

Alison's Branch Update

Alison Johnstone, Green MSP for Lothian

April/May 2014



Welcome to my latest update of the year.

This is a report to you, my Party colleagues, focusing on my work over the last few weeks. I hope that it gives you a flavour of how I try to ensure that your Green voices are being heard, both here in the Scottish Parliament and right the way across the Lothian region.

Scottish Green Party debates

As a minority party in Holyrood, the chance to lead Scottish Parliament debates comes around all too rarely, so in early May we chose to split our allotted time to consider two important core Green topics - inequality and fracking. The timing was apt given the obscene and growing gap between the wealthy and the rest, and the current 'dash for gas' threatening to see more fossil fuels being recklessly exploited, regardless of local public opinion or hazards, just as we are set to miss yet another climate target.

I led the debate on fracking after my motion called for the Scottish Government to prohibit all such activity, and although this was voted down, both debates were constructive. We have forced all parties to state their positions explicitly, but only with more Green MSPs elected will we be allotted more high-profile debating time in the Chamber to demonstrate that the Scottish Greens are the party who defend the public interest.

Supporting our community shops

I joined a large group of protesters outside parliament to highlight concerns about the rapid rise in the numbers of supermarkets and their 'local' or 'mini' stores.

Figures we obtained show the number of such stores in Edinburgh is higher per head of population than anywhere else in the rest of Scotland.



We need government action to end the harm done by these identikit shops to local small businesses, the identity of our communities and of course the threat they carry in terms of job losses.

Fans First campaign gathering pace

I had the chance to lead a members' business debate in parliament on fan ownership of football clubs, following the release of polling that shows huge support for our campaign to give fans more rights.

We know our plans are ambitious, but we hope to establish a model in Scotland whereby these community assets can be under the stewardship of the communities themselves.



Now we must see government action to make fan ownership an easier process, and we will continue to work with ministers to secure the best legislation possible.

We have launched a new website where you can find updates and you can follow us on twitter: @putfansfirst.

The video for the members' debate can be found here.

My recent media coverage

- I had a front page lead and double-page spread on the march of the small supermarkets in Edinburgh.
- I commented on two separate reports from Audit Scotland about council spending and procurement.
- There was good coverage of my debate on fan ownership of football clubs, including STV and the Courier, and separately I called for a community buyout of the Coop's farms that are up for sale.
- I am also keeping up the pressure on the cycling front, while trying to be positive where possible.

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Women of Scotland gathering

I had the honour of addressing this Year's [Women of Scotland](#) Luncheon, raising funds for [Bobath Scotland](#). I spoke on the topic of "independent women", highlighting how the role of women in society and politics has changed over time, and how much it has too often stayed the same. In the thoughts of us all were the schoolgirls [kidnapped in Nigeria](#), and all other women and girls subject to abuses of power around the globe.



Other Parliamentary Business

In April I lodged a [motion](#) calling for a ban on snaring, a [motion](#) congratulating Edinburgh Printmakers on being awarded £5m to create a cultural centre in Fountainbridge, and [one](#) congratulating Road Share's campaign to protect vulnerable road users. I also lodged a [motion](#) highlighting the [Voices from the Frontline](#) report by Citizens Advice Scotland, outlining the human cost of poverty and effects of welfare policy.

As well as my members' debate on fan ownership I spoke in a [debate](#) on Scotland's inshore fisheries.

I chaired the Cross Party Group on Children and Young People which joined up with the CPG Sport to discuss the legacy of the 2014 Commonwealth games.

Questions I asked recently included [one](#) on what resources the government is committing to improve air quality, and [one](#) on how Scottish Water plans to promote the generation of renewable energy.

Indyref panel discussions

In April, Yes East Lothian invited me to a panel debate in Dunbar with Paul Wheelhouse MSP, Ivan McKee from Business for Scotland and Comedian Paul Sneddon. I then took part in Yes Edinburgh Central's event encouraging members of the public to come along and ask questions of myself and fellow panellists Liz Lochhead, Marco Biagi MSP and Tommy Sheppard.

More recently, I took part in an MSPs' debate in Stockbridge along with Marco Biagi speaking in favour of a Yes vote, with Sarah Boyack and Gavin Brown making the case for No. Although there was no formal vote, a show of hands gave the result to Yes.

Demonstrating against climate change

To mark the release of the new IPCC report on the impacts of climate change, I spoke at a demonstration co-organised by Edinburgh Young Greens and the UK Youth Climate Coalition outside Parliament, reiterating the urgent need for serious action by governments.



In Committee

The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's study of [Scotland's Economic Future Post-2014](#) discussed poverty and inequality, and how the referendum gives an opportunity to highlight issues faced by a society that ranks so poorly in terms of its inequalities. In response to my questioning, Bill Scott ([Inclusion Scotland](#)) described how some disabled people currently pay care charges amounting to a shocking 90% or more of income their house receives.

Among the others interviewed were experts from [Oxfam](#), [Poverty Alliance](#), [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) and the [Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations](#).

We heard of plans for this year's [Bannockburn Live](#), including how it was scaled down from aiming to bring 45,000 attendees to 15,000 after the MoD scheduled Armed Forces Day for the same time in the next field.

Campaigning for 21st century travel

I spoke at [Pedal on Parliament](#) again, where this year pedestrians joined in too, emphasising the need to take active, affordable travel seriously. We must see proper investment in infrastructure to cut the fatalities on our roads and improve health across Scotland.

I was also invited to the [CTC](#) National Dinner, joining cyclists from across the UK who share the vision of a transport network in line with our continental cousins.



Photo by Chris Hill