



FROM THE CLOCK TOWER

May 2002



Chris Grayling MP

From the Clock Tower is a twice yearly update from your local MP Chris Grayling. The Epsom and Ewell parliamentary constituency covers the Borough of Epsom and Ewell, Ashted, Nork, Tattenhams and the Preston area of Tadworth.



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Tackling the school places crisis



Blenheim High School

There have been two important breakthroughs in the campaign to solve the mounting school places crisis in the area, although the changes won't, sadly, come in time to help all the parents and pupils who have been disappointed this year. 2002 has seen the problem at its worst level in recent years, with a large number of secondary school pupils affected in Epsom and Ewell, and a major shortfall of primary places in Ashted.

Chris has been actively involved in trying to find a solution to the problem, which is set to worsen in the future, and has had a series of discussions with the County Council as well as raising the matter in Parliament on a number of occasions.

Short term measures have now been agreed that will ensure that every local pupil will have a place in the area this September. But the longer term problem remains. Now Blenheim High School has agreed to begin discussions with Surrey County Council aimed at expanding the school to take significantly more pupils - probably from 2004 onwards. If the plans come to fruition, they will go a considerable way towards tackling the problem that the Borough now faces.

Surrey has also agreed to fund an extra class at The Greville Primary School in Ashted this year, and to mount a rapid review of future needs to ensure that there are enough places in future.

"I feel very sorry indeed for the families who have had such a difficult time over secondary school places this year, though I am pleased we have been able to solve the primary places problem in Ashted", says Chris. "But this must not happen again, and early action needs to be taken to prepare for next year. I very much welcome the news that progress is now being made on a long term solution. I just wish it had been done before this year's troubles."

IN BRIEF

Common Problem

Chris has written to Stephen Byers complaining about the Government's decision not to block an application to build a diving lake on green belt land next to Epsom Common. Conservationists working on the Common are concerned that the new development could pose an environmental threat to the area.

Mast Threat

Chris is working with local residents in Nork to try to get two proposed mobile phone masts resited. The plans would see the masts put up close to local houses. "We do need to find sites for mobile phone masts", says Chris. "But they should not be right next to local houses. There are better places for these masts to go, and I hope we can find a solution that meets everyone's needs."

Antisocial Behaviour

Following complaints from local residents, Chris is working with police to try to tackle problems caused by antisocial behaviour close to Epsom town centre as well as in one or two other parts of the area. "There are no easy solutions - but police are taking the problem seriously, and we are looking for ways to ease the situation", he says.



Hospital Review Begins

The Epsom and St Helier NHS Trust has launched a new review of future healthcare needs in the area, but its new Chief Executive John de Braux has pledged that Epsom Hospital does have a strong future in his plans.

Chris has held a series of meetings with Mr de Braux and says he is reassured by the way in which the new review is being undertaken. Last year, the Trust backed down on proposals to downgrade key services at Epsom Hospital after a local campaign involving tens of thousands of people.

"Last time the Trust did a review of this kind, it failed to consult either patients or the medical profession in this area," says Chris. "This time they are discussing future needs with everyone involved, and have said that Epsom Hospital will be an important part of their plans. I have warned Mr de

Braux that we will all return to the barricades if the Trust puts forward plans to downgrade Epsom again, but I am much more confident this time that the management will listen to the views of people in this area."

Meanwhile, Epsom Hospital has a new Hospital Manager, whose job will be to tackle some of the particular problems there. "I am delighted that Mr de Braux agreed so quickly to appoint a manager. Epsom has lacked effective local leadership and, hopefully, this step will make a real difference to the way the hospital is run," says Chris.

Tea at No 10

In March, Chris took a group of three autistic children, together with three of their teachers, from Linden Bridge Special School in Worcester Park to a special tea party at No 10 Downing Street. MPs from all parties are allowed to take local children to No 10 from time to time. They have tea with Cherie Blair, and look round the house. Afterwards, one of the children said it had been "a great adventure".



Fighting for a better deal on bus passes



Local MP Chris Grayling used a backbench adjournment debate in the House of Commons to challenge the Government over the bus pass issue in Epsom and Ewell. Pensioners across the boundary in Sutton and Kingston receive free bus passes, whereas their neighbours in places like Stoneleigh and Worcester Park do not. The issue has prompted widespread anger among local pensioners.

Every week backbench MPs enter a draw for one of a small number of slots that allow them to debate an issue of their choice with a Minister. In the bus debate, Chris told Transport Minister David Jamieson that the reason for the injustice was that London Boroughs receive much higher transport grants from Central Government than Surrey County Council. As a result, Surrey doesn't have

the funds to operate a free bus pass scheme. He says that the consequence of this was a major injustice for local people, and told the Minister: "The biggest losers are those people who can least afford it."

Chris also raised the issue in the debates over the new Travel Concessions Bill, which will reduce the age at which men receive cheap bus travel from 65 to 60. He pressed Ministers in vain on several occasions to give a pledge that Surrey County Council would be given enough extra grant to compensate for the change. "If Surrey loses out again over this change, it will make it even more difficult for the County to improve its concessionary fares scheme and the injustice for pensioners who see their neighbours in London getting free travel will continue".

The future of our railway lines

As a member of the House of Commons Transport Select Committee, Chris has been actively involved in debating the future of the railways in the past few months. He has also had a series of discussions with local train operators about their short and long-term plans to improve services.



Both South West Trains and the company replacing Connex – South Central – have significant investment plans as part of their proposed new franchises. Both franchises are due for renewal next year, but the renewal process is running well behind schedule because of the problems in the industry.

South Central is planning to expand its local services and to introduce an express service to and from the South Coast via the Epsom line. South West Trains is planning a programme of platform extensions and longer trains at peak hours. Epsom Station is likely to

be rebuilt as part of the changes. But these improvements are likely to take several years, and they will depend on whether the company replacing Railtrack manages to raise enough private finance to pay for the investments.

"The recent problems in the industry have, sadly, delayed the process of improvement on our local lines," says Chris. "However I will continue to press the operators for short-term action to improve services, and also for action on stations which need rapid improvement, like Banstead and Ewell West."

AROUND & ABOUT



Left:
*Opening the new
front desk at Epsom
Police Station*

Below:
*Visiting the Little
Saints pre-school
nursery in West Ewell*

Right:
*Visiting the
Citizens
Advice
Bureau in
Epsom*



Left:
*Working with the
conservation volunteers
on Ashted Common*



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 a Friday afternoon. The venues rotate between the constituency office in Ashted, the Epsom Conservative Club, Stoneleigh Library and Tattenham Corner Library.

For details of the next surgery date, and to book an appointment, please ring the Constituency Office.

A visit from your MP

If you would like Chris to attend an event or to visit your organisation, please contact the constituency office at 212 Barnett Wood Lane, Ashted, KT21 2DB, or telephone 01372 271036.