



Comment

Time to remember that we are all in this together

COUNCIL leader Jeremy Birch this week boasted to the *Observer* that he was proud the local authority paid workers on a lower income more than private firms did for similar jobs.

As a left-leaning Labour leader you would expect nothing different.

But, at a time when services are being cut that sort of idealism is unlikely to go down well with voters.

Should, as the town's MP Amber Rudd pointed out, one person's taxes be used to pay someone else in a similar job more just because they work for the council?

An *Observer* investigation this week showed four people at the council take home more than four times the town's average annual wage (page two). And yet the council cannot find funds to prop up struggling charities or fend off redundancies.

Perhaps a token pay cut among the highest paid 20 town hall workers might show that far from pulling up the drawbridge to its very own ivory tower, the council does in fact believe we are all in this together.

PLANNING is certainly one of the hot topics among our readers, with many locals saying it is all but impossible to mount a successful challenge against a developer.

This week one of the many campaign groups has scored a victory - albeit a small one - against the council's much-maligned planning department (page four).

The residents of Hawthorn Road have argued for three years that a Certificate of Lawful Use was invalid and that subsequent planning permissions were therefore granted unfairly.

It seems that a local ombudsman agrees because the group has been awarded compensation from Hastings Borough Council.

Perversely though, the campaigners are still out of pocket and the development is still going ahead. The only way they could take it further is by stumping up the best part of £20,000 in legal fees.

Elsewhere in town, more than 150 people turned up to discuss the controversial plans for the Archery Ground (page 34). Every single local councillor was invited. Only one attended.

One of the Hawthorn Road campaigners believes the council refused to listen because they were 'only residents'. Rightly or wrongly council officers are perceived to be arrogant. That needs to change.

Petitioners are given just five minutes of time at planning meetings to argue against developments which could change their lives for ever.

The council, and our councillors, have a duty to at least listen to both sides of the argument before making a decision.