

Back Home to Guildford

After six months of working on my new book in Cape Town, it was finally time to come home last week. We boarded the plane in 35-degree heat but it felt like we had been diverted to Greenland when it landed in the sleet and snow, but it was still good to be home. And it was also good to get off that plane after the worst flight I have ever had the misfortune to endure courtesy of my first experience of Virgin Airlines. Three hours before any food or drink arrived, coupled with the cabin supervisor informing me she was 'not answerable to me' when I asked her why, left me wishing I had remained a Virgin virgin and stuck to South African Airlines, as I will in future. On top of that I was soaked to the skin and passport control asked me if it was raining outside. 'No', I replied, 'My boat sank.' And so the rubber gloves appeared.

The drive home was marvellous, along the newly opened four hundred lane M25 flanked by green Surrey fields, until we arrived in Burpham of course and first encountered coned off roads with no workmen in the enclosure. Naturally I was pleased the council were finally doing something about the ploughed tarmac, masquerading as roads, that serve the town but a drive down London Road, that shook my fillings loose, reminded me why so many parents have off-road four by four's around here. That is to ensure they can ferry the children around without damaging their vital organs on the school run. The off road trails are smoother in South Africa than some of the main roads in Guildford. Whilst I realise potholes and cones are controlled by two separate agencies, the County Council and the Highways Agency, those agencies are not beyond the reach and influence of the Borough Council.

By the time we reached the Civic Hall I was reminded why, as that monument to the incompetence of our elected council rammed it home to me, because the people you and I have trusted with the future of the town would rather spend over twenty million of Her Majesty's finest, money also entrusted to them by you and I, on forcing through a building that looks like it was conceived in Slough and designed in the dark rather than concern themselves with the things that concern our families. Back in the town centre on Saturday morning I tip toed my way past the alcopop bottles, dried vomit and ground in chewing gum all over the pavements and zig zagged past the dogs mess up my road and started thinking about the last time I was home.

I was then reminded of the public meeting I was invited to speak at in October when the leader of the council, Captain Mainwairing, clearly fed up with being asked to justify the Civic Hall rebuild, glibly announced that there was no point in talking about it, the decision had been made and that it was final. This was a misunderstanding of how local politics really works on a biblical scale. So I pointed out to everybody on that night the matter was far from over.

There are local elections coming up in May and this provides us with the perfect opportunity to take some responsibility for ourselves. I have no political motive here as I don't care which party is voted in or who has the majority. Recent experience has proved that it makes as near as no difference these days if you vote Labour, Conservative, Lib Dem or Monster Raving Looney, they are all the same.

But, as we can see every week in the Surrey Advertiser, people like councillor Tony Rooth, who I have never heard of (is he new?) cannot open their mouths, or pick up their pens, without displaying spite towards whoever doesn't agree with him, which is many people. It is obvious nobody in the current chamber can get along with each other, let alone agree on anything, so it is time for a change. And a complete one at that. Therefore I urge my fellow residents to vote at the next local election for whoever on your ticket who is NOT currently an elected councillor. To be rid of every single one of them and start again is the only way to stop the backbiting and plain immaturity currently dominating local politics.

For those whose ward representative is also on the executive management committee of the presiding Conservative regime there is an extra responsibility upon your shoulders. For it is up to you to be rid of these people for us, there is nothing any of us living in different wards can do about them, so you have to do it for us. And, if you are a committed, die-hard, Tory who cannot bring yourself to vote for anybody else then consider this. It is because Guildford is so staunchly Tory that the current Labour government couldn't care less about us. If anybody seriously thinks we have a cat in hell's chance of saving our hospital, if Blair, Brown and all the other crooks in government believe there are more votes to be had in marginal areas elsewhere, that they can send our ever diminishing NHS funding to, then we are not thinking clearly. Because they won't be sending much money to Tory Town, that's for sure, as the four thousand potholes seem to confirm.

If the current government are to take any interest in the issues we have locally that affect us all, then they have to believe there is a vote or two to be had down here, so we need to start being more enlightened with our voting, and begin with a clean sweep and a brand new cross party executive at Millmead. Marginal boroughs are always treated with the most respect come election time.

So, remember this, if your ward councillor is one of the current City Fathers then it is up to you to change that for the rest of us. Because if we present them with any further influence over our lives after the May elections we are committing Guildford to look like Slough within five years and it will be our own fault. This is the last chance we have.

If prompted, I might even stand for office myself and, if so, this will be my simple seven-point manifesto:

1. Anybody dropping litter or spitting or fighting in the town will be publicly shot at Tunsgate on a Saturday morning.
2. Same goes for careless dog owners.
3. The Civic Hall will receive a one million pound refurbishment and be open within six months
4. There will be a midnight curfew in the town centre for anybody under twenty five. (I realise that will upset a few kebab and burger bar owners but it will stop the weekly beatings at the taxi rank and outside Sunburst with the added advantage that local residents can walk with their wives from their favourite restaurant without being punctured in a major artery with a broken bottle held by somebody from another town.)
5. 25% of staff will be cut at Millmead within one week and the saving from that and the Civic Hall will be spent on town security patrolling between 6pm and 6am. Anybody acting in an unsocial way will be driven to the borough borders and simply left there to find their own way home. They will then be banned from town for a year.
6. All roads will be smooth again within eighteen months.
7. Michel Harper can have his casino, what's wrong with casinos? It will bring a better class of punter to Guildford (and possibly more money) than the rest of Bridge Street currently does put together.

It's good to be home again!

Albert Jack - Guildford April 2007