

Stadium candidate scoops by-election votes

First-match score

for Seagulls Party

by **ROB HUSTWAYTE**

THE pro-stadium Seagulls Party confirmed its status as a new force in Sussex politics by polling almost a quarter of the vote in its first election.

Candidate Ed Bassford came third in the Lewes District Council Ouse Valley and Ringmer ward by-election on Thursday night with 359 votes.

Liberal Democrat candidate Peter Gardiner won with 715 votes while Conservative Paul Gander came second with 521.

Labour hopeful Trevor Hopper came fourth behind Mr Bassford.

The Seagulls Party was formed just five weeks before the election as a direct challenge to the ruling Liberal Democrat regime at the council which is seeking to overturn in the High Court Brighton and Hove Albion's Falmer stadium planning permission.

Mr Bassford, 58, of Firl, said: "I'm delighted. The size of my



TEST: Candidate Ed Bassford, left, and party leader Paul Samrah

vote has clearly rattled both the main parties in the ward and, at the count, it was amusing to watch the Tories and the Lib Dems in conversation with each other about how much support they had lost to this new-fangled force in local politics.

"They genuinely expected us to get hardly any votes at all.

"The Seagulls Party would never have chosen this particular ward as the place for our first electoral test. And we would have preferred not to be faced with the responsibility of

getting an election campaign under way only five weeks after our launch.

"We've done astonishingly well in the circumstances."

Seagulls Party leader Paul Samrah said: "We got more crosses in the box than the Albion did during the whole of last season and to beat the party of Government is no mean feat for us.

"To go from a standing start to winning almost a quarter of the vote is remarkable and shows that our message is backed by a significant propor-

tion of the electorate in the Lewes district.

"We must be one of the fastest-growing political parties in Britain.

"This was our first effort with just a few weeks' preparation and by next May we will be in a much stronger position to challenge at the local elections. It was a good dress rehearsal and demonstrated that we are a genuine force in local politics.

"I am sure that we can be a major player, particularly in those wards in Lewes District that elect more than one councillor.

"The main parties will have to sit up and take notice of this result."

The council's challenge to John Prescott's planning permission will be heard in the High Court in December.

The Seagulls Party is planning a rally on Brighton seafront on Sunday, September 17, to coincide with the Liberal Democrat annual conference at the Brighton Centre.

rob.hustwayte
@theargus.co.uk