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Message from Chairman - Kevin Thomas

Hello,

I hope you are keeping well, in good spirits and have received your vaccination.



It has been a long year and we are still not yet out of lockdown. Our Prime Minister has given us the pathway out and let's hope there are no setbacks and by the summer we are heading back to a more normal life. It has been the most difficult and strangest of years but for once there is a clearer light at the end of the tunnel for us all to focus on.

Our Association continues to advance forward. The focus is now firmly on the forthcoming May elections and our need to get control of Southend Council back in the hands of the Conservatives. The Conservative Group has achieved so much in opposition and has so many great plans for the future – let's all get behind our prospective candidates and support them however we can!

This is my last Newsletter as your Chairman. I have set out what I aimed to do. I have brought renewed structure to SWCA and the way our Officers work. As a team we have worked on a selection of matters relating to membership, campaigning, finance and administration, putting the Association on a great footing to move forward. SWCA has moved up the rankings of Associations in the Eastern Region. We are now comfortably in the top 10 out of 60+ organisations. May I therefore take this opportunity to thank the many of you who have supported me and the team. So many of you are involved but in particular I must thank our Administrator Jackie; my officers; our Executive Council; our Councillors; Sir David; and all our members. Thank you!

If you can make the AGM on 19 March, please come along. Sadly it will be a virtual meeting on Zoom which is not ideal, but it is your Association and your opportunity to be heard.

Very best wishes,
Kevin

Message from Deputy Chair (Political) - Cllr Kevin Buck



At last we can see some light at the end of the Covid-19 tunnel. With the devastating effects and personal losses we have all experienced or seen for ourselves, it has been an extraordinary time of sadness and reflection for all. With over 20 million now vaccinated and outcomes looking more positive, as we emerge we must start to focus on getting back to as normal a life as possible.

It is highly anticipated now that, save for a significant change in circumstances, the May local elections will proceed as planned. From 8th March, campaigning is once again permitted and we will need to ramp this up quickly. That said, the Conservatives in Southend have taken the decision to have a cautious approach to actual face to face contact. Whilst we will be leafleting and conducting other activities, we will not be knocking on doors until at least the end of March at the earliest. This will be reviewed based on several factors, including the general statistics and government and party advice.

Given that the electorate was denied the democratic opportunity last year to express their opinion of the current coalition's performance, this year is vitally important for the Conservatives. There have been some controversial decisions taken by this administration recently and in particular, the budget for 2021, which has caused a lot of negative feedback for them, in particular, the fiasco over parking charges. I received an unprecedented amount of correspondence on this from a cross section of the business and residential community. We can only hope that this has done enough political damage to them come the elections in May?

The numbers, though, do not favour an overall majority for us this year! We are defending 8 seats overall and need to win an additional 6. Having the help and support of our volunteers has never more crucial than now. In 2019, we lost many good councillors and it is essential that we retain those we have and see others elected. Seats like Leigh, Blenheim and St Laurence could be vulnerable for us, so working the wards over the next 2 months is going to be vital if we are to succeed. We do, though, have some excellent candidates and I remain eternally optimistic.

I'm sure I speak for many when I say that I cannot wait to get back to seeing you all in the Iveagh Hall or indeed, the Iveagh club over a drink and a game of cards. Let's win back control of the Council and continue with the good work we know we always deliver.

Message from Deputy Chair (Membership & Fundraising) - Judith Suttling

MEMBERSHIP

There are currently 321 members, of which 25 are under 26 years; 7 are Armed Forces.

There are several Young Conservatives who are very keen to get involved and as soon as we are able we will hold meetings for them.

Andrew Jefferies (Area Campaign Manager) is holding Connect Calling training sessions every Monday at 6.00pm until the elections. I hope to have 2 or 3 YCs helping as well as all candidates. This is our only way of canvassing voters at present.

FUNDRAISING

It has been impossible to hold any fundraising events, except for the Zoom meeting we had with the Rt. Hon. Sajid Javid MP, which was a very successful event with participants paying £10 each to join.

Cllr Kevin Buck has agreed to hold a fundraising Zoom Quiz on Friday 26th March, and we are hoping for a good number of participants for this.

Joyce Lambert was busy before Christmas making seasonal masks and we raised just over £150 from the sale of these.

I am hoping that we may soon be able to hold a tea party, restart Marlborough Club lunches, and even hold a fundraising lunch at The Lawn.



Census 2021

Councillor David Garston writes:

*Countless events have been cancelled over the past year, but Census Day for England and Wales is going ahead on **Sunday 21st March 2021** as planned.*

The Census has been carried out every decade since 1801, with the exception of 1941. It is run by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and takes place once every 10 years, giving the most accurate estimate of all the people and households in England and Wales. Your details are protected by law and information published is always anonymous.



This will be the first census managed predominantly online. allowing people to complete the questionnaire on their computers, phones, or tablets. Households will receive letters with online codes allowing them to take part from early March. However, although online response is encouraged, everyone will have the option to complete a paper form if they wish.

There has been a great deal of change in our town since 2011 when the last Census took place, and we need to know what those changes are. Information from the Census will help the Council to develop policies, plan and run services and decide how to allocate funds. Charities also use Census data to get information about the town they are working in, and businesses can use it to understand the needs of their customers, establish their customer base and the opportunities to invest.

An accurate Census in Southend will have huge benefits to us all, both in terms of government funding for the town and by enabling an accurate count of our residents and the demands on services such as housing, health and social care, education, transport, police, leisure facilities, employment, and many more.

CENSUS SUPPORT CENTRE

Southend Adult Community College will be operating as a local Census Support Centre from 1st March until 4th May 2021 to assist residents in completing the survey. If you or anyone you know needs assistance completing the census survey, advice is available from a trained census support advisor online or over the phone.

To find out more, please visit Southend Adult Community College's website <https://southend-adult.ac.uk> or call 01702 445700.



COUNCIL UPDATE - Cllr Meg Davidson, Conservatives Deputy Group Leader



At the time of writing, Southend Council is about to meet to set its budget for the coming year. Councils by law must agree a balanced budget and set the Council Tax rates for the year ahead. Council Tax for 2021/22 in Southend is due to increase by 1.99% plus a 2% surcharge for adult social care.



The Council is currently run by a coalition made up of Labour, Lib Dem and Independent councillors and the Conservatives form the opposition. It is not unknown for there to be cross party support for a Council budget or agreement reached on amendments to the budget put forward by the opposition. This is not the case this year. The Conservative Group has concluded that the budget proposed by the Labour led coalition is so flawed that it is beyond repair and we are not intending to support it.

The most controversial element in the budget is the Labour led coalition's proposed carpark charge increases. They are planning to whack up the cost of parking for the day at the seafront car parks by 50%. They were originally proposing a 100% hike, from £12 for the day to £24, but they have since backtracked following a furious reaction from the local business community who had not been properly consulted. Even so, the revised charge of £18 to park for the day is still very steep and will give Southend the dubious distinction of being one of the most expensive seaside towns in the country. This is definitely not a promising way to start the recovery process from the devastating economic impact on the town as a result of the Covid pandemic.

The government recently announced that the local Council elections will be going ahead on 6th May as scheduled. In Southend one third of the Council seats are being contested, one per ward. There are also two by-elections, one of which is in Westborough Ward in Southend West. We are awaiting confirmation as to when we can start delivering leaflets and campaigning on the doorstep. In the meantime, we are focussing our efforts on telephone canvassing and social media campaigning. Here in Southend West, we are defending six seats and will be working hard to gain some more. All offers of help will be gratefully received!

A WORD FROM WESTMINSTER....

At long last we all have something to look forward to, with the Prime Minister announcing the target date of the 21 June to end all legal restrictions on social contact. I know not everyone will be satisfied with this cautious approach, but if you look at the three stages set out, our lives will steadily return to some sort of normality. I know that many parents were pleased that our children have returned to school and I have no doubt that our wonderful teachers are doing their very best to help children with the challenges they face. The lost time will certainly be taken into account in assessments.



Sir David Amess MP

As for those businesses which are able to re-open, I and my team stand ready to help however we can. I do recognise how incredibly tough and stressful it has been for them.

The vaccination programme has been extremely successful – it leads the world. Anyone who has difficulty with being vaccinated and needs help, please do contact me. My heart goes out to anyone who has lost a family member or friend during this pandemic. It is truly heart-breaking, the damage that this virus has done.

Of course, with the virus mutating we must continue to be vigilant in our daily lives. However, with our strong community spirit I have no doubt that we will be able to rebuild our lives and enjoy a far better year ahead.

The local elections on May 6th are going ahead and I hope that our candidates who are standing for the Conservative Party will have been able to promote themselves to the electorate. As far as I am aware, the only up to date canvass records are those which I and my team recorded in the General Election.

Best wishes

David Amess MP

Email: amessd@parliament.uk

Tel: 0207 219 3452

NEWS FROM WARDS

BELFAIRS

Cllr Alan Dear writes:

I would like to take this opportunity to update you all on what's been going on in Belfairs during the lockdown and over recent weeks.

Cityfibre have been working in the Ward installing the new Gigabit network, this work is well underway and should be available to Belfairs residents very soon.

Belfairs Golf course is closed again, so is being used by our residents for their daily walks.

In January 2020 we had a very successful fund raising dinner with £227.20 going into the Association funds. We are hoping to arrange more this year once the current restrictions are lifted and we are looking to arrange a dinner in December to celebrate a normal Christmas for as all. (Dates to be confirmed).



Sir David Amess MP, Cllr Lesley Salter and Cllr Alan Dear

At the beginning of 2020 we were in full campaign mode here in Belfairs gearing up to May's election that was never to be. Now we find ourselves adapting to a new way of life that none of us could have ever imagined before! It's been a tough year and I hope everyone has kept safe and well throughout. Fingers crossed we can soon begin to return to a more normal way of life.



Belfairs Park in all its glory!

BLenheim PARK

Councillor Helen Boyd has been out and about in the ward reporting fly-tipping and other issues. Helen continues to deal with residents' concerns, as well as attending lots of online meetings!



Helen walking through beautiful Blenheim Park in the snow!

Helen visiting a fly-tipping area in Juniper Road



NEWS FROM WARDS (cont'd)

CHALKWELL

Chalkwell Councillors Nigel Folkard and Stephen Habermel and James Courtenay (Chalkwell Ward candidate) have been busy in the Ward

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Left to right:

Image 1. Cllr Nigel Folkard, Cllr Steve Habermel and Chalkwell candidate James Courtenay touring Chalkwell Ward between lockdown, visiting the roads off Finchley Road that are being resurfaced.

Image 2: Cllr Nigel Folkard and Cllr Steve Habermel visiting Crab Bridge in front of Crowstone in the Estuary. Officers are planning extensive repairs to this bridge.

Image 3: Cllr Steve Habermel, Cllr Nigel Folkard, Scott (owner of Surf Café) and James Courtenay touring the ward during lockdown and introducing James to Scott on Chalkwell Esplanade.

EASTWOOD PARK

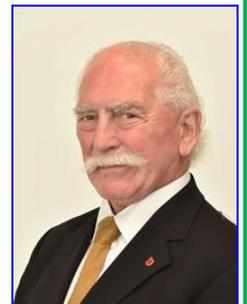
Our local Councillors Andrew Moring and Chris Walker have reported good news in Progress Road. After reporting flooding and drainage problems for some time including the sinking of part of the road, council contractors finally put cameras down the drains to see what was happening - repair works are now being authorised and should be happening over the next couple of months. Also the Gas Board has confirmed that the gasometers will shortly be just a memory - the view across Eastwood will never be the same again - for the better!!

Cllr Moring also reports that he keeps in contact with Dr Zaidi's surgeries over the vaccination programme and can confirm that letters are going out this week (first week of March) to the 60's and over. NB anybody who needs transport to a vaccine hub or any other clinic is welcome to contact Carecars based at Southend Hospital on 01702 385348 where fully checked and Covid compliant volunteer drivers are available.



Stop Press - Eastwood Park Ward elected a new Chairman last week at their AGM - former councillor Roger Weaver says " It is an honour to be elected as Chairman of the ward and it is my aim to provide both our members and residents of the ward with more information and the opportunity to be more involved with issues dear to their heart. I will be contacting all members shortly with details of our new committee & look forward to hearing their views".

For more information please contact Roger on 07919043191 or robertweaver@gmail.com.



NEWS FROM WARDS (cont'd)

ST LAURENCE



Steve (Buckley) gets busy but most will know that Steve has not stopped working since his seat loss in St Laurence a couple of years ago.

Steve has become a regular letter writer with his letters appearing on the Echo letters page most weeks. The scope of the letters are not just limited to national issues but dare to stretch across the international news.

Back at "Local" Steve is appalled at the waste of Council money, employing a consultant to look at verge damage! It's typical of the socialist regime in place at the moment, and Steve says, "deciding what to do with a damaged verge hardly needs a specialist and flies in the face of common sense".

Meanwhile, Cllr Mark Flewitt and Cllr Dave McGlone are working on regular casework and serve on their scrutiny groups to good effect.

DO YOU WANT TO VOTE BY POST?

If you would like to register for a postal vote for the local elections in May, please contact the Council Electoral Services:

Telephone: 01702 215010 or email elections@southend.gov.uk

