

Tory 'hat-trick' puts Fareham at top of lowest tax league...

CONSERVATIVES have scored a hat-trick of successes by keeping Fareham's council tax at another national record low level – despite receiving one of the meanest grants from the Government.

It comes at a time when every neighbouring council is announcing cuts in services, redundancies and increases in charges along with record council tax rises.

And they managed to do it despite a big shortfall in the Government's grant towards concessionary bus fares.

"We have been able to do all this whilst still keeping the council tax rate at the lowest in Hampshire, which is good news for everyone," said Council Executive Leader Councillor Seán Woodward.

Fareham's Band D property owners will have to pay only £2.43 more a year – a rise of less than 5p a week – and for Band C taxpayers it will be even lower.

Councillor Woodward commented: "As most Fareham properties are in Band C, the council tax rate for two adults will be £114.40 – an increase of just 4p a week.

"I am delighted we have been able to keep the increase to a minimum and that for the third year in a row we have kept the council tax increase below the rate of inflation - an impressive hat-trick!"

As an extra bonus the Council has also

frozen pay and display and pay on foot parking charges, having raised the prices only once in the last 5 years.

Announcing overall net expenditure for 2006-07 of £11,106,350, Councillor Woodward said the most significant issue the council had to face was the Government's free travel scheme for over 60s..

Costs for implementing electoral reforms, mainly to prevent recurrences of last year's Labour postal vote factories scandal, had to be added.

Although the Government made extra money available for the concessionary fares, the council's fears that the extra costs would not be covered by the annual Local Government Finance Settlement proved well founded.

"At first glance it appeared to be a generous settlement. But only at first glance!" he said.

The Government changed the method of distribution which made it impossible to identify how much extra grant had been received to cover the new responsibilities –



Top billing: Ferneham Hall has been selected as one of the top five entertainment venues from 189 British towns – thanks to hard-working staff and good management of council taxpayers' money.

a fact freely admitted by John Prescott's office.

Fareham will receive an extra £624,000 in what appeared to be a generous 12% increase.

When the figures were broken down and the shortfall in funding the concessionary fares plus the electoral administration costs taken into account, Fareham received only £57,000 (1%) in extra Government support for ALL other services.

"A paltry sum by any standards," added Councillor Woodward.

Midwife crisis may be solved, but will Blackbrook be re-born?



BLACKBROOK birthing centre, closed last year because of staffing difficulties caused by sickness and maternity leave, may not reopen.

Despite unequivocal assurances given by the Chief Executive of Portsmouth NHS Trust that it would reopen as

soon as there were enough midwives to staff it, its future is in doubt.

A recent meeting at Ferneham Hall organised by 'Save the Blackbrook Committee' and chaired by Mark Hoban MP, heard John Wilderspin, Chief Executive of the Fareham PCT, say a safe-

ty audit was nearing completion and the results might indicate serious inadequacies in the building not meeting modern standards.

He gave a strong indication that the £700,000 cost of upgrading Blackbrook might make it impossible to reopen.

Also, a plan for future midwifery services is being prepared that might concentrate all services at Queen Alexandra Hospital or at best, provide 2 or 3 peripheral, low technology units.

The Chairman of HCC Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Ray Ellis, stated if it were closed this would be a substantial service change and be open to full scrutiny.

He said Fareham, with a population of 110,000, needed a birthing centre, whether it was at Blackbrook or within a community hospital. The PCT agreed to go for full consultation on maternity birthing facilities for SE Hampshire.



WARD NEWS BRIEFS

Pay rise rejected

In a move to reduce council tax, county councillors have forgone the annual cost of living rise in allowances, which is normally the same as that of council staff (this year 2.9%).

At a time when pensioners are struggling to pay their bills, it was regarded as inappropriate for allowances to be increased, even in line with inflation.

Rubbish

Hampshire councils are considering phasing out landfill for untreated household rubbish.

Residents can comment on various options, which could result in up to 40 new style material processing plants in the county.

Anyone wishing to comment can do so through a short questionnaire online at www.recycleforhampshire.org.uk Hard copies are available in libraries and in local council offices.

Westbury Manor

The museum has partly reopened after a £200,000 refurbishment with an exhibition 'Titchborne Claimant Collection' on the ground floor.

Street lighting

Lamp posts across Hampshire are rapidly corroding and some are becoming unsafe.

An urgent replacement scheme has begun this month in some Fareham roads.

HCC has applied to the Government for funding to replace all defective lamp posts. If agreed, it will take 25 years.

County responds quickly to Delme safety demands

HAMPSHIRE County Council is to install interim safety measures at the Delme roundabout, Fareham, following a serious accident last September.

Havant College student Sarah Greenwood suffered head injuries when she was in collision with a motorcycle as she crossed the A27 Eastern Way, beneath the Delme flyover.

The County Council is working on measures to help reduce the chance of more accidents.

Coloured anti-skid surfacing has been laid on the approach to the crossing to help drivers identify a crossing point ahead, and provide extra grip if they need to stop.

A red pad has been put at the start of the anti-skid surfacing and will be marked 'Slow' and a warning sign on a yellow backing board alerts drivers that pedestrians could be crossing ahead. Measures will cost £5,000.

Feasibility studies will also be



Watch out: New signs and anti-skid pads are being introduced to prevent accidents at Delme roundabout.

carried out to assess whether a pedestrian crossing can be installed, or a build-out constructed reducing to one lane the carriageway where the accident happened.

If either of these options is viable, it could be introduced by the end of the 2006/07 financial year.

County Councillor Ray Ellis

said: "Over the next months traffic patterns will be carefully monitored to see whether these measures have resulted in better, motorised vehicle and pedestrian safety behaviour at this difficult road crossing.

"We must ensure that no more serious accidents occur on this well-used pedestrian and cycle route to central Fareham."

Ray's impressive record of public service

RAY ELLIS, who served on Fareham Borough Council from 1999-2002, was elected to Hampshire County Council in 2001.

He had a distinguished scientific career at home and overseas. After leaving school in his native Portsmouth, he gained a PhD at Southampton University and lectured in chemistry.



County Councillor Ray Ellis

He was head of Analytical Division, Thames Polytechnics, then head of the Faculty of Science, Paramedical and Engineering at Garnett College (London University).

Dr Ellis helped develop projects for education, training, tourism and manpower in many countries, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Egypt, Hungary and Portugal.

He held positions on several national scientific bodies, including The Royal Society.

At HCC, he chairs several committees, including Health Overview and Scrutiny and River Hamble Management Board; he is Vice-chairman of Employment in Hampshire and represents the council on the LGA Rural Commission, SE Employers, Hampshire Rural Access Forum, Schools' Organisation and Court of Southampton University.

Locally, he represents HCC on the Management Group for Network Fareham, the Local Strategic Partnership to improve the community.

He also serves on Fareham Community Safety Panel and Transport Advisory Group and believes in local consultation and reducing bureaucracy.

Ray is a member of Rotary, raising money for many charities. He is also Governor, Chairman of Finance for Cams Hill School and active in the School and Parents' Association.

Treasury should 'write off' NHS debts

HEAVY tax rises will be needed to keep the NHS from sinking deeper into the 'red and maintain the present level of services.

Despite above normal increases in funding, debts are estimated at more than £600m.

In 2008, funding will return to normal levels, but the cost of the service is rising, new doctor and dentist contracts are more expensive and new high cost drugs are becoming available.

There are signs of strain in the system with acute ward closures, threatened closures of community hospitals, loss of birthing centres and old person facilities.

County Councillor Ray Ellis wrote to the public accounts committee, on behalf of SE England County and Unitary Authorities, asking for all historical debts to be cleared by Treasury before the proposed reorganisation of the Strategic Health Authority and PCTs, to give the new structures a chance of maintaining financial viability.

He also wants the NHS funding formula examined, as the SE has a large proportion of over 75s and many visitors with health needs during the summer months.

'Freebie' parking is clogging town's side roads



Nuisance: Cars parked on Wallington Shore Road force on-coming vehicles on to the wrong side of the road. It's worse in the village where the road narrows.

DRIVERS looking for free parking spaces are clogging many streets in central Fareham.

Many are leaving their vehicles in Wickham Road, Serpentine Road, Wallington Shore Road and Southampton Road – to name a few – during working hours.

County Councillor Ray Ellis said: "In many cases this results in residents having great difficulty in using their cars safely, due to the

cars being parked near road junctions and obscuring visibility.

"It is difficult for the police to act unless there is a serious traffic problem and it is dependent on them having been notified of an infringement.

"Do we need to consider whether regular daily users of the central car parks could have lower priced concessionary rates, to encourage greater use of the car parks?"

Top safety award for Hampshire

HAMPSHIRE has received a national award for **E-Government Efficiency, for showing IT saving of over £4m a year.**

It also received the top award for achieving a massive 73% reduction in motor cycle fatalities in the year on the county's roads.

Legal backing to move travellers

A RECENT decision in the House of Lords has reinforced the legal right for councils to move travellers from unlawful camps.

"Perhaps we will see a more robust attitude from Hampshire Constabulary towards travellers in the coming summer months," said Councillor Ray Ellis.

Country guide to 160 days out

A GUIDE to 160 days out in Hampshire has been published by the County Council.

Copies of the publication, which lists a variety of pursuits, can be obtained from the Countryside Department or from Ray Ellis. A separate guide lists castles and other heritage sites.

Ambulance shift, then back to school for councillor

RAY ELLIS spent a Friday night shift with the crew of Fareham Ambulance Station, having spent the afternoon monitoring calls at Winchester Call Centre.

During the 6-hour shift he attended calls to Whiteley, Titchfield, Catisfield, Hayling Island, Portsmouth and Havant.

He said: "I was disappointed that all the 999 calls I attended were trivial.

"At a cost of £800 per call and the loss of ambulance time I hope people will consider carefully before making emergency calls."

Introduction of the new 101 number may help to reduce unnecessary emergency calls.

During December he joined a year 10 class at Cams Hill School for a day of lessons.

"I was very impressed with the teaching and the variety of methods used.

"The pupils were well behaved and responded well to the teachers."

Ray feels the only way to assess how well services are provided is to talk to staff and participate in their activities.

FAREHAM EAST CONSERVATIVES

We are very active with social and political events and membership drives. If you would like further details, to join us, or to help in any way such as distribution of *In Touch* newsletters in your road, please contact your councillors.

COUNTY COUNCILLORS – Hampshire Fareham Town Division

John Bryant
14 Highlands Road
Fareham PO16 7XL
Tel: 01329 281427
email: johnbryant@hants.gov.uk



Raymond Ellis
20 Cams Hill
Fareham PO16 8RB
Tel: 01329 236127
email: raymondellis@hants.gov.uk



Your man in Westminster



By **Mark Hoban**
MP for Fareham

I am a great believer in local people having a strong voice in matters that affect them and their community. It underpins my political beliefs.

That's why I want local people to have much more influence over housing and development. It was one of my reasons for opposing the merger of Hampshire Police with a neighbouring force.

Local organisations listen closely to the views of communities they serve. Unlike larger, more distant organisations, they set priorities to meet our needs. One reason why our Borough councillors set the lowest council tax increases in Hampshire is that, as well as running the Council, they know that you want good services at low cost and respond to that.

John Prescott's suggestions that councils should merge puts this at risk. Do we really want to merge Fareham with high spending councils? Do we want a council that does not reflect the needs of Fareham, but is dominated by the views of people from Portsmouth or Eastleigh?

It is part of a trend by this Government to take more and more matters out of the hands of local people and give them to larger organisations. For example, our local Primary Care Trust, which decides on our behalf what health care should be available to Fareham residents, will probably be scrapped in favour of either one body for the whole of Hampshire or become part of a Primary Care Trust covering the east of the county.

Decisions about our health will no longer be made by people living or working in Fareham, but by people from Alton or Petersfield. We must stand firm against this growing trend to take power out of our hands and start to turn the tide so we decide local issues in Fareham and not allow them to be taken elsewhere by people who are interested in our money but not our views.

**•You may contact Mark via his office
14 East Street, Fareham PO16 0BN.
Telephone: 01329 233573
email: mail@markhoban.com**

Councils can't get their act together, so ...

It's chaos on the buses

BUS PASS schemes across England are in utter chaos.

Unlike councils in Wales and Scotland, councils have opted to do their own thing, often to the confusion of the over 60s and disabled they should be helping.

Hampshire is no exception and standards vary from district to district, depending on how much they receive from the Government.

Then Chancellor Gordon Brown came into the equation by promising free off-peak travel nationwide by 2008 in his Budget speech.

Fareham was put in an impossible position when the Government short-changed its grant, leaving the Council to find more than double the amount from its budget.

Had Fareham opted for free passes throughout Hampshire, it would have meant either increasing council tax by 10% or charging £60 for a bus pass.

"These options were unacceptable to the Council or to users we spoke to, so the difficult decision was taken to adopt a concession that far exceeds the statutory minimum, but regrettably does not offer free travel across the county," said Executive Leader Councillor Woodward.

People qualifying for concessionary bus passes will be able to travel free anytime (not just off-peak), anywhere in the Borough from April 1.

They will also be entitled to a half fare reduction when they cross the Fareham boundary into Hampshire.

"We are offering more than the government's requirement for free off-



Free ticket to ride: Provided you're over 60 or disabled you won't have to pay anytime, anywhere in the Borough.

peak local bus travel inside Fareham," said Councillor Woodward.

Those eligible can buy a 'First day' ticket which gives unlimited travel on 'First' bus services in Hampshire at any time on the date of purchase. A 'First day' ticket costs £4.40 which equates to £2.20 for pass holders.

The Council is spending £1.1m on travel concessions in 2006/7 and was granted £351,000 by the Government, leaving £745,000 to be met from its budget.

Almost two thirds of the 750,000 concessionary journeys funded by the Council are within the borough. Each bus pass costs the Council £107 (£214 for couples), which is more than any couple pays to Fareham in annual council tax.

Despite this, Fareham kept its council tax to a record low.

Current holders have been told when and where they can renew their travel passes.

Newcomers can collect their pass from the Civic Offices, Fareham from Monday, April 3.

Contact the Council's Customer Service Centre 01329 236100 for more information.

IT'S NOT ALL FARES FAIR

Portsmouth: Off-peak travel in Hampshire. Travel tokens also offered.

Southampton: Off-peak travel in city only. No alternative concessions.

Winchester: Off-peak travel in Hampshire. No other concessions.

Gosport: Free all day travel in Hampshire. Tokens also offered.

Havant: Free off-peak travel in Hampshire. No alternative concessions.

This Mosquito won't sting, but it will 'do your head in'

PIERCED noses, pierced navels, piercing sounds from iPods ... they are all part of young persons' culture these days.

But they won't want their eardrums pierced by high-pitched acoustics generated by a new weapon Fareham Council is trialing in the war against anti-social behaviour.

The Mosquito, costing £500 and the size of a garden pet scarer, can be mounted wherever potential hooligans congregate.

Coupled in some cases with CCTV, it can be switched on at random or immediately the first

spray can appears and vandals are spotted loitering with intent.

The high-pitched assault on their eardrums is harmless, but so unbearable that they flee.

Fortunately, it can be heard only by the 10-24 age group and older people are unaffected.

Councillor Brian Bayford said it was secretly tried in a room at the Civic Offices and the younger workers there quickly left their desks.

In Touch is published by Fareham East Conservatives, 20 Cams Hill PO16 8RB, and printed by Tollwood, Unit 2, Lysses Court, High Street, Fareham PO16 7BE