FABIAN SOCIETY

HAVERING FABIAN

Volume 2 Edition 43 June 2020

Havering Fabian Society Covering...Wilf Mills Obituary Zoom meetings with Judith Garfield, Margaret Mullane **Stephen Timms** MP and Darren Rodwell. Plus. articles from Judith. Tele Lawal and on the future for the GLA, plus details of potential future meetings

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Introduction

Welcome to the new edition of the Havering Fabian Newsletter. These are unusual times with the Country on lockdown, and we have suspended meetings until some unknown point in the future, the newsletter will continue to provide updates and an opportunity for those of you confined to home to write those articles you always promised us...

This edition contains a review of recent Zoom meetings with Judith Garfield, Margaret Mullane, Stephen Timms MP and Darren Rodwell. There are articles from Judith, Tele Lawal on the Havering Racism campaign and an article on the future of the GLA.

We now have 1,261 followers on twitter. Keep up to date at our twitter site @haveringfabians for the latest news.

We have a blog now as well as our website

https://haveringfabians.org/posts/

You will need to follow us to get updates.

We are affiliated to the four local Labour Parties, and will do all we can to support their campaigns. Havering and Dagenham Young Labour are on twitter @HavAndDagYL and hope they reflect a growing interest in Labour politics in Havering.

As opinions are the lifeblood of politics, we welcome a reply to any of the articles. The Fabian Society exists to promote political debate, both within and outside the Labour Party. Progressive politics extends beyond the Labour Party and contributions from the Labour Movement as a whole are welcome.

Attendances at recent meetings have remained good and the quality of speakers remains exceptional. We are glad to see a number of new people attending the meetings, and have an ever increasing number of followers on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.



Our website address is http://haveringfabians.org As you are no doubt aware GDPR means we need to keep our mailing list up to date. If you are not on our mailing list (we use MAILCHIMP – please check your spam folders!) contact us via the website and we will add you in.

Wilf Mills Obituary

Collier Row based Wilf was a proud ex-serviceman who had served his country in a number of locations, including a spell of duty as part of the high profile Berlin Airlift. Along with fellow councillor Denis O'Flynn he was one of those involved in establishing Harold Hill War Memorial at Hilldene Avenue shopping centre. Both Wilf and Denis were regular speakers at an annual remembrance Sunday open-air service, which as the years rolled on, saw congregation numbers rise considerably. Wilf often attended a second such service on the same day as those of the Jewish faith held a Remembrance Service in the afternoon.



Figure 1 Wilf Mills RIP

Wilf was a prominent in Havering Council politics from early in the 1970s and was something of a proverbial "rolling stone" as at various times he represented the good citizens of Mawney, Gooshays, Heaton and the long since defunct Hilldene Ward.

When at Heaton Ward a disgraceful stitch up took place as Wilf, along with Dennis and Flynn were deselected following a closed doors meeting in a proverbial smoke-filled room. To this day there were people present who nobody seen before - or for that matter ever seen since, everybody suspected of wielding the dagger proclaimed "not me". Wilf and Denis were "out" as the Romford Recorder reported that Labour had ditched their two best drawing cards. The candidates drafted in to place the duo, who had both had large followings on Harold Hill failed to measure up. It was no secret that Wilf fancied his chances in Heaton Ward as an independent Resident but he failed to pursue that course of action, Denis won nomination as one of the Labour candidates in Rainham and Wennington and worked hard in that ward but to no avail.

So committed to Labour's profile on Harold Hill were the deselected duo, that despite being outside the Council Chamber they gave their time to hold advice surgeries in St George's Church every Saturday morning, so becoming "the face of local Labour", Despite goodwill generated by such worthy actions, Denis and Wilf received letters from Party officers criticising their efforts, ordering them to cease and threatening disciplinary action if continued. Continue it did and they brought much acclaim for Harold Hill Labour Party.

Wilf had held a number of positions at our Town Hall. He was a long serving Chair of Development and Transportation as it was then called - with Councillor Del Smith as his Deputy, Wilf was Deputy Council leader under former MP Arthur Latham and occupied the Leader's office when Arthur dramatically fell from power. Wilf was also a loyal Deputy Leader to Ray Harris in the times when Labour enjoyed better fortunes in Havering.

Wilf, again with Denis O'Flynn formed a most informative "double act" on local radio station LINK FM where they had a weekly hour-long spot discussing local issues and answering questions. This feature ran for years and only ended when LINK FM went bankrupt.

Wilf enjoyed Havering Fabian Society meetings and rarely missed one. He liked the front row as his hearing often wasn't at its best and he always preferred to make telling contributions rather than ask the question after the Chairman opened up our meetings to the floor.

Sadly, the last years of Wilf's life were not good ones healthwise and he rarely went out and spent most of his life living downstairs. We have said farewell to one who was so often at the fore of Labour party activities within Havering.

Dave Ainsworth. Havering Fabian Press officer

Zoom – keeping going during the lockdown

With meetings no longer possible, we have moved discussion online, and have made use of Zoom to host a series of on line discussions. Issues with technology have been limited and we have had an interesting range of speakers. We welcomed some interesting visitors from across Europe – Zoom is something we will use in future and is ideal if you cannot get to our meetings.

What NHS do we want post lockdown?

The first of these was a small test event to test the technology and the discussion centred on the impact of the lockdown on the NHS. At this point the number of cases was increasing daily and lockdown was at an early stage, with the population limited to half an hour a day exercise and shopping trips. The value of the NHS was obvious, as was the chaotic nature of care home provision. In the longer term closer co-ordination of the NHS and social care seems inevitable.

The issue starts with funding, and the need for a sustainable basis of future financing, given an ageing population with increasing needs. This is putting a strain on social care. Society needs to determine what level of care it wants to afford and be prepared to pay for it.

The previous proposal for a £70k payment fell flat with no insurance scheme coming forward. Inheritance tax is one potential solution, probably something most Labour members could live with but not society in general. Mental Health issues are now better understood but resources are lacking, and add to the financial pressure.

Part of the answer may be to move to a prevention based approach, often talked about but never really introduced.

There are some key policy issues – being free at the point of use is almost universally accepted, but requires funding. The Conservatives used privatisation and competitive tendering to drive down costs in catering and cleansing; PFI schemes had been used to address property management and repair backlogs; there have not been serious attempts to move on multinational pharmaceutical companies and overpriced drugs; are generic drugs a potential solution or at the margins?

The former Chief Executive of the local NHS trust Matthew Goodwin had made the point on his visit that missed appointments were a significant issue and wasted resources – do patients value something if its free and is this an area where compromise is needed?

Hospital Parking is a major annoyance – free parking sounds attractive but the proximity of Queens to Romford station would risk commuter parking. The general desire to reduce car use and encourage public transport conflicts with subsidised parking for staff.

Ending student loans for nurses was short-sighted, and will not end shortages.

While the NHS is dependent on overseas doctors and nurses, what harm is being done to the health provision in other countries as a result?

The link with care is critical with an ageing population; the preventative side of health care is needed, with a need to address obesity, diabetes, fitness generally and encourage good patterns of health from a young age, so a need for an education process.

Ever improving health care standards mean people need to look after themselves and play a part – there is a need to lower avoidable demand or address the financial consequences via a significant increase in taxation.

An interesting discussion, and content with the technology we moved onto guest speakers.

Judith Garfield and welcome visitors!

The first was Judith Garfield, the Havering and Redbridge Labour candidate for the Greater London Assembly – an article on some of the issues discussed is below. Moving to an on line platform allowed long distance attendance from former Havering Councillor Sean Willis, calling in from Grimsby, and Mark Whiley from Romford Labour Party member joining us from Berlin.



Figure 2Judith with Sadiq Khan

Judith introduced herself in a more informal way than was possible during the election. She works in the voluntary sector, and is currently a Redbridge Councillor, having previously been Deputy Leader in Newham.

We discussed a range of Havering issues, including the response to Covid (see articles by Keith Darvill and Tele Lawal on our blog). In particular discussion touched on the proposed housing developments in the borough

and the need for improved transport links – most major transport links run east- west (Fenchurch and Liverpool Street Lines, the District Line, A12, A127, A13) with nothing significant north south. Addressing these issues was a strategic matter, making the role of the GLA crucial. The cancelling of the DLR extension to Dagenham Dock was an opportunity missed, and the coming Beam Park station a welcome benefit.

Please behave...



Figure 3Margaret and friends ask you to behave...

At the next session the speaker was Barking and Dagenham Councillor Margaret Mullane. Margaret is Cabinet lead for Community Safety and Enforcement, a critical role during the lockdown. She set out how Barking and Dagenham Council had been dealing with the lockdown, and how enforcement officers had been encouraging compliance rather than being heavy handed. Crime levels had fallen during the early stages, but vigilance was needed – a by-product had been known criminals that were at home and could be reminded of their wider community obligations by a timely visit.

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An IT system to make payments in 5 weeks when since the 1940's a biro based system paid within a week...

Our fourth session was a welcome return for East Ham MP Stephen Timms. Stephen is currently Chair of the House of Commons select committee on Work and Pensions. We were joined on line by the chair of Southampton Fabians, further expanding our coverage,



Figure 4Stephen Timms MP

He had recently been able to question the Prime Minister at the Parliamentary Liaison Committee on a constituent who had no recourse to public funds (NRPF). Furloughing had meant they had lost their income and had no income, and were surviving on the goodwill of neighbours. The Prime Minister had no understanding of NRPF and believed they would have received support — as Stephen pointed out, this was a surprise as around one million people (of which around 100,000 are children)¹ have NRPF status, (most are overseas students) and related issues are common for MPs post bags and surgeries. This showed there was a crucial issue here that was misunderstood — some form of support was essential and could be

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¹ Estimate from the Children's Society

provided without changing the NRPF status. Lobbying would continue. The PM had promised to look into the matter.

Stephen had asked a question on the number of the relevant authority, but had been informed that the data was not available to suitably assured data standards – this was unacceptable, and he had made a formal complaint to the Office of Public Statistics; key public policy issues involving people sliding toward destitution were at stake, and not to be able to provide the data

The committee is looking at three areas;

- 1. The future of work, including automation and the impact on the future of retail employment, which would include checkout jobs and driving opportunities,
- 2. Disability assessment this was not being well handled, as evidenced by appeals generally being successful.
- 3. Five weeks' delay in payment of Universal Credit

The latter point has been an interest for Stephen for some time. In 2008 he had been Employment Minister and from 2010-2015 had shadowed Ian Duncan Smith as the current Universal Credit regime was phased in to replace Job Seekers Allowance and the other range of benefits. While there are advantages to simplification, it has not been possible to introduce the system fully in 7 years as IDS had promised in 2010. The original green paper had not envisaged a need for an IT system; as of today there is still a backlog of legacy benefits and an estimated five years before the system is functioning as intended. The wasted expenditure on computerisation has been significant and not driven a better outcome.

Despite this Universal Credit had coped well with the recent surge in applications and significant sums had been paid out – DWP staff had done an amazing job, mostly working from home on the phone to deal with a surge of applications (new benefit claimants go straight to universal credit).

The five-week delay is a policy choice – as Stephen pointed out the previous system, which since the 1940's relying on biros and hand written forms could produce payment in a week; a heavily computerised system now took five weeks.

This is an improvement on six weeks - a potential suicide as a result of delays led to David Gauke replacing IDS.

A more logical approach saw six weeks reduced to five and crucially the existence of advances made more widely known -these were loans in all but name, and after which half of claimants now take an advance; this forces them into debt with no way out. Scrapping the five-week rule would avoid this, although Ministers show no sign of moving.

We then had an interesting debate – Sean Willis was able to provide a practical example of how the assessment system was flawed - his benefit office is a quarter of a mile from the nearest car park and anyone able to walk to the office is deemed to be fit for work...

Covid, ELWA homes and jobs...

The fifth session was with Darren Rodwell Leader of Barking and Dagenham Council. He began by setting out the borough's response to Covid – daily updates had so far been seen by 8 million viewers and had been well received. As well as Councillors use had been made of local celebrities – such as Mark Noble and Russell Brand – to keep up the interest and engagement,



Figure 5Darren Rodwell

The borough has a young population - a third are under 16, which explained in part why the cases in the Borough (506) were less than Havering (724) and Redbridge (770). The borough had been quick to engage with the crisis with tier 1 risk cases contacted within 10 days.

The local community did the bulk of the work -85 different groups had helped and 1,200 volunteers had helped support 27/28 thousand families. Universal Credit numbers were up by 800% since March and 40% of the borough workforce was furloughed. While government had initially identified 1500 cases for shielding, this had risen to 10,000, giving rise to lots of issues.

The Cummings incident had damaged lockdown with more people on the streets subsequently. Testing had been haphazard and shambolic, a strain on all involved

Financially the Borough had spent £44 million (with more to come) dealing with the crisis – PPE had been provided to eight private care homes where most of the borough's deaths had occurred – these were mostly among the white community, counter to the trend elsewhere in the Country.

The Borough has 60,000 children of school age of which 5,000 have been attending.

So a lot of issues to deal with and Darren was proud of the Council staff – he was spending lots of time on line at meetings and missed being able to visit staff – he expects a lot of them and wants to be seen to be visible and supportive.

There were increasing links with Havering, recent issues being the reopening of ELWA civic amenity sites where co-ordination was needed.

Darren explained the Council's housing strategy - which involves new homes across the borough including 6,000 new homes in central Barking and there's another 3,500 now under construction at the old Ford site in the south of the Borough and a desire to make the borough a place that did not need commuting by expanding employment opportunities.

The new development on the site of a now-demolished May & Baker Works near Dagenham East Station is the key to this. So far developments include a large pub/carvery a Travelodge, and a KFC. The game changer will be the Film Studio for which the Planning Application will be considered in the next three weeks.

There is a College of Design & Engineering This high-tech office complex was used as the location for Lisa Nandy MP to open her Labour leadership campaign - and, shortly, the Trade Union (Unite) will move its local base to this site, from New Road (Dagenham).

Darren hoped the high-speed line can have an additional stop at Barking as this would bring substantial benefits. Darren's passion for the borough shines through, and as we ended the meeting he was off to walk his dogs. This ended the fifth Zoom meeting and keep an eye on our mailing list or website for future events.

I am Councillor Tele and I am tired and black.



Figure 6Tele Lawal in the Members Corridor at Romford Town Hall

The title 'Councillor' does not protect you from the overt and covert discrimination at Havering Council. When I have walked into the Town Hall, and without speaking a word, Council staff have immediately directed me to the public gallery to watch the proceedings, instead of the Council Chamber where my colleagues, politicians, like me, are sitting. At meetings, I am warned that I am asking too many questions, my recommendations are not noted, and my remarks are cut short. Meanwhile, others can speak at length and with no restrictions. What they have in common is the colour of their skin. More often, I raise my black hand, which is very visible, yet the Chair looks around the room and says, "let us move on."

It is a year since I was physically assaulted at the Town Hall by a white Councillor and Havering Council has done nothing. If it was a black man who aggressively grabbed a white woman in the Town Hall, the Council would have reacted very differently. I have written a report on diversity and race for Havering Council and put forward recommendations. Emails have been sent, and meetings had about these issues. I and many have concluded that Havering Council is institutionally racist. George Floyd's death and outcry for justice has shown me that several voices are powerful and it will take a collective to push the race agenda and that black lives matter.

Therefore, I am making a Call-to-Action for you to email Andrew Black-Herbert, Chief Executive: andrew.blake-herbert@havering.gov.uk and Councillor Damian White, damian.white@havering.gov.uk the following demands:

- 1. Switch on the Town Hall lights to purple in memory of George Floyd and in support against the fight of racism on Friday, 12 June 2020. This is being done across the country by other Councils. Havering Council has also done this before, and therefore, it is not a policy issue, but merely a decision to show solidarity or not.
- 2. Launch an inquiry into the entrenched racial inequality at Havering Council which affects their workforce and Councillors. This should be an independent Investigation and not someone on Havering Council's retainer as this will lead to a whitewashed report. Recommendations must be adopted within 5-10 years.
- 3. Havering Council should set up a task group including the BME forum and their BAME employee forum to provide solutions to tackle racial inequality in our community.
- 4. Havering Council should create an equality fund by the next Budget Council meeting. Members in the community can apply and use the funds for projects which will bring about better community cohesion and inclusion.
- 5. Havering Council does not know the ethnicity or race of over 40% of its workforce. How can they aim to want to achieve the 'Excellent' rating in the Equality Framework for Local Government when they do not capture or monitor such data about their employees? That is basic for any organisation and this failure shows clearly how much their employees' lives matter. Havering Council must close the data gap by April 2021.
- 6. Havering Council should diversify its Senior Leadership Team and Senior Managers within 5-10 years. At the Senior Leadership level, there is not a single black or Asian director in 2020.

In Havering, brothers George, Keane, Ryan, Charlton, and Robson Handley ran a combined marathon in support of Black Lives Matter on Sunday, 14 June. The Romford Recorder has published an article here; https://bit.ly/2zUT4jW. You can donate here; https://bit.ly/309nrxs.

Please see here other ways you can support George Floyd family and the Black Lives Matters Movement in the UK; https://linktr.ee/grmdaily

Londoners punished for doing the right thing. by Cllr Judith Garfield MBE Havering and Redbridge Labour candidate for the London Assembly

Transport for London's funding package from the government, agreed last week, will allow Londoners to travel safely for the next four-and-a-half months. But for our communities, it will cause added hardship – particularly for our key workers; care workers and those who are already struggling with day-to-day household bills.



Figure 7Judith Garfield and friends - coming to a door near you when the lockdown ends

The Government has insisted TfL must increase its fares above inflation next year, bringing an end to the four-year fares freeze introduced by the Mayor of London. They have also insisted that the scope and hours of the congestion charge be widened, a suspension of free travel for pensioners during peak hours, and that free bus passes for children be halted entirely. After pressure from the Sadiq Khan, the Government has now agreed to allow disabled Freedom Pass holders to continue travelling for free at all times.

When speaking with residents in Havering and Redbridge earlier this year, before lockdown, they want a safe environment without pollution for which reliable, fairly priced and comfortable public transport is central. They should not be exploited by the government through its abuse of our public

transport. They did not want to see politics put before people and this is precisely what this government has done.

We stayed indoors because it was the right thing to do; we worked from home, maintained social distancing, missed family birthdays, and even paid our respects via videoconference. We are continuing to stay home in a heroic effort to get us past the coronavirus peak and prevent a second wave of the infection, which some of our nearest and dearest wouldn't survive.

As the hub of COVID-19, we Londoners worked together to reduce the infection rate. The government tells us that we are 'in this together,' so why are they punishing us with a bad deal for our public transport? In Havering and Redbridge, this spells further hardship for frontline workers who have already been told not to expect a pay rise any time soon.

The Mayor has been honest with us all – this is a bad deal for London. But it was the only deal the Government were willing to put on the table, and one he had to accept to keep the tubes and buses running.

In 2015, austerity meant TfL lost a yearly £700 million grant from central government. Today, we are the world's only major capital city with an unsubsidised transport network. All our transportation costs are covered by fares and some devolved business rates, unlike the government subsidised transportation networks in Paris, Seoul, or New York City.

COVID-19 has left a £4 billion hole in Transport for London's budget this year. Travel on the tube and buses plummeted 95% in the first week of lockdown, representing an equal drop in fare revenue which the government has told TfL to fund its operations with. Whitehall has announced other transport networks in Britain will receive similar funding packages, because they have also suffered the same plunge in operating revenue. Except, they have assured private operators their bailouts will be devoid of the penalties inflicted on TfL. So, why is this government punishing Londoners?

Many of us in Havering and Redbridge rely on public transport to meet our everyday needs and get to work. Our NHS heroes, supermarket staff, refuse collectors, care workers, and cleaners all depend on TfL. Outer London

boroughs like Havering and Redbridge are home to the lifeblood of this city and if we want to get through coronavirus 'together,' the government needs to stop punishing low-paid Londoners and the residents in Havering and Redbridge.

Normal politics will be resumed at some point...

Here's an argument you have heard before...

Localism and devolution is fine up to the point where decisions are taken the government does not like. They really should leave it to the voters to sort but this frequently does not happen.

The GLC was formed in 1965 and became a victim of Thatcher, passing into history in 1986. The 21st year being necessary to put in place arrangements for the hand over to Boroughs. Cue an exponential growth in the number of traffic lights. An interesting fact – the GLC was never won by the Party of Government.



Figure 8You may need to dust this down...

The GLA came into life in 2000, a product of Tony Blair's first term. Devolution to a Mayor must have seemed such a good idea to the Labour leadership - until the likely winner emerged – cue some iffy politics but sanity prevailed and Ken Livingstone returned to occasional spats with the Government but broadly nothing fundamentally oppositional. Some even

stranger politics saw Livingstone adopted as the Labour candidate and a winner again in 2004.

Boris was elected in 2008, and the looming Olympics meant the Government and City Hall tolerate each other.

The election of the collation means both are under control of Tories, so no lasting rows. Cue 2016 and Sadiq Khan is elected with a vast majority – a very different agenda to the Government and the rows resume.

Just before lockdown, the MHCLG² rejected the Mayor's London plan for lacking ambition on Housing – echoing the views of Andrew Boff Tory leader on the GLA. The threat was to take responsibility off the Mayor (although its attitude was also a bit about boosting the Tory campaign) – this was sat on for ages, delayed by the election and timed to be a political intervention

.

The TFL settlement had to be harsh but included specific digs at the Mayor around competence and policy choices. As in the 80s, the electorate should decide this not Ministers – devolution means letting go!

Given that the Tories are currently not at the races in London, are they lining up to weaken the GLA – are we about to start the next London Local government re-organisation? If (almost certainly when) Sadiq wins again, further battles ahead. So in 2026/28 are we heading for abolition?

GLC abolition arguably started with loss of housing, was accelerated by loss of London Transport. The Telegraph ran a recent article about abolition - So are the parallels getting stronger?

Future Meetings -when we resume.

When we are able to resume meetings Wes Streeting has agreed to speak to get us off to a flying start. Many of you would have watched Ilford North MP Wes Streeting launch his Fabian pamphlet via webinar. He has agreed to come and talk later in the year.

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² Ministry of Housing Community and Local Government

Newly elected MP for Ilford South Sam Tarry has also agreed to come to a future meeting, and we look forward to being able to welcome Judith Garfield the Labour candidate for the May 2021 Havering and Redbridge seat on the GLA. Barking and Dagenham Cabinet member Samia Ashraf has also agreed to speak. We will arrange dates and venues once the current crisis ends.

Politics in Havering

Many of you will already be aware of the excellent Politics in Havering Blog, which we repost via our twitter feed. This gives a regular update on politics within the borough – a link is below, please follow them (and our blog!) for regular updates!

https://havering.blog/

We value your input!

The Society invites speakers on a range of subjects; if you would like us to invite speakers on a particular subject let us know and we will try to oblige. The Society has a policy of rotating meetings around the Borough; if you need or can offer a lift or if you know of any suitable venues we could use, contact David Marshall.

Local Fabian Society Contacts

Chair Councillor Keith Secretary David Marshall David Marshall

Darvill

Membership Secretary

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01708 441189

Vice Chair Sam Gould Treasurer Dave Baldock

Transaror Barro Balados

Committee Members

Cecile Duerinckx Graham Lane Sanchia Alasia

Mike Flynn Ed Glasson Ian Rusha John Reid



Chair Keith Darvill reports ...

Future Editions

Contributions to the newsletter are always welcome. The Fabian Society exists to promote progressive ideas from within and outside of the Labour movement. As such we are happy to publish articles in keeping with this broad ethos, but reserve the right not to include all or part of any material which falls outside of this parameter. Our next edition will be in September 2020 and will hopefully cover a return to something like normality, and we can top looking at screens all day.

Havering Fabian Society is affiliated to

- National Fabian Society
- Dagenham and Rainham Labour Party
- Romford Labour Party
- Upminster and Hornchurch Labour Party
- Barking Labour Party
- Havering and Dagenham Young Labour

Havering Fabian Membership

To join Havering Fabian Society, please complete the following and send to David Marshall. You can also join the Society nationally; David has more details. You do not have to be a member of the Labour Party to join Havering Fabians, but you will need to be a Labour Party member to take part in Labour Party selections and elections.



Havering Fabian Society

Founded in 1974, the Society promotes progressive political thought in Havering and beyond. Membership of the Society is not necessary to attend meetings, and neither is membership of the Labour Party.

However, to participate in nominations to the Local Labour Parties or in
selection conferences, membership of both is required. The Society meets
regularly throughout the year, apart from the summer and during election
campaigns. Local Membership is currently £10 waged, £5 unwaged.
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I\ we wish to join Havering Fabians
Name
Address
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nastanda
postcode
E-mail
Phone number
Waged (£10) unwaged £5