

# Tom's Mini Wychavon Round-up

*Tom McDonald*

*Conservative District Councillor - Fladbury Ward  
(Bricklehampton, Charlton, Crophorne, Fladbury and  
Wick)*

## March 2010 - The Budget Issue

### The Round-up and Lucy!

'Round Ups' have played a valuable part in my communication and work within the ward and I have been encouraged by your feedback and support for them. They are circulated both electronically and as hard copy and, in terms of finance and logistics, are produced at no cost to residents with ward distribution taking about 5 days. On occasion I have been accompanied by Lucy, my black Labrador, who sadly is no longer with us and greatly missed.

### 'Ambition in tough times'

Local residents tell me that, in terms of customer satisfaction, they view Wychavon as a successful local authority, a statement that reflects our national ranking as one of the highest performing and lowest taxing councils in the country. Such success is no accident; it has taken a great deal of commitment over the last decade to create an entrepreneurial environment with investment in bricks and mortar (hospitals, supermarkets, leisure centres), all of which have served us well financially and allowed for investment in service levels well in advance of many other councils. Things were going until, eighteen months ago, the financial world went mad.

### Back to basics is not an option!

It would be easy to overplay the financial situation, take the half-empty cup approach and tell you that expectations do not last for ever. To encourage a belief in safe 'statutory', services, under the slogan 'getting back to basics', would, I believe, mean that our residents would suffer at a time when communities will expect more from us not less.

To me the ambition must be to maintain an innovative edge, entrepreneurial rather than municipal. Not easy as we are already using fewer resources with positions not being replaced or put on hold and managers and staff increasingly stretched - a similar situation to that faced in the private sector.

Wychavon has responded quickly to the recession and recently fixed its Budget and council tax for 2010/11. Who better to give you the detail on this than the man at the centre,

### Vic Allison MBE Deputy Managing Director & Chief Financial Officer.

Wychavon District Council has recently fixed its Budget and council tax for the 2010/11 financial year, starting in April 2010. The Council had previously taken out £781,000 from its Budget in response to the recession. The financial impact on the Council so far has been in the form of lost income from planning work, car parking and its investments. However, the Council is preparing itself for further significant financial pressures from 2011/12 (the year after next). This is when the Government's funding of councils is reviewed.

With this in mind, the Budget proposals for 2010/11 are cautious. Very few additional expenditure items have been included in the Budget. However, a modest amount of money has been found for the Citizens Advice Bureau, youth facilities and energy-reducing measures at the Civic Centre, the latter being an invest-to-save initiative.

### Lowest Council Tax in the County 1.94%

Furthermore, in recognition of the tough times our taxpayers are facing, the council tax increase for next year will be set at 1.94% bringing a band D tax to £108.44. We had previously expected this to be 2.5%. This is the lowest increase of any district council in the county and probably amongst the lowest in the country.

Finally, some of you will know that we consulted widely before Christmas on where the residents of Wychavon would prefer to see any savings being made. We will take a closer look at responses over the coming months with a view to making savings, if necessary, from 2011/12.

This work and the careful financial management to date means that we are well placed to tackle the inevitable pressures which lie ahead for the whole of the public sector – we are moving on!

### **What's happened at Wood Norton?**

The long running saga of the prized but absent gates at Wood Norton Hall has taken a turn for the good. Following significant damage by a vehicle back in 2004, the highly ornate wrought iron gates, reputed to have come from Versailles and now listed for their historic and architectural interest, were rescued by local blacksmith and artisan ironworker Steve Cooper and taken to his workshop in Pershore for safekeeping and subsequent repair.

Following a period of some uncertainty, when the Hall went into administration and the new owners, Richmond Villages, established themselves, work on the gates stalled.

Following local 'what's happening' queries and working in partnership with Steve and Jim Burgin, Wychavon Heritage Manager, we were able to reinforce the importance of these gates and it was good to hear recently that Steve has now received the go-ahead to recommence work on the full repair and restoration of the gates with a view to re-installing them by the end of the year. This has come as a great relief to all involved as their heritage value cannot be underestimated.

### **Well done Charlton and thanks to the Regional Flood Defence Committee!**

I was pleased that the Charlton Flood Alleviation scheme recently received much needed recognition from the Regional Flood Defence committee, with financial support from the residents of Charlton, Wychavon and the County. Although this has made the scheme possible, we do still need to stay vigilant as flood prevention still remains a high priority, both locally and nationally, with a real risk that public expenditure reductions will delay such worthwhile projects.

The recent post Christmas snow and rain have once again shown how vulnerable the flood 'Wet Spots' in the ward can be. I can report that a localised flooding incident at Wood Norton was speedily addressed through effective County and District partnership working.

### **The Fladbury Parish Plan adopted**

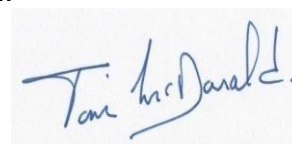
Parish plans are community-lead projects that provide a framework to take stock of the present and to plan for the future.

The Fladbury Parish Plan was recently adopted by the council as a local information source. It will also provide a sound basis for those projects developed through the Parish Plan that may require funding to take them forward. Congratulations to all involved.

### **Bad idea – Good Idea!**

We live in a world shaped by bad ideas, no doubt many of which were conceived as good ideas! Many of us believe that current central government-imposed inspection regimes, targets, and bureaucracy are suffocating local government and imposing a costly 'one size fits all system' on our communities. To that I would add the abolishment of quangos and devolvement of their budgets' – its time to remove some of these burdens to better address the balance between central and local government - hopefully soon!

As your Councillor I am mindful of your trust and I welcome your input on any council or ward issues. Together we can work to maintain and improve our services for the benefit of all.



Tom McDonald  
Conservative District Councillor  
(Executive Board Member - Regeneration)

