

County Council – 20 March 2012

**STATEMENT BY MEMBERS
WATTS GALLERY**

I want to take this opportunity to bring to the attention of members and the wider public that Watts Gallery in Compton has been nominated for the Art Fund Prize for 2012. This is a prize of £100k presented to a museum or gallery which has stimulated excellence and increased public appreciation and enjoyment.

The winner is not chosen by vote but a selection of the comments submitted on the website is passed to the judges before they make their choice. The quality and number of comments could therefore be a key influence on the final outcome.

Watts Gallery is in a contest which in footballing terms is a brilliant non-league side (with a fantastic manager) coming up against Championship or Premier League opposition. Last year's winner was the British Museum and other shortlisted finalists this year include: Bletchley Park, The National Galleries of Scotland and The Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Gallery.

We should all want to support Watts Gallery for a number of reasons:

- It is a shining example of what is best in Surrey – if you have not visited since the reopening it is a magnificent restoration of a unique collection at the place where one of Britain's greatest artists worked. This work was supported by Surrey County Council.
- It has secured Government Indemnity status which means that it can borrow from national collections without paying for insurance. This will enable our residents to see the highest quality art without travelling to London or further afield.
- It is actively engaged with the community – there is an artist in residence and they host visits from schools, prisoners and other groups who are encouraged not just to look but get involved in creating their own art.
- There are over 300 dedicated volunteers involved to ensure the gallery is open for visitors – an excellent example of the big society.
- It offers apprenticeships in curatorial, marketing, pottery and estate management skills. This has been a difficult career choice due to the lack of opportunities.
- It provides employment to local people in a number of areas including the fantastic tea shop which is soon to be increased in size to cope with demand.

Over 40,000 visitors have come to the Gallery in the last 9 months and it is estimated that another 120,000 visited the tea shop, the cemetery chapel and other businesses. These visitors bring benefits to Surrey as they visit other attractions and also spend money in the county. The reopened pub in Compton has benefitted hugely from passing trade.

Finally if Watts Gallery wins this prestigious and valuable prize they will put it towards the huge cost of securing Limnerlease, the large property adjacent to the Gallery which was where Watts lived and worked. This will help fulfil their exciting plans to increase the amount of teaching and community involvement in the gallery.

There is much more I could add but two minutes is not very long! I hope you will all now find time to visit the website – follow the link and offer your support to Watts Gallery for the Arts Fund Prize 2012.

**Simon Gimson
Local Member for Shalford**