

Split ward could go either way in upcoming council elections

Tom Ambrose

tom.ambrose@london.newsquest.co.uk

With the campaign trail for this month's local council elections hotting up, one ward that could seemingly go either way is Heathfield.

The ward is currently split with two Liberal Democrat councillors – Councillor John Coombs and Councillor Bill Treble – with the Conservatives represented by Councillor Alan Butler.

Heathfield traditionally wins the left vote, with the Lib Dems and a rejuvenated Labour campaign fighting for the hearts of the electorate.

Coun Coombs admitted his party had always appealed to “natural Labour voters” and hoped that would be the case again this time around.

He said: “We have upped our game because of what Labour have been doing in the ward.

“We are campaigning more than we have in the past – there are people in this area who are natural Labour supporters who lend their vote to us.

“And people who are Labour and voted for us are still doing that.

“There was a freak result last time when two white Lib Dems got the vote followed by two white Conservatives, followed by the Asian candidates from both parties.”

Among the issues Coun



Natural support: The Labour candidates are campaigning for the hearts of the voters

Coombs considered to be of importance to Heathfield people were traffic congestion in Powder Mill Lane and Hospital Bridge Road.

In 2010, Coun Coombs led the way with 2,338 votes, closely followed by Coun Treble on 2,088.

He is standing once again on May 22, along with fellow candidates Rosy Cobb and Michael Wilson, with Coun Treble standing down.

An issue, agreed on by all three major parties in Heathfield, was securing a direct bus link to nearby Whitton.

Labour candidate Craig Owen said frustration with the Lib Dems and Conservatives would lead to his party

winning its first council seat in the ward since the 1970s.

He said: “The message is in the Greater London Assembly elections in 2012, Labour came second in the ward so it shows people are fed up with the Lib Dems.

“The feeling is that Labour could do quite well.

“The Liberals are the natural opposition party in Heathfield, but we hope we can win a seat.”

He added that while he and fellow Labour candidates, Rhonda Evans and Rob Newbery, were pleased with the announcement Whitton station will have step-free access, more work needed to be done.

He said: “Five years is a long time to wait and we would like to see the funding brought forward and form part of a wider package of improvements to station platforms and the canopy.”

Coun Alan Butler, standing for re-election in the ward, described the rebuilding of Heathfield School as being “something that people like”.

He stands alongside fellow Annie Hambridge and Saba Shaukat, the latter of whom he feels is vital to connect the Conservative campaign with the

Tory: Coun Alan Butler

Muslim community.

He said: “There are 1,000 Muslims in Heathfield and, I don't know about other candidates, but I have found it difficult to engage with that community.

“I have done well with the Sikhs and Hindus but getting through to the Muslims has been difficult.”

He also stressed the Conservatives’ “pioneering support” for getting the 110 bus into Whitton.

Coun Butler secured the third-highest vote in 2010, with 1,795 voting for him, just 32 votes ahead of Lib Dem candidate Asad Mahmood.

Other candidates standing in Heathfield are the Green Party's Stephen Smith and Andrew Christie of the UK Independence Party.



To hustings

A Whitton independent candidate has organised an elections hustings on Friday, May 9.

Paul Hampartsoumian has invited all 12 Whitton election candidates to take part in the public meeting at St Philip and James Church Hall at 7pm.

He said: “It will be an opportunity for each candidate to speak about what they are offering and for Whitton residents to ask questions.”



Changes: Isla Dawes at Kew Bookshop RT84778

A new leaf for shop?

An architect who worked on plans to redevelop the independent Kew Bookshop believes changes will improve the shop.

Plans for the shop in Station Approach, which would see the size of the retail space doubled, have been met with hostility from the manager who said she would not be able to afford the rent.

Isla Dawes, shop owner, said: “If it goes ahead I will not be able to afford the rent.

“The changes will really impact on the whole character of Kew Village because what is nice about it here is we have these bizarre little buildings with wooden frontages that have been here for about 100 years.”

Architect Malcolm Kemp, whose plans include replacing the wooden building with brick, but keeping the shop front, building a new level on and doubling the retail space.

He said: “How many people who have objected to these proposals have actually been into the bookshop and bought a book?”

“We have kept the important part of it, the shop front, and will make improvements to the back, which is basically a plywood box, and the changes will improve the quality of the shop.”

Campaigners started a petition to stop the plans, which can be viewed on Richmond Council's website.



Recognition: Ben Woodhart receives his award from chief executive Ann Radmore

Paramedic praised for flood efforts

A Twickenham paramedic has been recognised for tireless efforts to help Wraybury flood victims.

Ben Woodhart, 42, was among 35 London Ambulance

Service staff commended during a ceremony in Westminster this month.

The father-of-three, who took action in his hometown Wraybury alongside

neighbours, said: “It felt like the longest resuscitation I've ever done in my life and I was exhausted afterwards. I was a resident first and foremost, protecting our village.”

Every dog has its day

Dogs were put through their paces at a canine agility course aimed at improving animal health in Teddington this week.

Pets and their owners congregated at Teddington Cricket Club on Wednesday, May 7, as part of an initiative to improve animal health launched by the

Pet Food Manufacturers Association.

The campaign launch saw pet owners meet animal experts on hand with advice.

The obstacle course for dogs was the first in an eight-month series of pet health events, which include free weigh-in sessions and exercise activities.



Dog obstacles: A pet health event

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