

# MIKE OLLEY



## Okay, let's get nosey about Richard Parker

With the West Midlands mayoral election less than five months away, our columnist **MIKE OLLEY** watches Labour candidate Richard Parker's campaign video

**W**HO exactly is Richard Parker? Well, he's a former top dog at renowned accounting firm PwC who, after taking early retirement, got involved in politics with the Labour Party.

Deploying his business brain and skills, he has run the Labour Finance and Industry Group – a much-respected business section within the Labour Party – for some time now.

He is also the man who has put his name in the ring to be Labour's candidate for West Midlands mayor in May 2024.

Richard launched his campaign video last week on X. In the 1970s, a campaign launch would sometimes involve a scantily-clad young lady bursting out of a large cake. But

Richard was comprehensively at the other end of that launch spectrum.

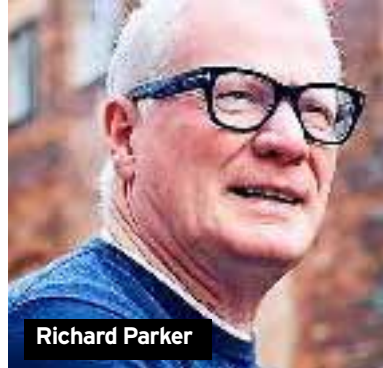
He has produced what I can only describe as a low-key, understated, supremely honest video. No dramatic music, flashing lights or diamond smiles. Just simplistic, decent and authentic content.

It depicts him as a candidate driving and walking around the West Midlands making pleasant and largely imaginative political commentary about our region.

He mentions he has only ever worked in – and has a life commitment to – the West Midlands.

Engagingly, he hasn't lost much of his youthfully gained Bristolian accent, and very reassuring it is too.

Almost in a matter-of-fact manner, he mentions bringing into pub-



Richard Parker

lic ownership the buses. Wow! That is a biggie, and I suspect a massively popular move. Given Birmingham City Council has recently bought a range of the latest hydrogen-powered double-deckers to give to bus companies, you could ask why not?

Candidate Richard also mentions in passing that he isn't really a politician, but a businessman. A really clever soundbite? Judge for yourself. Take a look at his @RichParkerLab X page.

We are going to hear a lot about him over the coming months.

■ **LOVE** him or... well, I'm not sure anyone could actually loathe Cllr Paul Tilsley CBE (Lib Dem, Sheldon). Yet you can't ignore him, leastways you'd be foolish to do so.

Paul has been on the city council since the 1960s and is wise beyond his years. Hence my ears pricked up at last week's full council when he raised the matter of the actual debt level of 'bankrupt' Birmingham.

He made a typically strident speech, punctuated with readily graspable commonsense points, essentially driving his viewpoint that the city council's debt isn't £760 million, but only £300 million.

But how could Paul be so right and all those clever professionals employed by the council so mathematically wrong?

Perhaps before we address that question, we need to ask why these same clever professionals didn't see the writing on the wall and raise the alarm before it was too late.

Well, who knows? But I do know Paul ain't been around the time he has without learning a thing or two.

■ **COULD** Olley have got it wrong? Last week, I mentioned that top Tory MP Andrew Mitchell's ultra-safe Sutton Coldfield seat was in danger of a Labour takeover.

I quoted evidence from the Electoral Calculus, a renowned predictor of elections whose statistics suggested it was going to be a close-run thing with Labour in the lead and hardworking Cllr Rob Pocock (Lab, Sutton Vesey) in with a shout, assuming he's the Labour candidate.

Since then, Labour has published its 'non-battleground' list of parliamentary seats – otherwise known as seats they don't think they can win.

And guess what? Andrew Mitchell's Sutton Coldfield seat is on it.

Has the Electoral Calculus got it wrong? Are the Labour Party predictions correct, that they are doomed in the Royal Town?

Time will tell, but all these authoritative contradictions will make for a fascinating general election.

■ **Mike Olley served on Birmingham City Council from 1991 to 2005, when he was made an Alderman.**

## INTERCLASS IN HEALTHCARE: CELEBRATING 75 YEARS OF OUR NHS

INTERCLASS IS PROUD TO BE SUPPORTING NHS HOSPITALS ACROSS THE REGION IN THEIR INVALUABLE WORK



Wolverhampton-based construction company Interclass PLC has contributed to enhancing care facilities for decades (Image: Interclass PLC)

As the National Health Service (NHS) marks its 75th anniversary, Wolverhampton-based construction company Interclass reflects on a longstanding partnership in the healthcare sector that spans decades. In this milestone year, Interclass is taking pride in not only celebrating the NHS's achievements but also acknowledging the collaborative efforts and significant contributions that it has made to the healthcare landscape in the Midlands.

### DELIVERING PROJECTS THAT MATTER

Since its inception, Interclass has been committed to championing the vision of the NHS.

It has worked with over 15 NHS trusts, playing a pivotal role in the enhancement and advancement of healthcare facilities. More recently, Interclass has been involved in a substantial programme of work for Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust. This included one of the UK's first new Community Diagnostic Centres (CDC), part of the government's £150m investment across the UK into community-based diagnostic centres. The investment aims to provide earlier scans and diagnoses for patients through increasing imaging

facilities, to enable faster access to the full range of diagnostic tests.

In addition to this, Interclass is also the principal contractor delivering Project Chrysalis, a £15m capital investment programme to eradicate dormitory accommodation across inpatient wards at Haglands Hospital. This initiative aims to further improve inpatient facilities and enhance the privacy and dignity arrangements for patients, aligning with the key estate improvement programme both nationally and within the Trust, as outlined in the NHS Plan.

Furthermore, as a contractor on the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust Framework, Interclass is currently onsite delivering a £10m project to establish new radio pharmacies, aseptic, and physiotherapy clinics at New Cross Hospital, Wolverhampton.

In 2023 alone, some 40% of Interclass's £52m turnover was in a healthcare setting, with a similar percentage already procured for 2024/25.

### A LEGACY OF SUPPORT

Through strategic sponsorships, Interclass has played a vital role in recognising unsung heroes in the NHS and supporting and enhancing the invaluable work they do. Just last month, Interclass was the headline sponsor of the REACH Awards 2023, celebrating exceptional individuals who display unwavering dedication and hard

work in support of the North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust. Opening the REACH Awards 2023, Des O'Neill, managing director of Interclass PLC, said: "Tonight is all about you and ensuring your work, and your sacrifices don't go unnoticed. We are proud to support an event that highlights the contributions of those who make a real difference to the lives of patients and their families." Interclass is also a proud sponsor of the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust Staff Recognition Awards for the second year running.

### TRUE PARTNERSHIP WORKING

At the heart of Interclass' collaboration with the NHS is a commitment to genuine partnership working. Interclass understands that meaningful impact requires a collective effort, and its approach is grounded in open communication, shared goals, and a dedication to achieving success together. Interclass' longstanding partnership with the NHS is a testament to its commitment to healthcare excellence, a passion for innovation, a dedication to community wellbeing, and a belief in the power of collaboration and partnerships.

To find out more about Interclass PLC, visit the website [www.interclass.co.uk](http://www.interclass.co.uk)