Minister Opens Waitrose's State of the Art dot.com Distribution Centre in Coulsdon

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The Rt Hon Anna Soubry MP, Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise, has formally opened Waitrose's new state of the art dot.com fulfilment centre.

When at full capacity, the multi-million pound centre, which extends over seven acres in Ullswater Crescent, will fulfil 20,000 orders a week or over 1 million orders a year for Waitrose customers living within the M25. It will allow the supermarket to build its online capacity within the capital by a third.

The facility, which began operating earlier this year, has already created hundreds of jobs for local people with all employees becoming Partners of the John Lewis Partnership. This will rise to approximately 800 when the site is at full capacity.

Among the Waitrose Partners the Minister met is one of the site's team of chefs, Fundador Cangson, who previously worked at the House of Commons as a chef. She was also introduced to Kaleela Harrower, a mother of one, who is able to combine her role as a driver with school runs due to the flexible shift patterns at Coulsdon as well as working dad, Daniel Smith, who is a picker in the warehouse.

During its recruitment for the centre, Waitrose has actively worked with job centres in Croydon and Redhill to offer jobs to those who were previously unemployed, including local young people. This has helped ensure that nearly 20 per cent of the workforce is under the age of 25.

Waitrose has also joined forces with the Shaw Trust to get people with disabilities into employment and work on practical solutions to help them lead fulfilling working lives. For example, one of the delivery drivers, who is profoundly deaf, is able to play a recorded message to alert customers in flats that their delivery has arrived.

Long term career progression is one of Waitrose's key priorities for its Partners at Coulsdon. For example, it runs an apprenticeship scheme for young people. It also operates a 'Warehouse to Wheels' programme in partnership with the Waitrose Regional Distribution Centre at Aylesford to help warehouse pickers progress to being drivers. The Minister met Stuart McDowall who has been promoted to Team Leader since the centre opened.

Waitrose works closely with smaller local and regional suppliers to identify unique products for its customers to enjoy. Camden Hells lager is stocked at the Centre. Camden Town Brewery, who started supplying Waitrose with the craft lager on a small scale in 2013, have grown their sales at 103% year on year. Jasper Cuppaidge, Founder and CEO of the Brewery, joined the opening celebration this morning.

Business Minister, Anna Soubry, said;

"*This new distribution centre will create 500 new jobs in Coulsdon and I'm pleased it will also offer apprenticeship opportunities. It's a boost for consumers and for the local economy."*

Andy Kirby, Manager of the Centre, said:

"Our investment in this state of the art centre will allow us to build our online business while creating career opportunities for local people.

"We're delighted that the Minister has joined us to celebrate this exciting development for our business."

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