

Norman Cuttings'

'Democratically Yours'



Personal newsletter on the political happenings in Town, Borough and Westminster

February 2003
Issue

♣ Read this bit before throwing away ♣

As an Independent Councillor between the years of 1995 and 1999, I produced a similar newsletter to give you information on what goes on in *our* local government. I also provided a column in that wonderful publication 'Berkhamsted Review' just in case I didn't get round to you and as a fall back, the Internet was used.

(see web page: <http://www.normcall.plus.com/norm>)

In case you missed something, you can access my archive from the same address!

Right, let's get on with the matter in hand!

The National situation

As I write, they have just announced that the South-East is about to have a lot more houses and green belt. The North is going to also have unwanted houses knocked down, more green belt and more replacement houses.

(Please everyone!)

They have also just realised that towns the size of Hemel will need to be built just to accommodate the current level of asylum seekers fleeing the safe haven of Europe - come on, think about it! Tony has announced it will have to be reduced - Hmmm!

To pay for all this, taxes are being increased from April, interest rates reduced to encourage people to borrow more either to improve their homes (increase VAT take) or move (increase stamp duty etc.). At the same time, responsibility for many services are moving from central government down to County and District (Borough) levels. This meets the pledge of both the Labour and Lib-Dems to bring decision making back to the people, however, they both conveniently forget that services have to be paid for, so kept a lot of the money rather than transferring it.

The Borough situation

It really is difficult to see exactly how they have got themselves into the state they are in.

They had to change the decision making process by

order of the government, they had to make a number of decisions on things such as transport, value for money services and the environment.

In typical 'British' style, they lacked any imagination in the process and just did what they were told. The French wouldn't have, would they?

It looks as though they got a few bob to employ consultants (councils cannot think for themselves!!) to decide that the best way to solve the parking 'problem' was to charge for the pleasure of leaving your vehicle on the Queens Highway unattended.

It looks as though they tried to address the value for money service provision themselves and got themselves in a similar mess.

The rubbish collection service is in for major changes in April 2004 when we will be given four containers for various materials (including non-recyclable) to be collected every two weeks. Not only that, but a man will come round to make sure you comply!! In Borehamwood, for example, if the lid is not closed tight down, they do not take it!

The good bit of news is that the Borough Council is only increasing the Council Tax by 6% even though central government funding has been drastically cut.

The Town situation

Out of 15 Councillors, 10 are Lib-dems and 5 are Conservative. The Lib-dems changed the system when they took over (again - in the interests of speeding up decision making), and introduced a system of 'working groups' which somehow do not have a program of meetings (so you can attend), and the agendas together with the minutes are only available if you ask. However, as you do not know when they meet, you do not know when to ask if minutes are available and only the recommendations are reported at the Standing Committee meetings.

Parking & Congestion

The 'consultation exercise' really was a bit of a fiasco.

~~Once again our beloved government issued an edict~~ which meant that local councils had to go through the process of reducing car usage. Grants were made

Money Matters

Around this time of the year, all the local Councils have their 'funding requests' centrally collected by the Borough Council. The largest sum is always the County Council requirement. They are responsible for education, highways, social services, law and order, amongst other things. The Borough Council share is much smaller, but as they are responsible for locally operated facilities such as leisure, planning and refuse collection. The Town Council also has a requirement which, although much smaller, ensures that money is actually raised to be spent on improving the life of residents. For example, the Town Council provides financial support to several Berkhamsted based organisations, part funding of improving British Waterways footpaths, ensuring customers going to Waitrose get a better view of the rear of the High Street shops and, of course, the best Christmas lighting display within the Borough (outside Hemel) by supporting the CVS who actually organise the popular 'switch on' evening.

The reason why your Council Tax has risen so much over the past few years is largely due to central government carrying out its' promise of devolving more power locally. On the other hand, funding has not followed this devolution and coupled with having to meet greatly increased re-cycling standards (without adequate funding, of course) means that local Tax goes up without local representation.

Privatisation or not

Under ideal conditions, we all would like public services to be provided by the public sector. However, in the real world either funding is provided out of local Taxes or we persuade an outside organisation to find a few bob to provide the service to the Councils and recipients satisfaction. In return, the outside organisation gets a contract to carry out a service for a fixed term and fixed price. The advantage to the taxpayer is that the capital costs are spread over a longer period and someone else carries out the day to day to day to day logistics. Advocates of the theory, put forward the argument that private management takes the risk, which ensures everything, is done in the most efficient manner. HmMMMM!

The system has both advantages and disadvantages, but providing the contract is correctly drawn up and supervision adequate, then the PPP, as it is known, benefits everyone.

Pounds, Shillings and Ounces

It now appears that Brussels could overturn any laws made by our national government. Earlier last year, it became apparent that although we are not full members of the Common Market, the affect is such that we are but a short step from being controlled by the un-elected 'commission' whether we want it or not. The Germans are making arrangements with the French to ensure that their own economy does not drag down the value of the Euro any more than necessary.

They already limit the rate of VAT that any British government can impose, our government is adhering to many directives, although being selectively ignored or interpreted by those across the water, frequently to our disadvantage. Even the refugee situation is selective. As you know, the Dublin agreement says refugees have to request asylum in the first country that they arrive in. I am still trying to work out why refugees fleeing in fear of their lives from France and Germany and having to come to the safe haven of Britain. These countries are the very ones that the pro-Europeans would have us join. I will leave you to provide the answers!

Youth facilities

Over the years, young people have got a raw deal from both the Town and Borough Councils, although strictly speaking, the responsibility is that of the County Council.

The Borough Council has allocated £30,000 for young persons facilities in the town however, while Tring get on with it, our Town Council is still messing about trying to organise a spot for a skate boarding area - meanwhile the kids already have found suitable spots including Manor Street, REX steps and the bund by the Hall Park Garage. I seem to recall in my youth that George Street had a very popular area as was the moor and Easts meadow

Young people are our future, and our town is woefully short of things for them to do. This situation has gone on for years and as we enter the 21st century, the Local Councils really must get their act together and bring the sort of activities our young deserve, to the town.

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