

FOCUS on

Whickham North & Swalwell



LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

Issue 152 - March 2020

Council reserves grow - but Labour still puts up Council Tax

Gateshead Council have set their budget for the year and residents now face another hike in Council Tax - for the sixth year in a row.

The increase will be 3.99% - the maximum that the Council can set without holding a public referendum on the charges - but residents have already endured a 27.5% increase in the last 6 years.



• Cllr. Sonya Hawkins said "Residents are asking why does Gateshead Council offer such poor value for money?"

And this comes despite the news that the Council has been building up huge reserves.

Lib. Dem. Councillors, who are the only opposition to Labour on the Council, have discovered that Labour bosses have been building up vast reserves which now stand at £39 million.

And Labour-run Gateshead Council already charges the highest level of Council Tax of any metropolitan borough in the country and the highest rate in the whole of Tyne and Wear.

Residents have been asking us "How do other councils cost the taxpayer less than in Gateshead - but still provide a better service, for example spending more on better street cleaning or on flower beds?"

"And why do the Council need such a high level of reserves?" Lib. Dems say that it is right to plan ahead, but taxpayers deserve a break.

Piling up huge sums of money in the bank while local residents struggle to pay their Council Tax and public services are worse than in other Council areas just isn't right.

Cllr. Chris Ord said "We have made this issue one of our Six to Fix this year and tackling Labour waste is another priority for us."

See back page for more info.....

Bank House update



Work could start again on the unfinished house on Whickham Bank if the Government approves changes to the building plans.

Planning permission for the house was given by Gateshead Council in 1998 but building work stopped when concerns were raised that neighbouring properties would lose their privacy.

Gateshead Council was then asked to intervene to get changes made to the house, so that the views of neighbouring residents could be addressed. There is a long and difficult legal process that has to be gone through to achieve this.

Cllr. Peter Craig reports "The final stage of negotiations has only now been reached and agreement is being sought with the building's owner to modify the design to reduce its height, reduce overlooking of neighbouring homes and alleviate local residents' concerns.

"Gateshead Council are proposing to serve a "Section 102 notice" which would amend the existing planning permission and approve a new design. The notice will need to be confirmed by the Secretary of State who may invite interested parties to comment. At this stage, local residents will be able to put forward their views and have these taken into account."

"This has been a long and drawn out process" said Cllr. Sonya Hawkins, "but we are hopeful that the future of the house can be resolved and that residents' concerns can be addressed."

Bench Update



Residents got in touch with your ward councillors to report that a well used bench had been removed. This was without warning and as you may know, Glebe Avenue is a steep hill and people use this bench to rest when walking back from the village. We have now arranged for another bench to be put back in its place.

A Greener Gateshead



Liberal Democrats are leading the battle to make Gateshead greener. Your ward councillors are working with Durham Wildlife Trust on a project to plant more trees in Cross Lane Meadows,

Liberal Democrats - Six to Fix

Making Gateshead Cleaner, Greener and Fairer

Liberal Democrats have a great vision for Gateshead. Our team of councillors, who are the official opposition to Labour on the Council, are battling to make Gateshead cleaner, greener and fairer. We are battling to improve six key issues in Gateshead:

1 Cut council tax

- Gateshead residents pay the highest level of Council Tax of any metropolitan borough in the country. Our plans would give residents a break from 6 years of Council Tax rises.

2 End Labour's waste

- For example, Liberal Democrats will reduce the size of the Council to 44 councillors and replace annual elections with one every four years, generating a saving of £400,000 a year.

3 Make Gateshead the green capital of the North

- Liberal Democrats are leading the battle to make Gateshead greener. The Council has now agreed to support Liberal Democrat calls to plant trees on appropriate land in the borough.

4 Provide the homes people can afford

- Labour have focused on building executive homes on our countryside, failing to address the housing needs of the many while they focus on the needs of the better-off few.

5 Give Gateshead a voice

- Labour stopped Gateshead Council from being part of the new devolution system. Lib Dems will ensure the people of Gateshead can vote for the North East Mayor and have access to the £600 million the government are giving the region.

6 Improve street cleaning

- There are too many streets full of litter under Labour. We will carry out a spring clean of the borough.



Planning Updates

Former Whickham Social Club (see above)

- Planning permission has been granted to demolish the existing club and convert the building into flats for wheelchair users.
- The new building will comprise of 13 apartments.

Front Street School

- An application has been made to the Secretary of State to declare the School as surplus to requirements, so that the site can be sold.

3 Tuns, Swalwell (see below)

- Planning permission was granted in 2017 to convert the former public house to six residential flats.
- The building was left in a dilapidated state and the building needed a good deal of maintenance works.
- Following intervention by your ward councillors a Section 215 notice was served which requires the owner either to make good the building or demolish it.
- Work has now started to make the building safe.



Business News



The new post offices in Clavering Road, Swalwell (top, right) and St. Mary's Green, Whickham (top, left) are doing well, but please do continue to support them. They offer a full range of postal services as well as e-topups, electronic bill payments and cash deposits. The Swalwell office offers the only free cash withdrawal service in Swalwell.

Gateshead Council are actively looking for new tenants for the store that was previously NISA. There are a couple of expressions of interest at the moment - we will keep you updated if there is any further news.

Croft House has opened recently in Swalwell on Beverley Drive, offering Chiropractic & Sports Massage in a professional but relaxed environment with on site parking and full disabled access.



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Whickham North & Swalwell Focus Team - working for you, all year round