

LEIGH AND WEST LEIGH FOCUS

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RECENT reports on crime and policing in the UK have shown us that after big spending cuts:

- Police numbers are at their lowest since 1981
- Thousands of reported crimes are not properly recorded, including violence and domestic abuse.
- Most investigations are closed without a suspect even being identified.

This includes three quarters of reported vehicle thefts, four out of five burglaries and almost half of shoplifting cases.

And this Government has no idea what the effect is of cuts in police funding, according to the National Audit Office.

Government Ministers say that cuts in police numbers have nothing to do with rising crime. But here in Southend, overall crime was up by six percent in the year to March, with violent crime and sexual offences higher, while vehicle crimes and theft fell a little.

Southend has been promised just 12 additional police officers, six of them community officers.

Cllr Carole Mulroney says: "The Government really needs to recognise that this is a crisis. They should get a grip on it and provide the resources the police need to do their job properly. Here in Leigh and across the country, victims of crime are being badly let down."

THE THIN BLUE LINE

Undermanned, underfunded and overstretched ... the Tories have pushed our police force into crisis

- » More homes and leisure facilities
- » Covered ways, green spaces
- » Better linkage with seafront



THE BATTLE IS ON TO SAVE SOUTHEND HIGH STREET...

We have a vision to reinvigorate the down-at-heel town centre

LIKE many High Streets around the country, Southend High Street seems to be going downhill fast.

It is now home mostly to low-price bargain retailers and some stores, such as BHS, stand empty for long periods. We need a drastic rethink of how our town centre functions.

In contrast shops and businesses in The Broadway and Leigh Road are thriving. Leigh has become a place

where people come to meet their friends, socialise, pamper themselves and find that unusual present. But you can't just look at Leigh's success and assume doing the same will work in Southend.

So what is special about Southend? It has a reputation as London's closest seaside resort. A place to have a fun day out. It is mostly a day-trip destination.

There are several million people less

than 40 miles away, with money to spend and not just on sunny summer weekends.

But Southend needs to be the right type of environment where people feel safe to walk around and where there is vibrancy.

We should play to its strengths by offering package day and weekend trips for tourists, and not expecting those visitors to be huge spenders in our shops.

The High Street needs a welcoming focal point, more green spaces and community uses. It needs more flats

and homes above shops so there are more people living in the central area and creating a local community as well as the shopping and entertainment on offer.

To achieve this the Council has to have the vision and the understanding about Southend itself.

So this is our suggested Lib Dem policy for a better High Street ...

- Southend's planning policies must reflect the way our shopping habits are changing.
- Encourage more flats and homes on upper floors and leisure at ground floor and create a more pleasant

ambience by the use of covered ways, green spaces and community uses.

- Enhance the Victoria Centre and Royals to cater for the new trends in eating out and leisure.

- Encourage a positive approach to the linkage between the two ends of the town centre and on to the seafront

Here in Leigh we should continue to encourage the independent nature of the shopping on offer and make sure we keep the character of the town.

What do you think? How can our main shopping areas be improved? We want to hear from you.



Cllr Carole Mulroney is leading Lib Dem policy on this issue

Brexit is such a mess it needs to be called off

THE Government has told Southend Council to write a report on what impact Brexit will have on Southend. What a joke!

First we need to know what sort of Brexit we are going to get. Will it be Mrs May's Chequers deal that she is trying to force through Parliament that leaves us following EU rules and paying into the budget but giving up our say on EU policies? Or will it be

a car-crash Brexit as advocated by Jacob Rees-Mogg and his extremist friends?

With the Tory policy on Europe so confused and divided, the only thing we can say for certain is that we would all be better off if we forgot the whole Brexit idea and went back to working with our friends in Europe as full members of the European Union.



Apparently, this road doesn't need repairing

SOUTHEND Council says that the road surface in Victor Drive is fine and that it is only halfway through its scheduled life. Who are they kidding?

Apart from all the potholes and patches in the middle of the road, the road surface has disappeared altogether alongside parts of the pavement.

But in other parts of Leigh, roads in much better condition have been re-surfaced.

Lib Dem campaigner Ashley Thompson says: "Of course we welcome any local road being repaired. However, the Council should get out, look at all the roads and deal with the worst ones first rather than doing them on a fixed timetable whatever their condition. It is just common sense."



SHOCKING: Lib Dem Ashley Thompson is appalled by the state of Victor Drive

Schools: A new school is needed now, more than ever

THE Council has announced that they are going to clamp down on parents who try to get their children into popular schools by using fake addresses. That makes sense.

But it's just tinkering at the edge of a bigger problem.

Our local primary schools - West Leigh, Leigh North Street and Chalkwell - are all in older buildings with limited space, and are serving much larger numbers of pupils than they were designed for.

Earlier this year, the Council's Tory leaders announced that these schools faced so much overcrowding that controversial and unpopular changes to their catchment areas were needed.

Under pressure from parents and local LibDem Councillors, the Tories backed down and killed off their own scheme. We welcomed that. But the basic problem hasn't gone away.

Pupil numbers are not falling, and the Council needs to be planning for the long term. But the Tories have put no money in the budget to do anything about this situation and there is no sign of any strategic planning.

Cllr Peter Wexham says: "Before Belfairs School was rebuilt nearly ten years ago, Liberal Democrat Councillors were calling for a new primary school to be built in that area.

"We were right to do that, and the need still exists. The Council can't keep squeezing more and more children into schools built over 100 years ago."

Austerity .. a sign of Tory rule

IF street signs are missing for months if not years, we must be in Tory run Southend. Neglect is the Tories' watchword as a result

of years of their policy of austerity. Don't believe us? Here are pictures taken in Lymington Avenue and Woodfield Gardens.



PRETTY VACANT: Our man Ashley Thompson looks for the signs in Lymington Avenue and Woodfield Gardens (right) ... but they are nowhere to be seen



We've put trees on the Council map

RESIDENTS are saddened whenever the Council takes down trees, as they have been doing recently in Highlands and Sutherland Boulevards. But when

trees get old and diseased it is not safe to leave them.

However, thanks to Cllr Peter Wexham, the Council has a policy of planting two trees for every one they take down. That is a great policy, but the Council does not necessarily plant the new trees anywhere near the ones they have taken down.

Your Lib Dem Councillors are lobbying to make sure Leigh gets its fair share of new trees. If you know a site that needs a new tree, please let us know.



LEIGH'S LIB DEM TEAM Always at your service

Meet your Lib Dem Councillors on the second Saturday of the month at Leigh Community Centre between 9 and 10.45 am.

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