

ISSUES RAISED BY MR JOHN FOX – A WHEATLEY RESIDENT

I've lived in Wheatley (London Rd) 42 years. I also did my stint as a parish councillor when pterodactyls flew overhead. In June this year at the first post-election WPC meeting I was the member of the public who raised the behaviour problem on Polling Day at the Merry Bells.

On Election Day 8 May before voting ended I wrote to David Buckle SODC Electoral Officer, and copied to Joanna Simons, OCC. My letter to them was also read out to the WPC in June with an accompanying letter and more information. I appreciated the respectful hearing which councillors gave to my concerns which I know for certain are shared by others. Let me summarise them so far.

The following have come to my attention:

- outright **'bullying' or harassment** (two tellers, from two parties, were challenged publicly and named to me afterwards
- **no name tags** on tellers. In fact tellers cannot be distinguished from activists.
- **too many people on the narrow (10-15 feet) apron in front of the Merry Bells** One WPC councillor described it as 'quite a party atmosphere' . I likened it to drinkers clustered outside at the pub door.
- **the 'gauntlet' of tellers in the wooden porchway** - intimidating *or perceived to be* incriminating. Both are criminal offences. Local authority 'Tellers' Advice' (Parish Clerk has copies) demands **'numbers should never be capable of being seen as intimidation in any way'**. One WPC councillor called blocking the porch 'an invasion of body space'
- the demand by one **for a phone number from a current WPC councillor**. (My neighbour claims to have been a **sked outright about his voting** at the previous election)
- **three of us, complete strangers, requested the supervising official on 8 May to clear the porch**, which she did: the porch filled as soon as she went back in
- A lady stood on the corner at the bottom of the Car Park steps and told me **'I don't want to go in there'. She had come to vote.**

It is now more than three months since I sent my initial concerns to Mr Buckle (elections@southandvale.gov.uk). I have had no response at all, not even to acknowledge receipt. I know the fire at Crowmarsh disrupted many things, but an acknowledgement would have helped. I read this officer's interim report on the conduct of elections in which it seems all is well on his patch.

Where do we go from here ?

This morning I met an old villager with a record of service - I told her of my concerns and that I was raising the matter, to which her reaction was 'About time too'. I believe the porch should be off limits. The apron should also be free of crowding and of activist-spectators. The numbers should be limited as *Tellers Advice* requires and individuals made identifiable. I know this year's elections were unusual - three on one day - but it will happen again, and we have the EU referendum coming up soon. At the end of the day if only one person is being intimidated or even feels intimidation, we should be taking it seriously.

Best wishes

John Fox