

Differences Need Not Divide

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

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Fifty years ago, I became involved in organised public and political service. We worked on small, local projects. Virginia was training adventure playground leaders and school care workers. With other volunteers I created the South Lambeth Neighbourhood Council and led the physical work to create two football pitches in what is now the Larkhall Park.

That experience led me to give strong public support to the Worthing Council initiative, resisted by some, to install the popular children's beach play area at Goring by Sea. One of my early ambitions was for a place for parents with prams and baby carriers to congregate every few hundred yards with small play parks within half a mile. Teenagers need a place for a kickabout or hoops to shoot within a mile or fifteen-minute walk.

Communities within towns and cities could gain with neighbourhood councils, urban equivalent of the village and hamlet parish council, aiding continuity of care for the community, creation of local facilities, comment on planning applications and where matters of concern can be discussed.

Residents' associations and Conservation groups fulfil many of these positive purposes. Join me in recognising examples, including Ed Miller for his constant service in the Ferring Conservation group, especially on rapacious planning applications. Rely on Terry Woodjetts, leading the West Durrington Residents as the developers are encouraged and if necessary, required to meet their commitments.

Commend the activists in Turning Tides, Worthing Homes, Heene Community Centre, the East Preston groups and Rustington's churches together.

This week, the Labour gathering in Brighton has had its heights and depths. Language at a fringe meeting should not dominate a serious gathering of activists from around the country, meeting with representatives of most trades unions.

Labour's leader Sir Keir Starmer visited Worthing. His Fabian pamphlet is available on the Labour List website. Parts will be familiar to readers of this column; occasionally he thinks everything Conservatives do is wrong.

Over the decades there have been political changes. Tim Loughton and I were selected as candidates for the 1997 general election in the new constituencies of Worthing West and East Worthing & Shoreham when the borough council and the county council were led by Liberal Democrats.

Elections for the European Assembly showed potential Labour support. Recent elections recorded the rise and ebbing of UKIP and its successors, growing participation by Greens and organised activity by Labour, helped for a time by Momentum enthusiasts.

Locally there was a clear, not overwhelming, majority to leave the European Union. My then chairman was for Out; on balance I was for remaining: Tim successfully argued Out; his chairman was on my side. That illustrated that party members do not need to split when differing.

It is regrettable that respect for trans people and respect for women has led to absurd ducking and diving in interviews about who is a woman. Those who feel they are in the wrong gender can have their feelings and needs recognised without upsetting general protections.

Tragic fatal attacks on primary school teacher Sabina Nessa, Sarah Everard and sisters Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman, together with many others each year are why in Parliament Jess Phillips MP reads the names of all women killed in the previous year when a man was subsequently convicted. Two a week.

When an administrator at Women's Aid, she learned that abstract principles do not matter as much as people's lives. No one wants to abandon true principles; nor should a principle hinder our attempt to overcome threats, disadvantage or discrimination against a fellow human being.

My choice was to work with and through the Conservatives rather than Labour or Liberals. I do not write off the alternatives. Let us overlap, let us cooperate when possible and let us talk about each other with respect.