

# Marie Goldman

MP for Chelmsford

## Let's celebrate our differences as well as all the things that unite us

**L**AST weekend I took part in two fabulously uplifting events in Chelmsford.

I had a couple of events to attend last Saturday afternoon and Holi was the first. Holi is the annual celebration otherwise known as the Festival of Colours, Love and Spring, and I was delighted to be invited along by the Chelmsford Hindu Society.

I'll admit that when I first turned up, I had naively thought that perhaps I might be able to get away with a quick freshen up with a wet wipe before I headed to my next event – but it soon became clear that was a stupid idea as I was instantly greeted with a dab of brightly-coloured powder on my forehead, and was handed a bag of bright blue powder myself to greet others. You do this by grabbing a pinch of powder, gently applying it (often with both hands) to the cheeks of whoever you meet in the crowd, and wishing them a Happy Holi!

Holi is one of those festivals that just bursts with life – quite literally! Celebrated across India and beyond, it's a riot of colour, laughter and pure joy. People take to the streets, smearing each other with vibrant powders, drenching friends in water, and dancing to infectious beats. But beneath all the fun, there's a deeper meaning – it marks the arrival of spring, the victory of good over evil, and the chance to let go of grudges. It's a reminder that, sometimes, life is best enjoyed in full colour, with a generous splash of spontaneity.

It was such a joyful event with hundreds of members of the local Hindu community enjoying the arrival of spring – with music, amazing food, dancing and laughter along the way.

Thank you so much to the organisers for inviting me along and making me feel so welcome.

My second event was a belated celebration of International Women's Day (IWD), held at the truly lovely Bubu's Café in Hamptons Sports & Leisure Centre in Great Baddow.

This was an opportunity for women from different cultural backgrounds to talk about who and what has inspired them. We also discussed this year's IWD theme of 'Accelerating Action', which is about not just settling for celebrating past successes, but also pushing for continued action and progress.

For my part, I highlighted the fact that we still don't have an equal

Celebration of International Women's Day at Bubu's Café in Hamptons Sports & Leisure Centre in Great Baddow

MARIE GOLDMAN MP



Marie Goldman MP gets into the spirit of things at the Holi celebration organised by the Chelmsford Hindu Society

MARIE GOLDMAN MP

number of men and women in Parliament. Of the 650 MPs in the House of Commons, only 263 are women. It's great that at 40 per cent, this is the highest-ever proportion of women, but considering that women make up 51 per cent of the population in England and Wales (according to the 2011 census), we've still got some way to go.

I also talked about the bravery of women who had battled as part of the suffragette movement to give

women the vote. In 1911, a young woman called Emily Wilding Davison hid overnight in a tiny cupboard to the rear of the Chapel of St Mary Undercroft, just off Westminster Hall in the Palace of Westminster. She did that because it was the night of the 1911 census and at that time, wherever you slept was recorded as being your home. Emily wanted her home to be recorded as Parliament. I guess she was trying to say that she – like every woman – had a right to be

there. On the census form, she is recorded as "found hiding in crypt of Westminster Hall"

Emily continued campaigning until her tragic death in 1913 when she was hit by a horse at the Derby. Women finally got the vote five years later, in 1918.

So many of the women at last weekend's event had inspirational stories to tell, but some were keen to point out the importance of living life the way you want to live it – not

constantly feeling that you have to always do as others before you have done.

I agree with that. Of course, we all need to recognise that we are part of one big world and that we need to acknowledge the importance of each of our roles in our communities to enable us to live happily together as a cohesive society.

But apart from that, we need to give ourselves permission to be unapologetic about being ourselves. We're all unique – let's celebrate our differences as much as we enjoy the things that bring us together and unite us.

Events that bring communities together, such as Holi, or celebrations of International Women's Day, are incredibly important to helping us understand each other – but more than that: to enjoy and celebrate each other. It was fantastic to see two such wonderful examples of this in our wonderful city just a few days ago. Long may that continue.

And finally, I was doing a little research for a talk I was giving to the Chelmsford Civic Society last week (thanks for inviting me to your AGM!) and decided to have a look at the number of bits of casework my team and I have been dealing with since I got elected last July. Our casework management system tells me that since then, we have opened 4,723 cases, and received 8,682 emails into the system (please bear in mind, this is just what has gone into our casework management system and is nowhere near the total number of emails).

My team and I have dealt with local issues as diverse as housing, special educational needs, car parking, visas, GP surgery appointments, buses, parking fines, Universal Credit claims, drugs, flooding and antisocial behaviour, to pick out just a few.

Thank you for being patient. Some weeks are busier than others and we often have to prioritise the really urgent issues before dealing with those that are important, but perhaps less time-sensitive.

The best bit about my job as an MP is being able to help people – and the most frustrating bit is when I can't. We can't always achieve what we want to achieve, but we certainly try.

Thanks for understanding when we can't perform the impossible or we take a little bit longer than we'd all like.

Marie