

Lothian Green News



The paper for green issues, right across Lothian, Spring 2011

www.scottishgreens.org.uk

MEET ALISON JOHNSTONE

The Greens' top candidate on the Lothian list talks about why Green politics makes sense.

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WHERE NEXT FOR TRANSPORT?



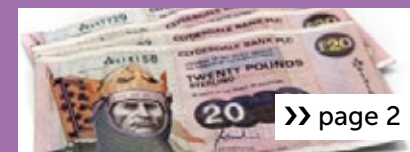
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GREENS: "2ND VOTES COUNT"

The Scottish Greens welcome reform of the voting process following 2007's ballot paper fiasco.

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NO TUITION FEES: GREENS PLEDGE



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Real progress on the Climate Challenge

In the last parliament Green MSPs secured over £37 million for a "Climate Challenge Fund" to support local community projects across Scotland.

Green MSPs Robin Harper (Lothian) and Patrick Harper (Glasgow) successfully argued for an additional £10 million for the scheme which has already made awards to nearly 300 communities helping tackle climate change.

Staggeringly, the government estimates that community action under the scheme has already been equivalent to taking 225,000 cars off the road.

This funding is awarded to

community groups across Lothian, enabling them to work on projects which cut carbon emissions, produce local food and bring local people together. Already, over £3 million has been awarded to projects in Edinburgh alone.

Top Green Party candidate, Alison Johnstone said: "We're extremely proud of what has been achieved through the Climate Challenge Fund so far.

"As your MSP, I'd look for further ways to support community groups who are on the frontline of tackling climate change"



First Green MP backs Alison for Parliament >> page 3

MAY 5TH

2ND VOTE GREEN

ALISON JOHNSTONE

Invest in services, say Greens

The Greens have slammed the UK and Scottish Governments for insisting that savage cuts are inevitable.

According to the party, Westminster and Holyrood seem set on making the wrong choices - choosing to cut vital public services instead of asking big businesses and well-off individuals to contribute more.

And, add the Greens, switching from council tax and business rates to a tax on land values would raise more than £1bn extra a year, while the 87%

of Scots who live in homes banded A-E would pay less.

As well as being fairer, it is claimed, a land value tax would enable Scotland to reverse the SNP's damaging cuts and start investing in housing, education and public transport again. The Greens have pointed to overwhelming evidence that shows cutting services in a recession is economically reckless, and hits the poorest hardest.

Top Green candidate Alison Johnstone said:

"The Tories have always wanted a weaker public sector, and the Lib Dems are helping them deliver it. SNP Ministers meanwhile have been like rabbits caught in the headlights, unable to defend Scotland's traditional public service values and just delivering the Tory cuts agenda for them.

"In this election only the Greens are setting out an honest alternative to the cuts. We need investment in education, housing and transport, not lower taxes for the rich."

We ask... Alison Johnstone

THE TOP GREEN CANDIDATE TALKS

Lothian Green News: So, Alison, you are seeking to fill the shoes of the UK's first Green Parliamentarian, Robin Harper. How does that feel?

Alison Johnstone: Well, I've said before that Robin's is a hard scarf to follow. He has recognition, even affection, across Lothian and across parties. On the other hand, I'm really in a lot stronger a position than Robin was when he made that historic breakthrough. For a start, I have worked with Robin in Parliament since 1999. I know how the place works. I have 4 years as a Green Councillor under my belt and, of course, Greens have 12 years of achievement in Parliament to talk about. Handing over the baton is always a challenge but it is fantastic to have Robin's 100% support.

"THE REALLY EXCITING THING ABOUT GREEN POLICIES IS JUST HOW COMPLETE A PICTURE THEY PROVIDE OF THE KIND OF SOCIETY WE CAN ASPIRE TO"

LGN: I spotted an athletics metaphor there! Is that significant?

AJ: Indeed it is! I am not your average career politician. My background is as a competitive athlete in both 800m and 1500m. Training as much as I have done over the years I have come to cherish the green spaces in Edinburgh and other towns. I get angry when they are sacrificed in the pursuit of profit. About 15 years ago I got involved in one campaign

very near to where I live. Although that campaign was lost and a developer's expensive flats took the place of open green space, it led me to get involved with the Green Party. And here we are today.

LGN: But there must be a danger in the Greens being pigeon-holed as just about green spaces?

AJ: Well, it's important that that we communicate clearly on issues that people know we are committed to: on use of public land, for example. That's why another of my campaigns has been about plastic bags (see page 4 for details). On that, I believe that public opinion is ahead of the politicians. But the really exciting thing about Green policies is just how complete a picture they provide of the kind of society we can aspire to. So that is why I am equally passionate about education, for instance, or the way in which green investment can enhance quality of life and reduce living costs.

LGN: Is there not a danger that this just becomes an expensive wish list?

AJ: That's what the so-called mainstream parties would have you believe! The economic climate is difficult, for sure. But we still have choices. We can choose to spend well over £2 billion on a bridge or we can invest it in public transport, walking and cycling. Or we can make sure taxation is as fair as it can be. Just recently I joined campaigners on Princes Street to protest at levels of tax avoidance that you and I would be prosecuted for. There is an alternative to cuts!



Councillor Alison Johnstone will take local experience to Holyrood

ALISON FACTS

Alison, who is Edinburgh born and bred, lives in the south of the city with her husband and young daughter.

A former East of Scotland 800m and 1500m track champion, Alison is determined to ensure that young and old alike are given every opportunity to stay active.

On City of Edinburgh Council, Alison serves as Green spokesperson on Education and Children & Families. She also sits on the Culture & Sport and Audit Committees.

Keep tuition free

The Greens' local Holyrood candidate has spoken up for students concerned about tuition fees.

The move comes following Westminster's decision to approve huge increases in fees at English universities – a decision with knock-on effects on universities in Scotland.

Alison Johnstone, the Greens' top MSP candidate for the Lothian region, said: "Education strengthens society and benefits everyone, not just students themselves. Places in our colleges and universities must be open to all with the academic ability, not just the ability to pay.

"Putting up tuition fees to as much as £9,000 a year will deter some students from going to university at all, and leave others with worrying levels of debt. As well as directly affecting students from Scotland at English universities, the Westminster cuts in funding mean cuts for Scotland too.

"Our universities in Edinburgh make a huge contribution to the region's economy. Scottish Greens are strongly opposed to passing on Westminster's cuts in funding to Scottish universities, and are committed to maintaining the principle of free education, funded by general taxation."

The Greens are the only party in Scottish politics to really join the dots between social, economic and environmental issues in a way which makes sense.

Louise Batchelor
Former BBC environment correspondent

I'm voting Green because I am tired of political parties ignoring the long term problems and focussing on short term populism – that's why we're in the situation we are in.

Dominic Hinde
Student

I am voting Green because they are the only Party I can trust on social justice issues.

Moira Dunworth
Social Worker

Alison Johnstone is one of the most tenacious, hard-working and committed campaigners I've had the pleasure to work with. You can rely on Alison to do what she says she'll do.

Joanna Blythman
Journalist and author

Eye on Lothian

LOCAL NEWS IN BRIEF...

FORTH BRIDGE

Do we really need another Forth road bridge?

Work is underway to dry out the cables on the world famous suspension bridge. Similar work on the Severn Bridge reduced humidity by half within 18 months. The work on the Forth Road Bridge won't be evaluated until next year – after the construction contracts will have been signed.

The Forth Estuary Transport Authority report shows the bridge can be fixed at a cost of £122 million. Estimates show a new bridge will cost a massive £2.3bn. Responding to this, the Scottish Greens have argued that Holyrood should only commit to a new bridge if MSPs are certain it's essential – especially at a time when there are 160,000 households on waiting lists for Council housing.

As an alternative, the Greens have suggested fixing the bridge, and investing instead in much needed improvements to public transport.

MAKE SCHOOLS MATTER: GREENS

Education has been a burning issue in Lothian over the last 4 years and now the Greens are calling for a fundamental rethink on schools.

Alison Johnstone, who is education spokesperson for the Greens on the City of Edinburgh Council, has worked with parent groups battling school closure plans put forward by the Lib Dem / SNP Council. Most recently, she successfully pushed for school budgets to be boosted to cope with the exceptionally cold winter.

Alison, whose daughter attends primary school in the city, said:

"I have called for a major investment in school energy efficiency that will pay for itself swiftly and release more money for the day to day work of schools. I have also supported local groups concerned that price hikes would force them to close, and ensured that those who wish to use our schools for sport and recreation are given every opportunity to do so. "Our children deserve better."

LEITH BIOMASS

It is more than a year now since retiring Green MSP, Robin Harper, questioned the so-called green credentials of a planned biomass plant at Leith Docks.

Since then, growing numbers of local people have raised concerns about the plans. Among these concerns are emissions from the plant, increased lorry traffic and the fact that the plant would be so close to homes and businesses. Campaigners have also pointed to the poor efficiency of the plant and that much of the fuel will be imported from abroad.

Green party councillor for Leith Walk, Maggie Chapman told Green News:

"This is a wolf in sheep's clothing. Forth Energy have put forward plans for a large scale industrial energy plant that is quite at odds with the clean green renewable energy we need. It is the wrong plan, in the wrong place and if it goes ahead it will put the case for genuine renewables back ten years."



CAROLINE LUCAS BACKS ALISON FOR MSP

In 1999, I was inspired by the success of Robin Harper in being elected as the first Green MSP, and we won our first seats in the European Parliament. Last year when I was elected to serve the people of Brighton Pavilion, giving the Greens our Westminster breakthrough, we knew Holyrood would be the next big opportunity.

Alison Johnstone is an outstanding candidate for Lothian and a perfect successor to Robin Harper. Only by using your 2nd vote to elect her as part of a big group of Green MSPs will there be a strong voice in the Scottish Parliament to back public services instead of cuts, to keep tuition free, and to insulate every home in Scotland.

4 Years in Parliament



It's almost twelve years since Robin Harper was elected as the first Green MSP, so Lothian Green News asked co-convener, Patrick Harvie MSP, to tell us say what the Greens have achieved in that time.

"Greens have had a growing influence, especially over the last four years. We've made every vote matter in Parliament, and Green MSPs have played a pivotal and constructive role

at the heart of Holyrood.

"During this session we've won funding for community projects to tackle climate change, as well as free insulation to cut people's fuel bills and create new jobs.

"Parliament also backed this country's first Green law, designed to tackle hate crimes, drawing on advice from Scotland's police forces.

"We brought improvements to

the Scottish Budget year after year, redirecting spending towards public transport, energy efficiency, small business and community projects. We secured £15m of investment in wave and tidal power – essential green industries of the future.

"We helped abolish the Labour/ Lib Dem "graduate endowment", the rebranded tuition fees, and we have successfully defended public transport projects when Ministers planned to scrap them."

But Patrick added, sometimes the other parties have lined up to support the indefensible, and Green MSPs have had to be the only voices of opposition.

"Ahead of this year's Budget only the Greens set out a costed and practical package of measures to limit the SNP cuts, including raising existing taxes on big business and tackling empty commercial property.

"The SNP chose instead to work with the Tories and Lib Dems to

squeeze public services, and when this 'Cuts Budget' first came to Holyrood only Greens voted against.

"We have also been the only party working with campaigns across Scotland, such as that to protect Aberdeenshire families from eviction by Donald Trump, or community efforts to block damaging incinerators and opencast mines.

All the other parties have lined up to spend at least £2.3bn on an additional road bridge over the Forth even though the existing bridge can be fixed for just £122m.

"So whenever possible, we have worked with other parties as well to deliver real changes. But, where necessary, we have brought a clear Green challenge to Scottish politics. A strong Green voice on all these issues is essential at Holyrood, both to tip the balance in favour of a fairer and more sustainable Scotland, and also at times when only the Greens can provide real opposition.

GREENS IN SECOND VOTE DRIVE

Green candidates in Lothian have welcomed reform of the voting process for the Holyrood election, after the single ballot paper in 2007 left thousands of voters confused.

"SECOND VOTES FOR GREENS REALLY COUNT, AND THAT WILL ONCE AGAIN BE CLEAR TO VOTERS"

For the Scottish election, voters will now have two ballot papers: the first will be for their local constituency MSP; the second will be to elect a number of regional MSPs across Lothian as a whole. Green candidates are only standing on this second ballot paper.

Top Green candidate, Alison Johnstone, said: "The 2007 election was a dark day for democracy with over 100,000 spoiled ballot papers. I am glad that the system has reverted back to two separate papers."

Green alternatives: in the bag



Lead Lothian candidate Alison Johnstone heads to the City Chambers with campaigner Gordon Millar from the local group promoting reusable bags

Plastic bags still litter Lothian. They choke the drains, pose hazards to wildlife and disfigure our towns and countryside.

But with the help of local group, BanPlasticBagsEdinburgh, Green Party candidate Alison Johnstone has been pushing the city of Edinburgh council to adopt simple solutions to this environmental problem.

Alison said: "Plastic bags, by weight, are only part of the waste stream – but since the average plastic bag is used for only 12 minutes they're an important symbol of a throwaway society. Once people start thinking about bags, they start thinking about other aspects of that society too. Scotland is a coastal country and we need to take action to protect our stunning natural environment."

She added: "I've been working with local bags campaigners and recently asked the City of Edinburgh Council to roll out a city wide scheme like the one Greener Leith has been running. People get discounts in local shops if they're carrying one of their branded reusable bags.

"It's simple and it benefits local shops and the environment."



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@AlisonJohnstone
@EdinburghGreens



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The Scottish Green Party
20 Graham Street,
Edinburgh EH6 5QR
t. 08700 772207
e. info@scottishgreens.org.uk
w. www.scottishgreens.org.uk
t. @scotgp
www.facebook.com/ScottishGreens

Promoted by Nigel Bagshaw on behalf of the Scottish Green Party, both at 20 Graham St, Edinburgh, EH6 5QR, and printed on recycled paper by Trinity Mirror, Stanley Boulevard, Blantyre, G72 0BN.

Can you help?

Can you help Alison Johnstone and the Greens in Lothian win on 5th May, and help to tackle the issues raised in this newspaper? You can make the difference!

Yes, I will help by:

- Voting Green with my second vote to elect Alison Johnstone as the Green MSP for the Lothian region
- Voting Green at future local elections
- Putting up an election poster on my window
- Delivering some leaflets in my area
- Doing some paperwork, such as stuffing envelopes
- Making a donation
- Joining the Scottish Greens

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