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29 June 2009

Mr Ray Puddifoot
Leader of the Council
London Borough of Hillingdon
Civic Centre
High Street
Uxbridge UB8 1UW

Dear Sir

HillingdonFirst Card

As you are aware the boundary between the London Borough of Hillingdon and Three Rivers District Council runs through Northwood. The area under the jurisdiction of Three Rivers Council is generally known as the 'Eastbury' area of Northwood. The Eastbury Residents Association is, as its name implies, an organisation which represents the interests of residents living in Eastbury. As an indication of the size of the organisation we currently distribute our newsletter to over 1100 homes within Eastbury. The residents of Eastbury not only support shops and businesses in Northwood but also use doctors, dentists, places of worship, the library and other amenities.

The introduction of the HillingdonFirst card has thrown into sharp focus the boundary which, it should be pointed out, is an administrative and not a physical one. The card will impact Eastbury residents in several ways which I outline below:-

- Parking charges in Northwood are set to double for Eastbury residents of Northwood whilst remaining unchanged for 'Hillingdon' residents of Northwood. To discriminate against a section of the community in this manner has caused understandable outrage and I attach a petition from Eastbury residents protesting against Hillingdon Council's action. Every time an Eastbury resident uses a parking meter they will be reminded of the discrimination being practised against them. The sentiments so aroused are hardly likely to be conducive to supporting Northwood shopping centre.
- In its effort to make the card attractive to its residents, Hillingdon Council has encouraged shops and businesses to offer discriminatory incentives (mainly in the form of discounts) to cardholders. Under this divisive policy residents of Eastbury who support Northwood on a regular, week in week out, basis are to be denied benefits which are to be available to people who may be from outside the area or who visit Northwood only rarely but happen to possess a HillingdonFirst card. The Association is attempting to mitigate the effect of this policy by negotiating with participants in the scheme to extend the benefits to Eastbury residents.

- With the introduction of the card Three Rivers taxpayers are being effectively prevented from using the Civic Amenity Site at Harefield (a £10 charge is surely a sufficient deterrent). However it is also a fact that Hillingdon residents use the Waste Recycling Centre at Rickmansworth. In seeking to reduce the burden for waste management on itself, Hillingdon Council has increased the burden on others.

As has been outlined above the effects of HillingdonFirst are likely to have a detrimental effect on local shops and businesses in Northwood. One of the many aims of the Sustainable Communities Act is to drive central government actions and policy to help promote thriving local communities. The sponsors of this bill, who include Mr Nick Hurd MP for Ruislip and Northwood, must surely be aghast at the prospect of a local council promoting a policy which is likely to have consequences diametrically opposed to the issues the act is seeking to address.

The Association believes that a successful and thriving Northwood requires the support of all its residents. The enclosed petition, containing over 900 signatures from nearly 700 households, protesting against the discriminatory nature of the increased car parking charges is surely an indication that the Council has got its policy wrong.

Hillingdon Council states that the card is intended to make it easy for their residents to access council services and in addition provide some financial benefit to their residents. Apparently when residents were consulted about the idea of a residents' card and what it might be used for the response was 'overwhelmingly positive'. It is entirely understandable that politicians should wish to pursue policies that ingratiate themselves with their electorate. However in the euphoria of pursuing a policy which appears to be a certain vote winner it is surely wise to step back and consider the possible negative side effects of that policy. In the case of Northwood those effects are likely to be considerable.

Yours faithfully

Elizabeth Willetts (Mrs)
Chairman

cc: without enclosure

Ann Shaw OBE, Leader, Three Rivers District Council
Robert Gordon, Leader, Hertfordshire County Council
Ralph Sangster, Three Rivers District Council
Nick Hurd, MP, House of Commons
David Gauke, MP, House of Commons
Tony Ellis, Chairman, Northwood Residents' Association