

Alison's Branch Update

Alison Johnstone, Green MSP for Lothian

25 July 2013

Welcome to my July update.

This is a report to you, my Party colleagues, on my work over the last month. I hope it gives you a flavour of how I try to ensure that your Green voices are heard here in the Parliament and across Lothian.



Whitmuir Farm visit



At the end of June the Parliamentary team visited Whitmuir Organic Farm. Owners Pete and Heather gave us a hugely informative tour of their ambitious projects which

include an organic shop, restaurant, butchery and bakery.

Whitmuir aim to produce high-quality, organic & healthy food, which doesn't exploit animals. They have benefited from Climate Challenge Funding and have plans to be the first community owned farm in Scotland. For info on how you can become a part owner see [here](#).



Chicken in school meals

After hearing anecdotal evidence that much publicly-procured food isn't locally-sourced we wanted to establish some facts. The Scottish Government said they didn't hold such information – worrying in itself – but the results of Freedom of Information requests to a number of Scottish councils were startling.

We began questioning the provenance of chickens in Scottish school lunches. Six of Scotland's seven cities confirmed that none of the chicken they serve is Scottish. And it's the same across the three Lothian councils. Much of the chicken being served is from the Netherlands and Thailand, meaning our local economies are losing out.

We are currently looking at opportunities in the forthcoming Procurement Reform Bill to increase the incentives for buying Scottish produce and the progress made by the Soil Association's Food for Life scheme.

There is a better way of sourcing chicken products than importing them from Thailand; local, high quality food on our children's plates should be the norm.



Media coverage

Despite parliamentary recess it's been a busy few weeks for me in the media. The chicken story (see right) was widely covered, from [STV](#) and the [BBC](#) to the [Daily Record](#) and [the Sun](#), and even in [educational, farming](#) and [meat industry](#) journals. I gave interviews to Real Radio and Radio Forth, Newsdrive on Radio Scotland and the new Sunday morning phone-in on Radios Forth, Clyde, Tay and Northsound. I also raised concerns in a [Scotsman](#) article about the power of corporate interests over the new food standards body for Scotland.

I was quoted in the [Scotsman](#), [Edinburgh Reporter](#) and [North Edinburgh News](#) calling for more government funding in sport following Andy Murray's victory.

The Evening News ran a [comment piece](#) from me about pay ratios following the revelation about the size of the Lothian Buses chief executive's salary.

The [Times Educational Supplement](#) and the [Scotsman](#) carried my comments on the latest qualification statistics.

The [Daily Mail](#) quoted me welcoming the Scottish Government's long-overdue decision to introduce a charge for single-use carrier bags.

Climate plan

The Government has recently published the final version of its climate plan, and I've said publicly that it is a [dismal](#) strategy. I was disappointed to see that, despite months of scrutiny and suggestions, there is not a single upgraded policy, and that, even though the climate targets were missed, the climate plan does not indicate that this will improve any time soon. While the government plans to cut transport emissions by promoting electric cars, it spends less than 1% of the transport budget on improving conditions for walking and cycling. We will continue to raise these issues at every opportunity.

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Royal Edinburgh Community Gardens

Cllr Gavin Corbett and I recently visited the gardens and met with staff & volunteers from the [Cyrenians](#). NHS Lothian have indicated that the gardens will have to be relocated on the Morningside site due to the hospital redevelopment plans. I will continue to assist the garden representatives in discussions to ensure that a positive solution is found for the long term future of this fantastic project.



Blacklisting

I have given my strong support to the [Unite the Union](#) campaign against [blacklisting](#). Unite the Union believe that blacklisting is abhorrent and that the companies involved in blacklisting should be removed from public contracts. I agree that there should be a public inquiry into blacklisting. Recently, there has also been a [petition](#) launched on behalf of Unite, [GMB](#) and [UCATT](#) to end blacklisting in Scotland. I joined a recent march on London's Oxford Street– the banner says it all.



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Parliamentary Business

At the beginning of the month, following my questions from last month, I lodged a [motion](#) supporting the vision for a tobacco-free Scotland by 2034 and highlighting the opportunity to support this through the 2014 Commonwealth Games. I am pleased that the Sports Minister has written to me giving her strongest support to date for this vision.

Following my [motion](#) last month on promotions firm Bounty and their access to patients on maternity wards, I have received a positive response from NHS Lothian who have said they are reviewing their relationship with the firm.

Education

Education Bill: We did back the [Post-16 Education Bill](#), which aims to widen access to higher education and changes the way colleges and universities are run. We have warned against using reorganisation as an excuse for cutting funds. I am also concerned at the Scottish Government's attitude toward colleges, regarding them as the poor relation to universities.

Poor progress on P.E.

I have recently highlighted two major reports that show the challenges facing teacher and also the lack of progress in terms of physical education in schools.

The latest Statistical Bulletin shows a 1% drop in the number of secondary schools that provide at least 100 minutes of P.E. a week. Furthermore, the [OECD's Education at Glance report](#) shows that teachers in Scotland are facing huge workloads, excessive unpaid overtime and pay falls. While it makes sense to encourage prepared lessons and professional development, I believe that, in order to do their job properly, teachers also need some breathing space, greater flexibility and we need to invest in P.E. specialists not simply add to class teachers workloads.

Tennis

Following Andy Murray's historic Wimbledon victory, I welcome the recent announcement of government spending for tennis facilities,



which is to be aimed at increasing participation, developing closer links between schools and places to play tennis, and rejuvenating park courts. It is a real shame that the investment that we are now being promised has taken so long to materialise. Local and national governments failure to invest in sport and leisure and maintain facilities over the years has deprived many communities of affordable opportunities to take part in sport. What are your local courts like?

Did you know? My office has been in contact with over 350 constituents over the past month following their enquiries to us. Issues being raised range from equal marriage legislation, the proposed Local Development Plan, antisocial behaviour, the Bedroom Tax, cycling infrastructure and the [IF Campaign](#).

And finally... A HUGE thank you to my Parliamentary team members Sally Cowburn who begins maternity leave next month, and Will George who is heading to organic pastures new on a New Zealand farm.