

Ben Gummer

Ipswich's MP on life in Suffolk and Westminster



Park will be for the people, transformed by the people



■ Liz Harsant, left, with Mary and Ben Gummer in Holywells Park

It was Liz Harsant, the grande dame of Ipswich, who took me on one of my very first visits as candidate to be the town's MP, to the annual autumn Apple Day in Holywells Park.

So I have a special attachment to this place. Many people who live in east Ipswich have known Holywells Park for many decades, so my experience is to that extent limited.

But even in the last five years we have seen the previous Tory/Lib Dem administration build the wonderful play area, whose success is announced by the shouts and screams you hear as you enter the park from Cliff Lane on a sunny weekend day.

It was also that administration, under Liz's leadership, that wanted to restore the park in much the way that Christchurch Park has also been given new life.

Now anyone who happens to be up early in Holywells Park, going for a run or making their way to work, will come across Liz with her hound Soldier and a gaggle of fellow dog walkers. Liz understands the park better than most, and understands that it is the way it is because of the passion and efforts of its local users.

So when the administration decided to try to get Lottery money for renovation, they did so with local people in the driving seat – via the amazing Friends of Holywells Park. These were the people who kept things going when in previous years the borough lost interest in Ipswich's beautiful parks; these were the people who used the park; these were the people responsible for many of the small projects that have improved the park in recent years; and these were the people who knew best how the park should be developed.

So it was right that it was the Friends who led the bid for the Heritage Lottery Fund.

On Tuesday, they received their

just reward: £2.8million from the Heritage Lottery Fund to restore the Orangery and parts of the Coach House and to bring a whole suite of other improvements to this remarkable place.

Let us be absolutely clear: Holywells Park would not have received this grant without the Friends of Holywells Park. All possible credit should go, therefore, to Robin Gape, his colleagues at the Friends and his fellow members, and to those who have gone before him in working for this wonderful end.

The result will be this: a park for the people of east Ipswich, transformed by the people of east Ipswich.

On a similar note, there is more good news to report. Over and over again, people put their concerns to me about the state of our town centre and about what should be done to improve it.

The problem is that for too long, politicians have lacked the vision and energy to make sense of what needs to happen to inject new life into the heart of our town.

So, it came as no surprise when, some years ago, shops and businesses in Ipswich got together to think about what they could do themselves to make up for a lack of effort elsewhere.

Ipswich Central was the result.

You may have seen their street rangers walking around and keeping an eye on things, but they have accomplished much more behind the scenes. And now they have heard some excellent news: their efforts have won them the Community Safety and Crime Prevention Award at this year's *East Anglian Daily Times* Business Awards ceremony. I am thrilled that their hard work is getting the recognition that it deserves.

Whether in our parks or our town centre, it just goes to show how much can be achieved when communities work together to make Ipswich a better place.

Wand-erful... good fairies raise £2,000 for appeal



■ Some of the 820 'fairies' who gathered on the Cornhill for the world record-breaking triumph.

Photo: PHIL MORLEY

A world record-breaker for the largest number of fairies in one place has raised more than £2,000 for charity.

A total of 820 people gathered on the Cornhill in Ipswich last weekend with their wings, wands and tutus to raise money for the Woolverstone Wish appeal and beat the previous record of 786 people.

Co-organiser Sharon Wragg, a conveyancing executive at Kerseys Solicitors, said: "We have raised £2,044.70 in total, which is an absolutely fantastic amount. We are all really

grateful to everyone who turned out and helped make it such an amazing day."

The 44-year-old said the charity was close to the heart of everyone at Kerseys after colleague Judy Sykes was diagnosed with Hodgkins lymphoma.

The Woolverstone Wish appeal is raising money to refurbish the chemotherapy outpatient clinics and day unit in the Woolverstone Wing of Ipswich Hospital.

Cheryl Thayer, chairman of the Woolverstone Wish appeal

committee, said: "People could make donations on the day, which was suggested at £1 each, but people have given nearly two-and-a-half-times that which is amazing.

"We are extremely grateful to everyone who came along and made a donation, as well as to Kerseys and all those who helped organise it.

"We have simply outgrown the current oncology unit and we are fundraising to provide a more private department, to ensure every patient is afforded their dignity."

Job search success for UCS graduates

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Increasing numbers of University Campus Suffolk (UCS) graduates are finding work or continuing their studies, new figures have revealed.

Ipswich MP Ben Gummer last night said UCS was entering the "big league" after a Higher Education Statistics Agency report showed 91.6% of students secured work or remained in education six months after graduating last summer.

The statistics mean UCS had a better graduation rate than the national average – at 1.1% higher – and has scaled the national league table, climbing from 79th position out of 120 universities in 2010/11, when its rate was 89.2%, to 61st in 2011/12.

It also means the university, which welcomed its first cohort of students just six years ago, is now ranked above Oxford Brookes University and the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Mr Gummer described the figures as "marvellous news", insisting more students will be encouraged to enrol at the university.

"It is a giant endorsement of the leadership of the university provided by Mike Saks (provost and chief executive of UCS) and his team," he said.

"UCS is now entering the big league of universities and I think this will have a transformational effect on the town in the years ahead.

"More and more students will be attracted which will give a boost to the town's economy. I think it will change the mix of the town, will help keep younger people in the town creating businesses and will bring prosperity.

"But we need to make sure that every public authority – the local councils, the MPs, the local enterprise partnership – does everything they can to make sure the success continues."

UCS is based centrally at Ipswich's Waterfront and has campuses located in Bury St Edmunds, Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth.

A total of 295 UCS students obtained a first-class degree from a full-time course in 2007/08 – which more than doubled to 560 last summer.

UCS deputy provost Richard Lister said: "We are delighted that, as a new institution, our students are doing well in the jobs market.

"UCS works hard to ensure that we produce graduates who are ready for employment, especially in difficult economic times.

"Although we are doing well, we aim to do even better on behalf of all our students to ensure they have the best possible future prospects."

Anti-fascism group to lead town march against hate

A broad coalition of Ipswich people including members of all major trade unions, the Labour party and many other community groups will be marching on Sunday in support of the town's tradition of multiculturalism.

The march is organised by Ipswich Unite Against Fascism (UAF).

David Ellesmere, leader of Ipswich Borough Council, said: "Ipswich has a long and proud history of being a diverse town where people of all communities get on.

"Extremists who seek to create divisions amongst Ipswich people do not speak for us. They are not Ipswich and we will not let them divide us."

Miles Hubbard Unite regional officer said: "By marching we are showing that there is no place for the politics of hatred in Ipswich."

The march will gather at Giles Circus in Queen Street, Ipswich at 11am.

For more information, contact Unite Ipswich on 01473 250321.