



GRAPEVINE

The Newsletter of the South Shropshire Green Party

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Greens to contest Oswestry seat of disgraced ex-Council Leader

On December 4th, Shropshire Council Leader Keith Barrow announced that he was to resign immediately both as Leader and as a Council member. This followed a complaint, upheld by an independent investigation, that he failed to declare an interest during a board meeting of the Council's private firm ip&e. It also emerged that he had been the subject of a similar complaint in 2010.



While his Conservative colleagues paid him fulsome tributes, BBC Radio Shropshire reported that police are investigating a complaint against him. Shrewsbury and North Shropshire Green Party will contest the now vacant **Oswestry South** seat where, in the last election, the Green Party's **Duncan Kerr** – expected to stand again this time - came second.

This will, therefore, be a very important by-election – to be held on 4th February - and we must offer Shrewsbury and North Shropshire Green Party as much support as we can, both with practical help and financial donations.



South Shropshire Green Party has agreed to make a modest financial donation to the campaign and will also provide a similar sum to assist with putting “our boots on-the-ground” in Oswestry in support of Duncan (left).

There will be canvassing every weekend on both Saturday and Sunday starting 9/10 January. Three or four items of election literature will be delivered, including in the last couple of days on 2 and 3 Feb when it will need to go out very quickly.

- If you would like to make a donation or offer other direct help, please contact Shrewsbury & North Shropshire directly at mid.northshropgreens@gmail.com or call 01743 245838 or 07964 895232.
- If you would like to help form a South Shropshire ‘expeditionary force’ to venture into the streets of Oswestry with leaflets etc. over the course of the next 5-6 weeks, please email contact@southshropshire.greenparty.org.uk.

The Big Con

Immediately before his resignation, Barrow set up his much-vaunted ‘**Big Conversation**’, an elaborate “consultation” exercise intended to make the public decide which council services can be abolished during the next round of swingeing cuts. The seasonal metaphor of turkeys voting for Christmas seems appropriate for this exercise. Thus, the online questionnaire invites us, for example, to choose one of the following as being most - and one as least - important:

- Employment;
- Leisure;
- Older people & vulnerable adults;
- Births, Marriages and Deaths.

The survey is on the Shropshire Council website (<http://www.shropshire.gov.uk>), and responses must be returned by 4th January 2016. For people without computers, paper copies can be collected from libraries and customer service points. We are presented with a dilemma: whether to take part and appear to be endorsing service cuts, or to boycott this sham process, which would allow the Conservative council to claim that the public isn’t interested in its services anyway!

The Council’s record on consultations is not good: if they do not receive the response they want, they go ahead with their plans anyway, having wasted the participating public’s time and taxpayers’ money. Needless to say, **we need a complete change in the way Shropshire Council operates.**

In the meantime, several of our members have engaged with Council officers to point out that many of the services the Council provides are statutory duties - obligations it must fulfil by law. It is completely inappropriate to be consulting on any of these, and arguing that it is too difficult to separate them out for public consumption - as the Council is currently doing.

West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Election

Although the Green Party opposed the introduction of PCCs, the more proportional voting system employed in these elections affords an opportunity for a good showing, and the election hustings provide a valuable platform for Green Party policies on law & order, so South Shropshire Green Party is supporting a Green candidate to contest the vacancy created by Bill Longmore’s retirement. **Look out for this chance to use your Green vote effectively in 2016.**

Philip Dunne Supports Voting Status Quo Shock!

In response to lobbying about reform of the current voting system, Philip Dunne replied “*FPTP (First-past-the-post) is decisive, giving voters the chance to kick out Members of Parliament they are fed up with. It is also simple and clear: the candidate who gets the most votes wins. This means it is cheap to administer and comes with little bureaucracy..... We’ve had that debate and the British public has settled the question.*”

South Shropshire Green Party 2016 AGM

Following our post-election EGM in September, we will hold our normal AGM on **Saturday 13th February at 2.00pm at Ludlow Assembly Rooms**. Officer posts to be filled include: Treasurer, Election Agent, Co-ordinator, Press Officer, Communications Officer, Minutes Secretary, Chair and Events Organiser.

Nominations for Officer posts should be sent by February 6th to local Co-ordinator David Gibbon (see contact details below). If you would like more information about what is involved, please do get in touch with David. There is a huge amount of work to do ahead of the 2017 Shropshire Council elections (see below), and we need as much help as possible to spread the load.

Target to Win

The South Shropshire Green Party intends to win seats on Shropshire Council in May 2017. The thinking and planning towards this objective is already underway and is supported by national Green Party policy on how to win elections, known as “Target to Win” (TTW).

TTW - done properly - works. *It has delivered 60% and 66% vote shares for the Green Party in 17,000- and 10,700-electoral wards in Leeds and Kirklees, respectively. In Norwich, it has nearly trebled vote share from 15% (and 4th place) to 42% (and 1st place) over two years; similarly in Watford, going from 19% (and 3rd place) to 53% and victory in one year. It has taken us straight from 4th and last place to 1st in Solihull. Thus did we win our first seats (in all cases against a ‘full’ Con, Lab and LD opposition) such that we now have 10 Green councillors in Solihull and have gone from zero to 23 councillors in the West Midlands as a whole. Targeting contributed to a doubling of vote share to 22% in Brighton Pavilion at the 2005 General Election, winning the seat in 2010 and winning it again with an increased majority in 2015.*

TTW was formally adopted as South Shropshire policy at the Executive Meeting on 7th December 2015. TTW is all about focus and prioritisation. At its core is the requirement that we embrace a rigorous 3-stage process:

- We select one geographical area where we have reason to believe we stand a good chance of getting one or more councillors elected. Amongst other things, the selection is informed by choosing an area where there are lazy or unpopular councillors, a comparatively inactive opposition and the likelihood that we will have a well-known local candidate. Ideally, we would also have a good “base load” of green voters and enough members in that area to assist with the many tasks required.
- The selected area then receives a large amount of attention with, for example, newsletters and leaflets, and our candidate acts to all intents and purposes like an elected councillor i.e. helping to resolve individual or community-wide issues or concerns, attending public meetings, issuing press releases etc. TTW suggests that

the amount of collective effort needed to deliver all of these activities is very large and that is why it is focused on a single geographical area.

- In the 12 months before the election there will also be traditional canvassing and door-knocking at nearly all addresses – and on several occasions – to discuss local issues and ask residents what they would like their Green councillor to do.

TTW does not mean that we do not stand candidates in areas other than the target area, but it does mean that resources (money, people, hours) are not diluted by trying to carry out the same level of activity in several geographical areas. It is, for example, quite possible to stand as a “paper candidate” with no leaflets or canvassing and this is widely accepted as a useful electoral strategy.

Does this mean abandoning Green voters in non-target areas? National guidance is clear that this is not the case:

Far from ‘abandoning’ Green voters in non-target wards, by targeting effectively you will instead be seeking to finally win representation and action on the Council for their viewpoint - even if it isn’t yet in their particular ward. And by winning seats, and thereby enhancing your credibility and media coverage, a positive ripple effect will aid performance in weaker areas and at other elections through the factors of improving momentum, success breeding success and a degree of herd mentality amongst voters (many of whom want to back a ‘winner’). Sometimes, the way to win a promising ward is therefore to stop campaigning there for a while and focus on your most winnable ward. When you have won that, you may well gain the extra profile, credibility and activists needed to break through in another strong ward.

Analysis of data to identify the most promising areas to prioritise is taking place. This links directly with our “chapters”. At the EGM in September we agreed to promote chapters so that members across our very large rural area could become involved with other members in that area, get to meetings more easily and promote Green politics with a strong local message. A target area will require a very active chapter to assist with what has to be done over the next 18 months.

Members will receive the Executive’s recommendations regarding a target area in the New Year. In the meantime, if you would like to find out more about *Target to Win*, please visit the Members’ section of the national Party’s website:

<https://my.greenparty.org.uk/elections/targettowin>.

If you would like to be considered as a candidate for a Council seat in the 2017 local elections, please contact David Gibbon (contact details below).

John Lloyd asks if we own anything now



George Osborne's "northern powerhouse" policy looks pretty useless against the whittling away of the financial foundations of local government. What might have proved a real transfer of powers downwards is proving all words and little substance. Osborne's Autumn Statement has only rubbed salt into the wound as **councils will see the central government grant to local authorities fall by 56% over the next five years**. Yes, over half!

Here in Shropshire we will feel the full brunt of Conservative policies, which have already put at risk our libraries, social care, youth clubs and assistance to town and parish councils. Already Shirehall has embarked on a programme of dismantling through cuts: off-loading services; selling-off buildings; dismissing staff. The fact that councils can now keep 100 per cent of the sale price of properties they dispose of means we can expect to see a spate of closing-down sales.

Similarly, **the prospects for maintenance of social care in the community look grim**, even allowing that the Council can (if it chooses) raise council tax by up to 2% for this purpose. With an ageing population in a scattered rural setting, this will do little to prop up the existing shaky and under-funded structures. Some relief to Shropshire's financial ills might have come from the ability to now retain the whole of the business rate, as announced in the Autumn Statement, but that is all very well for electorates who live in rich areas with a thriving business sector, and of much less consequence for places like Shropshire.

The attack on local government is not purely a financial one: it derives from an attitude of mind that insists that councils should act as PLCs. Increasingly, Conservative philosophy owes far more to the libertarian USA than to European social democracy. It believes that publicly-run enterprises are inherently inefficient, and that without a direct profit motive they can only be inferior. The truth rarely matches the theory: witness the outsourcing of council services which brings its own problems, or take the NHS's use of staff recruitment agencies with their massively escalating costs.

The circumstances are such that, under the Conservatives, there will be no end to this "slimming-down" exercise. "Leaner and fitter" goes the slogan, but **all these moves undermine the democratic basis of local government as decisions are made further and further away from the council chamber**. All of Osborne's devolved powers are no substitute for proper funding. We wait to see whether the new leader of Shropshire Council will act any more effectively than the last to work for the common good of the public and protect the services upon which we all depend.

Crisis in Shropshire's healthcare intensifies

It is hard to keep track of the escalating problems within our local NHS. After a long period of expense, concern and confusion, the Future Fit process has still reached no conclusion, and now the idea of **temporary night time closure of one of the county's Accident & Emergency departments is being very seriously considered**.



Our “**Healthy Greens**” **Special Interest Group** has been hard at work, and has produced a letter to the county’s MPs and Council Leaders setting out the myriad matters of concern. The letter concludes:

“There is simply not enough money in Shropshire’s NHS tariffs and budgets to provide the clinicians and staff to do the job required. Shropshire’s NHS is haemorrhaging funding and failing to deliver dubious ‘efficiency savings’ while faced with an evolving demand driven by the county’s developing age demography and highly rural population distribution ... we now ask if each of Shropshire’s five MPs and two unitary council leaders will combine, re-double their efforts and approach the Secretary of State for Health again to renegotiate a more appropriate ‘rural premium’ for Shropshire’s NHS funding so it can successfully provide a level of health and care to Shropshire constituents that befits the 21st century?”

With the coldest and most dangerous part of the year almost upon us, we look forward to your urgent response.”

If you would like to see the full text of this letter, or get involved with the healthcare Special Interest Group, please contact John Crowe: crowe@freedomia.net.

Special Interest Group: Food & Farming

The Food & Farming Special Interest Group was formed at September’s EGM in Ludlow. We have agreed that we will focus on a number of key themes which are drawn either from the Party Policy document or from food and farming matters that are of particular concern to us here in South Shropshire. We would like to inform Party members and the wider public of the distinctive strategies that the Party has adopted and how we might bring these to the fore in the coming months. These topics include:

- support for smaller farmers
- food production systems and gardening in schools and by community groups
- support for County farms which can help new farm entrants
- soil, crop, tree and hedgerow management in more sustainable ways than those adopted by larger, conventional farmers
- Fair Trade policies, not only for developing country farmers who export to Europe, but also for our own dairy and sheep farmers who need to receive a fair price for their products in our markets here.

We will communicate our messages through contributions to community meetings, discussions with farmers and others involved in the industry, letters to the press and press releases on topical matters. Some examples are: product pricing, the futility of badger culling, challenges to intensive farming proposals in the area, and the use/abuse of antibiotics in farming and human health.

We are currently a small group who would welcome a wider membership and the opportunity to discuss topical issues on a regular basis. Meetings via Skype or Zoom have been suggested. David Gibbon (contact details below) would welcome all comments & ideas.

Please Help End All Fur Farming in Europe

A new report finds that “**Foxes and mink farmed for their fur are wild animals, not domesticated, and it is impossible to meet their most basic welfare requirements in factory fur farms**”.

Please consider writing to our MEPs – perhaps easiest via the Write to Them website <https://www.writetothem.com/> – to ask them to help bring an end to the appalling industry of fur farming within the EU. Please request that our MEPs **ask why, when many national governments (see below) are recognising that this industry is intolerable, there has not been any action at EU level?**

In the absence of action at EU level, several European countries have introduced legislation prohibiting fur farming at national level. All fur farming is banned in Austria, Slovenia, the UK, Croatia (from 2017), Bosnia & Herzegovina (from 2018), The Netherlands (from 2024) and certain regions within Belgium and Germany. Farming foxes is being phased out in Denmark but it continues to be the second largest producer of mink fur globally. Other countries, such as Italy and Switzerland, have introduced more stringent welfare requirements for animals farmed for fur, including ground pens with additional space and enrichment.

<http://www.respectforanimals.co.uk/facts-and-reports/new-report-from-respect-for-animals-makes-case-for-ban-on-fur-farming-in-europe/663/>

Special Interest Group: Transport

Our South Shropshire manifesto, agreed in September 2014, sets out **our local transport priorities**:

- The Green party is fully committed to a general speed limit of 20mph on all Shropshire’s residential roads.
- We will support a network of rural buses connecting as many of our communities as possible, e.g. the 435 bus which provides a vital connection on the Shrewsbury-Church Stretton-Craven Arms-Ludlow corridor and serves several villages on the same route. We want to see this bus run 7 days a week, on bank holidays and run later in the evenings.
- We will lobby central government and the Welsh Assembly Government for a much improved train service on the Shrewsbury-Hereford corridor. We will argue for an hourly service stopping at all stations between Hereford and Shrewsbury (both directions) and this to be supplemented by a 2-hourly, non-stopping service to serve the needs of longer-distance passengers (e.g. Cardiff-Manchester).
- We will campaign for a guaranteed connection from Ludlow, Craven Arms and Church Stretton with the Virgin train to London timed to leave Shrewsbury at 0639.

- We will campaign for integrated public transport where buses meet trains and trains meet buses at Church Stretton, Craven Arms and Ludlow stations. The current situation with no buses at all calling at Church Stretton station is unacceptable.
- We will work with partners to encourage car sharing on the same model of the car share club running in Staveley in Cumbria.
- We will encourage community transport initiatives and bus services run along the lines of the Wiltshire Wiggly bus which “wiggles” off its main route in response to requests to pick up passengers within a defined corridor.
- In line with national Green Party policy we want to see the return of all rail services to public ownership and control.

We are keen to establish an active Special Interest Group to campaign on these issues in whatever ways will be most effective. **Please contact John Whitelegg (contact details below) to continue the discussion and contribute ideas as to how we can do this.**

South Shropshire Green Party ‘Green 100’ club

December’s ‘Green 100’ club winner was Bill Eastwell. Please consider supporting this modest fundraising project for your local party, which costs just £2.00 per month, with half of all subscriptions in any month going to that month’s lucky prize draw winner. Details from John Crowe at crowe@freedomia.net, tel. 01588 680338 or 07851 760443, or write to him at The Dacha, Walcot, Lydbury North, SY7 8AX.

Switch to the Phone Co-op to support your Green Party

Many Green Party Members and Supporters use the good services of the Phone Co-op. John Crowe writes, “*My family has used the Phone Co-op for all our electronic communications over the last 25 years. We have all of our landlines (business & home), mobiles, e-mails, broadband and web domains with this excellent co-op. They’re based in Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire and their technical support team is near Manchester. Both are readily accessible, easy to deal with and very pleasant with it! You also become a Phone Co-op member.*”

Uniquely, you can ask the Phone Co-op to donate 6% of each of your bills to the Green Party. This does not affect what you pay by one penny. Thus, if your monthly bill came to ~£30 then the Green Party would receive over £20 per year – a very useful source of additional funding.

Switching supplier can be tedious but from our experience the Phone Co-op staff will make it pretty seamless. You can read more here: <https://www.cable.co.uk/guides/is-the-phone-co-op-any-good/>.

**South Shropshire Green Party Officers
Winter 2015**

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For full information about our activities please visit our website:

<http://southshropshire.greenparty.org.uk/>

