



Mole Valley Conservative Association's Newsletter

Issue 2; April 2007

Welcoming note

Welcome to the second publication of the new Mole Valley Conservative Association's Newsletter. We published our first issue at the start of March on our new website: www.mvca.co.uk. This latest edition is the first to be emailed to Mole Valley Conservative members and those of you who have signed up to our mailing list through our website. 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.

On other business, most of you should now have received Sir Paul Beresford's latest edition of Westminster Report. As we need to know whether the distribution has reached all areas of Mole Valley, please contact us through our contact us page when you have received yours.

We hope you enjoy the April edition.

The Editing Team

A word from the chair

Council elections on the horizon



On May 3rd both Mole Valley District and Guildford Borough Councils have local elections. Guildford Borough Council has a full election of members, including nine Conservative Candidates who will be hoping to represent Wards from within the Mole Valley Parliamentary Constituency. On the same day, thirteen seats within Mole Valley District Council will be contested with thirteen Conservative Candidates hoping to be returned as Councillors.

The financial health of both the Mole Valley District Council and of the Guildford Borough Council has been maintained and is reflected in the very modest increase in the council tax. The modest increases have been achieved despite the 2006 Government Grant per person living in Surrey being set at £153.00, as against an average for England of £426.00 and, for example, a grant of £719.00 per person in Manchester. The figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland would only lead to a significant increase in the blood pressure of the burgesses of Mole Valley. Unlike Wales we are not seeing free NHS prescriptions but, as ever, the English are almost certainly funding these.

The local elections are being fought against a backdrop of public cynicism towards most things political. The Government have been found out for their rape of the pensions industry, their attack on share ISAs, the intended abolition of the 10% tax band (therefore penalising very low earners or those who work part-time or take holiday jobs). The trebling of the cost of the 2012 Olympics – two new aircraft carriers could be built for the same cost, but as usual the defence of the realm and the welfare of the armed forces seems to be secondary.

The Liberal Democrats will be mounting the challenge to the Conservative Party, trying to be all things to all people – and again being in Surrey is likely to be a financial burden for all, should the Liberal Democrats



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succeed in gaining control of either Guildford or Mole Valley. The experiment of using a postal vote in Guildford, as happened four years ago, which resulted in a superb percentage vote, is not being repeated. The polling stations will be open from 7am until 10pm, so let us hope that people will respond to the appeal of David Cameron and support the Conservative Party.

The very real threat of England having to accept a new rating system based on an annual percentage of the value of property is such that rates would soar in the South of England – and the monies would be shipped to safe Labour seats. I would urge all of you to work and vote for a Conservative victory in both authorities on May 3rd.

Mr Colin Crispin, Chairman

News in the House

Pension raids and Lib Dem taxes



After the expectations of a Prime Ministerial bid, Brown's budget came as a relative damp squib. At least everybody is accustomed to listening to the rhetoric of his traditional budget speech, where he appears to give a little, but on a subsequent examination of the small print, it becomes obvious the areas he is also taking.

Overshadowing the Budget was the recent publication of the official advice given to Gordon Brown in 1997 prior to his big annual raid of £5 billion (and rising) on pension funds. It has taken a long time for the effect of this to sink through to pension holders especially those who are some time off retirement. Of course it will be the poorest who are hardest hit as they are least able to step up their pension contributions to offset the Brown induced reductions in their final pension payments. I personally would like to persuade the next Conservative government to reverse this tax, but clearly with such huge sums involved and the possibility of more negative changes before the next election, the Conservative Party would be foolish to make any rash promises now. Indeed, many people forget that the Prime Minister – presumably soon to be Gordon Brown – does not have to call an election until mid 2010!

In other news, Sir Menzies Campbell did not get publicity for his two potentially horrific announcements at the Liberal Democrat Spring Conference last month. The first was that they would wish to impose an annual tax on the valuation of any houses over £1 million. This tax would be in addition to the normal Council Tax. Because of the astronomical rise in property valuations in Mole Valley over the last few years many residents would be in for a shock. In particular, those who either inherited their home or bought the property many years ago at a relatively low cost would be caught by the above inflation annual rise in valuation. Perhaps an even greater percentage of Mole Valley homes are worth £700,000 plus. As property prices locally are rising at about 5% per annum they would be hit by such a new tax in a new budget after a 2010 election.

Of course, any such proposed taxes would rely on the Lib Dems being in power and this is generally considered a low-risk outcome. However don't rule out the option as the second dreadful announcement was that the Lib Dems would be prepared to join Labour in forming a Government if the next election resulted in a hung Parliament! This means a vote for the Liberals actually means a vote for Labour and even higher taxation.

Sir Paul Beresford, MP



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Report from Surrey County Council

Improving our roads



After much effort, I was extremely pleased when Surrey County Council acknowledged the prime importance of the condition of Surrey's roads by establishing a new dedicated service to look after them – the Surrey Highways Service. The announcement is contained within a comprehensive report outlining the county's plans for 2007-08 details how more than £52 million will be spent on the highways over the coming year.

The highways are of vital importance to the Council and Surrey residents that we are separating them from all the other transport issues to give them our full attention. We have also been listening to the public and are responding by putting into our budget for next year the things they want to see happening.

One example of this responsiveness is the focus on vehicle activated signs (VAS). It is well known that these signs are a popular and successful means of ensuring safety on our roads. They are less intrusive than physical obstacles like traffic humps, and rely on reminding drivers about the speed limits rather than prosecuting them. There has previously not been enough in the budget to meet the demand for signs, but this year, boosted by a generous donation from the High Sheriff of Surrey, Adrian White, a major initiative will see around 100 locations benefiting from VASs.

£16 million will be spent on Potholes, the perennial bugbear, and other road defects as part of the overall maintenance programme. A further £1.4 million will be allocated to footpath improvements. The visual appearance of the highways is not forgotten either, with about £1.3 million to be spent on grass cutting and weed treatment, and looking after trees and hedges.

Another move towards a more responsive and customer focused Highways Service is the innovative introduction of Community Highways Officers (CHOs). The role builds on the existing highways steward, but with increased emphasis on local engagement. CHOs will work alongside county councillors, parish councils, residents associations and members of the public to identify what needs doing and increase the capacity to get it done.

The flooding and drainage issues that have worsened with the effects of climate change are addressed with a number of measures including spending an extra £1 million above last year's expenditure. There will be more gully cleaning and jetting, as well as more frequent use of Vactor units, the extra strength jetting machine used for particularly problematic blockages.

The Council has also responded to residents' concerns over damaged street lights and faulty illuminated signs. In due course it is anticipated that government funding will support a replacement and maintenance programme, but in the short term, just over £7 million is being allocated to maintenance and replacement.

This is not just about extra money, it is also about new ways of working. We will be focussing more on our residents and responding to their needs, with more emphasis on local engagement. In addition stronger management of the highways contract will ensure that we are getting the best value for money, and tighter monitoring of performance and accountability will deliver the best possible service to our residents.

Mrs Helyn Clack, County Councillor



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Report from Guildford Borough Council

Election campaign: defending our strong record

Our election campaign is currently in full swing in Guildford ahead of the elections on 3 May. We have a full slate of 48 candidates and we are optimistic of making further gains to increase our majority from the current level of two seats.

We believe that we are defending a strong record since we took control of the council in 2003 on a manifesto pledge of Putting Frontline Services First. Since then, our council tax increases have been much lower than the Liberal Democrats achieved over the previous four years, culminating in a 1.95% increase this year.

But this hasn't been at the expense of services to local residents. Recyclables are now collected weekly and we have added cardboard, plastics and textiles to the collection service during our term of office. We also introduced a Borough-wide garden waste collection. As a consequence, recycling has doubled over the past four years. Unlike other authorities, we also remain determined to maintain a weekly black sack rubbish collection.

We have also improved other services. We have speeded up the collection of rubbish from fly tipping and abandoned cars and we have invested more resources in street cleaning. For example, we have increased the frequency of street cleaning in the town and rural areas and we now clean the A3 central reservation (which hadn't been done for years).

The provision of a new Civic Hall has proved more difficult. Soon after we took office, we discovered that the hall required urgent expenditure of at least £85,000 to keep it open. This was on top of the existing annual subsidy in excess of £400,000. We took the decision to close the building in the knowledge that we were going to replace it with a new one. Although a legal challenge has delayed that process, we have now commenced the early stages of the redevelopment process. Planning permission is being sought, the site has been covered by hoardings ready for demolition and we have exciting plans for a new modern building that will provide a top class facility for Borough residents. We are determined to progress with these plans as soon as possible.

In conclusion, we have a record that we are proud of at Guildford and we go into the May elections with high morale.

Cllr Andrew French, Deputy Leader, Guildford Borough Council



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News in brief

Two different surveys, same bleak outlook for NHS dentistry

A year after the new NHS dental contract started, a survey carried out by the market research company Which revealed some fascinating statistics regarding the regional provision of NHS dental care in England, whilst the British Dental Association (BDA) released its findings on whether patients or dentists are better off under the new system. As a qualified dentist, Paul Beresford takes a particular interest in dental issues and patient access to NHS dental treatment. Stark statistics reveal that 95% of respondents to the BDA survey felt less confident about the future of NHS dentistry than two years ago and 85% believe that the new contract has not improved access to NHS dentistry. Similarly, Which? found that only 37% of dentists in England were taking on new NHS patients but this figure dropped as low as 13% in the North West. The BDA are now calling upon the government to take action and look at a "basket of indicators" to effectively manage and monitor individual dentists' efficiency.

Trident vote

Trident was debated in the House of Commons on 14 March with thought-provoking speeches made from members on both sides of the chamber. After six hours of fierce debate, the House divided into 161 Noes and 409 Ayes in favour of taking necessary steps to maintain the UK's minimum strategic nuclear deterrent beyond the life of the existing system and to take further steps towards meeting the UK's disarmament responsibilities. Sir Paul believes that the decision to replace Trident is of paramount importance to our country and welcomes the fact that Parliament voted in favour on this matter.

Village halls questionnaire

The Licensing Act 2003 has had an impact on hiring out premises for events in village halls as there is now a different application system and fee structure. To canvass opinion on the effects of this new law, Sir Paul has sent out a Village Halls Questionnaire to all Mole Valley Village Halls. There has been a good response rate and the findings will soon be published.

Hospital e-petition reminder

Recent press coverage of the 1.8 million who signed an E-Petition against road tax highlighted the government's new website www.number10.gov.uk as a useful channel for public debate. With over 21,000 signatures, the E-Petition to "Save the Royal Surrey County Hospital in Guildford from cuts or closure" is one of the most popular petitions on the website. It would be a tremendous message of protest to the Government and local Strategic Health Authority if you added your names to the campaign by the 2 May 2007 deadline.

Id card scheme showing no sign of slowing down

The Government continues to make progress on a new Identity Card system. The system will force all British citizens to provide details such as their fingerprints, iris scans and even medical records for a national identity database allowing sophisticated hackers access to a wealth of personal information. A senior Microsoft representative has said that the introduction of ID cards may trigger massive identity theft on an unforeseen scale. Adding to the diminishing sense of privacy are new revelations (The Mail, April 1st) of the growing number of surveillance cameras throughout the country capturing thousands of images of people going about their daily business.



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Feature Article

Surrey drivers face prospect of road charges

Sir Paul strongly supports the need to tackle congestion on our roads, not only for our quality of life, but also for businesses that depend on good transport to perform their job. However, Sir Paul is critical of the Government's proposed road charging system, announced last month, which will see motorists paying more per mile to use main roads at peak times. Councils will be able to charge more for the use of roads without any requirement to cut motoring taxes in other areas. Drivers will simply pay more.



Sir Paul said, "The increased cost of using our roads could have a negative impact on local businesses in Mole Valley. Local business that depend on the use of Mole Valley motorways and A-roads such as A25, A24, A3 and M25 will be worst hit and for what? While the Government continues to hike up the price of driving, there is no corresponding improvement in our road network."

Sir Paul is particularly concerned about the impact it will have on Mole Valley's rural communities and he questioned the Government as to whether they will ensure that rural issues are taken into account when decisions are made on any road charging system. The Government's response was vague and not reassuring. The Minister stated, "We are asking local authorities, in preparing proposals for local road pricing schemes, to assess the impacts on all groups so as to inform the scheme design."

Under the new scheme, Britain's estimated 40 million plus motorists will pay an additional £16 billion a year on top of the £47 billion they already pay in road related taxes such as congestion charges and fuel duty. The Government claims that the charges are being brought in to tackle congestion, not increase road taxes. Congestion looks set to get worse and traffic on major roads is likely to double by 2015.

The recent widespread press coverage of nearly 2 million names added to an online E-Petition on the government's new website, in protest of the Prime Minister's plans to introduce road tax and a Big Brother vehicle tracking system, highlighted the public's opposition to these proposals.

While Sir Paul firmly believes in the need for strategies to tackle congestion and carbon emissions, he sees the Government's new road tax scheme as a superficial method to a bigger problem. "I am not opposed to the need for road pricing schemes but when they aren't backed up by evidence that the Government has been using such taxes to improve our roads, I remain sceptical."