

10th May 2006

Bye the Bye

Hats off to Councillor Peter Killick who has just stood down after being Torbay Council's first Chairman. He has passed on this role to Councillor John Dunn who has made a flying start with a genuinely warm and witty speech at this week's annual council meeting. I wish him luck in his new job and I know he will do well.

Many of the speeches on Tuesday reflected on the fact that Peter Killick had become Mayor twelve months ago and then half way through his term of office, found himself as the Chairman of the Council. I personally appreciate that he has handled this change with considerable dignity and that he is one of those councillors who are quite happy to try and make the new arrangements work.

Indeed, he will be very welcome back in the council chamber where I hope he will endeavour to bring people together – something for which he has a genuine passion.

My election last October left many people confused. Indeed, I was quite confused myself (and still am, quite a lot of the time). Putting all the political stuff to one side, people kept asking 'what will happen to the existing mayor, who will wear the chain of office, who will 'do' the Royal visits, the conferences and lead the remembrance services?'

According to our constitution, the Elected Mayor (Yours Truly) is the Bay's first citizen and could perform all these duties and more. Indeed, in some other areas the Elected Mayor does just that. However, I decided that it would be quite impossible to do that role justice. My main job is essentially that of political and community leader with my time taken up repairing the relationship between Torbay Council and the community it serves, providing a sense of direction towards a vision of a clean, safe and prosperous Bay. Also, I am the Bay's advocate, dealing with Government agencies and the region.

For many matters I am the Council's decision taker and inevitably involved in controversy (just look at the letters in this paper). Wherever I go, people come up and start talking about the issues and problems of the day. You can't be concentrating on planting a tree or wishing somebody well on their hundredth birthday if you're getting your ears bent about what's going on in the Town Hall at the same time.

In any case, I had spent one year already as the other sort of Mayor and didn't see last October's election as my chance to stage a (five and a half year) comeback. It seemed quite right that I should delegate that role to the Chairman of the Council. Indeed, I made that quite clear within a few days of taking office.

It just happened that HRH Princess Anne was visiting Grenville House at Brixham and it was assumed that the Elected Mayor would wish to be there. Although somewhat fearful of 'Mayor Snubs Royals' headlines, I decided that Council Chairman, Peter Killick, should attend, wearing the chain of office and therefore representing the whole community of Torbay. That seemed the right decision at the time, there were no horrid headlines and it still seems the right decision now. There is a clear need for somebody to put politics to one side for a year, chair the council meetings without fear or favour, wear the chain of office and undertake the traditional civic role.

Of course, there are times when people want the 'New Mayor' to attend events and I see it as an important part of my job to celebrate success, highlighting improvements in the Council's services for example, or simply being seen 'out and about' in the community, listening to people's concerns.

I want to be accessible, and that means that I have maintained my links with numerous cultural, voluntary and charitable organisations. This will sound as though I am touting for business, but as the Council's Lead member for Children's Services, I very much enjoy visiting schools and seeing at first hand what goes on there. Also, as economic prosperity is

at the heart of the new vision for Torbay, I am delighted to 'cut the ribbon' at new business ventures. People who are prepared to show their confidence in the Bay's future prosperity, deserve encouragement.

So, inevitably, there is a grey area between what the Chairman of the Council does and what the Elected Mayor does. Ultimately, folks, it is down to whom people wish to invite along and I aim to please. However, I am realistic enough to understand that as my popularity dwindles, then so will the invitations.

Hopefully, the above makes some sort of sense. All this and more can be discussed next week in Ellacombe at my monthly Torbay Connect Roadshow on May 18th in Ellacombe Park, Top of Market Street, Torquay. I will be there between 10 and 12 and the roadshow is there between 10am until 4pm.

Nick Bye
Mayor of Torbay

P.S. Thanks for your many favourable letters, emails and comments regarding the simplified parking charges introduced last month. Many of you seem to appreciate the easier sums and the reduced two-hour rate. It is good to have positive feedback.