

**Ian T Donaldson**

**Your Molesey  
(South)  
candidate for  
Elmbridge  
Borough Council**



**Molesey  
Residents  
Association.**

**(Part of the Residents  
Association and  
Independents Group of  
19 Councillors on  
Elmbridge Borough  
Council)**



### **Background Information**

Ian Donaldson has served as a Councillor for eight years for the Molesey South Ward

He has been chairman and Vice Chairman of the Community Affairs overview and Scrutiny Committee, Vice Chairman of the North Area Planning Subcommittee and a member of the main planning Committee. Ian is also a member of various task groups for: Walton Town Centre, Excel Leisure Centre, Affordable Housing, The Local Development Framework and the Walton Playhouse. Ian is also the only Councillor who sits on the Elmbridge Environmental Forum.

The Residents Group were in power for 14 years up to 2006 and during that time Elmbridge BC rose to be given an "Excellent" rating by the Audit Commission. The RA group took the initiative for the development of the Heart Town Centre development in Walton, The Xcel Leisure Centre and the Brooklands Park leisure area. The Group built up services for elderly people and ran various centres throughout the Borough. It also managed youth centres and built up services such as football clubs, skate board parks etc for the younger set.

The RA Group administration kept local roads in an excellent state until Surrey County Council decided to take them back and form their own highways department which has been an unmitigated disaster.

Unfortunately Schools, Health Care, Roads and Children's Services are all governed directly by Surrey County Council who take about 75% of your Council Tax but were only rated with one star by the independent Audit Commission.

Ian Donaldson is also a local architect and keen to protect the interests of small businesses in Molesey

### **Looking after the interests of Molesey**

The current Conservative administration at EBC often seems to regard Molesey as the poor relation in the Borough and its interests often seem to be considered well after places such as Esher, Cobham and Oxshott that have much smaller populations. The Conservative administration wants to close our public toilets. They want to sell off Vine Hall and Mole Hall and they have already considerably reduced front line services such as frozen meals to elderly residents.

East and West Molesey have a population that is approximately 15% of the total population of Elmbridge. Molesey has a very diverse mix of shops and restaurants etc but currently traders are suffering due to excessive parking charges, high business rates, high rents and effectively free parking in the new Heart development in Walton. Molesey South has one of the larger industrial and productive areas in the Borough but the community environment is being eroded by permitting the closure of the Surveyor Pub and allowing more and more housing to be developed at a higher density than other parts of the Borough

As a local resident who has lived in Molesey for 40 years and as a Ward Councillor for Molesey South for the last 8 years I am committed to looking after and developing the interests of Molesey residents and traders as a whole and in Molesey South in particular.

## **Roads.**

The current state of the roads is nothing less than disgraceful. There are potholes everywhere. These roads are maintained by Surrey County Council who takes 75% of your Council tax. SCC apparently considers that it is much more important to spend your money on replacing 80% of all the lamp posts in the Borough at a cost said to be at around £180 million, although it is difficult to find out just how much it is really costing. At the same time they are in the process of cancelling one disastrous long term contract for road maintenance only to replace it with another long term contract which will, no doubt, also prove impossible to control.

The maintenance of roads was previously managed by Elmbridge Borough Council up to 2005 and during that time they were kept in much better condition than they are now. Your local MRA Councillors want to bring back the maintenance of your local roads under the control of your Local Authority where they should be.

## **Health.**

The NHS is partly funded by SCC from your Council tax. The NHS recently published a pamphlet entitled "Better health care closer to home" This emphasised that people leaving the major hospitals should be able to recuperate in local hospitals located close to their homes. This is so that they do not block main hospital beds and their relations and friends can visit them easily. It would also enable people to have treatment such as physiotherapy in local hospitals so that they do not have to travel far and take up valuable resources in major hospitals. What has the NHS done? They have done precisely the opposite. Molesey Hospital has already lost 12 beds and the NHS is now talking of closing it and other local hospitals altogether. In the eyes of accountants this makes a whole lot of sense: they can demolish the hospitals and sell off the land at high cost to developers who will build houses all over it. Does it benefit or make sense to the Community? No of course it doesn't but then who cares about the community as long as they keep paying their taxes!

## **Car parking.**

At present there is the absurd situation of residential roads being clogged with cars mostly belonging to people who commute into London or work in local businesses while nearby car parks such as the Walton Road car park remain less than half full . This all day parking annoys local residents who can no longer park outside their own house and this in turn leads to a call for Controlled Parking Zones. CPZs are not the answer; they will simply drive all day parkers further away to annoy yet another group of householders. Sooner or later the place will become full of parking notices and parking meters that will change to whole character of the area and destroy the pleasant village avenues that are so much part of the Elmbridge heritage.

We think that the way to deal with this situation is for each car park to be assessed in its own locality and for parking to be priced at an amount that will attract parkers to park in car parks rather than in local residential roads. In some situations this may mean no charge at all and in other situations where car parks become full then the cost of parking should reflect this. A much greater degree of flexibility is called for. Local trader should be given special discounts so that their staff can park at a realistic price. The Conservative administration is at last considering such discounted parking for shop workers but has put on a condition stating that discounts can only be given to people who live in Elmbridge. Your local Councillors think that this is nonsense as many of those who work in Molesey live just over the bridge in Kingston.

**Housing.** This is something where Elmbridge BC does have a degree of influence. However the location and construction of new housing has to be considered and tied in with the provision of schools, transport, and health care. It is rather pointless to plan for new housing without being able to make an accurate assessment of this type of infrastructure but that seems to be what is happening.

At present we do not know where or even if Surrey County Council is going to build more class rooms to provide urgently needed school places for Molesey Children and there is a real danger that Molesey children will have to be travel to schools which are much further away. NHS Southern partly funded by SCC is threatening to close Molesey Hospital and if that happens there will be pressure to demolish it and build yet more houses and elderly and vulnerable people will have to travel much further. There is even talk of closing Kingston Hospitals A&E Departments and ending emergency cases to St Georges in Tooting.

Imagine trying to build an aeroplane or ship without knowing where all the complex parts are being manufactured, when they are arriving and how they must be handled to complete the construction! And what alternative plan has to be put into practice if a particular part is delayed. There are well known and well tried procedures in such industries to provide co-ordinated partnership practices. Why not so in Local Government?

Elmbridge is way ahead of the Government target in the production of overall housing but way way behind the target in the production of affordable housing. The target for private housing is likely to be exceeded within the next few years and there could then be a considerable problem with the over production of houses resulting in a real scarcity of land and this in turn is likely to cause developers to cast a greedy eye on the green belt. At this point with almost no land available it will be very difficult to oppose if there are already

established precedents and if developers have sufficient influence on central government.

Attempts have been made to lower the threshold point where developers have to provide a percentage of affordable units. At present a developer must provide 40% of affordable housing if there are more than 15 dwelling units, or if development land area exceeds more than 0.5 hectares. What do developers do? They develop just sufficient land to support 14 units and of course these are all for the private market. If they have to develop larger parcels of land then all the private units are 4 and 5 bedroom units and all the affordable units have only 1 and 2 bedrooms. Lowering the threshold for the provision of affordable housing to 6 units is being suggested but we feel that this is just tinkering on the periphery of the problem. If Elmbridge really wants to achieve Government targets and considerably increase the number of affordable housing units then it needs to bring in much more robust planning policies. Other Boroughs do already have such robust policies.

So what do other Boroughs do? If the developer wants to provide less than the required percentage of affordable housing then they are required to provide an independent financial survey paid for by them to conclusively demonstrate that it is not economical to provide their assigned quota of affordable housing. If there is no independent report then automatically there is no validation of the planning application. It is just not accepted. A number of Local Authorities go so far as to have policies that dictate the mix of affordable units that they require, so many 4 bed so many 3 bed etc. right down to a small plot of land. They also base the percentage requirement on the number of habitable rooms instead of the number of dwelling. If a developer chooses to build his affordable quota as 1 and 2 bedroom units then he will have to build many more of them. Why are such policies not being considered by Elmbridge?

It is completely obvious that rooms above shops are not being fully utilised. Some are used as stores but many are not used at all. Such spaces could be converted at relatively low cost to provide ideal affordable homes. Is it beyond our wit to provide sufficient incentives for shopkeepers to turn these already built locations into affordable homes? We have been told that this has already been tried but without success. There is an old adage. If at first you don't succeed try try again. We really do not accept that there is no way to make this work.

**Zoning.** Many Boroughs have policies that create planning zones to take account of future development for such areas as shopping, offices, industrial units etc. Elmbridge does not appear to have any such policies so development is piecemeal and uncoordinated. Where is the future expansion of Walton town centre going to go? Do we leave it to chance and to the whim of developers or should we create a planning zone? It would appear that the area between

Sainsburys and HWM motors would be ideal for town expansion and it is likely that another car park will be required. We note that already new housing is being developed in this area. Surely this is something that should be considered in the Local Development Framework.

## **Education**

Under the previous Conservative administration Molesey lost the Bishop Fox Secondary School and the Church Farm middle school. The Bishop Fox school site has already been sold off and is now a large housing development which we welcome but the sale of school land for housing can not go on willy nilly without a proper infrastructure being put in place

SCC have stated that they wish to sell off part of the Chandlers Field school playing fields and the John Nightingale (ex Church Farm) site but under some pressure from Local Residents Groups they are at last reconsidering this and there is now hope that local children can be educated at local schools. This is particularly important at a time when SCC is considering radical cuts to local bus services including school busses. Your local RA County and Borough Councillors will continue to put pressure on SCC to provide adequate local primary and secondary school places within a reasonable distance.

## **The Jolly Boatman and Hampton Court Railway site**

This site is right opposite Hampton Court Palace and as such it is a site of National importance. We are not against some degree of development but we are against the massive over-development that has now gained planning permission. In my opinion this planning permission was bulldozed through largely by Conservative Councillors who do not live in this area against the wishes of the majority of local residents and all of the 9 Borough Councillors who do live in this area.

We disagreed with very many aspects of this proposed development but with respect to the Flood risk alone Elmbridge Council appears to have ignored Government planning guidance PPS25 and the advice from both SCC and the Environment Agency and proceeded to grant planning permission for this intensive residential and commercial development on a site that is in the highest category of flood risk.

How can it be right to allow a Residential Home like the Star and Garter to be built at ground level in Flood Zone 3? How can it be right to allow a two storey underground car park to be built in the same zone with air shafts that emerge nearly 6 feet below the minimum recommended build level?

SCC did object to the Jolly Boatman development but although it is the newly appointed "lead local flood authority" with responsibilities for surface water

flooding unaccountably this **excludes** flooding from main rivers such as the Thames.

That leaves Elmbridge Borough Council and the Environment Agency with overlapping responsibilities for applying the Government's planning Policy PPS25. Elmbridge Council - as the responsible planning authority - has the crucial role of using its powers to discourage building on the flood plain.

Without excusing in any way Elmbridge Council's errors, the Environment Agency must be held largely responsible for allowing the present situation to develop uncorrected.

We ask local residents to join with us to make our concerns very clear to all the candidates in the forthcoming Parliamentary Elections and demand their support for urgent, Central Government level intervention to tackle the near term flood risk that we all face. I hope that we can count on your support.

Please also see <http://elmbridge.residents-association.com/news.php>