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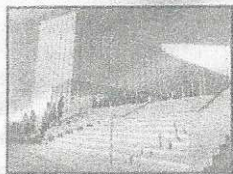
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£1,500
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Ezekiel starts his life behind bars

Jailed ex-leader yet to step down from Cliftonville seat

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DISGRACED former Conservative council leader Sandy Ezekiel spent his first week behind bars this week following his conviction for misconduct.

The 59-year-old Cliftonville East councillor was sentenced to 18 months in prison at Maidstone Crown Court last Friday after the jury found him guilty on four charges involving two properties in Margate Old Town.

Ezekiel is expected to serve at least four and half months at HM Prison Elmley, a category B jail on the Isle of Sheppey, where former Thanet Conservative MP Jonathan Aitken served his sentence for perjury.

Hearing

Ezekiel is likely to be let out on licence this summer, with a hearing on June 7 to decide what to do with the two Margate Old Town properties involved in the case. His friend Philip Emanuel, 64, originally from Margate but now living in France, was given a suspended sentence for aiding and abetting the misconduct.

As we went to press, Mr Ezekiel had yet to resign from Thanet council and had 28 days to appeal the conviction or sentence.

A council spokesman said: "In this period he could conduct any appropriate council business but there are of course two other councillors for the ward (Brian Sullivan and Martin Wise) who would also be in a position to do this. If he resigns or is ultimately disqualified from being a councillor, as a result of being sentenced to more than



NEW HOME: Elmley prison

three months, the election process would begin, but he would have to resign by March 25 to make it possible to arrange a by-election for May 2."

If Ezekiel does not resign by March 25, the authority would have to foot the bill for a separate election, as it would be too late to coincide with the May county council elections.

Ezekiel stepped down from the Tory group to fight the charges but current Conservative leader Bob Bayford believes there needs to be some perspective.

Councillor Bayford said: "It is undeniable that such a fall from grace serves to further tarnish the reputation of Thanet council and, by association, reflects badly on all councillors.

"There can be no defence for misusing a position of power but it must be recognised that there are very few councillor positions that carry any significant influence, the obvious exception being leader.

"Contrary to popular belief, the job of a rank and file councillor is not well paid and most of those stepping up to the plate do so out of a sense of public service and a belief that they can add value to the council."

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Why we have to sell up

Leader's View

with Sandy Ezekiel



THERE'S been a lot of interest in the council's asset disposal programme. Quite right. The taxpayers have a right to know that the assets they own are going to be sold at the best price.

The more open this process becomes, the better. This year, for the first time, we've published a complete list of all the properties the council owns. We've also published a list of the assets scheduled for sale.

Sadly, this has triggered mischief from some, who really ought to know better. That's a story for another day, but before you sign a petition to block a sale it's worth knowing that the process was passed by unanimous vote. That includes the councillors on the opposition benches.

Maybe this is why national support for Labour, according to a poll last week, has sunk to the lowest level on record.

I'm often asked why we need to

sell assets. Well, there are a number of good reasons, and also some regulations.

The good reasons are to fund investment in new, and improved facilities in the area. Thanet's two new swimming pools will largely be funded by sales.

It's also a central government requirement. The council's capital assets are taken into account when assessing the grant it receives from Westminster. If we're not seen to be getting the best out of the property we own, well, more or less, it's going to

end up on your council tax bill and mine. And that's on top of the real terms cuts in funding we've had to budget round in successive years.

This calls for some skilled decisions. We have to balance keeping assets for non-profit organisations, but make sure we identify what isn't being used and can be turned into much-needed funds.

At the end of the day, there's no point in the council sitting on patches of land which have value, or other assets which aren't going to get used. Each proposed sale goes out to all councillors, on all sides of the political divide, for comment. Nor is this new. Properties, including some very iconic ones, were sold under Labour's last administration. There's no point in going back over which and when. People are simply tired of that stuff. The task is to look ahead.

Living tribute to seven villagers

SEVEN trees were planted in Cliffsend last Saturday in memory of past villagers.

Their families and friends gathered for the tree planting and memorial service led by St Mary's vicar Rev Michael Darby.

The trees are the latest additions to the Marjorie Chapman Meadow, which was donated to the people of Cliffsend on a 125-year free lease by farmer Rob Chapman.

Cliffsend Parish Council named the land after Mr Chapman's mother Marjorie, a prominent resident who ran a radio station in the village during the Second World War.

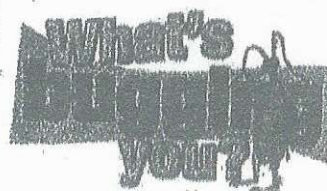
The trees were planted in memory of villagers, including one of Cliffsend's first parish councillors John Kellands and the council's first chairman Jean Dilliway.

Vice-chairman Beryl Harrison paid tribute to those who worked to prepare the ground and said: "It was particularly poignant that Rev Darby talked about each family member that the trees were dedicated to.

"We plan to continue planting flowering shrubs in the meadow and hope to put some seats there, too."

But, while encouraging residents to enjoy the meadow, Cllr Harrison gave a word of caution to dog owners.

She said: "I do hope that people walking their dogs will treat the meadow with respect. I'm disappointed that some



WE'RE told by the climate-change doom-mongers that cooperation will

