

No regrets in keeping pledge

Donate to food banks

Sir – Many hard things have been said of me on your letters page over the past few months in claiming that the council's decision to honour its longstanding policy position and permit a Catholic secondary school in our borough, a decision now validated by the High Court, is wrong.

Contrary to what is written about me by some, I detest arrogance.

I believe respect for others to be one of the most fundamental duties of civilised living. But that cannot exclude expression of differences of opinion or actions in accordance with those opinions.

I do regret the ill-founded intervention of a campaigning body peddling a national agenda in our local affairs –

and I know of no doctrine that says a civic leader cannot defend a legitimate democratic decision against such attacks – but I respect the viewpoints of local residents.

I simply disagree with those who are opposed to faith schools.

Faith schools are part of the modern educational settlement. They have shown themselves to be an effective part of a wide educational spectrum – they always have been in this borough and that has, until lately, been supported by both parties in it.

We promised that if elected we would seek to enable the local secondary school that Roman Catholics in other London boroughs have and which successive administrations in this borough

had promised.

Elected politicians should try to keep the promises given in a manifesto, in full consciousness of the fact that many people will perfectly reasonably disagree.

That is part of the democratic condition and the liberties, including religious liberties, which we are so fortunate to enjoy because of the past sacrifices, of those of all faiths and none.

A council is elected to serve all the people to the best of its ability, balancing the often countervailing views of residents.

For our part, however, that duty of service includes the minority of Catholic pupils in the borough, who, almost alone in London lacked a borough secondary school, and

we have never hidden that point of view.

Believe me I do not underestimate anyone's feelings in what has sometimes been a hard debate – I receive emails expressing a sense of hurt on both sides.

However, crucially, from my perspective this new school is only one part of a massive programme of investment in education for all, which, in addition to this school, is intended to introduce sixth forms into local schools; expand our local primary provision; rebuild our special schools, which are so important; create a new 11-16 community school in Twickenham; assist in the rebuilding and modernisation of the tertiary college as a centre of excellence long into the

future; sustain our wonderful adult college (the real financial beneficiary from our purchase of the Clifden site); and keep our outstanding family of local schools together, instead of letting them peel off into academy chains as was happening before we came to office in 2010.

I am sorry that, with so much going on to what I believe is the benefit of all in a wide-ranging and genuinely inclusive education programme, there has been so much disproportionate attention to this one part of a carefully considered whole, though I do not regret for a moment our party's keeping our word on that pledge.

LORD TRUE
Leader of Richmond Council

Sir – How good it is to inchoate a food bank in the Vineyard Church to help those low paid who would struggle with the cost of food otherwise.

I have actually donated food to a food bank in Waitrose in Richmond. I do know how it feels for families on a low wage or out of employment and how they are coping.

I hope the ones in work and get well paid should consider making some donation to the food bank from time to time.

Especially now at the time of the Christmas season and either the lonely or unemployed or those on a small wage will find it hard to manage.

STEPHEN J BLASBY
Richmond

Make meal out of poverty

Sir – I was interested to read two of last week's articles.

The first was reporting on how Conservative councillors had voted against becoming an accredited London Living Wage employer, meaning that social care workers and town hall cleaners, for example, could be paid less than the capital's living wage.

Further on was a report on Councillor Pamela Fleming and Richmond Park MP Zac Goldsmith lauding

Richmond's first food bank, providing charitable food parcels, paid for by Richmond Council's Civic Pride fund.

Would not such a venture be better funded from a Civic Shame fund? Can the Tories not see the link? Do they see charity as a long-term replacement to adequate benefits for those in need?

STEPHEN P SMITH
Richmond and Twickenham
Green Party

Just what I'm looking for

Sir – I wonder; may I please share my God fortune with your readership and put Barnes Baptist Church in the Godspot?

For although I have always believed in God, for one reason or a thousand, I have found it more and more difficult finding a church which I felt wholly taught God's word; until, that is, I came across, the East Sheen Baptist Church through prayer asking God to find me a way of helping Haiti in her need, and then as a result of it becoming more convenient, Barnes Baptist Church.

We are a tiny congregation,

and since it is advent and thus the church's new year, so to speak, it occurred to me that by writing to you I may be able to spread the God new year word of this church's wonderful existence via your newspaper in the prayer that we may swell our congregation.

Oh, and another wonder... May I please say that our carol service is being held at 6.30pm on Sunday, December 23; what more wonderful occasion to come and find out what we are all about?

ANNE GRICE
East Sheen



Neil Chessell from Whitton captured the cold beautifully when he got this frosty shot of Pen Ponds in Richmond Park on Sunday. If you have a picture you would like published in our weekly Borough View slot, email it to lettersrtt@london.newsquest.co.uk

Christmas should not have to break your bank

THE GOD SPOT

By Paul van Essen
greaterlife.org.uk

This last Monday was dubbed "Mega-Monday" as we geared up to spend more money than ever before in a single day of online shopping. How much? Amazon hired 10,000 extra staff. The expectation was a total spend

of over £200,000 a minute online in the UK.

We should view this in light of the bigger picture also: at the end of September outstanding unsecured consumer debt stood at £158bn, and for 2012 our national debt will have an interest-only figure of £43bn, costing each household over £1,800 in tax.

Houston – we have a problem. We can criticise the Government, but generally we do the same thing ourselves. We have all been

"trained" in this generation to spend what we do not have. And it's a recipe for disaster.

Let's consider what Christmas could look like this year, with a few smart adjustments. It ought to be a wonderful season of food, fun, family and time together – and actually that doesn't have to cost much at all. You don't have to be Scrooge – but you may as well be wise. Resist the pressure to keep up with the spending of others. Take control.

What can you give? Be thoughtful. Take a little time. Write a personal message in the card. Make something with your hands. Draw something. Write a poem. Find something small but meaningful for the people you most care about.

Just imagine if we were able to have fun together and then find that our credit card bills did not increase in January. That would make it one of the best Christmases in a long time for many.

High tides at Richmond Bridge

Hammersmith Bridge 26 minutes earlier; Kew Bridge 12 minutes earlier

	time	h:m	time	h:m
Friday	0730	6.14	2032	6.24
Saturday	0842	6.03	2145	6.25
Sunday	1005	6.06	2256	6.43
Monday	1122	6.30		
Tuesday	0000	6.66	1225	6.62
Wednesday	0059	6.90	1323	6.91
Thursday	0153	7.08	1416	7.15
Friday	0244	7.21	1507	7.32

National Severe Weather Warning Service 01344 856264.
Floodline 0845 9881188.

The Port of London Authority (PLA), Bakers' Hall, 7 Harp Lane, London EC3R 6LB.
020 7743 7900, portoflondon.co.uk. Environment Agency floodline information environment-agency.gov.uk/floodwarning.