



The Molesey News

Issue 25

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HELLO and welcome to this Spring 2017 edition of the Molesey News. I am Steve Bax, the editor, and this is your community newsletter, written, printed and delivered by the Molesey Conservatives (at no cost to the taxpayer).



We have a packed edition for you once again, with the latest on Surrey County Council's proposal to hold a referendum on a 15% rise in council tax to pay for adult social care.

Thankfully it's been called off after assurances were given by the government and we've been getting the low down from council leader David Hodge. See the article over the page.

In January I attended the My Elmbridge open evening at the borough council and learned of the continuing pressures on finances. It was not unexpected therefore to hear that the Residents/LibDem controlled council is putting up its share of council tax by 1.99%, the maximum it is allowed.

What was surprising was that those same councillors have awarded themselves a generous 12.4% rise in their allowances.

That's not something you'll read about in the Molesey Residents Association newsletter, but we have the details here.

That is the same publication which complains of being scrutinised by their political opponents, and no wonder!

Elections

In May there will be fresh elections to Surrey County Council and I am delighted to have been selected as West Molesey's independently-minded Conservative candidate.

For me it's a homecoming. My wife and I bought our first house in Cambridge Road and we raised our family there for eight years. I know the area and its residents very well.

Having been an East Molesey councillor in the past I would love to represent West Molesey this time, and the truth is we badly need some democratic competition again here.

The Residents Association has dominated the political scene for decades and currently holds all of Molesey's council seats - an unhealthy monopoly which does nothing to encourage good governance.

With Surrey County Council's finances in crisis, West Molesey needs a Conservative councillor to secure investment for road repairs and other essential services, which is what I'll do.

Please email me your thoughts on how West Molesey can be improved, or any feedback you have about the newsletter.

Molesey councillors' 12% pay rise!

RESIDENTS Association and Liberal Democrat councillors have voted themselves an outrageous 12.4% pay increase, while putting up charges for Meals on Wheels.

Elmbridge Council's ruling coalition, which is led by Stuart Selleck of the Molesey Residents Association, forced through an inflation-busting rise in their personal allowances at December's Full Council.

The timing was all the more insensitive as at the same meeting, councillors approved a 6% increase in the cost of meals for the elderly and upped the charges for community transport by 13%.

MRA councillors who took part in this shameful raid on the public purse were: Stuart Selleck, Ruby Ahmed, Mike Axton and Ivan Regan. Tony Popham and Victor Eldridge voted against.

No Conservatives voted for the rise, which was branded "indefensible" by Walton Conservative councillor Andrew Kelly. He had proposed a 2% increase in line with the pay rise for officers this year, but his amendment was voted down.

As a result the basic councillor al-



lowance will rise by £547 to £4,942 with effect from May. Special Responsibility Allowances enjoyed by party leaders, cabinet members and committee chairs were adjusted too.

Steve Bax of the Molesey Conservatives said: "At a stroke MRA councillors and their allies added £30,193 to the annual allowances bill, paid for by your taxes.

"They wiped out a significant chunk of the £50,000 yearly savings that were achieved by the last

Conservative administration that Peter Szanto and I served in, when we reduced the number of councillors from 60 to 48. This was also a decision they opposed.

"MRA claims to act in the best interests of Molesey's residents, but just months after taking control of the council we find their councillors feathering their own nests by voting for inflation-busting rises."

Cllr Kelly reminded all councillors that just because an independ-

ent remuneration panel had proposed the generous increases didn't oblige them to accept it, adding the "buck stops" with councillors.

Cllr James Browne, Conservative deputy leader, urged councillors to "think about this council's reputation outside these four walls" - words that went unheeded by 21 RA and Lib Dem councillors.

Cllr Selleck, who will receive £29,715 in total from his roles on Elmbridge and Surrey councils, claimed he had taken a "lot of persuading" to vote for the increase, but decided to because of the "hard work" councillors do. Meanwhile the officers, who do most of the actual work, could never dream of a 12% rise in one year.

One Lib Dem councillor even had the cheek to blame the Conservatives, arguing that such a large increase was only needed because the Tories kept freezing allowances while in power!

STOP PRESS: The Elmbridge cabinet is now recommending that charges be introduced for our tennis courts, including those at Grovelands Rec in West Molesey. Think of it as your contribution to their allowances!

Glenlyn struggling to recruit GPs



RECRUITING and retaining GPs is now a bigger problem for Glenlyn Medical Centre in Molesey than funding, it's owners admit.

In December, our MP Dominic Raab and Steve Bax (pictured) met with practice leading lights Dr Richard Strickland and Dr Ash Kapoor to raise residents' concerns.

During the frank discussion we asked why some patients are having to wait a month to see a doctor and why the ratio of patients to GPs at Molesey Park Road-based Glenlyn vastly exceeds the national average.

The doctors say official figures are misleading, as they don't include patients dealt with over the phone or the work of the practice's non-GPs, the Advanced Nurse Practitioners (ANPs). They say they are providing 94 "sessions" of care per week - a session being a morning or afternoon, which is above NHS England minimum requirements.

Dr Kapoor said 3-4 weeks for a non-urgent appointment is becoming the norm due to a national

shortage of GPs. Most will not commit to full time he said, due to workloads, stress and legal risk.

We asked why do they continue to advertise for new patients when they appear to struggle with existing demand? They said they are legally required to keep the list open. If they got permission to close it, where would new patients go?

There were some encouraging signs. A Duty Admin Doctor role has been created (rotated between senior staff) to do all the paperwork and enable colleagues to see more patients. Prescriptions and lab results are now being turned around within 24 hours.

Having acquired the former Giggs Hill surgery in Thames Ditton, they are seeing 75 urgent cases there each day (with non-urgent or ongoing complaints seen at Molesey).

Following feedback from their new Patient Participation Group they have agreed to have somebody at Molesey to see urgent cases for those who cannot easily travel.

Latest bid to build on Pavilion site fails

WE ARE pleased that the latest attempt to build houses on the open space next to the Pavilion club has been unanimously rejected by Elmbridge Council.

While housing is in short supply in Molesey, the land in Hurst Lane is a special case. It is protected by a Section 106 agreement requiring that it be used only for recreational purposes. Sadly, it has been fenced off by the owners for years.

On 30th January, Elmbridge's planning committee considered an application from Langham Homes to build 42 homes, half of which would be 'affordable', as well as provision for 90 parking spaces, an outdoor gym and children's football pitch.

Local objectors packed the gallery and supported resident Michelle Bains, who gave a passionate defence of Molesey's green lungs



which shape the character of our town. She called on the owners to reopen the site for public use.

The meeting noted there had been 150 letters of objections and Sport England was also opposed.

Conservative councillors joined with Residents Association members to refuse the application on a cross-party basis. They stated that the proposed junior football pitch fell way short of mitigating the loss of an entire 1.97ha recreation site.



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COMMUNITY NEWS

MEZZET restaurant in East Molesey has embraced the bright lights of London after opening a new restaurant at Selfridges in Oxford Street.

The Lebanese eatery in Bridge Road, run by Molesey local Fadi Kesserwany, linked up with Selfridges in October and has so far been rated "excellent" 523 times on the influential TripAdvisor website. Don't forget, you get a free glass of house wine when you visit Mezzet in and show the advert from the *Molesey News*.

RESIDENTS have been curious about the construction work going on at the former snooker hall in Walton Road, West Molesey.

Rumours it will be a supermarket are unfounded: it will be instead be offices and 13 flats. The developer was refused planning permission by Elmbridge but subsequently won consent on appeal.

MOLESEY Library will host a talk from journalist Barbara Fisher on Tuesday 28th February, who will talk about a book she co-authored called Finding Tipperary Mary.

It is a remarkable true story of a woman who tracked down her mother who gave her up for adoption, then nursed her without revealing her true identity.

Tickets for the talk are £5 on the door with proceeds to the Friends of Molesey Library.

MOLESEY Art Society holds its annual spring exhibition from 6th-11th April at its usual venue, St Alban's Primary School in Beauchamp Road, East Molesey.

Local artists will display and sell their paintings, crafts, jewellery, ceramics, glass, woodwork and more. They will be joined by guest artist Frances Jordan.

See www.moleseyartsociety.co.uk for opening times.

TWO warehouses leased by the retailer John Lewis have been bought by Elmbridge Council for a risky £13.81m - largely funded with a loan.

The RA/Lib Dem coalition hopes it will be an additional income stream, but Conservatives are worried about what could happen if the big-name client decides not to renew its lease.

Peter Szanto said: "It breaks the golden rule of investment... don't put all your eggs in one basket. Again, we see that the RA/Liberals can't be trusted with taxpayers' money!"

CAMPAIGNERS looking to prevent Elmbridge Council from building a flagship Sports Hub at Waterside Drive in Walton, scored a victory in January.

The High Court decided the council had not paid significant regard to the greenbelt elements of the site and quashed the planning permission. But councillors have since passed a revised planning permission to put and the project is on track to open in Sept.

THE coalition promised free Saturday parking across all of Elmbridge. It has gone back on this, but will drop the charges at Walton Road in East Molesey, on Saturdays from April.

Molesey Conservatives welcome this providing the council can make it work financially.

Relief as tax referendum is called off

■ Late breakthrough averts potential 14.99% council tax rise, but tough times ahead

WE are pleased to report that Surrey County Council (SCC) has decided not to hold a referendum on raising the council tax by 14.99% to meet the soaring cost of adult social care.

Instead, Surrey councillors meeting in February, approved a lower increase of 4.99% of which three fifths will be ring-fenced for adult social care. This is a relief. Many families would have struggled with a £190 council tax rise, but even the lesser amount is a challenge.

Molesey candidates for County Council, Peter Szanto (East Molesey and Esher) and Steve Bax (West Molesey), recently met with the council leader, David Hodge to discuss the state of the finances.

Mr Hodge said that as a Conservative, he does not increase council tax lightly. However Surrey is caught between a rock and a hard place at present. With residents living longer, the cost of caring for Surrey's elderly is rising by around £24m each year, yet the government has cut the council's revenue support grant by £170m since 2010!

In 2015 Surrey received £116m, last year just £67m, this year £28m and from 2019 onwards Surrey tax-



payers will be expected to contribute £17m to the pot, the equivalent of 3% to the council tax.

Mr Hodge, pictured above right with Steve Bax, confronted his own government publicly over the funding and said: "I was not prepared to agree such an outrageous proposition." He added that ministers accept that Surrey requires £25m a year from the Better Care Fund to help meet its obligations to provide social care. However Surrey is receiving nothing this year or next year, and just £1.5m in 2019!

In addition, £70m a year is re-

quired to provide for residents with learning disabilities: the government has cut this by £32m.

One of the reasons Surrey is so disadvantaged compared to other councils, is a 20-year-old Labour funding formula which allocates money to areas based on levels of social deprivation. Mr Hodge said it is unfairly skewed against more affluent areas like Surrey.

While ministers have assured they will reform the formula, this is not due to happen until 2019/20.

Mr Hodge said he had no choice but to proceed with plans for a

referendum, asking voters to agree a 14.99% rise in the council tax, or authorise the council to make swingeing cuts.

Thankfully the government saw sense and, at the eleventh hour, agreed that Surrey will be a pilot for the new Business Rates Retention in 2018/19. Mr Hodge is confident that this proposal, and greater reassurance on adult social care funding, offers the prospect of more sustainable finances in the future.

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn complained that Surrey had been given a "sweetheart deal" - clearly no support from Labour for our hard-pressed council taxpayers.

However, even with the 4.99% rise this year, Surrey must find additional savings of £123m - a huge sum. In recent years, the Conservative administration has saved £450m, while opposed at every turn by Lib Dem and RA councillors.

Steve and Peter said: "Cllr Hodge told us he 'makes no apologies for standing up for Surrey' and neither do we with respect to our residents in Molesey. If elected our top priorities will be to defend local services, oppose wasteful spending and inflation-busting pay rises for officers or councillors."

Elmbridge must build 9,480 homes

ELMBRIDGE has been told by the government to make preparations for 9,480 new homes (plus offices and retail) to be built in the borough by 2035.

The council is drawing up a new 'Local Plan' to set out where these will go, and has a preferred strategy of releasing three areas of "weakly performing" green belt in Cobham and Long Ditton, rather than accepting high density housing in urban areas.

A public consultation on the options ended on 24th February and



another is likely in the summer. Final adoption will be in 2018/19.

Meanwhile, a fresh application to build 1,024 homes on green belt in Hersham was refused by Elmbridge Council in November.

Molesey mentioned in Parliament

MOLESEY was mentioned in Parliament on 2nd February, when local MP Dominic Raab challenged the Transport Secretary over aircraft noise.

In a House debate on the proposed third runway at Heathrow Airport, Mr Raab stated that residents in some parts of Molesey are subject to intolerable levels of noise.

He said: "For my constituents, it will be absolutely critical to have tangible reassurances, including legally binding limits for noise and



air quality, the independent verification of both of those things, and a change of policy on flight paths from the arbitrary policy of concentration, which blights communities such as Molesey in my constituency, to a fairer policy of dispersal."

Chris Grayling, the Secretary of State and also a Surrey MP, said he was happy to give those assurances. He added that modernising airspace (essentially, using satellite technology to navigate aircraft more precisely)

would result in "less stacking and fuel wastage" and as a result "less emissions". The government favours expanding Heathrow rather than Gatwick, but is carrying out a further public consultation.

Molesey Conservatives have been working closely with Mr Raab over the issue of aircraft noise since Autumn 2014, when we were secured the early suspension of the intolerable airspace trials over Molesey.

Steve Bax chaired Elmbridge Council's Heathrow Task Group while a councillor. It reported back late last year under its new chair, Conservative Cllr Christine Elmer, and recommended that Elmbridge Council opposes Heathrow expansion. This was passed.

Cllr Elmer noted that expansion will mean an additional 250,000 flights and we do not know what the new flight paths will be.

Steve said: "It is pleasing to hear the Secretary of State agrees there should be legally binding noise targets and an independent regulator - we need a reduction in current aircraft noise, a commitment to cut or end night flights; and guaranteed periods of no overflying of Molesey to give respite."

Molesey street lights to be switched off

SURREY County Council is switching off street lights in 133 roads in Molesey from midnight until 5am, starting in February.

It is part of a county-wide policy of 'part-night lighting' to reduce spending by the severely cash-strapped council - it currently pays £3m a year for street lighting.

Town centres and main roads will be exempt from the blackout as well as roads with traffic calming and pedestrian crossings, and those flagged up by Surrey Police as a crime risk if allowed to go dark.

Steve Bax said: "Plunging streets into darkness feels like returning to an era long past. I worry about safety. However, we know that Surrey faces a huge challenge to cut its spending by £123m to balance the books.

"If residents feel there is a strong justification for their road being exempted, and would like us to lobby councillors, please contact Peter Szanto or myself."

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(AML) checks. As part of those checks, ID documents must be verified and authenticated.

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All we would say is that if you about to appoint a solicitor for something, before heading online pop in and see us for a friendly chat. It makes sense on lots of levels.



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