Budgets
So, we know the answer now; the Police service will be increasing its precept by 6.4%, the County Council by nearly 5%, the Town Council by 4%, the Fire Service by 3% and the District Council by almost 2%. All, except the Town Council, are limited by the government as to the % uplift. The impact will be painful for some, but there is an increasing recognition that you cannot keep reducing money from the Government each year, not allowing councils’ rates to reflect changes in costs and still expect services to be provided. Government grant has been dramatically slashed over several years and will soon disappear completely. Inflation is beginning to creep up and we have a growing population. On top of that the numbers of us who are getting to the age where they need more services is increasing rapidly. What is never mentioned is what the government is doing with the money they have taken from councils.

FIRE!

Jason Abelwhite, the Police and Crime Commissioner, seeks to expand his empire by grabbing the County Fire Service. Cllr. Mike Shellens said, “having been involved with a number of councils/authorities it is my view that our Fire Service is the best run one that I have come across”. The Fire Authority is made up of members from all 4 parties, Cons, Lib Dem, Lab and Independents. All are united in opposing Mr. Abelwhite’s move. The business case was presented to Whitehall in September. We were told over a month ago that the decision was with the Secretary of State. So far he has not released it. Perhaps he is waiting for a good day to bury news.

Parking in town centre car parks
At long last large parts of the major development in the Town Centre are now up and running. Hooray! Latest word is that whilst a number of units have still not opened, several of those are “with the solicitors” so we can expect further announcements soon. Cyclists seem to be bent on taking chunks out of the large seat in front of the M & S store. Hopefully a minor redesign will stop this. But there is a downside to the increased enthusiasm for Huntingdon Town Centre.

Excitement with the new shops has brought to the fore the inadequate parking capacity of our town centre. Car parks are much more full generally and, at peak times, you see cars circle around both the main and the Princes Street car park, just waiting for spaces to become vacant. And, of course, many more houses are being constructed locally. The 165 current rooftop spaces on the old Waitrose building will eventually become lost to us when some company works out what they want to do with the building. Problems will then get very much worse. Unless solutions can be found, would-be shoppers will go to other shopping centres where they are more certain of finding a hassle-free parking space.

Given the congested space in the town centre, it is clear that we need the Princes Street car park to have an extra floor put on it, probably using a modular system for speed of installation. The Car Park Strategy Working Party at the district council seems to have been running for ages with no visible output. When Waitrose car park closes it will already be too late to start thinking about a solution then and begin the protracted planning approval process. We need that preliminary work sorted out now. Time is of the essence.

Parking on streets
Many households suffer from the blight of on-street parking outside their door, usually during the day as drivers seek to avoid station or other car park charges. The police say they do not have resources to control it. The result is chaos. It causes misery for local residents and can prevent buses, dustbin lorries and ambulances from getting where they need. An enforcement solution is needed.

This is complex issue and over simplified so-called solutions will not work. But the following, which is slow and complicated, just might. Creating 2-hour-no-return parking zones with residents having permits would make life much nicer for those now living in the streets concerned. Drivers would certainly jib at the cost of moving to paying car parks, but residents have suffered too long.

Our District Council staff already patrol town-centre car parks, issuing penalty charge notices (fines to you and me) for drivers not complying with the regulations. There is a move to enable the district council to take over and levy fines of people who park on-street where they shouldn’t. Mike has discussed this with the Police and Crime Commissioner, who is keen for something to happen. Such a move would bring both parts of parking enforcement together. Much more efficient. Even if HDC decide to go ahead with this (and there are only 20 councils in England that do not have this power) nothing will happen for some time as every yellow line needs to be brought up to standard first and an application sent by the County Council to Central Government. But [SNAG] there is not sufficient room in car parks to take all the dislodged cars, particularly if the Princes St. idea above is not already in place. Before anything can happen we need a solution as to where these cars, currently parking in Avenue, Cowper and Priory Roads, Primrose Lane, Newtown and elsewhere, are to go. Tricky. There is no effect on blue badge holders, their current rules and privileges still apply.

Some surplus after wages and admin is ring-fenced for the local parking service. So, this is not a major revenue earner.

Your campaigning FOCUS team, Mike Shellens, Ste Greenall, Trish Shrapnel and Michael Humphrey - WORKING ALL YEAR ROUND!

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Casework
We get lots of casework, from the doorstep, by email/phone and from our monthly surgery in the Market Square. Recently there have been requests to get broken streetlights fixed, invasive trees trimmed, help in getting applications for housing correct, explaining the issues re parking, speeding, applications for retrospective planning approval, many issues with Luminus, the need for public toilets, cycle paths both for and against, concerns that the High St is dying, updating people about progress or otherwise on Sapley Road chicanes and Buttsgrove and a first for us, helping to find out who is throwing potatoes into somebody’s garden!!

American Lane Yellow Lines
We seem to have been talking about this for many months. Now, at last, it seems the principle has been accepted. Consultation has finished. The traffic order has been published in local papers and the works have been ordered. It should now be a matter of a few weeks before this ridiculous situation is resolved. It really shouldn’t take this long to put a simple measure in place.

Night Club signs of movement
The old night club building has been empty for what seems a long time. At long last there are signs of interest. Someone is employing architects and the like to look at the kostings to upgrade the property. It is early days yet, and the interest may come to nothing. In that case the District Council, which owns the building, may have to have a radical rethink about what to do about it.
The Labour party has enjoyed a resurgence based on the left-wing policies and popular appeal of Jeremy Corbyn. At a time of political upheaval and confusion, simple, radical measures seem to offer a way out. Unfortunately, it is unclear where all the money would come from.

Many people are increasingly concerned at the rise of Momentum and fear a return to the hard left policies of the '70s.

On 'Brexit', the biggest challenge we have faced for many years, Labour is muddled, with a leader who supported Leave while many Labour MPs and members now see it would be wiser to remain in the single market and customs union.

The Liberal Democrats, often derided for being ‘in the centre’, believe strongly that we need to work together in the best interests of the country. A central position, avoiding the extremes of both other parties, is surely what the country needs. This means investing in growing the economy but also protecting public services and supporting the police, the NHS, social services and education. In 2010 the Lib Dems went into coalition with the Cons as that was in the best interests of the country at that time. We had five years of ‘strong and stable’ government! The country needs more Lib Dems at all levels of government.

The present fiasco started when David Cameron called the EU referendum to silence the anti-EU wing in his political party. He failed, leaving Downing Street within hours. Theresa May inherited a working majority, but sensing party-political advantage, called a snap election which backfired on her, leaving us where we now are, a minority Tory government propped up by the DUP. The shambolic Brexit negotiations reflect the deep divisions within her own party. Many former UKIP supporters now vote Tory, dragging the party ever further to the right. All this shows that the Tories seem to be more concerned with doing what they think is best for their political party and not for the country as a whole.