

Filter Lights for Finaghy

Claire Hanna has welcomed agreement from Roads Service to install filter lights at Finaghy Crossroads, after a long campaign. Claire, and previous SDLP councillors, has been lobbying for the change on behalf of residents on safety grounds as currently drivers have to 'take a chance' to exit the Upper Lisburn Road in either direction. It is anticipated that the filter lights will also help to reduce the volume of traffic using streets around Diamond, Grangeville and Orpen as a shortcut to avoid the Crossroads. Roads Service have indicated that the work will be carried out in June.

Don't lose your vote on 22 May!

With local and European elections now confirmed for 22 May, now is the time to ensure you are on the electoral register to ensure you are able to cast a vote. If you completed the forms left at your door during the Electoral Office canvas last September and October you should be registered – you can check via the electoral office (EONI.org.uk or Freephone 0800 4320 712) or via Claire Hanna, who has a copy of the latest register. If you are not listed, registration is still possible until late April but it is advisable to complete the forms as soon as possible. Registration now will ensure you are able to vote in Westminster and Assembly elections due in 2015 and 2016

Postal and Proxy Votes

Every election, many votes are lost by those unable to make it to the polling station in person on the day – due to illness, being on holiday or working or studying away from home. You be entitled to a postal or proxy vote. If you would more information, or to receive a postal / proxy vote application form, contact Claire or the Electoral Office

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Balmoral; clean, green, shared & safe.



“Councillors are here to help ensure you get the best out of public services. If I can help you with a council service or to liaise with external agencies (like NI Water, Roads Service, PSNI etc), please contact me at any time by telephone, email, Twitter or by post. I'm happy to take on a wide range of cases and help you get the problem sorted. While I don't work out of a constituency office, I can meet with you at a time that suits if you'd like to discuss an issue in person.”

Cllr Claire Hanna



Balmoral Report

Spring 2014



An update from Cllr Claire Hanna

Hanna welcomes Planning Changes

Claire Hanna, Chair of the Council's Planning Committee, has welcomed the publication by SDLP Environment Minister, Mark H. Durkan, of the draft single Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS). She said:

“The SPPS consolidates the current more than twenty separate planning policy statements into a single document. This will make it easier for people to make a case for or against a planning application, where previously we had to wade through numerous and often contradictory policy papers. It signals a new approach to regional planning and emphasises sustainable development and community engagement in planning. SPPS also delivers a strategic policy for business and retailing which will enable clear and timely decisions that encourage investment and facilitate employment while protecting the environment.”

Council to back Living Wage proposal

Councillor Claire Hanna welcomed cross-party support for her motion calling on Belfast City Council to commit to becoming a Living Wage employer, paying no staff less than £7.65 per hour.

She said: This is an issue of fairness. £7.65ph is an independently set amount that allows a worker to live with health and dignity in today's society and aims to ensure that people working full time do not have to live in poverty” (continued inside).

Justin Cartwright joins SDLP Ticket



Local party members have selected Justin Cartwright to run alongside Claire Hanna in May's local elections. The two candidates will campaign to defend two SDLP seats in Balmoral, with the area going down from six councillors to five under new council boundaries. Commenting on his selection Justin said: *“I am 29 years old. I was born and raised in Victoria, Australia, graduating with a physics degree. I met my wife Leigh, who is from Belfast, while she was travelling in Australia. We moved to South Belfast together where we welcomed our first child, a son. I bring experience from the SDLP's sister party the Australian Labor Party and from my background as a trade union organiser. I want to bring fresh thinking into local politics, focussing on the things that really matter to people like health, education and jobs.*

An update from Councillor Claire Hanna – Spring 2014

'On The Runs' revelations a betrayal of Victims

Claire Hanna has said that the collusion exposed by the Downey judgement shows that a dirty deal had been put in place, and underlines the failure to properly and fairly deal with the past, and to deliver a genuinely shared future. She said: "There was monumental and morally corrupt collusion between the British Government and Sinn Féin. In effect, a dirty war has been followed by a dirty, clandestine peace, designed to serve selfish sectional interest and to provide a virtual amnesty to certain IRA members. The days of side deals, shabby deals and secret deals should be well and truly over. Key aspects of the Agreement remain unimplemented and the SDLP supports the Haass proposals in relation to victims, the past and parades but not on the narrow basis of the OTRs arrangements and not in a partial, selective, limited, self-serving, secret, piecemeal and unethical way".

More Disabled spaces requested



SDLP Balmoral Candidate Justin Cartwright is calling on the Department for Regional Development (DRD) to increase the number of disabled parking bays in Finaghy.

Speaking on the issue Mr Cartwright said "The lack of parking bays in Finaghy is both frustrating and stressful for disabled drivers. Some of these drivers need short walks so require parking close to services, while others require the additional area afforded in these spaces to get in and out of their cars. This is a basic mobility issue. We should be helping drivers with mobility needs get on with their day to day business, not frustrating them with a lack of car parking provision."

Living Wage good for staff, city and ratepayers

Speaking about her Living Wage motion at February's Council meeting Claire Hanna said "New research from Oxfam shows that 22% of working households are living in poverty since the economic downturn, and that the lowest earners have lost £1000 per year in real terms. As one of the biggest employers in the city it is our duty to show leadership in tackling poverty. We also have a huge duty not to increase the rates burden on residents and business, and this policy is consistent with that. I have explored the costs of the proposal with council officers and the financial impact is modest, despite a very real impact for low earning staff. As a Living Wage employer we would be joining with 19 councils in Ireland and England, as well as some of the highest profile and most profitable private sector employers including Deloitte, Llyods and PWC. I have no doubt that we will recoup this modest investment several times over as a result of increased morale, productivity and decreased staff turnover."

SDLP back Co-op Leisure Plan

SDLP members on Belfast City Council have voted in support in principle of a new Co-operative Social Enterprise model for the delivery of leisure services in the City. Claire Hanna said: "Many of Belfast's leisure services are in dire need of investment and modernisation, and the annual £8m subsidy they receive from ratepayers needs to be reduced. For nearly 20 years the council have been examining this and, after extensive research, our party has backed this arms-length, community interest company model – clearly, to get a different result we need to try something different, another set of councillors failing to take big decisions about leisure is not on. This model is in operation elsewhere and has been shown to deliver first class services for users and enhanced skills for staff, as well as making substantial tax savings and allowing access to European. This is not privatisation - these facilities must remain public and accessible to all as a key tool in the promotion of healthy lifestyles. The SDLP has consulted fully with trade unions to ensure staff are protected, and full due diligence will be undertaken to ensure this model can work effectively and fairly".



Attwood campaigning to put NI back into the heart of Europe

Claire Hanna has welcomed the SDLP's decision to nominate Alex Attwood MLA to fight for an MEP seat in May. A former International Secretary of the SDLP, Claire said "The SDLP has always been a pro-European voice, recognising Europe as the most remarkable conflict resolution project in history, as well as bringing enormous economic benefits for this region. As a decisive and dynamic Minister, Alex Attwood has shown clearly that he has the skills to ensure we have the strongest possible voice in Brussels"

Alex Attwood said "Over the last 10 years the North has lost much influence in Europe. When John Hume was your MEP, you had a strong voice at the heart of the strongest political grouping in the European Parliament. Today, opportunities are not being fully grasped by three isolated and anti-Europe MEPs and as a result we are losing major opportunities for business and communities. On 22 May you can change that by electing an MEP who gets things done".

Persistent graffiti condemned

Cllr Claire Hanna has expressed frustration at continuous vandalism of street furniture and walls. She said "I've been lobbying the Department for Regional Development for more regular clean-ups of local sites and calling for a policy of using one consistent colour to cover vandalism, rather than a paint patchwork. Unless it is of an offensive nature, vandalism isn't fully painted out for up to two years. In March DRD agreed to a fresh paint of the Finaghy Road North M1 Motorway bridge at my request, but within hours the vandals had returned. It's a waste of public money to clean up after these people, what they paint has no creative merit whatsoever, and it's frustrating for those of us who want to keep the local area looking tidy and welcoming."

Trim of Golf Course trees agreed

Claire has met with Belvoir Golf Club to discuss the issue of trees between local homes and the 17th Green. The meeting was about balancing the needs of residents for privacy, light and protection from stray golf balls, alongside long term conservation of a mature woodland. A plan has been developed which will see maintenance and removal of overgrown and diseased trees, and longer term planting of more native trees.

Marlborough Post Office return welcomed

Claire Hanna has welcomed the return of full Post Office services to the Lisburn Road, located at Mace Cadogan (beside the Fire Station). Since she highlighted the closure of the facility at the Co-operative in the last 'Balmoral Report', Claire campaigned alongside residents to ensure the local area retained a permanent and Post Office.

Parking Ticket disparity challenged

Claire Hanna has written to the Department for Regional Development asking for an explanation of repeated discrepancies in the number of parking tickets issued on the Lisburn Road, compared to other areas in and around Belfast. Claire said "Residents and traders alike depend on free flowing traffic and public transport and as such I fully support ticketing of illegal parkers. However, the law needs to be applied consistently and fairly in all areas. It's unreasonable that you are 1400 times more likely to receive a ticket in this area as others."

Ulster Bank lobbied to retain Branch

Claire Hanna has pushed Ulster Bank to retain their branch at Finaghy Crossroads. She said "The loss of another bank would be a blow for local customers and traders. It's unfair that local communities have to bear the brunt of reckless banking practices in the boom years"

Council Rates Freeze again for 2014/15

The SDLP Group on Belfast City Council were pleased to be able to secure a zero rate change, for the second consecutive year. However, rates are still a substantial pressure on many residents and small businesses – as the number of empty shops locally shows. Claire Hanna has questioned continued rises in the regional rate set by MLAs which makes up 55% of the total billed to ratepayers and which has risen by.....