

# What Matters Most To People

*Sir Peter Bottomley MP*

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Parties' leadership contests are fascinating and hard work for political journalists. They can be congratulated for knowing everything in advance and for explaining afterwards why it did or did not quite happen.

During the past 100 years, there have been few occasions when the expected person succeeded a leader who has died, been deposed or chose voluntary retirement.

When I have made a first choice, my candidate either would not stand or would not make it into the final stage. I have said who I would choose; I do not predict the outcome and I do expect to work harmoniously with the winner.

The same applied to leaders of other parties who served as prime minister, or who tried to. Harold Wilson and I shared respect for his parliamentary private secretary Bill Hamling, my first predecessor as MP for Woolwich West. Bill and I would have a drink together on a Saturday during our contested elections, after a week trying to outdo each other campaigning.

What matters more to most people than the early stages of a party's leadership selection? To many, over the longer term is the climate change facing people around the world and in this country. I hope those seeking selection will talk about our commitment to Net Zero.

That does not rule out measures during transition to avoid being in hock to Russia or to uncertainties in the Middle East. The high price shock of oil and gas, food and fertilisers require sympathetic action that does not lead to unsustainable wage/price spirals.

For a powerful, informative briefing that Caroline Lucas MP and I heard on Tuesday from Sir Patrick Vallance. His presentation is at Policy Connect.

Even if the constituency I serve had no one in retirement, I would still argue to defend the real living standards of pensioners. Do not forget the elderly. They too are concerned for the interests of parents and of children.

People of all ages come together, demonstrating common interest. There was a great enjoyable illustration in Goring by Sea at the Fayre at Romero's Catholic High School. During an hour with supporters, parents, staff and students, people raised all kinds of issues and they also reminded me of past joint endeavours.

One example is how to care for and to restrain the small numbers of youths who are out of the control of their parents. Saving them and saving those they trouble can be helped by the ability of an MP's team to be sure that public bodies share responsibility and opportunity to act decisively.

My contribution to good comes mainly from the leaders in our local businesses, our police, our colleges and schools, our churches, chapels, meeting houses, synagogues, mosques and temples, not forgetting town and county halls. Their leadership and service are beneficial beyond their doors.

Someone with toothache knows access to dentistry matters most. I went to one of the leading dental hospitals to be undated on the training of new dentists and the changes needed to keep more serving in the NHS. The existing contract is not working well.

At last week's Prime Minister's questions, I was thanked for raising the issues of protecting the Goring Gap, in amongst the pressures on Boris Johnson's position. Rather than playing to the press gallery, I chose to stick to what matters most locally.

People enjoy living and working on the south coast because we have villages and a town: let us work together to avoid becoming suburbs of a city from Brighton to Southampton.