

THE POST

Newsletter for the Angus & Mearns Liberal Democrats

THE COMMITTEE From 1/1/2023

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Cllr Sarah Dickinson

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Stewart Owers

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**WE WISH YOU A
MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND A HAPPY NEW
YEAR 2023!**

WELCOME TO THE NEW TEAM OF ANGUS AND MEARNNS

by Ben Lawrie

Greetings members and supporters and welcome to the latest edition of The Post! In the AGM held in November we elected our Executive Committee for 2023. After some careful consideration I decided that now is the right time for me to take a break from political activism to focus on my new job as a Mental Health Networking Coordinator for the Third Sector in Dundee.



This means that I will be stepping down from the Executive Committee and as Convener of the Angus & Mearns Lib Dems. However, we have managed to pull together a fantastic team to see us through the next year with a good mixture of new faces and more experienced veterans of the local party. I'd like to wish the incoming Executive all the best moving forward.

Thank you Ben for all your hard work, enthusiasm and drive. Congratulations on the new job & we wish you all the best in your new role in Dundee!

NEW EMAIL TOOL FOR MESSAGES

Those of you who receive communications from us by email will have noticed that we are using a new email tool to send out messages. Messages come from the email address hello@angusmearnslibdems.org.uk. You can reply to these messages. You can also use the email address info@angusmearnslibdems.org.uk to send us messages.

DUNDEE WILL BE THE PLACE TO BE IN MARCH 2023

It's official! The next Scottish Liberal Democrat Spring Conference will come to Dundee for the first time in 10 years. All the action will be at the Apex City Quay Hotel & Spa on 10th - 11th March 2023.

Tickets are available on www.scotlibdems.org.uk/conference

General weekend, early bird tickets cost £50 per person.

There are concession rates and a discount for first time conference goers, so worth using the opportunity.

If you have never been to a party conference, please consider attending.

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING FUND IN ABERDEENSHIRE

46 projects need your vote!

Each project will help Aberdeenshire's transition to a carbon neutral, sustainable future. If you live in Aberdeenshire, voting is open now and closes at 5 PM on Friday 16th December.

Online voting:

www.avashire.org.uk/jtfundvote

THE AUTUMN CONFERENCE AT HAMILTON HOUSE INSPIRED AND ENTERTAINED US ALL

by Michael Turvey

At the end of October it was Conference time at Hamilton Town House, Glasgow. The first in-person conference for several years and for many of us, it was the first!

On Friday the highlight for me were the speeches from some of our newly elected Councillors. We heard from rising stars including Aberdeen Councillor **Desmond Bouse**.

The atmosphere was unrelentingly positive. On Saturday our new leader **Alex Cole-Hamilton** held a barnstorming speech declaring that “we are in the end game of the clash of nationalism.” He set out the “150 rising” strategy to win 150 new council seats in Scotland. He also spoke with great passion about the war in Ukraine and the SNP’s poor treatment of the refugees. Having taken a refugee into his home, Alex had a clear message to the First Minister: “It’s time to stop fighting elections based on who we are not, it’s time to fight them based on who we are!”

That night an ebullient dinner paid tribute to outgoing leader **Willie Rennie**. The tributes and anecdotes were lead by former local MSP and MP **Lord (Nicol) Steven**. It was clear that Willie’s infectious good humour and inexhaustible energy had inspired many to stand and win, including the inspiring former police officer and N.E.Fife MP **Wendy Chamberlain**. On Sunday it was the time for first speeches: Cllr **Yi-Pei Turvey**, Cllr **Jeff Goodhall** and myself spoke to conference in favour of motions on Long Covid, Energy and a successor for the Erasmus student exchange programme respectively. All in all a fantastic weekend!



All posts promoted by the Scottish Lib Dems, 4 Clifton Terr, EH12 5DR

SCOTLAND NOT FIRST IN THE EU MEMBERSHIP QUEUE - WHATEVER SNP SAYS

by Outi Määttänen -Bourke

Scotland will re-join the EU, promises the SNP. Membership will be granted swiftly. Borders, currency, free movement of people and goods or debt to Westminster are all just details which will be speedily solved, they say. But would Scotland be welcomed to the EU with open arms?

“I think there is little or no evidence of that, and I am certain that Scotland would not meet the necessary criteria any time soon”, says ex-MEP Sheila Ritchie to The Post.



Sheila was one of six Scottish MEPs from 2019-2020 and left Brussels after Brexit. During her tenure, she was on committees handling budgetary control, agriculture and rural development. She also got involved with human rights issues. Sheila is still in almost daily contact with former colleagues and friends.

Even though Scotland's possible re-entry would have significant level of political support and it would be “a big coup to have us back”, it would not be a straightforward process, Sheila thinks. Some member states will oppose it tooth and nail: Spain, for example, does not want to see the precedent and others, mostly Central European countries, think that other accession states have greater priority than Scotland. Also, it will not be fast.

At the moment there are seven candidate countries to join the EU: Albania, Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine. Some of them have made only modest progress towards full membership despite years of negotiations. The process can take years.

All countries must meet the Copenhagen criteria, which means political, economic, administrative and institutional capability and stability. Scotland will not be given special treatment and might have to set up new institutions such as a new central bank and new agencies to qualify.

“For example, we absolutely fail the Copenhagen criteria on our economy at the moment. It means demonstrating good governance of monetary policy. So, if you don't govern monetary policy, interest rates or the ability to influence your exchange rates, then it is literally impossible to meet this

criterion. The SNP's current plan to share the UK pound and have no central bank for an indefinite period disqualifies compliance with the economic criteria, "Sheila says.

She thinks that European enlargement is generally speaking desirable but it has to be done carefully. There are geopolitical reasons for fast-track entry, for example in the case of Ukraine.

Working together across political lines

Sheila remembers fondly her time as a MEP. The only downside for her was the constant travel between Scotland and Brussels but other than that she describes it as "the former best job in British politics."

"Collegiate, based on consensus and working together across political groups. Well resourced, respected. Everything that politics on Brexit Island is not."

"If we had had a full term, I would have split my time between home and Brussels. We had no idea how long we'd get so we were doing 3+ days in Brussels or Strasbourg, and the rest at home. I always wanted to spend as much time as possible campaigning across Scotland, and I did that anyway."

The closest allies of Liberal Democrats in the EU are the ALDE Party parties.

According to Sheila some are more liberal than others, but nevertheless the parties are closer to each other than anyone else.

"The Germans are much more economically right wing than we are; the French more... obedient; and we are sometimes uncertain as to the differences when there is more than one liberal party in a country. But it doesn't really matter; we are great allies- especially the women," she adds.

The painful day of saying goodbye

Sheila's first reaction was utter despair when she heard the results of the Brexit vote on 23rd June 2016. "I had gone to bed but the radio was playing in the background. I heard updates through the night, then woke to a gloating Farage."

And then came the dramatic final exit on 30th January 2020.

"The special plenary was in Brussels, unusually. There were many tributes: we had printed out the words to Auld Lang Syne, and distributed them, and the whole Parliament sang it in both French and Scots. Everyone was full of sadness. There was a presentation to each of the UK MEPs by the President of the Parliament, and some moving speeches. The Brexit MEPs were insufferable. So much history flushed away. So much opportunity lost."

"A few of us had decided we could not bear to be in Brussels when they took down our flag, so we had booked a huge chalet near Geneva; 5 MEPs, various staff members and some children. After the plenary, we flew out, and drove up into the mountains. We skied, ate well, and watched the midnight news, weeping quietly," Sheila remembers.

There is still a lot of contact with the EU through Liberal International and ALDE. Sheila is also part of a group called "Renew Ladies" and speaks with them almost daily.

Sheila sees the EU fundamentally as a force for good in the world and its members.

"I sometimes wish it would be braver in things like dealing with Hungary and Poland, and it definitely needs more democratisation. But, for example, the leadership shown over the invasion of Ukraine is impressive. It's hard to take 27 member states with you at all times, and that makes things slow, sometimes. I think that's a necessary price of making the project work. For example, the Covid vaccination programme was slow, but it's now over 70% across the bloc, and the EU was the first major international institution to share vaccines."

STONEHAVEN SNIPPETS

by Cllr Sarah Dickinson

It has been a very busy 6 months since I was re-elected in May. There has been the usual wide range of case work covering everything from enquiries about potholes (of course), to play equipment to car parking and safety on our roads outside schools - to name just a few issues of concern. There has also been the opportunity to comment on initiatives that affect all the residents and visitors to Stonehaven.

These include the recommendations of the *Stonehaven Traffic Management Review* which finally came to committee in November. There were fourteen recommendations made off the back of this work which will be taken forward gradually over the short, medium, and longer term. The full report and recommendations can be found at item 8 of this link [Aberdeenshire Council - Committees and Meetings](#)

Aberdeenshire Liberal Democrat councillors have also worked closely since the summer with our Administration colleagues to finalise a joint manifesto and the strategic priorities at the heart of our council plan for the next five years. These priorities set the Council's direction and strategic approach to supporting Aberdeenshire communities and businesses to thrive. They make clear that the council will work with partners to face the challenges of the cost-of-living crisis, will continue the work to recover from the pandemic and will respond positively to climate change. They reflect the very real challenges the Council faces and will inform the wider Medium-Term Financial Strategy to address what will be a significant financial shortfall. There are six strategic priorities in the Council Plan under the pillars of People, Environment and Economy and they are:

Learning for life, Resilient communities, Economic growth, Health & wellbeing, Climate change & Infrastructure and public assets.



The [plan](#) was agreed at the November meeting of Full Council.

Finally, I want to congratulate the Stonehaven Horizon Group on their multiple successes in this year's Keep Scotland Beautiful Competition. Working with other local groups and individuals, they won Gold, Best Coastal Town, and Year of Stories with The Mearns Writers. I was delighted that their efforts and hard work were recognised in this way and want to thank them for all they do to make Stonehaven such a fantastic place to live, work and visit.

You can contact me by email but I also pick up case work through Facebook and Twitter or you can call me on 07388 956 160. Please do leave me a message if I do not answer.

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Photo above: "Golden Town" - a bright yellow-gold sunrise lights up the horizon in this angled shot of the new sign indicating Stonehaven is a 'Beautiful Scotland Gold Medal Winner 2022' on the Den of Logie Welcome to Stonehaven sign.

INDEPENDENCE RIP

by Stewart Owers

On the 23rd November 2022 Lord Reed won the Mexican stand-off, leaving Nicola's ego heading back into the wilderness. Sadly, the independence judgement gives legal cover for the British Government to pursue a hard-line unionist strategy forever, which is almost as bad. This is coupled with the constitutional embarrassment of a House of Lords stuffed with Tory acolytes, and a Prime Ministerial appointment system, the envy of Putin.

For decades, the LibDems have been promoting constitutional reform including proportional voting systems, Federal Government structures, with devolved responsibilities; and more powers and funding for Local Authorities. Whether reform can be achieved before the inevitable social unrest, from the last decade of politically induced incompetence, is doubtful. However, as there will be no independence referendum in October 2023, the confrontation will be demonstrated in the Westminster elections in 2024/25, in which both SNP and Conservatives will be on the back foot, as their decades of maladministration will be tested by resurgent Labour and LibDem parties.

It will now be harder for the SNP to negotiate the independence treaties requiring the division of UK assets and liabilities, pension splits, supply of energy when the wind fails, acceptance of Scots in the UK armed forces, or currency if not the GBP. Given the SNP's hostility to Westminster, the electorate would be justifiably suspicious that the SNP could gain a 'Great Deal for Scotland'.

According to the pollster Ipsos, only 37% voters think a General Election could serve as a proxy referendum, so Nicola's options are limited... if no independence is possible, what does the SNP stand for? In 1999 it was Labour, not SNP, who created the Scottish Parliament, with a voting system which restricts single party domination. The next Scottish Parliament may well constitute sufficient Labour/LibDem/SNP and Green MSP's to persuade the Westminster Government to implement more Federal reforms, introduce proportional voting in England, and reform of the House of Lords.



Sources: Economist Nov 6; Alistair Carmichael MP, Shetland News website

MATTHIAS IS THE NEW CAMPAIGNS ORGANISER

Matthias Glenday is the new Campaigns Organiser for East Dunbartonshire. His role will be organising campaign sessions, materials and volunteers. Guided by the campaign manager MSP Willie Rennie, the team has talked to well over 1000 residents in November alone and the name recognition for the candidate, Susan Murray, is building up. At the moment the campaign team meets three times a week for canvassing sessions, which usually equates to around 11 hours a week. They are currently using 'knock and drop' local residents surveys, a very effective tool. "I would not have the confidence and drive that I have today without the support and friendship of our outgoing Convenor, Ben, and the other local members that I met through the Council campaign. I will *always* be on standby to come back to the sunny East Coast and support the Angus & Mearns Liberal Democrats in whatever way I can, because the people of Angus deserve so much better", Matthias says.