

## Time we voters looked beyond party labels

LIKE many other parents attending the RBWM council meeting about Lowbrook, I was appalled that councillors couldn't see the benefit of expanding an outstanding school so more children in Cox Green could attend their local school. The vote came after two hours of councillors stating their support for, or opposition to, expanding Lowbrook, and fell to a tie.

Cllr John Lenton, in his role as Mayor, decided to vote against Lowbrook – and its hard-working teachers, students and parents – because he wanted 'unity'. His vote fell far short of that goal.

Perhaps what surprised me most was the glaring face of privilege and entitlement that pervaded the room among our councillors, and the mayor in particular. He looked down upon the councillors as he deigned to let others speak and refused to let some have their say – even when they had valid points needed to correct inaccuracies.

For example, one councillor urged Mr Rooney, as headteacher, to start helping other schools become better; she did not seem to know that he already spends two-and-a-half days a week helping Holy Trinity in Cookham, which has transformed from needing improvement to becoming an outstanding school in just two years.

The mayor would not allow the opportunity to present the facts needed to contribute to this debate, and other areas of confusion such as the size of the school hall.

In the end, the mayor took a lazy approach as he cast the deciding vote that sunk Lowbrook's hopes for expansion.

His careless choice has set a precedent that will pit school against school, and ward against ward in a fight that will hurt us all at a time when Maidenhead needs to come together to grow and prosper.

One glaring lesson I learned was the need for greater diversity in our local government; diversity of thought, diversity of culture and diversity of experience. Far too many councillors are white and male, and far too many come from generations where fathers didn't have as large a role to play in the day-to-day work of raising their children.

Far too many seem unable to relate to the pressure of the school run or the need to do this while keeping a job to make ends meet. It's no wonder there is such a disconnect between the council and its constituents.

This is evident with the Local Borough Plan, with Lowbrook and a range of other issues that have raised discontent.

We as parents will not forget the council's decision, or the attitudes of the mayor and many others who voted against Lowbrook's expansion.

Those concerned about the Borough Local Plan will also not forget. 2019 is coming, and many in Maidenhead are seeing just how important their local government is in their daily lives, and the need to put in place representatives who understand their challenges and hopes.

I would urge my fellow residents to look beyond party labels to find individuals who will listen to them and represent them, individuals who will act on their behalf and be held to account by residents.

6/7/17  
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## We must not tolerate these 'no go' areas

LAST week we returned home late in the evening from a short break with friends to discover that a field near us had been occupied and several caravans and vehicles had been parked in it for over 24 hours.

Well after midnight that night there were several gunshots, loud voices, shouting, wolf whistles, vehicle noises, and a male voice urgently shouting 'get the guns!' By 3am police were in attendance... two rather confused young gentlemen sent from Slough. They said a phone call from one of the travellers had claimed they were under threat from someone with a shotgun.

During the next day smoke was rising from the field behind us and the fire brigade turned up trying to find a way to gain access to the fire.

The owner of the field has recently had to suffer previous incidents. Not long ago the hedge was cut through with a chain saw, the ditch filled with earth, and a pickup repeatedly driven through to deposit a very large pile of manure. A short while after that he and his girlfriend had to spend many weekends trying to clear a huge load of logs dumped by a completely irresponsible 'businessman'.

He now found himself being obliged to engage bailiffs and to inform the invaders ... who proceeded to beat him up! He phoned 999 but the police apparently would not attend to give him protection and furthermore threatened to arrest his bailiff! By the end of the day there were two fires left burning with small explosions heard and large piles of assorted rubbish left in the field as the invaders decided to leave.

I am appalled at the disgraceful list of police failures. Why was an innocent member of the public not supported and protected as we might expect? Why is it acceptable for a clear case of GBH not to be prosecuted rigorously? Why is the obvious presence and discharge of firearms not the cause of exhaustive searching, confiscation, and prosecution? If necessary with the support of armed officers? Why is a blind eye turned to mismatched vehicle number plates with a UK plate on the front and an EU/Eire plate on the back? How can it be acceptable for unattended foul smelling fires to be left burning where there is a distinct possibility surrounding dry grass and undergrowth are at risk? Why is it apparently OK to fly tip on a massive scale leaving the landowner with a crippling clean-up burden?

If any of us had been guilty of this kind of behaviour we would have found ourselves in a cell. I am at a complete loss in trying to understand how any of this can possibly be acceptable. Is it reasonable to ask our local police to explain this if they can?

And this represents only the tip of the iceberg. There are permanent or long-term sites where local residents face this kind of anti-social behaviour and intimidation constantly. Our natural inclination to be fair and respect individual freedoms is exploited and abused mercilessly.

Surely early playground experience teaches us that bullies cannot be appeased but have to be confronted otherwise we are lost. If we fail to face the fact that there appear to be 'no-go' areas within our society where our police fear to enter then we truly are lost.

6/7/17  
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