

where six local groups meet to play geography, local history and walking. tions by amateur dramatic societies.

Tax rise fears over homes revaluation

LOCAL IsitFair campaigners will not be relaxing their opposition to council tax as a result of Gordon Brown's budget 'sop' of a £200 refund for the over-65s.

The revaluation of properties started last Friday, and IsitFair is warning residents to brace themselves for enormous hikes in council tax.

The Chancellor's one-off refund to pensioners was nothing more than "blatant pre-election bribery", said Christine Melsom, founder of the UK-wide campaign.

While she welcomed any assistance for pensioners, she said they were not the only ones unable to meet soaring council tax bills.

"There was no help with council tax for the many hard-working families who have struggled for years to keep up with the relentless inflation-

busting hikes in council tax," she said.

As the build-up to the elections begins, Mrs Melsom believes both the Labour and Conservative parties are "out of touch with public opinion.

"The solution is not about making the best offer to pensioners, whether it's £200 from Labour or £500 from the Conservatives.

"What we want is a fair system for everyone," she said.

The Headley pensioner was adamant: "Council tax is a regressive tax whatever age you are - the less income you have, the higher the percentage of your income you have to pay in council tax."

IsitFair campaigners believe the tax is fundamentally unfair because it is based on property values.

"We want a fair system that takes account of people's ability to pay, and you will not

achieve that by tinkering with the present system based on property values."

The property revaluation exercise in Wales has raised fears for the impact rebanding will have on households in England and Scotland when it comes into effect in April 2007, she said.

"Now that most Welsh councils have announced their increases, we know that one in every three households across Wales will face massive increases in council tax bills.

"We were led to believe the 'ups' would be balanced by the 'downs' in the Wales rebanding exercise.

"Now the cat is well and truly out of the bag.

"For every four houses that have been moved up in the property bands, only one has moved down.

"Every household that has been moved up just one band

faces an increase of between 12 and 33 per cent, based on council announcements to date.

"Even worse, many houses in property hotspots have been moved up two or three bands.

"For these people, the increases are so high (some are more than 70 per cent) that the Welsh Assembly has instructed councils to stagger them over two or three years.

"How can we be expected to believe politicians who are telling us that fears of a similar effect from revaluation in England and Scotland are unfounded?"

The IsitFair solution is to scrap the current council tax system and replace it with an income-related tax that would spread the burden more fairly.

"In addition to making the tax fairer, it would completely eliminate any need for property revaluation, means testing or discounts," said Mrs Melsom.

Health and nutrition talk at national show

A HASLEMERE businesswoman will speak on the importance of health and nutrition at a national health and wellbeing show.

Christina Barton of Grayswood Road runs the distribution company Chrisbar health and nutrition which retails supplements and vitamins, mainly imported from the United States.

Mrs Barton will be a spokesperson for Allergy magazine at the Vitality show in London this week. She will also be offering a consultation service.

She has enjoyed much success since starting the business in 2000 having been featured in a number of magazines including Woman and Home, Prima, Health and Fitness and Time



Out. Mrs Barton is also actively campaigning against the proposed EU ban on vitamins and supplements.

Mrs Barton is also scheduled to speak on BBC London radio next month.

More countryside walks

IN the last year several new walks have been opened to the public in the South East, complementing more than 350 existing routes.

The move is in agreements between farmers and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

The 18 walks in Surrey range from the heathland of Lightwater Country Park which is home to roe deer and the newly-introduced sand lizard to the site of a 13th century moated complex near Horsham.

The site is unusual in that it is at the top of a hill rather than the bottom, where these buildings were usually situated.

Among the new walks and rides open this year is one on Home Farm near Dorking

which is part of the National Trust's Harewood Estates.

The farm was formerly part of the medieval deer park of South Bletchingley Manor.

The walks are detailed in the latest edition of a free guide to walks and rides published by Defra.

Also available online, the conservation walks and rides register lists more than 2,000 routes in the countryside open to the public, broken down by county.

The access is made possible under Defra's environmentally sensitive areas and countryside stewardship schemes (ESA/CSS).

These were closed to new applicants last year but are being replaced by the new environmental stewardship scheme, which will maintain the access elements.



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