

**Madam Mayor: it is a pleasure to address the Council at the beginning of another Municipal Year. I wish you well, both in this Chamber and in the community. I am sure that, like all of us who have had the privilege to have been Mayor of Woking, it will be a delight for you to engage with the extensive and vibrant community and business life throughout the Borough.**

**This year, we did not hold Borough Elections but helped our colleagues to campaign in the Surrey County Council Elections. I would like to congratulate all Members of this Council who are now also County Councillors.**

**I am of course delighted that the result for the Conservative Party was so positive and we won six County Council seats out of the seven being contested. Madam Mayor, I wonder if Members are aware that Woking was the only Conservative-led Borough in the country to secure two Conservative gains in the county elections. I believe this is in part due to the recognition by our local community that the Conservative-led Borough Council is working hard and has delivered many improvements for our residents through working in partnership with the opposition whenever that has been in the best interests of the community. Accordingly we will continue with our practice of engaging positively with the opposition and will continue being proportional on the Local Committee based on the make-up of this Council.**

**Much has been said about those parties who are not represented in this Chamber, and who campaigned against immigration and promoted exclusion. This is not for Woking. Their failure to secure a large proportion of the vote locally reinforces this message. Woking is**

**blesSED with a rich and diverse community which has benefited over many years from migration of people of different cultures and different faiths, all with one common goal of being good citizens of Woking. They continue to integrate into our culture while maintaining their faiths, and long may this continue.**

**This Council continues to face the challenges brought about by the economic downturn which at last shows some signs of recovery. I believe we have done well despite the Coalition Government's squeeze on local authority funding and I also believe that Woking residents recognise that our efforts are making a difference. However, we have much more to do.**

**Last year we again balanced our budget, achieved our objectives and returned a significant revenue surplus of some £2m to add to our reserves. We will need them. I am clear that our plans for 2013/14 are robust and that we will again balance our budget, achieve our objectives and return a modest surplus through our continued efforts to improve cost efficiency. The outlook for 2014/15 and beyond however remains most challenging, as the Coalition Government still struggles to maintain an economic revival. Therefore, whilst remaining constrained in our revenue activities, we will need to be robust in bringing forward capital investment that will generate both economic activity and produce long term underlying revenue income for the Council.**

**Now is not the time to have a change of heart over our commitment to capital investment financed from long term borrowing. However, we must ensure that the investments we make will generate a sustainable level of long term income that will both enable the repayment of the**

money borrowed and provide additional underlying income for the Council. It is clear that we will continue to need a steady long term income if we are to sustain the services we provide to our residents and make the improvements which they have come to expect.

It is therefore a pleasure for me to report tonight on the success of some of our initiatives to date, and the impact they will make over the next few years.

Implementation of the Hoe Valley flood prevention scheme was a major high risk undertaking for the Council. It relied upon raising short-term finance to fund the project being repaid through the sale of Council assets following its completion. I am therefore delighted that a contract for the sale of the housing land at Hoe Valley to the housing developer Crest Nicholson has been exchanged and that the sale of the housing land at Brookwood Farm is moving forward with the Planning Consent now approved. Together these sales, and the development of other small sites should provide all the finance needed to repay the costs of the Hoe Valley project and will also help finance our Community Asset programme which is now underway in St. Johns and Horsell and soon Byfleet.

A further important step was taken by this Council at Brookwood Farm when we secured Planning Approval for a two forms of entry school. This school will be built later this year and help meet the shortfall in school place in 2014. We will continue to work with Surrey County Council and others to ensure that all parents in this Borough have access to quality schools within the Borough for their children.

**A milestone was reached when Planning Approval was given for the PFI Priority Homes scheme at Moor Lane. The enabling works to widen the access roads is underway and the final legal agreements and Coalition Government approvals are being sought. All should be ready to start construction on site in late summer this year.**

**These three housing schemes will provide 820 new homes of which around 370 will be affordable homes for local families. Based on the estimates by the house building industry such direct investment will generate in excess of £500m of economic benefit for the UK economy over the three year construction period. Locally the investment will ensure local jobs for the construction industry and opportunities for apprenticeships for local young people.**

**The New Central scheme by Barratt in Guildford Road will complete its construction phase of 445 apartments later this year. The project has been successfully selling around three apartments every week and will have sold all units by mid 2014. Because of its positive experience in the town, Barratt are looking to bring forward further proposals in the town centre. We need the housing accommodation in the town centre to support our shops and restaurants and to assist us in limiting the impact of new housing on our green spaces and our existing suburban areas. Building in the town centre makes sense but we need to remember that many of the families needing lower cost housing want smaller homes with gardens. We therefore need to remain open to accepting commuted sums where appropriate to enable more suitable homes to be built elsewhere. I hope that, through the use of our subsidiary, Thamesway Housing Limited to buy and/or develop affordable homes across the Borough and through our regeneration**

proposals for our Housing Revenue Account properties, we can address this local need for affordable homes over the coming years.

Jubilee Square has proved that we were right to make the investment in the acquisition of Wolsey Place and in our partner, Moyallen. Wolsey Place still makes the Council a net return of over £1.5m per annum despite us needing to keep some units empty or on short-term lettings to enable us to redevelop the area and integrate the proposed Bandstand development. The works to improve Commercial Way have started and the works to provide a new Market will be starting in July. New toilet facilities will be open in Wolsey Place prior to Christmas and the new market will open next summer. At the Executive on 27 June we will consider recommendations to redevelop Alexander House, for enlarged office accommodation for the Ambassador Theatre Group, and for two new restaurants in Commercial Way. Subject to approval and Planning Consent, the work will start in October to enable the new restaurants to open for Easter 2014. I believe you will all be pleased with the names when we are allowed to publish them. They will add to the positive contribution to the town centre already being made by Café Rouge.

The planning application for the new Fire Station in Goldsworth Road will be submitted shortly and, subject to the necessary approvals and Planning Consent, construction will start in the autumn for completion by winter 2014.

The main Bandstand proposals, with our joint venture partners, Surrey County Council and Moyallen, continue to evolve and we will receive a report on the proposal later in the year following the submission of a planning application in the summer. I am particularly pleased that, as

**part of this development, Marks and Spencer has signed their agreement to return to Woking and the timetable envisages the new store opening for trade before Christmas 2017. Equally encouraging has been the expressions of interest from quality hotel operators and residential developers in those elements of the scheme. I am sure we will have more good news later in the year.**

**Madam Mayor, I hope that you and the Council accepts that what we have pursued together over the last few years has helped to enable our community to withstand these difficult economic times. However it is important for us all to remember that we did not get to this position by accident - we got here because of our shared commitment to invest in the future; let us continue to do so.**

**Finally, the Executive for 2013/14 will remain at seven members and comprise Cllr Bittleston as Deputy Leader together with Cllrs Cundy, Elson, Hunwicks, Whitehand and Bowes. In welcoming Cllr Bowes who will have the Planning and Licensing Portfolio I would like to thank Cllr Thomson for his efforts on the Executive last year which he fitted in despite major pressure from his business commitments.**

**Madam Mayor, this Executive is committed to working hard for our community and delivering excellent council services for the benefit of all residents.**

**Cllr John Kingsbury  
Leader, Woking Borough Council  
20<sup>th</sup> May 2013**

**Address by the Leader of the Council at the Annual Council meeting**