



The Red Letter

The letter that keeps you posted...

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THE FUTURE OF THE NHS IS IN YOUR HANDS

We were promised extra NHS funding by this Government in their 2015 manifesto "Protecting and improving our National Health Service" which states: Our commitment to you: "Our National Health Service must be there for you throughout your life. We will:

- continue to increase spending on the NHS, [...] so the NHS stays free for you to use;
 - spend at least an additional £8 billion by 2020 over and above inflation ;
- ensure you can see a GP and receive the hospital care you need, 7 days a week by 2020, with a guarantee that everyone over 75 will get a same-day appointment if they need one;
- integrate health and social care, through our Better Care Fund and lead the world in fighting cancer and funding a cure for dementia.

Have you seen any evidence of this? Quite the reverse is true. Funding has been SLASHED!! Teresa May is proposing to discuss our NHS with Trump and this can only be bad since, in the USA, the normal delivery of a baby costs around \$10,000, a caesarean section \$50,000 and each day in hospital costs \$2,500. That's without any extras so you'll

need a hefty health insurance policy to cover all that!

The threats of further cuts to OUR NHS are advancing at a terrifying pace even without any USA input. We, as the owners of our NHS, need to rally behind our health workers to secure its future.

This is a service that we have already paid for through our regular, and compulsory, National Insurance contributions. These services are being quietly and systematically sold off to "interested parties" (with no health credentials) whose remit is to make a profit for their shareholders, at the expense of your healthcare services. Doctors and nurses are being forced to work unhealthy and dangerously long shifts while they and GPs' services are being scapegoated to

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I was born under the NHS and I'm voting to save it!

Our NHS...cont....

shift the blame from Jeremy Hunt. Doctors, nurses and care workers are fighting to resist but are not being listened to by a Government that only hears what it wants to hear: the sound of money going into the coffers of the already wealthy 1%.

Community care has been slashed, putting an extra burden on hospitals which are unable to discharge patients without some form of package for continuing care at home. The number of beds available in care/nursing homes is diminishing as their funding is being cut back. Many care workers are on zero hours contracts with no job security or fringe benefits, barely able to cover their living expenses and bolstering their income with tortuous benefit claims and visits to food banks. The funding of Mental Health Services has been slashed at a time when more people are experiencing severe mental health issues: PTSD, depression, hunger, fearfulness, anxiety, unemployment, homelessness — and hopelessness!

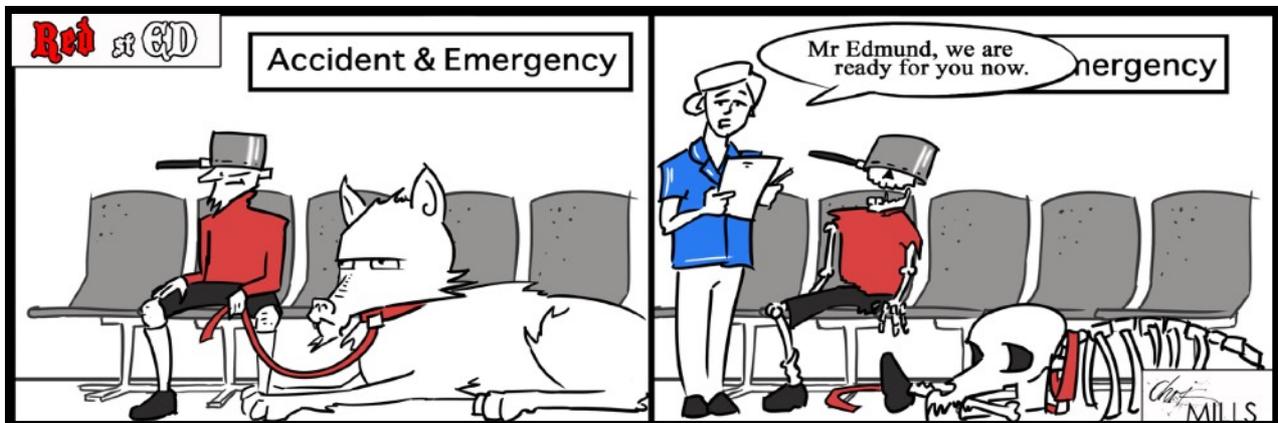
Raised input to the NHS was a part of the

promise if we voted for Brexit; and many voted on just that ticket alone. Now the real Brexit is being laid out and the NHS has been put up for sale!

Jonathan Ashworth, our Labour Shadow Health Secretary is getting his voice heard at last! We know that Labour stands for a fully funded NHS, with all health provision being free at the point of delivery. We can't let our NHS get eroded to the point of 'no return' before we are given the opportunity to vote this Government out.

Contact Jonathan Ashworth:
jon.ashworth.mp@parliament.uk
Find out what YOU can do.

- Hannah Pomeroy



Further Red St Ed adventures in Tory Britain cartoons by Chris Mills can be found on the: 'Bury St Edmunds Branch Labour Party' Facebook Page.

Meet the new Branch Officers.

At the Bury Branch AGM held on the 19th January 2017, the following members were elected as officers:

- Chair** - Darren Turner
- Vice-Chair** - Elle Zwandahl
- Secretary** - Alex Griffin
- Treasurer** - Nicola Iannelli-Popham
- Youth & Equalities Officer** - Joe Weaver
- Public Relations Officer** - Cate Hadley

As part of his Ten Point Plan, Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party have pledged to build a million new homes in 5 years, with at least half a million council homes through the proposed public investment strategy. They have pledged to end insecurity for private renters by introducing rent controls, secure tenancies and a charter of private tenant's rights and to increase access to affordable home ownership.

No Place Like Home

Turn a corner of any street in Bury St Edmunds and you will find a 'To Let' sign. As the housing stock for buyers diminishes, private rental landlords set their prices. The sky is the limit it seems as tenants dig deeper each time the unchecked landlord decides to hike the rental price. As a result, many have been forced into homelessness and unfit accommodation. Under the Tories, young people can't get on the housing ladder as many simply don't earn enough while the unemployed are penalised by changes to the benefits system.

The rental boom, of course, is due to the fact that, because of such low interest rates, the only safe bet is to invest money in property. We live in a British culture of never discussing our salaries but, research on the average wage for a Bury citizen, reveals why renting or buying a property in our home town has become so problematic. Across a sample band of 7 occupations, the lowest paid is an administrator/office manager with an approximate, average wage of £13,350 p.a. which, after deductions, becomes £12,245.



The hourly rate for such jobs is between £7.26 and £12.37. The highest paid in the survey was a solicitor with an average annual wage of £35,000 (payscale.com). To buy a home, lenders will typically lend up to 3 times an average income. For a couple, it's 3 times the first income, plus 1 year of the 2nd income and 2 and 1/2 times the joint income. Therefore, a single office administrator on a salary of £13,350 could expect to borrow £40,000. A couple with the Office of National Statistic's stated median income of £29,200, could borrow around £140,000 but both would also need to put down a deposit of between 5-10% of the house price!

In 2015, most house sales in Bury were terraced properties, selling for an average of £275k. Detached properties sold for around £366k with semi-detached fetching £266k (rightmove.co.uk). Currently the very cheapest one-bedroomed flats for sale in Bury cost around £90k. So our office administrator would have to find an extra £50,000 for a 1 bed flat and a couple £117,000 to buy a modest terraced house.

Ok, you can't afford to buy, so let's look at the rental market.

Using the example of our single office administrator, or a minimum wage retail assistant looking to rent a one bedroom property, for which the average monthly rent in Bury is around £673*, they will have to find start-up costs of £1,346. If the office admin's net monthly pay is £1,020, they will be left with only £373 for bills and living expenses.

So how do people manage to find an affordable home in Bury St Edmunds? The answer is... They don't!

So, the long-term solution must be to introduce a system of rent controls and to provide affordable and low cost housing. To do this, WE MUST VOTE THE TORIES OUT.

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No Place Like Home...cont....

It really is that simple. Ordinary people are paying the price for voting for a Conservative government and your vote makes a difference. And, if you don't vote, it's nearly as damaging as voting Tory.

Let's work together as a community here and across the country to change this dreadful situation where only the well-off can have decent affordable homes.

- **Cate Hadley**

*www.home.co.uk/for_rent/bury_st_edmunds/

Local Housing Policy

In line with the Conservatives' long-term strategy of eradicating state social and welfare provision as an acceptable political concept, social housing is subject to the diktats of 'market forces'.

With a complex formula of social rents with service charges added, the Local Housing Allowance and "Affordable Rents", housing associations and councils are being cajoled and coerced by central government into jettisoning the old ideal of providing housing at costs that working people can afford, at no more than 30% of their income.

Housebuilding grants from central government also come with a string of complex conditions requiring the social housing sector to take on

ever more risky debts and sell-off 'high' value properties, leading to what may look good on paper as 'new' builds but in fact covers up the fact that social housing is rapidly decreasing. Locally, housing associations are cutting back on capital and maintenance budgets, are deeply in debt and fear any interest rises. The Borough Council is considering setting up a development company to build and sell houses to subsidise the council tax: which can only mean the Council will be competing with other developers, so pushing up land prices. This is beneficial to large land owners who are the core Conservative electorate and who they represent in Parliament - along with the financial sector to which the housing sector is in debt.

- **Malcolm Searle**

A Nation In Crisis

The country is in crisis from the NHS to social care, housing, the railways and GPs. However, we only have ourselves to blame. After all, we vote these people in to power (well about 30% of us do).

Yet people who voted Conservative at the last election are complaining! The Labour Party warned time and again what was going to happen. It's almost criminal that the Tory Party has no money for these essential services, yet is happy with the likes of Sir Philip Green and thousands of others who, even though they are the richest of the rich, continue to evade fair taxes.

But many feel 'safe' with the Tories because they 'know how to rule'. They privatised the railways but, are these any better now that they are largely foreign owned and still receive millions in tax handouts? Your taxes pay for foreign owned company profits while we pay the most expensive fares in Europe!

Is the housing supply satisfactory since Thatcher started selling council property?

It is all so short sighted – 'conserve' rather than the socialist ideal of invest and innovate. Socialism brought us pensions and unemployment benefits under Lloyd George (Lib), the Labour Party created the NHS when the country was in dire need (1948), together with social housing and a nationalised rail service affordable for all.

Tories privatised utilities because 'competition will make them cheaper'. More recently, pensioners have to thank the Labour Party for their Heating Allowance and Xmas £10 and, of course, the Tories wouldn't dare lose votes by abolishing those benefits. Pensioners surely realise where every one of their benefits comes from while the Tories blame them for the state of NHS! The State should support every citizen who is vulnerable – and it was the Labour Party that expanded, innovated and introduced everything this country holds dear.

- **Marilyn Sayer**



Suffolk County Council And Its Budget Cuts

The Suffolk Labour Group's manifesto (<https://suffolklabourgroupp.org/manifesto-2017/>) states that is dedicated to making Suffolk a fairer, greener, healthier and safer County and it pledges to invest the County's money in:

- Education for our children and younger people;
- Care services that are preventative and early intervention to improve health and reduce the need for expensive nursing care;
- Roads and transport that are safe, effective, healthy and sustainable;
- Broadband to improve our productivity;
- Our Fire Service (restoring the Fire Engines and Crews cut in 2016), Trading Standards and Flood Prevention.

The levels of Suffolk County Council reserves (excluding schools) rose from £77.8m in 2010 to £191.2m in 2016 while its last budget (2016/17) proposed savings of £73m (for the period 2016-18) which include:

- £5.9m from Health and Social Care Integration;
- £12m from Supporting Lives Connecting Communities;
- £3.5m from Travel;
- £3.6m from Highways and Infrastructure;
- £5.7 from Support Services;
- £0.7m from Library and Archive services; and
- £1m from Public Health
- to name just a few.

Staffing has been more or less halved since 2010 with more 'savings' in this field expected. (www.suffolk.gov.uk/assets/council-and-democracy/budget-and-finance/Budget-and-Capital-Programme.pdf)

It is obvious that much of this savings programme necessitates from the reduced funding received from this Tory government, but the Labour Party is committed to trying to reverse these cuts and adjust the Council's

priorities so that our communities and most vulnerable are both served and protected for the future.

The Suffolk Labour Group tried to introduce a series of amendments to the proposed budget cuts, as it believes that the higher level of overall reserves can be spent down safely to invest in preventative services, prioritising care above cuts to ensure that the most vulnerable in society are not adversely effected in a time of financial difficulty.

Their amendments included reversing the cut to Supporting Lives, creating a new training programme for Care Home staff, reversing the cuts to Housing related support, Library Services, Culture and Heritage services and home to school transport. They also proposed a revenue enhancement to teacher recruitment, early years help and specialist services, children's centres staff, the reduction in workforce development grant and discretionary post-16 transport. The amendments also included funding for new full-time fire service crews in Sudbury and Felixstowe and a reversal of the proposed new cuts to the Fire Service, Trading Standards and Citizens' Advice funding and provision of an additional £0.3m to compensate for the cuts made to the Fire Service in 2016/17.

However, on 9 February, the Tory Council - and Bury's own Green Party councillor - voted against these amendments and to maintain the proposed cuts to our services. Suffolk will be a poorer, more difficult and more dangerous place to live for a large proportion of its citizens as a consequence.

This is a time of considerable hardship for many, with rising prices, under-employment, lack of affordable housing and additional costs - from health to our children's education - appearing on the horizon. To sit on such large reserves while cutting services which are vital to our young, older and most vulnerable populations seems both short-sighted as well as cruel, shoring up problems for the future instead of investing in preventative measures that can ensure a less worrying future with brighter prospects for many.

- Nicola Iannelli-Popham

The Post Office In Crisis

Just after 5.30 p.m. on Wednesday 16 November 2016, the iconic home of the Post Office since 1896 closed its doors for the very last time. This treasured public institution's closure can only be attributed to government funding cuts and gross mismanagement on the part of the board of the publicly-owned company.

The separation of the Post Office from Royal Mail in 2013, left the Post Office in a vulnerable position. The cross-subsidy provided to the Post Office by the more profitable part of the operation Royal Mail, was lost. The split meant that natural synergies and public services were sacrificed for greed and profit. Prior to Royal Mail privatisation, the government declared the Post Office would not be sold off because of its "essential social and economic role" in our communities. The UK is the only major economy that has separated the retail and delivery functions of its postal network.

The government had committed to ensuring that the Post Office would become a genuine front office for government, including checking and processing applications for government services – but it failed to deliver on this pledge. Post Office income from government services is 40% lower today than it was 6 years ago. An important element for future sustainability would be to grow Post Office revenues from financial services but, nonetheless, the government rejected proposals for a Post Bank, which would have provided full banking services and affordable credit, aimed at small businesses and individuals.

The Post Office has successfully demonstrated its efficiency in running a bank. National Giro bank, which opened for business in 1968, was run by the Post Office. This was the first bank designed with computerised operations in mind; the first in Europe to adopt optional character recognition technology; the first to offer interest-bearing current accounts and the first in Europe to offer telephone banking - its reward was privatisation by the Thatcher government in 1990. So who benefits from the franchise of the Bury St Edmunds Crown Post Office? Certainly not the employees who lost

their jobs or the high proportion of elderly, disabled, vulnerable and mobility impaired customers who are now faced with access difficulties. The Tory ideology of moving public institutions into private ownership only benefits City of London speculators.

With the doors to the Crown Post Office shut, it was depressing to hear that over 300 bags of confidential waste were removed from the building after its closure, containing documents, files and reports, as well as records of the people who had worked and served the public of Bury St Edmunds over many years. The confidential waste sadly included War Bonds found when clearing the building.

There was very strong opposition to plans to franchise the Bury St Edmunds Crown office. The Communication Workers Union and Bury St Edmunds Labour Party (the only local political party who bothered) campaigned against the franchise. A petition gathered nearly 7,000 signatures, 104 individual representations were made to Post Office Limited and a public meeting opposing the closure was very well supported. On two occasions the counter staff withdrew their labour to highlight the threat to the Crown Post Office. If you were one of the signatories on the petition you have a lot more in common with Labour Party values than you may have previously considered. Labour Party Leader Jeremy Corbyn opposes the franchising and privatisation of Crown Post Offices and has called for the process to cease. *Cont/...*



The Post Office...cont....

This is in stark contrast to the Tory Government who awarded a Post Office director an OBE in the New Year honours. There can be no justification for honouring an executive who is complicit in the destruction of an industry.

This is just one of many reasons why we need fundamental political change in this country and one of the reasons, if you supported the fight to retain our Crown Post Office, why you should vote Labour in future elections.

There are other reasons, of course, as the Tories have doubled debt, borrowed more than every previous Labour government combined, while simultaneously squeezing living standards, running down the NHS and flogging off Royal Mail on the cheap.

The Bury St Edmunds Labour Party will have candidates standing in the Suffolk County Council elections taking place in May. This is your opportunity to elect people who care about the services in our town.

While the Conservative Government and the Post Office board appear content to see Crown Offices vanish from the high street, their motive to franchise Post Offices becomes clear. Crown Post Offices offer some of the finest real estate and are situated in prime locations in our town centres, making their sale very lucrative for their owners.

The franchise programme which is currently taking place all over the country is no more than an asset sale for short term gain at the expense of a cherished British institution.

- **David Cull**

Trumped again...

Donald Trump bans all refugees from 7 Muslim nations from entering the US and a few days later, our own PM reneges on a commitment made by a Tory government to take in 3,000 refugee children fleeing from war torn nations. The Tony Blair poodle had nothing on this 'special relationship'!

Suggested Film List:**Che Part 1** (2008)

In 1956 Ernesto 'Che' Guevara and a band of Castro-led Cuban exiles mobilise an army to topple the regime of dictator Fulgencio Batista. (134 mins.)

Director: Steven Soderbergh

Stars: Julia Ormond, Benicio Del Toro, Oscar Isaac, Pablo Guevara

Che Part 2 (2008)

In 1967, Ernesto 'Che' Guevara leads a small partisan army to fight an ill-fated revolutionary guerrilla war in Bolivia, South America. (135 mins.)

Director: Steven Soderbergh

Stars: Demián Bichir, Rodrigo Santoro, Benicio Del Toro, Catalina Sandino Moreno

Pride (2014)

U.K. gay activists work to help miners during their lengthy strike of the National Union of

Mineworkers in the summer of 1984. (119 mins.)

Director: Matthew Warchus

Stars: Bill Nighy, Imelda Staunton, Dominic West, Paddy Considine

Riff Raff (1981)

The story of Stevie, a construction worker, and his girlfriend, an unemployed pop singer, serves to show the living conditions of the British, poor, working class. (95 mins.)

Director: Ken Loach

Stars: Robert Carlyle, Emer McCourt, Jim R. Coleman, George Moss

Selma (2014)

A chronicle of Martin Luther King's campaign to secure equal voting rights via an epic march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama in 1965. (128 mins.)

Director: Ava DuVernay

Stars: David Oyelowo, Carmen Ejogo, Tim Roth, Lorraine Toussaint.

BURY ST EDMUNDS BRANCH LABOUR PARTY

The Bury St Edmunds Labour Party Branch meets every third Thursday in the month at 7.30 pm at:

Oddfellows Hall, 85 Whiting Street, Bury St Edmunds, IP33 1NX



facebook.com/burystedmundsbranchlabourparty



twitter.com/burystedlabour

www.labourburystedmundssuffolk.org.uk

Editor's Note:

Since the last Red Letter, we have witnessed a seismic shift in global and national politics. From a socialist point of view, it is hard to know which challenges to address first? Which of them should we, as RL editors, prioritise? Trump's retrograde administration has attempted to bury the accepted norms of tolerance and equality, recently abetted by Theresa May in her anxiety to secure Post Brexit trade deals. We have witnessed the unedifying sight of our so-called "special relationship" with the US heralding the beginning of betrayal and sell offs of our country's most valuable assets to greedy and exploitative companies. Furthermore, being seen to be complicit in this ghastly inequity may have unforeseen consequences for the UK, encouraging the already growing xenophobic and racist elements witnessed as a result of the Brexit vote.

On a lighter note...our local branch has changed. We now have a new, enthusiastic team (see website address above). We are passionate about developing our successful and attractive town into a more caring and socially responsible place. Our branch is committed to fighting for our NHS to remain in public ownership. You will see us out in the town centre many weekends campaigning to raise awareness. We are also currently challenging the Borough's decision to wipe the homeless from the town centre. Watch the Facebook page (see above) and follow us on Twitter for updates on Branch action.

Like many across the country, our schools are buckling under funding cuts: parents are required to dig ever deeper to fund their children's education. Many are already being asked to pay for books, art equipment and stationery. The Labour Party believes that an excellent education is a right that all children should have - none excluded.

We are currently being asked to take on more of our elderly parents and disabled folks' care. But what happens when caring for an elderly parent with dementia or those with complex needs becomes too onerous for home care? Where is the safety net? Are we to face a return to Victorian times with the elderly taken to the poorhouse or dying in abject pain because they can't afford the drugs required?

Our meetings will involve much discussion about these and many other topics which directly affect us all. Get involved, join us, come to meetings, vote for us and together let's build a strong local community which has the capacity to change the status quo.

Strength lies in group action at local and national levels and we will have 4 Labour candidates in the May County Council elections. We urge you to go out and vote for them!

- **Cate Hadley & Nicola Iannelli-Popham**

Contact: editor.red.letter@gmail.com