



GRAPEVINE

The Newsletter of the South Shropshire Green Party

Summer 2015 Issue 86

THANK YOU TO ALL MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS FOR HELPING TO PRODUCE SUCH AN INCREASE IN THE GREEN VOTE IN THE GENERAL ELECTION. AND CONGRATULATIONS TO JANET PHILLIPS FOR BEING AN OUTSTANDING CANDIDATE.

The Remains of the Day

Veteran Green Party organiser John Lloyd, who has completed 70 years of activism, assesses the 2015 General Election



How well did we do? Well, refreshingly better in the May General Election than previous attempts in the Ludlow constituency. But can we really compare this election with past performances? Something happened earlier this year that made all the difference. The Green Party message began to be heard nationally and we gained members in unprecedented numbers throughout the country and currently we are 67,000 strong. Many were first-time voters who rebelled against the tired look of the three London parties, Tory, Labour and LibDem and their adherence to austerity policies. The result was that the Green Party matured into an effective electoral force, notwithstanding either that we lacked the financial strength of our political opponents or that biggest of anti-democratic bugbears, the first-past-the-post electoral system.

In South Shropshire we joined this green surge and for the first time worked to seek office rather than merely offer the electorate an alternative vote to keep the Green Party on the slate. We knew all along that the large Ludlow constituency - which extends from the Welsh border to Telford and, northwards, from Herefordshire to Shrewsbury - would stretch our resources, and all this travel goes against the grain for a fully-paid-up Green. However, we were particularly fortunate in our choice of candidate in Janet Helen Phillips who could articulate Green Party policies well and this proved a great asset at the many hustings Janet attended. Her hard work - in conjunction with her husband and campaign manager John - travelling so many miles meeting members, supporters and the wider electorate brought the election to life.

Before we entered the election campaign we knew that South Shropshire was Tory territory and they are well dug in and have the active support of local newspapers, but after this election the political map may well change radically. The outstanding result of the SNP in Scotland, who virtually wiped out the Labour party and others, is instructive. It would be wrong to take the present position for granted.

The outdated electoral system must now be at the top of the agenda. We achieved 1.1 million votes nationally, and under PR we would have had a group of around twenty MPs in the House of Commons today.

Fortunately, our star performer, Caroline Lucas, was returned with an increased majority in her Brighton constituency after a bitter fight with the Labour Party who threw so much into their campaign that they neglected the neighbouring seat and let the Tories win by 600 votes. Incidentally, Phillip Dunne would have won under PR as well this time as he gained over 50% of the vote. However, under PR the local electorate might well have voted differently.

Our first stepping stone in building a successful future was achieved in so much as this time we saved our deposit, gaining over 5% of the vote. At first sight it may seem modest, but it is part of our planned development and we are now looking to local government elections in 2017 to challenge the shabby administration in Shirehall and bring back democracy to Shropshire.

Lobbying Philip Dunne

We are grateful to local member Dave Luckhurst for a report of his attempt to lobby Philip Dunne at Westminster on climate change when the following questions were posed: Did our MP

- accept the overwhelming scientific evidence that climate change was mostly anthropogenic (originating from human activity)?
- was he aware of the 6-8 potential tipping points for runaway climate change (some of which are already on the move)?
- where does he obtain his information about climate change/what are his sources?
- did he regard it as urgent that we reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and aim for a fossil-free energy sector by 2030?

In response, the MP then spent several minutes “waffling” about how there have been many climate changes over the aeons, Ice Ages, etc., before touching on the fact that Church Stretton is famous for its geology!

Having arrived late Philip Dunne then left early for a vote, giving a total lobby time of 9-10 minutes. Dave concludes, “in a roundabout way, he denied that humans are mainly responsible.”

It is obvious from Dave’s experience that there is a great deal of lobbying still required. Even if you can’t get to raise the issue with Philip Dunne in person, how about writing to him? This matter is too urgent to be fudged by those in power who purport to represent us.

Shropshire Council's Disastrous Pursuit of "Austerity"

All around Shropshire the effects of Conservative policy, carried out with ruthless fervour by the Council, are really starting to bite. The Council's "commissioning" model, combined with its creation of the obscure company "ip&e", is designed to ensure that public services as developed and funded through the last century are dismantled in such a way that they cannot be restored when the economy picks up.

Of great concern also is the Council's scrapping of checks and balances within its procedures. Have a look, for example, at the online minutes of its Scrutiny committees and you will find supine acquiescence to the leadership. Attempts to secure some level of democratic accountability by opposition councillors are treated with contempt and pushed aside.

Fight back

Children's services, care homes, libraries and museums are all being damaged beyond repair. However, some communities are attempting resistance.

- **In Ludlow, the Campaign for Fairness** was met with illegal repression when it attended a full meeting of Shropshire Council to protest against its austerity measures. Filming equipment was seized from peaceful lobbyists, despite the filming of Council meetings being allowed under localism legislation.
- **In Church Stretton, the Library Support Group** is currently involved in legal action against Shirehall and its attempt to move the public library from its town centre location to an out-of-town Academy.
- **In Oswestry, national heritage experts** are backing local protesters against plans to build within yards of the internationally significant hillfort. Legal avenues of opposition are being explored.



- **In Wem, town councillors** seem to have secured a seven-year reprieve for their town library, overturning Shropshire Council's plans.
- **In Hopton Heath**, planning permission to erect sheds

for 216,000 chickens was met with determined opposition from local residents and the launch of legal proceedings. Claire Porter, head of legal and democratic services at Shropshire Council acknowledged, "*there is some merit in some of the complaints raised and [Shropshire Council] would not seek to defend any challenge brought by way of a judicial review to the decision.*"

Do you know of other examples of resistance to the excesses of Shropshire Council's service cuts and planning decisions? Please let us know by contacting sshropsgreen@aol.com.

Stop Press

Dart Energy's application to drill an exploratory borehole at Dudleston near Ellesmere as an obvious precursor to fracking is now to be subject to a full public enquiry. This follows months of delay and prevarication. No date has yet been set for the hearing which might not take place until next year, as reported in the Shropshire Star of July 10th.

Extraordinary General Meeting

Ludlow Assembly Rooms Saturday 5th September 2.00-4.00pm

To improve our work, and in the light of the dramatic surge in our membership we are reviewing the way we operate. Currently a discussion document is being prepared, which will be sent to all members for comment. **Please do respond when you receive it.** If you are not yet a member, please consider joining. Even if you can't be very active your subscription and your vote at election time are valuable.

South Shropshire Green Party 'Green 100' club.

A message from John Crowe

So we launch our monthly 'Green 100' at last after a *hiatus* due to our General Election workloads, change of Treasurer (now Jacki Lambert) and stimulating exchanges with our bank...! I apologise to those participants who are anticipating new-found wealth and we now are working towards the first draw, hopefully in August.

The appeal to members and supporters to join in are as described in the Winter edition of Grapevine. To the original appeal can now be added the need for adequate funding for our work around the referendum on our EU membership terms, plus progress towards our next major challenge of Shropshire Council elections in May 2017.

So please do engage with this bit of funding fun, which has the potential - with enough participants - to make so much more effective our important progress. Contact me by email crowe@freedomia.net or phone 01588 680338 or 07851 760443 (m), or write to me at The Dacha, Walcot, Lydbury North, SY7 8AX.

Ludlow Green Fair - Sunday, 30th August 10am-4pm in Ludlow's Castle Square

Halloo!!! Your Party Needs You. We will be running a South Shropshire Green Party stall at the Ludlow Green Fair. This has proved to be a very fun and useful way to engage with local people and out-of-town visitors.

We need people to help us put up and dress the stall and then help dismantle the stall at the end of the day. If you're a gregarious type, we need people for one to two hour slots to chat with passers-by, hand out copies of the short manifestos, and ask people whether they vote Green and if not what would persuade them? If you're a quieter type, we need people to help oversee the petitions on local and national topics (suggestions for these welcome) and the "yes, please, I'd like to stay in touch" sign-up page. If any one is minded to run a raffle or a tombola or make some cakes etc for sale that would be excellent too.

So there's a job that needs doing whatever your personality and time available. **If you can help, in whatever way, large or small, with this event please contact Hilary Wendt on 01588 680 338 or email: hilarywendt@yahoo.co.uk**

Diary Dates

- **August 4th 7.00pm Craven Arms Community Centre Business meeting.**
- **August 30th Ludlow Green Fair** see item on page 4
- **September 5th 2.00–4.00 pm EGM Ludlow Assembly Rooms**
- **September 7th 10.30 Church Stretton Mayfair Centre Business meeting, to take forward plan agreed at EGM**
- **September 19th Bishops Castle Michaelmas Fair Green Party stall**
- **September 25th–28th Autumn Conference Bournemouth International Centre** More information and booking at <https://www.greenparty.org.uk/conference>.

Skills Register

At both national and local level, party organisers are seeking information about what skills members and supporters may be able to offer on behalf of the party to help us expand our activities in the light of our increased membership. Locally, you will have gathered that we are reviewing how we operate ready for the EGM. You may already have received the following appeal by email from the national party, and they have now asked us to repeat the request.

“Could I ask that you use this link which will open a 'webform' into which you can enter your skills, then please submit the form. The process should take a couple of minutes.

https://my.greenparty.org.uk/form/your-skills?cid1=5187&cs=0c5c509d01cfd1f1ba8fe0199467e0fe_1436521605_168

This will give your local party an understanding of your skills and so how you might help them in their campaigning activity should you wish to get more actively involved. I would like to stress that giving this information won't commit you to undertaking any activity, and please don't complete the form if you are uncomfortable with the request.”

