

LETTERS AND COMMENT



View from the House

Lee Scott
MP for Ilford North

If speculation around the town hall is correct, the new Labour-run administration of Redbridge Council is planning to scrap the area committee system. If this were to happen, I would be very disappointed but not at all surprised.

Area committees give residents the chance to speak on local issues that concern them and to meet and hear directly from their ward councillors. People can also comment on agenda items and make suggestions of possible topics for future meetings. Area committees can debate and decide on neighbourhood roads, recreational and open space issues and scrutinise the effectiveness of local service delivery. In addition, to help provide funding support for community groups, they have an annual discretionary budget.

Over the years, Labour has proclaimed vociferous support for bringing key decision making as close to local people as possible. The sad reality is that once Labour takes power, the knee-jerk reaction is to centralise political authority. For Labour, the fact that they do not have absolute political control of each and every Redbridge area committee makes these expendable.

I do not want our residents to be fobbed off with phoney political consultation and debate. The suggestion that electronic chit-chat via the internet is a substitute for discussions between real people at real meetings is self-serving nonsense. If the abolition takes place, I promise I will do all in my power, working with neighbourhood groups, residents and interested councillors, to provide a structure for an alternative area forum that will keep in place the opportunity for local people to have their say.

SOCIAL DIVERSITY
Mix of cultures enriches life

How lucky I am to live in such a diverse area. On Saturday, June 7, I attended the Kabaddi Games in Goodmayes. The weather was fantastic, as was the atmosphere. No end of Sikh residents were only too happy to explain the rules of the game to me. It is very much a Punjabi game and the crowd were very excited supporting their teams.

One of the highlights was the children's team. Their enthusiasm was wonderful and I was delighted to see that this tradition wasn't going to disappear.

On Sunday, June 8, I went to the Al-Noor Family Funday. The event is key in Al-Noor's fundraising strategy for Islamic Relief and Orphans In Need.

The charities focus on education and training, provision of clean water, health and nutrition, etc. All monies raised goes towards helping the charitable work that the Al-Noor foundation does in the community.

Again the weather was fantastic, with a variety of stalls, exciting rides, good food and much more.

I enjoyed a wonderful weekend thanks to people who allowed me to share their culture and my life is much richer for it.

Cllr Barbara White
Goodmayes

POLITICAL DEBATE
Personal slurs are unmerited

Over the last few weeks it has become very clear that the Tories plan to respond to their recent defeat by launching increasingly personalised attacks against Labour people ahead of the general election.

In response to Pauline Fynn's letter last week, I'd like to point out that Ilford

iWitness24 PICTURE OF THE WEEK



Tony Webb took this picture of two Egyptian geese on a wildlife raft in South Park, Ilford, with the caption: "Which way

to Egypt and the Nile? Tony is one of several iWitness contributors who regularly send us their images of wildlife in and

around Redbridge. We'd love to see more, so why not sign up to london.iWitness24.co.uk and start sharing your pictures?

North Labour members chose Wes Streeting to be our parliamentary candidate by a significant margin – precisely because of his life experience.

He has spent his professional career working outside politics for a range of charities focused on supporting people from disadvantaged backgrounds to access education.

There aren't many people in Parliament from working-class families like Wes.

Even fewer, I suspect, are those who worked at McDonald's to fund their way through college. Does this count as a "proper job" for Mrs Fynn?

The Tories may wish to fight the next election in the gutter, but we have no intention of joining them there. The people of Ilford North deserve a better standard of political debate.

Annajoy David
Chairman
Ilford North
Labour Party

CLLR STREETING
Criticisms show Tories afraid

Some of your readers seem to have short memories when launching personal attacks against Labour deputy leader Cllr Wes Streeting.

Ilford North has a history of electing local councillors to the House of Commons. Linda Perham was a sitting councillor when she was elected in 1997 and chose to stand down following the general election.

Current MP Lee Scott was selected as the Conservative parliamentary candidate just months after the local election and was a serving Cabinet member when elected to the Commons in 2005. He chose to stay on the council to see out his term.

I am sure Cllr Streeting will take heart from these attacks as a sign that the Tories are worried. They should be.

Ken Turner
Worcester Gardens
Cranbrook

That attack was not in my name

I would like to point out that, though Mr Smith rightly reprised my concerns about Wes Streeting sitting on the fence about his Westminster career, I do not wish to be associated with the other comments made in that letter.

I made no reference to Mr Streeting's educational achievements, nor his lack of what Mr Smith calls a "proper job". I applaud those who dedicate their time to charitable causes and have many friends and family with Oxbridge degrees for whom such an award presents no major obstacle.

It is outrageous that any politician thinks s/he can hedge their bets on a

post at Westminster at the residents' expense, whatever their party.

That the electorate should tolerate it is another matter entirely, but my comments were not party political, nor an attack on Mr Streeting as an individual, which was not clear from Mr Smith's response.

Pádraig Floyd
Elmstead Road
Seven Kings

AREA COMMITTEES
Cost can be cut in other ways

With regard to the Labour Party agenda to scrap area committee meetings, I would like to suggest that they do not use "a sledge hammer to crack a nut"! There are other options that should be considered for reducing cost, but not least because I can recall that it was they who insisted on these meetings in the first place.

I think the principle of community engagement is paramount and, while cost and numbers taking part is important, I do not think they should be dropping the idea altogether. So I would, for example, suggest that they cut the number of area meetings from seven to two meetings held on the basis of Ilford North meetings alternating with Ilford South meetings where the constituency councillors and MPs can be held accountable and consult on key local community issues rather than routine council agendas.

If even this is unaffordable, then the politicians can attend voluntarily to engage with their constituents and earn voter support through regular engagement, even if MPs are unable to attend each time. After all, there are a number of other community individuals involved on a voluntary basis. I wonder how many other people would agree that it is a better

Turn to facing page



The Rev Stephen Derbyshire
City Gates Christian Centre, Ilford

Spiritual life

Freedom for "hostages", "press freedom under threat", "free at last – how I finally stopped smoking". We all love a freedom story.

There is something liberating and exhilarating about freedom, whether it's the release of those imprisoned unjustly, the opportunity for those living under a repressive

regime to speak their mind or just the first day of your holiday.

We want to be in charge of our own lives, express our opinions freely and make choices about the things we want to do.

But, for many, true freedom seems out of reach. We like to be in control but too often we feel out of control. We'd love to be free, but too

often we feel imprisoned.

Harmful addictions and behavioural patterns can ruin relationships and wreck lives. The Bible calls this "sin" – doing, saying or thinking things that go against God's plan for living.

The good news is that Jesus came to rescue us from sin – to give us a fresh start and the life of freedom that we were

designed for.

His death on the cross and resurrection three days later broke the power of sin over us and enables us to break through to a life of freedom and fulfilment.

"If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." John 8v36

Why not come to Jesus and start a new life of freedom?