

Public Service in Parliament Square

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

Worthing Herald and Littlehampton Gazette Article

23rd September 2021

Constituents could have seen and heard me on the southern Parliament Square rostrum by St Margaret's addressing two thousand residential leaseholders. They came from around the country to encourage parliament and government to do much more to resolve the scandal of defective homes built with fire risks.

We started with moving silence for the seventy-two victims of the Grenfell Tower fire. It was my cross-party responsibility to lead speakers from the Cladding groups, the National Leasehold Campaign and the activists in the Leasehold Knowledge Partnership.

Progress so far is because of the groups' work. Greater steps are promised. The tasks for MPs include making government find the ways to identify the risks, fix the problems appropriately and fund them, before retrieving the costs from those responsible and from their professional insurers.

The Treasury are on the north side of the square; let us hope their windows were open so the needs and the ways to help were heard by officials. To the west lies the Supreme Court where tricky legal judgments are issued, perhaps eventually on issues raised by this modern catastrophe.

The Great Hall of Westminster first built by King William Rufus to the east is over 900 years old, like the discredited feudal leasehold system. The Hall has been changed once, more often than the inappropriate leasehold mess.

Do read the roles of the Hall over the centuries. We have heard speeches by The Queen, a recent Pope and Barack Obama who reflected that his Presidential grandfather cooked for the British army. He commented on my Stars and Stripes tie.

I am parliamentary warden of 'Parliament's Parish church', St Margaret's, now within the Westminster Abbey family. I previously attended an amazing Service arranged by the all-party group for Twelve Step Recovery.

Mutual Aid, following recognition of an addiction and a commitment to facing it was at the heart of the twelve-step programme developed by Alcoholics Anonymous, now followed by others including people addicted to overeating, drugs, gambling, excess sex, and companion groups for family members affected by someone else's compulsion.

The United States national ending of prohibition of alcohol in 1933 was followed by spikes in alcoholism and alcohol abuse. Within a few years two confessed abusers, Bill W and Dr Bob S established Alcoholics Anonymous, developing their 12-steps, based on understanding alcoholism was more than just a physical issue. Treatment needed to involve mind and spirit.

Brave people came forward to speak of their experiences. I am glad my church made possible the sharing and the caring that was obvious to all who were present. Every community could have an equivalent gathering every few years. People will know more of the available help if they choose to attend a relevant self-help group.

I look forward to the return of the annual Salvation Army carols in Westminster Hall. Through much of the world they seek to bring physical and spiritual help to the poor, the destitute and hungry, or as described in Worthing and district as working with some of the most vulnerable people in society, people on the margins.

The respected local historian Chris Hare tells us what happened in 1885 when the town initially backed the Skeleton Army's rough resistance to the Salvationists tackling the vilest spots of decadence. The Skeletons also attacked the police. In my view, the 'Insulate' groups blocking motorways would do better and risk fewer lives by arranging a demonstration in Parliament Square.