

END OF THE WEEK



with editor IAN MURRAY

If you value your local paper ... help to save it

IT HAS been a fairly typical week for the Daily Echo.

The paper – in print and online – has reported on a variety of items.

We told of the mum who was tracked down by the man who was given her son's heart ten years ago.

We probed further into the sex abuse in football scandal.

The paper revealed how rail travellers are missing out on cheaper fares over split-ticketing.

We raised questions over why it took 90-minutes for an ambulance to reach a dying heart-attack patient.

We toured the new Southampton city centre arts complex and £85m leisure development for readers to see what is taking shape.

There were plenty of photographs of charity Santa runs, and of course we ran the first of our popular Nativity school photograph supplements.

In sport we featured hopes and woes of local teams – including The Saints – and we were there to cover the presentation of awards to care association workers and volunteers.

And we launched our new Education Awards to support hard-working teachers and other staff who are ensuring students get the best start in life.

We campaigned, we supported, we delved, we probed, we reflected.

In short, just another week in the life of a local newspaper.

And whether you read us every day in paper or on line, or come to us just occasionally, or seek us out just when you need us, I would say that your local paper fulfils its important role in helping to provide the glue that knits together our communities.

Put simply, Section 40 means that if anyone takes a paper to court, even if they lose then the paper will have to pay all of their costs

You would, I contend, miss us if we were gone.

And that is a very real risk, thanks to what is called Section 40.

It sounds very bland, but it is in fact the most dangerous threat to the independence, indeed the very existence of local newspapers in this country for 300 years.

I have written about Section 40 before. It is a clause that could become law if enacted by the government as an addition to the Crime and Courts Act 2013.

Put simply, Section 40 means that if anyone takes a paper to court for libel, breach of confidence, misuse of private information, harassment, malicious falsehood, or slander, even if they lose, then the paper will have to pay all of their costs as well as their own.

It means that anyone who bears a grudge against this paper or any other can simply keep taking them to court over spurious matters, even in the knowledge they cannot win, and bleed us dry.

Either the paper will have to restrict its reporting to cheque presentations and Nativity photographs – and there are a few politicians who might applaud that – or we would sink under an



Parliament could enact legislation which may restrict press freedom

avalanche of legal fees.

Of course, it is dreadfully, patently unfair and indeed unjust. So why in a free democracy are the press facing such threats?

The answer lies in the fall out from the Leveson Enquiry and the need to create an independent press regulator.

The press say we have created such a body in the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) which the bulk of newspapers have signed up to. The government has created a Royal Charter and recognised a body called IMPRESS, funded and supported by one man: millionaire Max Mosley.

Section 40 is a bid to force papers to join IMPRESS, something we are unlikely ever to do. To come under the Royal Charter means giving power over what

can and cannot be published in the press to politicians at Westminster. Too many people have fought and died over 300-years to prevent that from ever happening for this generation – including myself – to give way to bullyboy tactics now.

But all is not lost. The government is keen to ensure it does not act rashly and the Secretary of Culture, Media and Sport Karen Bradley, and the Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, have announced a public consultation on what should happen next.

Their finger is poised over the button of enacting Section 40, but we can still persuade them that free speech is more important than revenge – with you help.

Which is why I am asking everyone who values their local paper, even if we at times you do not always agree with what we say or do, to take the time to visit the consultation website and register your thoughts.

Naturally I hope you will support this paper and the continued freedom of the press in this country, that you will register your belief in the value of the local press in our communities.

I thank you in advance for that support.

I can, however, assure you of one thing. No matter what the outcome of the consultation, no matter what the decision by the government over Section 40, I and this paper will not be abdicating our duties in attempting to hold those in positions of authority to account.



Make your voice heard
● Go to 'Consultation on the Leveson Inquiry and its implementation': <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-the-leveson-inquiry-and-its-implementation>



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Lots to be proud of in our fair city



I WAS lucky enough to be among a select few invited media guests to take a hard-hat tour of the emerging new Studio 144 in Southampton this week.

Where? Yes, I agree, the name doesn't really grab you. It's the street address of the former Tyrrell and Green department store that was demolished to make way for the exciting arts complex on the site.

I say exciting with some passion. It will truly be a state of the art arts centre that should stamp the city's credentials as a world-class creative cultural hub.

Studio 144 will actually be the home to three institutions: The Nuffield Theatre, The Hansard Gallery and City Eye.

The Hansard Gallery, currently housed on the Southampton University campus, will open first. The impressive space will transform the Gallery's ability to present its already world-renowned exhibitions. Huge floor to sky windows will enable passers-by to be enticed inside where the exhibitions will be free to enjoy.

City Eye will be marking its 30th anniversary by moving to the site. And when the NST, Nuffield Southampton Theatre, takes possession of its pretty tremendous theatre and rehearsal spaces then the scene will be set for a stunning mix of arts.

My question to Southampton City Councillor Satvir Kaur then as we toured the complex as to how much the development would eventually cost the NHS might have seemed out of place.

There was a moment's silence and then those around realised I was jesting. Which I was, but only in part.

For with a price tag of build of £28.5m – a mixture of council cash, government grants and arts funds – the public would expect to see a return on their investment. And it would need to be one that they saw as value for money.

The upside of bringing culture on this level into the heart of the city is that it will undoubtedly engage many who do not encounter such experiences on a regular basis if at all.

The downside is that they will need to feel the beauty and the benefits if they are not to point to the lack of hospital equipment and shake their heads.

Personally, I am confident. The enthusiasm of those involved is contagious. This is a pivotal moment in the city region's cultural identity, indeed its overall feeling of worth.

And what fun we will have.

Something old and something new...

AHEAD of the crowds that will undoubtedly descend on the new £85m watermark development at west Quay in Southampton this weekend, I took a stroll on the part-opened leisure complex this week.

The development opens with a bang today with a parade and heaps of fun aimed at introducing those restaurants that have already opened to their customers.

The remainder of the development opens early in the new year.

But from what I could see from the elevated outside walkway, the whole project looks mighty fine.

I have to admit, however, that although the modern buildings look attractive and the developers have done a grand job in blending the complex into the area, it was a much older section that took my breath away.



When did they put those medieval walls there? OK, I know they have actually been there since the 1200s, but from the new vantage point it is finally possible to see them in all of their glory.

We have always been told that Southampton has more medieval walls than York.

Which is a hollow boast if you cannot see them. Now we can.

So when you trot along to the place in the coming weeks, take time to stand and stare at the wonderful architecture of expert developers who toiled away 800-years ago. Time they were recognised too.