

# Marie Goldman

MP for Chelmsford



One of the many pieces of artwork that are part of Concrete Canvas in Chelmsford



The sheep show, complete with dancing sheep, at the Essex Young Farmers Show



## Events that brightened the gloom

**A**MIDST all the doom and gloom, the political navel-gazing and the psychodrama taking place in Government at the moment, I think it's important to savour and appreciate the positive things that are happening, especially right here in Chelmsford. So I'd like to tell you about a couple of things that took place last weekend, in case you missed them.

Last Saturday, the Bond Street Bowl in the centre of Chelmsford (right in front of John Lewis) was taken over by artists, entertainers and local businesses for the latest incarnation of Concrete Canvas.

I'm sure you will have noticed over recent years, the incredible murals that have sprung up around Chelmsford city centre, brightening up once drab, dreary and often unsightly walls with brightly-coloured and beautifully-crafted paintings. This wonderful initiative to provide some more cheer and interest to our High Street and surrounding area was put together by Chelmsford For You (the Chelmsford Business Improvement District). Over several years now, we've seen internationally-recognised artists come to Chelmsford to showcase their talents. There are so many to choose from that it's hard to pick a favourite, but from the huge eye looking down over Chelmsford Market by artist My Dog Sighs, to the City of Chelmsford Mencil-inspired mural by H Samuel by Chelmsford's very own The London Police, there's surely something for everyone.

And the offering has grown again this year.

If you get chance, check out the photo-realistic face now adorning the previously unloved wall by the bus stop at the multi-storey car park



Marie Goldman MP at the Essex Young Farmers Show with representatives from the NFU, the CLA and Yana  
PHOTOS: MARIE GOLDMAN MP

at the back of the market. And then marvel at the incredible talent required to do this, by hand, with spray paints. I can't even begin to imagine how you create something as spectacular as this. Just amazing! I hope it brightens up everyone's day as they arrive into the city or wait for a bus to take them home.

As I wandered around the city centre on Saturday afternoon and then ventured into the Bond Street Bowl, it was truly lovely to see

families, couples and solitary shoppers having a look at the activities.

There were artists making their creations materialise in front of your eyes, a close-up magician was doing card tricks to baffle children and adults alike, the Chelmsford

Brew Company was selling pints of their locally brewed beer (I restrained myself, but I'm quite a fan of their Cool Bay), and lots more besides.

One artist from Sketch Face was getting pairs of people to sit opposite each other, study each other's faces,

and put pen to paper to sketch what they saw. She was keen to stress that this wasn't about the ability to draw, but more about taking time to observe, to chat, to truly get to know each other and really live in the moment - without the distraction of mobile phones or the myriad other things that compete for our time. It was about making a real, human connection with the person in front of us. I like this idea. Probably something we should all do more of.

In short, it was such a lovely atmosphere, and the legacy of the new murals that are now cheering up Chelmsford makes this year's Concrete Canvas an even bigger success.

It was definitely a weekend for lovely, wholesome, family-oriented events, because Sunday was the Essex Young Farmers Show at Boyton Hall in Roxwell, on the outskirts of Chelmsford.

I've been to this show a few times, and now twice in my official capacity as the MP for Chelmsford. It's a good opportunity to meet various people and organisations representing the rural community.

Of course, the Chelmsford constituency is almost anything but

rural, but I have plenty of constituents who work in businesses and organisations that are part of the rural economy. On Sunday, I met with representatives from the NFU (the National Farmers' Union), the CLA (the Country Land and Business Association), and an important rural mental health charity called Yana, which stands for You Are Not Alone.

Yana explained to me the toll that the unpredictability of farming can take on a person's mental health, especially over a long period of time. As they described it, imagine every year having to invest a large percentage of your savings into the materials, machinery and seeds required to grow crops that are hugely reliant on forces far beyond your control - weather, disease, demand. Even global geo-politics can have a big impact, affecting the price and availability of vital fertiliser, for example. Sometimes, it all becomes too much to cope with, as the extremely tight profit margins under which farms operate leave little wriggle room to cope with the challenges.

And Government isn't making it any easier. Once upon a time, we used to have some of the best-

equipped farms in the world. Our farming standards are still amongst the highest around the globe, but increasingly we haven't been keeping pace with innovation, or investing in renewing farm assets, meaning it's harder and harder for farmers to keep up and to make a living from it. And this matters because food security is surely akin to national security. We must not become too reliant on food imports from abroad.

Yes, there are things that we can't grow here, and we can't grow everything all year round either, but we should be investing more and supporting our farmers and our farms, rather than making things tougher for them.

My party, the Liberal Democrats, was disappointed not to see a Good Food Bill in last week's King's Speech, setting us on the right track. We'll keep arguing for better support for our rural communities.

In the meantime, hats off to the volunteers from the Essex Young Farmers who did yet another exceptional job of organising this lovely one-day show. Growing up in the West Country with family members who were heavily involved in the three-day Devon County Show, I know just how much effort goes into making these shows run smoothly, so I was very impressed - yet again - with what I saw this year.

I had a lovely day, too. It wasn't all work for me, thankfully! I also got to watch the gun dog training display (my word - Labrador puppies are soooooo cute!), and something that I've seen several times before, but which never ceases to bring a smile to my face, the sheep show, complete with dancing sheep! There was delicious food on offer, too, from a wide assortment of Essex businesses. Definitely something for everyone.

If you missed either Concrete Canvas or the Essex Young Farmers Show this year, be sure to look out for them next year. You won't be disappointed.

Keep well.

Marie

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