



Mole Valley Conservative Association's Newsletter

Issue 44; January 2011

Welcoming Note

Welcome to the January issue of the Mole Valley Conservative Association's Newsletter.

To unsubscribe to this newsletter, please contact us through the website 'Contact us' page with a subject line of 'unsubscribe'.

Our aim is to provide you with a monthly update on the work of the Conservative Association and your elected representatives. We would value your feedback or comments.

We hope you enjoy reading the January issue.

A word from the Chair

Cuts – not an option – a necessity!



The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) figures for the last quarter of 2010 indicated a fall of 0.5%. The inflation rate is above 3% yet again but the Governor of the Bank of England assures us that it is only really ½% that is “our” own fault; 3% is the fault of jonny foreigner in the guise of energy costs, food costs and raw material (including fabric) costs.

As we sit back at home and contemplate where we make personal savings let us hope there is no slip up in the pursuit of savings in the public sector. The picture of unused Nimrod aircraft being destroyed illustrates only too vividly the real cost of cuts to the security of the UK, but to then have to wonder how long we have to subsidise peripheral activities such as theatres, art galleries and state playing fields when all these should be in the private sector. It is more important to ensure we have adequate facilities for the infirm and the elderly than to ponder to the whims of high profile stars of stage, screen and athletics.

The sooner Mr. Pickles can bring about a restructuring of local government the better it will be. The efficiencies to be achieved by bringing Surrey Local Government under either one unit, the County Council with full authority over not only the Police, but also all the duties performed by District or Borough authorities, the better. If this is not to be the way forward then let the County Council be abolished – sell the Kingston offices for housing development – and have four unitary Boroughs with full powers. These units would each have some 215,000 electors and would be able to provide a full range of front line services – including weekly bin collections – in a more competitive environment. There could be considerable savings in the hierarchy of management and, of course, only eight chief executives would be needed instead of twelve.

Why should any large retail operator be prepared to invest in development at the moment? The business rates increase for next April is to be based on the retail price index for September 2010, which was in excess of 4%. The methodology for calculating the business rates for 2011/12 could add some 20% to retailer's rates bills from April. With the restructuring of local authorities, this



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might be avoided. The status quo will lead to smaller margins for retailers or higher costs for consumers and as the retail sector is a major employer, this cannot be good. With people thinking twice before buying non-essential items then any further disincentives will not help to restore the growth in the private sector we all require. For councils (not Mole Valley District Council) to even consider increasing car parking charges is yet another blinkered approach – cuts must be made. Do not price drivers away from the shops or we will have a further deterioration in GDP.

The Euro crisis has not gone away but the fact that much of the Euro 1.5billion bond recently issued by Portugal was purchased by China should not be assumed to be a 'philanthropic act' but has, obviously, got a commercial angle. If this largesse extends to Spain then perhaps that country will continue to be able to cope with a million empty homes and 20% unemployment.

To be Chancellor is not, at present, an easy task and to have the double talking, double dealing Ed Balls as your shadow must be very trying. I hope some of the problems I have mentioned will be addressed in 2011, particularly the local authority restructuring and the banks can find credit worthy small business borrowers to use the extra £20billion of unused capacity.

Mr Colin Crispin
Chairman, Mole Valley Conservative Association
January 2011

News from the House of Commons

The Localism Bill debated in the 2nd Reading



The Localism Bill had its Second Reading in the House of Commons on Monday 17th January. This Bill will devolve greater powers to Councils and neighbourhoods and give local communities more control over housing and planning.

I really welcome this Bill, which has been a long time coming and I am delighted that the Bill, once enacted, will go a long way towards freeing councils to think and act for themselves according to local needs.

The provisions relating to councils include:

- giving councils a general power of competence;
- allowing councils to choose to return to the committee system of governance and allowing for referendums for elected mayors in certain authorities;
- abolishing the Standards Board regime and the model code of conduct, and introducing local accountability and a criminal offence of deliberate failure to declare a personal interest in a matter;



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- giving residents the power to instigate local referendums on any local issue and the power to veto excessive council tax increases;
- allowing councils more discretion over business rate relief;
- providing new powers to help save local facilities and services threatened with closure, and giving voluntary and community groups the right to challenge local authorities over their services.

The housing provisions will

- abolish the requirement to have a Home Improvement Pack;
- reform the Housing Revenue Account system;
- provide for a new form of flexible tenure for social housing tenants;
- allow local authorities to discharge their duties to homeless people by using private rented accommodation;
- give local authorities the power to limit who can apply for social housing within their areas;
- abolish the Tenant Services Authority and provides for a transfer of functions to the Homes and Communities Agency;
- amend the way in which a social tenant can make a complaint about their landlord;
- improve the ability of social tenants to move to different areas.

The planning and regeneration provisions will

- abolish Regional Spatial Strategies;
- abolish the Infrastructure Planning Commission and return to a position where the Secretary of State takes the final decision on major infrastructure proposals of national importance;
- amend the Community Infrastructure Levy, which allows councils to charge developers to pay for infrastructure. Some of the revenue will be available for the local community;
- provide for neighbourhood plans, which would be approved if they received 50% of the votes cast in a referendum;
- provide for neighbourhood development orders to allow communities to approve development without requiring normal planning consent;
- give new housing and regeneration powers to the Greater London Authority, while abolishing the London Development Agency.

In his speech to introduce the Bill to its Second Reading the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the Rt. Hon Eric Pickles MP said:

"The Localism Bill will herald a ground-breaking shift in power to councils and communities overturning decades of central government control and starting a new era of people power.

It is the centrepiece of what this Government is trying to do to fundamentally shake up the balance of power in this country. For too long, everything has been controlled from the



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centre - and look where it's got us. Central government has kept local government on a tight leash, strangling the life out of councils in the belief that bureaucrats know best.

By getting out of the way and letting councils and communities run their own affairs we can restore civic pride, democratic accountability and economic growth - and build a stronger, fairer Britain. It's the end of the era of big government: laying the foundations for the Big Society."

The Bill removes the layers of bureaucracy, hundreds upon hundreds of targets and the control of minutiae. It proposes the removal of further expensive central Government systems of data collection, targets and inspections following the earlier removal of comprehensive area assessments, local area agreements and the Audit Commission – I could go on. At last, we have a move towards diversity in the supply of public services, which has already been taken on positively in Surrey by councils, including the county and parish councils, by councillors and by residents groups.

I hope that the Government are taking radical measures to remove the Labour Government-imposed obstacles to fair, competitive tendering. Whether the service is provided in-house or by a private franchise, a properly drawn-up contract, properly managed, enables better services to be provided at less cost, which is increasingly important at this time. Tendering must be fair and effective and the obstacles must be removed.

It is a great relief to councils to be rid of regional strategies, with their millions of words and tonnes of documents. At last, local councils will again be making local planning decisions. Councillors will be able to have opinions without risking the accusation of bias and being unable to act.

Moves on retrospective planning permissions will be welcomed, particularly in Mole Valley, where we are plagued by Travellers abusing planning legislation. To be fair, many Travellers in my area are law-abiding people who fit in with our communities. A few are not. The claim by those few that they are a special racial minority and therefore apparently beyond planning laws is sickening. The cost to my local planning authorities of a constant flow of actions from those few individuals is notorious and outrageous.

I am delighted that councils will be able to return to the old committee system if they wish. For many councillors, it will mean that they will be able to have a say in decisions rather than feeling left on the sideline.

I shall watch the move for mayors with agnostic interest. Success will depend on the appearance of strong characters to take on the task. They are around and always have been. I recall some from my days in local government, some of whom were good for their local areas and some of whom were not. They include David Bookbinder, Shirley Porter, Peter Bowness and, of course, two Members of this House from Sheffield, one of whom has just left the Chamber, the other of whom is still here.



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For me and many Councils, the Bill's enactment will be a great start for local people, returning local government to Councils and concerned local people. It is a huge and positive start, but Councils need to act fast to use the opportunities it presents; they should be acting now in readiness for when the Bill becomes an Act.

Sir Paul Beresford
Member of Parliament for Mole Valley

Report from Surrey County Council County Council Budget Plans Underway



Now that the Christmas and New Year festivities are over, January has seen us get back to County Hall and drill down into the budget for 2011 to 2012. The Government set out a draft settlement in late December last year for its local authority grant which covers about 5% of the County Council's budget (The vast majority of the County's income comes directly from the council tax payer in Surrey). This of course does not include the devolved budget to schools which is dealt with separately.

The County Council correctly anticipated a tough settlement (£180million targeted efficiencies and service reductions over the next four years) and in addition to the £6million reduction announced by the government last summer, we now know that we will lose 14.3% of our formula grant in 2011/12 and 2012/13 – a total of £41 million plus some previously specified and area based grants of £10 million from this year on.

However, at the end of November 2010, the County was on target to over achieve its target of savings for 2010/2011 of £66million by an additional £1million.

This will have repercussions for us all and inevitably there will be redundancies at County Hall and cut backs on services. Discussions are taking place across the County already about the ability of the voluntary sector to step in and take on more when they too are receiving grant reductions as well, so it looks as though the new Localism Bill may be the tool to give powers to community groups and Councils to take on assets and services previously delivered by the larger Local Authorities.

Discussions are going on in every community about this, whether they will want to do it? Will there be the resources to do it? Will there be people in the community with the time and ability to take this on? It's really important that we all get involved in this debate over the big society and re-establish the role of government versus our individual and collective local responsibilities. My husband was astonished to receive a phone call from a local resident during the snow last year requesting the council clear their driveway, he asked them whether they were unable to physically manage to do it themselves, but they said no they were just too busy and they expected the council to do it as they paid their council tax.



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Some might say that Surrey is better placed than most in having Parish Councils and residents associations with volunteers already providing valuable local services and that the reduction in government grant has hit Surrey least as it had such a small amount of this grant in the first place. But this will be a huge challenge to all of us, and we are not going to find it easy.

It is really important that we Conservatives get involved in this debate and support our community groups in their efforts. The County has already agreed a policy for transferring assets to community groups and has set out how it wants to work in partnership with local people to devolve powers and resources to get a better deal where possible.

We are paying the price for the proliferation of the last Labour Government, and must regain responsibility for our lives and of others around us.

All is not totally bleak, the coalition Conservative led Government do seem to have addressed the grossly unfair and bias policy of resource equalisation in their grant funding and in capital grant at least after having received zero for the last few years of the Labour Government. £22 million has been made available to Surrey for Transport and Highways plus capital maintenance grants for schools of £18million.

The Conservative County Council Group will continue to spend the next couple of weeks at County hall setting out the budget in more detail and it will come to our Council meeting on the 8th February for debate and approval.

County Councillor Helyn Clack
Member for Dorking Rural

Report from Mole Valley District Council

Latest News from Mole Valley

On-Street Parking Charges from Surrey County Council



With Surrey County Council proposing charges to park in local streets – and our opponents not losing anytime in simply blaming Conservatives for them - you might be wondering what we are doing to help our residents and business community, and what we can all tell our residents we as the Executive Group have been doing.

We have submitted a Motion which will go to Full Council:



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On-Street Car Parking Charges Motion

Mole Valley District Council recognises the need to balance what may be the competing ideals of generating income for Councils in order to rectify the financial problems made worse by historic National Government spending, promoting the use of sustainable forms of transport and at the same time supporting local businesses and encouraging residents to use local shopping facilities.

We note that Surrey County Council has stated that they intend to introduce on-street car parking charges in towns and villages across Mole Valley, after a short period of consultation. We fear that this could have adverse impacts on our local residents, businesses and simply encourage shoppers to drive further to out of town facilities where parking is free, to the detriment of the local economy and the environment.

This Council calls upon Surrey County Council to

- (1) Undertake - either directly or via the Local Committee - a full consultation with residents, the business community and environmental groups to be able to fully take their views on board in any decision making process;
- (2) Reveal the exact shortfall in costs that apply to Mole Valley;
- (3) Consider that, as part of the Local Committee pilot scheme in which Street Scene is a key work strand, give the Mole Valley Local Committee the freedom and maximum opportunity for flexibility in helping the County Council to find and achieve the required level of savings, whilst supporting residents and businesses in accordance with our mutual priorities, thereby truly enacting Localism – a philosophy shared by both authorities.

Proposed by

Cllr Chris Hunt – Portfolio Holder for Partnerships

Seconded by

David Howell – Leader of the Independent Group

This is a necessary step as it suggests working together to find an alternative, rather than simply moaning or blaming the other Council. Surrey County Council proposes introducing charges in November in Mole Valley, so there is time to look for alternatives.

Cllr Chris Hunt

Ashted Village Ward, Mole Valley District Council

Mole Valley Conservative Councillors new Communications Officer



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Report from Guildford Borough Council



Guildford Borough Council has sent a clear signal that the new entertainment venue will soon be open for business by revealing the new name for the first time – G Live.

Progress with the construction of G Live continues apace, with the outside of the building now complete. Fit out work is now under way inside with the aim of opening the venue to the public in September, albeit with an official opening a few weeks later. The venue's operator, HQ Theatres is now working on the autumn line-up and is confident of attracting some big names to the centre.

Guildford has recently updated its Housing Strategy, which covers our aspirations for affordable housing, whether for rent or shared ownership. Sadly, in the current climate, it is proving increasingly challenging to provide the amount of affordable homes needed in the Guildford Borough area, as developers are not building out large sites (where around a third of the houses built are reserved for affordable housing) and grant funding from the Homes and Communities Agency, which supports the development of affordable housing sites, has all but dried up. As a consequence, Guildford, like many other local authorities in the area, is failing to hit its affordable housing targets – a sad situation with a housing waiting list of over 3,500. We continue to look for new ways to provide the homes for people who are unable to afford to buy.

Cllr Andrew French
Deputy Leader, Guildford Borough Council

Feature Article

The Alternative Vote System



The Parliamentary voting System and Constituencies Bill was introduced to the House of Commons on the 22nd July 2010. The Bill makes provision for the next general election to be fought under the Alternative Vote system, provided that the change is endorsed in a referendum to be held on 5th May 2011. The coalition agreement makes clear that despite bringing forward a referendum, this will not prejudice the position parties take during the referendum campaign.

The Bill provides for the introduction of AV to be linked with the proposed reduction of the size of the House of Commons to 600. Until the necessary boundary changes have been made, AV cannot be introduced. However, the boundary changes take effect, whatever the result of the referendum.



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The form of AV proposed for Parliamentary elections in the UK allows voters to express a preference for as many or as few candidates as they wish. Below is an outline of the UK's version of AV:

Summary

Voters fill in a ballot paper by marking their ballot paper 1,2,3 etc against their most preferred individual candidates in a single member seat. Winning candidates must get more than 50% of the votes as the second and later preferences of the least successful candidates are counted in turn.

Example:

Three parties stand for election – Party A, Party B and Party C. At the polling booth, voters list each party in order of preference. On election day, 120 people turn-out to cast their vote. The votes are counted and tallied as follows (third preferences have been omitted for the sake of simplicity):

42 voters 17 voters 10 voters 51 voters
1st preference Party B Party A Party A Party C
2nd preference Party A Party B Party C Party A

The first preferences are counted and the results are:

Party A = 27, Party B = 42, Party C = 51

No candidate has the 61 votes needed to win an outright majority. Party A has the fewest votes, so is eliminated. The votes of those who put Party A as their first preference are then re-distributed to their second preference nominations. In this example, 17 votes are transferred to Party B and 10 votes are transferred to Party C. After this process, the new result is:

Party B = 59, Party C = 61

The Labour Government's review of voting systems in the UK (2008)

If AV is introduced, this will be another new electoral system since 1997 to be used in the UK: the Single Transferable Vote system, the Additional Member system, the Closed Party List system and the Supplementary Vote system have already been introduced since then.

Despite the fact that it rejected AV as an alternative to the First Past the Post system, according to The Jenkins Commission (October 1998) it met several of their four criteria. They argued that it would:

- fully maintain the link between MPs and a single geographical constituency;



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- it would increase voter choice as it would enable voters to express their second and sometimes third or further preferences;
- there is not the slightest reason to think that AV would reduce the stability of government; it might indeed lead to larger parliamentary majorities;
- AV would involve no change of constituency boundaries and could therefore be implemented from the moment that Parliament accepted a positive vote in a referendum;
- Also virtually ensure that each MP commanded at least a majority consent within his constituency.

However, I am absolutely adamantly opposed to the AV method of voting. There are many arguments against the replacement of FPTP with AV:

AV creates unfair elections: AV breaks the principle of one person one vote, because supporters of fringe parties end up having their vote counted several times while supporters of mainstream parties are likely to only have their vote counted once. It is possible under AV that the candidate that comes in third place could end up winning. It is unfair that the voting system can determine who is the best candidate, rather than the voters. Our current well-practiced voting system produces clear results and each vote is equal. One person, one vote is the fairest way to elect an MP and the most democratic way to choose a government. I dispute the claim that AV produces fairer votes.

AV is complicated: FPTP is simple in that each person votes for the candidate they support and the candidate with the most votes is declared the winner. To demonstrate its unpopularity, only three countries use the complicated system: Australia, Fiji and Papua New Guinea – and Australia has compulsory voting to make sure people turn up. A recent poll showed 60% of Australians wanted to return to the British First-Past-the-Post system. FPTP on the other hand is the most widely used system in the world; over 2.4 billion people use it in fifty countries such as the USA, Canada and India.

AV is expensive: It would be expensive to change our voting system as it would be necessary to educate voters about AV and install new voting machines. Councils would also have to spend more time and money on vote counting, which would increase council tax.

FPTP creates strong governments: Our present voting system constructs strong, accountable governments and means that coalitions are less common, with no private deals by politicians behind the scenes. It is also a system that is most likely to enable voters to eject a failed government.

FPTP excludes extremist parties: Parties such as the BNP have tried and failed to gain election seats because there is never enough support in a single constituency to elect one of their candidates.

The Coalition's main concern at the moment, however, is to ensure that The Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill clears its House of Lords stages by 16th February so that the referendum on replacing FPTP with AV can take place on 5th May. Labour MPs have been



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filibustering the Bill - largely because they object to the reduction in the number of MPs and the way it will favour the Conservatives.

By the morning of Tuesday 25th January, Peers had already spent more than 98 hours debating the bill, including a two-day second reading in November and a 21-hour-all-night sitting on the 17th January. The Committee stage will continue from Monday 31st January when further amendments will be discussed.

The battle to keep first-past-the-post is certainly not going to be easy. A ComRes poll for the Independent on Sunday 16th January gave a 36% to 30% lead for AV but that leaves out many who are undecided. The ComRes numbers contrast with YouGov which, earlier that week, gave FPTP a 9% advantage.

The Tory leadership is solidly behind keeping the present voting system and it seems many Labour MPs are on the same side as the Conservatives. During the Christmas holidays, the cross-party NO to AV campaign announced the names of over 100 Labour MPs – almost half of the Parliamentary Labour Party – who will be voting no to the Alternative Vote at the referendum in May.

This impressive show of support for a 'no' vote from Labour brings together senior figures from all sides of the party and plenty of its new generation, including many MPs elected for the first time in 2010.

To register to vote in the referendum, or to find out if you are registered, go to:
<http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/>



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National news in brief

Modernising the NHS

Andrew Lansley, Secretary of State for Health, published the Health and Social Care Bill on 19.01.11.

It will modernise the NHS by:

- Cutting managers, waste and bureaucracy.
- Giving control over NHS services to frontline doctors and nurses.
- Giving local communities powers to stop forced and unwanted closures.
- Injecting real democratic legitimacy into the NHS.
- Focussing the NHS on the results it actually delivers for patients.

“This legislation will deliver changes that will improve outcomes for patients and save the NHS £1.7billion every year – money that will be reinvested into services for patients”.

GDP growth worse than expected

ONS announced on 25.01.11 that GDP growth in the fourth quarter of 2010 was worse than expected due to severe weather at the end of the year.

The Chancellor admitted the figures were disappointing. He said that the weather had “clearly had a much bigger impact on the economy than anyone forecast. It’s notable that sectors of the economy that are less affected by the poor weather, such as manufacturing, continue to perform strongly, helping to rebalance our economy. We will not be blown off course by bad weather”.

School reform gaining momentum as number of academies doubles

The number of academies in England has doubled since the General Election: 407

academies have opened and 11% of all secondary schools in England are now academies.

Since September 2010, one school a day has become an academy making a total of 204, of which 136 were schools which will now use their academy freedoms to support weaker schools. 68 were weaker schools that have been granted academy status and new sponsors to help them turn round underperformance.

Under Labour it took four years to open the first 27 academies.

Michael Gove said, “Schools are taking up our offer to become academies because they recognise the huge benefits of being an academy.”

New programme to offer young people work experience

Employment Minister, Chris Grayling has announced a programme to give young people a chance of extended work experience in response to the problem of workless households.

Young people will be able to partake in work experience for up to 8 weeks without losing their benefits, which will improve their CV and provide value to the employer.

More than 250 000 young people grow up in homes where no one has ever worked and 600 000 young people under the age of 24 have never worked since leaving education.

Grayling said, “We have a big challenge ahead of us, but tackling youth unemployment is crucial for the future of our county and our labour market.”



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Local news in brief

Tesco admit they are no closer to resolving car park issue with Council

Tesco's have announced that they have so far been unable to resolve the car park issue with Mole Valley District Council.

Tesco's had been granted planning permission but only on the condition that no development could begin until the Council confirmed a new venue for the 74 long-term spaces currently in Ashted Peace Memorial Hall car park.

This has given new hope to campaigners who are against the development. They have already handed over a petition containing more than 6000 people's signatures to MVDC.

Waitrose enters race to become Dorking's new major supermarket

Waitrose has proposed a redevelopment of its store at the junction of South Street and Junction Road, which would create 100 new jobs for the town and see the store grow from 9000 sq ft to 25 000 sq ft and the car parking spaces increase from 80 to 215.

The announcement comes after Mole Valley District Council's decision to choose Morrisons as its favourite option of four bidders for a site in Station Road, another of the suggested sites for a Dorking supermarket.

The Dorking SOS, a campaign group which opposes supermarket expansion, is preparing to re-launch.

Cuts to Local Housing Allowance

Mole Valley tenants will be affected by cuts to their Local Housing Allowance, and could lose up to £46 a week.

The Council is concerned that some tenants may not be aware of this and so are contacting those affected as well as private sector landlords.

Salt stock running low

Surrey County Council has announced that around 10 000 tonnes of the Council's 13 000 tonnes of salt were used in December 2010.

They are expecting a delivery of 2000 tonnes in a few weeks but in order to preserve its stock only A-roads and key hospital routes will be treated.

Pay and Display car parking charges to be introduced in town centres

Charges of between 60p & £1.40/hr are to be introduced in on-street parking bays that are currently free.

Surrey County Council launched a consultation period on Wednesday which recommends the new system and that it be introduced in some areas by as early as May.

The Council promises that part of the profit made from the scheme will be reinvested into improving roads in the area where the money came from.

Local Elections

Local Elections will be held on May 5th this year and those wishing to vote must be registered on the electoral roll.

Anyone wishing to use a postal vote must apply at least 10 days before the election.

More information available if you phone 01306 879 134 or email:

electoral.registration@molevalley.gov.uk