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CHAIRMAN'S PERSPECTIVE ON BREXIT



HERE we are, in mid-October, and all the domestic news is still totally dominated by Brexit.

Every time I listen to or watch the news I get a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach that what appears to be gradually being negotiated is not at all what the millions of people who voted Leave voted for.

I accept that millions also voted to Remain but I am sure that no-one wanted us to leave on terms which mean that, in effect, we have not left at all: that we are tied in to a Customs Union preventing us from making our own trade deals with other countries; bound by EU regulations, paying into the EU budget and having no say about how the EU operates.

In my mind that will result in all the disadvantages of membership without any of the advantages. We are being held to ransom by the EU Commission because, despite her original statement that "No deal is better than a bad deal", our Prime minister now apparently believes that a deal has to be done at almost any cost.

Forget Chequers. What we are now negotiating makes that look like a perfect scenario. We gave away all our bargaining chips in the first few months and now have relatively little to bargain with. There is even a suggestion that if we do not get a deal we still have to pay the EU the £39 billion.

What happened to 'there is no agreement on anything until everything is agreed'?

We cannot allow this to happen. If we

leave with no deal then so be it.

We can continue to try to reach a trade agreement but make it plain that, unless we do, nothing will be paid.

We should also be clear that we will not put in physical border structures between Northern Ireland and the Republic. If the EU want to do so then they must do it and pay the price.

We need the Government to show some courage and resolve. They must stand up to bullies and not just adopt the view of the last person to speak, for fear of losing votes.

Unless we get this right, and honour the referendum result, the Conservative Party will pay the price. What would Margaret have done?! I think I know.

Teresa May at Chequers



Selecting election candidates

AS AN Association team, Wealden's officers have gone through a long and convoluted process for the selection of candidates for next May's elections. The system was designed to give local members more of a say in the selection process and to ensure that a sitting candidate did not have a position for life irrespective of how effective he or she had been.

We dealt with the latter point by deciding as an Association that, because of boundary changes, there were no sitting councillors so that every ward was up for grabs.

This process (which is still not totally complete 10 months after we started it) has attracted much criticism and, it is hoped, will be changed for the elections after 2019. I will not even mention the additional complications which arise in wards which cross Parliamentary boundaries!

Thankfully we have been told that we need not follow the same procedure for the three town council candidate selections, and we will not do so.

Helen Galley



Fire numbers

It's a busy time for East Sussex Fire and Rescue, in more ways than one, as Clr Roy Galley explains.



THE overall number of fires in the county is down by about 50% in the last 20 years but the Fire and Rescue Service in East Sussex still deals with 9,500 incidents per year, of which 1,132 are so-called primary fires, that is fires which cause injury or affect property.

We have a number of priorities including reducing the number of accidental fires. There were 499 of these in 2017/18: this is an improvement on previous years but much worse than other fire authorities, so we are putting a lot of work into reducing accidental fires. We are also focussing on preventing fires spreading from the room where they started. In 2017/18, 92% of fires were confined to the room in which they began.

Fire Prevention is a key part of the work in the modern Fire Service. We carried out 11,000 home-safety visits last year, aimed primarily at homes considered to be vulnerable, and we are working closely with GPs and other frontline services to identify people who may need safety advice. Our aim this year is to make 12,000 home-safety visits and increasingly to visit business premises as well as homes.

Another big focus is on a Fire Cover Review which is undertaken every few years. This will engage many staff and look for gaps and overlaps in fire cover. We will be looking at appliances,



vehicles, equipment and duty patterns to ensure we are giving safe cover and making the best use of our resources. Separately, there is an estates' review looking, for example, at sharing buildings with the police and ambulance service in Uckfield and Heathfield.

In addition, the Government has set up a new inspection regime under a joint inspectorate which also covers the police. The inspection of East Sussex will take place next Spring. We are reviewing all our activities so that we will hopefully impress the Inspector. We are concentrating on maintaining and improving a responsive Fire Service, fit for modern times.

CENTRAL MEMBERSHIP



Wealden's Treasurer, Robin Farmer, recaps on recent changes to membership administration

Until July this year Wealden Constituency Conservative Association (WCCA) was responsible for collecting membership subscriptions and issuing membership cards to members from our office.

Conservative Central Office has been rolling out a programme, over the last few years, of centrally administering membership on behalf of local associations. WCCA, along with other associations in the South East, were in the final phase implemented from July.

New system

In the month before your membership is due for renewal you will receive an email from the Membership Department with a link and code allowing you to renew your membership online. Where an email address is not held, notification and details of how to pay are posted to the member.

Membership has been standardised at £25 per member. Current and former members of the armed forces are entitled to a reduced rate of £15 and members under 23 pay a reduced rate of £5.

The previous concessions available to local associations to offer reduced rates, such as WCCA's £40 joint membership, have been

withdrawn. WCCA are writing to all affected members prior to them receiving their membership renewal from the Membership Department giving them their available options including becoming a Supporter.

Members who currently have standing orders payable to WCCA need take no action as arrangements are in place for the office to process their membership on receipt of the standing order payment.

We are aware that some members prefer to pay WCCA locally and members can continue to send cheques, payable to WCCA, to Trevor in the office at 4 Foundry Terrace, Foundry Lane, Lewes, BN7 2FD. Membership will then be processed through the office on the member's behalf as previously. You can call him on 01273 937 661 with any questions about your membership.

Cards

Membership cards are now being sent out by Campaign HQ rather than WCCA. Members should be aware that it can now take be up to 28 days from renewal before cards are received.

Current members who pay below the standardised rates have the option of being a Supporter. Supporters will continue to be notified of local events but will not have voting rights.

Patrons

Most Patrons currently pay by standing order. Patrons who pay by cheque will be contacted by WCCA and be asked to pay locally as central membership administration cannot deal with the different membership levels for single and joint members. Patron's membership will be processed by the office.

200 Club

Membership of the Wealden 200 Club does not constitute membership of the Party and will continue to be administered locally by WCCA.



OLD HOP GARDENS' NEW LIFE

The first new tenants have been welcomed into Wealden's latest new-build development in St Mary's Avenue Hailsham. The Old Hop Gardens (formerly Elizabeth Court) boast a mix of general-needs houses and flats in a contemporary design as Cllr Graham Wells, Wealden's Cabinet Member for Housing and Benefits, explains.

HAILSHAM has the highest level of housing need in the District. We are proud of our commitment to provide high-quality council housing at an affordable rent to those who need it most. Every aspect of this build has been given careful consideration. It not only meet the needs of the tenants, but also ensures that maintenance costs are manageable for the Council in the longer-term.

This development offers more than just a roof over people's heads. It offers a secure,

stable environment for families to grow and prosper. We hope the residents of the Old Hop Gardens are very happy in their new homes.

The completed scheme cost £2.4million. It delivers 17 quality, affordable homes made up of 9 one-bedroom flats, three two-bedroom flats and five two-bedroom houses. Parking is provided, along with landscaped communal gardens.

All properties on the site will be let to local households via the council's choice-based lettings system.

On the Road for CPC 18

As this year's Conservative Party Conference descended on Birmingham, Cllr Toby Illingworth was among the Wealden contingent.



The pre-conference Saturday night is one of my favourite evenings at Conference. One has the opportunity to meet old friends in a relatively calm and quiet atmosphere; very much the calm before the storm.

This being my seventh consecutive CPC, I have become accustomed to using this night to judge the mood of Party activists and MPs. It is fair to say that this year it was somewhat downbeat. Frustrations over a lack of direction, domestic policy, and the vision for the UK after leaving the EU were common topics of discussion. This therefore was a conference for the Party leadership to refresh the brand, bring a new vision for Party and country, going forward. Unfortunately, at least for the first three days, this did not materialise in the main hall. Key speeches lacked content and a new vision for what the Party stands for, meaning that the success of the conference on television relied solely on the Wednesday speeches.

Fringe-worthy

There was however hope, not from the ministerial speeches, but from the Fringe. It was brimming with policy ideas and visions for the UK that were positive, ambitious, new, and exciting. Discussions ranged across any and every policy area imaginable, and I even managed to attend one where Brexit wasn't mentioned at all. This was the Party beginning a process of re-engineering its ideology, finding a new platform from whence to fight Labour and demonstrate to the country that we are still the Party of aspiration and the future.

The reception circuit was noticeably lacking the attendance of one key individual, rarely seen through a sea of activists and lobbyists guzzling warm white wine and distinctly-average canapés: The Prime Minister, determined to save her voice after last year's catastrophe. Instead, Jeremy Hunt stepped up to replace her, doing a superb job of being in three places at the same time during a relentless schedule.

The Wednesday of Conference was much anticipated, to see what the Prime Minister could do to unite her party and turn the page on the troubles of the last year. It was all looking positive when her warm-up act Geoffrey Cox, the Attorney General, provided the best speech of conference so far: a rousing, powerful and hope-filled vision for the UK after leaving the EU. For the first time this year, the hall erupted with excitement following his speech as almost deafening cheers filled the venue. It was then the Prime Minister's turn to reassure her party that she had a plan that we could all get behind.

Strutting her stuff

Dancing on stage, in what I have to say was one of the strangest entrances I have seen at Conference, the PM began to lay out her pitch. The speech was a success: yes there were many, including me, who would prefer a more Conservative economic approach, but the PM did what she needed to do: demonstrate she stood for something and had an idea of what the Britain of the future could look like.

As we left Birmingham, there was at least a feeling of relief that we had managed to get through the week unscathed, and that the PM had performed one of the best speeches since entering Number 10.

