

I sit on a Select Committee that looks at some of the more constitutional and political aspects of Parliament and at the moment we are conducting a really interesting inquiry into voter engagement. Since 1945 turnout for general elections in the UK has fallen from a high of 84% in 1950 to a low of just under 60% in 2001. While turnout for the 2010 general election was higher than the previous two elections it was still the third lowest since the introduction of universal suffrage.

We are taking evidence from lots of worthy academics and commentators on why this is ranging from voting age and systems through to a lack of respect and trust for politicians (although the latter is not a new phenomenon).

However from the responses on my own facebook page about this inquiry it seems that one key factor is a belief that politicians don't listen and only care about what people are thinking at election time. That is why, even before the inquiry has concluded, I think voter engagement is as much about community engagement as it is turnout at election time.

As reported elsewhere in this paper community engagement in Wouldham has invigorated local democracy to its best ever levels. Although at times controversial and time consuming for all involved, holding a 'referendum' on parish council proposals to build houses on the allotments in exchange for financing a new village hall not only enthused local residents into voting but also to seek alternative funds.

If politicians are going to engage with voters then they have to show them respect and listen to them. In return the electorate should trust that their elected representatives are doing all they can to stand up for their local communities. Both can be achieved by working together and this is what Wouldham village proved this week.