

Marie Goldman

MP for Chelmsford



Marie Goldman MP with Chelmsford Litter Wombles
MARIE GOLDMAN MP



Joining the Litter Wombles in their crusade to keep Chelmsford tidy

I'm always so impressed and thankful to people who give up their time to help their community. We're incredibly lucky in Chelmsford to have some amazing, dedicated people who are relentless in helping to make the city we call home an even nicer place to live. One of these groups of people is the Chelmsford Litter Wombles, and last Sunday morning I joined them for a pick along Chelmer Valley Road.

The Chelmsford Litter Wombles group can be found on Facebook here: www.facebook.com/groups/chelmsfordlitterwombles.

It's the brainchild of Claire Fry who started the group after lockdown in 2021 as a way for litter pickers to come together (in a socially-distanced way, at the time) to enjoy each other's company at the same time as tidying up the local area.

Over the intervening years, the group has grown and grown, and last Saturday they welcomed their 1,000th member.

The group organises about four big picks a year. I've seen them out many times before, but I've usually joined in with the SUPsect Water Wombles, picking litter from the river banks while the Litter Wombles (probably sensibly) stayed on dry land and picked clean the surrounding areas. But this time, it was really good fun to join the 22 other people who also turned up on a cold and breezy January morning - pickers, bags, gloves and high-vis waistcoats at the ready.

For those who haven't invested in

their own, all the equipment you need can be provided by Love Your Chelmsford, an initiative set up by Chelmsford City Council to help promote and encourage sustainable, community-minded living. You can find out more about litter picking on their website here: loveyourchelmsford.co.uk/volunteer/what-can-i-do/litter-picking.

Last Sunday's event was organised by the unstoppable Beccy Sparham, a key Litter Womble and fabulous group organiser. She made sure all the equipment was properly dished out as we assembled in the Rectory Lane West car park, off Broomfield Road, ready for our trek down both sides of Chelmer Valley Road.

In total, 61 sacks of litter were collected on this pick, most of which will be collected by Chelmsford City Council. If you want to go out on a pick either by yourself or with friends, you can leave up to five of the filled green sacks that Love Your Chelmsford supplies beside any Chelmsford City Council litter bin and they will be collected when the bin is emptied.

If you collect more than that - as was definitely the case last Sunday - you can contact the Love Your Chelmsford team and they will arrange a collection.

It's amazing what you find lying by

the side of the road. There were bottles, cans, bits of unrecognisable plastic, empty crisp packets and sweet wrappers, traffic cones, car hub caps, even a large, empty paint can nestled in amongst the brambles that looked like it had been there for years. There are also some really quite nasty things - a soiled nappy, used condoms, a dead fox - and then there were bigger items, presumably fly-tipped, such as a table and chairs!

A huge thank you to everyone who braved the cold to make this such a wonderful, community-spirited event that was actually a lot of fun. Litter picking is strangely satisfying - no wonder some wonderful people make it part of their daily routine. I was told of one fabulous woman who goes out picking at least once if not twice every day, and last year collected 700 bags of litter! Amazing stuff.

Now, of course, we all wish that litter picking wasn't necessary, and that everyone would dispose of their rubbish sensibly and carefully, but litter isn't always the result of inconsiderate behaviour. Sometimes, the weather plays its part, blowing over bins and scattering their contents far and wide. I'm so grateful to the Chelmsford Litter Wombles - and indeed everyone who volunteers in this way - for

helping tidy it up. If you've never done it before, why not give it a go? It's a family-friendly activity, too - I often see children out with their parents on a pick.

If you fancy finding out more, get in contact with the Chelmsford Litter Wombles - they're a very friendly bunch doing their bit for the community. Oh, and getting a bit of exercise at the same time.

Finally, I just wanted to tell you about something important that happened in Parliament last week.

I'm proud to say that last Wednesday I led a Westminster Hall debate on special educational needs (SEND) - specifically about government support for education, health and care plans (EHCPs).

If you've been reading this column regularly, you'll already know a lot about this subject, and you'll also know why it's important that it gets lots of attention from government.

I was particularly pleased to see that the 90-minute debate was so oversubscribed, with 34 MPs registered to speak, that a speaking limit of just 75 seconds was imposed on each MP once I had delivered my opening speech.

I am genuinely relieved to see this issue now getting the airtime it needs. Many of us quoted truly shocking statistics relating to the SEND system.

I noted in my speech that across England, 37.4 per cent of EHCPs took six months or longer to issue; 5.7 per cent took over a year.

And that's against a backdrop of a statutory timeframe of 20 weeks,

which is obviously being regularly exceeded. And then there's the incredible statistic that says when parents take local authorities to tribunal in relation to EHCPs, local authorities are fighting them with barristers and in some cases, KCs, but that local authorities are still losing in 99 per cent of cases.

It's not over the top to say that's outrageous and must stop.

But as I said in my closing remarks at the end of the debate, a year ago, when a parent first opened my eyes to this awful, broken system, parents felt unheard.

They were fighting tooth and nail every day against a completely broken system and nobody seemed to be listening to them.

Well, with MPs from across the House taking part in this debate in a packed debating chamber (with the very notable but frankly unsurprising exception of the right-wing parties - the only MP to turn up from the Conservatives was their spokesperson, and there was nobody at all from Reform), that is no longer true.

MPs are listening - and so, I believe is the Government. The burning question now is how long will parents and children have to wait before they see tangible signs of improvement? Until then, I'll keep on fighting.

You can watch highlights of my speech on my YouTube channel here: https://youtu.be/EGfJ1p_DbE. The full debate is available on Parliament TV.

Keep well.

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