

Out & About (4th Oct 2009)

By the time you read this, the political parties will have held their conferences before the general election which must be held before next summer.

As I write, there are debates about when we should retire, how to fund the small hole in the countries finances without upsetting anyone (that should keep the politicians occupied until the year dot and still not resolve the problem) and stop unemployment rising any more than necessary.

Before I go much further, I suppose I should remind readers that I'm really a Conservative Liberal Democratic Socialist with leanings towards the middle. Let's have a look at how we can get the country back into financial balance after those nasty bankers got a little greedy. The current flavour is to let people work as long as they wish, to reduce the time when the state has to support them. At the same time, keep the up and coming work force - young people - out of the labour market by training them for something, sending them to university or just generally keeping them quiet and giving them a few bob. Indeed, young people are assumed to have no interest in politics, so they are really just ignored. Then when they get into mischief (aka trouble) nothing is done to help them. So we have a typical political dilemma, how to raise or save money to keep themselves in the manner to which they have become accustomed to. The current thinking is to reduce spending on OAP's by deferring the payment of the state pension and allowing them to continue to earn money and pay taxes. Great, until it's remembered that there aren't actually enough 'real' jobs for everyone to do and we have this strange group of people who are going to work and pay taxes to support the elderly - only the elderly have already nicked their jobs.

Sending the young to university doesn't actually solve the problem, only defers it. So what is the answer? As the well known Irish answer to a similar question goes, 'if I were you, I wouldn't start from here.....'. I suppose I was lucky in some ways. when I Had to join the labour market, National Service had already been stopped but there were actually a lot of jobs available and I'd even been offered apprenticeships at two different firms (Beatles, eat your hearts out, you could have had me on the mixing desk!). Today, the vast majority are 'pen pushers' and indeed, the public sector has outgrown all others. Even our local council managed with two and a half staff and just 13 Councillors 15 years ago. Now, 15 Councillors have at least double the number running around behind them. I've obviously missed exactly what better service we get from these extra people. Perhaps it was a big mistake that I 'persuaded' the Council that we needed more space if we were to behave like a functioning Town Council, rather than a 'consultative' body with nothing but look after allotments!

It seems all levels of government are having to reduce their spending to stay within the agreed budget. Even the Borough Council is looking to scale back on their ambitious plans to redevelop the town centre in Hemel. Even the revenue from the parking now doesn't cover the running costs. Naturally, the way to resolve this is to increase revenue (reducing expenditure is not a phrase in the civil service dictionary). Have you noticed how every advertisement for local government posts have on the first line 'Final Salary Pension Scheme'. No? Remember we all pay for this gold plated benefit, which was brought in to compensate for comparative low wages in the civil service, even though you cannot be 'dismissed' in practice No matter what.

It never ceases to surprise me that politicians seem to have a blinkered mind set. Let's consider something local like Gable Hall in Prince Edward Street. The Borough Council have decided that it has reached the end of it's life and should be demolished. The Town Council and Citizens Association convinced the Borough to hold fire while alternate options were considered - like Victoria Schools proposal for additional parking to supplement their use of a school playground for parking (why?) rather than a play area like wot it was in my day.

As the Borough council own the land as well as Gable House (next for the chop?) next door, courtesy of Berkhamsted residents pre Dacorum, I think it would make a nice site for the Berkhamsted, sorry - Dacorum, museum. I mean, it has to be better than occupying a few old garages behind the Civic Centre as it does now. The town 'rescued' the Town Hall after the centre was ripped out of the town. This project has to be a lot easier.

If you think this is an idea worthy of the towns support, why not get in touch, either direct to me (www.normancutting.com), your local councillor (www.berkhamsted.gov.uk) or the Citizens Association (www.bcacitizen.org.uk).

That's my quota for this issue, so don't forget the Festival of Light on Friday, December 6th - father Christmas will arrive 15 minutes earlier than usual - and I'll have a look at a few more local and political matters in the next issue.