

# Leader's Report

July 2024



**Walsall Council**



## Foreword

**It is the privilege of my life to have been elected to be the Leader of Walsall Council.**

I take my duties very seriously. I have been an elected member of this council for 27 years. As a Walsall boy, born and bred, I very much understand the pressures and the challenges that we face.

I also celebrate our successes and achievements and there have been many. I was delighted when this council was recently recognised as the Most Improved Council in the country. Judges of this prestigious national award described our journey of improvement over recent years as being nothing short of remarkable.

Credit, along with my thanks, goes to our officers who work hard every day to deliver services to improve outcomes for our residents. Credit also goes to our current elected members and those who previously served. My predecessor, the previous Leader of this council, Councillor Mike Bird also deserves a great deal of credit.

Councillor Garry Perry  
Leader of Walsall Council

# Strategic initiatives and collaborations

**Led by Councillor Bird and working together with our partners we have digitised our services, making them accessible to our residents 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.**

Our Walsall Connected centres ensure that those who are digitally excluded have access to services on their doorstep and are supported to gain transferable digital skills.

Our Proud transformation programme has delivered £54million of efficiencies since 2022. Our continued transformation promises to deliver another £13.5million this year. A culture of embracing change is embedded, where we continuously review and improve what we do, to make it better for our residents, our communities, our businesses and for our staff.

Partnership working happens at every level in our organisation. We are an active member of the West Midlands Combined Authority working together with our neighbours to make Walsall and the West Midlands region a better place to live and work. I look forward to working with our newly elected West Midlands Mayor Richard Parker and his team.

We are proud of our Black Country roots and we will continue to work closely with the three other Black Country local authorities.

This council is part of a highly effective partnership with NHS trusts and commissioners, VCS and social housing partners. It is called Walsall Together. It is our place-based health and care partnership. Walsall Together has kept more people out of hospital, improved discharge pathways, enhanced care homes support, boosted workforce recruitment and retention, and bolstered community resilience.

Walsall Together is a partnership that is leading the way nationally and was the winner of another prestigious public sector award earlier this year. We will build on the success of the Walsall Together Alliance to achieve better care outcomes for all.

Our Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) infrastructure and Walsall for All are two more innovative examples of the work that this Council has done which leads the way nationally. Walsall for All provided the Council with a step change in its approach to inclusion and has led to Walsall being recognised as a national leader in cohesion.



# A Walsall fit for the future

**Walsall is also leading the way having been selected as one of just seven Wave 2 areas in England to pilot the 'Families First for Children' Pathfinder Programme.**

We will test new ways of working, which will include establishing local multi-agency family help services, which will enable families to access support to meet their needs at the earliest opportunity and where needed to overcome challenges such as domestic abuse, addiction, and poor mental health, to enable families to stay together and thrive. We will work with our partners to strengthen our child protection services and we will recognise the importance of the wider family network, involving them at an earlier stage, providing them with support to help keep children safe and well at home.

Supporting our children is investing in our future and looking ahead my plan as the new Leader of this council is to:

- Fulfil Promises for a Secure, Resilient, Cleaner, and Greener Walsall:
- Ensure Financial Stability
- Prioritise People and Place
- Lead with Empathy
- Celebrate Achievements Together

We will drive transformative initiatives to create a Walsall that is safer, stronger, cleaner, and greener, ensuring a vibrant future for every resident.

We will govern with wisdom and foresight, aligning our expenditures with core priorities to maintain financial health and effectively support our community's needs.

We will adopt a "Walsall First" mindset, putting the well-being of our residents and the growth of our community at the forefront of every decision we make.

We will exemplify compassionate leadership by valuing the diverse voices within our community and recognising each individual as the foundation of Walsall's strength.

We will foster a spirit of unity and teamwork, celebrating collective successes and advancing our shared goals to enhance Walsall's tradition of accomplishments.

It is my job to ensure we move speedily to deliver on our long-term vision for the borough, We Are Walsall 2040. Together with our partners, we have listened carefully to over 10,000 of our community groups, businesses and residents who live, work, study and invest in this borough. Collectively they have all helped us to shape this plan.

We Are Walsall 2040 is owned by our strategic partners across the public, private and voluntary sectors, who come together as the 2040 Partnership – aligning how we work together to achieve the maximum impact for our residents.

With our partners we will achieve the ambitions that together we have set out: to make Walsall a place where our residents are thriving and happy; healthy and well; prosperous and innovative and a Walsall that we can all be proud of.



# Future priorities

**Our new Council Plan is being developed which will adopt these ambitions as our organisational priorities. Our Council Plan will clearly set out our focus for the next four years.**

The relationships that we have with our partners are already strong, they will become stronger and braver as we continue to tackle the many issues we face across Walsall. I will reach out to our partners to personally ask them to join us on our journey. The foundations we have built will continue to be strengthened over the next twelve months as we build a secure, resilient, cleaner, and greener Walsall.

Following on from the Knife Angel which made such an impact on so many of us when it was here in Walsall at Christmas, the Manchester Bee monument is currently visiting schools across the Borough. The Bee has been made from thousands of seized knives and guns and is touring schools, as part of an anti-violence campaign.

Like in so many other parts of the country there have been tragic incidents here in Walsall caused by people carrying knives and other dangerous weapons. We will address the causes of youth crime and knife crime with a comprehensive Anti-Crime Strategy focused on saving lives and protecting young people at risk. We will seek funding for a piece of public art as a permanent reminder of the consequential impact of knife crime.

We commit to enhancing training and job opportunities through our innovative Walsall Works programme. Our focus is on promoting positive outcomes for young people and adults, meeting the demands for new skills and supporting unskilled individuals in their career development.

We will continue our efforts against fly-tipping taking firm action against perpetrators. Last year we served almost 500 litter fixed penalty notices and more than 20 fixed penalty notices for fly-tipping. Using CCTV cameras we will continue to capture incriminating footage to help us to crack down on illegal dumping activities across the borough. We will maximise the number of fines for littering and prosecutions for fly-tipping, strictly enforcing our zero-tolerance approach.

I have fond memories of spending some of the best of times at the Walsall Arboretum. I share the pride in 150 years this year of our beloved 170-acre green space in the heart of Walsall.

We are fortunate to have many more fine parks and open spaces including King George V Memorial Playing Fields in Bloxwich, Palfrey Park, Willenhall Memorial Park, Pelsall Common and many more. We will promote a culture of respect for nature and open spaces, emphasizing the importance of conserving existing ecosystems while enhancing them through responsible management practices.

We will work even more closely with our communities and our key community infrastructure ensuring that we involve our residents and support communities to thrive.

We will value difference, we will value diversity, and we will value openness and integrity. We will never forget that Walsall is made up of many and our leadership will work for them all.



# Community partnerships and regeneration

**I particularly want to praise our relationship with the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector. Walsall is blessed with strong, caring voluntary sector leaders and organisations that make a difference to our residents every day.**

We will support them to ensure our community voices are heard providing equal opportunities to all of our well-integrated communities.

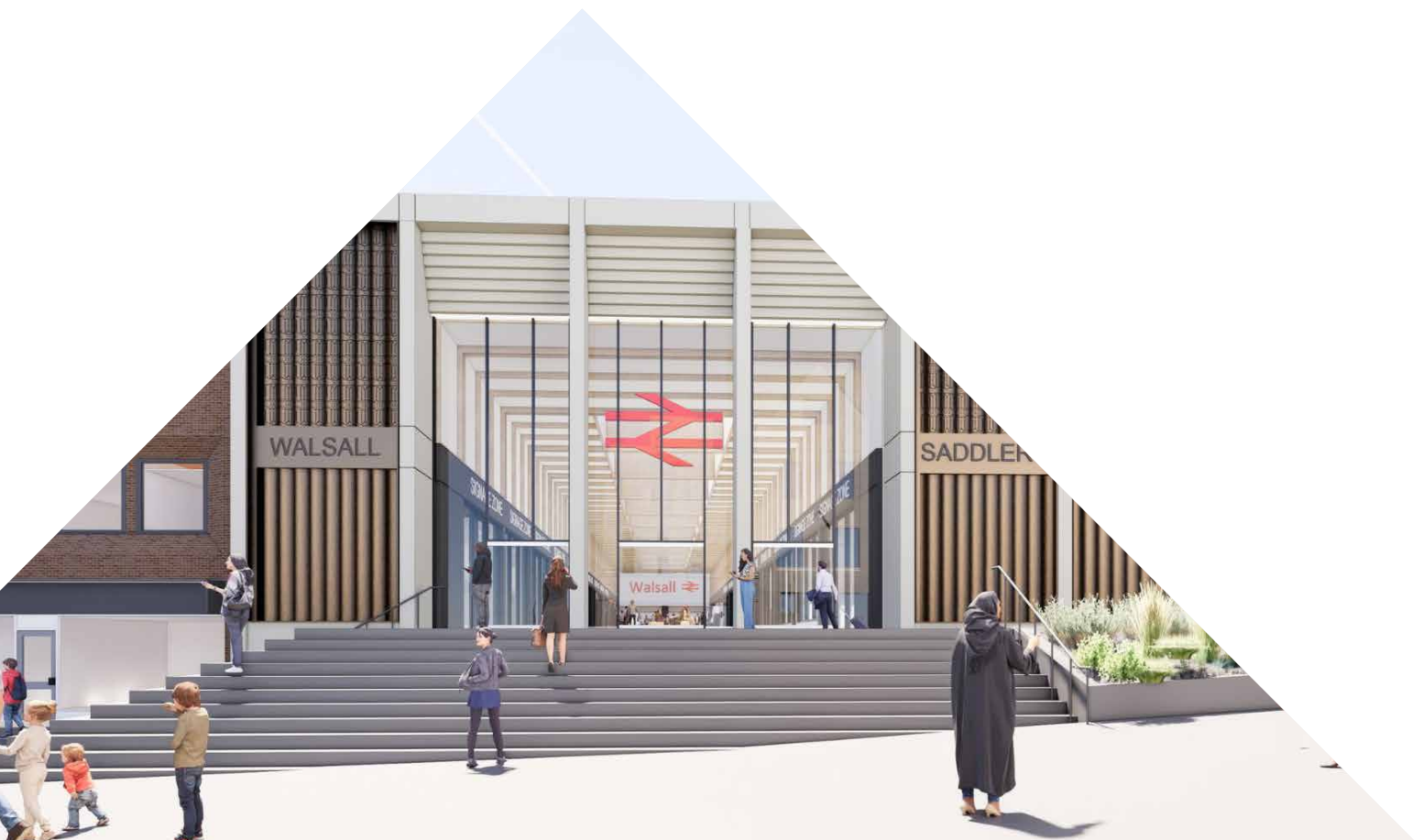
We will continue to deliver our £1.5billion regeneration programme, transforming our borough, creating new opportunities, new jobs and new homes for Walsall. We want to ensure future housing to provide for our community's needs. Our aim is to encourage the growth of local companies and attract businesses from further afield. The resilience of our local economy, ensuring it remains robust in the face of future challenges is a priority.

Our Walsall Town Centre Masterplan, including the Connected Gateway project will enable us to harness the imagination and creativity of Walsall people to transform our historic market town. Government investment and support from the West Midlands Combined Authority and a range of influential partners is allowing us to begin to make that vision a reality.

A new £3million centre in Bloxwich will see the former post office transformed into a modern, partner run centre offering space for entrepreneurs to form and grow their small businesses, and for residents to gain digital skills.

New train stations for Willenhall and Darlaston will create opportunities for the local economy to grow. We will provide a range of high quality, energy efficient new homes and we will create a greener, healthier living environment for our residents.

We support and encourage regeneration and economic development across the whole of our borough by working closely with investors, developers and landowners. We recently attended UKREiF, the UK's largest real estate and investment conference to promote Walsall as a thriving up and coming area for investment.



# Proud of our people and our place

**We will work with the new Government to make sure that we continue to create opportunities and new jobs for Walsall and we continue to encourage the growth of our local businesses.**

We will shout loudly and proudly about the best of our borough, promoting Walsall regionally, nationally and internationally whenever we have the opportunity to do so. Our Walsall Borough Local Plan will be developed as the overarching spatial framework for Walsall, ensuring there are enough homes and jobs for the needs of people living and working in the borough. The local plan will show where we expect new building to happen and the areas that we will protect. It will replace many of our current planning policy documents and will provide the opportunity to shape the geography of the borough so that we can realise our ambitions for the future.

The Walsall Borough Local Plan has to deliver the types of homes our communities can be in reach of, whether that's affordable for both purchase and rent. However, let me be crystal clear – building on the Green Belt, the parts of our communities that are inherent to well-being, identity, and place will not happen in my name. The Walsall Plan has to be creative in its thinking, respecting the need to provide for the future but never at the risk of using a wrecking ball to tear through all we have affinity with. This will be challenging, and if it means we can't deliver against an expected quota so be it.

We need to be honest about our intentions in this regard and this is mine. As a result I have asked officers to look carefully at all available options – my leadership approach will be Walsall led not developer led'.

## Closing remarks

**I understand the pressures and the challenges that we face but we also have much to look forward to. As I have said before it is the privilege of my life to have been elected to be the Leader of Walsall Council. I take my duties very seriously.**

Together with my Cabinet, we aim to foster a political environment that is ethical, inclusive, and dedicated to the betterment of the Walsall community. We are committed to leading with integrity and working tirelessly for the common good, ensuring a brighter and more prosperous future for all residents.

Together we will make a difference from '24 to '40.



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