

In a Crisis Choose Civility not Civil War

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

Worthing Herald Article

3rd October 2019

Elections for the Arun District Council in May this year led to change of control. The councillors elected James Walsh (Liberal Democrat) to lead the council in succession to Gill Brown (Conservative).

Four of the 32 parish and town councils are within the Worthing West constituency; the others are represented by my colleague MPs Nick Gibb and Nick Herbert.

The problems that might have followed from a hung council were avoided. Terence Chapman leads the Conservatives. He and all the councillors can be trusted to use the changing political situation to maintain the quiet provision of local services. Residents can expect civility in place of civil war.

I had returned early from the Conference in Manchester to attend the Tuesday debate in Westminster Hall on the problems facing park home residents. The person in the chair was not present at first: the only MP on the Speaker's Panel was to introduce the motion; I resolved the situation by proposing he took the chair while I spoke first. My intention had been to listen rather than to speak.

When called, I praised the way government had responded to the nationwide initiative that had been convened by Arun's officer Nat Slade with active encouragement by the chief executive Nigel Lynn. It is a shame that for too long, dodgy operators exploited the law to make lives horrible and horribly expensive for people, often elderly with medical conditions and without the money to risk expensive court disputes.

Sadly the vulnerable are ambushed by events. This Wednesday I shall have led a parliamentary debate on residential leaseholders. Progress is coming to make lease-rental safer and fairer. A new challenge lies in the proposal to allow two storeys to be added to existing blocks.

On Friday I had a well-attended advice session in the Worthing Library, before happy Macmillan coffee.

This week I have given support to the National Caravan Council's representations on intended change to Motorhome Vehicle Excise Duty (VED). The leisure vehicle industry contributes over £9 billion to our domestic economy. It employs 130,000 people and there are a quarter of a million motorhome owners across the UK.

The complication is that four engines are used in nearly all new motorhomes. The VED penalty could be massive. Motorhomes travel far less than most cars and vans. Their annual emissions are lower. Let us hope the Treasury will find a fair way to treat these special-use vehicles.

In between the housing debates, I have a question on our official humanitarian help to Venezuelans in the country and as refugees across the borders. It is shocking that apologists for successive regimes go around the circle of new rulers who claim their predecessors were not true socialists, then that outside forces were wrecking things, then when pushed out, their own successors claim that true socialism has not yet been tried.

I have known Venezuelans for decades. The well off got up and went; the poor were left behind. Like Zimbabwe, the country could have been one of the wealthiest in its continent. This is not the place to consider if and whether civil war can be justified. We can agree that civil war can be as costly in human terms as dictatorship and of gross misrule.

At the beginning of the new season of the English National Opera this week (it includes versions of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice), a veteran former Fleet Street editor said I was one of the most active MPs in defence of reporters and journalists around the world. More are being killed or imprisoned than in decades past.