

TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY

2025 - 2030

WATFORD
Actually



WATFORDACTUALLY.COM



FOREWORD – ONE WATFORD



WE'RE PROUD TO INTRODUCE WATFORD'S TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY AND SHARE OUR TOWN'S ACHIEVEMENTS AND SOME EXCITING PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.

Watford is a town that punches above its weight, defying expectations and consistently performing above national averages on many fronts. Our town centre is safe, vibrant and dynamic, and has something for everyone. Our diverse, engaged and united community is the beating heart of the town and the energy that drives us forward.

There are three pillars to our strategy: **a great place to live, growing our thriving economy, and fostering vibrant culture and entertainment for all.** These pillars align with One Watford's own missions for 2040, which include:

- **Opportunities for all generations** – ensuring people of all ages can access the opportunities, support and quality homes they need.
- **Dynamic and entrepreneurial** – focusing on enterprise and innovation.
- **A star performer** – showcasing Watford's fantastic entertainment, heritage, arts and cultural offer.

Our dynamic town centre offers great opportunities to benefit from a wide range of facilities and excellent access to award-winning parks. It's our priority to continue to develop the town centre as a fantastic place to live.

Watford is well known for its retail, hospitality and leisure offer, bucking trends to remain successful despite national pressures, such as the cost-of-living crisis. Businesses grow here, benefitting from a safe and welcoming environment. Our town centre is agile, responding to the needs of our residents and visitors and providing an ideal base for business, and has become a regional hub for enterprise and innovation.

We're also proud that our town centre is a hub for arts, culture, heritage and entertainment, with theatres, cultural venues and entertainment opportunities available day and night for residents and visitors alike to enjoy.

This is all underpinned by strong partnerships that provide the foundation to ensure Watford's success is secured for the future.

Whilst our town centre is thriving and successful, we can't afford to stand still. This strategy provides a framework for partners and investors in the town centre to deliver our priorities and ensure Watford continues to grow, evolve and thrive. We look forward to continuing to work with partners and investors to deliver our vision and shared aspirations for Watford.

One Watford Place Board



INTRODUCTION

The Town Centre Strategy 2025 - 2030 sets out our vision, pillars and priorities for the hub of our town. It is owned by a wide range of partners and governed by One Watford.

Together we have developed our vision for the town centre:



VISION STATEMENT

In 2030, Watford town centre will continue to evolve and thrive as a desirable place to live, do business, invest and spend time. Safety, accessibility and inclusivity are the foundation of our ambition, to foster the warmest welcome for families, residents, businesses and visitors alike.

The Watford of the future has something for everyone: a hub for arts, entertainment and culture, a thriving business community, and, above all, a home.



This vision is underpinned by our 3 pillars:

A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE

GROWING OUR THRIVING ECONOMY

VIBRANT CULTURE AND ENTERTAINMENT

Our community is our greatest asset and they are the golden thread that runs through all three pillars.

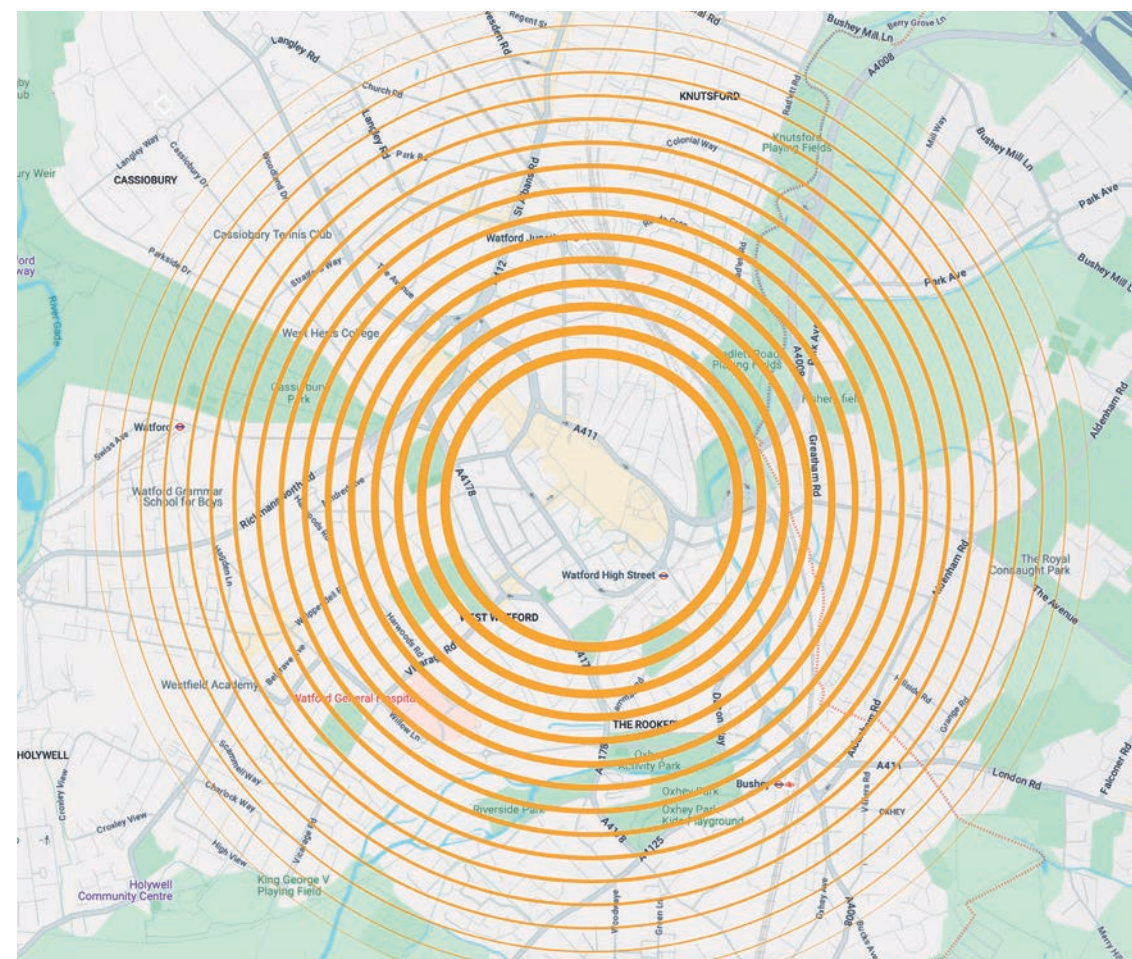
Watford's town centre already benefits from a wide range of investment and initiatives, plus a diverse, welcoming and engaged community, both of which help it to flourish. This strategy will bring these existing activities, initiatives and developments into one place and support their development.

This document belongs to Watford and supports cohesive and coordinated delivery against the strategy's vision. Ongoing oversight of the deliverables will be conducted annually by One Watford, which brings together partners across the public, private and third sectors to provide system and place leadership. It will sit alongside Watford Actually, our place brand, which tells Watford's story.

OUR TOWN CENTRE, MAPPED

Whilst this strategy focuses on the core area that is known as the town centre, there is also a wider area to be included, as it reflects the facilities, local economy, infrastructure and green spaces that also feed into the town centre's vitality. The reach of this strategy therefore reflects this reality and takes a more permeable approach to defining the area.

Beyond this area, there is a wider catchment area from which people visit Watford town centre, extending across Hertfordshire and into North London, potentially including up to 15 million people.



THE TOWN CENTRE IN NUMBERS

Our starting point:



#1 IN LSH VITALITY INDEX 2024

By incorporating a varied range of indicators across Economy & Business, Living and Health & Environment, the report takes a holistic approach in assessing the vitality of the largest towns and cities outside London



JOBS DENSITY OF 1.08, COMPARED TO 0.87 IN GREAT BRITAIN



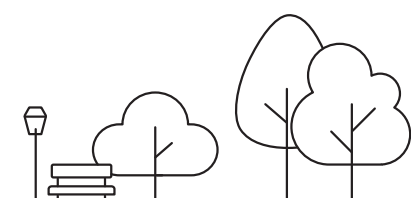
SITS WITHIN THE BOROUGH'S BOOMING ECONOMY WHICH GENERATES AROUND **£5.4 BILLION IN GVA** EACH YEAR, WITH AROUND **6,000 ACTIVE BUSINESSES** (25% INCREASE SINCE 2015) AND **73,000 JOBS**



LOW VACANCY RATE OF LESS THAN 10%, NATIONAL AVERAGE OF 14%



15 MINUTES FROM EUSTON
26 MINUTES FROM MILTON KEYNES
68 MINUTES FROM BIRMINGHAM



3 HECTARES OF OPEN SPACE

PREMIER OFFICE LOCATION IN NORTHWEST M25 REGION



1,369 MILLION DAY TRIPS TO WATFORD IN 2021, WITH A TOTAL SPEND OF **£50,916,000**



550,000 PEOPLE LIVING WITHIN A 20-MINUTE TRAVEL-TIME CATCHMENT OF WATFORD AND 15 MILLION IN THE WIDER REGION

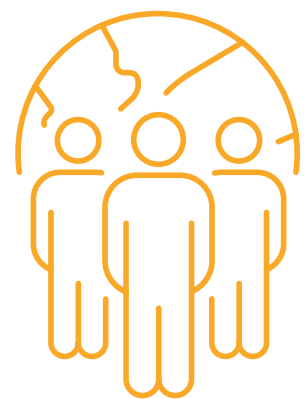
WATFORD BOROUGH'S WIDER COMMUNITY

Watford's community is increasingly expected to choose to live in the town centre.

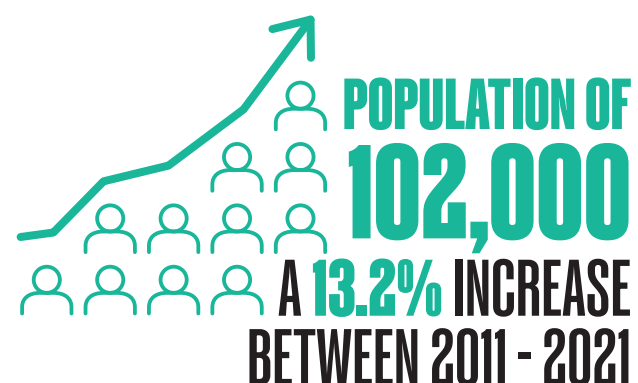
This is a picture of our community in 2025:



AVERAGE AGE IS



INCREASE IN DIVERSITY
BETWEEN CENSUS
2011 - 2021, WHEN THE
**NON-WHITE BRITISH
POPULATION ROSE FROM
38% TO 54%**
WE CONTINUE TO WELCOME PEOPLE
FROM ACROSS THE GLOBE



OUR TOWN CENTRE DRAW

Watford benefits from being a destination retail centre, as well as a high street for local residents. This means it benefits from committed local shoppers throughout the week and visitors from the wider region, particularly at weekends.

THE 3 PILLARS OF THE STRATEGY

THESE 3 PILLARS UNDERPIN OUR APPROACH FOR ALL PLANS AND INITIATIVES IN THE TOWN CENTRE AND SET OUT OUR PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT AND INITIATIVES.

PILLAR 1 A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE

Living in the heart of our town is a fantastic way to benefit from all that Watford has to offer, with an increasing city-living experience within a close-knit and vibrant community and plenty of green space. The Local Plan identifies the town centre as an area where there are opportunities to deliver more new homes for our community.

We will continue to promote initiatives, approaches, policies and developments that support the town centre area as a healthy, sustainable and desirable place to live, for all ages. The increasing number of people choosing to live in the town centre, and spend their time and money here, is a testament to its liveability, inclusivity and safety.

A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE – SUCCESS TO DATE

Engagement undertaken whilst the council developed the Town Centre Framework demonstrated that our town centre is a fantastic location and new residential developments will provide residents with the opportunity to benefit from everything on their doorstep, as well as becoming part of an established and welcoming community. Living in the heart of Watford offers the chance to be part of this diverse and close-knit community, and close to outstanding amenities.

Living in central Watford provides easy access to wide-ranging employment opportunities in international, national and local businesses, and the key business

district on Clarendon Road. There are also wider opportunities near the town centre, including business parks and the hospital, plus fast rail links into central London.

Green spaces and sustainability matter in Watford. We have the most Green Flag parks of any Hertfordshire district and it is a key part of what makes Watford such a desirable place to live. The town centre is encircled by the River Colne, an inviting and peaceful place for residents to enjoy that has been carefully restored over recent years, reflecting its place in shaping our town. Investing in green spaces and an inviting urban realm remains a priority in Watford.

Above all, Watford is all about our communities. We are diverse, engaged and united.

We're known for being a Rainbow Town, where diversity is on the rise and segregation on the wane. We're also a hub for the region, hosting events for the wider Hertfordshire community, including Herts Pride. Our community is engaged and part of the development of new town centre provision, including our young residents, who provide valuable input into projects.



OUR OFFER

There is already a great deal in place to enable our residents to access high-quality amenities and facilities. Our town centre offers a wide range of excellent employment opportunities in businesses and organisations committed to Watford that are thriving in the local business environment.

Watford's town centre is renowned for its range of retail, hospitality and leisure facilities, which people from the town and surrounding areas visit, making Watford an important local leisure destination.

Our connectivity allows residents to travel quickly and sustainably for both work and leisure. The town centre is pedestrian-friendly

and has superb sustainable transport options, with the London Overground, West Coast Main Line, local and TfL buses all within easy reach, as well as a car club and a bike-hire scheme, plus fast and easy access to the M1, M25 and A41. All these options ensure our town centre remains accessible and a sustainable place to live and visit

Families benefit from well-regarded primary and secondary schools and also West Herts College, all of which offer great opportunities to our younger residents. Many family-friendly activities are hosted in the town centre throughout the year, including the Big Beach, Winterfest and a fireworks display that attracts visitors from well beyond the borough's boundary.



ST MARY'S

The council is investing in a fresh new look at St Mary's Churchyard, with work starting in early 2025. The churchyard improvement project evolved from public engagement: residents identified the potential of the churchyard to become an inviting greenspace in our town centre, as a peaceful contrast to the adjacent High Street. This project will transform the churchyard into a lively, family-friendly green space that further enhances the town centre and provides a more welcoming environment for everyone.

Local design students from West Herts College shared their creative ideas for the project, and some feature in the final design. It's all about creating a space where people can gather, play and relax, with the added benefits of reducing antisocial behaviour. New wildflower areas will boost local wildlife, and informal play areas, new pathways and raised planters with seating mean there will be something for everyone to enjoy.



There are many green spaces accessible from the town centre, with Watford Green Loop cycle, walking and wheeling route connecting those within easy reach. Cassiobury Park, one of the UK's most loved parks, is within walking distance and provides a host of opportunities to be active and enjoy nature within its 190 acres.

Watford is a place where all are welcome, and enabling all our residents and visitors to take advantage of what's on offer remains a priority for us. Our town centre lights celebrate different cultural events throughout the year, supported by Watford BID. Our community groups are flourishing, engaged and well supported. These groups support Watford to grow as a town without prejudice, where all are welcome.

Watford town centre is a safe place, supported by an effective and proactive Community Safety Partnership. The partnership brings together different agencies, including the police, local government and health providers, to improve safety and reduce crime within the town. The partnership engages with communities and businesses and delivers responsively to key priorities. As a result, businesses and residents have confidence that Watford is a great place to be based, which, in turn, attracts footfall and investment.



A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE — COMING SOON

There are some great developments in store for present and future town centre residents and visitors, creating more opportunities to dwell and enjoy all that's on offer.

Supported by £16 million in government funding, the Town Hall Quarter is an ambitious programme to revitalise the top end of the high street and provide new homes; commercial space; an enhanced town square for civic, community and cultural functions; a business incubator for entrepreneurs; and community spaces. It will also include a health hub, offering a wide range of health and wellbeing services for our residents, all in one place. This exciting programme will attract increased footfall and strengthen Watford's reputation as a hub of culture, enterprise and innovation.

Our connectivity will continue to grow through the proposed sustainable transport hub and other developments in the Lower High Street. This will

improve interchanges between travel services and an easy hub for visitors to Watford. We are also exploring improvements from Watford Junction, via the town centre and onwards to Croxley that will enable better public transport options to reach Watford General Hospital, the business parks and neighbouring communities in Croxley Green.

Watford Junction is the busiest railway station in Hertfordshire, and the third busiest in the eastern region. In the year to March 2023, the station had 5.5 million entries and exits. The land around Watford Junction station is one of the last major rail lands around London still to be redeveloped. The council is encouraging Network Rail to refurbish and enhance the existing station.

We are working with Network Rail, other public sector partners and adjoining landowners to promote redevelopment of the wider rail lands

and to enhance the capacity and functionality of Watford Junction station. Its role as multi-modal sustainable transport hub creates a major gateway to the town centre and more high-quality public realm will encourage visitors into the town centre.

There is an opportunity to deliver 3,500 new homes on brownfield land next to a major public transport hub, to create a new urban quarter. This is envisaged within Council's Local Plan as Watford Gateway, a strategic development area and extension of Watford town centre. The coordinated change in this area will create a mixed-use urban quarter of high-quality design and placemaking, with excellent connectivity and a combination of housing, employment and community-orientated facilities. The station is already a major gateway to the Warner Bros Studio Tour, which welcomes more than 2 million visitors annually. This provides a significant opportunity for Watford to welcome these visitors into our town centre.

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

In common with many areas, Watford needs more homes for our residents. To meet this need, there are various housing-led, mixed-use schemes that have been identified for the town centre. These schemes will provide more opportunities to enjoy all the town centre has to offer and bring more footfall and vibrancy to the town.



Watford is a town centre for everyone, and partners across the town recognise the opportunity to continue to focus on Watford as an inclusive place where people can thrive.



OUR KEY DELIVERABLES FOR THIS PILLAR:

We will progress our transformational plans for the Town Hall Quarter.

Subject to Homes England funding, we will explore opportunities to revitalise the north end of Watford High Street for our residents to enjoy, as well as establishing a new area in the town for culture to flourish.

We will lobby partners to move forward plans for developing the Watford Junction Quarter.

We will continue to work with the Department for Transport, Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Network Rail, Homes England, Herts Growth Board and other landowners, with an ambition to create a new sustainable neighbourhood that successfully combines new homes, new station facilities, jobs, public spaces and community facilities for both our existing and new residents.

We will achieve the right long-term balance of development, services and transport links for our town.

We will continue to deliver our award-winning Local Plan for Watford, which will shape how the town will develop sustainably over the next 30 years. We will produce local design codes for allocated sites and provide additional guidance where required, and continue to monitor the effectiveness of the Local Plan.

We will implement our Transforming Travel in Watford strategy to improve transport across the borough with a focus on active travel, and improve cycle ways across the borough and make it easier to cross the ring road. We will also expand our local car club and introduce more electric vehicle charging.



PILLAR 2

GROWING OUR THRIVING ECONOMY

Watford already has a successful and growing economy that benefits from innovation, investment, flair and superb connectivity. Enabling the town centre economy to thrive brings further employment to residents, those that live further afield, and attracts visitors and adds vibrancy to the area. Our approach to the town centre economy will promote Watford as a destination for retail and leisure spend, as well as a hub for innovation and a great place to do business. Our businesses support our local community who value the vibrancy and opportunities they contribute. We will continue to place a high value on the diversity of our offer and encourage the resilience of our businesses. Our business community benefits from an agile and coordinated response, ensuring that the town centre remains safe for business and visitors alike.

GROWING OUR THRIVING ECONOMY – SUCCESS TO DATE

Watford's town centre is thriving across a huge range of economic sectors. We frequently welcome new local, national and international businesses, providing employment and economic opportunities for our residents and visitors. Watford also continues to prove itself as a destination where people come enjoy their leisure time, and therefore proves a great location for retail, hospitality and leisure operators with a high-quality offer.

Watford has a highly successful Business Improvement District, known as Watford Town Centre BID. This brings together hundreds of local businesses to collaborate and pool resources to deliver initiatives in relation to safety, sustainability, business support, marketing and events. The work of the BID contributes hundreds of thousands of pounds to the vitality of the area, boosting our future prosperity.

Following a £180m investment in Charter Place, and its integration into the wider Harlequin shopping centre, it now provides a new high-end hub for the centre's retail offer of 166 stores. Watford's economy is agile and dynamic responding to trends and community needs. The town centre has high levels of local footfall and is also a regional centre. As a result of our dynamic approach, vacancy levels have long been below national averages and stores seize the opportunity to stay in Watford when looking to scale up to larger premises.

The Clarendon Road business area is pivotal in attracting investors to Hertfordshire and supporting the health of the wider Hertfordshire economy. It is a significant location for the Hertfordshire Growth Board's ambition to enhance the county's reputation as a world-class economy.



THE CLARENDON WORKS

Outstanding office accommodation is also key to our offer to businesses, with Clarendon Road playing a central role in the business district. Recent developments include The Clarendon Works, which occupies a prominent position in Watford's skyline and offers 140,000 ft² of Grade A office space.

A 100% renewables (BREEAM 'Excellent') flexible workspace with a range of facilities, it has been designed to enhance occupants' work-life experience. Comprising 12 floors of open-plan floorplates and high-quality fittings and finishes, occupiers also benefit from state-of-the-art amenities, including a gym and fitness studio, café and landscaped roof terrace.



Harlequin Watford is one of the UK's 20 largest shopping centres, with annual footfall of over 17 million. Following challenges experienced through the pandemic, a new approach has been taken that has seen the centre consolidate its outstanding offer with major retailers including a Next concept department store, an upsized Zara and a new town-centre TK Maxx, which had been an aspiration in the store's hometown.



OUR OFFER

Watford serves a large population of 550,000 people within its catchment area, which is a great resource for businesses, who are enabled by our transport connectivity. We have consistently high footfall rates across the town centre. Our vacancy rate on the High Street, which is home to a range of both independents and brands, is consistently below the national average, at 10%. The town

Following the closure of John Lewis, a bold decision was made to subdivide the former store into multiple smaller units, and this has borne fruit with a string of lettings to successful high-street retail brands.

Strong efforts have also been made to bring local character to the centre through engagement with community groups, charities, schools and Watford Borough Council and this has been reflected in planning guidance in the Town Centre Framework.

The bold and decisive asset management seen at Harlequin over the last couple of years has resulted in a slashing of vacancy rates, while trading at the centre is now around 9% above the level seen when John Lewis was fully trading in 2019.

centre benefits from a wide range of businesses and entrepreneurs, from micro-businesses to large international corporations. Businesses in Watford are active and engaged, looking to invest in our town and communities, and provide quality goods and services.

Many businesses have signed up to the Watford Good Employer Charter, which commits to using local supply



chains, employing more local people, becoming more sustainable and supporting the community. Watford supports an economy that encourages accessibility for all, across the sectors. In the town centre, the BID enables businesses to come together to create an environment that supports this continued commercial diversity.

CLARENDON ROAD



In 2021 £10m was invested in the quality of the environment along Clarendon Road, which links Watford town centre to the station (and Watford Junction rail lands) and represents the town centre business district for Watford. This is expected to leverage over £100m of private sector investment along Clarendon Road, with land plots already commencing construction and several more in the pipeline.

The public realm improvements include the forecourt at Watford Junction, to welcome visitors with planting, lighting and a playful forecourt: this multi-modal sustainable transport hub provides a gateway to Clarendon Road.

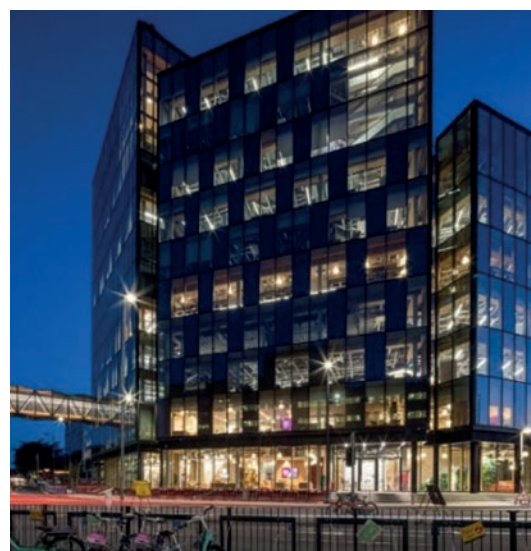
Visible from the station, and setting the tone of high-quality office space, in 2021, TJX Europe, which operates

retailer TK Maxx, opened its new £93m European headquarters on Clarendon Road. This exemplary office development comprises three new buildings, with a link bridge across Clarendon Road, and now provides some of the highest quality grade A office space, for around 3,000 employees. The development also includes 620m² of living wall and has achieved a BREEAM 'Excellent' rating.

Clarendon Road is the primary office location in Watford, comprising 51% of the total office floorspace within the borough. It is also the primary office and business destination within SW Herts, predominantly supporting the professional services sector, and is already home to a cluster of national and international businesses. The proximity of Watford Junction

mainline station, combined with the provision of high-quality office space and the clustering of professional organisations, is a major draw for business and makes Clarendon Road an attractive proposition to investors and new businesses that otherwise would not consider investing in SW Herts.

As a result of continued investment in the Clarendon Road office market by international businesses (£100m of private sector investment), Watford remains the only authority area in SW Herts that has net in-commuting – supporting further inward investment and encouraging smaller and medium-sized businesses to cluster in the area.



GROWING OUR THRIVING ECONOMY COMING SOON

We want to continue to grow our thriving economy and there are a range of new opportunities in the pipeline to support this. Small businesses matter and the planned Innovation and Incubation Hub within the Town Hall Quarter will provide a space where they can become established, receive support, and grow. The growth in our economy and visitors to the town, and nearby attractions, will also be supported by new hotels, providing more visitors with the chance to explore our thriving town centre.

Watford began as a market town, and our market has been evolving to reflect the needs and priorities of our residents and visitors. A new development is planned that will reimagine the market, providing new opportunities for existing and future market traders and revitalising the whole area.



FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Watford has already established itself as a resilient and agile town that responds to changing national and local trends and outperforms other areas in terms of its footfall and vacancy rates.

In a changing world, maintaining this resilience is key and we want to support our businesses to grow in this area, so that they can continue to provide their vital contributions to the town centre. Diversity is also important to our economy and our communities and we will continue to encourage different types of businesses to make their homes in the town centre and benefit from all that it has to offer. Businesses will continue to benefit from a local community that prefers to shop locally and enjoy everything our thriving and dynamic town has to offer.

OUR KEY DELIVERABLES FOR THIS PILLAR:



We will deliver our Innovation Hub.

Following confirmation of Levelling Up Funding, we will provide a new Innovation and Incubation Hub to support start-ups, give our key sectors a boost and draw new businesses into the borough.

We will promote the appeal of our town centre and all it has to offer.

We will continue to market the opportunities for businesses in Clarendon Road and the wider town centre, encouraging inward investment and employment in the town. We will also deliver our 'Shop and Eat Local' campaign to attract people to our town centre, supporting our local businesses and their unique appeal.

Harlequin infrastructure investment.

Harlequin Watford is committed to a significant lifecycle replacement programme to ensure that its essential infrastructure is maintained to the highest of standards. Although subject to annual review, there is expected to be over £10m of investment over the next five years.

Harlequin digital wayfinding.

With continued focus on improvement, Harlequin Watford is conducting a complete review of all wayfinding assets, both within the shopping centre and online. They will explore modern and cutting-edge solutions to help visitors navigate the shopping centre, with direct involvement from local people, improving the experience for all.

HAIRCONNECTIONS BY ANDREA OF WEMBLEY: THRIVING IN THE TOWN CENTRE



We have been a proud part of Watford for over 47 years, originally in Charter Place and now Market Street. Our team serves clients not just from Watford and the wider region, but as far away as Norfolk.

Watford's dynamic environment has been key to our thriving business. The bustling town centre is a magnet for businesses and shoppers, and we see great levels of foot traffic on Market Street. The town's growth and lively atmosphere make it an ideal place for independent businesses like ours.

Recent highlights of our time in Watford include the party with clients and business leaders to celebrate our ten-year milestone. We were also over the moon to win the Watford Observer's Best Local Hairdressers award in 2023.

We are excited about the future of Watford. The BID's initiatives to enhance the town are fantastic, and the convenience of nearby bus routes and parking makes it easy for everyone to visit. We feel fortunate to be part of this vibrant community and look forward to growing together in the years to come.

PILLAR 3

VIBRANT CULTURE AND ENTERTAINMENT

The town centre benefits from an extensive arts, culture, heritage and entertainment offer and a diverse evening economy. This is fundamental to the character of Watford, and especially for the town centre, bringing new visitors to the town and providing opportunities for our communities to enjoy and participate in the diverse cultural and social offer. We recognise that a thriving arts sector is a source of pride for our residents.

Watford is proud to be home to three National Portfolio Organisations, funded by the Arts Council: the Palace Theatre, Rifco theatre company and Tiata Fahodzi theatre company. This sector is also supported by thriving retail, hospitality and leisure facilities. The approach we will take will promote our arts, culture and heritage offer more widely, attracting new visitors and showcasing the talents of our people.



VIBRANT CULTURE AND ENTERTAINMENT – SUCCESS TO DATE

Watford town centre is about more than retail: the Harlequin Centre offers wider leisure opportunities for daytime and evening. National trends have moved away from a traditional night-time economy and Watford has successfully pivoted to meet modern social patterns. Watford offers a cinema, bowling, indoor climbing, dessert houses, mini golf and more, to provide entertainment for the whole family.

Watford's arts and culture scene is increasingly vibrant and diverse. As well as the major town centre venues, including the refurbished Colosseum, the Palace Theatre and the Pump House, there are numerous events and initiatives that place Watford firmly on the cultural map.



OUR OFFER

Watford's arts and heritage scene includes the Colosseum, renowned for its outstanding acoustics, which brings an exciting programme of events to the town. Following an extensive refurbishment programme, global operator AEG will deliver an exciting programme.

Watford is fortunate to be the home of the Palace Theatre, the only producing theatre in Hertfordshire, which offers a diverse range of theatre, comedy and community events, attracting audiences from Watford and beyond.

The Pump House Theatre is a hub for emerging talent and an active leader in Watford's cultural development. Our commitment to the arts goes beyond our larger venues and there are various community arts and cultural groups supporting the sector at a grassroots level.

Events spaces feature along the High Street, hosting pop-up events supported by the BID and others throughout the year, including an outdoor cinema, beach, street theatre and Christmas events.

Our culture, entertainment and economy are mutually supportive, bringing footfall into the town centre and providing opportunities for our residents and visitors.



WATFRINGE 2025 – PUMP HOUSE THEATRE

Initiated by the Pump House Theatre and Arts Trust, the Watford Fringe (WatFringe) has been part of Watford's cultural calendar for 9 years. For years, the Pump House was known as the town's best-kept cultural secret; a town-centre hub for emerging talent, bringing Watford together to celebrate the town's creativity.

Since it began, the event has grown from a one-day occurrence over three venues to offering 106 acts in 14 venues, all enjoyed by audiences of over 4500. WatFringe includes dance, musical theatre, jazz, folk, khatak dance, poetry, magicians, quartets, spoken word, drama, comedy, orchestras, choirs, and more.

In 2025, WatFringe is teaming up with the Edinburgh Fringe to be a preview festival for acts heading to Edinburgh. Previous acts who have trialled this approach have included the 2025 winner of the Best Festival Show at the Offies. Remarkably, the WatFringe is run by volunteers from the local community who are the driving force behind its success and demonstrates the community's commitment to the arts.

WatFringe has evolved from a local festival to a national and international festival, with an exciting and impressive lineup every year, while remaining affordable and accessible. Details of forthcoming acts are available on our website.

VIBRANT CULTURE AND ENTERTAINMENT – COMING SOON



As well as the dynamic programme offered by the Colosseum, there is much more in the pipeline to ensure Watford remains a hub for arts, culture, heritage and entertainment.

Watford's museum is moving to a new home within the Town Hall Quarter and will offer a new and dynamic and sensory visitor experience, elevating Watford's diverse heritage. It will showcase our heritage and the people and places that have made a significant contribution to our town. The project has received a huge vote of confidence with the awarding of £2.4 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund to transform its offer and showcase the town's history. Its new location within the Town Hall Quarter places it within the civic hub and is more accessible for visitors.

The leisure opportunities within the Harlequin Centre are also developing with new facilities planned to enable visitors and residents to enjoy a full day out in Watford.

AMANARTIS: LIVING CREATIVELY IN WATFORD

Amanartis, a town centre-based home for artists, has been instrumental in transforming Watford's arts scene through innovative projects at Harlequin and the Vicarage Road Cemetery chapel. With two distinct spaces, Harlequin and the Chapel, Amanartis offers unique experiences and serves different purposes, each with its own identity and function.

At Harlequin, Amanartis has created a gallery space that allows artists to display, sell and gain inspiration. The chapel, in contrast, is a community hub, a place where people come together to create, share, and learn. Only a few minutes' walk from the town centre retail offer, the chapel has become a hub for artistic activity.

Amanartis's efforts have normalised the act of living creatively, with open studios and regular workshops fostering a vibrant arts community.

With its supportive local partnerships and grassroots initiatives, Watford provides a unique environment for artists and makes. One of the great things about Watford is that so much on offer is accessible.

Looking ahead, continuing to enhance Watford's walkability will enable a broader range of people to engage with the arts offering. Amanartis is keen to see the creation of even more dedicated spaces for artistic expression. With its fantastic cultural activities and facilities and vibrant community, Watford is a thriving centre for the arts.



FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES



Watford's Cultural Strategy sets a clear vision for Watford as a cultural hub. Delivering this strategy across partners will strengthen the sector and enable access to funding and new opportunities.

Looking ahead, there is an opportunity to further promote Watford as a cultural hub to both residents and potential visitors from outside Watford.

Our cultural sector is outstanding, and organisations and venues are keen to explore extending their collaborative approach.

OUR KEY DELIVERABLES FOR THIS PILLAR:

We will launch a refurbished Colosseum with a new, global operator.

We will complete our refurbishment of Watford Colosseum, to retain its status as a first-class entertainment venue, with a world-class operator bringing an exciting and diverse range of performances and creative events to boost the town's cultural offer and local economy.

We will complete the refurbishment of the Town Hall, repurposing its use and opening it up to our community.

We will finish the refurbishment of Watford Town Hall whilst protecting its heritage, providing a new home for our museum, space for the community and a refreshed customer space for those accessing face-to-face council services.

A partnership approach.

The town centre matters to us all. This strategy will support the vision for the town centre in collaboration with all partners.

Watford benefits from strong networks of partners who are collaborative and ambitious by default. Partnerships that underpin the success of the town centre include:

- Business Improvement District
- Community Safety Partnership
- Town Centre Operations Group
- Cultural Leaders Group

These groups and others have a proven track record of providing the sound foundation that enables Watford to thrive in the long term.

Our place brand, Watford Actually, tells our story and encourages people and businesses to discover all that Watford has to offer.

This document belongs to Watford as a place, and ongoing oversight of the deliverables will be maintained by One Watford, which brings together partners across the public, private and third sectors to provide system and place leadership. It will sit alongside Watford Actually, our place brand, which tells Watford's story.

ABOUT ONE WATFORD

ONE WATFORD'S VISION FOR WATFORD AS A WHOLE IN 2040 IS:

A child born today will experience Watford as a welcoming and vibrant place, championing a healthier and greener way of living. Everyone will be able to reach their full potential by sharing in the economic, social and cultural opportunities Watford offers.

This vision is underpinned by
7 missions:





GREENER AND FORWARD-LOOKING

Watford will be a greener place; we will protect the environment and reduce our carbon footprint, spearheading high-quality growth and design that complements and enhances Watford's character and identity.



HEALTHY AND HAPPY

We will develop Watford as a healthy place and increase our healthy life expectancy. We will focus on friendly neighbourhoods where people feel safe with services, and opportunities that support wellbeing and enable people to enjoy active and happier lives.



SUPER-CONNECTIVITY

We will build on Watford's transport, digital and community connections, promoting the links that make us stand out as a thriving and excellently positioned place.



DYNAMIC AND ENTREPRENEURIAL

We will strengthen our reputation for innovation, enterprise and education to attract and retain great local jobs, matched by a skilled and talented workforce. We will focus on growing a dynamic and sustainable economy to grow as an engine of business and industry for the region.



A STAR PERFORMER

We will pivot Watford's fantastic entertainment, heritage, art and culture offer to showcase our spirit and flair, involving our diverse communities and putting Watford firmly on the map for inspiration and creativity.



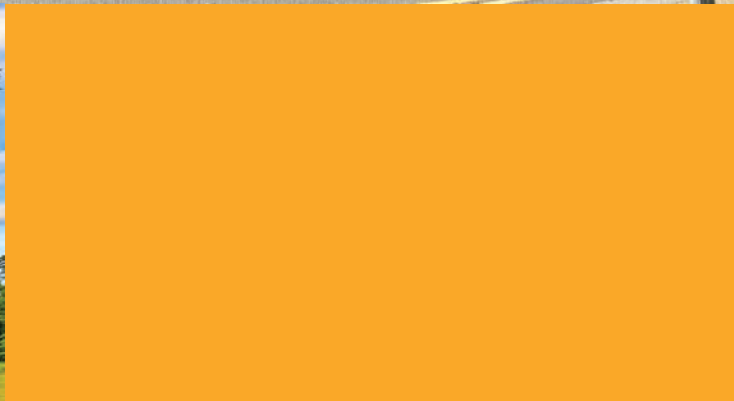
A CONFIDENT, RAINBOW VOICE

We will celebrate our optimistic, caring and confident rainbow community, encouraging our residents, businesses and groups to recognise their powerful voice in shaping Watford's future.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL GENERATIONS

We will give our young people the best start in life and ensure people of all ages can access the opportunities, support and quality homes they need to live their best and fulfilling lives.



WATFORD
BOROUGH
COUNCIL

watfordcouncil

