

Serving the community - Keeping you informed

FOCUS

On St Mark's ward

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Lib Dem budget freezes council tax



Councillor John Webster welcomes the news that there will be no increase in Cheltenham's Council Tax for a third year

It's good news for Cheltenham residents. The Liberal Democrat administration on Cheltenham Borough Council has announced that there will be no increase in its council tax precept this year, meaning that council tax for Cheltenham residents will be **FROZEN** for the third year running and third year in a row. Car park charges will also be frozen for the second year in a row. At the same time, frontline council services will be protected.

This very positive result for Cheltenham taxpayers has not been easy to achieve. Although the Government has provided some one-off financial help to keep council tax down, it has cut its ongoing support to the council by a further £534,000 in 2012/13. The Council has responded by making big savings in bureaucracy, and radical changes to the way some services are managed, in order to balance the books.

Local St Mark's Ward councillor **John Webster** is the Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Development and

deserves much credit along with his Liberal Democrat councillor colleagues for such a creditable outcome of delivering a council tax freeze without cutting major services. John says: "I know only too well that many people are struggling to make ends meet in the current economic climate. It is right that we should avoid adding to their burdens." John added "Cutting major services is not the Liberal Democrat way – unlike the Conservative administration at Shire Hall and their shameful cuts to our library and youth services."

Church Road planning application

Local residents have been successful in campaigning against an application to put ten houses and flats on the site of the two old police houses in Church Road.

The site is less than a quarter of an acre in size and the planners had recommended it be permitted – but the committee disagreed. The argument that the design was not in keeping with the area and was the result of over-intensive development won the support of the planning committee.



The planning application in Church Road was refused but the developers may lodge an appeal

St Mark's councillor John Webster said "The applicants are only interested in cramming as much development as they can onto this site to make as much money as possible. The scheme they produced is cheap and nasty, and would clog the streets up with more traffic.

I've no doubt they will lodge an appeal but local people need to work with their councillors to oppose development like this to protect their quality of life. The rot began when planning officers permitted the awful building on the corner under delegated powers without taking it to planning committee. The design of these buildings used this as a reference point. We have to stop the rot."

M5 victory

Protests by local residents, businesses, MPs and councillors have forced the Government to think again about its plans to close part of **Tewkesbury Road** for up to a year from next March. They planned to do this as part of a scheme to replace the bridge at junction 10 of the M5.

The scheme has now been put on hold for at least a year, while the impact of the scheme is more fully investigated.



The planned closure of the bridge at Piffs Elm on Tewkesbury Road has been delayed



Now the Minister for Roads has asked the Highways Agency to look at cutting the length of the project, which could greatly reduce the disruption to local people and businesses.

He says he is also prepared to look at the possibility of building a full four-way interchange at junction 10, which would help to reduce unnecessary traffic trips across Cheltenham.

Cllr Sandra Holliday, was one of those who raised serious objections to the scheme. She was particularly concerned about the impact on **Princess Elizabeth Way** and **Gloucester Road**, which would have to carry even greater volumes of traffic during the closure.

Working for St Mark's all year round - not just at election time

Griffiths Avenue

We reported in the previous Focus last Autumn, that **LibDem Councillor Sandra Holliday** had asked Gloucestershire County Council if a 'Slow down - concealed entrance' sign could be installed near to the entrance of the nature reserve, **The Knoll** and **The Granleys** in **Griffiths Avenue**.



The Conservative-run Council has now replied saying that they cannot justify installing a "Concealed Entrance" sign along **Griffiths Avenue** as they believe the entrance to **The Knoll** is not concealed. They also claim that they have no record of accidents there.

Sandra says "I do so hope that we don't have to wait for a serious accident to happen before anything is done".

Devon Avenue



St Mark's Lib Dem County Councillor, **Mike Skinner** was delighted to see the resurfacing of **Devon Avenue** finally being done.

Mike said "It's good to see it finally happen after such a long campaign by myself and Councillor Charmian Sheppard on behalf not just of the residents of Devon Avenue but of residents of other roads in the area too."

You can report pot-holes on **Freephone 08000 514514** or by emailing: highways@gloucestershire.gov.uk.

Alternatively you can contact any member of your local Liberal Democrat team and we will take up the issue for you, our details are below.

How to contact your Lib Dem team

Councillor John Webster

T: 224889
webster.j@blueyonder.co.uk

Councillor Sandra Holliday

T: 700434
cllr.sandra.holliday@cheltenham.gov.uk

Councillor Charmian Sheppard

T: 511971
charmian.sheppard@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Councillor Mike Skinner

T: 510549
mike.skinner@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Martin Horwood

(Member of Parliament)

16 Hewlett Road

Cheltenham,

GL52 6AA

T: 224889

martin@martinhorwood.net



Let there be light

In the last issue of the St Mark's Focus, we reported that a number of local residents had raised concerns about the removal of a number of street lights in St Marks.

This followed a survey of the safety of the lamp posts in our area, a number of which were in danger of collapsing from rust or other problems.

These were removed immediately and work is now well underway to replace them, as seen in the photo.



Lib Dem County Councillor Mike Skinner, who has been pressing for speedy replacements given the time of year, said "A number of residents were concerned and didn't know what was happening. I am glad to have been able to shed some light on this matter."

Victory for Hesters Way Library campaigners

The Conservative County Council had egg on its faces when **Friends of Gloucester Libraries** successfully campaigned for a judicial review into the highhanded and arrogant way that Conservative councillors had ignored the needs and wishes of local residents.

That review found that the Council had acted improperly and had **not followed correct procedure**.

A High Court judge ruled that the Council failed to take account of their equalities duties when pushing through the cuts. **The judge condemned the Council's approach as "bad government"** and said that it was important that the **decision be quashed**.



Flashback - Cheltenham's Member of Parliament, Martin Horwood joins protesters campaigning to save Hesters Way Library

In a humiliating about-turn, Gloucester County Council announced on 17 January that, having consulted properly this time and having taken into account the views of the local population, three libraries would remain Council-run. These are the libraries at Matson and Tuffley – and **Hesters Way** here in Cheltenham. This is brilliant news for local residents and is testament to the power of responsible protest and we would like to congratulate the local campaigners on their tremendous victory in defence of our local library services.

A waste of your money

Less good news is the fact that it cost the Council over £100,000 in legal fees to fight the judicial review. So where does that money come from? The only option is cuts in other areas – so a longer wait to get your potholes filled.

Commenting on the Council's climb down, local Liberal Democrat County Councillor Mike Skinner, who was active in the libraries campaign, said "This is a well deserved bloody nose for the Conservatives at Shire Hall. No Liberal Democrat Council anywhere in the country closed a single library in this year's budget round. But libraries are just not important to Conservative politicians. Arrogance combined with incompetence from your Conservative County Councillors is an expensive mixture!!

"If only the council had listened to the thousands of residents who were against these proposals then this expensive court case could have been avoided."

Martin Horwood

Member of Parliament for Cheltenham

holds regular advice surgeries at his constituency office and at other locations around the town



Call **224889** for an appointment