

Cabot News

Serving Kingsdown, Cotham, Brandon Hill, Redcliffe, Spike Island and the City Centre

Edited by Mark Wright & Alex Woodman

Spring 2014

Forty years of service!



Lib Dems deliver £700 tax cut



↑ The Cabot Team: Cllrs Mark Wright (R), Alex Woodman and Bristol West MP Stephen Williams (L) celebrating tax cut for workers

The national Budget has confirmed victory for the Liberal Democrats in their campaign to cut taxes for people on low and middle incomes. Cutting income tax by £700 - by raising the tax-free allowance to £10,000 - was the top priority on the front page of the Liberal Democrat manifesto, and focuses the benefit of this tax cut on those on low pay.

The increase in tax-free allowance comes into effect in April, and this year's national Budget in March has confirmed that the Liberal Democrats have now been able to go even further. The tax-free threshold will rise to £10,500 next year, giving a tax cut of £800 for 25 million working people since 2010.

Stephen Williams, MP for Bristol West, said: "This is excellent news and provides a huge boost for everyone, especially low earners. I want us to go even further after the General Election - with the goal that you do not pay Income Tax until you earn more than the minimum wage. Our manifesto pledge to take the poorest out of tax and give millions of low-earners a tax cut is making Britain a fairer place."



Lib Dems in Bristol try to stop Council Tax being put up

At the Council's Budget meeting on 18th Feb the Mayor's proposal to increase Council Tax by 2% was voted through by Labour and Conservative councillors, and a large package of funding cuts was passed. Lib Dem councillors tried to block the tax increase as the Government was offering extra funding to all councils that would freeze the tax - effectively paying half the cost of the freeze and bringing millions of extra pounds into the city. The Lib Dems also found enough unused cash in the Council's bank accounts for the other half of required 1% for the freeze to be covered with no cuts required to fund it!

But in a very strange debate, the Labour and Conservative groups voted down the proposal, saying it was "irresponsible" to spend the unused money the Lib Dems had found. Then just 15 minutes later, after voting against a Council Tax freeze, they decided that it was okay after all to spend this money, but on their own projects instead!

Cabot councillors Mark Wright and Alex Woodman were extremely disappointed by this outcome. Mark says "I'm astounded by the hypocrisy of the Labour Party in this issue. Over the last year Labour have been saying there is a 'cost of living crisis' ... and actually they're absolutely right about that. But the moment someone comes up with a way of keeping costs and taxes down, they are not interested!"



"A majority of all councils in the country took the Government money and froze Council Tax this year because it is one of the biggest costs on ordinary families, and it's a very unfair tax as well - but rather than accept funding for freezing the tax, Bristol Labour preferred to put it up so they can spend more on their own projects."

You can see Mark's speech to the Council here: <http://tinyurl.com/pr2rn3h>

Centre Post Office closed

Many city centre residents will notice that the Post Office on Baldwin Street closed recently. Cllr Alex Woodman says "We were notified by Post Office Ltd, after the closure, that it is only 'temporary'. However, no indication has been given of what 'temporary' means. Bitter experience teaches us that the closure may be long term. The Post Office branch at the Triangle was 'temporarily' closed in 2008, and six years later it still hasn't re-opened..."

When the branch at the Triangle closed, Alex complained to the Post Office that this would leave residents in the area without access to a nearby branch, and ironically the response was that the Baldwin Street branch is not far away!

Alex continued, "We will be following this up with the Post Office, and seeking an assurance that replacement branches will be opened as soon as possible. It is simply not acceptable to continue closing Post Offices on a 'temporary' basis without providing an alternative service for local residents."



↑ Cllr Alex Woodman shows the "temporarily" closed Post Office

Newsletters all year round, not just at election time

Working all year round, not just for elections

20 mph zones start



Bristol's 20mph zones have gone into action! Alex and Mark welcome this as they have been arguing for it for a long time. Details and map: <http://tinyurl.com/pw6friu>

Bearpit improvement works start!

The highway works for the St James Barton Roundabout pedestrian/cycle improvement scheme have started. The construction is expected to last until the end of July. This can be broken down into the three phases:

- 1) The first phase, until April, involves altering the footways and islands and installing new traffic signals to accommodate new surface-level pedestrian/cycle crossings
- 2) The second phase, April - July, is the refurbishment of the interior 'Bearpit' area. This work will require some of the pedestrian subways to be temporarily closed. Alternative pedestrian routes will be provided.
- 3) The third phase is to construct the new footway that will run around the inside edge of the roundabout. This work will be carried out in July and will involve lane closures.

Mayor retreats on Castle Park

The Mayor has been persuaded by the campaign to protect Castle Park to reduce the size of the redevelopment plans there. As reported in the last Cabot News, the Mayor had originally proposed scaling up the plans he inherited from the previous Lib Dem administration, and would have encroached on some of the best bits of the park.

Alex Woodman says, "We are pleased he has reduced the plans nearer that originally proposed, but disappointed that part of the park next to the harbour will still be lost."

The changes are contained in the current draft of the 'Central Area Plan' - an important document which will determine how the centre of Bristol will develop over the next 12 years to 2026. Details of the plan, can be found on the Council's website at www.bristol.gov.uk/centralarea

Government and Planning Inspector both confirm BRT

The Government and the independent Planning Inspector have both confirmed that the Ashton to Temple Meads BRT (now "Metrobus") route can go ahead. This means that the plans will now proceed with the Mayor's adjustments, with planning permission being given by the Council's planning committee last month.

During the construction period - over a year - there will unfortunately be a great deal of disruption along Cumberland Road. The Council is expecting that the road will have to become one-way for a substantial part of the period. Your Cabot councillors Alex and Mark have made it clear to the planners that they believe the road is wide enough that even with the works going, one-way operation should only be needed in exceptional circumstances.

In addition, there have been rumours that the road could be fully closed at times. Mark wrote to the planners in February laying out in no uncertain terms that it would be totally unacceptable for the road to be fully closed for anything more than a half-day - the effect of any total closure would be devastating to residents and businesses.

The planners replied by acknowledging Mark and Alex's position, and noting that early discussions with construction tenderers and the Transport department had already taken place about the need to maintain access to and egress from Spike Island via Cumberland Road at all times. To make sure that this definitely happens, Alex used his position on the planning committee to add a condition to the planning permission requiring that adequate access arrangements be maintained.



↑ Cllrs Mark Wright (R) and Alex Woodman (L) in Castle Park, showing the area that will be lost in the Mayor's new plans

Other Local News in Brief...

Residents' Parking on Spike Island

The Parking Department has now indicated that they are currently drawing up initial proposals for an RPZ area in Spike Island and are planning to carry out informal consultation on the initial plans early in 2014. We will help publicise the plans when we see them.

Knightstone is developer for Carriageworks

In December it was announced that Knightstone have been selected by the City Council as the preferred developer for the Carriageworks and Westmoreland House. Progress on dealing with the derelict eyesore has been making slow but steady progress over the last year.

Low Emission Zone update

Cabot councillors Mark Wright and Alex Woodman have been pushing the idea of a "Low Emission Zone" (LEZ) in central Bristol. These exist in many European cities and mean that lorries and buses would face stricter exhaust emission rules in order to reduce pollution. The Mayor is sympathetic to the idea and commissioned a report into the impact it might have. Now consultants ARUP have now been commissioned to provide a report which will examine the business case for LEZ and enable an informed decision to be taken.

Contacting your local Cabot Lib Dem Team...

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