

BIGGLESWADE CHRONICLE

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FRESH HOPE, AND FRESH START

It will not have escaped the eagle eyes of Chronicle readers that a general election is just around the corner – not much gets past you. Tempting though it is for me to list the reasons why I think one outcome is better than another, an outcome I will work for passionately as I believe it is in the best interest of you, Bedfordshire and the country as a whole, perhaps I should leave that to my election address.

I am conscious that engaging people in the election process is perhaps more important this year than most. Compared with the high turnouts of a generation or so ago, the public have lost their enthusiasm and perhaps belief that parties and Parliament can make the difference or change that people wish to see. One reason is not hard to uncover. The disappointment with Parliament as a whole over expenses has left a bad taste. I will not bang on about it, and I hope you feel that my own record has not caused embarrassment, but I am aware it is still the elephant in the room. You may take some persuading that the next Parliament will be different.

A further reason is more difficult. Everywhere I go in my constituency I come across people who are active in a variety of different causes, displaying huge commitment. You care about health and schools, so you sit on Governors boards and lobby me. You care about jobs and the recession and set up debt assistance and support groups. You want greater safety on the streets, so join neighbourhood watch. You want a fairer world, so you support overseas development and trade. But something has held people back from seeing modern political parties as an answer, and an assistance to your hopes, although party supporters will be in all such groups. Over time, I would like to persuade you that this can be different.

I have never lost my excitement that an election allows a fresh start. Hardworking people from many parties will seek your attention and interest. The election is not the be-all and end-all. It is only part of a process of converting those things you hope for into reality. It is not easy, and involves discussion, change and leadership to achieve what we want together. This is a vibrant, active community just waiting to release even more of its talent for the future. Let us hope this year's election process is a springboard for such opportunity.