MIKE OLLEY

Mitchell set to face a real fight to hold Sutton seat

Andrew Mitchell MP

Statistics suggest that Andrew Mitchell MP might lose his Sutton Coldfield seat if a General Election was called tomorrow. **MIKE OLLEY** reports.

FOR years, I watched how Cllr Rob Pocock (Lab, Sutton Vessey) worked his socks off to win the safe Conservative seat he now holds on Birmingham City Council. Good luck to him I say.

He put the effort in and now Sutton Vessey is a safe Labour council seat. Remarkable.

What's even more remarkable is the growing belief amongst Labourites that they might actually take the Parliamentary seat of Sutton Coldfield. Given this is one of the safest Tory seats in the land and has been returning Tories simply forever, this is would be some feat.

But I checked up the Electoral Calculus's latest statistics and, if there was a General Election tomorrow, Labour is predicted to win Sutton Coldfield. This would give the seat to 72-year-old Rob, who I imagine would be the Labour candidate.

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Assuming that Rob stands, Labour is predicted to receive 52% of the vote, leaving only 48% for current sitting MP Andrew Mitchell, which means the current Minister of State for Development and Africa's seat in the House of Commons is at risk.

And I don't even feel the Electoral Calculus's prediction takes into account the significant personal vote Rob gets. That's not great news for energetic and top Tory Andrew, who in so many ways has been a good servant for Sutton Coldfield. Yet the old Tory dog (and I mean the party, not Andrew) has had its day.

This is such an unexpected cliff hanger, but certainly one to watch.

CAN you imagine the Irish PM demanding the return of the equestrian stature of King George I, from outside the University of Birmingham's Barber Institute, on the grounds it was commissioned by the city of Dublin in 1717?

Or how about the French President demanding the return of the Barber's Claude Monet collection?

No-one would take them seriously, I sincerely hope. Yet last week, various dreary folk repeated the dreary chorus that Britain should immediately give back the Elgin Marbles, after the outburst by Greek PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis.

They overlook the fact that Lord Elgin lawfully purchased the marbles off the Ottoman authorities, who were governing Greece back in the early 19th century. The British Parliament then converted the ownership to the British Museum via an Act of Parliament. It doesn't get more lawful than that, I would suggest.

We must remember that when in the safe care of the Athenian authorities, half of the marbles just disappeared, and most of what remain were vandalised.

Of what remains of the marbles, half are now at the British Museum, and more or less the other half at the Acropolis Museum, in Athens. Fragments remain in five other European centres.

Mitsotakis was simply grandstanding when he engineered a break down in bilateral talks with Rishi Sunak last week.

Given important events such as the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, you would have thought Mitsotakis would drop his dull, illegitimate and unilateral claim to the marbles and concentrate on more vital world matters.

IT'S been a while since the bombshell fell on Birmingham with the announcement that the city is effectively bankrupt. The council, we are told, is now working to settle the position.

But we are only now getting to feel the true impact of this issue. As was signalled at a recent full council meeting, council officers galore are to lose their jobs, we will lose vital services and there is almost certainly going to be a massive sell-off of council assets. All so sad.

Cllr John Cotton, the Labour leader of the council, has a real task on his hands. It must be like having to change the course of a whole flotilla of oil tankers, all bound together as one. Crikey! What a task it's proving to be.

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