

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Parliamentary candidates quizzed by Halton Chamber**

Runcorn town centre regeneration, the proposed Mersey Gateway bridge, youth unemployment, pensions and the economy were just a few of the topics discussed by Halton and Weaver Vale's parliamentary candidates at Halton Chamber's Business Election Special on Tuesday (May 4).

With only two days until polling, Halton Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise invited all the candidates from the two constituencies to attend a special business hustings event as part of the popular 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday Breakfast Networking series.

More than 50 local business entrepreneurs gathered at the Heath Business Park in Runcorn to quiz the candidates and raise matters of concern to the business community.

Chaired by Halton Chamber's executive vice chairman, Eric Hudson, the event featured candidates from each of the main three parties - Halton : Derek Twigg (Lab), Ben Jones (Con) and Frank Harasiwka (Lib Dem), and Weaver Vale: John Stockton (Lab), Graham Evans (Con) and Peter Hampson (Lib Dem). Independents, Mike Cooksley and Tom Reynolds, Paul Remfry from UKIP, and Jim Craig, representing the Green Party, also offered their views on the issues debated.

Sitting Halton MP Derek Twigg pledged to tackle the decline of Runcorn town centre, if he is re-elected, by bringing together all the public and private sector agencies and interest groups to work together to re-energise the town.

Responding to a question asked by John Wall, of John Wall Drainage Service Ltd, every candidate acknowledged the need for an extra Mersey River crossing and pledged their support for a new bridge, however tolling remained a key issue.

The retention of the Northwest Development Agency was also an area for agreement among candidates, although several want to see it being more efficient and giving better support to small businesses.

Measures to boost the economy, the role of community pharmacies, the imbalance between private sector and public sector pensions, proposed increases in National Insurance contributions and youth training also came under the spotlight during the two hour hustings exchange.

"We were delighted to welcome ten of the parliamentary candidates from the two constituencies to our business debate," said Eric Hudson. "The business community

asked some challenging questions and our two new MPs will go to Westminster with a firm mandate to bring about positive change for the Halton area. All the candidates were left in no doubt the effect of the recession is still hurting future growth and local businesses are still finding trading conditions very tough. We need our new Government to appreciate our problems and work on our behalf to engineer long term solutions.”

For more information about the work of Halton Chamber, check out the website:  
[www.haltonchamber.com](http://www.haltonchamber.com)

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*On behalf of Halton Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise*