

## **Revealing Local Tactics by Albert Jack – 24<sup>th</sup> April 2007**

I noticed a letter in last weeks edition from a man with high blood pressure called Tim Downing who doesn't want us to know if he lives in Guildford or not, basically dissecting, piece by piece, a letter from a Guildford pensioner complaining about potholes and various other things. It is the letter printed next to the one by Tony Rooth who, as usual, is ranting and rambling at the same old lady in a way that I am not even sure I can understand, let alone her. The one thing he did actually say of note was that he is paid £2,995 a year in expenses, written in a sarcastic manner perhaps expecting Mrs Podmore to be grateful for his time, effort and benevolence. But she isn't, and nor am I. In fact having read everything Tony Rooth has to say over recent weeks the phrase about paying peanuts and something to do with monkeys comes to mind. But back to Tim Downing.

I have sat and thought about this and for the life of me cannot understand why a local resident would take such exception to the valid questions a dear old pensioner would have about the state of our roads. Who would take the time to address each of her points in such a confrontational and unpleasant way in a letter to a local paper? Now, I have some news for you that I have been saving for a day such as today. Last year, when we were involved in the live music debate over issues such as Guildford Civic Hall I noticed a similar passionate support of the local Conservative Group springing up in newspapers and websites. So, smelling a rat, I telephoned various public relations companies asking to speak to the person dealing with the Guildford Conservatives public relations account.

And was not surprised to be given the very name of one of the people posing as a 'concerned resident' who was supporting the Conservative Council in such a high profile and visible way. By the way, there is nothing wrong with them employing a public relations team. But there is everything wrong with them posing as ordinary residents in an attempt to swing public opinion. Naturally I confronted them, well I couldn't help myself could I and, guess what, had it flatly denied. But when I presented my evidence I was told there was 'some work going on but it was unofficial and unpaid work.' Now, you can believe that if you want to. After my enquiries I received a series of increasingly desperate emails from various people and on October 26<sup>th</sup> last year, as I gave a speech to the Guildford Book Festival, I noticed Andrew Hodges, leader of the Conservative Council sitting in the front row who

simply stared at me for an hour and a half before leaving. Now, I know I have been critical of the elected council in the past and I oppose their plans for a brand new Civic Hall, but I am starting to notice an Eastern European feel to local politics around here. It also might interest you to know that I have recently become the target of a committed email virus attack and the subject of a detailed tax enquiry as the result of an anonymous tip off. Luckily, I have all my affairs in order but it does make you wonder doesn't it. I promise you, I have even started looking out for poisoned tipped umbrellas coming my way in the high street. There is more.

I think I now know who Tim Downing is and we can assume that he either enjoys attempting to humiliate old ladies or he is working in some sort of public relations capacity for the local Tories. Is this the same Tim Downing who is no longer employed as the Chairman of the Town Centre Management Group? Formerly employed partly by local business and partly by the council, or in other words you, me and Mrs Podmore? By the way, it is also worth noting that part of what she wrote was in fact correct and Tim Downfall is wrong. I know, because I have checked for myself. And that has the mark of a PR company stamped all over it. So, Mr Downing of Address Supplied, pick on somebody your own size in future. Me, for example.

Finally, and this is the most serious part, I also know that on the day Mrs Podmore's letter appeared she received a telephone call, that she quite rightly found intimidating, from Maurice Byham, the Conservative Councillor for Bramley, Busbridge and Hascombe which, you might note, is not in Guildford but in Waverly. At 4.53pm on Good Friday he told Mrs Podmore he wanted to 'put her right' on a few things and, frankly, just stopped short of bullying her. He also told her Tony Rooth only drew £5,000 a year in expenses, so we now know one of them is wrong, or lying. I know this and I think everybody in Guildford should know this too at such an important time. I know this because, and this is the best part, Mrs Podmore is my dear old mum. And she wouldn't lie to me knowing I intended to go public with it all would she. And I wouldn't lie to you. And you, Maurice Bygone, can stay out of it, you don't represent any of us.

I also now know that Mr Thing-of-the-past used to work for Tim Downing in some capacity at the Guildford Town Centre Management Group who might be responsible for the unpleasant letter in support of Tony Rooth's unpleasant letter to my old mum. I don't like to see politicians ganging up like a pack of dogs against people, especially not my mum who simply wrote a letter expressing her concerns, as is her democratic

right that millions have died protecting over the years. So gentleman, pick on me instead if you are still in office come next Friday. Because, if we are unlucky enough for you to be voted for in enough numbers you can carry on as you currently are, you will have plenty of opportunity to do so over the next year or so.

For the record, there is one last thing you should all know. I am not personally for or against any political party. In fact, I am happy to tell you, I intend to vote for Anne Milton at the next general election because I believe she is good for Guildford. And the last time I checked she is a Conservative MP. But it wouldn't matter to me if she was Labour, Green, Lib Dem or Monster Raving Looney, because I think she is good for the town. But, Anne is also the Shadow Minister for Tourism and that means if the Conservatives win the next general election we may well have a cabinet minister representing us in Government. And that is good for Anne Milton and that is good for all of us. Something to be proud of in fact. My only worry is that her colleagues at a local level will derail her efforts between now and then and spoil all that good work if she loses her seat.

We are all voting next week so please think carefully about who you put your name to.

Albert Jack – Guildford

23<sup>rd</sup> April 2007