

THE POST

Newsletter for the Angus & Mearns Liberal Democrats

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2024

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A TALE FROM TWO CITIES

by Rod Falconer, Convener



Are you still trying to digest the political dramas in Westminster and Holyrood? The “when is he going to call it” - question still remains unanswered, of course, as Rishi Sunak delayed the inevitable, after a disastrous set of May local elections.

The electorate, questioning a government in flux as it formulates yet another new plan, has its most basic request ignored: a general election date. Legally, he can wait until January 2025.

Not wishing to be outdone, Holyrood followed with the Greens unceremoniously removed from government and then it was time for **Humza Yousaf** to go after only 13 months in the job. Are we simply witnessing poor statecraft or watching some form of political multi-dimensional reality show?

We were within a cats whisker of having an immediate election here in Scotland this summer. We would have been on the campaign trail and organising hustings, as that is how actual democracy works in the real world. Confidence and trust are a vitally important currency for politicians and public alike. Everyone that I speak with, especially on doorsteps, has much greater priorities than either London or Edinburgh tend to focus upon.

I am sure no matter when we have Westminster or Holyrood elections, one thing will be crystal clear: a Lib Dem voice as well as Lib Dem representation will be increased within both parliaments.

SELECTION OF CANDIDATES FOR THE NEXT COUNCIL ELECTION IN THE MEARN'S WARD

by Peter Bellarby

Applications are invited to be our candidates in the Mearns Ward of Aberdeenshire Council. This ward is seen as a top target. Our candidate in the 2022 election came very close to being elected. Prior to that Bill Howatson was the Lib Dem councillor there and Provost of Aberdeenshire too. Before that we had two councillors in the ward.



All 14 Lib Dem councillors elected to Aberdeenshire council in 2022

Successful applicants will have a lot of support locally and can expect to work with Michael Turvey, our candidate in West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine at the coming Westminster election. Once our candidate for the Angus North and Mearns Constituency at the next Scottish Parliament election is selected there will be the opportunity of working with them. Nationally the Scottish Liberal Democrats have a programme called 150 Rising which has the aim of increasing the number of Lib Dem councillors at the next council election in 2027. The Mearns Ward can expect support from 150 Rising, both financial and in kind. Application forms and further

information can be obtained from Peter Bellarby peter@pwbellarby.plus.com. We aim to have two candidates.

WE NEED ONE MORE PROSPECTIVE PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATE

The new boundary changes in Scotland affect us directly here in Angus. The county will now be split so that Arbroath and Broughty Ferry will be in one parliamentary seat while the rest of Angus joins up with Perthshire to become Angus & Perthshire Glens. Therefore, instead of one PPC (Prospective Parliamentary Candidate) coming from our area we now have a chance for two.

This gives us a great opportunity for the exec committee to find another great talent amongst you, our members. If you or any of your liberal acquaintances have a strong desire to be heard upon the national stage, this is your opportunity. Please contact us and we will do the rest. What are you waiting for? Please get in touch today!

Email: info@angusmearnslibdems.org.uk

Post: Angus and Mearns Liberal Democrats, 1 Balglassie Farm Cottages, Aberlemno, Forfar, DD8 3PH

CLAIRE McLAREN IS OUR CANDIDATE FOR ANGUS & PERTHSHIRE GLENS

by Alison Andrews

Angus & Mearns Lib Dems and Perth & Kinross Lib Dems have selected Claire McLaren as our candidate for Angus & Perthshire Glens at the next general election. Boundary changes have created a long ribbon of a constituency which stretches from Montrose to Loch Rannoch. If your local burgh is Montrose, Brechin, Forfar or Kirriemuir, you will have Claire's name on your ballot paper.

Claire has been a councillor in Perth & Kinross since 2022, winning back



Claire's name will be on the ballot paper for the next general election.

Strathtay ward from a Conservative. She's a Perthshire farmer's daughter, one of her sons is a farmer, and many of her relatives work in the agriculture sector, including some who farm in Angus. No surprise, then, that she's the Scottish Liberal Democrat Agriculture Spokesperson. She's also a member of the Scottish Liberal Democrat Executive Committee.

Claire sends this message to Lib Dems in Angus: "It is a huge honour to have been chosen as the candidate to stand for Angus & Perthshire Glens. I intend to run an active and vigorous campaign,

advancing the Liberal Democrat voice.

"The people of Angus & Perthshire Glens deserve an MP who will listen to their concerns and fight for their needs. We were all repeatedly assured the cost of living would go down, but it just keeps rising. I hear people's worries about employment opportunities, employment stability, increasing pressures on businesses. It's frustrating that people's concerns are apparently ignored by so many Westminster politicians."

The picture isn't entirely gloomy, however. When Claire met with North East Fife MP, Wendy Chamberlain, they discussed Wendy's recent Private Member's Bill, entitling Carers to unpaid leave. This would benefit 2.4 million carers across the UK – an example of what a hard-working Liberal Democrat MP can achieve.

"The opportunities for the Liberal Democrats are ripe," says Claire, "and I mean to harvest!"

STONEHAVEN SNIPPETS

by Cllr Sarah Dickinson

When the White Bridge re-opened in September 2023, the design of the Flood Protection Scheme required the bridge to be significantly raised. On the south side, this meant pedestrians were presented with not just three times the number of steps to go up but a large expanse of staircase which was intimidating and risky to come down without a central handrail. It is good news, therefore, that in the past week a central handrail has been installed as well as additional rails on the other handrails on both sides. Colour contrast anti-slip strips are soon to go on the stairs too.



A new handrail makes a difference

Working on resilience

The boardwalk was badly damaged during the winter storms. Any repair work has to offer a resilient solution that will stand up to future storms. Officers are still considering how best to go forward but certainly the boardwalk will not be replaced as it was. Funding will also be a challenge. I am very aware of how important the beach walk is to residents and visitors alike and I hope a way forward will be identified soon.

The Arbuthnott Drain

The Arbuthnott Drain was originally installed at the bottom of the High Street not as a solution to surface water flood risk but as an improvement in handling that risk. Storm Babet last year highlighted the problem that can arise when the duck bill valves at the outflow into the Carron River are restricted in their operation by shingle washing in with the tide and needing to be cleared to enable storm water building up in the drain to clear out to sea. Council officers have been looking at what they can do to address this weakness in the performance of the drain with improvement works expected to be complete in time for the winter of 2024/25.

Heated Open Air Pool 90 years!



An art deco treasure with 90 years of service

The Stonehaven Heated Open Air Pool is celebrating its 90th birthday this year and HRH The Princess Royal marked the occasion with a tour of the pool and the unveiling of a plaque. Thank you to the Friends of the Open Air Pool and to Aberdeenshire Council whose commitment and efforts have kept this art deco treasure open season after season. The pool fully opens to the public on Saturday, 25th May 2024. Find out more at [Home | Stonehaven Open Air Swimming Pool \(stonehavenopenairpool.co.uk\)](https://www.stonehavenopenairpool.co.uk)

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ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL WITH MICHAEL

It's been a very busy year so far for Michael Turvey, our West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine candidate (WAK) for the Westminster seat. Michael and his team have been tirelessly knocking on doors and they keep getting encouraging messages from disillusioned, life-long Tory supporters, who are turning against the Conservatives, as well as SNP voters saying they have had enough.

The March fundraising event in Stonehaven was a success with around 100 people coming together to show their support. In Marykirk, where a road was washed away, Michael has been campaigning for more to be spent on flood defences. In March Michael met with royalty when the Duke of Edinburgh stopped for a chat at Bogenraith Equestrian Centre. In the Mearns Michael visited the proposed location of an 85 acre substation. The onshore infrastructure issues are much debated in the area. On a lighter note, there was some fun moments at the recent Spring Conference in Glasgow, Hamilton. Michaels' daughter Isabel, 10, was demonstrating a Lib Dem computer game called "Campaign Ninja" she has designed. In the game, Lib Dems battle against Tories and Labour with the Focus!



Very good attendance in the fundraising event in Stonehaven in March.



Michael met Alex Cole-Hamilton in Mid-Dunbarstonshire.



Isabel, 10, shows how to play Campaign Ninja.



A quiet word with the Duke of Edinburgh in March.

BY-ELECTION GAVE US A GOOD FOUNDATION

by Sandra O'Shea

On 25 April 2024, a by-election was held for the Arbroath West, Letham and Friockheim ward in Angus as a result of a long-standing Independent Councillor standing down. I was delighted to become the Scottish Liberal Democrate candidate to contest the ward I live in.



My campaign tag line was *‘active, local and vocal’*. With financial support from ALDC fighting fund and ASLDC along with additional personal donations to my campaign fund, we were able to print and deliver a total of 14,500 leaflets throughout the ward. In addition, the ALDC fighting fund support enabled us to send out 511 targeted letters by post to coincide with postal votes being delivered

and display A3 laminated posters at polling stations. I’m truly grateful for the financial support and to the campaign team who helped me enormously. Campaigning, delivering leaflets and making use of social media encouraged engagement significantly and my resolve was strengthened as a result of voters contacting me directly regarding a number of issues (education, planning, recycling, potholes) that were all mentioned as key priorities in my campaign material.

The percentage turnout was 29.4% with a total of 4010 valid votes that resulted in a win for the Conservatives. However, I’m pleased to report that our campaign efforts paid off and we increased our share of the votes as follows:

	2024		2022	
	Votes	Percentage	Votes	Percentage
First Preference	333	8.3%	286	4.4%
Second Preference	816	20.35%	344	5.29%
Third Preference	678	16.9%	474	7.29%

These results demonstrate that the campaign landed well with many voters and gives us a good foundation on which to build for the 2027 local elections.

HOW CAN BRITAIN REMAKE ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH EUROPE?

by Clive Sneddon

As a candidate on the Scottish list in all European elections except 2014, I can safely say that the 2019 campaign was the most difficult because of the large number of voters who thought we should accept the will of the people and get Brexit done.

Party policy is now to rejoin the Single Market, which would help us economically and resolve the sea border with Northern Ireland, but would give us no say in the EU and risks reopening the wounds of Brexit. The UK thus needs to find a way of engaging constructively with the 27.

The figure to watch just now is the French President, **Emmanuel Macron**. He has distinguished himself in 2020 by causing a massive tailback of lorries on the M2 to persuade **Boris Johnson** to sign the EU deal, setting out in 2021 a vision of a three-tier Europe with the UK in the third tier, offering Ukraine to Russia in 2022, and on 4th May 2024 giving an interview to The Economist urging European unity in defence.

The EU began as a Franco-German treaty in 1951 which other countries were invited to sign, and four did. Unfortunately, one of the features that gave credence to 'Take Back Control', was the need for Franco-German agreement before new policy could happen, because only they could steer change through a transactional organisation.

My personal view is that the UK should signal its willingness to work with others by proposing a Treaty of Cooperation, open to all democratic European states and organisations such as the EU or EFTA, whose signatories would agree what to cooperate on with any other signatory/ies. It would need a central secretariat to inform members of proposals, but involves no loss of sovereignty; countries that became undemocratic would not be co-operated with.

France could then share more widely across Europe its frugal but effective model of defence spending, needed to increase munitions capacity, with contractors required to deliver in house what they have signed up to. What the UK brings is its nuclear capacity and experienced military. Such an arrangement does not rely on the involvement of other powers, and could survive any withdrawal from NATO while working together to defeat Russian aggression.

A NEW START FOR LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL SCOTLAND

by Outi Määttä-Bourke

The Liberal International (LI) Scottish Committee was formally re-launched at the Spring Conference in Hamilton in May 2024. The new Convenor, ex-MEP Sir Graham Watson is a well-known veteran of international politics. There is space for liberal thinking, he says.



LI, a forum for liberals around the world to debate, share ideas, analyse and influence international affairs, has been on a backburner in Scotland since the pandemic but no more. One of the aims of the newly formed Committee is to raise the profile of international issues in party conferences. During the Spring conference in Hamilton, LI Scotland held a well-attended fringe meeting with guest speaker Lord **Jeremy Purvis**, Lords Lib Dem Spokesperson for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. He talked passionately about the situation in current hot spots including Sudan, Gaza and Ukraine.

Liberal democratic values do not seem to feature much in the avalanche of news about wars and conflicts, the rise of populist governments and polarisation of politics in general. In recent years, the tone of debate and dialogue has also hardened around the world. Still, liberalism is not a spent force according to Sir Graham.

“As the great **Russell Johnston** used to say, Liberalism is often most neglected when it is most needed. Yet I detect that Liberal ideas are once again gaining ground, perhaps as a counter-reaction to the rise of the populist right,” he says.

“As the need for Liberalism grows, more and more people seem prepared to call themselves Liberals. The Liberal International has raised its game to respond to this new demand and is doing hugely valuable work, for instance in defending and promoting human rights in international fora.”

Liberal parties around the world share a common ground, but there are differences as well. According to Sir Graham, there is more that unites than divides. The main differences are between those who are fundamentally economic Liberals and those who espouse social liberalism.

“In my experience, this narcissism of small differences is overblown. Liberals all believe in the dignity and worth of the individual as the cornerstone of society. When I led the Liberal Group in the European Parliament (2002-09) we were sometimes dismissed by our opponents as being a broad and disparate coalition; in fact our

members had much more in common than that which divides, for example, the UK Labour Party and Greece's PASOK socialist party," he says.

"With the possible exception of South America, where Liberalism currently has a distinctly free-market and anti-statist flavour, most Liberals remain neither enamoured of the market or overly attached to the state, but healthily sceptical of both for their tendency to abuse of power if unchecked."

Sadly, Brexit has weakened Britain's position in the international arena.

"Brexit has been hugely costly to the United Kingdom's reputation among democracies and I fear it will take us many years to recover. Already we are having difficulty securing international diplomatic posts for UK citizens."

"Membership of the EU - even more so than of bodies such as NATO, the UN and the Council of Europe - gave us huge heft in the world. Unless the UK moves soon to re-join the EU, the danger of its losing Northern Ireland and Scotland will grow. Both Scotland and Northern Ireland voted clearly to remain in the EU and have been taken out against their will, which is a recipe for trouble," Sir Graham says.

He has had a lifelong interest in international politics. Sir Graham was a Vice President (1977-79) and Secretary General (1979-81) of the International Federation of Liberal and Radical Youth, a Member of the European Liberal Democrats' Council from 1983-93 and a Member of the European Parliament from 1994-2014. He is probably best known for having become the Leader of a group of just 43 Members of the European Parliament and building it up to 108 MEPs, the largest third party ever in the EP, between 2002 and 2009.

"I consider myself immensely fortunate to have been introduced to international politics at an impressionable age within the framework of the Council of Europe's international political youth work which evolved after the anti-Vietnam-war student riots of the late 1960s."

"I met the woman who became my wife at a Young Liberal summer camp which we hosted near Broxburn in West Lothian; she was the leader of the Italian YL delegation there. I had the honour of working for Party leaders Russell Johnston and **David Steel**, each a great international Liberal thinker, who opened my mind to a broader horizon; as a linguist I was able to thrive in that environment. "

"Perhaps the most fascinating moment of my career was taking part in the European Parliament's first official delegation to North Korea, about which I have written in the books I published between 1995 and 2015." To join LI Scotland, please visit: <https://www.libg.uk/join-libg>

