Together for Watford

Council Plan 2026 - 2028

Welcome to our final Council Plan



Poised for the future
Standing together for Watford

Mayor Peter Taylor

In Watford, we are always pushing ourselves to do more and to do it better. That's what makes our town special and that's how we have built such strong foundations for the future.

Bold and ambitious, Watford is consistently recognised for our strong track record of delivery and innovation. The last four years have been a testament to that, delivering standout major facilities like the upgraded Watford Colosseum and a plethora of biodiversity projects, alongside the excellent frontline services our communities rely on.

Looking ahead to the reorganisation of local government – through which Watford Borough Council will be dissolved and merged with neighbouring councils and Hertfordshire County Council services – everything we do now must be a springboard for Watford's communities to thrive in the future landscape.

As we move towards the end of Watford Borough Council, it is imperative that we prime the town and its communities for success in the new era by doing what we do best: rolling up our sleeves and delivering every day, uniting our community, businesses and partners behind the town and striving for long-term impact.

Standing up for Watford is the thread which runs throughout this plan. That means galvanising support for the town and influencing the decisions that matter. This includes securing investment in new facilities at Watford General and ensuring Watford's unique character is protected and celebrated by the new unitary authority set to take over on 1 April 2028.

While the council may be coming to an end in 2028, the legacy of what we have achieved together will abide. We remain unapologetic about our ambitions for Watford and will continue to meet that ambition with action. This, combined with the energy of the communities which make Watford special, will ensure Watford thrives long into the future.

An award-winning council delivering for Watford

Ambition meets action

Over the last four years, we have continued to push ourselves to achieve more for Watford. Bold ambition and tangible results have led to national recognition as a multi-award-winning council. Our communities and businesses are at the heart of everything we do and are the driving force behind our determination to deliver both excellent services and major projects which will improve the lives of residents for generations.



Council tax increases kept below inflation



Worked with local charities to tackle rough sleeping

New Green Loop for walking and cycling around the town

Winner of Council of the Year in 2025 + many more*

Refurbished & Relaunched



WATFORD COLOSSEUM



Vibrant Annual Events

£1 million
in grants for community projects

17
Green Flag Parks



40,000+
trees planted
since 2018



Expanded
Beryl
Bikes, with
600,000+
journeys
since 2020

Big improvements
to **Woodside** and **Central**
leisure centres

Supported businesses with
‘Shop Local’
and improved local parades

*iese Public Sector Transformation Awards 2025. For full list of awards visit: https://iese.org.uk/awards/public-sector-transformation-awards-2025/

A council plan with a difference

Things are changing for Watford and Hertfordshire. We want to turn our achievements into a launchpad for Watford to keep thriving in the future.

This Council Plan is unlike any that have come before it. Watford and Hertfordshire are accelerating towards the biggest structural change the area has seen, requiring a whole new outlook.

Condensed into two years, the Plan maps out what we must achieve to put Watford in the best possible position for the changes ahead. It is made up of five themes, underpinned by the drivers Standing up for Watford and A Competent Council.

We want to nurture the things that matter most to our communities, including caring for everyone right across the borough, boosting the health and happiness of residents and fighting for a cleaner, safer and greener Watford. Alongside this, we want our local economy to continue going from strength to strength, overcoming challenges and bucking trends. This means jobs for local people and a lively, bustling town with lots going on.

A rejuvenated Council Plan gives us the laser focus needed to deliver on our aspirations for Watford, whilst also transforming local government services. With that focus comes a renewed energy to deliver the best for our residents and businesses. Everything we do over the next two years is anchored in this Plan, ensuring resources and budget are dedicated to achieving your priorities.

Watford has a brilliant future ahead. Our job now is to keep building on the strong foundations we have and ensure Watford steps boldly into the new world.

Watford is important, known as a major regional centre and located just within the M25. It plays a vital role in Hertfordshire's economic prosperity as a successful business and commercial hub and it continues to be a hugely popular place to live and visit. It has its own strong identity, rooted in the dynamism that has seen it prevail, whatever challenges are thrown our way.

Over the next two years, there will be many more challenges. Along with the transformation of local government, we face the issues of an ongoing cost of living crisis, climate change, rising extremism, turbulent international relations and global conflicts. These are all having a very real impact on our every day lives and must shape the way we work to serve our communities.

Yet, time and again, Watford has shown its resilience in times of crisis. Our local economy has continued to thrive, community relations blossom and we have maintained our drive, delivering fantastic services as well as major projects to keep Watford vibrant, like the Town Hall Quarter and Riverwell.

Our determination to keep Watford moving forward with purpose, coupled with the energy and commitment of our communities and partners, have earned us a place in the top 3 UK towns of the Lambert Smith Hampton (LSH) Vitality Index for four consecutive years. This is an annual assessment of the top 100 towns and cities, identifying the best places to live, work, and do business. Consistently topping it shows the tremendous effort we have all put in to keep Watford thriving and is a resounding vote of confidence in our town.

With this grit and enthusiasm, we will be ready to grasp the opportunities the new unitary authority structure brings, while keeping the ambition, delivery and collaboration that sets us apart.

Ambition built on capability: A Competent Council

Ambition can only take you so far. We are very clear that to hit the high standards we expect of ourselves and deliver the big things, we have to get the basics right. Underpinning this Council Plan is the driver to remain A Competent Council, supporting success through:

- Continued financial stability, with smart decisions made in line with the Council Plan commitments;
- The dedication of our councillors, building on their strong links to the community and our partners;
- The commitment of our staff to always strive for excellence on behalf of our communities;
- Collaborating with our local government colleagues and partners across the public, private and voluntary sectors to deliver for both Watford and Hertfordshire;
- Using our extensive experience, expertise and professional project management approach to deliver complex major projects with maximum long-term impact.

"We want to nurture the things that matter most to our communities"

Standing up for Watford

Part of shaping Watford's future is influencing regional and national decisions which have an impact on our town. We have a duty to speak up for Watford and make sure we are heard.

Not all decisions about Watford's future rest with the council. Standing up for Watford includes speaking up on the big issues of the day on a regional and national level. It is imperative we use our voice to advocate for our town and its people, making best use of our networks and platforms to promote the interests of Watford.

Commitments:

- Protecting Watford's unique identity and ensuring local government reorganisation delivers real benefits for our community by making Watford's voice heard during the transformation.
- Fighting for Watford General Hospital to be rebuilt as quickly as possible, so that our community gets the modern healthcare facilities we deserve.
- Bringing the disused Croxley Line back into use and advocating for the Hertfordshire to Essex Rapid Transit (HERT) project to start in Watford.
- Campaigning for Watford's railway stations to be rezoned into zone 6, so that passengers pay fairer fares.
- Pressing for improvements to local train stations to make them more accessible.
- Demanding a bus franchise model that improves local bus services, with affordable and reliable buses in Watford.
- Battling for well-designed, sustainable, social homes in the right places for local residents, along with the infrastructure to support new developments and the public services people need to flourish.



STANDING UP FOR WATFORD





"It is imperative we use our voice to advocate for our town and its people"

A Healthy and Happy Town

Our plan is made up of five themes, underpinned by the drivers Standing up for Watford and A Competent Council.

These shape our ambitions for the town over the next two years and direct our energy and resource to achieve for our communities.

Watford is a place of opportunity

Improving the lives of residents is at the heart of everything we do. We want to give everyone the opportunity to enjoy themselves and experience first-class facilities to boost their wellbeing. We also want to celebrate our vibrant and diverse culture, building pride in our heritage while looking ahead to the future. It's only right we do that justice with community facilities that inspire and empower residents. The range of events and leisure options available are a big part of Watford's appeal. But more than that, they are an important way to give people of all ages and backgrounds equal chance to share in activities which enrich their lives.

Where we will make a difference:

Continuing to upgrade our parks, sports and leisure facilities; supporting young people in the community to be the difference; providing children and families with lots of opportunities to be active; modernising and revitalising facilities to give back to communities.

Commitments:

- Champion wellbeing in our town, with a special focus on young people.
- Give every child the same chance to enjoy Watford's parks.
- Host a range of family-friendly events.
- Provide opportunities for children and young people to get active and have fun.
- Improve sports facilities for young people.
- Open a new, modern, and inspiring Museum of Watford.
- Refurbish the Town Hall and bring it back into the heart of the community.

THEME 1



"Improving the lives of residents is at the heart of everything we do"

A Safe and Clean Town

Leading the fight-back, Watford is a town with spirit

Everyone has a right to feel safe in their hometown and enjoy clean, attractive spaces. Along with residents, we feel passionate about protecting Watford from the blight of anti-social behaviour and littering. Strengthening our powers to tackle these issues is something that we know residents greatly value. We are also committed to protecting the wellbeing and dignity of everyone and will lead the town in standing up for what's right, including combating violence against women and girls. By galvanising Watford's community spirit and our fantastic partnerships, we will continue to rally people behind activities and events which make a big impact in the short-term, while also changing behaviours for the long-term.

Where we will make a difference:

Nurturing partnerships and rallying everyone to the same cause; running and supporting local events with short-term gain and long-term vision; increasing resource and improving community safety tools.

Commitments:

- Keep Watford safe and welcoming for everyone.
- Expand our network of CCTV cameras.
- Help to tackle anti-social behaviour.
- Help residents build a positive relationship with the police.
- Champion the safety of women and girls in Watford.
- Keep our parks safe and attractive for our community.
- Tackle littering, fly-tipping and dog fouling.
- Work with Veolia to keep Watford's streets clean.
- Work with residents to dispose of waste properly.
- Encourage safer parking near schools.
- Improve signage in Watford, with new signs for people entering the town and better wayfinding for people walking around it.



THEME 2

"Everyone has a right to feel safe in their hometown"



Caring for Everyone

A place where everyone can flourish

Watford is a community with a big heart. We look after each other, stepping up to help and support whenever it is needed. That compassion drives our belief that every person matters and no one should be left behind. Working with our brilliant voluntary sector partners, we want to give people the stepping stones they need to navigate the difficult times life can throw at us. This reinforces the message that Watford is a place where everyone can belong, where everyone can contribute and where everyone can flourish.

Where we will make a difference:

Actively supporting the local voluntary sector through collaboration and promotion; convening community forums to align objectives and action; empowering the community to take action through coordinated funding programmes; easing some of the financial burden on families.

Commitments:

- Collaborate with local charities to end rough sleeping in Watford, ensuring everyone receives the support they need.
- Support local families and residents with the cost-of-living crisis.
- Work with and advocate for the voluntary sector to ensure they can continue helping local causes beyond local government reorganisation.
- Show that Watford is a town where everyone is welcome and where everyone can thrive.
- Work with the community to identify how we can provide the support people most need in the cost-of-living crisis.
- Promote community cohesion and collaboration.
- Support registered charities to maximise the benefit of their community events in the town.



"Every person matters and no one should be left behind"

THEME 4

A Greener Town

Taking action today for lasting change

The fight for our planet is still the most urgent emergency we face, with climate change continuing to wreak havoc globally. As a council and as a town, we have worked hard to bring about lasting change for the environment but there is still much to do. Our commitment to reducing our carbon footprint, improving biodiversity and driving down pollution is unwavering. Uniting Watford behind our exciting biodiversity projects, providing more opportunity to choose green and active travel and giving people the tools they need to be part of the change are pivotal in achieving our goals.

Where we will make a difference:

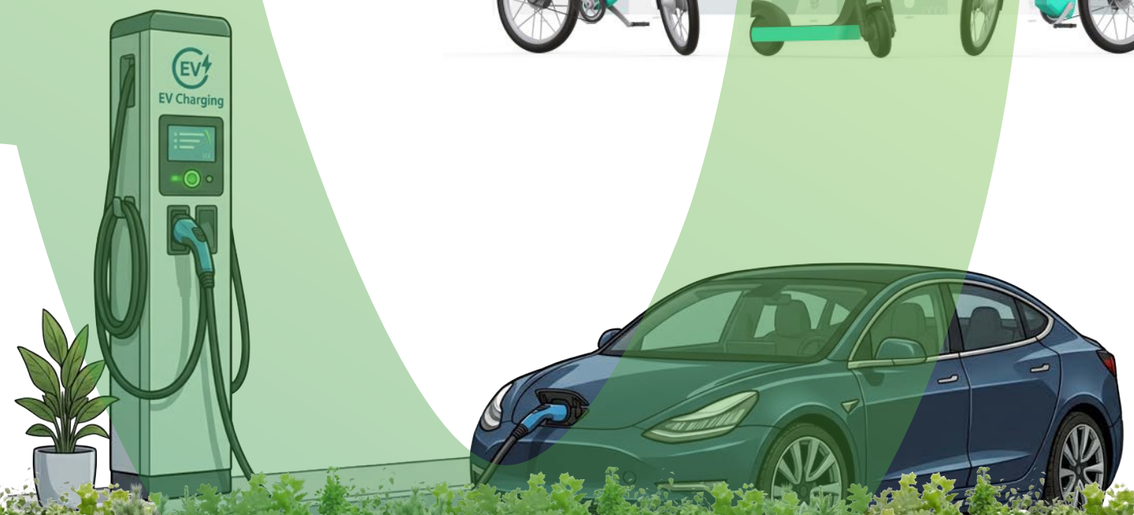
Making Watford greener through a mix of council-led planting and empowering the community to act; improving the energy efficiency of council buildings and giving residents the tools to do the same; improving green and active travel through better infrastructure; continuing to deliver on the restoration of the River Colne.

Commitments:

- Continue to invest in and improve Watford's outstanding parks.
- Plant more trees across the borough and help residents to make their neighbourhoods greener.
- Continue making council buildings more energy efficient, reducing fuel bills and supporting the environment.
- Promote sustainable transport and encourage active, eco-friendly travel, making Watford's air cleaner and reducing our carbon footprint.
- Support greater biodiversity and actively improve water quality.
- Equip residents to identify where heat may be escaping from their homes, highlighting insulation gaps, draughts and other areas where energy efficiency improvements could be made.

"We have worked hard to bring about lasting change for the environment but there is still much to do"





A Thriving Local Economy

Watford is a place where things happen and anything is possible

Watford is filled with creative energy, marking it out as a cultural hub and an outstanding place to live, visit and do business. Harnessing this dynamism and enterprise keeps us marching forwards and is why Watford consistently bucks the trend, outperforming national averages for the success of our town centre and visitor numbers. Building on our reputation as a lively place with an entrepreneurial spirit will enable us to create more opportunities for our residents and businesses. It's also a big part of Watford's character, which we will ensure shines through now and beyond the transformation of local government.

Where we will make a difference:

Creating the right environment for fledgling enterprise to succeed; proactively attracting visitors to the town centre; connecting the community with their local shops and restaurants; maximising opportunities for local people and businesses; matching our ambition for success in the creative industries with our heavyweight reputation.

Commitments:

- Support start-ups, attract new businesses, and create jobs and opportunities in our town.
- Support local businesses by continuing to attract residents and visitors to the town and boosting Watford's reputation as a vibrant, cultural hub.
- Ensure our town centre continues to thrive, as spending and leisure behaviours evolve.
- Foster growth and collaboration to ensure our high streets remain vibrant.
- Promote Watford Market as a dynamic destination for residents and visitors alike.
- Support local businesses outside of the town centre to succeed, benefitting local communities.
- Ensure developers support the local economy.
- Cement our region's reputation as a globally significant centre for the creative industries.



"Building on our reputation as a lively place with an entrepreneurial spirit will enable us to create more opportunities"

Delivering our commitments

The Delivery Plan (2026 – 2028) has been developed from the Council Plan. It turns our ambitions into clear actions, setting out how we will deliver on our commitments to the people of Watford. We will monitor how well we are performing against the Delivery Plan, ensuring we remain focused, and report back to our communities.

WATFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

BE BOLD

watford.gov.uk