

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 was closed last year because of 'staffing' difficulties caused by sickness and maternity leave among the staff.

Although the Blackbrook and Grange (Petersfield) units were not directly affected, it was decided to maintain

staffing levels at Blake (Gosport) and the Mary Rose unit (Portsmouth).

A public meeting at Ferneham Hall recently heard the Head of Midwifery confirm that staffing levels should be adequate by the

autumn.

However, the Chief Executive of the Fareham and Gosport Primary Care Trust gave a strong indication that the £700,000 cost of upgrading Blackbrook might make this impossible.

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. This plan is being prepared and with a consultation in the late 2006 early 2007.

Executive Member for Health Councillor Brian Bayford stated: "If Fareham's long awaited Community Hospital was being now being built as promised in 2004, the problem of funding improvements to Blackbrook would not now be a consideration."

Since St Christopher's Hospital and Blackbrook closed, Fareham (population 108,000) has no major health facilities.



WARD NEWS BRIEFS

New signs

Councillors John and Pam Bryant are pleased that several replacement road signs have been erected in North Ward following their requests to Council Highways Officers. The budget is small and not all requests are considered essential.

Surfacing at last!

Residents have long been requesting resurfacing of Mallory Crescent, Irvine Close, Tensing Close and Potters Avenue.

Councillor Pam Bryant had made numerous requests to highways officers without success, but finally it has been agreed that these will be resurfaced this summer.

End for laundry

Outline planning permission has been approved for the Co-op laundry and fuel depot site.

It will include mostly houses with a small number of flats and will generate 25% affordable housing. An area of public open space and equipped children's play area are included.

Financial contributions will also be given towards the much needed pedestrian crossing at the top of Gudge Heath Lane.

It's hit the deck

A bid to build a decking area at the Jolly Miller pub, which would have protruded into the car park, has been dismissed on appeal on grounds that it would materially harm the living conditions of residents.

Trees, shrubs and landscaping give Highlands Road a facelift

FINAL STAGES of the landscaping of Highlands Road shopping area and planting as a result of Fareham Borough Council's regeneration programme have been finished.

Residents have praised the new-look centre.

Tim Geoghegan, who uses the shopping area almost every day, feels it is a more pleasant experience when shopping.

"The modern style seating and tastefully erected railings add an attractive feature.

"The additional car parking is also most welcomed," he said.

Mr Geoghegan also congratulated Conservative Councillor Leslie Keeble (Fareham West) for his work to achieve the new pedestrian crossing in Highlands Road at the junction with Hillson Drive.



Safety first: Tim Geoghegan is pleased with the new crossing.

"With increasing traffic it is important that safe crossings are created to help, in particular, young and more senior people to cross this busy main road safely.

"Thanks should also go to County Councillor John Bryant

for his efforts to encourage the highways officers at Hampshire County Council to set aside funds within their budget for this project which I am sure will be invaluable to the school-children and many local people," he said.

Battle to save countryside

SOUTH EAST England Regional Assembly (SEERA) met at the beginning of March and approved the massive number of new houses to be built in the South over the next 20 years.

"This is the first step towards losing our delightful countryside," said Councillor Pam Bryant, who feels that the government is determined to push for this massive development within the ward, destroying its character.

"Fortunately local people are prepared to help in the fight to save our green fields.

"John and I are delighted to have joined members of the Funtley Village Society at their regular meetings which have followed the public meeting last November, and continue to work with so many supporters prepared to join the campaign," she said.

Computers boost for library

FAREHAM library was closed for three days to extend the People's Network - computer terminals offering customers free internet access and the facility to send emails.

The installation of more terminals is part of a County Council move to add 205 more computers to libraries throughout the county.

Fareham Library is set to receive 21 new computers, including four in the children's area, which will be for use by under 16s only.

County Councillor John Bryant said: "The People's Network terminals play an important role in ensuring that everyone has access to IT facilities, especially those who don't have access at home or work."

Accident spurs County to act on safety measures for Delme roundabout

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.

Buff-coloured anti-skid surfacing will be 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 with 'Slow' will be put at the start of the anti-skid surfacing, with a warning sign on a yellow backing board to alert drivers that pedestrians could be crossing ahead. Measures will cost £5,000.

Feasibility studies will also be 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 Cllr John Bryant said: "Sarah has made excellent progress since her accident and I send her my best wishes for a full recovery.

"We've quite a difficult balancing act at this location, which is why we've been anxious to talk to interested parties about suitable short and longer term remedies - although as always our first priority is to put in measures that will help prevent similar accidents."



Youngsters' views are sought on new skatepark

YOUNG people in Fareham with a keen interest in leisure were invited to meet councillors, Council officers and skate-park contractors to discuss future facilities for Park Lane Recreation Ground, near Fareham Leisure Centre.

Detailed designs for the skate park, which retains the ball hoop, includes a skate unit (made up of several units) and a teenage shelter.

To allow all this equipment at this location, the tarmac will have to be enlarged slightly to allow for the teenage shelter and the bowl part of the skate ramp to be incorporated within the design.

The design also includes a path from the leisure centre.

The Council will be writing to residents who live near the recreation ground to explain the proposed plans and give them the opportunity to give their views.

Councillor John Bryant said: "We want to find a solution that will accommodate the views and needs of both the young people and the local community; therefore it's also important that we consult local residents about the proposed new facilities, too."

The Council will evaluate the proposals and, following consultation, the new facilities should be installed by the end of the year.



Bananarma: Pam Bryant (right) and Councillor Mrs Connie Hockley on their visit to the new Banana Suite.

The Bryants drop in on two flourishing parts of their ward

BUSY husband and wife team Councillors John and Pam Bryant have been out and about in their ward as usual.

Pam and other members of the Council's Leisure Panel visited the new Banana Fitness Suite at Fareham Leisure Centre.

SLM the trust, which is managing the Leisure Centre on behalf of the Council, has spent the past few months updating and revamping it.

It is proving very popular with members both old and new as it now offers some excellent new equipment in a very friendly environment. The cafeteria area has been

completely refurbished and modernised and now incorporates a crèche.

John and Pam were invited by managing director Tony Barnett to visit Barncroft Systems, a vibrant engineering business tucked away in Fareham Park Road.

They were shown the hive of activity in the workshops in making some components for aerospace industry which are exported to various parts of the world.

Tony is proud to have so many local people working for him, many of whom have been with the company for many years and a high number are able to walk to work.



Systems go: John and Pam Bryant were shown around Barncroft Systems by MD Tony Barnett (right).

FAREHAM NORTH & NORTH WEST 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 ward councillors.

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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.

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