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GREEN LEAF

Tories axe jobs to buy votes

Brighton & Hove council cuts 250 posts and slashes social services to fund pre-election tax cuts

In a cynical move designed to buy votes, Brighton & Hove City Council has devised a budget which offers tax breaks while cutting essential services to the most needy and vulnerable. By the council's own calculations, the equivalent of 250 full-time posts will be lost as a result of the 2011-12 budget.

At a time when central government funding has been cut and public services are being slashed, the move has been condemned by Green Party councillors as destructive and irresponsible.

The budget by the Tory-led council includes a 1% cut in council tax and 5% off the cost of parking per-

“Using cuts in social services to bankroll election bribes is heartless”

mits – providing savings of just £11 per year for the average council-tax payer, or £16 if they own a car.

In order to pay for these reductions and make the cuts imposed by central government, the council is proposing wide-ranging cuts to children's welfare provisions, family support and environmental planning. The highly-regarded Connexions organisation, which



Cycle lane dig up! The Tory council is cutting jobs and services – and spending £1.1m removing existing cycle lanes from Grand Avenue

provides out-of-school support for young adults, will be axed outright.

Despite these brutal cuts, the Tory administration has set aside £1.1 million to remove cycle lanes from Grand Avenue and £4.5 million to repair car parks around the city. The money to pay for car park repairs will have to be borrowed at

a cost of £400,000 per year.

Green Party finance spokesperson Cllr Jason Kitcat said: “A Tory budget using cuts in services for children and adult social care services to bankroll election year gimmicks is heartless, short-termist thinking which this city can do without.”

Cllr Kitcat also pointed out that

the 250 jobs losses announced by the Tories are largely avoidable. Simply freezing council tax and linking the cost of parking permits to the rate of inflation would save more than 40 jobs. Likewise, the money saved by not needlessly digging up cycle lanes and repairing car parks could save a further 160 jobs.

The decision to reduce the price of parking permits is particularly ludicrous at a time when there is a waiting list for them, and demand exceeds supply. Taking into account the usual annual increase for inflation, the 5% cut amounts to a 7% reduction in real terms.

Cuts in funding for the planning and licensing departments mean that planning decisions are likely to be delayed even further, while the enforcement of planning and licensing rules may be weakened. This could potentially affect everything from food hygiene in restaurants to pub licensing hours and noise abatement orders.

One of the few positive notes in an otherwise mercenary budget comes as a side effect of cuts in the IT budget. Rather than replacing computers automatically on a rolling timetable, they will now only be replaced when they need replacing, rather than on a rolling schedule, reducing unnecessary wastage as well as expenditure.

Green answers

- ✓ Freeze council tax at its current rate
- ✓ Link parking permit prices to inflation
- ✓ Seek savings where it will not affect social services
- ✓ Protect the vulnerable and needy
- ✓ Spend money more wisely – eg not ripping up existing cycle lanes!

What the council is spending

- £1.2m to fund 1% council tax reduction
- £158,000 to fund 5% parking permit reduction
- £1.1m to remove cycle lane on Grand Avenue
- £4.5m to repair car parks

What the council is cutting

- ✗ £4.9m from adult social care
- ✗ £470,000 from children and families welfare provision
- ✗ £91,000 from the Youth Offending Scheme
- ✗ £347,000 from drug and alcohol rehabilitation
- ✗ £476,000 from Connexions
- ✗ £548,000 from the planning & licensing departments

City news

GreenLeaf is a quarterly publication produced by the Brighton and Hove Green Party

Main office:
The Eco-Centre
39-41 Surrey Street
Brighton
BN1 3PB
Tel/fax: 01273 766670

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Editor:
Nic Compton
editor@brightonhovegreens.org

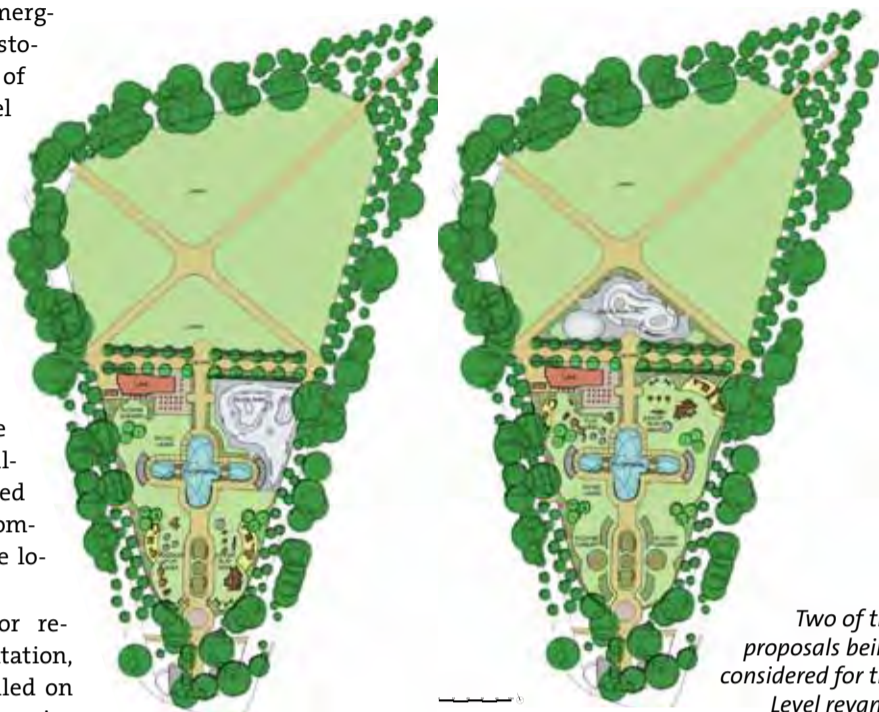
Contributors:
Russell Honeyman, Jo-ann Fortune, Lianna Etkind, Andy Knott, Green Party candidates & councillors

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Revamp for Brighton's Level park

Exciting new plans are emerging for a fully-funded restoration and improvement of Brighton's historic Level park, off the Lewes Road. An initial bid to the Lottery provided funding to commission designs, including a new play area, skatepark, café, gardens and restoration of the 1920s features. Fitting all these new facilities into the southern end of the Level proved a major challenge, however, and caused friction among the local community, especially over the location of the skatepark.

Unhappy with the poor response to the initial consultation, local Green councillors called on the council to re-run the exercise on final designs. They also took a leading role to ensure there was ample opportunity for members of the community to have their say in developing the detailed design ideas. Green Councillor Pete West said: "We were concerned that not enough people



Two of the proposals being considered for the Level revamp

COURTESY OF BRIGHTON & HOVE COUNCIL

were being involved in the process and that the project team had become fixed on what the designs should contain. Residents and skaters were telling us their views were not being listened to. So we insisted the Council improve its communications, produce more

newsletters, run more workshops and be open to discussing new layouts."

Two complete design options, one with a skate park north of the Rose Walk, one with it in its current location, will now be consulted upon in March.

Why cuts are not the cure

Finance spokesperson Cllr Jason Kitcat explains why it's all a 'Con trick'

This year will see the most draconian public sector cuts since Margaret Thatcher was in power. Yet, according to a joint report by the Green Party and Finance for the Future, these cuts aren't even necessary. Not only that, but the report suggests the huge scale of the cuts threatens economic recovery. It would be fairer, and more economically effective, to tax those most able to pay rather than cut services for the more vulnerable.

The FFF report reminds us that, as happened in the United States in 1937 and more recently in Ireland, severe public sector cuts knock economic recovery, taking important sources of jobs and spending out of the economy – just when it needs some stability to build on. It also calculates that a public servant earning £25,000 a year would, if made redundant, save the state less than £2,000 due to benefits paid and loss of tax revenue. Each lost public sector worker is someone who has less to spend and so risks private sector jobs too.

When Margaret Thatcher was rolling out the last lot of Tory cuts, she had £112 billion of North Sea oil and gas revenue to help balance the books. Such revenue is now in terminal decline, there's

little to pad the fall as the coalition cuts bite. As Greens have argued, the report shows how in the context of the last century, the national debt is not particularly large nor is it a cause for alarm. UK national debt interest repayments peaked at around 7% of GDP in the 1920s. We've never been near that level since, and currently interest



payments are between 3 and 4% of GDP – well within acceptable levels.

Turning its attention to the tax system, the report shows that more than £100 billion a year is lost through loopholes in the tax system, tax bills remaining unpaid and illegal non-payment of tax. In particular, as recent concern over Vodafone's tax situation has highlighted, HM Revenue & Customs estimate that £28 billion of taxes are overdue.

With a more progressive tax system, which ensures people pay up on time and with a better un-

derstanding of the harm their cuts will do, government could pick a path out of this economic downturn without leaving a trail of destruction behind them. During the election campaign, Cameron and Clegg were quick to rule out frontline service cuts, as well as VAT rises. Yet now they lead the charge while Labour admit they would have cut too. There is another way - one which is economically responsible but doesn't leave people depending on public services out to dry.

The full report can be downloaded from: www.financeforthefuture.com

What the Greens would do

- ✓ Implement a 'Green New Deal' to create jobs and stimulate the economy by supporting green industries, energy efficiency drives and manufacturing.
- ✓ Clamp down on tax avoidance, both personal and corporate.
- ✓ Reduce our defense spending to levels necessary for self-defense, not 'projecting power' overseas, eg cutting Trident nuclear weapons.

YouTube vindication

Green councillor Jason Kitcat has won an important tribunal in defence of freedom of speech. A complaint was filed against him by Conservative councillors for posting excerpts of videos of council meetings, already publicly available on the council website, onto YouTube.

A panel of local councillors initially upheld the complaint of 'misusing council resources' and threatened Jason with suspension for up to six months unless he apologised and submitted to 're-training'.

Jason appealed to an independent tribunal which found in his favour, quashing the original panel's findings. The tribunal said the council's interpretation of the councillor code of conduct was excessively restrictive and would impinge on councillors' freedom of political expression.

Jason has now submitted a freedom of information request to find out how much the Conservative complaint has cost council tax payers. He is also pushing for restrictions on council publications and videos to be lifted, making access to democratic processes more open and transparent.

When fare's not fair

Green Party activists dressed up as "pickpocketing" politicians outside Brighton station to protest against a 5.8% rise in the cost of rail fares. The Fair Fares Now protest, organised by the charity Campaign for Better Transport, demonstrated how the government's decision to raise train fares is "pickpocketing" train users. The increase adds £180 onto the price of an annual season ticket from Brighton to London.

Brighton Pavilion MP Caroline Lucas said: "We're told that this is to be the greenest government ever, yet the coalition's transport policies are already forcing people into the least green travel options. These fare rises are hugely unfair and unnecessary."

The protesters collected over 500 signatures for Fair Fares Now, which runs regular actions to challenge the increase in fares.



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Education cuts could cost local businesses £110m

The effects of the government's recent tuition fee hike will be felt far beyond the canteens and bars of university campuses, according to the UK's largest academic trade union. Research by the University & College Union (UCU) estimates that a potential £110 million could be lost from Brighton and Hove's economy as a direct result of the changes.

The impact is particularly dramatic in Brighton and Hove as there are two universities, Sussex and Brighton, with a combined

including include landlords, local shops, pubs, bars and clubs.

But they will also have a wider effect on Brighton's buzzing cultural and creative scene, which is a major attraction to tourists visiting the city. With the low and negative growth currently affecting the national economy, there is a strong possibility that there will be further unexpected side effects on city businesses.

Caroline Lucas, MP for Brighton Pavilion said: "Many people here in Brighton may be priced out of going to university altogether – and those who do go are likely to be saddled with massive debt.

"No one should be made to feel excluded from education by prohibitively high costs. If only the Government had considered alternative ways to fund education, like a more progressive taxation system. For example, a business education tax levied on the top 4% of UK companies would require business to pay its fair share for the substantial benefits it receives from higher education."



PHOTO: TOM WILLS

Students protest against the cuts

student body totaling over 30,000 – an eighth of the city's total population. The government's savage higher and further education cuts will impact upon businesses that serve the academic community,

Reprieve for central PO



Green councillors have persuaded the Post Office to drop plans to relocate their London Road branch to an out-of-the-way location on Preston Road.

Green councillor Pete West launched a campaign to keep the service in London Road after it emerged it was being moved to the former premises of oriental grocers Zam Zam. Cllr West set up a meeting with the Post Office and council officials, and explained that the proposed venue would be cramped, out of the way and hard to reach. A new site at 82 London Road is being considered, although there are concerns this may be too small too.

Further investigation revealed that the Tory-run Council were approached by the Post Office in May 2010 about possible relocation, but failed to respond.

"We lost many local sub-post offices in the 2008 cull and it would be a disaster for residents and businesses if this main branch went to the back of beyond," said Cllr West. "The Tories have really let us down, wasting valuable months when a better solution could have been found".

The Green Party opposes the sell off of Royal Mail and is lobbying for the Post Office Network to be protected and given a new lease of life.

Rise in complaints against police

Complaints against the police in Brighton and Hove are on the up – and are likely to get worse before they get better. Recent reports show that there was a sharp increase in complaints against the way the police handled protests against student fee rises, tax evasion, and public service cuts. With more protests planned and the police facing cuts of over £50m, the tension between police and protesters is likely to escalate.

The cost of policing the demonstrations has been estimated at £250,000 – money that would be better spent on neighbourhood policing. Green councillor Ben Duncan, who is a member of the Sussex Police Authority, has called for the Government to reimburse Sussex Police.

"It's deeply unfair that local taxpayers should have to fund the policing of these demonstrations," he said. "We are facing our fourth successive year of cuts to police budgets. More than 1,000 police officers and staff are set to lose their jobs, and yet the police are wasting their money on high-profile responses to political demonstrations, often by children."

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Special report

Reclaim the streets

Brighton and Hove needs a transport policy worthy of a sustainable 21st century city. Russell Honeyman looks at the options

"Sustainable transport for all" is one way of summing up what the Greens see as a key component of the Green vision. But what does it mean? Surely everybody agrees with the idea of sustainable transport – if only it were practical and possible.

It's not a secret, and only some of it is rocket science. Our city planners know what to do to achieve a city built around the dream of sustainable transport. Brighton and Hove has award-winning planners on its team, who have already constructed visionary projects here.

But our planners need political backing from an elected city council that understands and believes in sustainable transport. Only the Green Party understands, in its blood, that sustainable transport is necessary and possible, and knows how to get there. The other parties have too many vested interests in the current system and can only pay lip service to the idea of sustainable transport.

The Green vision offers people a choice of using rapid and affordable public transport, cycling,

walking or using private cars. Our vision is of a city where the air is clean, cycling and walking routes are safe and attractive for adults and children, and public transport is reliable and convenient. Where beautiful, clean, vibrant public spaces have replaced noisy, dangerous polluting traffic jams. Instead, the traffic flows smoothly along well-designed arteries. If we get it right, we'll look back and wonder why we ever did things differently.

Ian Davey, Green Party spokesperson for transport, is an active campaigner for sustainable transport. He and Christina Summers, Green candidate for Hollingdean & Stanmer, organised a public meeting with local group Transport 21 in January 2011, which brought to the fore issues of air quality and sustainable transport, and highlighted the capability of Brighton & Hove City Council planners to provide a road map for sustainable transport. Even the city's biggest bus company was there, talking about how much more efficiently they could run if the streets weren't clogged with traffic.



There is no shortage of ideas, and cities in Europe are showing us the way. For example, some commentators style the city as the 'Barcelona of England'. But, like many cities, Brighton has a bike hire scheme, which Greens first advocated in vain for Brighton and Hove seven years ago. Elsewhere, Portsmouth city centre has a 20mph speed limit. London's Oxford Circus and Kensington High Street have become mixed-use areas, reclaiming parts of the city from the vehicles

and prioritising space for people.

Our city already has people who know how to put together an integrated plan. In fact, they are putting together a plan right now: the Local Transport Plan that will set the agenda for our city over the next 15 years. This plan will be finalised in April. But what the plan contains and what is carried out depends on the vision and political will of the council. Both qualities that are sorely lacking in the current Tory administration.

What the Greens would do

- ✓ Implement 20mph speed limits (without humps and bumps) in the city centre and residential areas to improve safety and reduce congestion.
- ✓ Work with communities to promote safer streets, expand car clubs and increase on-street cycle parking.
- ✓ Create a ring-fenced fund for communities to make local environmental improvements.
- ✓ In the longer term, our aim is to improve the choice of transport to make it easier and safer to get around using public transport, cycling, walking or by car.
- ✓ When more people choose sustainable transport, congestion will reduce. Options include 'limited-stop' buses on key routes and safe cycling and walking routes.
- ✓ We will redesign the city to take back the public realm from vehicles, and evaluate options to provide a low emission, rapid and affordable public transport system.

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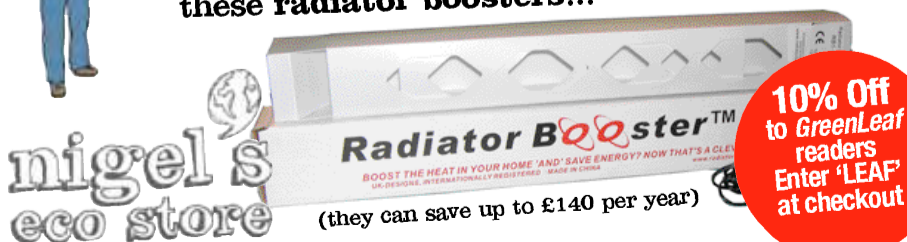
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Well connected

GL talks to Stephanie Powell, Green Party candidate for Queen's Park



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One of the new Green candidates to watch in the May 2011 local elections is Stephanie Powell. A careers advisor of 15 years experience, she has been at the forefront of the campaign to save the youth careers service Connexions, which is under threat from funding cutbacks. The 39-year-old lives in Kemptown with her partner and has a self-confessed addiction to Cadbury's chocolate. Interview by Russell Honeyman

Why did you decide to stand as a Green Party candidate?

To fight injustice! I grew up in Surrey, outer London. My mum divorced when I was five. This was back in the days when fathers did not have to pay maintenance, and money was always tight, so I had to grow up quickly. I grew up in Thatcher's Britain. Now the Tories are back, and I'm in a frontline service under threat. I want to do something about it, and I believe the Greens are the party of fairness. I've been inspired by Caroline Lucas – she's a very credible politician.

What is the single most important issue facing Brighton and Hove today?

The single most important issue I'm seeing on the doorstep is fear of unemployment. Not only jobs, but the knock-on effect of losing so many valuable services. Brighton has been targeted for big cutbacks because it is deemed to have high private sector opportunities. But we only have a handful of large employers. Many businesses are small to medium enterprises without the capacity to offer hoards of people work. One in six people in Brighton and Hove earn their money from the council. Paid jobs are disappearing and being replaced with volunteer positions all over the country.

How should the council deal with the financial cutbacks?

They shouldn't cut frontline services for a start! I see an inefficient bureaucracy caught up in its own procedures and interests, and decisions are

being made without proper consultation or in reasonable timeframes. It's shocking how much is spent on consultancy while frontline workers are being axed. Our council needs a structural shakeup so that it can meet the needs of the people of our city.

What will be the consequences of cutting Connexions?

The proposed changes to services will concentrate on those who can bump up employment figures for the council; those who are most employable. The problems of teenage crime, teenage pregnancy, teenage homelessness, as well as alcohol abuse and mental health issues will increase. We'll be creating a forgotten generation of under-achievers.

How do you get to work?

I don't drive – never have. I like walking, and I get to work on the good old No7 bus. Public transport is pretty good in Brighton. It's not so much public transport that's the problem; it's the traffic!

What's your worst non-eco vice?

I'm a big fan of Cadbury's chocolate. Even though I wasn't happy about it being taken over by Kraft, I still love it. There's nothing like Cadbury's.

What's your favourite local shop and restaurant?

I love literature and I like coffee, so the Kemptown Bookshop Café is a big favourite. I'm also partial to a good curry, such as Pavel on St James Street.

Where would you like to be in ten years time?

I'd like to be in a job where I was helping people. I'd like to be part of the Green Party – hopefully as a councillor! I would certainly like to see Brighton and Hove run by a Green council by then.

What's your tip for success?

It's a Chinese proverb. "Be a person of value rather than a person of success".

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Queen's Park

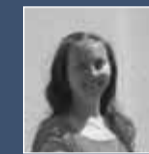
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Preston Park

Amy Kennedy
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Regency

Jason Kitcat
tel: 296447



Sven Rufus

tel: 296429



Hanover & Elm Grove

Bill Randall
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Community news

Stand up and be heard

Green councillors have won several battles recently – including a reprieve for the popular Bright Start nursery



Green councillors campaigned to prevent the closure of Bright Start nursery

Preston Park

Commuter parking in award-winning Preston Park has become a major problem since the introduction of the residents pay-and-display scheme in nearby Preston Park Avenue. Cllr Amy Kennedy recently handed in a petition signed by over 2,200 people calling for action on this. The petition was organised by the Rotunda Café, whose business is



Green councillor Amy Kennedy and candidates Mike Jones and Leo Littman want better parking solutions

being affected by the problems. A council working group has now been established and an initial meeting was held in January to discuss possible solutions to make parking easier for leisure users and to deter commuters from leaving their cars there all day. Since being elected in 2007, Amy has worked with local residents on issues concerning the derelict Anston House site, so she was delighted to learn that the new landowner has engaged designers Urban Splash to bring forward plans for the site. Amy says, "This prominent site deserves a landmark building, which I have no doubt that Urban Splash are capable of delivering. However the landowner needs to show real willing to consult with the local community on any development proposals, and to listen to their views."

Queen's Park

Queen's Park's Green councillors have been fighting proposals for Sainsbury's to open its tenth store in the city at the site of the former Taj shop on St James's Street. The street already has three supermarkets, Morrisons, Tesco and the Co-op, within yards of each other. Residents are opposed to the further 'supermarketisation' of the street, and more than 450 people have joined a Facebook Group 'No More Supermarkets in Kempdown' that is spearheading the campaign. Green councillors are petitioning the council for public consultation on the future of the Queens Park bowling green. Since the bowlers moved out, young people have used the area for football and other games, and there is support for the conversion of the green into a formal multi-use games area. Other park users favour the creation of a landscape garden.

Goldsmid, Hove

The Green Party has long campaigned for two new primary schools to cover the shortage of places in Hove, and finally a first step in the right direction has been taken. The Connaught in Hove will be turned into a permanent three-form entry infant school – although the



Cllr Alex Phillips campaigning for more primary schools in Hove

junior stage of the school will not be opened until September 2014, and it's not clear yet where this stage will be located or how the Council will fund it. Congratulations to parents involved in Action4Kids who've been arguing the case for these urgently-needed school places for some time now. The Twenty's Plenty scheme has shown that area-wide 20mph speed limits are seven times more cost effective than isolated 20mph roads. Research also suggests that 20mph traffic speed zones can cut road injuries by 40%. Pedestrians have a 95% chance of surviving crashes at 20 mph, but only 50% at 30 mph. "We've led the way in pushing for a 20 mph speed limit in areas around schools" says Cllr Alex Phillips, "but this is only one solution to a whole raft of problems, including parking and costly public transport, poorly designed cycle lanes, pot holes and a huge lack of pedestrian crossings."

Hanover & Elm Grove

Green councillors have been campaigning with Queen's Park Estate residents for a play area on a small piece of wasteland behind Plumpton Road. This follows their successful campaign for a community base on the estate. The base opened its doors two years ago and is used constantly by many groups, including a young people's cookery class, a street choir, a book club and a sewing club. Cllr Georgia Wrighton has campaigned successfully for new trees for Hartington Road following a local resident's request for trees to replace those lost in recent years. The 13 new trees were planted in February and more are planned. Green councillors are pressing for more tree planting in other parts of the neighbourhood. Cllr Bill Randall worked with residents to scupper plans by a Queen's Park Road off licence to stay open until 3am every morning. Following their representations to the council's licensing committee, closing time was fixed at 11.30pm.

St Peters & North Laine

Exciting new developments on the planning front have recently seen plans submitted for the Open Market and the last remaining plot on the Brighton station site. If it gets the go ahead, the mixed used proposal for the station site will help complete the whole project

and contribute to the Brighton Station Gateway scheme, which aims to improve the public area at the front and rear of the station. Plans for the Open Market include 44 small retail units around a central, glass-covered plaza, plus affordable housing units. This follows years of hard work by former Green councillor (now MEP) Keith Taylor to see new life injected into this important central location. Not only will the Open Market survive as a primary shopping hub, it will also act as a venue for art and performance, and help boost the whole London Road area. The future also looks rosier for Bright Start nursery which was threatened with closure when the Tories announced the axing of its annual subsidy. Led by Cllr Lizzie Deane, Greens actively supported the parents' campaign for the consultation on closure to be abandoned. As a result, Bright Start will stay open until September, allowing time for a working group of parents and council officers to be set up, and options for its future discussed.

Regency

The developers Taylor Wimpey have submitted two new applications for the site of the old Royal Alexandra children's hospital. One is for complete demolition and redevelopment of the site, the other keeps the main hospital building and uses new build on the rest of the site. Cllrs Sven Rufus and Jason Kitcat are working closely with community groups and the developers to negotiate last minute improvements to the conversion scheme in the hope that a consensus can be found so that the site won't lie derelict any longer, and the popular main building is saved. Residents are working closely with businesses in East Street to minimise the impact of the night-time economy. Following a cross-agency summit convened by Cllr Jason Kitcat, good links have been built up between nightclub operators, shops, residents and public agencies. Positive actions include regular patrols of a troublesome alley by door staff.

Brunswick & Adelaide

Green Party candidates Phelim Mac Cafferty and Ollie Sykes are calling for a 20mph speed limit throughout Brunswick and Adelaide to improve road safety,

help traffic flow and reduce emissions. Through the work of Green councillor Ian Davey, Greens have spread the petition across Brighton and Hove. Green councillors in Sheffield have successfully put a city-wide cap of 20mph limit on residential roads. Greens can do the same here! Recycling is an issue often raised at the doorstep. Many residents in the ward aren't happy with the way the current system of kerbside collection operates. Two-weekly collection means that if recycling is left behind or a collection date missed, material for recycling builds up at home. Many residents don't have the space to store a month's worth of recycling, so it gets thrown away. Residents have proposed communal recycling facilities be improved to augment or even replace kerbside collection.

Hollingdean & Stanmer

Green Party candidates have put back on the agenda the disused Preston Barracks site and have argued for a fitting development as a gateway into the rest of the city. Christina Summers, who has



Hollingdean & Stanmer candidates Cllr Sven Rufus, Christina Summers and Luke Walter protesting about cuts

a background in business and co-ordinates the Another London Road campaign, said: "This large swath of land on Lewes Road has been left derelict for nine years – a shameful legacy from current and previous administrations at a time when buildings and space are desperately needed for both living and small business purposes". Greens have also been taking a keen interest in the future of the Wild Park. Cllr Rufus, an ecologist who is also a Governor at Hertford Infants School, said: "The consultation about its future management continues, with exhibitions planned to set out more options, giving residents the opportunity to comment on what they want to see. Greens are involved in this process and are pressing for full weight to be given to public views".

Recycled fashion

Are vintage clothes the ultimate Green fashion statement? asks Jo-ann Fortune

The fashion industry has a bad reputation when it comes to environmental issues – perhaps not surprisingly considering its very existence relies on a constant cycle of consumption and disposal. But, with the vintage and second-hand retail scene thriving in Brighton, it seems that the cyclical nature of the beast is helping to make recycling, well, fashionable.

The independent retail haven of the North Laine is now crammed with second-hand shops and vintage boutiques, and the number of online vintage retailers has rocketed. “Brighton is the perfect place for vintage shops,” says Jennie Davies from VintageOwlBoutique.com. “Brightonians have so many different kinds of styles, and vintage shops can help them achieve this.”

So what has made vintage so popular? Emily Amelia Inglis, who launched a pop-up vintage boutique in Lewes last year, and is now taking her brand online, says it’s simply “a fashion statement – an expression of style and an example of one’s own personal ability to create an outfit without the help of a designer.”



Vintage clothes are environmentally-friendly, fashionable – and affordable

As with most fashion trends, however, the roots of vintage clothing can be traced to top of the chain: the Fashion Week catwalks. Top name designers now regularly reference the iconic styles of decades past, with this season’s collections heavily influenced by bohemian Seventies styles. But can it also be viewed as a welcome indication that people are think-

ing more about helping to reduce the energy required to mass produce new clothes and combat the disposable nature of fast-fashion?

“I believe that people are seeing it as an ethical alternative,” Emily says, “which, to be honest, has become fashionable in itself.”

The economic downturn is another reason many may have turned to second-hand shopping, be-

it in a vintage shop, charity shop or at a car boot sale. You can now even pick up second-hand clothes for free at so-called ‘swish’ parties. The events work on the basis that each guest bring along several items of clothing that they no longer wear, to swap with any number of items donated by other ‘swishers’. Clothes that are left over are then donated to a charity shop.

“It’s an ethical alternative which has become a fashion in itself”

Leila McKellar and Sarah Maddox set-up their clothes swapping events company My Swish last year, and have been amazed by the response. “We had so many swishers at our event in Lewes, that when we declared the swish open we were nearly trampled in the rush,” Leila says. “We’ve also had lots of press interest too and this month are featured in the Cath Kidston magazine.”

But, while Leila states that “re-

use is important as it prevents usable items ending up in landfill and reduces emissions from clothing production,” she believes that it’s also important to support ethical producers of new clothes. “We need to send a strong message to the whole fashion industry that consumers really do care about issues like Fairtrade, carbon emissions and pesticide use.”

Whatever the motivation for buying vintage, the fact that recycling has become embedded in such an influential cultural force can only be seen a positive social shift. “Very often the big picture is changed by small, subtle tweaks at a lower level of the chain,” environmental writer Sarah Lewis-Hammond says. “A global movement is made of millions of components, and wearing second-hand clothes or donating to charity or going to a clothes swapping party is one tiny but very important facet in the larger whole.”

Jo-ann Fortune is a freelance fashion writer and founder of www.vintagebrighton.com

PHOTO: HOPEANDHARLEQUIN.COM

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Our heritage: not for sale

The Post Office, public woodlands and Brighton's language schools are all in the Brighton Pavilion MP's in-tray



THEY'RE AT IT again. This time the Tory-led government is trying to sell off the Royal Mail, a 400-year-old institution that plays a key role in ensuring that Post Offices remain at the heart of our communities. The Postal Services Bill, which MPs voted on in January and which I opposed, could have serious consequences for Post Offices everywhere, because it doesn't provide any guarantees that the current business agreement between Royal Mail and the Post Offices will continue when Royal Mail is sold.

Many people, especially older people and those with young families, rely on the Post Office as a way of making contact with others and accessing key services. Yet in 2010 alone, more than 1,000 POs in the UK were closed or put up for sale.

Closer to home, closures and relocations in Brighton are already leaving hundreds without adequate access to this service. Just recently, the London Road Post Office was threatened with relocation to smaller and less accessible premises, leaving a sizeable area of the city centre without a

Post Office. I joined with Cllr Pete West in speaking out to oppose local closures and relocations (see News, page 3). Although, thankfully, those plans were scrapped, it's clear that the threat to our local postal service remains.

ANOTHER ISSUE ON which the government utterly misjudged the public mood was the proposed sell-off of publicly-owned woodlands. There are very good reasons for our woodlands and forests to remain under public ownership. The Forestry Commission has a history of environmental protection and managing sites of special scientific

"The government utterly misjudged the public mood"

interest - it's very unlikely that the same kind of long term care and protection would be afforded once in private hands.

What's more, the government's own research suggests the sell-off could have cost more than it raised in revenue. So even their own

shortsighted economic case made no sense. It took a massive public outcry, including a petition of more than 500,000 signatures, to persuade the Government to change its reckless plans.

MANY CONSTITUENTS have written to me in recent months to raise concerns about the government's proposed changes to immigration rules, which will reduce the numbers of overseas students coming here to study. Since English language schools in Brighton and Hove contribute over £100 million a year to the local economy, the impact could be huge.

I've been working with several language schools on this issue, and recently hosted a Home Affairs Select Committee hearing in Brighton as part the inquiry into the proposed changes. The meeting gave local language schools an opportunity to voice their concerns and put forward ideas. While I think it's important to minimize abuse of the UK visa systems, these proposals put all English language schools in our area at risk.

Solar Panels



The Facts.

Since the 1st April 2010, new Government backed incentives have seen a huge rise in the number of businesses and residential properties having solar panels installed.

Michael Yeoman, Managing Director of South Downs Solar, answers some of the main questions that people are asking.

Q. Why should I have solar panels installed?

There are many reasons why you should consider having them installed, some of our customers have had them installed to importantly reduce their carbon footprint, others to receive the Government backed 'Feed in Tariff'.

receive £22,000

Q. What's the Feed in Tariff?

It's a system that's been designed to encourage people to generate electricity from renewable sources, such as solar electricity. If you were to have a 2 kWh solar PV system installed now, you'd earn around £900 per year for the next 25 years. Guaranteed.

tax free

Q. But there would be tax to pay on that?

No, not at all! That's why it's so popular now.

Q. Will my electricity bills reduce at all?

Definitely. Depending on the size of the system you choose and how much electricity you use, you will see your bills reduce by anywhere between 50 and 75%.

Q. Fantastic. But what about the electricity that I don't use?

That gets sold back to the national grid, nothing is wasted and you get paid approximately 3pence per kW that is sold back. That price is index linked too, so it will rise in line with inflation.

reduce carbon

Q. So, why should people contact South Downs Solar today?

Of course I'm slightly biased but we differ from other solar companies in that we are more professional in our

approach with our customers. We have a fully inclusive price and we instruct a qualified ISE structural engineer to carry out surveys on our clients properties prior to any work being carried out. We also provide our clients with images of what the solar panels will look like on their property prior to any installation so we know they'll be happy with whatever work we carry out for them.

Q. So if I wanted to look into this further today, what do I do?

That's the simple part. Call us on the Freephone number shown below today and we'll talk you through the process. If you'd like us to run through the details in person, we're a local company so we'd be more than happy to do this for you.

Call South Downs Solar today on:
Freephone 0800 009 4199
to learn more about this exciting opportunity, or visit:
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