

## PRESS REPORTS OF THE BOROUGH ELECTIONS

Extracts from the *Harrow Observer*, Thursday 9 May 2002

### **Only Three Of Them Stood But They Hold Harrow's Political Future In Their Hands**

#### **LIB DEMS HAVE THE FINAL SAY**

Labour has lost overall control of Harrow Council but remains the largest single party in the Borough, just two seats ahead of the Conservatives, following a dramatic election result on Thursday. But, in an ironic twist, the Liberal Democrats now hold the balance of power within the hung Council despite having 60 of their 63 candidates barred from standing over a mix-up with their nomination papers.

The Lib Dems won the three seats they contested in Harrow Weald to gain their position of power. On Tuesday night the party elected Paddy Lyne as group leader and she will hold discussions with the two major parties during the next fortnight. Until then, the direction of the Council will hang in the balance.

While the Tories increased their number of seats in the Council to 29, they were bitterly disappointed not to seize overall control. And while Labour lost its majority, the party viewed it as a partial victory to remain the largest party with 31 seats. It was a very bad night for the People's Independent Party which failed to secure a single seat despite having been widely tipped to take Roxeth ward. The Green Party also lost out.

More than two thirds of voters in Harrow stayed away from the polling booths. The overall turnout in the borough was 31.5%, markedly lower than the 1998 election when 36.6% of the electorate had voted. Nevertheless, the eyes of the London political scene were firmly on Harrow when polls closed and counting began in the Byron Hall behind Harrow Leisure Centre at 9.30 pm. The Borough had been identified as one of the key marginals in the capital.

The first results were announced shortly after 11 pm by Returning Officer Gerald Balabanoff, who stood at the front of the hall and bellowed out the figures to cheers from either Tory or Labour supporters. With the returns in traditionally safe seats going to plan, it became clear by midnight that the result would hinge on a handful of marginals where canvassing had been at its most intense. When it was broadcast that the Conservatives had made key gains in both Harrow on the Hill and West Harrow, it became clear that the overall control of the Council could hang in the balance.

With rumours spreading of a possible Tory victory, Labour agents and candidates could be seen hurrying about the count calculating the predicted swing in each ward and its impact on the overall political picture. As several recounts in other key seats were announced, supporters from both sides became even more frenzied.

It was not until 2.15 am on Friday that the make-up of the Council was finally decided. The result hinged on the final undeclared ward of Kenton West where just 68 votes separated the six candidates. After two recounts, the ward was split with the Tories gaining one seat and Labour retaining two seats by the narrowest of margins to ensure they remained the largest party in Harrow.

Minutes after the result was announced, Labour Group leader Archie Foulds said: "The Tories have clearly blown their best chance that was handed to them by the Liberals. The Tories simply failed to capitalise on [the situation]. I do not think the Tories will ever mount a close challenge again. It has been very closely fought but Labour is the largest party and we know how to work with small majorities."

### **Police Called After Parties' War Of Words Outside Polls Station**

Police were called to break up a verbal spat between rival political candidates after Labour accused the Conservatives of "harassing" voters outside a polling station. Trouble brewed as Tory candidates and supporters gathered outside the polling station at Little Stanmore First and Middle School in Edgware on the evening of the Council election.

A group of eight Conservatives, including candidate Dinesh Kotecha, were confronted by Labour candidate Keith Burchell. A heated argument ensued which led to Mr. Burchell contacting the Returning Officer, Gerald Balabanoff, who called the Police. Officers rushed to the scene to calm the situation but no arrests

were made.

The row started when Mr. Burchell said the Tories were trying to interview voters as they entered the polling booths — a claim they have denied. “They were very aggressive in my opinion,” Mr. Burchell said. “I do not believe they should be challenging people on the way into the polling station. I asked the Tories what they were doing and their reaction was that they were just delivering refreshments, which was surprising because there were seven of them doing it.... It is something I would never want to happen again in Harrow. I have never seen it before in 30 years.”

But Mr. Kotecha rejected Mr. Burchell’s version of events. He said the Tories interviewed voters only after they had left the polling booths. They were trying to ascertain who in the ward still had to vote. “One of my colleagues said Mr. Burchell came around and was saying we were doing illegal canvassing and intimidating people, but we were doing nothing,” he said. “The supporters had brought us tea and snacks. The Police were quite satisfied with our explanation.”

Mr. Balabanoff said the incident was resolved on election night and no complaint had been lodged with him.

### **‘NO DEALS’ PLEDGE AS POWER LIES WITH THE GANG OF THREE**

From election pariahs to power brokers, the Liberal Democrats are now the smallest party on Harrow Council but have the biggest political clout. The Lib Dems secured just three seats in Thursday’s election, the small number being due to the fact that 60 of their candidates were ruled invalid before a vote was cast.

Before the election it was feared the Lib Dems could be wiped off the political map, with many Tories and Labour supporters finding it hard not to resist gloating at their plight. Now the tables appear to have turned. With Labour having a narrow two-seat advantage over the Tories, to ensure their policies and budgets are approved they will need the support of at least one Lib Dem councillor. Similarly, the Tories could overturn any Labour policy by persuading the three Lib Dem councillors to side with them....

The official line from the Lib Dems is that there will be “no deals”. The reality is that Labour will need to satisfy key aspects of the Lib Dem agenda, such as doing more to improve the borough’s environmental record.... But while [former councillor] Chris Noyce is no longer party group leader, behind the scenes he remains Harrow’s most influential Lib Dem figure. On Tuesday he met the three Lib Dem councillors, who have chosen Paddy Lyne as their leader, to thrash out their approach to the new council. “We should put no one into power and not do any formal deals with anyone,” he said. “We will deal with each issue on an as-and-when basis. The other parties are going to have to deal with us on every issue. They cannot assume their votes are in the bag for any course of action.”

The Tories had hoped the People’s Independent Party would hold the balance of power. They had gambled that, by not fielding candidates in Roxeth ward, the independents would sweep in and ensure the Tories were the single largest party. But it backfired badly, with Labour winning all three seats....

Extracts from the *Harrow Observer*, Thursday 11 May 2006

### **OUR NEW BLUES**

The people of Harrow saw red and voted blue during Thursday’s local elections, propelling the Conservatives into a 14-seat majority, banishing Labour into the background and nearly annihilating the Liberal Democrats. At the counts in Byron Hall and Harrow Leisure Centre, Labour councillors looked on ashen-faced as seat after seat fell and the wards totted up for the Tories. The blues took overall control of 11 wards and also got seats in three others, leaving just seven for Labour to cling on to.

The Liberal Democrats failed to improve on their disastrous performance in the previous local election, losing all three seats in Harrow Weald. Only in Rayners Lane, where the experienced Cllr. Chris Noyce won his seat, did the party make any impression.

Cllr. Chris Mote was understandably ecstatic, shaking hands with his victorious colleagues and proclaiming to all and sundry that “Labour got it wrong.” His party on the other hand got something right, so right that their national leader David Cameron MP treated them to a personal visit the morning after to wish them well. Mr. Mote said: “I am absolutely thrilled and just want to pay tribute to everyone who was involved in our victory.”

The polls closed at 10 pm on Thursday last week and within an hour postal votes had arrived to be counted just before the first bundle of ballot papers came in. Greenhill was one of the first Labour strongholds [*sic*] to fall, with a crestfallen Cllr. Howard Bluston blaming the antics of his national party for his own fall from grace. Six hours later and things looked even worse for Labour as the final results confirmed a substantial Conservative victory. The last ward to be called was Kenton West and a blurry-eyed Cllr. Sanjay Dighé watched closely as the ballot papers for his ward were counted. It eventually went to a recount at 10 am the following morning and the Labour deputy leader's eventual defeat by three Conservative challengers summed up the theme of Harrow's local elections, 2006.

### **Losers Left To Lick Wounds**

The Conservative victory on Thursday last week filled the party with a joyful sense of achievement but left Labour and the Liberal Democrats with different feelings altogether. Labour will hold its annual general meeting within a week and part of the evening will be spent deciding whether Cllr. Navin Shah is the right man to continue as leader of the party. Mr. Shah said: ".....Now is a time for consolidation after a temporary set-back but rest assured we will hold the Tories to account on every point of policy they come up with."

The Liberal Democrats were reduced to just one seat in Rayners Lane and the man who won it was Cllr. Chris Noyce. Cllr. Paddy Lyne did not stand and before the party's annual general meeting on 22 May her leadership defaults to Mr. Noyce who also becomes deputy leader, chief whip and everything else in the absence of any colleagues. He said: "I have 16 years experience as a councillor in many different roles, including being a back bencher, so being a lone ranger does not bother me. I intend to crack on and represent the ward as best I can."

### **Cameron Clapped As He Joins Celebration**

Conservatives greeted their party leader David Cameron with cheers and whoops when he dropped in to congratulate them on their victory. The Civic Centre in Station Road, Harrow, was awash with blue colour on Friday morning when the borough's party celebrated its win.

Mr. Cameron met the new leader of Harrow Council, Cllr. Chris Mote, before being introduced to the men and women whose victory he hopes to echo in the next general election. Mr. Cameron was greeted with a hug from re-elected Pinner South candidate and long-time friend Cllr. Lurline Champagnie before asking candidates how much sleep they managed, and said he expected it had not been much.....

The visit was slightly marred by a minor spat between Cllr. Jeremy Zeid and Mr. Mote. Mr. Zeid was at the Civic Centre to hear the result of a recount for Kenton West ward in which he stood.... Mr. Mote instructed all party members to remove their rosettes for the photocall with Mr. Cameron. Mr. Zeid refused to heed the instruction, causing Mr. Mote to verbally reprimand him in front of the media.

### **Big Rise In Turnout**

The bright sunshine proved to be a vote winner when it helped boost the turnout at last week's local elections — attracting an extra 10% to the polling stations compared with 2002. With voter apathy becoming increasingly worse as disillusioned residents opt to bail out of having their say, there was nothing to suggest this time round would be any different.

But as temperatures soared to 26EC — the hottest day in the year so far — turnout figures in Harrow were up to 41.38%, compared to 31% in 2002. However, John Robinson, who is director of corporate governance and Harrow's returning officer, believes the council's extra publicity helped urge residents to cast their votes.

He said: "One factor in increasing the turnout figure was the hard work of the council's electoral services team who contacted all households in Harrow, making sure the correct details were submitted for the electoral register and ensuring electors knew about the election and were registered to vote. The council's magazine *Harrow People* also ran regular articles and our website was constantly updated with important information."

## **CONSERVATIVES TAKE HARROW**

### **Labour Lose Power — Lib Dem Revival Stillborn**

As Friday dawned, Harrow had its first Conservative-run council for 12 years. Labour had hoped to cling to minority rule, but paid the price for massive council tax rises, although group leader Cllr. Navin Shah blamed the Conservative victory on the Liberal Democrats' failure to make a comeback in the borough.

To cap a disastrous night for Labour, the former deputy leader of the council, Cllr. Sanjay Dighé, lost his Kenton West seat in a cliffhanger that ran until Friday afternoon. After a number of recounts at Harrow Leisure Centre in the small hours of Friday, Mr. Dighé was running neck-and-neck with one of the Conservative candidates, Jeremy Zeid. At 3 am the returning officer called it a night and the candidates had to wait for another recount at 10 am at the Civic Centre. The final result was declared only after mid-day, with Cllr. Zeid winning the Tories' 38th seat.....

An ebullient Cllr. Chris Mote, the new Tory leader of the council, said: "I'm absolutely delighted. This is a great result and shows that the voters of Harrow were desperate for change. We are very pleased they have put their faith in the Conservative Party."

Deposed council leader, Cllr. Navin Shah, said: "I'm disappointed, but I'm not ashamed of our performance. Had the Liberal Democrats not capitulated it would have been a hung council and we would have controlled it with Liberal Democrat support. The arithmetic certainly points towards this. But we accept the people's mandate with humility. We will continue to represent the people's aspirations in opposition. Our work isn't finished yet."

Councillor Noyce [the Liberal Democrats' sole representative on the Council] said: "We campaigned very hard across the borough but it's very clear there has been a backlash against the Labour Government and the Tories have been the beneficiaries. I can assure people we will be back....."

The former Harrow Council Tax Campaign chairman Stanley Sheinwald, now a Conservative councillor, said: "I hope I can do as much for the people as I did with HCTC, only this time from the inside. I will definitely keep good contact with HCTC."

Harrow East's Labour MP, Tony McNulty, who attended the count, tried to deflect attention from Labour's showing. He said: "The shock of the evening is only one Liberal Democrat left." But he admitted: "It has to be said that the national picture wasn't helpful. We now have to get our message across in a far more effective way. There is still enthusiasm for what the Government is doing but some Labour voters have stayed at home."

## **LABOUR IN SHOCK WIN AS THEY TAKE BACK CONTROL OF COUNCIL**

Labour pulled off an astonishing victory in last week's elections, gaining a whopping 10 additional seats on Harrow Council. Despite losses throughout the country in the General Election, the Harrow Labour group seized control of the council in a remarkable reversal of fortunes locally. The victory sparked some significant high-profile casualties for the Conservative group, with losses for the Mayor of Harrow, Eric Silver, former cabinet member Anjana Patel and the outspoken Jeremy Zeid.

At first many of the seats went according to form, with the Tories clinching clean sweeps in strongholds Pinner, Pinner South and Canons. But soon group members were looking on in shock as they lost all three seats in Greenhill ward and lost two seemingly safe seats in Harrow on the Hill, all to Labour. The defeat was compounded when Krishna Suresh pipped his Conservative counterpart to a former Tory seat in Rayners Lane and Dinesh Solanki (Con) lost his seat in Queensbury.

As the final ward was announced late last Friday, it was still a closely fought contest, with three seats left to claim [and] the Labour group leading by 31 seats to 27. And despite an eleventh-hour recount the group claimed two more scalps in Mrs. Patel and Julia Merison, taking [all the] seats in West Harrow.

The result seemed to come as a bit of a shock to Labour group leader, Cllr. Bill Stephenson, who said: "It

is absolutely fantastic — truly remarkable. I don't think any of us expected a result like this and it has certainly gone better than many of us thought it would, but it shows that people are clearly not happy with the way the council was being run. We are now just really looking forward to taking it onward and upwards; it's going to be a tough task. It is ridiculous for the opposition to be blaming higher voter turnout. Getting more people to vote can only be a great thing for democracy....."

The Conservatives lost 11 seats in total since the last election in 2006. Harrow on the Hill ward councillor Eileen Kinnear had lost the Tory party whip and last week she stood unsuccessfully as an independent.... It could have been even worse for the Tories had they not clawed one back in Harrow Weald. Their clean sweep in the ward saw the Lib Dems' Paul Scott losing his seat, halving the party's presence on the council to a solitary seat.

### **Former Leader Leaves Warning Behind Him**

The former leader of Harrow Council has blamed the shock local election result on the vote falling on the same day as residents went to the polls for the General Election and warned that the future of the borough's finances could be in danger. David Ashton, who stepped down from his role as leader of the Conservative group on the day the electorate crossed their ballot papers, was clearly disillusioned by the result.

Speaking at the count last Friday, he said: "I think the result is totally unjustified given our efforts to turn around a council with crippling debt. We worked tirelessly to turn this council around and that has been totally ignored by the electorate. It's a reflection of what happens when a local election is overwhelmed by the General Election and people don't vote on specific local issues. We had a fantastic record leading the council but it looks as though everything we have done could count for nothing."

His wife, Marilyn Ashton, who also stepped down from her position as portfolio holder for planning, echoed his concerns, and added: "I'm completely baffled. I worked very hard, as did we all, to turn Harrow's fortunes around. I was very good at my job but what does it matter now? I think it is a very worrying time for Harrow."

### **Independent James Bond Now On A Mission To Serve**

Independent councillor James Bond was shaken but not stirred as he secured a momentous victory in the local elections. The popular North Harrow Tube station worker was desperate to act as a voice for the community he serves daily and follow in the footsteps of his dad, also James Bond, who triumphed as an independent in Pinner in the 1980s.

Mr. Bond was victorious in Headstone North, where his memorable victory ousted Harrow Mayor Eric Silver. Following the announcement of the win, he said to the *Observer*: "I'm completely overwhelmed, it is the proudest moment of my life. I'm lost for words. I always entered the race to win it, but I knew it was going to be very difficult to win as an independent. I was inspired by my dad's work as an independent and wanted to do whatever I could to serve the people I live among and those I work with every day..... "

Extracts from the *Harrow Times*, Thursday 13 May 2010

## **'WE WILL LISTEN'**

### **Labour Leader Admits He Was 'Shell-Shocked' By Win**

Labour has pledged to put the development of Harrow town centre at the top of its agenda, having swept back into power after four years in opposition. On a dramatic day of election results, the party gained 10 seats, including two in Conservative stronghold Harrow on the Hill, and seized the reins of power on Harrow Council.

Cllr. Bill Stephenson, leader of the Labour group and council leader-elect, initially admitted he was "shell-shocked" by the result, but has now turned his attention to running the council for the next four years. He has promised to reinstate the town centre and major project panel, which was scrapped under the Tories. He also plans to ditch the Harrow Leisure Centre and Gayton Road redevelopments and make Harrow's residents and business a corporate priority during the recession, as well as fix potholes, clean up the streets, make Harrow a fair trade borough and reinstate Sunday opening for Harrow Central Library.

Cllr. Stephenson said: "We are obviously delighted but not triumphalist, because there is a serious job to be done." He said the town centre and major project panel is central to the future development in the area, and promised cross-party dialogue and consultation with residents on the future of Harrow. He also said now was "exactly the right time" to look at arts and performing spaces and entertainment venues as well as new homes.....

In a shot at the departing Conservatives, he labelled them "arrogant" for "failing to listen" to residents, and pledged to review areas such as controlled parking zones and the controversial Neighbourhood Champions scheme — something Cllr. Stephenson said he would not scrap but needed looking at again. Cllr. Stephenson will spend the next fortnight building his new cabinet ahead of a full council meeting, and has indicated he intends to hold the finance portfolio himself.

## **The Numbers Game**

It was a night of mixed fortunes for the parties and more of a two-day marathon roller-coaster of emotions as voters chose Harrow's next MPs and councillors. The Conservative Party entered polling day in high spirits, hoping to claim the two scalps of Gareth Thomas and Tony McNulty and confident of holding on to the council for four more years.

Tory, Labour and Lib Dem activists, along with a handful of UKIP and Green supporters, arrived at Byron Hall shortly before 10 pm on Thursday night with a full day of last-minute canvassing behind them. It soon became clear the count was going to take longer than expected, as the council and Parliamentary ballots needed separating and verifying, but no one was predicting what turned out to be, according to Mayor of Harrow Eric Silver, the "longest election count in Harrow's history", stretching past 6 pm on Friday.

Just after 6 am on Friday morning, Tory Dr. Rachel Joyce found out her two-and-half year campaign had not been enough to topple Mr. Thomas, despite a 5.7% swing in her favour. Soon after, better news for the Conservatives as Bob Blackman beat Tony McNulty to claim Harrow East, but a close look at the ballot papers revealed shocks were on the cards for sitting Tory councillors. Mr. Silver was said to be "concerned" and things were not looking rosy for fellow Tory Jeremy Zeid, who was defending a measly six-vote majority in Kenton West.

Both prophecies came to pass on Friday afternoon as the Tory big-hitters were booted out, and they were followed out of the council by Dinesh Solanki, Julia Merison, Anjana Patel, Golam Chowdhury and Narinder Mudhar. The drama was stored up for the end of the count, starting with the results in Harrow on the Hill, where former Tory Eileen Kinnear and her band of independents had split the Conservative vote and helped seal two seats for Labour. The Greenhill ward, in the heart of the town centre and traditionally an indicator of who will run the council, was next, swinging from the Conservatives to Labour. And finally a recount was ordered in West Harrow before all three seats were declared as Labour's, handing them a seven-seat majority.

Cllr. Susan Hall, who had hoped to take over as leader of the council, said she was "devastated" with the result, which puts Labour on 34 seats, the Tories on 27, and one each for independent James Bond and the Lib Dems. However, she said her party would provide robust opposition to any Labour plans that were bad for Harrow and would support good ideas that are put forward.

The Lib Dems are now down to one councillor on Harrow Council after Paul Scott was defeated in Harrow Weald. The party had unsuccessfully targeted several seats while not contesting others, and must now regroup or face dropping off the council altogether.

Mr. Zeid, leaving the count, accepted his defeat had been the will of the electorate, while retiring Conservative leader David Ashton blamed a higher than usual turnout for the result. Meanwhile, jubilant Labour councillors headed off as the sun set on the 2010 election, and began planning the next four years in power.