



Editor's opinion

Simon Angear

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I've always been immensely fond of the Tropicana. I swam there regularly as a child in the 1980s, and actually worked behind its bar on the night it closed in 1999. It holds many happy memories for me.

That is why it has pained me to see it standing empty and neglected for so long. I have always viewed it as a building with great potential and, like most Westonians, I've been desperate to see it revived in a positive way.

Of course, we have all watched as a series of regeneration proposals have been put forward over the years; some with real merit, others with an eyes-bigger-than-their-belly feel from the off.

Scepticism has grown with each failed idea though, and although Weston always retained hope that a positive future could still be found, we had, in truth, reached a point where belief had waned. The bulldozers were close, and it was arguably sentiment rather than pragmatism which kept them at bay.

But then things changed.

Banksy's intervention last year opened the door to a raft of new possibilities – first, by proving beyond doubt that the Tropicana debate does not have to be argued along the lines of swimming pool or bust. And secondly, by putting Weston, and the Tropicana itself, onto the radar of those with the drive, ambition, and knowhow to at last bring it back to life.

Wayne Hemingway certainly fits the bill.

His firm Hemingway Design specialises in seaside regeneration, and has a track record of success on projects in towns like Bournemouth, Morecambe and Margate. He knows what he's doing, and he's really excited about the possibilities which the Tropicana holds.

He's a realist, too. He understands the need to work within a realistic budget, and the importance of a steady Tropicana evolution to ensure its appeal endures in the longer term.

North Somerset Council deserves huge credit for having the vision to involve him, because Hemingway Design is the real deal.

After 15 years of disappointment, I'm convinced we are at last about to see the Tropicana reborn... and I'm excited to see what the future holds.



■ Salvatore's replaced Tutto which was built where the old tourist information stood.

Seafront restaurant site could be a tourist information centre

I was sorry to hear Salvatore's Kitchen is having to close but perhaps I could make a suggestion for a new use of the building.

Why not make it into a tourist information centre?

The downstairs could house the information desk and perhaps a small tea room and the upstairs could be transformed into an area to show some of the museum

pieces there might not be room for in the new museum opening in 2017.

There could be photos on the walls of Weston through the years and perhaps someone could make a diorama depicting life in Weston from its earlier days. Perhaps an enterprising councillor could help with the setting up of this idea?

It could also be used as a resource

for schoolchildren, those in Weston and the surrounding area and those that visit from other towns. In fact it could be a resource for all ages and I am sure that many residents of Weston would be happy to share their memories of the town and perhaps contribute photos etc.

FRANCES BAKER
Locking Road, Weston

End is nigh for UK's high street districts

It has been said that we are a country of small shopkeepers, but no longer according to a recent report and more than 75,000 retailers will close their doors within the next 10 years.

Even the large stores are finding it difficult to compete with the growing trend of online shopping and this is a very worrying situation. It will of course affect our local shopping centres.

It is not only retailers which are facing an uphill struggle with high street banks also on the decline. Take Glastonbury for instance where 10,000 townspeople will soon be losing their last two banks – Barclays and Lloyds – and the nearest bank will be in Street. Lloyds states only 27 customers a week use the bank, so I was rather puzzled to see more than 400 protesting against the proposed closure. I just wonder how many of these protesters do their banking online because if they all used the bank it would not face closure. I am told this is progress and that

everybody is switching to online shopping and banking which means that visiting these premises is 'progress' towards couch activity. No wonder there are so many chair and sofa adverts on the television these days. It is also reported 75 per cent of children have signed up to the digital world so it is obvious future generations will consign the high streets to history and spend most of their time glued to their various digital gadgets. Fortunately I will not be around to see this happen but surely society should be concerned at how fast our lives are changing and what the future holds for civilisation.

GEOFF MALHAM
Clarence Grove Road, Weston

Impressed by my local councillor

I feel obliged to respond to Mr Burnett's letter of last week criticising our councillors for not listening or representing us and asking for new blood.

I am in agreement with Joanne Bruce's 'Not every councillor deserves criticism' letter, also of

last week.

We have new blood on the council (town and district) but it takes time for them to find their feet, and their way round, as new councillors. When you become a councillor, there is no training manual telling you how to do it. There is no point trying to change the way things are done until you know how to do it, and that takes time.

I am a born and bred Westonian and I am particularly impressed with my new councillor in the Winterstoke ward, Sarah Codling. I have spent time talking with her and not only does she listen, but she has Weston and its people in her heart and mind and will be doing all she can to represent us in the future.

Yes, she is new and still discovering the best ways to get things done. However, I am certain she will not give up on the things she and her constituents believe in and, given time, will be a strong member of a vibrant, active council that will break the mould of previous councils, working for us and improving our town immeasurably.

HOWARD BROOMHALL
Old Mill Way, Weston

Invaluable support from councillor

I was born and lived nearly all of my life in Weston and have recently moved back to the area. I have come back because of personal reasons and have needed advice and contact details for lots of different organisations, on a range of issues. Social media has been extremely helpful and one evening after trawling through the usual avalanche of words and pictures I came across a page run by a councillor called Sarah Codling. Her page and wording just seemed to talk to me in a very understanding manner; it did not talk down to me, and it just reported facts and asked questions. Sarah doesn't even represent the ward I live in as I later found out, but I contacted her nevertheless, and from that moment she has offered so much assistance and still continues to do so.

She is a newly-elected councillor and is trying to do things differently and I'm sure many would say 'yeah we've heard all that before' but I genuinely believe Sarah does want to make a difference.

Anyone who puts themselves forward in a public service role and Sarah clearly is active and responsive across social media, should be applauded.

So I write this now because I was appalled to read recent letters to the Mercury complaining about councillors and referring to them all as one identical group without the interests of our area at heart. I really disagree with this comment, my own first-hand experience shows we have at least one councillor out there trying to respond to what local people say and need, doing her best for our area.

As well as trying to make a difference herself, Sarah has also been encouraging me, she has advised me about various positions of employment, she has also asked me to get involved as a volunteer with community projects and that's given me some missing confidence to pursue various opportunities. Sarah doesn't know me from Adam, and it's really nice to have her support.

Weston is changing, slowly, but it is changing and in a good way. It is undoubtedly a better place with people like Sarah in the heart of the community, when she has the community at heart.

N LOVELL
Tamar Road, Worle

No need for negative letters all the time

Last week I wrote to your newspaper which I was pleased you printed under the title, 'Not all councillors are the same'.

I was then very worried to read a new letter this time from someone else making similar remarks. Now I can well imagine people write to your column for all different reasons. Sometimes it's hard to understand the motivation and with some the motivation is more obvious.

Why is it right to offer a constant



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OPINION

stream of negativity and as a community we rush so quickly to complain?

Few letters I read are often encouraging or positive, we are so quick to judge and slow to praise. Perhaps we should all have a go at running things for a day, if it could be arranged. I'm sure we would have a lot to learn and what we think is simple, might well be beyond us.

Holding people to account is important, but also is giving them a chance to get on and do things.

JOANNE BRUCE

Amberey Road, Weston

Everyone has a voice in EU referendum

I thought I should reply to Roger Badham's letter last week about the EU referendum.

He's absolutely right there are legitimate and deeply-held views on both sides of the argument.

For most of us, including me, it will be a very finely-balanced decision. But whichever side each of us is on (I've decided, just, to vote to remain) everyone's vote will have the same weight as mine in the referendum on June 23.

So it's a bit different from a normal Parliamentary vote when I have to blend my personal views with local opinions. Mr Badham, and everybody else, has the same say as me.

At the General Election last May, I promised to help deliver a proper EU referendum if I was elected as MP for Weston and the villages, and I'm proud to say that promise is being delivered.

It will be the first time in our lives that most of us, including me, have had a chance to vote on whether we stay in the EU or leave.

And whichever side wins, I think it's about time we all had a chance to make our voices heard!

JOHN PENROSE

Alexandra Parade, Weston

We must protect our green belt properly

We need to do more to protect our green belt areas not just by words, but introducing a legislation to stop future development straying into our green areas but at the same time safeguarding our wildlife that the Government and developers oversee.

There are sufficient brownfield areas which are suitable for constructing new and eco-friendly villages on for the future, providing quality and affordable homes, the necessary facilities, better road network, without any new development merging into existing towns or villages, as high density of housing are not in keeping with the character of town and village life.

However I do feel the proposed figure of housing requested by the Government to be built across the district is ridiculously high, just as the idea of building more houses within places like Banwell and Hutton, where any more will put extra pressure on amenities and roads and could result in losing their village identities, and the threat of merging into neighbouring boundaries.



I hate to be the lone voice on this, but I rather like the beach huts, even their location.

In many ways it reminds me of my old home town, just newer huts and better presented.

I have some difficulty understand why people would want to pay more than £1,000 for them, when the view of the sea is often obscured by the mud, but I should

imagine they would offer a great position for the events which take place on the seafront.

My honest opinion is that as more people rent them, it will result in more people visiting Weston and spending their money in local shops and restaurants.

My only irritation is when I see letters in your publication which claim to speak for everyone calling

for their removal, can I ask please don't speak for me, because I'm happy with a new colourful and less bland promenade.

Just to be clear I won't be investing myself, a picnic on the Beach Lawns is not only free, but also feels less like visiting my garden shed.

ROGER SAMUELS

Alfred Street, Weston

With our council feeling its hands are tied for reasons of its own, it is powerless to fight for a more realistic number of houses, that residents need to act to save our rural communities and green spaces by a direct appeal to David Cameron, as we need to emphasise that people, man's best friend (the dog), children and wildlife need open spaces and green fields, that even unattractive green areas house wildlife.

JOANNE NIGHTINGALE

Totterdown Lane, Weston

Birnbeck work must start at land end

With reference to the article about Birnbeck Pier roof damage last week.

Whilst this neglect is not welcome, it is obvious that any attempt to rescue this precious pier must start at the land end of the pier and continue in sections towards Birnbeck Island.

Once some work is seen to be taking place, further progress will follow.

MIKE DAVIES

Baytree Road, Weston

Delighted to hear of Red Arrows' return

What good news it was to read how the unmistakable red, white and blue trails of the Red Arrows will again adorn the sky above Weston this summer, and joined for the first time by a RAF Eurofighter Typhoon, a twin-engine fighter plane which is capable of flying at speeds of up to 1,500mph, almost twice the speed of sound.

The daredevil Red Arrows are truly a magical sight, showcasing their trademark formations, close passes and dynamic loops and rolls and it is good to hear that the crowd-pulling Weston Air Festival will be returning on June 18 and 19.

D F COURTNEY

Victoria Park, Weston

Fighting for local people on issues

I hope readers will forgive me for responding to Mr Fisher's and Mr Burnett's letters of recent weeks. My thoughts were that these were initially personal comments which seem to have grown into possibly questioning my commitment to residents.

I have worked for many years in the local community, independently and in association with a number of worthy and charitable organisations who in themselves do a fantastic job in the local area. I

was born in Weston and have lived here all my life and am very proud of our town.

Let me assure you that nothing stands in my way, or ever will, of doing everything, to support the local community.

I have my own voice and often use it to disagree with the council if I feel it's necessary or offer support, if a fair deal for residents is on the table.

It's not helpful to disrupt each and every item proposed. Not only could this possibly slow progress but some items are well-researched and have good foundation, these enable the council to maximise limited resources and support some very important community services. However on other subjects debate is important and the result of this can mean that I take a different view from my council colleagues.

In these cases I have always been vocal and used my vote accordingly. No-one has ever tried to compel me or suggest that I do anything different and nor would they because firstly I would take great offence and secondly anyone who knows me, knows that I am my own person.

This rough and tumble of local debate is not often newsworthy but something I do not shy away from. Everyone is welcome to come along and experience full council

sessions for themselves. They are open to all the community and I would encourage everyone to try and attend and also register to have your say, especially if they have an opinion to put directly to council members. It is after all your council, elected by residents.

With my current council commitments, running several local businesses and my other commitments in the local community, it is a seven-day-a-week dedication and I'm thankful to my volunteer team who themselves are completely dedicated to the local community and I am very proud to work with them.

It may interest readers to know that along with the well-reported larger projects such as Dolphin Square, Banksy and the exciting town centre regeneration project on which I gained a commitment from the council that the Meadow Street area of the town would also be considered, there are smaller, less well reported issues, but in many ways no less important.

These include central ward residents' parking concerns, town centre parking, road resurfacing, recycling, safe night time economy, the Purple Flag award, dog fouling, job creation, refuse collections and care bed funding among others.

There are others projects that I've initiated like the support and enforcement zone, a review of the beach huts, highlighting health and well-being issues for town centre residents, disabled access issues and a campaign for better public transport.

Again not all newsworthy but I feel an important part of my role in working for the community. On Monday at 7pm in the New Council Chamber I am due to speak again, this time in defence of an element of our society I feel are not being treated acceptably.

I will call for action and I hope to convince my colleagues to focus the council's attention on this important subject. Mr Fisher and Mr Burnett please do attend, it might alleviate any misgivings you have and it goes without saying that local residents would also be more than welcome.

Being a councillor is one of the most difficult, challenging and demanding positions I have been appointed to and I hope I will do everyone justice with my efforts.
CLLR RICHARD NIGHTINGALE
Aisecome Way, Weston

Not great food at Weston hotel

I see Weston College is taking over the building of The Arosfa Hotel and note it will have a canteen. I imagine this will be the first time a decent meal is produced in the building.

We stayed at the hotel last year and were told to choose our meals in the morning to indicate our choice for the evening.

On our first night it ran out of food and was surprised when we went to Papas fish restaurant to be greeted by fellow residents, who also had the good idea of finding a most splendid way of having a decent meal that night.

VIVIENNE GARNETT
Churchill Street, Heaton Norris, Stockport

■ Have your say on local issues by writing to: **Opinion, Weston Mercury, 32 Waterloo Street, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 1LW** or email newsdesk@westonmercury.co.uk - the deadline is noon on the Tuesday prior to publication, and contributions should be limited to 300 words. All letters must be signed and fully addressed. We reserve the right to edit or omit contributions.