

FOCUS



JAN/FEB 2017 EDITION

FROM YOUR NORTH HEATON LIB DEM COUNCILLORS **DOREEN HUDDART & GREG STONE**

Can you help the Heaton Lib Dem FOCUS team campaign for our area?

I can help deliver FOCUS newsletters in my street/neighbourhood

(approx 30 minutes a few times a year!)

I'd like to join Heaton Lib Dems

(From as little as £1/ month)

I'd like to receive eFocus updates

(Please provide your email address!)

HEATON MANOR: SPECIAL MEASURES

Local parents will probably already be aware of recent developments at Heaton Manor. The previous head stood down at Christmas, and a new interim leadership appointed for the next two terms (Mr Foster and Miss Patterson) seconded from St. Mary's. The school's recently published OFSTED report finding of "Inadequate" was concerning and identified serious concerns over leadership and performance, leading to the school entering "special measures" to implement an improvement plan. The report has confirmed a perception that the school hasn't performed as well as it could recently.

All of us want the school to prosper and every child to get the best possible education, and we recognise that this has the potential to cause uncertainty. We know some parents are anxious about whether the school's strong reputation for inclusion will be replaced with a stricter school regime. Equally, we know that some parents welcome the opportunity for improvement given the identified shortcomings. We think it's important that the new leadership team is given time to settle down and get on with the job, and that people recognise that Heaton Manor is a good school with good teaching - though clearly it will also be important to address the challenges identified by OFSTED on leadership, outcomes and behaviour. .

Entering "special measures" may result in the Government requiring the school to start the process of conversion to an academy. Heaton Manor and its feeder schools chose not to go down the academy route, and we are aware that many people have qualms about academies - particularly where these involve strong faith elements. It's also a concern that academies don't have to reflect local communities or have parent / community governors. However, this decision is likely to be in the hands of the Government, not the council or the current board of governors. We have stressed to the council director of education and the chair of governors that we hope that local parents and the local community will be kept closely informed as this progresses and that our concerns are taken on board.

GREG was interviewed on BBC Radio Newcastle about the OFSTED and academy situation at HM. He attended the recent parents meeting and GREG and DOREEN hope to meet with the school and decision makers on these matters. We will seek to keep you informed and would be pleased to hear from you if you have comments or concerns about the situation.



COUNCIL BUDGET

COUNCIL TELLS YOU ONLY HALF THE STORY ON ITS CUTS: In its budget for next year, as usual the Labour-controlled city council prefers to focus your attention on Government cuts and not on things that it could do differently and better. In recent years we've seen the Labour council leadership vote down sensible budget amendments from the Lib Dem opposition - but then adopt them the next year!

WHAT THEY DON'T MENTION: The council says it needs to make savings of over £30m next year - BUT over £24m of that is from "cost pressures" including inflation and pay rises, much more than from cuts in Government funding. In 2015/16 overall the council spent a massive £865m - TEN MILLION POUNDS more than in the previous year. The greater part of the money still comes from Government grants, with the rest from business rates, fees and charges (including £7m from parking), rents and council tax.

WE SAY The council has to be held accountable for the choices it is making. Paying big salary increases (of up to £24,000) to the Chief Executive and other top staff is wrong and unfair - and we opposed them. We are glad that the council has now backed down under pressure from its plans to cut pay for low paid shift staff such as care workers. Raising £45m to refurbish the civic centre is not justifiable.

We are concerned at council cuts to social care and to services for the care and protection of vulnerable children and young people. We support a ringfenced council tax rise to address the social care budget shortfall - but we agree that many of these services need to be re-modelled to deliver services in a more effective and better-targeted way.

Many of our streets and neighbourhoods are now very untidy, and we think that cuts to local environmental services have gone too far (Labour are proposing a further £1m budget cut). Other cuts are simply not justified - plans to stop all but two of the school crossing patrols are not acceptable. We proposed reductions in the number of councillors but Labour turned it down - the savings would have covered the costs of the school crossing patrols. We agree that the Government revenue support grant cuts are too much and for Newcastle are disproportionate to the overall level of reductions that local government as a whole faces, but there are tens of millions of pounds of additional, specific government grants that are rarely mentioned, and councils like Newcastle still (quite rightly) get much more than the national average.

WHAT WE WOULD DO The council's "reserves" (money held back for future projects) have grown by a gigantic £30 MILLION over what was predicted less than a year ago. More of the reserves need to be used to support local services. This Council is one of the slowest in the country to look at sharing services with neighbouring councils - we think there is particular scope to combine services with North Tyneside - including having one senior management team.



AIR QUALITY CONCERNS GROW



DOREEN and GREG are increasingly concerned about air quality on the Jesmond Road / Coast Road corridor, which is frequently congested and has over 50,000 vehicle movements a day. Air quality at the Cradlewell exceeded air pollution limits through much of late November-December, with the average level 68% over the limit and nearly five times the limit on one evening.

We agree that the council needs to take urgent action in order to bring pollution levels to within legal limits. The Government is supposed to be developing a draft plan by April and a final plan by July to improve air quality at national level. London is moving towards the introduction of "urban low-emission zones" in central London possibly involving a permit system for diesel vehicles, or making some routes low-emission vehicles only. Although there has been some progress on introducing cleaner buses, diesel buses are still major contributors to the problem. Almost all diesel cars exceed nitrogen dioxide limits, and some petrol cars do too.

The council's policy is to encourage sustainable transport where possible and discourage unnecessary car journeys in the city centre. However, recent changes to city centre road network risk increasing congestion and pollution on the Central Motorway and approaches to the city centre.

Lib Dem councillors will propose a motion at city council on this issue calling for the council to update its air quality management plan. Our area is currently not covered by air quality sampling monitors, and we believe that the problems at the Cradlewell may also affect the Corner House, Chillingham Road and Crosslings junctions. We'd like to see more done to tackle this, as it's clear that there is a major link between air quality and public health. This issue won't go away on its own.



A RECORD OF SERVICE & ACTION: WE WORK HARDER FOR HEATON!

VICTORY ON NEW MANOR PARK WARD PLAN!

The Local Government Boundary Commission has now completed its review of Newcastle's local government election arrangements. It has redrawn ward boundaries but will retain the current quota of 26 wards & 78 councillors. We think they missed a trick by not cutting the number of councillors when they had the chance - why not 2 councillors per ward instead of 3? We don't agree with Labour who argued to keep 78 councillors when frontline services and staff are being cut.

The boundary changes in our area will abolish the current North and South Heaton wards and will restore a combined Heaton ward which will include the St Gabriels, Bungalows, and terraces part of North Heaton - this will essentially run from the Coast Road in the north to the railway line in the south and east, making up a logical community with Chillingham Road at its heart. It should make an intriguing battleground between Labour and the Lib Dems in 2018! The areas of North Heaton north of the Coast Rd (High Heaton, Cochrane Park) will form a new ward to be known as "Manor Park", which will also include the Greystone & Fairways estate, Benton Road, Haydon Grange, and Victoria Glade - and the houses on the north side of Newton Road and Cragside - which have previously been in Dene ward.

We are pleased to report that the LGBC listened to our representations and agreed to keep Jesmond Park West and the Denewell Avenue area in the Manor Park ward - many thanks to residents who supported our petition! We argued that it was better to keep this area together with High Heaton and Cochrane Park (and keeping the Benton Lodge area in Dene ward) made more sense.

HADDRICKSMILL & BLUE HOUSE UPDATE

Proposals for redevelopment of the Haddricksmill double roundabout junction have been in preparation for some time and have now been agreed. We are conscious that this has the potential to cause significant congestion and disruption on Freeman Road over a two year construction period, but feel that this improvement is needed.

The first phase is to widen Killingworth Road and the Metro Bridge, which is starting with replacement of gas mains, and will also involve a Metro closure between South Gosforth and Longbenton stations. Major work to develop a new larger single roundabout is expected to start later this year. Closure of Castle Farm Bridge to vehicles is also anticipated.

Following enormous protests from residents about proposals to expand the Blue House Roundabout which would have meant chopping down dozens of trees and loss of land on Little Moor and Dukes Moor, the City Council has bowed to pressure. Revised plans propose the loss of the Blue House to expand the junction on its current configuration while keeping the trees and green spaces. However, it's not yet clear whether this will involve restrictions to the Osborne Road / Ilford Rd / Moorfield junctions on Jesmond Dene Road.

NORTH HEATON NEWS IN BRIEF

HEATON CITIZENS: GREG has met with the curate at St Gabriels church, the head at Ravenswood School, and interested local residents to support the establishment of a Heaton Citizens community group which aims to provide a civic voice to speak up on local, national, and global issues such as financial inclusion, housing, and a fairer society at home and abroad. It is intended to be a non-party political initiative to campaign for the "common good". If you're interested in getting involved, please contact Revd Aaron Kennedy c/o St Gabriels Church (vicarofheaton@gmail.com).

WOODLANDS EASTER EVENT: The Woodlands Centre at the Spinney is now being managed by the Children NE charity, with a particular focus on providing counselling to young children and families with particular needs - Barnardos previously ran the centre. DOREEN established a community steering group to ensure local groups can continue to access the centre for community use at evenings and weekends. We're supporting their spring community event, with children's entertainment, storytelling, games and stalls - this will be held on Sat April 29th (2pm). Let us know if you'd like to book a stall! PS You might also like to make a note in your diary that the Heaton Festival will be held in Heaton Park on June 24th!

CHILLINGHAM ROAD At long last work has started to redevelop the former Motor World / Charlie Browns site on Chillingham Road and Warton Terrace. We were told the work would start in the New Year - but that was 2016, not 2017! The site has planning permission to construct a block in keeping with the "building line" along Chillingham Rd, with a Sainsburys Local supermarket and coffee outlet on the ground floor and 6 flats above. A new Italian restaurant is to open in the former Grosvenor School Dancing upper-floor premises. We've contacted the British Heart Foundation to ask for their help with emptying their collection point regularly, as it's frequently overflowed with donation bags and has contributed to untidiness on the street.

CYCLE LANES: Work has begun on cycling improvements and 20mph zone on Heaton Road in vicinity of the Park, Heaton Park View roundabout, and the Cardigan Terrace junction. There may be some temporary traffic lights during roadworks.

LEAVES: GREG has arranged for the Coast Road footpath near Ravenswood school to be cleared of accumulated leaf mulch following concern that it had become slippery and hazardous to pedestrians.

Contact the North Heaton Lib Dem FOCUS Team!

Let us know if you'd like to let your Lib Dem councillors know about a local problem or concern affecting you / your street / your neighbourhood / our area: we're here to help! See below for contact details or come to our monthly surgery at High Heaton Library - First Sat of month, 10.30am (next is Feb 4th)



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ACTION ON WASTE STRATEGY



Your North Heaton Lib Dem councillors DOREEN and GREG have welcomed the council's intention to update its waste strategy - we think there's a lot the council could do to improve performance, and we welcome the appointment of a new senior manager for waste management as we had concerns that not enough attention was being focused on this agenda. The council claims that a "green thread" runs through everything it does but this is often vague and it's hard to detect a coherent approach to sustainability.

We very much support waste minimisation, re-use, recycling, and waste treatment including reduction of landfill and mass-burn incineration. However, we're conscious that resident satisfaction with street cleaning and bin collections have fallen over the last 5 years, along with the council's recycling rate. We're also acutely aware of the issues affecting Heaton's back lanes.

There is clearly a need for a renewed focus on waste reduction - we can all play our part on this. It needs to be more than just a council document - it must achieve a culture change amongst residents, businesses, and local organisations like the universities.

We've submitted an Opposition response to the initial consultation on this, setting out where we think the council can do better - better enforcement against flytipping and back lane dumping, a takeaway tax to tackle litter in areas like Chillingham Road, greater use of social and community environmental enterprises to tackle bulky waste collections, and greater provision for recycling food waste.

We also want to see more transparent publication of performance data on local neighbourhood services, a fit for purpose Envirocall service (the council concedes it's not fit for purpose) an effective community engagement plan, and looking into joint service delivery with North Tyneside on bin collections, and better scrutiny of the council's contracts for waste treatment - the council admits it hasn't done all it could to ensure the best value for money for these deals. Contact us if you'd like us to send you a copy of our submission.

Of course, it's about actions as well as words. GREG has participated in recent litterpicks carried out by local volunteers via the Friends of Heaton Back Lanes Facebook group. The number of people taking part has meant that large areas of back lanes can be covered, and a lot of litter has been removed leading to a welcome improvement in the visual appearance of our area. GREG's also recently litterpicked around Benton Rd shops, subway, Stephenson Rd, Horsley Rd and Hilden Gardens.

GREG also arranged and chaired a public meeting at Heaton Methodist Church with South Heaton and Ouseburn ward councillors and the Labour council cabinet member for neighbourhoods to discuss better enforcement against flytipping locally and plans for a more effective waste strategy for Newcastle - we are very aware that the current arrangements are not delivering as well as they could and need to improve. It was a positive meeting - we'll keep you posted on progress.



Printed by Novoprint, 17 Denmark Street, Heaton
Published & Promoted by G Stone (NH Lib Dems) 38 Faldonside, Heaton