

# liberator



- 🌟 Lib Dems done for without wider appeal - Nick Harvey
- 🌟 Refugees left to drown by Tories - Stewart Rayment
- 🌟 Data drives a progressive alliance - Peter Dunphy

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## LIBERATOR

ISSN 2755-5097

was founded in 1970 and is produced by a voluntary editorial collective.

acts as a forum for debate among radical liberals in all parties and none

welcomes written contributions on relevant topics, up to 1800 words

We reserve the right to shorten, alter or omit any material.

Liberator Publications  
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# CONTENTS

<b>Commentary .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Radical Bulletin .....</b>	<b>4..5</b>
<b>UNABLE TO COUNT .....</b>	<b>6..7</b>
The Liberal Democrats will be finished if they further narrow their appeal to voters, says Nick Harvey	
<b>TORIES PLUMB NEW DEPTHS.....</b>	<b>8..9</b>
Home secretary Priti Patel's use of cross-channel refugees as a populist weapon hasn't been widely welcomed on the south coast, says Stewart Rayment	
<b>TIME TO GROW HAIRS .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Last year's two by-election gains showed what 'Big Hairy Audacious Campaigns' can do. Now spread that to wider campaigning, says Roger Hayes	
<b>LIBERATE SCHOOLS .....</b>	<b>11</b>
Authoritarianism characterises too many schools, when well-being should be at the heart of everything they do, says Liz Makinson	
<b>AFGHANS NEGLECTED BY PATEL'S HOME OFFICE .....</b>	<b>12..13</b>
Afghan refugees are being persecuted by the Home Office for suggesting how it could save money, says Rebecca Tinsley	
<b>HAS LIBERALISM'S TIME COME AGAIN?.....</b>	<b>14..16</b>
Chris Bowers found himself unable to explain what his own party stood for. The search for answers has led to the New Liberal Manifesto - an attempt to define modern liberalism	
<b>WHERE'S THE BEEF?.....</b>	<b>17</b>
The New Liberal Manifesto explain Liberalism well but where are the new ideas, asks Susan Simmonds	
<b>CATCHING THE TORIES NAPPING .....</b>	<b>18..20</b>
North Shropshire was won with a huge campaign but a small initial base. Matthew Green explains how, and looks at lessons for other by-elections	
<b>TIME BANDITS.....</b>	<b>21</b>
Parliamentary minutiae can swallow up a mere 13 MPs, so the Lib Dems should concentrate where it matters, says David Grace	
<b>SO, WOULD IT WORK? .....</b>	<b>22..23</b>
Claims for and against a 'progressive alliance' have lacked useful data. Now there is some and Peter Dunphy crunches the numbers	
<b>REVIEWS .....</b>	<b>24..26</b>
<b>Letter.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<i>Lord Bonkers .....</i>	<b>28</b>

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# COMMENTARY

## PLUMBING NEW DEPTHS

It's hard to know what the Government will look like by the time *Liberator* appears, with appalling daily revelations about Boris Johnson's conduct.

But it is hardly surprising that a Government full of Brexit supporters should instinctively hate foreigners, and its treatment of both the cross-Channel refugees and even Afghans settled here by invitation hits new lows.

Priti Patel's cruelty in leaving refugees to risk drowning - rather than receive them in the UK and then decide who has the right to go where - has appalled anyone with a shred of humanity.

It is a stance clearly designed to appeal to the Tory base - in every sense of the latter word - and a clear reminder that in any upcoming Tory leadership contest that party is perfectly capable of plumbing new depths.

Patel's stance puts her on the same moral level as the regime in Belarus with its attempts to use migrants as a political battering ram.

The Afghans who have made it to the UK - most with some connection with the former British presence in their country - are better off but still being treated badly by Patel's department.

Rebecca Tinsley's article in this *Liberator* - and her earlier one in *Liberator* 410 <https://liberatormagazine.org.uk/back-issues/> shows the Home Office treats with incompetence and callousness even those it has invited to the UK.

The litany described of inadequate accommodation, rotting food and obstacles to settlement into normal life shames the country.

So too do the large number of Afghans now in danger because of their British links who were left in their country at the mercy of the Taliban.

This is happening with the resettlement of a foreign community whose presence has considerable public support given the bravery of those involved in having helped British forces. One shudders to think how Patel would treat a community with less public approval.

Historians have to go back to Roy Jenkins in the 1970s to find a home secretary of any party who wasn't a posturing authoritarian playing to a galley of right-wing supporters (though the very brief tenures of Ken Clarke and Alan Johnson might constitute exceptions).

Governments assume this sort of cruelty towards 'the other' is popular, or at least popular enough among those to whom they wish to appeal.

The response in donations to the Royal National Lifeboat Institute when right-wing extremists tried to stop a lifeboat launch to rescue Chanel migrants suggests plenty of British people are better than that, and are repelled by the Government's stance.

## NEVER SEEN TOGETHER

As one prominent party figure has pointed out to *Liberator*, Ed Davey and Kier Starmer have never been seen at the same by-election.

That separation can be expected to continue since neither will be in Southend West and Birmingham Erdington is unlikely to hold much interest for Lib Dems.

What this means of course is not that Davey and Starmer cannot stand each other's presence but that there is tacit co-operation to keep out of each other's way when opportunities arise to maximise pressure on the Tories.

This has been suspected for the past year but became plain when Lib Dems in the Old Bexley & Sidcup by-election were abandoned apart from an agent being provided. Despite the seat being in easy travelling distance of thousands of party members for whom North Shropshire was an impractical trip, not the slightest attempt was made to persuade anyone to go to Sidcup. Labour did a little more in North Shropshire but by all accounts not much.

If Davey and Starmer hired a sky-writing aircraft to emblazon "we've done a deal" across the skies the situation could hardly be plainer.

That means this deal has to be publicly acknowledged. The public may not care who goes to which by-election, but it will if - as seems inevitable - the media eventually picks up on the extent of Lib Dem-Labour co-operation, broadcasts it and exaggerates it.

This is why if Davey and Starmer intend a repeat of the way Paddy Ashdown and Tony Blair discreetly co-operated in the mid-1990s they need to get their story straight about what they will - and will not - co-operate on and why.

The Ashdown-Blair exercise became known to be based around constitutional reforms agreed by Robert Maclennan and Robin Cook respectively on behalf of each party.

People could agree or not with what that contained, but at least it was eventually published.

Apart from disliking Boris Johnson and wanting him gone it is not stated openly what Davey and Starmer are co-operating to try to achieve, and Labour's conference vote against electoral reform gives little room for confidence that it would support more than modest constitutional reforms.

The present tacit co-operation is much to be preferred to trying to carve-up constituencies between parties. But it must be explained what it includes and excludes, and its objectives, because sooner or later someone will notice it is happening.

# RADICAL BULLETIN

## TRUSSED UP

Could the new darling of the Tory right Liz Truss be the first former Liberal Democrat into 10 Downing Street?

Truss understandably draws little attention to her Lib Dem past and several readers who still come across her noted a marked disinclination on her part to reminisce about old times.

A photograph exists of Truss with other members of what was then called Liberal Democrat Youth & Students on a protest against the M3 extension in 1994 - one of presumably few occasions on which the foreign secretary and 'Swampy' have been on the same side.

LDYS was also opposing then Conservative home secretary Michael Howard's Criminal Justice Bill which sought to curb protests, though which looks positively moderate compared to the Policing Bill that the Government of which Truss is part is seeking to push through Parliament.

She spoke against the monarchy in the Lib Dem conference debate in 1994, which called for a referendum on its abolition after the Queen's death. Truss has since dismissed this as a youthful indiscretion but it might leave Her Majesty unamused were she ever invited to kiss hands. Truss is thought to have joined the Tories in 1996.

One LDYS veteran recalls: "She was always older than her age even at 17 when we first met. Always very ambitious and confident and displays the same mannerisms as she did all those years ago. I don't think her characteristics are dissimilar to Boris (or are they just typical Tories?)"

Another thinks Truss's politics never changed much being liberal (at least then) on social issues and an economic liberal who was always an admirer of Margaret Thatcher. "I think she has always liked being controversial and is intelligent but says daft things either from lack of thought or to get attention," he recalls.

## USELESS INFORMATION

When conference set a zero election expense limit for the contest for Lib Dem vice-president for ethnic minorities it may have intended to help those of limited means to stand.

Nobody though realised this made it impossible for candidates to use party membership data to contact voters, even where this could legally be issued.

An email of baffling complexity went to candidates which said that while they could be given access to certain membership data, this could not happen if "doing so would breach the party's regulatory/legal requirements or the party's data protection rules (we cannot break the law); OR doing so would automatically mean you were in breach of the

campaign expenditure limit (which would disqualify you)".

The first of these objections could be overcome by meeting seven criteria including having a candidate and agent who had both completed party GDPR training.

Assuming all that could be done, what about the election expenses? This was where the rules disappeared up their own fundament: "If candidates wish to use, store, or record data outside of the party's systems, they will need to provide the returning officer with: an explanation as to how they will do so legally and in compliance with the party's data protection rules without incurring expenditure or notional expenditure."

Candidates who felt able need not though bother as "the returning officer does not currently believe that this is possible [without incurring expenditure or notional expenditure], which is why it was ruled that candidates would not be provided with the data, but we are open to considering proposals from candidates".

So candidates could jump through an immense number of hoops to access data but could not use it.

As Liberator went to press the result was still not declared, despite having been due on 13 December, because to an appeal.

## WHAT I DID ON MY HOLIDAYS

If a Lib Dem chooses to spend their summer holiday down one of Europe's nastier political sewers that would be their own business, but not if they are a prospective parliamentary candidate.

David Campanale has been selected for Sutton & Cheam and it is unclear whether local members - or indeed those who approved and shortlisted him - were aware of his past.

Campanale was elected a Lib Dem councillor in neighbouring Kingston in 2002 but later defected to the lunatic fringe Christian People's Alliance, becoming its de facto leader.

The CPA might be an electoral irrelevance but it takes predictably deplorable stances on social issues and makes Tim Farron look by comparison like a militant gay rights activist. It seeks a theocracy.

Campanale left the CPA at some point and re-joined the Lib Dems, running as a little-noticed paper candidate in Spelthorne in 2019. But how much of the CPA did he leave behind?

He has been pictured sharing a platform with Hungary's prime minister Viktor Orban - who supports 'illiberal democracy' - at something called the Tusvanyos Festival in the Hungarian speaking area of Romania.

His excuse was that Orban's Fidesz was once a liberal party and he made friends many years ago who remain in it.



That would be fine if he were making a private social call but given that he was already a Lib Dem politician when he attended, what on Earth was he doing making a speech on a platform with Orbán, who has sought to destroy Hungary's civil liberties, free press and independent judiciary?

As if that were not bad enough, Campanale was as recently as 2020 at an event in Hungary where he is listed among speakers described as "united in the belief that secular liberalism threatens Europe because it cannot understand itself without reference to Christianity".

Amid a welter of overwhelmingly hostile comment on Lib Dem Voice, <https://www.libdemvoice.org/focus-on-tories-in-sutton-and-cheam-69599.html> Campanale did at least engage with his critics but the results were less than convincing.

As former Liberator Collective member Alex Wilcock put it summarising Campanale's responses: "You left the Liberal Democrats but you didn't disagree with any of our values. You were President of a party which declared our values the enemy but you didn't notice. There was a manifesto but you didn't read it. You were against discrimination on sexual orientation as President of a party whose mission was to scourge LGBT people. They were extremist but only after you left but also before you left. There was a conference you led with the express mission of opposing secular liberalism but you were just with there with friends. And when people quote your exact words, well, they were in another language so they don't count."

Campanale is vice-chair of Ed Davey's local party in Kingston and applied unsuccessfully to become PPC for Richmond Park, but was slaughtered by sitting MP Sarah Olney. He decamped to Carshalton and came a poor third before landing Sutton.

What he - and others - may not have realised is that despite its history Sutton & Cheam is no longer rated a target seat, though six nearby constituencies are and will draw in activists.

The whole episode again raises questions about the candidates process. Did those who approved Campanale know of his past? If yes, why approve him, if not, why not?

## PICK A NUMBER

Stalwarts of Lib Dem fund-raising tombolas may recall giant jars of sweets where competitors have to guess the number contained.

Something similar is happening with party membership figures. The last Reports to Conference were silent on the membership total, which implies it had fallen by some embarrassing amount since the palmy days of 2019.

Liberator attempted a rough calculation and we were further helped by a reader who pointed us to party's annual report to the Electoral Commission for

2020 [<http://search.electoralcommission.org.uk/Api/Accounts/Documents/22744>], which as noted in Liberator 410 [www.liberatormagazine.org.uk](http://www.liberatormagazine.org.uk) showed 98,247 members against 126,724 the previous year, a large drop but still high in historic terms.

A reader who was on a Zoom call in November with party president Mark Pack and chief executive Mike Dixon says they were shown a slide of membership totals which gave the order of 76,000.

When an organisation declines to publish its

membership total it is usually a sign of trouble, so when is the party going to stop pretending it still has something like its 2019 'Brexit bubble' total?

And when is it going to divulge how many people have really signed up for the much-vaunted supporters' scheme, on which the last Reports to Conference were entirely silent?

## OUTBREAK OF PEACE

Rumours reached Liberator last year of a lack of harmony in the Social Liberal Forum. Some members were unhappy about, among other things, the appointment over a year ago of Ian Kearns as director at a proposed high salary (Liberator 405). Kearns has now moved on after helping to build up the forum's membership and activities and the proposed salary was never paid.

Another issue was the party's choice of Ed Davey as leader and his endorsement by Kearns in a personal capacity, although SLF itself endorsed no-one. A wider group of members also took exception to the way the officers dealt with these complaints, although the decisions made were endorsed by the elected council of the forum. Tempers frayed with people taking offence at some published statements. However, at the online AGM in November agreement was reached on how to conduct matters in future. It seems SLF was another victim of the pandemic which has prevented people meeting, eating and drinking together (except at No.10) and resolving disagreements in person.

## MUSICAL CHAIRS

A mere six years after Sal Brinton's governance review supposedly sorted for the long term how the party would be run, the most important part is being ripped up.

The Federal Board has proven no more able than its unlamented predecessor - the Federal Executive - to get to grips with running the party.

Given the FB has in excess of 40 members it is hardly surprising that it is more like a public meeting than a working body.

President Mark Pack tried to circumvent this by having the most 'important' people on a steering group, but that was voted down after a clever manoeuvre at the last conference (Liberator 410).

But having committed to carry out the recommendations of the Thornhill Review into the 2019 general election fiasco, the party will be present with options at the spring conference to try to produce a board that is small enough to work and a body that is representative enough to hold it to account. Does this sound familiar?

## CLEGG DROPS A BOMB

In his new life working for Facebook in California, Nick Clegg is immersing himself in his employer's Metaverse, and has been interviewed about this by the Financial Times.

This contains one genuinely interesting insight into Clegg's political past, where he surprisingly confesses that his biggest political mistake in the Coalition was to support the bombing of Libya. Clegg does not elaborate further in the brief interview. He does though say he won't stay in California long-term as he is "too much of a European" and will head back. Just hope he isn't after a safe Lib Dem seat again.

# UNABLE TO COUNT

## The Liberal Democrats will be finished if they further narrow their appeal to voters, says Nick Harvey

The best possible dividend from the Lib Dems' epic by-election win in North Shropshire would be to learn the collective lesson that we can and must appeal once again in leave areas, as well among remainers.

Among Lyndon Johnson's many memorable quotes was his observation: "The first rule of politics is being able to count."

For more than a decade, we Lib Dems have been singularly poor at this. We have made drastic mistakes in recent elections (as has Labour, though not the SNP) by narrowing our appeal to a smaller section of the electorate – broadly the middle class 'chatterati' at the expense of our appeal to much of our traditional support base.

All this has happened just as the electorate has been fragmenting, and old allegiances and assumptions breaking down. Professor Rob Ford, of Manchester University, and other analysts have highlighted the need for parties to diversify their appeal and build broader electoral coalitions to thrive under our voting system – whatever internal tensions this might cause.

### WINNING MOSAIC

Paula Surridge, of Bristol University, says the trick is to piece together enough fragments of the electorate into a winning mosaic, seat by seat.

The Tories have grasped this. Their audacious land-grab into Labour's 'red wall' was precisely a calculated and well-targeted drive to broaden their appeal, and it delivered their huge majority.

The SNP has also avoided the trap. Their carefully crafted narrative appeals to both a traditional working vote ('standing up to English toffs in London') and to graduate types ('studying up for a cosmopolitan, internationalist Scotland which didn't want Brexit.') As Groucho Marx said: "If you can't ride two horses at once, you might as well get out of the circus."

The tragedy is that the Lib Dems used to be masters of this. Over decades we built our strength to a high point of 63 Westminster seats and 5,000+ council seats, by combining affluent and university areas (Oxford, Cambridge, Bath, Cheltenham, Winchester, Richmond, Sheffield Hallam, Edinburgh) with marginalised rural areas (Cornwall to Berwick, Ceredigion to Aberdeenshire), seaside towns (Torquay, Eastbourne, Southport) and neglected urban areas (Bermondsey to Burnley).

Yes, critics claimed we said different things in different places – but representing diverse communities with energy and passion was precisely our political strength.

In recent elections our messaging, resources and even our emotional energies seem to have been channelled exclusively towards the affluent areas and our highly educated supporters living there. We have made little appeal to our rural, seaside and rundown urban

communities.

This folly is tantamount to political and intellectual masturbation: addressing ourselves and people like us, rather than moving beyond our comfort zones. Unless we snap out of it, and wake up to the shifting political landscape, we are screwed. The idea that Chesham & Amersham heralds scores more affluent seats on the brink of turning Lib Dem is up with the fairies – there is barely even a handful. Some seats, where high profile defectors stood last time, are not even long shots now.

There are some hopeful signs. Duncan Brack's survey on members' attitudes towards campaigning on Europe [<https://www.libdemvoice.org/campaigning-on-europe-members-views-69609.html>] found a strong majority for pitching our appeal to both former remain and leave voters – even though this may be a less clear message – by stressing the need to build a better relationship between the UK and EU in the first instance, simply leaving open the possibility of re-joining in the longer term.

That sensibly avoids try to reignite the whole ghastly saga among the voters for now. (It is worth pointing out that the EU would hardly take us back with open arms anyway. We were lousy Europeans – a drag on everything, and they certainly wouldn't want us back while we are still badly divided on it. Re-joining is, sadly, at least a generation away.)

A similar self-denying ordinance not to engage in the Tories' culture wars would help too. All evidence shows that, depressingly, these just drive voters into the Tories' arms. Part of the explanation may be that it plays so badly with older voters, who are a large group and by far the most likely to vote.

At the 2010 election and those since, Lib Dems have developed much more message discipline. While arguably admirable at a technocratic level, this has not served us well politically. The weakness is that if the message is flawed, but everyone follows it, then we are all shafted.

Tailoring messages to work in all our different types of seats is a challenge, and we rarely have the resources to build up the skill sets to sustain this over time. With snap elections (as the last two have been) resources arrive at the last minute, so there is only time to fell a few forests and pump out huge volumes of paper from the centre into target seats. Our small team of campaign staff have performed logistical miracles to achieve this and have issued materials of reasonable quality in the circumstances.

But too often they have had little salience. I groaned as Winchester was lost by just 985 votes in 2019, but HQ had wasted resources sending out glossy magazines about the candidate for East Dunbartonshire. If the same money had been spent featuring the Winchester Lib Dem team and their local issue campaigns, perhaps the seat could have been won.

## CLUMSY SHORTHAND

Some will think, incorrectly, that such materials would count against the candidate's election expenses, which were no doubt spent up anyway. Wrong! The party has been lazy in misunderstanding electoral law through a clumsy shorthand of national v local spending. The actual distinction under the PPERA 2000 is between party v candidate spending. The former is – outrageously – unlimited in a seat, whereas the latter is tightly capped at a parsimonious level. But there is no requirement for the party spending to be on national materials; it can be local and feature the local team and issues. So long as it doesn't explicitly solicit votes for the candidate, it can even mention the candidate (just not too prominently!)

Much of the money pumped into target seats could be better spent locally, if only the seats had the capacity to use it well. Some do, some don't. The trick over time is to build up that capacity, or at least augment it with a bigger team of writers, designers and print/media buyers who could serve the seats rather than the centre.

None of this is to say that there are not national campaigns to be run and unifying messages to communicate. Candidates in all seats need the national platform to have relevance and credibility.

Rebuilding the economy in the aftermath of both Covid and Brexit will offer opportunities, as will the alarming gap between Government rhetoric and harsh reality on climate change. The NHS and social care are in crisis, and the latter will never see any of the promised money once it has been swallowed by the NHS. Mental health care has almost collapsed in many areas. Disruption to education during Covid will leave a legacy for years to come, unless there is a dramatic intervention. The criminal justice system has effectively ground to a halt.

The realities of Brexit and the Government's preposterous antics towards France and the EU provide ideal openings to promote a more constructive relationship with our neighbours. Supporting Ukraine may be a strategic interest for the UK, but sailing aircraft carriers largely undefended into the South China Sea is entertaining dangerous delusions of military adequacy.

Our politics is now so broken that there may be the potential to stimulate some public appetite for political and even electoral reform.

The UK's political fracturing was explored further last year by ex-BBC journalist Gavin Esler in his gloomy book *How Britain Ends*. I compered a book festival event, where he analysed the schisms which the Brexit vote exposed and warned that the UK will inevitably split unless there is fundamental devolution from Westminster to the nations and regions in some

*“This folly is tantamount to political and intellectual masturbation: addressing ourselves and people like us, rather than moving beyond our comfort zones”*

sort of federal settlement.

Our ability to reach voters with our ideas on all these issues is now much diminished. We are no longer the third party in Parliament, so even when broadcasters can be coaxed out of their simplistic binary mindset, they go to the SNP for a third voice. The Paddy and Charles era, when we often muscled into two-and-a-half party politics, feels a long time ago. Even before 2019, the Parliamentary arithmetic enabled Vince to get airtime fairly often.

There is no point blaming Ed Davey for this: he is holding his nerve and going a good job with his hands tied behind his back.

## INSANE DECISION

No, any blame on our own part comes down to the insane decision to allow the 2019 election to happen. We traded a hung Parliament in which we had 21 seats (and Brexit still in the balance) for a Tory majority of 80, just 11 Lib Dem seats and Brexit inevitable. The fiasco left us stranded in a much-weakened position.

Nor is the outlook that much brighter for Labour. Keir Starmer has done well to rid his party of much of the Corbyn legacy, and is enjoying a poll lead at present (though not a big one by historic mid-term standards). However, no longer being able to bank on 40 or so seats in Scotland he faces a monumental uphill climb to win the next election outright. Their task would be helped if they largely keep out of our way in 30 or so Tory seats we could win but Labour never could. There are some encouraging signs that Labour strategists are across this.

For our part, we must use the time until the next election to prepare a much better battle plan than we have effected in the last three elections. We must learn the lessons Dorothy Thornhill's election review identified. If we do the same things again, we will get the same outcome. Fortunately, in Dave McCobb we have a capable and well-grounded campaigner at the helm, who being based in Hull is not infected with a London-centric view of politics.

On top of the 13 seats we must defend, we can only realistically pour resources into a maximum of about 25-30 more to attack. Choosing them wisely, and deploying resources effectively, are crucial to our survival as a national political force.

Putting all our eggs into a basket of remain-voting seats in the south east would be a disastrous error. Neglecting the rural, seaside and marginalised communities which used to vote loyally for us election after election would be fatal.

Well-off soft Tories will revert to type come a general election. But dispossessed voters in left-behind areas will come back to us if we give them good reason to. The ball is in our court.

---

Nick Harvey was Liberal Democrat MP for Devon North 1992-2015



# TORIES PLUMB NEW DEPTHS

## Home secretary Priti Patel's use of cross-channel refugees as a populist weapon hasn't been widely welcomed on the south coast, says Stewart Rayment

On 26 November 2021 a caller, Zoe, to James O'Brien's London Broadcasting programme said that she had she witnessed fishermen blocking an RNLI lifeboat from rescuing migrants and shouting "don't bring any more of those home, we're full up".

In the following social media storm, there were accusations and counter-accusations. None of it looked very good – my comment fairly early in the proceedings ran: "I'd been thinking that a Dunkirk spirit is needed here. A flotilla of small boats bringing refugees over, out of the hands of criminal gangs and criminal governments," It seems to have been fairly popular with 10 likes at the time.

### UNLIMITED FINE

Lifeboat crews up and down the south-east coast have taken a lot of stick for bringing in refugees, but this is the most extreme incident to my recollection. Hindering an RNLI launch is breaking the Obstruction of Emergency Workers Act 2006, punishable by an unlimited fine.

It probably won't come to that – the fishing community and the lifeboat community will have close inter-relationships. The RNLI thought that fishermen were obstructing them at the time; whilst a spokesman for the fishermen thought they were just going about the jobs. The lifeboat chose to launch on the east side of the harbour arm rather than the west, and a fishing boat was blocking its way. A fisherman happened to be throwing waste scraps to the seagulls in the path of the launch. It was a lorry-driver, not a fisherman who shouted the abuse... no arrests were made.

What I would say to the fishing community is that they need all of the friends they can get, and incidents of this kind won't help.

Some Hastings fishermen and their boats were quite prominent in the Brexit campaign – never quite thinking the issue through, they tended to be Leavers (Hastings & Rye voted 55.94% Leave to 44.02% Remain in the referendum). The shortcomings of that stance are rapidly becoming apparent. Michael Gove and Amber Rudd made soothing noises over the years, but they have come to nothing.

When we joined the EEC Ted Heath paid scant

regard to our fishing industry, and governments of either hue have invariably backed large-scale industrial fishing rather than small fishers since – the Lobster Quadrille couldn't be more appropriate.

I might add that Liberal Democrat MEPs were always very active trying to change the shares of British quota in favour of small boats and visited often. This was appreciated by the fishing community, but was rarely reflected in a change of vote. Chris Davies was indeed chair of the European Parliament

Committee of Fisheries from 2019 until we left the EU in 2020. Pierre Karleskind and Søren Gade, the current chair and vice-chair, are both members of Renew incidentally; use them well.

Back in July, when the RNLI brought in rescued refugees to Ramsgate, Nigel Farage tweeted: "Sadly the wonderful RNLI in Kent has become a taxi service for illegal immigration." The ensuing twitter-storm saw attacks on the RNLI, one

of our most venerable voluntary bodies, with threats of withdrawal of donations. Whether they, or the lorry driver above ever donated to the RNLI is an open question.

The RNLI rescues people at sea, often at considerable peril to themselves; they don't stop to think about who or why they are there. I hope Mr. Farage never has need of their voluntary services. While it is foolhardy, at the very least for a refugee, to consider crossing one of the world's busiest sea-lanes in a dinghy, HM Government has unfortunately, made this an attractive option.

Typically, when the RNLI or HM Border Force respond, it is a 999 call just after a group have crossed over half way. The government should not expect the Royal Navy to respond any differently.

The Observer (2 January) reported that the efforts of Mr. Farage and his ilk had the opposite effect to what they had intended – RNLI donations swelled by 50%. Locally, the Romney Marsh Morris raised £2,100.81 for the Littlestone RNLI through collections at dancing and singing events. Otherwise, refugee support organisations in Hastings say when they make requests for items – jumpers, socks, sleeping bags, the





community response always exceeds their expectations.

Hastings has a progressive community; it even had a Liberal Democrat council at one time. Labour held the Hastings & Rye constituency between 1997 and 2010 since when the Conservatives have out-organised them; in 2015 they expected to win, in 2017 came within 346 votes, but by 2019 that candidate was unelectable. Many Liberals voted tactically in 2017, but by 2019 Labour's running of the borough council counted against them. As shrunken boundaries make the constituency potentially marginal at the next general election, Labour would do well to think about this in the context of the Liberal Democrats and neighbouring seats.

Pluralism is strong in the community, there are a number of refugee support organisations – Hastings Community of Sanctuary, Hastings Supports Refugees, the Refugee Buddy Project of Hastings, Rother and Wealden, and many individuals work in English language support (Brexit has been devastating for that employment sector).

## **FREEZING WATERS**

On 25 November, 250 people gathered on the Stade for a candlelit vigil for the refugees who had drowned the day before in the freezing waters of the Channel. Somewhere around 350 people joined the demonstration on a wet Saturday following the lifeboat incident. More might have attended with better publicity. (Hastings has population of around 92,000).

A rabid gutter press has seen the growing number of channel crossings last year make immigration and refugees the third biggest issue in UK politics that voters are focused on.

The Conservatives have a large lead on this issue over Labour and their tough talk on migrant numbers and border control policies plays to a large number, particularly of their Leave supporters. There was a reduction in Tory support on this issue over the latter half of 2021, but mainly among Remain, younger and AB class voters. Labour's Leave voters on the other hand seem less confident in their party's ability to manage the issue.

Andrew Mier, Liberal Democrat councillor for Southern Rother, tells me that when a boatload of refugees came ashore at Fairlight a couple of months ago there was quite a lot of sympathy on Facebook.

He was able to tell me more of Rother District Council's response: "We have

already been able to find safe and comfortable homes for two families under the Government's Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) for citizens who provided services to the British Armed Forces during the recent conflict. We have also made a commitment to find homes for families under the Afghan Citizens' Resettlement programme.

"East Sussex local housing authorities have discussed an indicative target to resettle 200 people across the whole of East Sussex through the ACRS and ARAP programmes. The rationale being that this represents 1% of the 20,000 Government commitment and the population of East Sussex represents 1% of the UK.

*"I hope Mr Farage never has need of the RNLi's voluntary services"*

"Rother has a UK Resettlement Programme team that have been supporting the Government's various commitments to resettle refugees from Syria and the wider region.

The team has been enhanced to meet the needs of the Afghan households

we have committed to resettle. The team provides a comprehensive support package to refugees throughout the resettlement period including assistance with accessing language classes, education, health and social care services as well as support with a range of activities to promote their integration into our community."

In terms of the wider question, Andrew says he has no local feedback, despite raising the matter at parish council meetings.

Hastings Borough Council has a good track record on refugee placements; it is my recollection that they exceeded the government's expectations in meeting the Syrian refugee crisis (still unresolved by the global community) and given at least one of their councillor's connections with Afghanistan I don't expect them to do any less.

Their communications department told me: "We have accommodated 118 individuals through the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme, many of whom were fleeing the conflict in Syria.

"Hastings has been working with partners across East Sussex to support people displaced by the conflict in Afghanistan. In Hastings we have agreed to resettle 54 individuals through the Afghan Citizens and Afghan Local Employed Staff (LES) schemes over the next three years. Across East Sussex there is a commitment to resettle 256 individuals through the schemes – this represents 1% of the national target, with East Sussex representing 1% of the population of the UK.

"The first Afghan family has already arrived safely in Hastings, with a further two families due to arrive soon."

All of this doesn't answer the question of what are the views of people in these coastal communities?

I can only extrapolate after almost two years of lockdowns – the handful of people that I meet or communicate with are mostly of progressive opinions, and those that aren't, are at least humanitarian.

But that also puts me out of touch and 50 years down those mean streets tell me that not everyone holds those views. Our Conservative MP Sally Ann Hart is a typical example – she rightly condemned the lifeboat incident, and undoubtedly entered politics with good intent; but listening to her on other issues, things will slip out, and you know you are not on the same side.

I don't know what her spoken or unspoken views on refugees are – I formed my opinion of her during the 2019 election. The Conservative party is undoubtedly a nastier piece of work under Johnson and his Brexit band – they have let the genie out the bottle, and for the moment, show no intention of trying to put it back.

# TIME TO GROW HAIRS

## Last year's two by-election gains showed what 'Big Hairy Audacious Campaigns' can do. Now spread that to wider campaigning, says Roger Hayes

Sarah Green's summer victory in Chesham and Amersham lit a fire under the Lib Dems and kindled fresh hope in a despondent party worn down by a decade of poor politics, missteps and bitter disappointment.

Despite the momentary success of the European elections, the recovery from the trauma of coalition was quickly overshadowed by three disastrous general elections, five leaders in four years, all capped by the pandemic. Little did it then expect the unforced Tory error that led to the earth-shattering sensation that was Helen Morgan's victory in North Shropshire.

Owen Paterson's sense of Tory entitlement led to him flouncing out, like watching someone choose a public flogging to avoid a slap on the wrist. But what a gift his bad temper proved to be.

It was the perfect coming together of the essential forces that made this B-HAC (Big Hairy Audacious Campaign) such a bold success: a party still buoyed by Chesham & Amersham and keen to volunteer again; a leader willing to take the gamble and lead from the front; a competent campaign team; and, importantly, a candidate more than a measure for the task and very worthy of the win.

All the way to the next general election, the party must keep up that enthusiastic momentum and a B-HAC strategy in everything it does. The parliamentary party should adopt a B-HAC approach to key issues such as climate change, the disaster of Brexit, care and funding for the NHS and social care, and much more.

Be bold, be different, get noticed, get ahead of Labour's timidity and be seen to challenge the Tories' waffle and incompetence at every opportunity.

The Liberal Democrats are, and need to be seen as, a resurgent party. No more polite alternative, protest vote, happy to receive your consideration when you've had enough of the 'real thing'. Our purpose is to build a Liberal society not to force the Tories to be 'proper Conservatives' or fill in the 'progressive gap' while Labour works out what it wants to stand for.

Of course there has to be a hard-nosed targeting, but the ambitions for our country cannot be merely opportunistic. It is time to make the weather not just be blown around by it. We must press home our challenge and aim to crush the Tories in May in as many areas as possible.

There are three very good reasons why the people of Chesham & Amersham and North Shropshire voted Lib Dem after lifetimes of voting Conservative: we actually turned up; we told them how we are different; through hard work and tenacity we showed them we can win.

In contrast, at Old Bexley & Sidcup no one turned up – Labour made no effort, the Lib Dems lost its deposit,

and nothing appeared any different to residents.

Everyone assumed the Tories would win, most people stayed at home – and sure enough the Tory did win. The difference was startling.

I have written elsewhere about why the Lib Dems should be standing in Southend West, and that hasty and poor decision should never have been made. On current form, it could have made a third magnificent victory.

The Tories are in a deep hole but, whatever happens over the next few months, the BHAC strategy must be about a lot more than elections.

I have long complained about how the party has allowed 'campaigning' to become an alternative term for electioneering. Election campaigns are fundamentally different from 'campaigning'. And that is something else the party needs to rediscover.

True campaigning is about standing for 'things' not just standing for election. There is a whole generation of new and enthusiastic members who think the sole purpose of knocking on doors is to ask about voting intentions. Quality data is of course vital, but the real reason we should be knocking on doors week-in-week-out is to talk to people about stuff that matters to them.

Stuff that matters to us. Stuff that will improve their communities. Stuff that will engage them and that can make the world a better place and help to build our Liberal society. And, yes, stuff that will make people more likely to vote for us.

There are thousands of great campaigners in the Liberal Democrats, all achieving a lot in support of their communities. But to millions of people the Liberal Democrats are still just not-the-Tory-party, not-the-Labour-party, or not-the-SNP. We have no real presence where many people live. They never see us on the TV, or read about us in their newspapers, and we certainly don't knock on doors regularly. Well, millions have now heard about us, twice during 2021. Heard about us defeating the Tories when Labour can't. And we must turn that to our, and to their, advantage. Issues-based campaigning, community Liberal campaigning is the way to do that. And the Bigger, Hairier, and more Audacious those Campaigns can be, the better.

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Roger Hayes is a foamer Liberal Democrat leader of Kingston-upon-Thames Council

# LIBERATE SCHOOLS

Authoritarianism characterises too many schools, when well-being should be at the heart of everything they do, says Liz Makinson

Not many of us would have thought two years ago that we would still be in the midst of the Covid pandemic, and we have seen the significant impact on children and education.

Two years into the pandemic, it is time to rethink some educational norms and make our schools places, first and foremost, of well-being for children.

For too long, the zero-tolerance model with an authoritarian focus on uniform and discipline has been seen as the ultimate in good schooling. This was unsuitable before the onset of Covid 19 and is now utterly redundant.

Children's mental health is suffering from this illiberal model. As the liberal voice in British politics, it is time that we stood loud and proud against this and put forward a more liberal, progressive and kinder approach to our children's education.

In too many schools, special educational needs (SEN) pupils whose behaviour is challenging are put into isolation and have to sit in silence for lengthy periods. These methods are at best a sticking plaster and more often are injurious to a child's mental health and personal development.

No child should be sent home from school and publicly shamed for having a particular hair style or the wrong type of black shoes – but this really happens. Publicly shaming children belongs in a Victorian theme park, not a modern education system.

Personal social and health education has seen its curriculum time diminished; many schools viewing it as a waste of time to allow children the time and space to explore issues and discuss these with their peers. The loss is adding to the mental health issues in our schools.

Children also need a clear route to help and guidance in school if they are experiencing issues. Many schools, while having this, are not sharing this explicitly enough with children who are left without someone to talk to when they need it.

Attendance is important. As a school issue however, it has grown into a punitive stick whereby children who have diligently taken time off to self-isolate are told that they now cannot attend the school trip or a prom.

This was an issue before Covid-19 that is now even more pertinent. For children with ongoing illness, including the 1 in 7 with long Covid, this is a barrier to accessing and enjoying school if they are continually being punished for not getting the right attendance percentage.

We should deal with attendance issues by looking at the underlying problems, not by punitive measures. Where poor attendance is linked to negative attitudes to being in school and where school is seen as a harsh and unforgiving environment, shaming, league tables

of students and detentions will only exacerbate the very situation they are supposed to be improving.

Chronic absence is often linked with childhood trauma – persistent absentees need persistent support, not punishment. For a child who has suffered traumatic experiences to miss out is rubbing salt into an already open wound.

The 'three strikes and you are out' system is as spectacularly unsuccessful in schools as in society. Children who experience fixed term or permanent exclusions are more likely to end up without employment or training and find their way into the criminal justice system.

It is far better to provide the time and funding for these young people to be empowered to make better choices, than to consign them to a future with diminished choices and opportunities.

Referral units attached to schools can achieve amazing results with small group tuition and support. The trend away from this and to off-site private providers removes the pupils from their peers and support groups and makes it more difficult to retain contact with the school. 'Problem' students can be removed from site and be completely out of mind.

All schools should have well-being hubs where children and staff can access help and can get information. Yes, this would be costly but the savings in better health and fewer financial costs in the longer term would be significant.

Every tool needs to be utilised – therapy animals, meditation, yoga – to get our children's mental health on track and build resilience during the pandemic and for life. This will not work however if they are mere window dressing and the punitive systems in our schools remain unchallenged.

As a party, we need to stand against the tide of authoritarianism in our schools and promote radical new thinking in education. Well-being should be at the heart of everything we do; the trauma from the pandemic will be seen in children for years to come.

Those who only see the pandemic as worrying with regard to children having missed some academic work have rather missed the point. Happy, safe and secure children will thrive. Teachers and school staff have done an amazing job during this pandemic and are still doing so. They are working hard to ensure academic success while trying to deal with a daily onslaught of Covid cases and distressed pupils. This job is made even harder by the systems in many schools. The time for change is now.

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Cllr Liz Makinson is the Liberal Democrats education spokesperson in Liverpool and a former teacher



# AFGHANS NEGLECTED BY PATEL'S HOME OFFICE

## Afghan refugees are being persecuted by the Home Office for suggesting how it could save money, says Rebecca Tinsley

Afghan refugees are being punished for trying to stop the Home Office wasting UK taxpayers' money.

When the Afghans staying in a London hotel organised a petition asking for less expensive food, they were accused of anti-social behaviour and removed. Officials also discouraged refugees from finding work, hinting that it might affect their chance of securing accommodation.

An estimated 12,000 Afghans (out of 16,500 who were evacuated when Kabul fell to the Taliban) are still in hotels. One central London hotel (which must remain anonymous for the safety of refugees threatened by Taliban supporters in the UK) is accommodating 200 of the 4,000 Afghans in the capital.

Two Afghan men were elected by their fellow refugees to advocate for them. But when the men made polite suggestions that would have saved the Home Office money, they were removed, separated, and sent to hotels on the outskirts of provincial towns.

The Afghan spokespersons asked the management of the hotel to find an alternative caterer because families were becoming ill after eating the food supplied by an expensive Lebanese restaurant. The Afghans found an Afghan-run company willing to cater for the 200 families for less money than the Lebanese restaurant was charging the hotel (which then billed the Home Office).

However, the hotel switched to an Indian-owned company, which supplied food that was rotting, mouldy or containing rubber bands on several occasions. Hotel management would not accept that Afghans do not eat a Mediterranean diet or cuisine from the subcontinent.

A Liberator source familiar with the hospitality sector suggests it is known for hotel catering managers to accept gifts from their favoured food suppliers.

The Home Office has contracted with hotels across the UK to provide accommodation and a list of items including toiletries, fruit, healthy snacks, bottled water, infant care products, and access to laundry service.

In the central London hotel in question the Afghans struggled to get healthy food for their children, and rooms might be cleaned once in three weeks. Afghans were not allowed to borrow the vacuum cleaner to clean their own rooms. Since none of the refugees had money, they could not buy cleaning supplies or healthy food. As the meals deteriorated, the Afghans (none of whom knew each other before arriving in London) organised and choose spokespeople.

Central London hotels would have been almost empty during the pandemic had it not been for the Afghans, and if the hotel in question is typical, the UK taxpayer is not getting value for money.

An unanswered written parliamentary question from Lord Alton asks the Home Office if it negotiated a discount on the bulk booking of hotels across London.

When I contacted the Home Office, officials chose to listen to the hotel management rather than me, my vicar, the journalists who I asked to investigate the story or the Afghans. When we supplied photos of rotten food, the Home Office said any problems must be raised with the hotel management, who referred us to the Home Office.

A volunteer from my church found an employer willing to train 100 Afghan men to do maintenance on London Underground. However, it appears that officials falsely warned that their lack of a permanent address might jeopardise their chance of getting social housing.

Home Office officials gave the two Afghan spokespersons and their families less than 24 hours to leave the London hotel. (In the case of asylum



seekers, five days' notice is required).

When the two men asked to meet UK government officials, the hotel management claimed the men were guilty of anti-social behaviour. The management provided no proof of the accusation, but Home Office officials chose to accept the hotel's word.

A Home Office official told one of the Afghan men that his expulsion "should act as a lesson" to him not to complain. As the situation escalated, the hotel called the police to forcibly remove the Afghan families. The Home Office official falsely claimed the men would be put onto the street and would not qualify for rehousing if they did not comply with their demands.

Back in August, the two Afghan families endured days and nights in a line outside Kabul airport, being threatened and beaten by the Taliban. The one-year-old infant son of one family still has a scar on his head from being attacked by Taliban. Both men had been senior officials in Kabul, working with British officials, and were on the Taliban's lists of wanted people. One of the men is now receiving counselling

*“When we supplied photos of rotten food, the Home Office said any problems must be raised with the hotel management, who referred us to the Home Office”*

due to traumatic flashbacks. Not surprisingly, the families found their expulsion from the London hotel unsettling.

The families are now in hotels in remote locations. One family is keen to return to central London because their six-year-old daughter was attending a school where she was learning English.

Her father told me: “It breaks my heart that she cannot see her new friends anymore. She loved going to school there.” Attempts to find the families alternative accommodation closer to London have so far proved futile.

Anyone involved in humanitarian work overseas is familiar with the UK government's fondness for

projects encouraging beneficiaries to advocate for themselves, rather than relying on the traditional neo-colonial 'white saviour mentality'. Paradoxically, it seems that refugees in Britain who organise and articulate the needs of their group to those in power are seen as troublemakers.

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Rebecca Tinsley founded Waging Peace which works with Sudanese asylum seekers





# HAS LIBERALISM'S TIME COME AGAIN?

Chris Bowers found himself unable to explain what his own party stood for. The search for answers has led to the New Liberal Manifesto - an attempt to define modern liberalism

Cast your mind back to the evening of 16 April 2015. The chances are that you – like me – were on your sofa watching the seven leaders' TV debate in the run-up to the general election, the only time all the party leaders came together in that campaign.

As Nick Clegg's biographer and a Lib Dem candidate in a moderately high-profile seat, I was watching to see how Clegg did. I actually thought he performed quite well, but that was almost beside the point. By then people had stopped wanting to believe him, so he could have announced that his mother had been shot by a leopard that morning and it would have washed over most viewers. That's the problem with politics – when people stop listening to you, your best ideas are worthless.

Which is why the other memory I have from that night is so important. As I gazed at my telly, it occurred to me that I could sum up in a few seconds what six of the seven parties in front of me stood for. The one I couldn't do it for was my own party. What did the Lib Dems actually represent? If I couldn't answer that, how could anyone be expected to vote for us?

We had spent the previous five years in coalition government, which had knocked one perennial criticism on the head: that we had never been in government and therefore wouldn't be up to it.

Our ministers proved incredibly capable, often putting the Tories in the shade, even if the Tories worked the politics much better than we did. In order to keep ourselves attractive to those we put down on our canvass returns as Soft Tories and Soft Labour, we had exalted under the slogan 'stronger economy, fairer society.' As a more dignified way of saying 'more head than Labour, more heart than the Conservatives' it was OK, but it reinforced the idea that the Lib Dems were a compromise, a half-way house between the two main parties.

Is that all we are? It's not what I am, and if we're looking at the motivation that gets people out of the comfort of their homes to put inky pieces of paper through letterboxes on cold and rainy days or knock on doors asking if the occupant might consider voting for us, the idea of being a half-way house doesn't take us very far. Where's the passion in that?

## HEINEKEN EFFECT

There is, of course, something dignified and pragmatic about a compromise. Daisy Cooper said after the North Shropshire by-election that the Lib Dems can have a 'Heineken effect' in that we can reach the parts

other parties can't reach because we can become the anti-Conservative or anti-Labour alternative option, depending on the seat. That's fine in a by-election, but we then get squeezed at general elections, especially if the identity of the prime minister is at stake.

No, we need to know what we stand for, even if it might alienate a few Soft Tories or Labour voters who thought we were something else. And not just because we need a more inspiring motivation to get people to do canvassing, delivering and telling.

Think about it. Since time immemorial, the Liberal Party and the Liberal Democrats have been known for one policy: electoral reform. Yes, we go through phases where our Europeanism or our commitment to civil liberties and human rights come to the fore, but over the years if you'd asked the average person what Britain's centre party stands for, they'd have said: "proportional representation". If we ever get PR, that will mean hung parliaments, which will mean the need for cooperation in government. And if we want to cooperate, we need to say what is important to us, what we believe in, why people voted for us. Compromise is good, but not when it comes to setting out our creed.

Our ability to appeal to Soft Cons and Soft Labs served us well from 1987 to 2010, in fact it was a very clever way of gaming first-past-the-post. But our failure to be known for specific policies meant that, when we teamed up with the Tories in coalition after the 2010 election, it was always going to alienate those voters who had supported us because they wanted to defeat the Tories, irrespective of the fact that we got certain Lib Dem policies through. That contributed to the hammering we took in 2015.

So in late 2018, a small group of Lib Dems came together to discuss creating a user-friendly paper on what liberalism is, and how it can be reframed for the third decade of this century.

The group was originally David Howarth, Paul Pettinger and me. Paul and I had written a paper 'The place for radical liberalism in 21st century British politics' a year earlier, and David, as a professor of public policy at Cambridge University and a former MP and leader of Cambridge City Council, was keen to revitalise what the British liberal movement stood for.

But then 'events, dear boy' took over. In early 2019 came the defections of the Labour and Conservative MPs who formed The Independent Group for Change, later Change UK; then a double round of elections in May (local councils and the unexpected European Parliament elections); amid talk of a second EU



referendum we had a change of prime minister; and then a general election. No sooner had we tried to get the project back on track in early 2020 than we were thwarted by the pandemic.

I mention all this because really the New Liberal Manifesto that we published in December 2021 was probably a year or two late. Then again, Covid-19 would have so quickly outdated it had we brought it out in 2019 that maybe its gestation period has helped it become a philosophy document for the post-pandemic period.

Regardless of the timing, we also needed a broader group of creators, so we reformed the project in 2021 with me as lead author and coordinator, working with four people who represent pretty much every level of Lib Dem activity.

David Howarth remained from the original group. Duncan Brack joined us as the doyen of liberal history as well as bringing his experience from various federal committees and a stint as a coalition 'spad'. Monica Harding was our candidate in Esher & Walton in 2019 who took Dominic Raab's majority down to 2,000 and has since worked for the Britain Project. And Rob Parsons is local to me in East Sussex, a retired Open University lecturer who wants to do his bit for democracy but hates being on committees so is active locally yet always keeps the escape route clear.

Between of us, we produced a 24-page document that is effectively a user-friendly short guide to modern liberalism.

It sets out why a restatement of liberalism is needed for today's political world, in particular where it fits into the post-election landscape if the next general election delivers a hung parliament (as it might well do). That was the easy bit.

Setting out what liberalism has been historically, and what the core tenets are that should stand firm regardless of fashions and prevailing political winds, was harder. We drew on writings of lots of people, from John Stuart Mill to modern-day Lib Dems who have dealt with the principles of liberalism in their own political careers. In this respect, having David Howarth and Duncan Brack on the team was invaluable.

We threw in a few sections that anticipated questions people would ask. There is a section on the role of the state – where the state should get involved and where it should leave well alone.

## **BEWARE IMPOSTERS**

We included a section on what liberalism is not. It's remarkable how many people who aren't liberal like to be thought of as such (we clearly have a positive label), so we set out where we had to beware of impostors claiming to be liberal, and pre-empted a couple of criticisms of liberals (like the idea that we're anti-patriotic or that we support freedom without restriction). And we added a small section on

*“We need to know what we stand for, even if it might alienate a few Soft Tories or Labour voters who thought we were something else”*

the use and abuse of the word 'liberal', particularly in places like America, Australia and mainland Europe, where the word often denotes something very different to British liberalism.

We also threw in a page on the role of ecology in liberalism, which we rather provocatively called 'Britain's original green party' – to make the point that, while other parties have had to assimilate environmental issues into their platforms, liberalism's commitment to the common good meant

environmentalism was always central to the liberal creed. Making this point could be crucial to giving Green voters emotional permission to vote tactically for a Lib Dem candidate who could win.

The hardest part of our work was in drawing up the heart of the paper: a seven-page section highlighting what any self-respecting liberal manifesto for the next general election has to cover. We tried to link this to the six core tenets of liberalism we identify at the start of the paper, and on the cover (liberty, equality, community, the common good, democracy and internationalism), but equally important was to show how liberalism involves thinking in broader terms than just the customary political topics.

To this end, we included a section on addressing data and the tech revolution, in particular stressing the need for policies that will force tech giants to honour their obligations, not become bigger than governments, and generally be a force for good. And we added a collection of ideas under the heading 'Thinking outside the box', which involve rethinking various aspects of how we view life (income, taxation, Britain's role in the world, etc), and stressing the importance of indicators that aren't primarily economic.

All this was presented in an eye-catching format by Nim Design, which developed the motif of a lightbulb to go above certain crucial paragraphs, to illustrate 'lightbulb moments' in presenting the significance of liberalism in a modern British context.

In many ways we were freer to speak, given that we were outlining the central tenets of liberalism rather than specific policies (though a few policies are floated, like universal basic income or some approximate equivalent), and we were able to talk broadly about the ethos of liberalism – that it's kind, that it includes emotional intelligence, and that it includes a recognition that electoral defeats are sometimes healthy, and just occasionally we can be wrong.

Then again, our freedom was limited by the fact that anything we publish could be used in evidence against us by our political opponents, so we had to be careful with our phrasing.

The result is in effect a discussion paper that we hope will get people talking about what the Liberal Democrats actually stand for. Not everyone in the Lib Dem family will agree with everything we say, and in a 24-page paper there will always be things we have left

out. But we have put it out there so people can base discussions on how to sell ourselves on a document that gives the historical context to liberalism and sets out the values that any Lib Dem policy ought to meet if we are to remain the rightful inheritors of the British liberal tradition.

Of course such discussions won't exempt the party from having to work through the media, and here we slightly ducked the issue. If I started this piece at the 2015 seven leaders' TV debate by saying I couldn't sum up what the Lib Dems stood for in a few seconds, can I now?

## **SELFISH LIBERTY**

I have nothing prepared on this front, though any pithy, media-friendly summary of liberalism would have to be centred on the pre-eminence of the individual and individual liberty, but in a way that makes it clear that it's a compassionate liberty that doesn't infringe others' freedom, and is not the 'I'm all right Jack, so sod the rest of the world' libertarian selfish liberty propagated by the far right of today's Conservative Party.

One of the reassuring things that came out of the New Liberal Manifesto project was that there's not only still a place for liberalism, but that its time may well have come again. With the threat of big tech reducing us all to a number or a byte, a political philosophy based on the self-determination of the individual in a compassionate society in which we all constantly move into and out of various communities could be absolutely what's required come the next election – so long as we can find a way of selling it to voters.

Another note of optimism came from the clarity that emerged that the same narrative really can appeal to both traditional Labour and traditional Conservative voters. In an era of social media, the days of giving one story to Labour-leaning voters and a different story to sceptical Tories just won't wash. Emphasising that the liberal is as suspicious of the power of the state as of the power of big business is a form of centrism that is far more defined than just being a Lab/Con compromise, and is likely to appeal to our ubiquitous target Soft Labs and Soft Cons.

The work is a long way from being done, but we have set the ball rolling. The next step is to get people talking about it. It's such a shame the spring conference is not an in-person event, because this is an ideal subject for a fringe discussion, but maybe there will still be scope for that in Brighton in September. And there are plenty of other ways of getting discussion going.

Ultimately, we need to move on from this manifesto to the party's election manifesto. The New Liberal Manifesto is more of a statement of principles along the lines Karl Marx used to set out his Communist Manifesto, not a manifesto in the pre-election sense we have come to understand it. But elections aren't won with manifestos, they're won by convincing enough people that a party has something they want to support, and that's where we need to use the New Liberal Manifesto to get people excited about what liberalism has to offer.

By 2015, people had stopped listening to Nick Clegg. We hope the New Liberal Manifesto is a step towards people listening to the liberal movement once again.

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Chris Bowers was a two-term Liberal Democrat councillor in Lewes, and has stood four times for Parliament and once for the European Parliament. He wrote Nick Clegg: the biography (Biteback, 2011).

The New Liberal Manifesto can be downloaded from: [www.newliberalmanifesto.org.uk](http://www.newliberalmanifesto.org.uk)

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# WHERE'S THE BEEF?

## The New Liberal Manifesto explain Liberalism well but where are the new ideas, asks Susan Simmonds

The New Liberal Manifesto is an informal initiative by a group of Liberal Democrats led by former Liberal Democrat councillor and parliamentary candidate Chris Bowers as lead author and a reference group of Duncan Brack, David Howarth, Monica Harding and Rob Parsons.

Bowers lays out that the New Liberal Manifesto has a clear objective “this manifesto sets out what liberalism is, applies it to today’s political landscape, and illustrates the role it could play in helping to unite all those who long for a more hopeful alternative to the current British government”.

He s also clear that Liberalism needs to be reinvigorated for two key purposes, although in my view they are seriously interlinked. Firstly the Liberal Democrats are likely to play a key role in defeating the Conservatives because they are best placed in more than 100 seats and need to stand for something to achieve this; tactical considerations have become the Liberal Democrats defining theme and that leaves the party lacking credibility.

Secondly Liberals need policies to underpin a credible alternative to a re-elected Conservative government, and along with an inherent liberal belief in co-operation that means reimagining the tribal politics and parties working together becomes as accepted in the UK as in most European countries.

There is little to disagree with in this analysis. Bowers has articulated where Liberal Democrats currently sit, and defines a space and parameters for a strategic discussion.

How far this manifesto can take that forward and whether it has enough scope and depth is an interesting point for discussion.

The manifesto contains much to be applauded – thinking, discussing and writing about Liberal philosophy, ideas and policy is not common enough or far enough entrenched in the party DNA.

However, this is not designed to be a document full of new ideas or a testing ground for potentially new, progressive or controversial thought or discussion areas; it is an explainer. It offers a brief, uncomplicated – simple or oversimplified depending on your viewpoint – narrative of ideas about who Liberals are, what they think and why.

It provides a straightforward approach to policy areas Liberal Democrats should be focusing on and covers areas such as equality, community and internationalism. It discusses how Britain’s governance should be modernised, tackling inequality (although if there is ever a revision, I would suggest this section is strengthened) and addressing the tech revolution. Bowers also describes Liberalism as “Britain’s original Green Party” with a welcome reference to the Yellow Book. Any Liberal Democrat or interested political observer who has read a manifesto

will be familiar with the ideas and discussions.

Inevitably, in such a short document, there is little room for nuance or exploring a Liberal perspective on emerging themes, which is a predictable challenge. Occasionally, it is gently contradictory, and the casual, or explanatory language lightly grates. Overall, there is little to disagree with, but therein lies the central dilemma of this publication.

One could argue that the proposition that Liberalism needs to be reinvigorated is a more complicated and nuanced point than may first appear. It could be argued that Liberal thought does not require reinvigoration; it is a political philosophy which has remained cohesive and adaptable; capable of providing good governance, navigating complex policy challenges and is accessible intellectually.

Arguably, what is required is better communication with an electorate more used to casting their vote based on practical policy or trust, rather than political ideas.

Equally, it could be argued that all philosophies and political movements need to be reinvigorated, redesigned or reinterpreted periodically, to ensure that that are fit for a contemporary purpose. Probably, Liberalism is no exception to that.

Reinvigorating Liberalism would require policy ideas, which are relevant, engaging and dynamic and accessible in dealing with the challenges which exist for a majority of the electorate.

There is thinking and writing being produced within the Liberal Democrats by organisations such as SLF, initiatives from individuals and policy working groups which is vibrant, radical, thought provoking and clearly addressing the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

Potentially, this publication can helpfully continue the discussion about how Liberal Democrats communicate the vibrant Liberal political creed that already exists. Bowers is clear that starting the discussion would be a win

And that discussion is actually critical again – the tactics of winning seats have potentially undermined the philosophical understanding. Two by-election wins overturning substantial Conservative majorities have put an encouraging number of seats into play – and with that comes the temptation to focus on tactical messaging.

There is a continuing risk that serious policy messages will be demoted and that the ‘two horse race’, bar charts and ‘Labour can’t win here’ graphics will dominate; which – in fairness - have probably delivered more seats than the most dynamic of policy positions since the Liberal Democrat stand against the Iraq war.

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Susan Simmonds is a member of Thanet Liberal Democrats  
[www.newliberalmanifesto.org.uk](http://www.newliberalmanifesto.org.uk)



# CATCHING THE TORIES NAPPING

## North Shropshire was won with a huge campaign but a small initial base. Matthew Green explains how, and looks at lessons for other by-elections

Many Liberal Democrat members and long-term supporters live in constituencies where the prospects of ever seeing a Lib Dem elected as MP seem remote.

North Shropshire was one of those seats. A small but dedicated team of activists kept the flag flying, with the ambition of gaining seats off the Tories in council elections to help remove them from majority control of Shropshire Council.

Its worth recapping where, the LibDems in North Shropshire were on 4 November. Some details don't sound very promising.

With only around 130 members there were not many local activists. The only councillor in the constituency had made a late decision not to stand again in May and his seat had, narrowly, been lost. The constituency chair had moved to Scotland for work reasons just a week before Owen Paterson resigned.

However, there were also signs not all was hopeless. Sixteen candidates had been fielded in the May elections, with nine actively campaigning and six of those coming close to winning. An extra 366 votes in the right boxes would have delivered six Lib Dem councillors. The vote share in those local elections was double that of the Greens and Labour. In local elections terms, at least, Lib Dems were the clear challengers, albeit a long way behind the Tories. This did mean a legitimate bar graph could be produced with the Lib Dems in second place.

It was also a considerable advance from the 2017 local elections. It represented a doubling of vote share and actual votes, despite the frustration of coming so close in so many seats the local elections had encouraged the local activists they were on the up.

The candidate from the 2019 general election, Helen Morgan, was active and was one of those who'd narrowly missed gaining a division off the Tories in May, in her case by a mere 23 votes.

Crucially she was also up for being a by-election candidate. A number of people suggested I might stand, as the only Lib Dem to have ever (at that stage) won a parliamentary seat in Shropshire, but I was clear, Helen should be the candidate.

The other favourable factor is that in Shropshire campaigning is often organised on a county wide basis. Co-operation across North Shropshire, Shrewsbury and Atcham, and Ludlow constituencies had been improving in recent years and the response to the by-election was as much a Shropshire response as a North Shropshire one.

## ORGANICALLY ORGANISING

As soon as Paterson resigned, people organically started organising. At least one WhatsApp group was up and running within minutes among Shropshire campaigners. A Facebook campaign HQ group was set up by the regional campaigns officer Joe Harmer the same day. There had been some provisional work on a possible recall petition leaflet and this was rapidly turned by Shropshire's Vijay Naidu into a first leaflet and plans were made for delivery from the Saturday morning. Harmer also emailed Dave McCobb, director of field operations, saying North



Shropshire was interesting and could have potential – a prescient email.

I knew that, as perhaps the most prominent local Lib Dem (to people outside the county at least) I had to use the social media reach I had, supported by others active a, to make members and supporters across the country, the party hierarchy and those journalists who follow me believe the LibDems were throwing themselves at the campaign.

What we knew at the outset was that we could secure a good second place, we knew Labour and Greens locally were not capable of running a campaign that could challenge, we also knew it would take a lot of campaigning to do it. There wasn't a meeting about this, or some directive from HQ, we just all knew it. Perhaps this was a benefit of having a decent number of activists in Shropshire who are not just experienced in local campaigning but experienced in national by-elections.

My only advice to those organising the ground campaigning was that we had to throw everything at the campaign initially, to try to create that crucial element in any election campaign, momentum; to be seen by the public and the media as the challengers; and to make it hard for the party nationally not to get stuck in to the campaign.

I advised that people out campaigning should remember to take selfies and share them on social media. Weight of campaigning photos would have a significant effect convincing others we were the challengers. I think its safe to say we achieved that objective.

There was little in the way of a delivery network in the constituency, the delivery would have to be done by teams operating out of car boots. On the first Saturday six teams assembled in car parks in Oswestry and Market Drayton, Constituency vice-chair David Walker headed up the Oswestry operation, with Morgan heading the Market Drayton meet. Also, instrumental to organising the initial campaigning was Shropshire group leader and Shrewsbury councillor, David Vasmer; Shrewsbury councillor Alex Wagner; and from Ludlow constituency councillor Heather Kidd.

So, leaflets were going out in the two of the five towns, two more towns Ellesmere and Whitchurch were targeted the next day. Activists from Montgomery, Brecon & Radnor, Telford & Wrekin, Ludlow and Staffordshire took bundles to deliver some of the larger villages closer to where they lived. On the Sunday the team in Whitchurch was joined by Ed Davey who took a decision to make an early visit to the seat, our not-yet-selected candidate Helen Morgan was on hand for a photo which went out in a press release which the local papers all duly published.

*“My only advice to those organising the ground campaigning was that we had to throw everything at the campaign initially, to try to create that crucial momentum”*

In that initial weekend, in excess of 20,000 homes received a leaflet. There was no sign of activity from any other party.

## **CRICK ARRIVES**

What we didn't know, at that stage, was that veteran - much feared - by-election journalist Michael Crick was arriving in the constituency to film a piece for Mail+.

Unknown to us, he went to Ellesmere and vox-popped locals who told him we the only ones doing anything, and said they'd already been leafleted (fortunately we'd delivered Ellesmere on the Sunday!) and that we were the challengers.

We simply couldn't have set up better vox pops if we'd tried. Crick made contact with the Lib Dem press team who contacted me, I rushed from work and joined the team delivering in Wem to be the interviewee.

It became apparent Crick's angle was that Labour weren't going to try in North Shropshire and we weren't going to put effort into Old Bexley and Sidcup. This may not have been news to those from Labour nationally who'd clearly briefed Crick, but it was news to the limited number of Labour activists in Shropshire who had assumed they would naturally be the challengers.

They must have spent a lot of time discussing this at meetings as they didn't start campaigning on the ground until twelve days after Paterson had resigned; by then Labour were an irrelevance.

Ed's initial flying visit, the campaigning pictures on Twitter and Crick's report combined to have a crucial early effect, political punters saw what was happening and starting backing the Lib Dems. By one week into the campaign the bookies now had it as a two-horse race between Lib Dems and Tories. Bookies' odds were to become a very useful tool during the campaign.

The following week the party nationally began to step up the gears, a superb agent Chris Lovell was appointed, and Mike Dixon, the chief executive and Rhiannon Leaman, Davey's head of office came up to Shropshire for a meeting with Kidd and Walker.

Walker - armed with encyclopaedic knowledge of data from elections in North Shropshire - told them, if enough boots could be got onto the ground the seat was potentially winnable. The next day McCobb sample canvassed across the seat, and found long-term Tory voters expressing uncertainty about voting Tory and tat voters already had begun to perceive the Lib Dems as the challengers. He was also convinced it was possible. Lovell's budget began to increase and McCobb set about successfully convincing others at a national level North Shropshire had potential.

He also chanced upon Soulton Hall and found it had an available well-equipped converted barn, which became the campaign HQ. The standard for campaign HQs is now firmly set and activists will be bitterly



disappointed if future by-election HQs don't reach the same level.

At the end of that week Davey was back with Daisy Cooper, and the next day, the Campaign HQ was opened by Sarah Green, with Tim Farron also on the campaign trail. More than 200 people were there that day and the campaign was now flying. It was no longer just leafleting; canvassing was firmly underway and results showed we were firmly in second place and Tory vote was sharply down.

That weekend, the only sign of any doorstep activity from any other party was a local leaflet from the Greens in Oswestry. By the time most people received a leaflet from anyone else, they'd received several from us, no wonder they were telling us we were the only ones with a chance of beating the Tories.

## TYPICAL ARROGANCE

It's a truism that you make your own luck, we certainly made ours. On the same day as our office launch the Tory candidate was announced. With their typical arrogance, they'd assumed they were selecting the MP, so had ruled out local candidates and selected a candidate living in Birmingham. That might not matter in an urban constituency but in a deeply rural seat it does, people want someone to know their patch. A similar situation was fundamental to my victory in Ludlow in 2001. There was a hostile response from voters on the doorstep to the Tories' selection.

On 16 November Morgan's selection was announced. We now could officially campaign for a candidate. Principled and immersed in local issues she was a perfect choice, particularly so, in light of the Tories' choice.

Helen was not someone who'd set herself on securing a parliamentary career, instead she was a dedicated local activist, committed to her local area and brave enough to put her head above the parapet in a by-election.

I spent a lot of time campaigning with her, and I've no doubt she will be a superb MP. She was at the forefront of ensuring the local issues of ambulance station closures, the damage to the farming industry and the overall neglect of North Shropshire by the Tories were at the forefront of the campaign. Her campaigning instincts are excellent.

A few days later, Johnson made his Peppa Pig speech, again the negative reaction of people who usually voted Tory was palpable, the responses were clear that Johnson was now a liability for the Tories.

The choice of candidates, the Peppa Pig Speech and the Lib Dems out-campaigning everyone else, meant the gap had closed to just a few points and a win was possible if the Labour voters could be persuaded to vote tactically.

The tactical voting message was redoubled and then ten days before polling day, came revelations about parties in Downing Street and the Allegra Stratton video. Voters were appalled. By the final Saturday



we had our noses in front of the Tories and that was without tactical votes from Labour. The campaign now had to get the vote out and in the final week it delivered. The result is now political history and rapidly becoming LibDem legend.

The big take from North Shropshire, is keep plugging away, even in seats where a win seems improbable, because events can take unexpected turns, but you can only take advantage of those twists if you've given yourself the chance to do so. The Lib Dems in North Shropshire, Shropshire and neighbouring constituencies got the campaign off to a flyer, the party nationally (leadership and professional teams) made the right calls and built seamlessly on that start. Helen Morgan was a superb candidate.

Well over 1,000 people were involved throughout the short six-week campaign, it was campaigning at its best and the Lib Dems at our best. Roll on the next by-election.

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Matthew Green was Liberal Democrat MP for Ludlow 2001-05



# TIME BANDITS

## Parliamentary minutiae can swallow up a mere 13 MPs, so the Lib Dems should concentrate where it matters, says David Grace

Have you ever joined in when Rod Stewart sings Sailing, especially the bit where he repeats “Can you hear me. Can you hear me?” My friends usually answer “yes” and then ask me to stop. It would make a good anthem for the Liberal Democrat parliamentarians whose contributions to the national debate are largely ignored by the media.

I was going to demand Liberal Democrats take a stronger line on Europe, but found conference resolutions already called for the line I had in mind. Well then, I thought, our MPs aren't carrying out the resolutions. So I checked on parliament and they're doing it.

So why do people so often say they don't know what the Liberal Democrats stand for? If the person asking is a Sun or Mail or even Telegraph reader, the answer is simple - those rags won't print what Liberal Democrats say. The BBC is little better.

The House of Commons is an extraordinarily busy place, sitting for more days every year than any other national parliament, usually more than 150 days a year. They pass about 33 Acts every year, all of which have to go through three stages plus ping-pong if the House of Lords tries to amend them. Bills have been getting longer year by year with the current average being 86 pages. In addition there are committees, questions to ministers, adjournment debates, early day motions, statements, secondary legislation with over 700 statutory instruments every year of which the Commons only takes a good look at about 160. I count 17 government departments plus Number 10 and the Cabinet Office and numerous other agencies and offices, the work of all of which MPs have to scrutinise if possible. Wed have 13.

I know I sound like a cracked record but look at the figures. Under First Past the Post, the Liberal Democrat 11.5% share of the popular vote elected 11 MPs, - 1.7% of the seats, meaning it took 332,936 votes to elect each MP. A proportional share of seats would have elected 74 MPs. Don't get me started on the SNP with their 48 MPs elected by 3.9% of the vote. It's not just that the voting in the Commons is grossly disproportionate, it's also the speaking time, the funding of offices, the number of staff, the membership of committees. It's why Ian Blackford gets two prime minister's questions and Ed Davey is lucky if he gets one.

Our MPs get a lot of help from their noble friends, which may explain why the Tories are considering reducing the size of the Lords. They're so used to that house having an inbuilt Tory majority for over a century that they can't understand why it doesn't any more. When you add the immense volume of casework, the task for 13 MPs begins to seem impossible.

Sadly the media shamelessly copy the unfairness of parliament in the number of column inches devoted to each party's pronouncements. The newspapers can choose what they want to print but we all own the BBC with its peculiar ideas of balance. The BBC claims to allocate coverage during elections according to past and current support for the parties. How they do the maths remains a mystery. During the 2019 election they received no fewer than 24,400 complaints of bias. Outside of election periods the much vaguer criterion of impartiality supposedly applies and the occasions when Lib Dems appear in news stories, interviews and current affairs programmes remain comparatively rare.

So what's the solution? Should we take to the streets (before this dreadful government bans that as well)? Should we throw Tory statues in the river? One solution is very old and we know it well. Given that the media would not spread our stories when we had something to say, David Penhaligon told us to “Put it on a piece of paper and stuff it through a letterbox” and we have been doing so ever since. The problem is that the other parties have learned from and copied us.

The other solution which the parliamentary party must seriously consider is also called Focus. They must learn to resist the temptations of the Westminster bubble to speak on every subject, to respond to every statement, to cover every issue.

Far better to step back from the daily fray and spend time identifying the key items on which the Liberal view is essential and unique. Then hammer away at it and not just in parliament where the scales are so heavily weighed against us.

Paddy Ashdown took to touring the country. I don't know if anyone has analysed the effect of his travels on the voters but we do know he had a higher profile than any leader since (with the exception of Clegg for obvious reasons). I don't believe that profile came from following parliamentary minutiae.

Simple physics and military strategy teach the advantages of concentrating force and the same applies in politics. Spread too thinly, we will change nothing except to produce a small cadre of exhausted parliamentarians.

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David Grace is a member of the Liberator Collective

# SO, WOULD IT WORK?

## Claims for and against a 'progressive alliance' have lacked useful data. Now there is some and Peter Dunphy crunches the numbers

The debate about the merits or demerits of a 'progressive alliance' has continued for years, growing with each Conservative election victory but has been relatively uninformed by empirical analysis or dedicated polling.

This lack of evidence has allowed its supporters and detractors to assert unverifiable statements unchallenged other than by contrary unverifiable assertions.

In one corner we have the home made grand schemes for compounding 'progressive' or opposition vote totals that assume that every Liberal Democrat or Green voter would choose Labour in preference to the Tories and vice versa with little regard for the realities of the way political parties really work, the constitutional and/or policy imperative to stand everywhere, the role of constituency/local, regional and national party organisations, the role of the PPC in a long term campaign, electoral commission restrictions relating to pooled spending and the very real antagonism that exists in many places between the 'progressive parties' fuelled by years of tribal fighting.

### PARTY TRIBALISTS

In the other corner are the Party tribalists (and in the case of the Liberal Democrats many active members who are at least as opposed to Labour as they are to the Conservatives). Their assertions – that the Lib Dem vote will split equally, that the Lib Dems presence can help Labour (as was asserted in the Batley and Spen campaign) or that Labour voters may prefer the Tories, that 'voters can work it out for themselves and vote tactically' or that 'voters don't like stitch ups' are equally speculative or based on completely exceptional by-election circumstances.

There is historical data that can help. The British Election Study, the huge survey undertaken after each general election has asked the critical question 'How would you have voted as a second preference'. This survey has shown a varying Lab vs Con preference amongs Lib Dem (previously SDP/Lib Alliance) voters and among other findings that kills the often-repeated assertion that 'the SDP split the anti-Tory' vote.

The evidence suggests the opposite that the intervention of the SDP suppressed what would have been an even larger majority for Thatcher (the General Election Campaign of 1987, by Ivor Crewe, Martin Harrop Cambridge University Press, 1989). The evidence presented is that in some elections such as in 1997 and 2001 Lib Dem voters heavily preferred Lab as a second choice but in others (1987, 2010) this was not the case.

There are some mathematical facts that should be indisputable. The Liberal Democrats do not need every Labour vote to switch to them for a progressive

alliance to provide benefit.

They would only need most of them. However, if this has the effect of deterring Tory to Lib Dem switchers then this should also be considered. This is particularly the case because in a Tory held Lib Dem target seat (and this is every target seat bar Sheffield Hallam) every Tory/Lib Dem switcher is worth two squeezed votes - as such a switcher both adds to the Lib Dem tally while reducing the Tory tally. So a single vote lost to the Tories nullifies two votes gained from Labour or the Greens.

So how do we know what is best? Best for Britain has commissioned a private MRP poll to try to answer some of these questions. Of course, there are caveats. It assumes very different circumstances in Scotland and so relates to England and Wales only. The poll is a snapshot (the survey was completed before the current sharp fall in Conservative voting intention). And it does not consider campaigning.

As the poll addresses transferability and second preferences the results could be modified to consider headline vote changes. On the 'campaign' point we cannot possibly know how a campaign would impact. Advocates of deals will argue that the impact of campaigning will add to the positive impact on seat gains, whereas detractors will argue the opposite.

So we should simply regard the poll results as a starting point, though one which presents an opportunity for Con-leaning voters to stay with/switch to Conservative if they are indeed turned off by an arrangement between the other parties.

### UNLIKELY SCENARIOS

The MRP polling methodology did not allow us to ask voters' preferences beyond a second choice, and this means that we are forced to deal with unlikely theoretical scenarios: Labour voters are offered the choice between Con, Lib Dem, Green and Won't vote; Lib Dem voters are offered Con, Lab, Green and Won't vote. In practice no-one would ever propose a scenario whereby Labour stood down for Lib Dem or vice versa but the Greens still stand. So while we can take a firm figure for the ratio of switchers between parties we need to make at least one assumption - which is I believe a fair one - which is that Labour and Lib Dem voters who choose Green as a second preference would not be likely to split in proportionately higher numbers to Conservative rather than Lib Dem or Labour if offered a third choice.

The results appear below. What we can see may not please many people, but several common assertions should be quashed. So here are the key findings:

- \* Liberal Democrat voters do currently heavily favour Labour over the Conservatives and vice versa;

- ☛ In nearly all Lib Dem target seats a seat deal would provide a significant net benefit resulting in additional gains;
- ☛ There is no evidence that in Con/Lib Dem marginals a deal would alienate Conservative voters;
- ☛ In some Labour target seats a seat deal would benefit Labour
- ☛ There are a significant number of seats where a seat deal would be counter-productive, but they are all Con/Lab marginals. They are typically former 'Red Wall' Brexit voting and with very small current Lib Dem or Green presence. These may well be the 'Batley and Spen' seats where the Lib Dem presence does help Labour.

This data has been presented in more detail to key individuals and groups across the three parties. The data is offered without any commentary on the likelihood or practicalities of the arrangements and should be seen as useful additional data.

## EXAMPLES OF SEATS GAINED BY THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS WITH A UNITY CANDIDATE

### Esher & Walton

	Con	Unity	Reform	Other
MRP	46	29	2	2
Alliance	45	49	4	3
Difference	-1	20	2	1

### South Cambridgeshire

	Con	Unity	Reform	Other
MRP	43	27	2	1
Alliance	43	51	4	2
Difference	0	24	2	1

### St Ives

	Con	Unity	Reform	Other
MRP	44	27	2	2
Alliance	45	48	3	3
Difference	1	21	1	1

## Kingston & Surbiton

	Con	Unity	Reform	Other
MRP	34	31	2	2
Alliance	38	54	5	3
Difference	3	23	3	1

## EXAMPLES OF SEATS GAINED BY LABOUR WITH A UNITY CANDIDATE

Sedgefield – 41% to 40% margin in favour of Conservative becomes a 46% to 45% margin to Labour as a Unity candidate.

Warwick and Leamington and High Peak – very small margins widen in favour of Labour

Reigate – a 22% Conservative lead (46% to 24%) is narrowed to 46% each

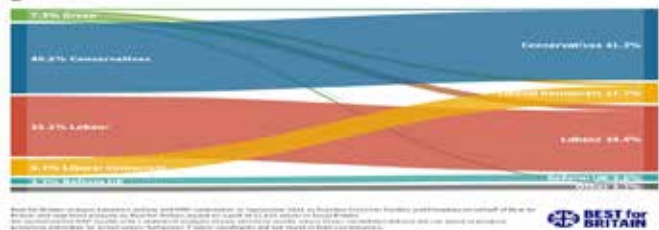
## EXAMPLE OF A SEAT LOST WITH A UNITY CANDIDATE

### Blackpool South

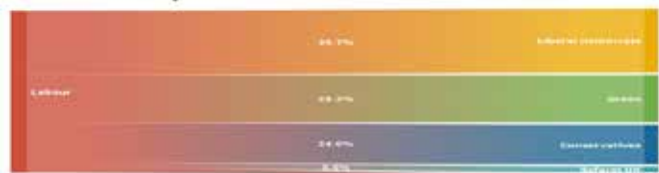
An alliance candidate here, though would tip the balance towards the Conservatives and result in a Conservative hold by just 2 points.

	Con	Unity	Reform	Other
MRP	41	42	4	3
Alliance	46	44	6	4
Difference	5	2	2	1

How vote shares would change in an average constituency in England and Wales would vote if there was no Green candidate at a general election



How Labour voters in an average constituency in England and Wales would vote if there was no Labour candidate at a general election in their constituency.



How Liberal Democrat voters in an average constituency in England and Wales would vote if there was no Lib Dem candidate at a general election in their constituency.





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## From Pit Banks to Red Benches

by Jenny Tonge

Louisa Publications.

Aged 14 a girl, born to two Black Country teachers read about Albert Schweitzer. Inspired to help people like he did, but without the religion, she decided to become a doctor and in 1959 Jenny Smith became one of 10 women in a class of 120 medical students at University College London.

Jenny spent 30 years in the NHS as a junior doctor and a GP, then a senior medical officer and manager of community health services. Then in 1981 Jenny was one of the Lib Dem group which took control of Richmond-Upon-Thames council and started to put into practice the community politics which the Liberal Party had espoused for a decade. After coming within 4,000 votes of taking the Richmond Park constituency in 1992, she won the seat in 1997 and set to work on local issues like limiting the noise from Heathrow, opposing airport expansion and traffic in and around the royal park.

She refused to become health spokesperson because she wanted to talk about other things. She became an active member of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Population Development and Reproductive Health because of her unshakeable belief that enabling women to control their fertility and access safe maternal health is essential to the well-being of individuals and the planet.

Jenny's dream job was international development spokesperson, shadowing another midlander Clare Short. In the aftermath of 11 September 2001, each of them was at odds with their party leader's support for the bombing of Afghanistan.

In 2003 after witnessing a rocket attack near the hospital in Gaza, then Labour MP Oona King, who is Jewish, called for a boycott of Israeli products, and Jenny made the statement which will stick with her forever: "If I was a mother and grandmother trying to bring up her family in those conditions (in the Occupied West Bank and Gaza) I might have considered becoming a suicide bomber myself."

She states that she never intended to indicate approval, just



# REVIEWS

that she has always empathised with women and she felt for Palestinian women coping with poor conditions harassment, imprisonment and deaths of their husbands and family. She was instantly sacked from the front bench.

From 2005 to 2021, sitting mostly as an independent in the Lords, she campaigned on the issue of Israel-Palestine and was attacked, sometimes with justification, sometimes without. She never stopped talking about reproductive health and issue such access to contraception and safe abortion, FGM and ending child marriage. In 2015 Jenny was made an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists in recognition of her services to women's health.

Those who only know Jenny from media reports should read about the death in 2004 of Jenny's daughter Mary died in a horrific accident. The pain of bereavement and the challenge of helping to bring up two small children are told with characteristic candour. A little of the mischievously funny Jenny occasionally shines through this illuminating read.

Liz Barker

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## The Electrical Life of Louis Wain [film] Will Sharpe (dir) 2022

There is an entire Facebook group devoted to 'Liberal Democats' and the Liberator Collective is famously pro-feline so this film ought to be a draw for Lib Dems.

Wain was a Victorian artist famous for his anthropomorphic cats, which became hugely popular and helped popularise cats as pets.

Later in life Wain's increasing mental disturbance saw his cats become increasingly surreal multi-coloured figures.

By all means see the film, but be prepared. The cats are best things in it, the drawings of cats the second best. Unfortunately, we

don't get enough of either and most of the footage is devoted to Wain's family life with an eccentric troupe of sisters.

All this is mildly diverting, but not much more than that, and despite the film's title we get little explanation of Wain's bizarre views on electricity, which was then in its infancy.

This seems at least worthy of a bit more elaboration since in one section Wain says he believes electricity will eventually lead to cats evolving to become blue and to communicate with their owners in English (the latter a mixed blessing for cat owners).

The film will have cat lovers purring, but it could have been rather more.

Mark Smulian

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## Louis Wain's Cats by Chris Beetles Chris Beetles Ltd & Canongate Books 2021 £30

More than anyone else Chris Beetles has kept the flame of Louis Wain – the man who drew cats, alive. I cannot remember when I first attended one of the cat shows at his Ryder Street gallery. Now he has stepped into the limelight, portrayed by Benedict Cumberbatch in *The Electric Life of Louis Wain*, which I hope will be screened in a cinema near me, as they need our support. Chris has an exhibition at his gallery, including many works from private collections running until 29 January.

What does Wain's work tell us of a man who's primary, but not sole output revolved around anthropomorphic cats, often of a rascal nature? He struck a goldmine, particularly in the heyday of late Victorian and Edwardian illustration, - beyond that of children's books, for the content of *Louis Wain's Annual* was also adult.

But when that vein ran thin, he

'The artist closest to my heart' NICK CAVE

# LOUIS WAIN'S CATS

Chris Beetles

Foreword by Benedict Cumberbatch



despaired as the provider for his family, sunk into obscurity and was declared insane. Discovered in a paupers' asylum, a public appeal and the intervention of Ramsey McDonald led to his transfer to more congenial surroundings until his death in 1939. Rodney Dale, an earlier biographer of Wain speculates "raising the social status of the cat was due, in no small measure, to Louis Wain himself".

Neither Dale nor Beetles commit to how Wain voted. Beetles writes: "Louis Wain and his cats were political animals and held strong views boldly spoken." Off print, Beetles thinks Wain was probably a Tory, but there can be no certainty of that – he was a loyalist on the Home Rule issue, and free trader at a time when Chamberlain was raising the issue of tariffs. His cartoons reflect his opinions, but like others, will also reflect the needs of the day.

Many cartoonists have told me that they don't like any politicians. Beetles thinks the politics of Speakers' Corner probably best represent Wain. His cartoons aside, he was a frequent and full commentator on the state of the nation. An anti-socialist, Beetles

see Wain as mildly critical of Lloyd George's National Insurance Bill of 1911 after his experiences in the USA.

You will, of course, first and foremost, buy this book for the cats and other examples of Wain's work, but it contains much more both in terms of commentary of his life and work, and primary sources to support that. The book shares the scholarship of Rodney Dale, and of David Wootton on Wain's ventures into ceramics. There is much to enjoy.

Stewart Rayment.

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## The Making of Oliver Cromwell by Ronald Hutton Yale University Press 2021 £25.

This is a remarkable book, the definitive account of the life of Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) up to the end of the First Civil War in 1646. A lucid, gripping narrative accompanied by stimulating analysis, the book makes two significant contributions to our understanding of Cromwell's early life and his rise to power.

The first is its handling of

military history. Cromwell's astonishing ascent from provincial obscurity to head of state was brought about by his extremely successful military career. Equally breath-taking is the fact that Cromwell had no military training, he learnt the art of war the hard way, in the saddle. Hutton is a gifted historian of the Civil War, and his book explains key aspects of early modern warfare, its theory and practice; and he takes us by the hand through Cromwell's military experiences, from the occasional early blunders to his part in the battles that led to the outright defeat of the king and his supporters.

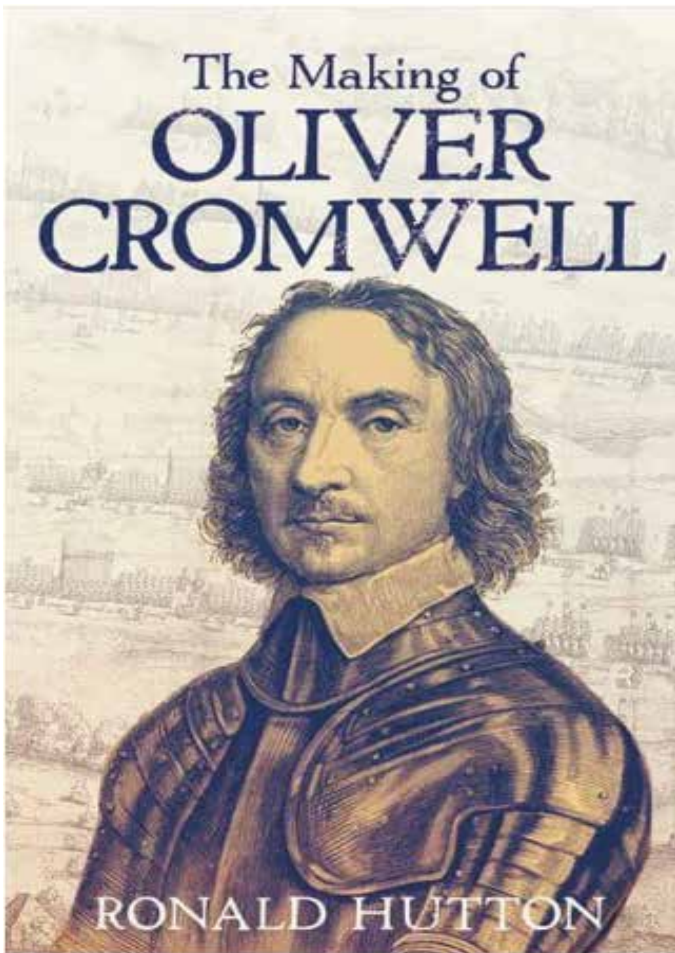
The second important contribution is made via Hutton's handling of 17th century sources and his engagement with Cromwell's other historians. The first forty years of Cromwell's life have always presented a difficult problem to scholars because so little evidence relating to him is extant.

From then on, as Cromwell found his political calling in the opposition to Charles I while rising to prominence in the parliamentary army that fought the king, we have a different problem. There is much more evidence relating to Cromwell, but much of it is contradictory or vague. Indeed, this issue characterises the whole of Cromwell's life throughout the 1640s and 1650s, exacerbated by the man himself whose surviving letters and speeches are notoriously inconsistent or lacking in the sorts of detail that historians savour. If only Cromwell had left us a thorough written record of his political philosophy and aims, in the manner of, say, James VI and I.

Yet Hutton explains and navigates these troubles with such coherent erudition, courtesy and humour, that the book is, at times, a page-turner. Hutton's postmodern historical interpretation illuminates Cromwell afresh while revising many earlier readings of him.

Hutton separates fact from fiction, often revealing that things that we thought we knew about the young Cromwell are either unconfirmed or were invented by his early modern biographers. These writers fell into two camps, unsurprisingly – Cromwell's hagiographers versus his enemies who set out to destroy his reputation once the Stuarts had





least the last thirty years; Hutton reveals the naivety of this without engaging in spats with his colleagues.

Hutton's Cromwell is still a Godly Puritan who saw the hand of God everywhere, especially in the defeat of the king; but in this study Cromwell is at times manipulative, ruthless, and a political streetfighter. Thus, Cromwell's military victories against the royalists were written up in the parliamentary press in ways that were especially favourable to himself, even at times exaggerating his contributions.

Although we do not know the procedures by which such accounts made it into the newspapers, it is inconceivable that Cromwell had no hand in the creation of his reputation in the media and his own image manipulation.

This view is reinforced by Hutton's close readings of Cromwell's letters to parliament in which he informed both houses of his successes in battle. He used the first person plural ("We destroyed the king's cavalry"), a technique that meant that he did not have to name other victorious commanders and share the glory.

Cromwell's ruthlessness is evident throughout the book. As he rose to prominence he settled scores with various people from his pre-war life, while the leading role that he played in the destruction of the duplicitous Hothams, both father and son, is very telling regarding Cromwell's brutality -- or as he would no doubt have put it, his commitment to expunging the enemies of his Godly cause.

All history books reveal something about the times in which they were written and this one is no exception. At various junctures Hutton tells us that certain royalist military commanders were upper

class twits, promoted way beyond their abilities. On reading this one immediately thinks of our current prime minister. And the book is peppered with vivid descriptions of the English rural landscape, its fauna and flora. This adds greatly to the reader's ability to picture events in their imagination, but it also makes me think of the looming climate catastrophe and all that we have to lose.

In sum, this is a meticulously researched and highly readable book.

Stephen Brogan

## Housmans Peace Diary Housmans 2022 £8.95

Every year Housmans publishes its world-renowned Peace Diary – now in its 69th edition. It includes a World Peace Directory listing more than 1,400 national and international peace, environmental and human rights organisations from around the world.

I find it particularly useful for social media campaigning – for example, on the 21 February 1952 identity cards were abolished in the UK following “an individual refusing to cooperate”. What they don't say is that individual was Liberal activist Harry Willcock. There is a plaque in the National Liberal Club, and this is a live issue; look it up.

This year is the 40th anniversary of the Falklands War and Albert Beale has contributed an excellent article around the subject and non-violent resistance to invasion – buy a copy for your friends in Ukraine.

If you forgot to get your diary and found the shelves run empty last month, Housmans can come to your rescue, as they had delays getting theirs back from the printers and still have stock. To order it: [shop@housmans.com](mailto:shop@housmans.com), or call 020 7837 4473.

Stewart Rayment

*Lord Bonkers  
is away*

been restored.

Thus, it is highly unlikely that the young Cromwell studied law at Lincoln's Inn, even though those who sought to “emphasise his credentials as a conventionally educated gentleman” maintained that he did. On the other hand, his detractors wanted to demean his early status, spreading the story that he had run a brewery; again, this is almost certainly untrue. When dealing with contradictory evidence, Hutton weighs up different accounts, exploring the motivation of various authors before explaining to the reader which is the most plausible interpretation, and why.

Broad contextualisation is also utilised to very good effect. While no new stash of documents has been found germane to Cromwell's early life in the East Midlands, Hutton furnishes us with useful information concerning the towns, villages and countryside with which Cromwell would have been very familiar.

And what of Cromwell himself, his ambitions and aims, his mindset, and his ways of operating?

The prevailing tendency among scholars has been to take Cromwell pretty much at his word, for at