

Marie Goldman

MP for Chelmsford

It has been huge privilege to serve as a councillor and deputy leader

MANY of you may know that prior to becoming the MP for Chelmsford, I spent five years as the deputy leader of Chelmsford City Council. It's a role that I was incredibly proud to perform as it gave me the chance to help bring about real and positive change for our city.

Among other things, I was pleased to be able to help our Liberal Democrat administration of the council bring forward new social-rent housing in the form of 12 new homes in Woodhall Road.

We declared a climate and ecological emergency that allowed us to put in place an action plan to play our role in decarbonising the council's activities. We planted tens of thousands of trees, both enhancing the local environment for residents to enjoy and helping to suck carbon out of the air as the trees mature. And we have recently created a Local Nature Reserve at John Shennan Field in Moulsham Lodge, protecting it for future generations from the local Conservatives' plans to sell it off to developers for houses, thereby destroying the much-needed green space that residents need and love.

We've also invested in our city centre, removing traffic from the top of the High Street by pedestrianising Tindal Square – creating, in the process, a new space for performances and other activities to increase footfall in the city centre and support local businesses.

We've pushed forward with plans to rehabilitate the old gas works site in the city centre by investing in a project to decontaminate the land and relocate the major gas infrastructure in this area. This will quite literally clear the way for much-needed new homes on a brownfield site in the heart of our city. And of course, access to this has been unlocked by the Bow Bridge – the beautiful (in my opinion) new bridge over the river connecting Baddow Road with Wharf Road.

But we need a city that has an enticing, exciting cultural offer too. So, while there is always more to do, I'm extremely proud to have led a

The refurbished and pedestrianised north end of Chelmsford High Street and Tindal Square



The new Bow Bridge over the river connecting Baddow Road with Wharf Road in Chelmsford



Chelmsford Theatre, formerly the Civic Theatre



John Shennan Field, in Moulsham Lodge, Chelmsford



project to transform our tired, outdated and under-performing Civic Theatre into a vibrant, buzzing venue that's now attracting new audiences, best-in-class shows, while also supporting our local economy, especially our bars and restaurants.

All of this – and more – was done against a backdrop of probably the most challenging times local government has known in my lifetime.

From unexpected elections (i.e. the European elections in May 2019 and the snap General Election in December 2019) to a global pandemic where I was so pleased to be part of the leadership of a council where we kept all of our services running with very little disruption. A huge debt of thanks is owed to the council officers and other staff who went above and beyond to make that possible.

Local councils are often the butt of many jokes about incompetence

and inefficiency, but while there is, of course, always room for improvement, I can honestly say that the staff working behind the scenes at Chelmsford City Council do a fabulous job, often in increasingly difficult circumstances with fewer and fewer resources.

I'm thrilled that the council's recent peer challenge – where leaders and experts from other councils (and other political parties) come to look at opportunities for improvement – gave Chelmsford City Council a glowing report.

That's no mean feat and it's testament to the good professional working relationship my Liberal Democrat colleagues and I have built with the council officers and their dedication to getting the best possible outcomes – in difficult times – for the residents of Chelmsford.

In short, it was a huge privilege to serve as a local councillor, but that time has now come to an end.

I have now resigned as both a Chelmsford city councillor and an Essex county councillor.

Since being elected as an MP, I had always intended to stand down from both of these positions at the

local county council elections in May. This was to avoid the additional costs of a by-election when the county council was up for election in May anyway. However, given the Labour Government's decision to agree to the Conservatives' calls to cancel the May elections, I have decided to stand down now instead of carrying on for another three years.

A by-election will be held on May 1 to elect a new councillor or councillors into these now vacant seats.

I'd like to express enormous thanks to everyone who has voted for me and supported me in my roles as a local councillor. It has been a true honour and privilege to stand up for the residents of Chelmsford in local government.

I will, of course, be continuing in my role as the MP for Chelmsford and while potholes are really the responsibility of the Conservative-run county council, I imagine I will continue to receive many emails on this subject (there really are times when I wish I could just put on a high-vis jacket and fill them myself!).

But seriously, it's a time of enormous change for local government.

I'm afraid I'm not at all a fan of the proposals to reorganise local councils. Apart from anything else, I think it won't save the sort of money the Government appears to be hoping for, but it will be a huge, unfortunate distraction for local government at a time when there is so much need from residents for support.

I worry that scarce resources will necessarily be redirected to the reorganisation efforts instead of helping to fix the issues that so desperately need attention, such as special educational needs, social care and housing.

But we are where we are. I will continue to keep a close watch on developments and will be holding the Labour Government to account if it doesn't deliver the benefits it claims it will.

In the meantime, thank you again to everyone involved in local councils at all levels.

Your work is so important to residents and affects everyone's lives on a daily basis arguably far more than parliamentarians do, yet often without the recognition. Keep up the great work.

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Marie Goldman MP