

Campaigning Charities and Common Sense

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

Worthing Herald and Littlehampton Gazette Article

14th January 2021

At the weekend I enjoyed the online quiz evening led by Katie Sanderson of Brighton and Dan Coxhill of Worthing. The other MP was Sara Britcliffe: she was elected age 24 in 2019 for Hyndburn, Lancashire; this was two years after she had been mayoress alongside her father before succeeding him as the local councillor. Unsurprisingly she beat me in the quiz on topical culture events.

We enjoyed answering questions together on the purposes, practices and lives in politics. It reminded me that in each major party in each constituency there are overlapping groups of people contributing within communities and nationally.

Few involved in good causes have no political views. I have yet to meet a political activist who is not also involved in doing good through charity, faith group or organising worthwhile activities for the young, the old or people with special needs.

Public officials and civil servants can fulfil their duties impartially while keeping any party preference private. Once a fellow minister offered to tell me his guess at the personal political allegiance of each senior permanent official. I declined: if it showed in their work, I would know; if it did not, I would neither know nor need to know.

Ed Miller of the Ferring Conservation Group and I were colleagues over thirty years ago in the Department of Employment. It is a matter of pleasant record that he has been involved in one party, now the official opposition, and I in another. It is important that our cooperative relationship gives the communities of Goring-by-Sea and of Ferring and the Kingstons the best opportunity to fight off attempts to concrete over every green field and farm that link our hamlets, villages and parishes.

Worthing's Town Crier has been a leader in the local Lib Dems (other political parties are available). Robert Smytherman has been prominent in the cause of mental health, probably from the time I served on the council of MIND, the National Association for Mental Health. Robert also has been significant in promoting and protecting residential leaseholders; this is another field where we respect each other's efforts and our organisations work together.

Tom Wye is the major person in Worthing and district who has privately and publicly demonstrated that party political service matters and that many other non-party causes do too.

Most successes with which I am associated have come from cross-party cooperation and close working with campaigning charities. The flurry of good news for many residential leaseholders and the welcome decision to ban ground rents on new leased retirement apartments follows the expert advice by the charity Leasehold Knowledge Partnership to my all-party parliamentary group and to the impartial Law Commissioners. Proposed extensive practical reforms benefit existing lease-renters.

My experience in a small block of flats opposite Christ Church in central Worthing has been consistently good with a fair-dealing landlord who used a competent managing agent. Fellow residents and I took his offer of the freehold of our homes at an affordable price agreed without expensive legal challenges or employing professionals.

This is my basic approach. Bad experiences for constituents prompt me to act to help others avoid them. Good experiences for constituents prompt action to help other choose to share them too if they wish.

Common sense is the guide. Reducing unnecessary unproductive conflict matters in international relations, in community choices and in family or personal relationships. It is charity in every sense of the word.

Collaboration on the growing vaccination campaign brings together volunteers, NHS staff and helpful military assistance. We are facing Covid together. I said in this week's debate: Maximise benefit; reduce harm.