



THE PHOENIX

Campaign for Independent Living in Lewisham

May 2006

Mayoral & Local council ELECTION SPECIAL

INTRODUCTION

In her letter to candidates in the forthcoming mayoral and local council election, Denise Smith, CILL's Chair, addressed some issues identified by CILL, including:

- the need for a Centre of Independent Living
- the value of CILL's Active Life Projects (ALPs) in promoting a healthier lifestyle for disabled people
- the right to have advocacy services so disabled people have the chance to have their views represented, and that advocacy intervention at an early stage can both improve relationships with services providers and save time and valuable resources for them
- a shortage of Occupational Therapists in Lewisham has led to long delays in disabled people being assessed for often crucial adaptations. However once assessed, the quality of the work, which Lewisham Council pays for, is often poor
- Lewisham Council does consult with residents but consultation comes at the end of the process. Disabled people need to be involved from the very beginning so that their needs, experience and knowledge can shape the services they use.
- many younger disabled adults are socially isolated. The Disabled Interactive Social Club (DISC) has been set up for young disabled people and they manage it themselves – so just like other young people they choose what they do.

Candidates were asked:

1. **As an elected Councillor how would you support the concept of independent living and CILL's Centre of Independent Living?**
2. **What is your response to the issues we have highlighted?**

MAYORAL CANDIDATES

Whatever one's views are on having a directly elected Mayor, and some like John Hamilton (Independent Mayoral Candidate) believe this system "leaves ward councillors powerless we should go back to the more democratic system used by other boroughs." Lewisham has decided to have a mayor and cabinet. We are grateful to the three mayoral candidates who took time to respond personally - Sinna Mani (Mayor of Lewisham and Lewisham Peoples Alliance Party Candidate, Forest Hill Ward). Mike Keogh (Mayor of Lewisham and Green Party Candidate, Ladywell Ward) and John Hamilton (Independent Candidate for Mayor).

It is very disappointing that in the mayoral addresses that have been published there are so few explicit references to disabled people who are one of the most vulnerable groups in society and a sizeable minority. However, Sinna Mani (Mayor of Lewisham and Lewisham Peoples Alliance Party Candidate, Forest Hill Ward) mentions his work with people with Alzheimer's and John Hamilton (Independent Mayoral Candidate) states, "Our railway stations need better access for pushchairs and wheelchairs."

Sinna Mani, who has a website: www.mani4mayor.com, sent us the following encouraging response, particularly about the need for a review of services and full consultation:

"I was responsible for setting up a working party to look into the facilities and services for patients suffering from Alzheimer's.

This resulted in a one-stop service point for Alzheimer's sufferers. You can thus see that I am in full sympathy with the aims of CILL, and would be more than pleased to endorse fully your program regarding services for the disabled and support for CILL.

I am saddened by the fact that the current sheltered homes operated by the council are not adequately staffed, nor are any support staff readily available to help the disabled.

I have had first-hand experience of dealing with the disabled in the borough who are ill-served by the lack of proper council provision for the disabled, despite having communicated my concerns to both the current Mayor and the Director of Community Services. Neither of these has furnished me with a satisfactory reply,

If elected on the 4th May I shall order a full review of the services provided, and organizations like yourself will be consulted as to the needs of the disabled in Lewisham.

I believe, as you do, that consultations should commence immediately, so that organizations like yourself are involved from the beginning and not at the end."

Mike Keogh (Mayor of Lewisham and Green Party Candidate, Ladywell Ward)

I suffered a medium stroke on September 2003 so can empathise well with your cause.

I have been involved in Dacres Wood Nature Reserve and done much work improving access (for all) by managing overgrowth across paths there. In my previous jobs I worked on a project for the Green Chain Walk in improving interpretation and signage for People with Disabilities.

My other activities include Chair: Lewisham Environment Trust, Vice Chair: Quaggy Waterways Action Group, Treasurer: Ladywell Fields Park User Group, Member: of Ladywell Fields Steering Group, Ladywell Society, Hilly Fields User Group, Lewisham Local History Council and Society, Lewisham Biodiversity Partnership & LBL Streetleader no 749,

As elected Mayor I would seek to arrange or supply financial support to an organisation such as yours as it is clearly cost effective saving, money for the PCT and improving Quality of Life for your clients (for want of a better word). I would also support local Time Banks to encourage independent living.

John Hamilton (Independent Candidate for Mayor)

I had not heard of your campaign and must say that you seem to be very active and have many good ideas in the field of helping disabled people to be more self-sufficient.

I am standing for election as Mayor of Lewisham, which as you know is a powerful post in theory. Councillors have very little influence under this new system and the Mayor has, until now, been content to listen to the advice from his officers and go along with their recommendations in the main.

I am opposed to this system and will, upon being elected, invite people from all the parties represented on the council to join my cabinet. I will then devolve my own power to that cabinet, making it a democratic body in which voting will be used to decide on issues upon which there is no unanimity.

I would be interested to visit your DISC and to learn for myself whether this segregated facility is able to work better in the interests of young disabled people than the old PHAB clubs which brought disabled and able-bodied youngsters together in a social environment.

As to your concern about delays in adaption of premises, I quite understand your complaint. I am generally in favour of not contracting out council services, such as school dinners, parks maintained, etc. and it sounds as though the poor workmanship you mention was probably done by an outside contractor. By employing staff directly we would have more control over quality of workmanship and this is my aim.

COUNCIL ELECTION CANDIDATES

We thank Sinna Mani, Mike Keogh, John Hamilton and council election candidates for their contributions. From the following you can see that we have had an encouraging but not a comprehensive turnout, which is surprising when one in ten of the population is a disabled person and political parties are putting pressure on their supporters to vote because in some wards the margin to be elected is so small. As disabled people we are a sizeable minority and perhaps should be given greater consideration.

The following contributions have been received:

Bellingham Ward

See 'The Conservative Party' - page 5

Blackheath Ward

See 'The Conservative Party' - page 5

Brockley Ward

Keith H Adderly (Liberal Democrat, Brockley Ward) – page 9

Darren Johnson (Green Party, Brockley Ward) – page 7

Catford South Ward

Nick Hill (Liberal Democrats Candidate, Catford South Ward) – page 4

Crofton Park Ward

Stephen Locke (Liberal Democrat Candidate, Crofton Park Ward) – page 9

James Wild (Green Party Candidate, Crofton Park Ward) - page 7

Downham Ward

Simon Carter (Liberal Democrats Candidate, Downham Ward) – page 8

Julia Fletcher (Liberal Democrats Candidate, Downham Ward) – page 8

Roy Kennedy (Labour Party Candidate, Downham Ward) – page 5

See 'The Conservative Party' - page 5

Evelyn Ward

Sydney H Smith (Green Party Candidate, Evelyn Ward) – page 5

Charles Turner (Liberal Democrats Candidate, Evelyn Ward) - page 6

Forest Hill Ward

Kathy Holtham (Labour Party Candidate, Forest Hill Ward) – page 9

Sinna Mani (Mayor of Lewisham & Lewisham Peoples Alliance Party Candidate, Forest Hill Ward) – p1

Grove Park Ward

See 'The Conservative Party' - page 5

Ladywell Ward

Christine Dinsmore (Liberal Democrats Party Candidate, Ladywell Ward) – page 6

Mike Keogh (Mayor of Lewisham and Green Party Candidate, Ladywell Ward) – page 2

Lee Green Ward

Gerard Ambrose (Independent, Lee Green Ward) – page 9

Ashtaq Arain (Labour Party Candidate, Lee Green Ward) - page 6

Jim Mallory (Labour Party Candidate, Lee Green Ward) – page 4

Nora Riordan (Labour Party Candidate, Lee Green Ward) page 7

Brian Robson (Liberal Democrat Candidate, Lee Green Ward) – page 9

See 'The Conservative Party' - page 5

Lewisham Central Ward

Seyd Akbar Aghamiri (Liberal Democrats Candidate, Lewisham Central Ward) – page 6

See 'The Conservative Party' - page 5

New Cross Ward

No response

Perry Vale Ward

John Paschoud, (Labour Party Candidate, Perry Vale Ward) – page 5

Jill Rutter (Green Party Candidate, Perry Vale Ward) – page 5

Rushey Green Ward

No response

Sydenham Ward

Tony Bays (Conservative Party Candidate, Sydenham Ward) – Page 6

Telegraph Hill Ward

Robin Cross, Joan Millbank, Paul Newing (Labour Party Team, Telegraph Hill Ward) – page 6

Chris Flood (Socialist Alternative Candidate, Telegraph Hill Ward) – page 8

Ian Page (Socialist Alternative Candidate, Telegraph Hill Ward) – page 5

Whitefoot Ward

Jens Winton (UKIP Candidate, Whitefoot Ward) – page 6

See 'The Conservative Party' - page 5

The Conservative Party (Lewisham East – Conservative Party Candidates in Blackheath, Downham, Grove Park, Lee Green, Lewisham Central and Whitefoot Wards) – page 5

The Green Party (Darren Johnson writes on behalf of Green candidates standing for the London Borough of Lewisham) – page 7

In the contributions we have received from candidates, overall there has been unequivocal support for the concept of independent living. Based on first hand personal experience and/or campaigning on behalf of a group of disabled people, many candidates are able to demonstrate an understanding and a commitment to the rights of disabled people and the desperate need for improvements in services.

At first we had considered addressing various issues and bringing in candidates' comments and opinions as appropriate. However, after reflection and in order to be fair to the candidates we have decided to list their contributions separately - the first reply to have been received is listed first and so on. Also, because of limited space in this election special, we have had to edit contributions and hope that respondents are satisfied with how we have gone about these tasks.

Jim Mallory (Labour Party Candidate, Lee Green Ward)

If elected, I will be supporting both the concept of independent living and the proposed CILL scheme. I've always supported more support and facilities that would help disabled people to lead more independent lives, the best way of ensuring they have a chance of fulfilling their potential. In the past, I've served as a Lewisham councillor (1986-2002), during which time I hope we managed to sustain support for disabled people, even at times when resources were tight.

Central to my decision to stand again has been to work to improve community involvement and support for vulnerable people. I am a member of a local time bank, which actively promotes through its members' taking part in such activities as healthy walks for older people. I think working with disabled people could prove an important new dimension to the work we do.

Nick Hill (Liberal Democrats Candidate, Catford South Ward)

I feel there is a general feeling of exclusion and powerlessness through our society, not limited to disabled people. I feel very strongly that the general feeling of powerlessness which so many feel needs to be reversed by re-empowering communities and individuals, both those with able bodies and minds, and those without. It isn't just the case of money needed to help disabled people, but the power for disabled people to affect the services they receive.

I most strongly endorse support for those with disabilities to have a choice of how they will live, and definitely support the offering of a choice to live independent lives. Services which support such are very valuable to both the people directly affected and to the community at large.

As regards road humps, they are not only uncomfortable for disabled people, but often excruciatingly painful and often cause further damage. No more road humps should be laid in Lewisham, and those

which exist already should be reconsidered. The money otherwise spent on road humps should be spent on better road safety education.

Those with certain disabilities are more likely to need emergency medical attention. Ambulances are delayed by road humps. London Ambulance Service assert that many more people are likely to die as a result of medical treatment delays caused by road humps, than lives saved by reducing speed.

Sydney H Smith (Green Party Candidate, Evelyn Ward)

As an elected councillor, I would endorse the importance of the recognition of disabled human rights. I would be pleased to be invited to the advocacy project.

Although not classified as disabled myself (yet), I have occupational health issues and age related wear and tear! I understand that some disabled people need support to represent themselves and assistance with employment and volunteering.

The Conservative Party (Lewisham East – Conservative Candidates in Blackheath, Downham, Grove Park, Lee Green, Lewisham Central and Whitefoot Wards)

The Conservative Candidates for East Lewisham wards will support any proposal that will effectively allow disabled people to lead independent lives.

In addition to this we are as a group supportive of CILL's aims. This is evidenced by the attendance of Cllr Barrie Anderson, the Conservative group leader on Lewisham Council at CILL's inaugural *International Day of Disabled Persons* meeting.

Roy Kennedy (Labour Party Candidate, Downham Ward)

I don't as a matter of principle respond to questionnaires or surveys in elections. As a Labour Party candidate I stand for election on our manifesto record.

(Editor's note: I wonder what the manifesto says about disabled people?)

Jill Rutter (Green Party Candidate, Perry Vale Ward)

I was interested to read about the work of CILL, which I support. The Green Party has passed policy on disability, which you can view on <http://policy.greenparty.org.uk/mfss/disab.html>

You can see that the Green Party bases its ideas on the social model of disability. Importantly, the Green Party believes that responses to the needs of disabled people should not be defined by others. If elected I would work to ensure that disabled persons are represented on local area forums. I was also appalled to read about delays and the poor quality of building adaptations. I would investigate this, as an elected councillor.

(Editors' note: we were very tempted to include the Green Party's policy on disability because it speaks directly to us as disabled people. Unfortunately space does not permit this)

John Paschoud, (Labour Party Candidate, Perry Vale Ward)

I'm fully in support of the concept of independent living for disabled people, and proper effective investment (within the finite resources we always have) of public funding in helping to enable it.

I also hope that we can achieve more coordination and consistency between the various organisations in Lewisham that work for disabled people. I particularly believe that we have to be careful not to ignore the less visible disabilities that society imposes on people, such as learning difficulties.

Ian Page (Socialist Alternative Candidate, Telegraph Hill Ward)

Whilst central government continues to cut council budgets and Labour councils such as Lewisham loyally make no protests, cuts in services and particularly non-statutory services, will continue. CILL projects which should enjoy council support will continue to remain vulnerable as the council will see this as an 'easier' cut. The shortage in Occupational Therapists (along with the shortage in Social Workers, Youth Workers etc) illustrates that key services will continue to be run down to meet government budget targets by compliant Councils. The Socialist Party deplores this and believes that councils should demand full funding to meet needs based budgets. This is the only way to guarantee that the issues you raise can be met.

Socialist Party councillors will always fight for Lewisham residents to be given full consultation over the services that affect them.

Seyd Akbar Aghamiri (Liberal Democrats Candidate, Lewisham Central Ward)

I personally would like to support its (CILL's) concept in any way I could. I believe all disabled people inclusively (regardless of their race, colour, language and other orientations) are entitled to equal access to all opportunities to live, learn, work and enjoy life. Cill's centre could help disabled people to achieve that objective..... given that there is adequate provision of resources and suitable, focussed training in place.

Tony Bays (Conservative Party Candidate, Sydenham)

I fully support all efforts to promote facilities for disabled people and sympathise with the intention of Independent Living rather than residential homes which can be large and anonymous.

Christine Dinsmore (Liberal Democrats Candidate, Ladywell Ward)

Centre of Independent Living – disabled people need to be able to have people to support them in their every day lives. Many cannot express themselves so are not aware of (*being*) socially excluded and suffer (*low*) self esteem. Why are employers not encouraged to take them on their books?

Adaptions – well the Council needs to act now to find the occupational therapists in Lewisham. As a parent with disabled children ... it is disgusting Lewisham puts other things on top of their list.

Society's attitudes need to be changed...I felt isolated as a parent.

If it is estimated that 10% of the population is disabled – a sizeable proportion,,, it makes it a matter of acting at once to improve the subject for all those involved.

Ashtaq Arain (Labour Party Candidate, Lee Green Ward)

I entirely agree on your comments about consultation. I also believe it is important to consult with residents before a decision is taken by the Council. I am somewhat surprised that it does not happen.

I believe it is important that the concept of independent living is encouraged at all time and I would support every effort by CILL..

Robin Cross, Joan Millbank, Paul Newing (Labour Party Team, Telegraph Hill Ward)

We can support unequivocally the right of equality of opportunity for people of all ages who have a disability. As local councillors, we would work to ensure that the views and interests of people with disabilities living in our ward and across the borough are taken into account when planning and delivering council-run services, and we would advocate these needs with other services providers as opportunities arose.

Jens Winton (UKIP Candidate, Whitefoot Ward)

If elected, I would be building upon the work I already undertake as board member for the new Phoenix Housing Association that serves the wards of Bellingham, Downham and Whitefoot (where I live). Chief among our concerns are those residents who are elderly and disabled. For more information on what we have done, please visit our website at <http://www.phoenixcommunityhousing.org>

I am also pleased at the sterling work of the Horizon Housing Group at Leeds Court in SE6.

If elected, I would embrace my work with Phoenix and knowledge of Leeds Court to promote an active blueprint that could dovetail with the work of CILL to create a better environment for the disabled of Lewisham. I note with interest the challenges your organisation faces dealing with Lewisham Council. I would aim to leverage that existing relationship with the one I would have as Councillor to help advocate on behalf of organisations like yours.

Charles Turner (Liberal Democrats Candidate, Evelyn Ward)

Liberal Democrat policy is all about encouraging and enabling people to take as much personal control of their lives as possible, and maximising their opportunities to participate in society. As a group we would therefore favour independent living initiatives for disabled people wherever possible, and I would personally support this if elected. Borough support for a Centre for Independent Living would seem a reasonable way forward in principle.

Consultation before decisions are taken (rather than the afterthought pattern favoured by the current administration) is also a basic tenet of Liberal Democrat policy.

The Green Party (Darren Johnson writes on behalf of Green candidates standing for the London Borough of Lewisham)

The Green Party has long supported the social model of disability and rejected the medical model. It is non-disabled society which has created the barriers to full social and economic equality for disabled people, and it is non-disabled economists and politicians who tell us that we cannot afford the cost of removing those barriers. But disability is a human rights issue; and human rights are not to be denied some people by the oppressive fiscal calculations of others. The Green Party firmly encourages Independent Living for disabled people. Targets need to be set for new housing developments to increase the supply of fully accessible homes. Support care needs to be tailored to meet the needs of the individual in order to maximise the potential for independent living. The new extended provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act and other legislation which will follow it, must be enforced rigorously and fearlessly and further legislation introduced to ensure full equality for disabled people and to allow them to participate fully in the society and the decisions affecting them.

Centre of Independent Living and Active Life Projects - all elected Greens in Lewisham will give their full support to CILL and the Centre of Independent Living and the three current active life projects. We would work to ensure that the Centre was properly resourced.

Advocacy - in order to empower disabled people, facilitate independent living and ensure people get the services to which they are entitled, tailored to suit their needs, we will support CILL's advocacy project and work to ensure the necessary funding is made available.

Adaptions - currently, our built environment is one of the principle factors by which society disables people. The Green Party will require all central and local government bodies to instigate immediately the necessary structural and other modifications to all their buildings, so that these buildings do not reasonably exclude people with impairments. Building regulations will be radically overhauled with accessibility in mind, including visitors access, access to public buildings, access to work premises, entertainment and sports, etc. Associated social measures will also be taken to open up previously inaccessible locations and activities to people with impairments. A comprehensive plan for fully accessible transport will be implemented, so that public transport will be usable by all members of the public. In addition, the necessary arrangements will be made to meet any extra transportation needs of disabled people beyond that which can be provided through general services. We understand your concerns about the shortcomings of the current work on adaptions and would seek to dramatically improve this and tackle the shortage of Occupational Therapists.

Consultation - Green councillors will work closely with local and regional disability groups to ensure the voice of disabled people is heard at every stage of the decision-making process, not just at the end. We must replace tokenistic consultation with genuine participation in the decision-making process. I do not promise to have all the solutions for tackling the problems faced by disabled people in London, but I do promise to work with disabled people to implement this manifesto and to ensure that disabled people are properly involved in the decisions that affect them.

Young Disabled Adults - we agree that there are insufficient facilities for younger disabled adults. We will work to ensure that the barriers to young disabled adults participating in the range of mainstream leisure activities are broken down and will also support the DISC initiative in order that young disabled people can meet and interact in a way which suits their own needs.

James Wild (Green Party Candidate, Crofton Park Ward)

If elected I would definitely consult with organisations such as yours before making decisions regarding disabled people. I was disturbed to hear that there is a shortage of occupational therapists in Lewisham. This needs to be remedied as soon as possible.

I agree that the Centre of Independent Living (CIL) needs funding to successfully provide for the needs of local disabled people and I am sure any Green councillor elected would endeavour to get funding for the Lewisham CIL.

Nora Riordan (Labour Party Candidate, Lee Green Ward)

My main career in social services, special needs housing and health has focused on more choices, support and opportunities for disabled people to live independent lives. Self-advocacy, and on occasions citizen and formal, has been central to achieving successful ventures and in particular, person-centred approaches and greatly increased public commitment to the benefits all round of social inclusion.

Many Lewisham colleagues have been to the fore in developing “Valuing People” which promotes rights and independence. All have been totally signed up to enabling disabled people have a direct voice, “Nothing about us without us!”.

Of course the best ways of doing this to cater for various needs of all local disabled people must be worked out at a local level. CILL’s specific plans look robust and draw from valuable successful experience elsewhere. Although you do not refer to partnerships, I feel sure CILL would be committed to collaborating with the many excellent independent sector initiatives in Lewisham on cross-cutting issues, and to participating in relevant Partnership Boards and other such structures.

You mention areas for improvement such as timely adaptations and the contributing shortage of Occupational Therapists. I am in complete agreement that the early inclusion of views and experiences of disabled people is essential and can only help with producing better outcomes in the short and longer term, which is in everyone’s interests.

You also mention the success of DISC for younger disabled people which is very heartening and may also provide a tool for widening participation and increasing active citizenship, to which Lewisham Council and I personally are very committed.

Julia Fletcher (Liberal Democrats Candidate, Downham Ward)

I very much support all initiatives to ensure that disabled people have more control over their lives and that they are directly consulted over all relevant services. My party would very much welcome a centre of independent living being set up in Lewisham.

Thank you....for setting up the Active Life Projects and the Disabled Interactive Social Club, which are just the kinds of projects needed to encourage people to participate and adopt a healthy lifestyle.

The Lewisham Lib Dems strongly support better advocacy provision. We are worried to learn about the concerns you have raised about adaptations.

We very much share your concerns about consultation. Consultation properly done at an early stage can raise important issues and problems which can be avoided.

For more details of all our policies please see the local manifesto we have put together, which is available on our website: <http://lewishamlibdems.org.uk/home.html>

Chris Flood (Socialist Alternative Candidate, Telegraph Hill Ward)

As the socialist Group on Lewisham Council we have specifically and consistently spoken out against any loss of Occupational Therapy posts/Social worker posts etc and the unreasonable waits for aids and adaptations etc.

I have done research and published.....studies (*which*) showed BOTH social work and occupational therapy as being valuable resources for determining need amongst this client group - and therefore worth defending as resources. But most particularly showed long waits for equipment and adaptations, as has been the anecdotal experiences of staff and users for years.

Although you mention that Lewisham does consult, we are firmly of the opinion that there is a big difference between meaningful consultation and consultation that pays lip-service to the notion. We will always advocate consultation at the earliest stages of changes and service development therefore.

Simon Carter (Liberal Democrats Candidate, Downham Ward)

I do support in principle the proposal for a Centre of Independent Living in Lewisham, which would have a real impact for many disabled people. Liberal Democrats strongly support all initiatives to ensure that disabled people have more control over their lives and that they are directly consulted over services that

they depend upon. Furthermore we feel that the council could improve the way it consults with local residents. Many people with a sensory, physical or other disability are often excluded from the consultation process.

Gerard Ambrose (Independent, Lee Green Ward)

As an elected Councillor, I would support the concept of independent living and CILL's Centre of Independent Living by bringing to the attention of the council, its needs, ideas and concerns.

My response to the issues you have highlighted is to congratulate you on setting up Active Life Projects. Everyone deserves to have a fulfilling life within their own limitations. With regard to adaptations I am disgusted, but hardly surprised. Delays in Occupational therapy can cause some conditions to worsen. This is unacceptable. Delays in adaptations can only decrease the patient's mental and physical well-being and increase their feeling of isolation. As for the quality of work (paid for by Lewisham) and consultation by Lewisham Council, I think this question can best be answered by copying an excerpt from my election leaflet.

Private contractors are making profits on our services when these profits could be improving our services. High consultancy fees for planning projects are causing our facilities to be left to deteriorate as we are told these plans are now unaffordable. They are unaffordable because the consultancy fees have eaten away at too much of the funding originally allocated.

I have also highlighted lack of consultation, poor quality and high prices of contractors and consultation fees and also the fact that the council doesn't listen.

Keith H Adderly (Liberal Democrat, Brockley Ward)

If elected I would actively support the concept of independent living and in principle CILL's Centre of Independent Living.

I welcome the initiatives and proposals contained in your letter. Liberal Democrats support any move towards enabling disabled people to have better control over their lives and the services to which they are entitled.

Kathy Holtham (Labour Party Candidate, Forest Hill Ward)

It would look as though you have some exciting and innovative schemes in hand, of course i would be happy to support any organisation that has such excellent aims. As you rightly state funding is all important, if elected to the Council i would endeavour to assist a scheme such as CILL. Consulting and listening to all members of the community is the most important part of being a local councillor.

Can I take this opportunity of wishing you well for the future and assure you of my support.

Brian Robson (Liberal Democrat Candidate, Lee Green Ward)

On the centre of Independent Living Issue, I would certainly support a centre of independent living for Lewisham. As a party, the Liberal Democrats strongly support all initiatives to ensure that disabled people have more control over their lives and they are directly consulted over services that they depend upon.

In my present role I am managing a needs survey of a 500 unit estate due for demolition - this involves speaking to residents about their future housing needs, including adaptations required, etc. I thus have a good understanding of many of the housing-related issues you raise.

I was very interested to learn about the DISC project, and as a younger person myself (I'm 24) I would be very interested to learn more about this project and support it in any way I can should I be elected.

Stephen Locke (Liberal Democrat Candidate, Crofton Park Ward)

As one with some experience of disability issues, I am enormously sympathetic to the objectives you outline. I think you will find my colleagues are too, as should be clear from our manifesto which is published on our website at <http://lewishamlibdems.org.uk/home>

On the specific issue of a CIL for Lewisham, I am happy to record my support for the idea in principle – it chimes in completely with our party's policy of giving disabled people more control over their own lives and to improve ways in which citizens are consulted. Although small, our group of councillors has

campaigned tirelessly for the interests of disabled people in general. For example, it has secured changes to disabled parking provision in Lewisham – incredibly, up to 2003 only disabled drivers from Lewisham were entitled to use disabled parking bays. Now the criteria relate to disabled people, which is vital as often the disabled person with greatest mobility needs are not actually drivers. We have also backed motions highlighting such issues as the record of schools that have a disability plan (despite being a legal requirement only about 50% of Lewisham schools have one), and the need for much higher take-up of Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance across the borough.

I feel that Lewisham Council needs to embrace issues of the kind you describe with much more energy and enthusiasm.... It is unacceptable that, when Ladywell Leisure Centre is closed under current plans, elderly and disabled people living in central Lewisham should have no swimming, affordable gym and other facilities for a period of at least 3 years; meanwhile residents in the West of the borough already face a collapse of such services following the closure of Forest Hill Pools for safety reasons due in turn to serious long term neglect.

There is also room for a major improvement in the way Lewisham consults its residents of all backgrounds, ages and ability.... I am constantly amazed at the Council's inability to engage effectively, especially on 'difficult' issues.

DEFINITION OF INDEPENDENT LIVING

The Disability Rights Commission's formal definition of independent living, based on principles defined by the Independent Living movement, and which has been adopted wholesale in the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit 2005 report on Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People:

"The term independent living refers to all disabled people having the same choice, control and freedom as any other citizen - at home, at work, and as members of the community. This does not necessarily mean disabled people 'doing everything for themselves', but it does mean that any practical assistance people need should be based on their own choices and aspirations and should address the practical barriers to participation that they face."

Even if they do rely on support in their day to lives, this should not define the parameters of disabled people's identities, or the extent of their rights. In reality, disabled people are customers, workers, students, parents, taxpayers and voters, and community members. The purpose of any form of support should, therefore, be to enable people to overcome the practical barriers they face to participating in all of these roles and activities.

The DRC believes that there should be a basic enforceable right to independent living for all disabled people. Although some people assume that this already exists, the DRC knows it does not – and that many, many disabled people are denied independence on a daily basis. That is why we are supporting Lord Jack Ashley in introducing an Independent Living Bill in the current session of parliament aimed at establishing legal entitlements to a range of support, including advocacy and communication support, that we believe to be essential to enable disabled people to participate in the social and economic life of their communities on a par with other citizens.

**From Paupers to Citizens: Independent Living and Human Rights. Paper presented at 'Human Rights: Transforming Services?' conference, QEII Centre, London, 27 March 2006
Gerry Zarb, Head of Health and Independent Living Strategy, Disability Rights Commission**

"Independent Living is not a service, it is freedom; it is liberation; it is equality for disabled people"

SUPPORTED BY CAPITAL COMMUNITY UNIT – NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL UNIT

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