking. Hopefully our plans will enable our Business Rate income to grow in future and be available to benefit local residents under the Government's Business Rate localisation scheme; at least the Coalition Government has promised it will.

### **Recycling**

The work we have done in improving the refuse and recycling services have already enabled us to improve on recycling performance of previous years. We will maintain this improvement and will strive to move our recycling levels towards 65% over the coming years.

### **Publicly Accessible Green Spaces**

Our record is already excellent; if you haven't seen the transformation we have made in the Hoe Valley you must go and see it for yourself. Our work so far and our plans for the Brookwood Country Park are equally exciting. Both these facilities will be designated "Fields in Trust" in recognition of the Diamond Jubilee which will secure public access to green space for years to come.

We will continue our programme to provide new play and sports facilities for children and young people to help improve the health and well being of all residents.

### **Community Buildings**

We will deliver upon the projects we authorised in March 2011 and will continue to explore opportunities to meet the needs of communities across the Borough.

Those of you that have visited the new community facilities in Woking Park and Goldsworth Park as part of the Hoe Valley project can see how important such investment has been in encouraging community organisations. What a great improvement for our young people.

The planned facilities for a new Memorial Hall in St Johns, refurbished accommodation for Link Leisure, a local charity doing such excellent work with disabled children and young people, a new Scout Hut in Horsell and improvements to Horsell Village Hall, and a Sports Pavilion and playing facilities at New Monument School in Maybury are on track with some of the tenders expected shortly. Interest has also been expressed, with cross party support, to undertake a similar community project in Byfleet and I look forward to considering this initiative at the Executive in the near future.

Our community is strong and many people are willing to give up their time voluntarily to work with people of all ages across the Borough. We can help by ensuring they have the right premises and then leave them to it whilst concentrating our direct service efforts on the capacity of under performing areas of our community. This approach will become self sustaining as is demonstrated by the work we have done at Lakeview.

The Big Society is alive and well in Woking!

### **Dog Fouling**

In response to the petition received by the Council, the Conservative Manifesto pledged to support the “Foul Play” campaign to make Woking a safer, cleaner and more pleasant place for us all. I know many Councillors are appalled by the

actions of a few irresponsible dog owners and I hope that our action against such irresponsibility will help, and that we can widen our approach to cover litter and other anti-social conduct across the Borough.

Mr Mayor, I have focused on the Conservative manifesto commitments but there is much more that the Council does. I do not intend speaking further on the vast array of activity and corporate priorities that are embedded in our Service Plans; but I assure you that I am fully committed to their delivery.

Woking is about taking action today. Our “strap line **“Towards Tomorrow Today”** is not a hollow gesture but a real commitment to action. We are here to lead the community; yes we must listen, engage and consult, but most of all we must lead. Only through strong leadership will we secure a better **Place** in which to live and a stronger community for the **People** of Woking. It’s up to **Us**, the Council, to make a difference. It’s for **Us** to lead and I assure you that is what I will do over the coming year.

Mr. Mayor, again I thank you and fellow Councillors for your support and I look forward to another positive year in the service of the residents and businesses of Woking. Let both political groups work together to achieve this aim.

Cllr. John Kingsbury,  
Leader of the Council,  
Woking Borough Council

21<sup>st</sup> May, 2012.