

Local Politics

BY JOHN HOLLIDAY

EDUCATION

They're worrying about Reserved Places again. People moving into the area may find there are no places for their children in the local school, which causes problems, so the Education Act allows a number of places to be reserved in most schools for those who move house after the start of the school year. This has a knock-on effect on parents who want a place for their children in a school other than the one in whose catchment area they live. I had a problem with this system in 1981 when my wife and I were not happy at the way the Education Department of the time handled our placing request. We eventually took our daughter out of school altogether and educated her at home. Anyway, to get back to 2008, the proposals are that Bridge of Allan Primary School will have 10 reserved places for 2008/9, up from 7, while Wallace High will have 15, up from none. This is the effect of all the building which has been going on recently in the catchment area. A note on Bridge of Allan Primary School comments that "a small number of developments are scheduled within the catchment area." Could this be a warning of building plans we know nothing about?

FISHING

The price of fishing on the Forth and Teith is going up by 60%, so any fishermen among you will have to catch 60% more fish to keep the cost of your hobby at its present level - unless you are a juvenile. Juveniles pay an extra £2 - £3 for the Forth and Teith respectively, and face a 10% increase for all other charges. My hobby is hill-walking - not taxed yet, although I'm sure they are working on it.

What's in a bottle of wine...

BY DOUGLAS WOOD of WoodWinters

After the busy Christmas period, the focus at this time of year for retailers is preparing for the year ahead - trimming lists and selecting new products, looking at new vintages coming through, talking to wholesale partners and writing new restaurant lists. This year there is an additional task which is managing prices.

There has been inflation from just about every source this year - a short (small) harvest across most wine regions (Europe and Australia in particular) putting pressure on grape prices, increased demand for naturally limited production quasi-brands such as Chablis and Sancerre from emerging markets, increase in glass prices across



PLAY AREAS

An interesting paper on play area provisions was presented to the Executive recently. It appears that most of the funding for new play areas comes from developers' contributions when new estates are built, which leaves the problem of regeneration areas and maintenance of existing areas for the Council to fund. Current Council funding for play provision is £25,000 from the mainline capital grant to cover replacement and major refurbishment of equipment for those areas which cannot access developer contributions. In spite of this, Stirling's play provision is apparently very well thought of nationally. Stirling has had lots of visitors from across the UK, interested in what we are doing. Apparently, Stirling Council Play Services were awarded the prestigious RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) Gold Play Quality Operator Award for the quality of the maintenance of the Council's children's play areas in 2006. Darnley Park, Top of the Town, Stirling, was

Europe (it appears to be a bit of a duopoly), and rising fuel costs. Where is it going to stop? And then to compound it all a strong euro instantly giving a 10% increase in purchase costs in the last three months. So the process of selecting good wines at the key price points of £4, £6, £8 and £10 has become even more important.

We are also thinking about the increased coverage there has been in the press about how alcohol is sold by retailers and whether there is any link between promoting cheap alcohol and binge drinking.

It is often noted that in France and Italy they have a healthier relationship with alcohol - they drink fewer white spirits and RTDs (ready to drinks) and more wine, and they tend to drink a modest amount more regularly, even although there is access to

runner-up, and the only Scottish award winner in the International Architecture and Design for Young Children Award, 2005. Additionally, an authoritative Play Space Design Guide being produced by Play England, designed to be the required and standard guide for all English local authorities, will be published in March 2008 and will strongly feature Stirling Council's approach. Officers are asking for an increase of £75,000 annually for the next four years. I do not know what the Executive's reaction to this is. Let's hope it's positive.

WASTE

A report to the Executive tells us that currently 43% of all waste collected by the Council is either recycled or composted, one of the best rates in Scotland. Disposal of residual waste to landfill currently costs £59 per tonne. This is inclusive of Landfill Tax, currently set at £24 per tonne. However, Landfill tax is to rise at the rate of £8 per tonne annually. This means that by 2010 it will cost around £85 per tonne (based on current contract rates - the contract is due for renewal) to dispose of residual waste in landfill. This tax escalation equates to a cumulative additional cost to the Council of £250k per annum. It sounds as though we'd all better do something about increasing recycling or just not producing so much waste.

PUBLIC TOILETS

It is well over a year now since these were closed, and still nothing is happening. Is this the worst example of Stirling Council incompetence? It gets my vote (and goat).

cheap alcohol (duty on wine is 133 times less in France than the UK). The Chancellor takes the vast proportion of the cost of a bottle, and this goes up by a fairly small amount when you double the price of a bottle.

The biggest difference is in the amount that goes on the actual wine in the bottle. This rises almost sevenfold when you move from £3.50 to £7.

It is increasingly important for us to work closely with our small producers who can make interesting and wonderful wine.

When you next sit down with a glass, do spare a thought for the high quality small producers, who have all the pressures of price applied to them and yet can give us such a unique product each vintage.