

Facebook Q&A, 8.30pm to 9.30pm, 30th April 2013

QUESTION ONE

Haslemere resident: If you want meetings to be in the open, will you bring your influence to bear on Haslemere Town Council's unacceptable practice of holding grants panel in "exempt"? They are just about the only local authority in the region to do so.

Nikki Barton's response: My thoughts: I do not agree with the practice of holding grants panel in "exempt" and I would openly share this view with Haslemere's town councillors. I understand from an informed source that Haslemere Town Council is already aware of this and is going to be discussing this next month. I would extend this principle to any Surrey committee I'd be involved with. Of particular concern has been that the Haslemere and Western Villages Task Force (our local representation into the Local Area Committee) has terms of reference which mean their meetings are conducted in secret.

QUESTION TWO

Haslemere resident: Hi Nikki, I am wondering: how much influence will you have as a Councillor (Positive thinking here :o) with regards to new shops opening in Haslemere? As an example: why do we have WHSMITH when this clearly will put at least 2-3 other privately run shops of business and there was no need for a shop like this. Same goes for THE ENTERTAINER, who opened opposite the Enchanted Wood. I am just concerned that filling 1 empty shop with a HighStreet Brand will destroy 2-3 other private shops and change the face of our still quite unique High street.

Business owner response: I agree, however, there is nothing in planning law at the moment that councils can use to prevent a particular shop going into an empty unit - however, could you perhaps bring pressure to bear over this loophole - especially in view of the Government's so-called commitment to the High Street

Nikki Barton's response: On WHSmiths and Entertainer, the planning framework does not allow a community like Haslemere to choose which retailer comes to town. But for me personally the unique character of the town and its vitality is linked to our independent retailers and I believe we should all do everything we can to support them. I fought very hard against the SCC plans for pay and display meters in the town and there is much evidence to show charging would damage many of these small businesses. The challenge is to find ways to support our independents.

Haslemere resident (who asked original question): It would be great if more could be done to support the small retailers and vote with our feet. Maybe something like monthly promotions or reviving the good old Haslemere Reward Card could be an option? Just a thought..

Nikki Barton's response: Over to you [Julianne Evans](#) and the Chamber to share any initiatives. The Reward Card is alive and well and I use it as often as possible.

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QUESTION THREE

Haslemere resident: It's great that local businesses are supporting Nikki but what will Nikki do to help support local business?? It seems that every time I go into town yet another shop is about to close for good?

Nikki Barton's response: I have a good working relationship with the Haslemere Chamber of Trade, stemming from our work together to campaign to stop Surrey County Council's pay & display parking proposals for the High Street. I helped businesses have a voice and I have come to understand the complex relationships between the many parties involved. We're in a recession and I have no magic wand. If elected I would continue to engage and have open consultation with business with a view to establishing a working group in collaboration with the Chamber to see what could be done to boost trade. I invited 18 SCC councillors to meet local shopkeepers in January and only one councillor took the time to reply which I found very disappointing as several shop keepers took the time to wait in Darnley's to meet during their working day. The road works had a terrible effect on the businesses in town. I was appalled at how little SCC and WBC did to rationalise the road work schedules, or provide some free parking for shoppers to minimise the economic damage. The current situation, with 100% Conservative representation at Town, Borough and County level for Haslemere has meant that there has been little, if any, apparent willingness to challenge and stand up for the traders in the town.

Haslemere resident: Maybe it's because they have faith in you ...

Business owner 1: We would certainly welcome that - the idea of marketing Haslemere more effectively (rather than businesses doing it separately, doing it collectively) has been floating around for a while. It would be great to pin it down and make it happen

Business owner 2: Unfortunately there's no magic wand, we're in a recession...however an independent councillor, with no political axe to grind, who is visible and listens to the concerns of residents and businesses will hopefully make a difference. I am fed up with a load of grey suits enjoying their free parking in Kingston making decisions about what we need as a community? An open surgery once a week would also be a good idea for people to air views and concerns about potential matters. For the record the first time I even saw Councillor Renshaw was at Haslemere Town Hall last year when a public meeting was held about SCC parking proposals...not exactly visible during his representation as our local councillor.

QUESTION FOUR

Hammer Resident: Hi Nikki, I have a question about multi-story car parks. Do you think we need to have multi-story car parks in Haslemere?

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Nikki Barton's response: Many have asked this question during my campaign. The issue of commuter parking highlights this complexity well. Clearly more commuter parking is needed, and a multi storey car park at the station would provide welcome additional parking capacity. However the business case for this development will require extensive parking restrictions on the residential streets within reasonable walking distance of the station to effectively 'drive' people who currently park all day in the town for free into the paying car parks. This would impact on the daily lives of those living in these streets and there would also be a displacement effect as those who couldn't afford upwards of £35/week in parking charges (including some commuters as well as lower paid workers in the shops and businesses in the town) would look to park in other roads further from the station without parking restrictions.

As we have already experienced with the SCC parking proposals, real problems arise when the interconnectivity of the system is not taken into account. What may look like a great solution for one group may in fact create real issues for other stakeholders.

I believe we need a holistic strategy, with a long term transport vision which considers a range of creative solutions which doesn't just focus on cars and parking, includes walking and cycling, and is led by the concerns and interests of the community. In my view an elected representative should be working in partnership with the community to develop such a strategy/vision. It would take time and would be a great challenge but I believe it would be the right thing to do if we believe in creating a better environment in Haslemere for our children to enjoy in the future.

QUESTION FIVE

Haslemere shop worker: A year ago I would never have been so interested in local government but everything I have seen makes me convinced that we need local people involved fighting and listening as you have the questions I have are what will you do to make sure people know who you are and how to contact you? Communication will be paramount and how important is the local economy in your view

Nikki Barton's response: This Facebook page could become a forum if I am elected. Do you think this is a good idea? If elected I would also have a dedicated SCC email address, and I would plan to run a regular column in the Herald and have regular drop in sessions. The local economy is crucial for the vitality of the town and underpins the well being of the community.

Haslemere resident: I think FaceBook is definitely a good medium as proven just now and of course the good old email. Same as Cathy, I was never too interested in local politics but I love this town and have seen definitely things getting worse over the last years. I think rather than just complain, It is time we got up and did something about it. With you campaign, Nikki, I feel that we have a real chance and that I am properly represented - not something I can say about the previous councillors I'm afraid.

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Haslemere shop worker (who asked original question): I think social media is a really important way to communicate instantly and will become more important as time goes on. I really do believe though that face to face communication is key to engage as many people as possible and has been missing to date, so drop in centres will be very important

QUESTION SIX

Haslemere resident: Hi [Nikki Barton - Haslemere First](#) - I like the way you've listened to the views and concerns of the [Haslemere & District Volunteer Centre](#) - particularly about the need for services that may not be 'obvious' but is this a genuine interest to support the 100+ not for profit organisations? And the food bank?

Nikki Barton's response: I am very committed to the not for profit organisations. Although I have a lot to learn about all these organisations, I have had personal experience of the great work of Crossways counselling, Home Start, the Hockey Club, the Scouts and Cubs and the Wave to mention just a few. As regards the food bank I believe this type of initiative is more important in Haslemere than many people realise. Irrespective of the outcome of these elections I would continue to support these great ventures.

QUESTION SEVEN

Nikki - what are personal motives for being an independent councillor...?

Nikki Barton's response: I am standing as an Independent for Haslemere because I believe that the town needs someone to speak up and act in the best interest of the community independent of party politics. I am motivated by a drive to challenge where there is a lack of openness and transparency, I have shown through the parking campaign a willingness to speak out when the views of people have been ignored even when it has meant being thrown out of SCC meetings. I have young children and I am motivated to work to make Haslemere a better place for them in the future.

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