



South Shropshire Green Party

Officers 2005/6



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Grapevine



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WHAT IT MEANS TO VOTE GREEN

*We look at the General Election campaign and why voting green
is a vote for a fairer and more locally sensitive society*

Green candidates are standing for election in Shropshire and Herefordshire at the General Election. In Shrewsbury & Atcham the candidate is Emma Bullard; in Leominster it is Felicity Norman; in Hereford the candidate is Brian Lunt and our candidate here in the Ludlow constituency is Jim Gaffney.

The Green Party has a radical agenda. Although we know that there will not be a Green government after the election the Green manifesto presents a robust message. It offers strong policies about preserving our environment, creating a government which is fair to all, reducing centralism and giving local communities power over issues that matter.

The opportunist and two-faced qualities of traditional political parties do not represent the Green approach. Green MPs will not be hand-in-hand with big business, they will not bow down to multi-national

interests, nor will they dumbly follow other country's international agendas. Even one or two Green MPs could make a difference. just by standing up and being heard.

Voting Green in 2005 is a Real Choice and will be a vote for a Real Change.



Inside

- Meet Jim Gaffney
- More on Green Policy
- Church Stretton - a town with its future in the balance ?
- Your Personal Data - how this Election could be won

Our Green Candidate

At the annual meeting in February the South Shropshire Green Party nominated Jim Gaffney as the Green Party's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for the Ludlow constituency in the General Election.

Jim and his wife Diane run a small business in Bishop's Castle. Their two sons grew up in the town and attended the local school. Jim, who has a degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics from Oxford University, has lived, worked and travelled extensively in the developing world and continues to do so for the family business.



He is a Town Councillor in Bishop's Castle and a volunteer in many local community organisations, including The Wasteless Society and Spotlight, which is dedicated to giving young people creative opportunities.

Talking to Grapevine after his nomination Jim outlined some of the key issues which he expects to be debating during the election.

"Our priority is to reverse the environmental devastation that is now closer than ever to overwhelming this planet and its human population. We can only do this with policies that tackle over-consumption and

pollution in the developed world and alleviate the desperate poverty that is daily reality for so many.

Clearly, social justice has to be at the heart of our strategy, for reasons of survival as much as fairness. How can we expect people to go to extra trouble to protect the environment when they are struggling to make ends meet? This logic applies as much in South Shropshire as in the Amazon rainforest!

The economic policies of all the big three parties are based on the same message - 'Carry on Consuming'. We're going to have to be much cleverer than that to live in comfort and security in the future.

Only Green Party policy has the honesty and determination to face up to our predicament and sort it out."

Come and meet Jim Gaffney
Tuesday 26th April 2005
at 7.30 pm
in Oscar's, at the Ludlow Assembly Rooms,
Mill Street, Ludlow

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political parties trawling the commercial market for information which, even when it anonymises individuals, enables them to make predictions on the basis of where people live.

And they know where you live because the electoral roll tells them that.

What happens in the next few weeks needs to be watched, the new data protection regime will be tested this way for the very first time. How far data analysis techniques will be pushed in the future will depend on its success in this election.

When one reads that the Conservatives are working with Experian, a private company which collects information and sells it to credit reference agencies, one cannot help wondering 'what is this all about'? No doubt the Tories are fully aware of their data protection obligations and have all the right licenses but how tempting will it be for an individual to transgress if winning a marginal seat is the prize for transgression and the risk of detection is low?

When people don't answer the door to canvassers or turn up for public meetings it may be the only way they can be reached in a targeted manner. With the outcome of the election likely to be decided in sixty constituencies the focus will be on a few thousand floating voters.

Of course it all depends in the first place on how much information voters freely give. The use of commercial consumer data as a political marketing tool is still in

its infancy here but parties with large sums of money at their disposal see this as an effective way of getting to the voter.

There is a great deal of personal information to be gleaned from an assortment of documents which can be commercially acquired quite legally from surprising sources. People often don't read the small print when they complete a form. They unwittingly sign papers without looking at the 'opt-out' boxes, thus allowing their information to move on. Loyalty cards, subscription lists, catalogues, sales enquiry cards – all are vehicles for data gathering and some use confusing techniques to gain consent for passing data .

It is not illegal to confuse. It is easily done; for example, design a form so that customers leave one box blank to get data from that company, but by leaving the next box blank too that allows the company to pass your data on. The data gathered is then bought by specialist agencies who, using sophisticated data management techniques, can match it all up and collate a picture of just about anyone.

General Elections are won in the marginal seats under our current first-past-the-post voting system. In these constituencies identifying the "swing" voter and being able to influence him or her is all important.

With the Labour and Conservative parties neck and neck in the opinion polls you can guess where some of their millions is going to be spent during the current election campaign.

OUR ELECTION BACKGROUND STORY

Floating voter ? Your data - their political opportunity.

If the main political parties have you in their sights you will probably have received an application to vote by post in the forthcoming General Election. This, as with the recent Liberal Democrats request to respond to a questionnaire that has also been arriving through letter boxes, is one of a number of methods being used to discover and influence "swing" voters.

These relatively open canvassing methods, plus the time honoured "door knocking" are giving way to more sophisticated data analysis techniques being brought over from the USA and are expected to play a greater part than ever before in May.

In last year's Presidential Election in the USA, the Republican Party used extensive databases of personal information to good effect.

It has been spoken of as the 'secret weapon' which led to their success. Where the USA differs from us is that data privacy is far less strict and they are permitted to record and use sensitive personal information which allows them to tailor their electoral message to each individual.

Data protection laws here mean that political parties are reined in to some extent. Nevertheless word has it that both the Labour and Conservative Parties have bought profiles of every postcode to help them build up a picture of potential supporters who can be specifically targeted. Whilst political opinions, sexual orientation, health information etc are classed as confidential personal information and cannot be bought, regardless of who holds it, there is nothing to stop

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DIARY DATES

Please see separate leaflet for election related activities.

We live on, when it is all over !

Thu 5th May	ELECTION DAY
Sat 7th May to 15th May	Ludlow Green Festival - a full programme of events for the week organised by Ludlow 21, including Green Fair on 14th.
Mon 9th May 10.30am	Acorn Restaurant, Church Stretton
Sat 14th May all day	Green Fair in the Castle Square - with Green Party stall
Sat 21st May 10.00 to 4.00	Regional Meeting - Kidderminster - Library at the Railway Museum
Sept 8th to 14th	Green Party Autumn Conference, Lancaster

Vote Green for a radical voice in Parliament

*Voting Green is a valued vote.
It is a vote for the Real Choice for Real Change.*

The Green Parties in the UK now have more elected representatives in more influential positions than ever before.

There are 2 Members of the European Parliament, and 2 Green Party Members in the London Assembly. The Scottish Greens also have 7 Members in the Scottish Parliament.

In June last year the Greens increased the number of local councillors by 10%. There are now 61 Greens sitting on 25 different local Councils - and they are part of the ruling administration on two of them. There are also many Green Party Parish, Town and Welsh Community Councillors.

Lord Beaumont speaks for the Green Party in the House of Lords.

There are several constituencies in the south-east of England where there is a realistic prospect of electing a Green MP.

The Green Party recognizes that it will not form the next government but a strong Green voice at Westminster would act as the conscience of Parliament and change the face of British politics for good.

Just one or two Green MPs could:

- **Tackle climate change** – expose how the Government's efforts rely on subsidizing nuclear energy over renewable
- **Defend schools and hospitals** – expose the true costs of Private Finance Initiatives
- **Keep the peace** – demand information to ensure that British troops have not colluded in US war crimes
- **Defend free speech** – investigate government attempts to undermine the independence of the BBC
- **Make poverty history** – monitor overseas aid so that it is directed towards indigenous industry, not British contractors
- **Keep big business out of government** – expose the revolving door between government and private consultancy
- **Stand up for our communities** – campaign on the real issues that matter to local people
- **Stay true to our principles** – promote the radical Green manifesto.



CHURCH STRETTON'S FUTURE

The debate on how Church Stretton will look in the future is moving into an interesting phase. A Town Design Statement, developed through a consultative process led by the Town Council, is aimed at providing a guide to the character of the town that can be used to inform the planning process at the District Council.

It is hoped that this way decisions taken by the planners will enhance and complement what exists, rather than allow inappropriate development to take place.

In the meantime the District Council itself has formed a joint Officer/Member Working Group to consider design principles, density of new housing and other related matters and is waiting for feedback from the town open day on April 30th (see opposite)..

John Lloyd highlights what he would like to see emerging from the two processes.

Our first step should be to make a Statement of Intent. The approach I favour is enshrined in pioneer work of the garden cities. Alan Jackson in "Semi-Detached London" rings the right note when he writes of these early experiments *"retain an open setting to maintain as close a harmony with nature as possible and create a mood of rural peace and security."*

Unlike the pioneers of Letchworth and other places, where there was an ample supply of green fields to build upon, land is scarce and expensive in Church Stretton. What is more, there are clear physical restraints. It is not reasonable, or desirable, that expansion moves higher and higher up the hillside of the Long Mynd or Caer Caradoc. Consequently, we have a township formed by hills that have, up to now, prevented sprawl and have benefited the town with a certain cohesion.

This means all the play is on the lower levels, intensifying the built environment and targeting the

"We are in danger of getting something that is visually second class"

water meadows for development. Notwithstanding the Local Plan, and supplementary planning guidance, the onslaught on land use in Church Stretton has brought very few benefits, save financial ones for the developers.

The loss of natural habitat, tree cover, open green spaces, rock faces, parking areas, and skyline all come readily to mind. What is more, social housing and affordable homes to rent have not been beneficiaries either.

Consequently, most recent building of expensive housing has intensified the trend in favour of older age groups.

This 'thinning out' of the natural environment has replaced the previous wealth of variety of a small country town, with its prevalence of green and the 'intermittent' substantial houses of with their

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equally large gardens. We are in danger of getting something that is visually second class. This down grading of the Town says very little for the Council's design policy and certainly indicates a lack of vision as to what might be.

Whether at this late stage we can reverse the trend, or at least hold the ring, will need resolve and a degree of imagination. As a first step here are some of the issues that need addressing:

- ✓ Consider how the tree canopy can be retained by means which are not reliant on putting TPO's on individual trees in the hope it will create the same result.
- ✓ Consider the re-use of large Edwardian houses, with large gardens without losing their role as 'flagships' in the built environment.
- ✓ Consider how social housing might best harmonise with its surroundings so that it is indistinguishable from others categories of housing.
- ✓ Consider the impact of private car ownership and how pedestrian traffic might be improved (the new path between All Stretton and Church Stretton has been a great success).
- ✓ Consider how the concept of "Little Switzerland" might be resurrected and what this would mean in terms of design policy.

Have your say in the Church Stretton design debate

**Saturday 30th April 2005
10.00am to 1.00 pm**

- **See the plans**
- **See the photographs**
- **Get involved**

Church Stretton Parish Centre

Council Tax - there is a fairer way

Council Tax is an issue which concerns many people. Increases of more than 50% since 2000 look set to rise further with the revaluation of property which has just started.

Tinkering with the grant to local councils is the current government's approach and alternatives such as local income tax are proposed by other political parties. Such ideas are cosmetic and are not designed to reflect fairly on the distribution of wealth.

The fairest system of local taxation is the Green Land Value tax, which will be related to property values. It will also apply to business properties, and could be used in conjunction with the planning process to encourage sustainable business development. Another of the benefits is that it would tax empty and speculative property.

The Green Land Value Tax would be set at local level based on the annual rental value of the land.