

## **Leader's Speech – 5 October 2021**

*(3,729 words / 28.7 minutes)*

Members and officers of the Council,

Before I begin tonight, I want to take the opportunity to pay tribute to our Olympic and Paralympic athletes for their successes in Tokyo.

I want to highlight especially the medal triumphs of those athletes who were either born in or live in Tameside. Altogether, they brought four medals back to the borough. This means that if we were counted as a separate country we would have won as many medals as Ireland, Israel, Romania or Portugal.

These champions include Droylsden triathlete and former Fairfield School and Ashton Sixth Form pupil Georgia Taylor-Brown, who despite suffering a bicycle puncture halfway through the race nevertheless finished with a silver medal in the women's triathlon.

However, her best was still to come in the mixed triathlon race, as along with teammates Jessica Learmouth, Jonny Brownless and Alex Yee she successfully held off France and the USA to win Tameside's first gold medal for 100 years.

Paisley-born but Stalybridge-based cyclist Jack Carlin also won silver in the men's team sprint alongside Ryan Owens and Jason Kenny, and then took bronze in the individual team sprint.

There were victories as well from the coaches' bench, as former Olympians Mike Harvey from Mottram, and Martin Stamper from Denton lent their experience to the Great Britain taekwondo squad to help them finish with two silvers and a bronze.

Then in the Paralympic Games, Aileen McGlynn from Mossley won silver in the women's B 1,000-metre time trial with partner Helen Scott, recording a personal best of 1:06.734.

Despite enduring incredibly difficult circumstances as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, these men and women have nevertheless done our borough and our country proud. On behalf of Tameside, I offer them our heartfelt congratulations and wish them every success for the future.

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Since the last Full Council meeting a number of individuals and services have won or been nominated for awards and recognition. I want to take a moment to highlight them. The LGC Awards 2021 has seen three nominations - Dr Jane Harvey for outstanding leadership; the Partnership Engagement Network for community involvement; and the vaccination roll out in the public health category. Winners will be announced in November.

Also in November, we'll hear if the GMPF has won in its three nominated categories at the European Pension Awards 2021 - European Pension Fund of the Year; Pension Fund Communication Award; and Infrastructure Manager of the Year. Good luck all.

Our 'Everybody Can' service, run in partnership with Active Tameside, received the 'Diversity and Inclusion' Award for the second time at the national ukactive Awards last month. Well done to all involved.

Philip Woffenden from our Criminal Justice Mental Health Team has been presented with a Gold Award. The Department of Health and Social Care award recognises outstanding achievements by a nurse or social care worker in their sphere of practice. Philip, your public service is an inspiration to us all and this recognition is richly deserved.

The Public Services Managers Association awards last month saw two successes for Tameside. Our Recruitment, Payroll and Pensions Team won the Excellence in Service Delivery - Unsung Hero's Award. Well done to manager Louise Walker and all the team for this outstanding achievement. Tracy Brennand was also the winner of the HR Leader of the Year category which was given in recognition of the fantastic strategic leadership that Tracy provides in her role as Assistant Director of People and Workforce and Development. Congratulations Tracy.

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Like I'm sure all of you were, I have been shocked and saddened at the crisis unfolding in Afghanistan. That's why, alongside the other Leaders of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and the Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, I have signed an official statement pledging us to do our part to help people leave that country and rebuild their lives here.

Many of those Afghans now fleeing to our shores provided valuable help to the military during our two-decade long mission. Should they be forced to stay behind, there is a very real chance that not only they, but their families and friends too, would be subject to arrest, torture and execution.

Our city-region has a long and proud history as a safe haven for those fleeing prejudice and persecution. However, over the past few years it has become clear that our entire asylum system has been transformed into a race to the bottom, with unfair and unpleasant consequences for both those seeking sanctuary and many of our most deprived communities.

The Combined Authority's joint statement to the Immigration Minister recognises this reality. It urges him to ensure that every part of the country takes a share of the responsibility for asylum and resettlement schemes, and that all placements are given appropriate funding to support the individuals and communities in which they are housed. Only in this way will we be able to discharge our national moral duty to Afghanistan and its people.

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In other Greater Manchester news, at the Combined Authority meeting last month we heard from the new Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police, Stephen Watson, as he outlined the plans to improve the performance, transparency and accountability of our city region's police service. I'd like to thank our new Chief Superintendent for Tameside, Robert Cousens, for coming here tonight to talk through the plan and what it means to Tameside and we look forward to working with Rob to improve community safety for our residents.

These plans have been encapsulated into a number of public promises, including but not limited to, reducing waiting times for 999 and 101 calls, making sure every area in Greater Manchester has a dedicated neighbourhood policing team, taking the fight to organised crime, and building public trust and confidence.

I have been greatly encouraged by the start that our new Chief Constable has made, and I look forward to working closely with him in the future to make our city region safer. In particular, I want us to combine forces and resources to get to grips with the rise of so-called "low level" crimes such as anti-social behaviour.

As always, it is impossible to ignore the impact of austerity. While council teams work closely with the police and communities to prevent and resolve issues of anti-social behaviour their area, a decade of cuts have meant that it's estimated that local authorities would need at least £2.5 billion in additional funding over the next financial year just to maintain these services at the current level.

My view is clear. There is no such thing as “low level crime”, there is only crime. For those communities in Tameside who have been blighted by such incidents for far too long, I offer you my assurances that your concerns are being heard, and that a clear and swift reaction will soon be coming.

I’d also like to highlight another important and related piece of work discussed and agreed at the GMCA meeting at the end of September. Bev Hughes, the Deputy Mayor for Police, Crime and Fire presented the new Greater Manchester Gender-Based Violence Strategy which was then agreed by the GMCA for publication and delivery. The strategy document is clear about the challenge and bold in its ambition. To quote from the document ...

*“The ambition, reflected in this Gender-Based Violence Strategy, is to challenge the attitudes and social conditions that sustain or excuse gender-based violence and deliver whole system improvements in responses to those affected by it. These will fundamentally change the story of Greater Manchester over the next ten years, in terms of what it delivers with regard to safety for women and girls, gender equality, challenging misogyny - the contempt that follows from ingrained sexism - and holding perpetrators of gender-based violence - the majority of whom are men and boys - to account.”*

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Over the past 18 months, coronavirus has dominated the national headlines and the day-to-day business of this borough.

While this is a crisis that is by no means over, thanks to the tireless hard work and dedication of our health workers, Public Sector workers, volunteers and individual residents, I believe we are now in a position where we can give thought to what we want life after the pandemic to look like.

I also want to note the great work of our 267 Community Champions, all of whom are volunteers. They have been tireless in not only getting Covid messages out to our diverse communities but also in their practical support to keep residents safe and well. It's been just over a year since we launched the Community Champions initiative and the number of volunteers signed up keeps on rising. We'll keep this initiative going as Covid recedes as we can see the benefit in so many other areas of this network of active citizens who are championing and caring for our communities. Thanks to you all for your work and commitment.

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Back in 2020, before anybody realised what the next two years would have in store for us, I pledged that my priority as Leader would be to ensure and secure Inclusive Growth at a local level. As 2021 draws to a close, I want to take the opportunity to renew that promise and explain what it means for Tameside and its residents.

We live in a time of extreme and widening inequality. While the world's richest 1% have more than twice as much wealth as 6.9 billion people, almost half of humanity struggles on less than \$5.50 a day.

This economic injustice is apparent not just on a global scale, but within countries as well. In 2019 the Institute for Public Policy Research North think-tank reported that the UK was more regionally divided than any comparable advanced economy.

That might come as no surprise to anybody who saw with their own eyes over the past decade how ideologically-obsessed and economically-illiterate austerity ravaged the towns and communities that we call home. But during the coronavirus pandemic, this brutal economic fracture was laid bare for all to see.

During the first wave of the pandemic alone, in March to July last year, 12.4 more people per 100,000 died in the North than the rest of England from the virus, and an extra 57.7 more people per 100,000 died in the region due to all causes.

Any recovery from the pandemic that takes us back to this inequitable status quo will not only be unsustainable, it will be unacceptable. Sadly the government just doesn't understand that, as highlighted by the motion from Cllr Ryan later in the meeting. Increases in National Insurance, scrapping the £20 uplift to Universal Credit and a failure to take action on rising costs, particularly heating costs as winter approaches, shows you how much the Government do not get it.

Further proof their commitment to levelling up is only rhetoric, and they have no plan. In fact the Government fails to plan so often. We only need to look at the HGV driver crisis leading to queues, panic and fights at petrol pumps and shortages on the supermarket shelves to tell us that.

Inclusive growth is the only viable alternative. Its purpose is simple; to generate economic growth that creates opportunities for all, and distribute the benefits of prosperity fairly across society.

It is an idea whose time has come, and it is the vehicle by which we will build back not just better in Tameside, but fairer and greener too.

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One of the most key elements to secure inclusive growth is housing. In crude monetary terms, it is one of the biggest drivers of wealth accumulation as well as the biggest spending item and source of debt for most families or individuals.

Housing, and the areas in which people live, can also have drastic implications for health, employment and education. These effects can begin in childhood, and the consequences can last a lifetime. While good housing can be a vehicle to opportunity and better life outcomes, bad housing is almost always a barrier to the same.

It is for this reason that I'm delighted that the outline planning application for Godley Green Garden Village was completed and submitted last week. It will now need to be validated by the Local Planning Authority before the content is made publically available – which will take approximately two weeks, as a minimum.

Throughout the process, we have been in close consultation with various statutory and non-statutory organisations. This includes, but is not limited to, the Environment Agency, Highways England, Transport for Greater Manchester, Network Rail, the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit, the Local Lead Flood Authority, Energy North West and United Utilities.

The proposal has also been voluntarily submitted to a Places Matter Design Review, hosted by the Royal Institute of British Architects, to provide an independent and impartial evaluation process.

In line with best practice, community and stakeholder engagement has taken place through the entire preparation of the planning application. This began as far back as 2019, and between February and March of this year a number of stakeholder workshops, online engagement sessions and community meetings were held to allow people to have their say.

Overall, these events were attended by some 350 participants, including local and regional residents, family households, working and retired individuals, businesses owners and community representatives. This was supplemented by the circulation of a community newsletter, which was hand-delivered to over 7,000 houses within a 1.5 mile radius of the proposed site.

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Through these discussions, we have developed a clear picture of the hopes, aspirations and, yes, the concerns of some of our residents in regards to the Godley Green Garden Village. I want to take the opportunity tonight to go through some of them in detail.

Many asked why we had chosen not to develop brownfield land within Tameside first. Our latest Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment has concluded that not only is there no existing site in the borough that could accommodate a project on the scale of Godley Green, but also that all the brownfield sites in the borough combined would still be insufficient to meet our projected housing need.

Furthermore, the current footprint of the development encompasses only 2.5% of Tameside's total greenbelt land. Of this, 50% of the site has been earmarked for green infrastructure, and by consolidating ownership we will also be able to increase the proportion of publically accessible land from 1% now to 50% upon completion.

Questions have also been raised about the infrastructure to support the development, especially around education provision.

In order to address this, we undertook a comprehensive analysis of primary and secondary school capacity in the area. This concluded that while more secondary school places would be required in the early stages of the development to mitigate the impact of Godley Green, additional primary school capacity will not be required until the work is near completion.

To that end we are in talks with Alder High School about a significant expansion of their facilities, and an entirely new one-form primary school has been earmarked for construction within the development.

Others have expressed scepticism about the consequences of building on Godley Green for the area's wildlife and diversity.

We have committed to retaining and enhancing Brookfold Wood and Werneth Brook, the two sites that contain ancient woodland and biological interest within the development. Across the entire site, 75% of all mature trees will be retained. No trees identified as Category A, the largest and highest-quality, will be cut down, and 92% of the lower Category B trees will also be preserved.

Our ambition is for a 10% gain in biodiversity across the area, to be achieved on site if possible. Some of the practical steps we're taking to make this happen include protecting 8 of the 11 ponds holding water, installing 1 bat box for every 10 houses, and building 2 barn owl boxes to increase the provision of breeding and shelter habitats for these important animals.

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The Godley Green Garden Village will stand as an example for others in Greater Manchester and across the country on how to deliver the right homes, in the right places, using the right methods. It will foster inclusive growth and expand opportunity not just within the development itself, but in Hyde, Hattersley and beyond.

As well as over 2,000 new homes, a proportion of which will be ring-fenced for affordable rent or purchase, the construction process itself will deliver £25 million gross value added and 550 high-quality jobs a year for the next decade and a half. Once completed, the £9 million windfall from additional council tax, business rates and New Homes Bonus will also provide a much-needed funding boost to services across the borough.

Now that the outline planning application has been submitted, we must now await the recommendations of the Local Planning Authority. Due to the nature of the development, it must also be presented to the Secretary of State to have the final say on approval or rejection. If and when these steps are completed, we will finally be able to turn the Godley Green Garden Village from ambition into reality.

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But inclusive growth is about more than delivering one major project in a specific area. In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, we need to deliver as many ways as possible for our towns and communities to not just survive, but thrive.

That is why I'm delighted to say that, over the past few months, we have brought to fruition a number of investments and projects in areas as diverse as leisure, retail and public health.

In Droylsden, the new library opened for business halfway through September. While the original library served its community faithfully for over 84 years, what we need and expect from such services in 2021 is not the same as it was in 1937. Based in the heart of the town in Guardsman Tony Downes House, the new Droylsden Library includes, among other amenities, modern IT facilities and fully disabled access throughout.

As a tribute to the man whose vision and ambition for Droylsden led to the successful construction of the Guardsman Tony Downes House, the community space within the library has been named The Kieran Quinn Room, enshrining the memory of former Leader of Tameside Council Kieran Quinn within the very walls of the building itself.

In July I also had the pleasure of officially celebrating the opening of the new state-of-the-art swimming pool at Active Hyde. Commissioned by the Council and managed by Active Tameside, the facility is allowing us to offer swimming lessons for over 1,000 local children as well as support a fully schedule of other health and leisure activities.

Every person that uses Active Hyde, or one of the many other leisure facilities across the borough, is a person that may avoid visiting a GP or a hospital for an illness or conditions as a result. Protecting our resident's quality of life, as well as saving the NHS valuable time and resources, may not be the type of benefit you can easily put on a balance sheet, but I challenge anybody to deny the positive impact nonetheless.

We've chosen to leverage the power of our award-winning markets to attract residents back in our town centres through bespoke events offering high-quality street food, handmade goods and live entertainment. These include the Ashton Artisan Market, Farmer's Market, Craft and Cake Festival and the Stalybridge Street Feast.

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Last, but by no means least, we are working closely with consultants Baker Stuart and Journey4 to redesign and formalise the ways of working we have adopted during the pandemic into a new "hybrid culture".

It is our hope and expectation that this will combine the strengths of home and office working, embracing the positive changes and overcoming the challenges that this fundamental shift has presented us.

We are aware that the Council's workforce is large, complex and diverse. There is no guarantee that a change that suits one group of employees will work for a different group. It's therefore essential that we hear from as many of our staff as possible to ensure that all options and opinions are taken into consideration. As part of this, we carried out a number of dedicated employee workshops as well as an online whole workforce survey.

The feedback from these is now being collated and analysed, with the aim of drawing up a series of recommendations as a basis for moving forward. I hope to be able to deliver the results of this work and outline our next steps in the very near future.

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As we begin to emerge from the long shadow of the coronavirus pandemic, we must remember that significant challenges still remain. There is no vaccine for inequality, and no social distancing that will protect us from the consequences of further austerity.

Our priority over the next year and beyond is to rebuild Tameside better, fairer and greener. While economic growth must be our highest priority, we must also never lose sight of the fact that the only kind of economic growth worth having is that which benefits us all. It is this philosophy that I will champion as Leader of the Council, but we cannot do it alone.

In that spirit, I want to finish off tonight by encouraging you all, regardless of your background, profession or politics, to bring your ideas and energy to the table to turn our vision for inclusive growth in Tameside into real progress on the ground.

Our work has only just begun, but our potential is yet to be realised. Let us all do our part, and let us all share in the rewards.

Thank you.