



FROM THE CLOCK TOWER

A Bulletin from Chris Grayling MP
for residents in the Borough of
Epsom and Ewell, Ashted, Nork,
Tattenhams and Prestons

October 2001



This is the first regular update from Chris Grayling, the Member of Parliament for Epsom and Ewell. The Epsom and Ewell Parliamentary constituency covers the Borough of Epsom and Ewell, as well as Ashted and the north end of the Borough of Reigate and Banstead, including Nork, Tattenhams and Prestons.

This bulletin will be published twice yearly, in October and April, and will provide all local residents with an update of Chris's work in the area and about other news and events. It will also provide you with updated information about surgeries and other contact details should you have a problem you need to raise with your MP.



Chris Grayling MP

You can write to
Chris Grayling MP
at the
House of Commons,
London
SW1A 0AA.

Hospital Watch



Epsom General Hospital

The situation at Epsom Hospital continues to dominate the headlines locally. Many patients have raised their concerns with both Chris and the Epsom and St Helier NHS Trust. They have now been endorsed by the Government-backed Commission for Health Improvement, which has publicised a report highly critical of the way the Trust is being managed.

The Commission highlighted several specific failings at Epsom and St Helier. Cleanliness was picked as a matter of particular concern. The Trust does not learn from complaints, and they take too long to be investigated.

Relations between the management and staff are also poor - all findings which reflect many of the complaints that patients have been making in the past few months.

In July, Chris met the previous Chief Executive of the Trust, Dr Nigel Sewell, to discuss some of the specific concerns raised by Epsom patients. After Dr Sewell's decision to take early retirement, Chris met the new Chief Executive, John de Braux, to discuss ways of improving the situation. He has also held meetings with senior officials at the East Surrey Health Authority.

"By far the biggest issue in my Parliamentary postbag is the Hospital," Chris says. "I will continue to monitor the situation and do what I can to encourage the Trust to make improvements at Epsom Hospital. I have also asked the Trust to make a proper long term commitment to the future of the hospital, to get rid of the doubts that are affecting staff morale."

Dealing with the school places shortfall

According to Surrey County Council, there will be a shortage of more than five hundred secondary school places within the next five years. In July, the Government agreed - in its

response to a written Parliamentary Question from Chris Grayling - to reopen discussions with the County and Blenheim High School about the possibility of providing

funding to expand the school. An extra two forms of entry at Blenheim would help meet some of the expected shortfall.

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Blenheim High School

"I have been doing what I can to start and support discussions between the County and the Government to find a solution to this problem. I will continue to do so, and have expressed a willingness to lead an all-Party delegation from the area to meet officials at the Department of Education if necessary," said Chris.



Chris meets local residents affected by the Central Railway proposal

IN BRIEF

Teacher shortages

In July Chris made a speech in the House of Commons calling for urgent government support for Surrey schools, which continue to have great difficulty in filling vacancies. He has also met the Director of Education at Surrey County Council to offer what support he can at Westminster as the local education authority tries to find a solution to the problem.

Mobile Phone Masts

Many residents have raised concerns about the number of mobile phone mast applications locally, and particularly about a number of applications falling within residential or conservation areas. If there is an application near your home, your first contact point should be your local councillors. However in cases where a proposal is inappropriate, Chris will also be happy to make representations on your behalf. Please write to him at the House of Commons.

Horses and the Downs

In September Chris, together with Chris Frost, Chairman of the Downs Conservators, organised a meeting at Epsom Downs Race Course between the racing industry and the local authorities in the area. The aim of the meeting was to start discussions between all those involved in the area about how best to support the future of the industry in Epsom and to tackle the planning and road safety issues that affect the area.

Tackling our transport problems

In July, Chris was appointed to the House of Commons Transport Select Committee. "I feel very strongly that we need to improve the quality of the transport system in this country, and hope to contribute to making improvements both locally and nationally," he says.

This autumn he is holding meetings with a number of our local transport operators, including South West Trains, South Central, the new rail company that took over from Connex, and the bus company Arriva. He met South West Trains in September, and urged them to move as quickly as possible to make the improvements promised in their application for a new franchise. He is also pressing South Central to make improvements to services and stations on the Epsom Downs line.



The disused line south of Chessington.

Central Railway update

The Strategic Rail Authority has just completed a study into the viability of the Central Railway proposal to build a new freight railway alongside the M25.

It is not yet known what the study says, or whether it will be made public. Chris has written to the Chairman of the SRA to ask for more information about the findings. Central Railway is currently trying to secure government backing for its scheme.

Following a Government response to one of his Parliamentary Questions, he has also begun a consultation exercise locally about the possibility of extending the Chessington South railway line closer to Epsom to serve the developments on the old hospital sites. A disused embankment running south from Chessington towards Epsom was left derelict after the War, and could be used to build a new line. The idea was briefly considered by local councils in the 1980s.

In his response to Chris's question, the Transport Minister said such a scheme could be eligible for funding from the Strategic Rail Authority.

"I want to find out what the thoughts of local people are before I pursue this idea seriously," Chris says. "If you have a view on the proposal, please write to me at the House of Commons."



A NEW
VOICE

Chris Grayling, your local MP, made his first speech to the House of Commons on June 25th, in the debate on the Queen's Speech.

Here is an excerpt from it.

It is a huge honour and a matter of great personal pride to address this House for the first time as the Member of Parliament for Epsom and Ewell. I have the great privilege of representing what I suspect is one of the few constituencies known around the world for its famous racecourse and Britain's most famous horse race. I also suspect that I am one of few Members of Parliament able to stand on the highest point of his constituency and look down across the valleys at the Palace of Westminster.

The Epsom and Ewell constituency covers not simply the borough of that name, but the north end of the Reigate and Banstead and Mole Valley districts. It runs from Worcester Park and Stoneleigh in the north to Ashted and the borders of Tadworth in the south. I suspect that it must also be one of the greenest constituencies inside the M25, being well endowed with green spaces and parkland--not just the famous Epsom Downs but also Nonsuch Park, the site of Henry VIII's palace, which is sadly no more. The constituency is also the site of the Epsom wells, the point of origin of the world-renowned treatment, Epsom Salts.

Epsom has always been an important commercial centre. Today, it is home to some of Britain's most successful companies, such as W.S. Atkins, the engineering consultancy, and Bacon and Woodrow. Indeed, I look forward in two weeks' time to attending the opening of Toyota's new British headquarters.

The real commercial heart of the constituency is not its big businesses but the smaller companies in places such as Ewell, Stoneleigh and Epsom, which are the engine of our local economy. They face real challenges of regulation and doing business in tough climates, and I look forward to being a powerful advocate of their cause in the years ahead.....

..... We face real challenges in the next few years and I hope and intend to play an important role in meeting those challenges. First and foremost is the future of Epsom general hospital. Over the past few months, many of us in the area have fought hard to protect the hospital against the local health trust's plans to downgrade it and transfer key facilities to another, already overcrowded hospital ten miles up the road. Our campaign crossed party divides, brought together organisations and individuals from throughout the constituency and beyond, and won the backing of more than 25,000 people. It is to the local NHS trust's credit that it has recognised the strength of the opposition to its plans and decided to take its plans back to the drawing board. The battle is far from over, however.

It has become only too clear to me that one of the consequences of the reforms and changes currently being made to the NHS is to weaken local services--to centralise at the expense of local people and local services. Experience in many parts

of the country has shown us that that is a false step. I look to the Government and to NHTS authorities to ensure that Epsom general hospital has a secure future, and that the people of my constituency continue to enjoy the services of a strong and effective local hospital.

Our second challenge is the availability of school places in the next few years. As we speak, many parents in my constituency are scared witless about what is to happen to their children this autumn, because places are not available for them. The problem is in part the result of funding cuts made in the past four years, when this country's grant-maintained schools lost funding and the support that they had enjoyed under the previous Conservative Government. In the next few years, between 500 and 1,000 teenagers in my constituency will face the prospect of having no secondary school place. That is clearly intolerable. I shall be beating a path to the Government's door to ensure that a solution is found to the problem--and quickly, because time is not on our side. The parents and children of Epsom and Ewell have the right to expect the secondary school places they need in future.

I will also be pressing the Government on their proposals to reform the planning system. Ashtead, which is at the southern end of my constituency, is one of the many communities that have been blighted by the ill thought out Central Railway proposal that threatens to do so much damage in Kent, Surrey, Buckinghamshire and beyond. Do not get me wrong--I do not think that anyone would disagree with the proposition that it is desirable to take freight off the roads and get it on to rail. However, it strikes me as extraordinary that a company can launch a major infrastructure proposal simply by sketching lines on an Ordnance Survey map, not backed up by any detailed engineering drawings, and can then sit back for years doing nothing.

That is the problem facing many of my constituents today; while it prevails, houses cannot be sold, or can be sold only at reduced prices. Ashtead and Leatherhead, on the other side of the M25 in Mole Valley, are two of this country's property black spots in which prices are falling. That cannot be right. The current laws must be changed and I shall look to the Government to address those issues in the current Session of Parliament as part of their proposals on the planning system.

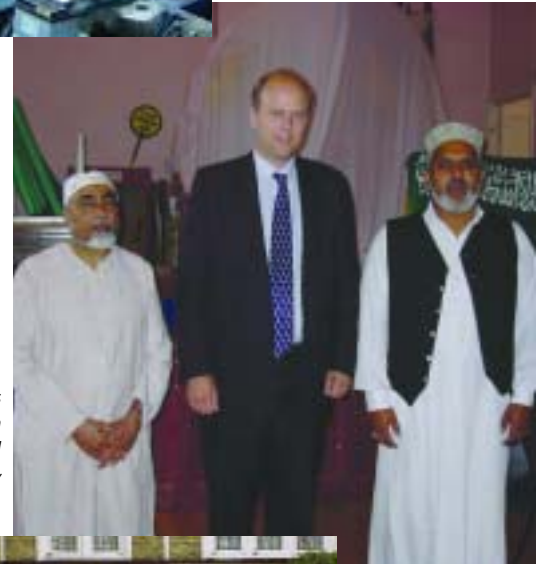
In the years ahead, I hope and expect to repay the trust that has been placed in me by my constituents, by working tirelessly on their behalf and helping them to solve many of the problems that they face.

A visit from your MP

If you would like Chris to attend an event or to visit your organisation, please contact the Constituency Office.



Visiting Epsom Fire Station



With members of the Epsom and Ewell Islamic Society



Campaigning with residents for a new crossing over the A24

Visits to the House of Commons

If you are part of a local school or organisation that would like to arrange a tour of the House of Commons, please contact Beth Mitchell in Chris's office at Westminster.

You can ring the office on 020 7219 8194, or write to her at the House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

Surgeries

Chris holds surgeries every fortnight on either a Friday afternoon or Saturday morning. The venues rotate between the Constituency Office in Ashtead and venues in Epsom, Ewell & Tattenham Corner. For details of the next surgery date, and to book an appointment, please ring the Constituency Office.

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