

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 – a fact freely admitted by John Prescott's



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.

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

Branch agm

Warsash branch AGM was held in January and the following officers were elected:

Chairman - Mrs Ann Estlin; Vice Chairman - Cllr Mrs Mary Nadolski; Treasurer - John Pullen; Secretary - Mrs Ruth Cartwright; Membership Secretary - Mrs Teresa Huggins; Recruitment Officer - County Cllr Keith Evans; Committee - Cllr Trevor Cartwright, Mrs Joyce Porter, Mrs Mary Ford, Mrs Madeleine Cameron, George Cameron, Mrs Lyn Bounds.

Nostalgia

Fareham's Community Safety Partnership hosted an afternoon of wartime nostalgia at the Genesis Youth Centre recently.

It aimed at forging stronger bonds and increasing respect between the younger and older communities in the Western Wards and provided an opportunity for visitors to see the wide variety of activities available.

They were entertained by young people from the Youth Centre singing wartime songs with period music provided by the Brookfield Trad Jazz Band.

Pay rise rejected

County councillors have forgone the annual cost of living rise in allowances (2.9% this year).

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.

Village at war with those infernal men and their flying machines

IT'S LIKE the Blitz all over again, but in this air battle over the fields of Hook village it's not ME 109s or JU88s from which people have to take shelter.

Villagers are under attack from model aircraft.

The air strikes have caused damage, but fortunately to date no injuries on the ground.

Two planes have plunged out of control through glasshouses at local nurseries.

One made a forced landing in somebody's garden, another crashed on to a resident's roof.

Councillor Trevor Cartwright, who's been taking flak from residents, said:

"The noise of these model aeroplanes has caused horses, some of them pregnant, to stampede in the field next to the recreation ground.

"People out walking their dogs fear for their safety.

"These planes can reach speeds of over 100mph. A direct hit could kill or seriously injure somebody."

But the Battle of Hook recreation ground may soon be won if a move to ground the model planes goes ahead.

Councillor Cartwright has contacted the Council's Public Open Spaces and Environmental Health departments, as a result of which villagers have been sent a letter asking whether they want a by-law passed either banning or restricting model aircraft flying from the recreation ground.

When the consultation is complete, the issue will go to the Licensing and Regulatory Committee.

Meantime, perhaps a squadron of model Spitfires can be scrambled to chase the intruders off.

•A model flown on a monoline in Australia reached 180mph.

Bid to overturn Stone Pier pontoons decision sinks in the High Court

A HIGH COURT judge has ruled in Fareham Council's favour over plans to reposition pontoons at Stone Pier Yard into deeper water.

Planners refused the yard's application because it would jeopardise ease of navigation in the secondary channel. The owners sought a judicial review and served papers on the Council.

Councillor Trevor Cartwright said the High Court refused permission for a judicial review.

"The judge stated that it is not arguable that ease of navigation was not a planning consideration or that the planning committee erred in law referring to it.

"The ease of use of a major leisure and commercial waterway can impinge on a number of planning matters.

"The harbourmaster's views are not binding on the planning committee and especially not on the ease of navigation issue."

The owners are considering an appeal as well as a modified smaller marina, with an application to dredge as recommended by the Council.



Delighted: Trevor Cartwright has championed the Stone Pier case.



Air strike: Trevor Cartwright wants to clip their wings.



One of their aircraft is missing: This model crash landed.

Praise for Genesis Centre staff's work

GENESIS Centre at Locks Heath is going from strength to strength – thanks to the excellent staff.

Two issues of a magazine called INTRO have been printed and delivered to young people in the area.

Sessions include learning to play decks and drums, building computer games, plus drug and alcohol awareness for older groups.

Councillor Mrs Ruth Godrich said: "The Centre regularly works with an average of 40 young people and is getting new contacts every week."

Events with senior schools in the Borough are planned.

The Music Studio continues to expand and bands and groups from across Hampshire have recorded there.

The Centre will close from March 31 for 5 weeks for redecoration.

Their 'sea legs' won't stretch to a short walk to college

LAZY seafaring students are causing traffic problems by parking haphazardly in narrow Newtown Road, Warsash.

Residents complain they have to navigate around cars belonging to students attending the Maritime College.

Councillor Trevor Cartwright said the parking problems arose when building works started within the college last September.

He said talks and site meetings with the police had taken place

The Council contacted the college to obtain an update and was told the



Chaotic: Daily scene in Newtown Road, Warsash.

building works were due to be completed by the end of April.

"The college had asked students to use the Working Men's Club car park, but unfortunately they were unable to enforce this on students who seem to think it is

too far to walk.

"Once the works are completed, the car parking capacity will be the same as before, and hopefully, the problem will be rectified. If not, further action will need to be taken," said Councillor Cartwright.

Chance for residents to discuss crime and disorder

A SERIES of community meetings held in March gave residents an opportunity to comment on crime and fears they encounter locally.

People had the chance to meet beat and Council officers to learn about their enforcement roles and what they are

doing to meet policing priorities.

Community Safety Partnership Chairman Councillor Trevor Cartwright said: "We are working closely with the police and many other organisations to make Fareham a safer place. It's a good way to get feedback."

River users to have their say

USERS' concerns about lack of consultation over imposition of harbour dues on the River Hamble will be discussed by a working group.

It has been set up to look into all the issues around harbour dues, including supervision charges.

All users will have the opportunity to give evidence to the working group at Warsash Sailing Club at 2pm on Tuesday, April 18.

It will be chaired by Councillor Seán Woodward, Vice-chairman of the River Hamble Harbour Management Committee.

He said it was an opportunity for anyone with concerns about the new charging regime to come and make their views known.

"The working group will consider carefully everything raised and will make recommendations to the Harbour Board in July," he said.

Vandals destroy safety fence

VANDALS destroyed safety fencing during construction of a new skateboard area on the green near Lockwood Shopping Centre.

Fareham Council is providing the facilities, which include cycle ramps and handball goal posts, after consultations with local youngsters.

Councillor Mike Godrich said the fencing, like the new facilities, was costly and designed to protect the area and the public.

"If you see anyone vandalising the equipment please tell the Council or the police," he said.

Lockwood market is a success

A **TRADERS'** market held on a Lockwood Centre car park was successful and it is hoped it will be a regular feature. A French market is planned soon.

LOCKS HEATH & WARSASH 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.

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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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