

Alison Johnstone MSP - AGM Report January 2015 to January 2016

Welcome to my annual report. This is a snapshot of my work representing the Lothian region, where I have continued to promote the Green vision for a just, equal Scotland, and to highlight and challenge the devastating impacts of [austerity and in-work poverty](#). My work wouldn't be possible without support from the Parliamentary team, Councillor colleagues, and the passion of party members in Lothian and beyond.

Healthcare matters

Issues of healthcare remain key campaign topics for the Greens when it comes to advocating a different path than that followed by successive SNP or Labour administrations. I meet regularly with the board of NHS Lothian to discuss issues including the crisis in acute medicine and shortages in GPs, among other matters.



Meeting the children at a Scottish Network for Arthritis in Children (snac) event in Parliament.

I have worked on a number of constituency cases in the past year to resolve individual issues, and have [asked for detail](#) on how the £200 million investment in new elective treatment centres across Scotland will be allocated. I [urged the Scottish Government](#) to do more to provide care home places and care-at-home packages, as figures show 44% of delayed discharges from hospitals are due to patients waiting for places in care homes. It's clear that more needs to be done to care for our increasingly complex health needs.



With some of the staff at Marie Curie's Edinburgh Hospice.

I have been working, with ongoing support from Councillor Chas Booth, to secure a vibrant future for Meadowbank Sports Centre, one of the city's best used sports and leisure facilities, playing a vital part in supporting public health.

As Health spokesperson for the Greens, I look forward to the opportunities ahead to work with the excellent NHS staff and campaign groups, and emphasise the Greens' support for those working to deliver a healthier Scotland.

Welcoming refugees and opposing the latest rush to war

In addition to speaking at a counter protest in Edinburgh against the Scottish Defence League, I took part in [a summit](#) chaired by the First Minister in response to the refugee crisis in southern Europe, bringing together groups including charities and local authorities to discuss what Scotland can do to help.

The summit made clear that Scotland wants to play a serious role in helping those fleeing horrendous situations in the Middle East and Africa.



I spoke out against the illogical and inhumane approach taken by the UK Government to the humanitarian crisis facing Syria and surrounding nations, and to make clear [the unequivocal position of the Scottish Greens](#), that diplomatic and humanitarian efforts be put at the forefront of our efforts to support the region.

Keeping up the pressure over climate change and fracking

I was pleased to take part in several public meetings and protests on [climate change](#)-related issues in 2015, including speaking at [Global Divestment Day](#) in Edinburgh (pictured).

The campaign against [fracking](#) gathered pace nationally and in Lothian, and I worked with communities and colleagues across Scotland, forcing the Government to introduce a



Speaking at Edinburgh's Global Divestment Day protest.

moratorium. Our polling showed that Scottish Greens were in tune with local communities who want decisions taken closer to home, and the challenge was clear to each of the other parties at Holyrood who failed previously to support my calls in the Scottish Parliament to ban fracking in Scotland completely.

Edinburgh Uni's fossil fuel investments

I lodged a motion in support, and had the pleasure of joining Edinburgh University students who staged a peaceful live-in protest over the [University's decision](#) not to divest from fossil fuel industries, to pursue ethical investments instead.

The positive and constructive way in which they made their case was clear for all to see, and their commitment was rewarded by a positive change in the University's position.



Meeting the campaigners at Edinburgh Uni, with Co-convenor, Maggie Chapman.

Transparency on public pension investments

I [secured a pledge](#) from the Scottish Government that the largest public pension investments will be made more transparent, allowing local government employees to see whether funds are invested in the fossil fuels contributing to climate change.

Those with a stake in these funds need access to the facts so that they can understand the full economic case for divestment from fossil fuels.

Standing up for workers' rights across the region and beyond

I have met with members of the PCS union many times in support of staff strike action at the National Museum of Scotland, and I continue to support their calls for weekend working allowance for all staff.

I spoke at and supported those striking at the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, and was pleased to stand with EIS union members on their march to the funding council in Edinburgh.



Supporting PCS members with fellow Lothian MSPs, Neil Findlay and Jim Eadie.

Trade Union Bill

In a debate towards the end of 2015, the Greens called for Holyrood to go beyond statements of 'opposition' to Westminster's Trade Union Bill, to offer real support for public sector employers and Trade Unions who choose non-compliance with legislation that attacks the basic rights of workers.

With draconian measures such as fines of up to £20,000 for picket supervisors who do not wear armbands, we will need to see the determination of the public backed up by cross-party political support to defy this law.

You can read more about this [here](#), and you can find the [Scottish Green Party Trade Union Group](#) on facebook.



Opposing the TU Bill, with Co-convenor Patrick Harvie MSP.

Travel in and around (and above) the region

Railways

I asked several questions in 2015 about the Scottish Government's plans for the railways. For example, I asked when the strategic transport appraisal guidance study into the reopening of the [Levenmouth Rail Line](#) will be completed, and raised the issue of dreadful overcrowding on railway services between [Edinburgh and North Berwick](#) – far from an isolated or localised problem facing commuters, and one which generated local [news coverage](#) and correspondence from those affected.

In addition to this work within Parliament, I tested out Midlothian's new railway in September. You can read more about this [here](#).

Flightpaths

A great number of concerned constituents contacted me on the impact on communities of [Edinburgh Airport's Airspace Trial](#) for new flight routes. I was delighted to meet with local campaigners (pictured), and to support calls for the trial to be halted immediately.



With community campaigners from SEAT (Stop Edinburgh Airspace Trial)

News that the trial would end two months early was welcome, but communities need to be consulted on future plans that may cause upheaval.

Active Travel

In Holyrood, the [20th anniversary of the national cycle network](#) led to a debate in which I was able to make the case for celebrating this milestone while also recognising how much work remains to be done, in Edinburgh and elsewhere, to make our transport infrastructure fit for the needs of those living in a modern society.

It is vital that walking and cycling improvements are pushed forward with funding



With Mark Beaumont and fellow CPG Cycling members, Jim Eadie MSP and Claudia Beamish MSP.

attached. This is a transport justice issue. The Government makes clear funding commitments to roads for cars and lorries, and should make a clear funding commitment for walkers and cyclists, too. Sadly, the draft 2016/17 budget indicates spending on trunk roads will increase while support for public transport and active travel shrinks. It is currently less than 1.9% of the Government's transport budget, a clear indication of current government priorities.

To honour climate change commitments made in Paris, and for the sake of bringing our infrastructure into line with that of many of our European cousins, we must

take a different approach.

As Co-convenor of the Cross Party Group on Cycling, I have frequently pressed the Transport Minister and the Finance Secretary to scale up

their ambition, and deliver a transport network that can best serve the needs of the public in their daily lives, with an integrated approach to walking, cycling, and public transport infrastructure. Recent research demonstrates a link between air pollution and heart disease and makes this a matter of extreme urgency.

Fans First – Delivering more powers for Scotland’s football fans

When I launched the [Fans First campaign](#) in 2013, few anticipated that we would see the Scottish Government address the matter by setting-up a working group on supporter involvement in response, and far less that an amendment to the Community Empowerment Bill would be passed in June 2015, leading to a public consultation on fan ownership and right-to-buy.



With former First Minister, Henry McLeish.

The consultation has now closed, and it remains to be seen what the final legislation will look like, and whether Green proposals will be adopted, but I remain convinced that community and fan ownership should not be seen simply as a last resort to rescue a club already at crisis point; but as a viable and sustainable option for clubs to adopt.

I am immensely grateful of the support received during the campaign (including from former First Minister, Henry McLeish, above), and I am very proud to have been able to help deliver an ambitious manifesto commitment upon which I was elected in 2011.

Women 50:50 and supporting the next generation of leaders



It is one of the major highlights of my work that young women ask me for insights into life as a public representative, in writing and at events around the country. The Scottish Parliament itself plays host to events designed to help young women develop their confidence and leadership skills.

One such event in spring 2015 was *Inspiring Young Women* (left). 182 pupils from 32 Scottish schools shared their own experiences of leadership, as well as the barriers facing young women in gaining confidence in order to succeed in their chosen field. I look forward to more opportunities to take part in vital events like these in future.

Today, women make up 52% of the population, yet in Scotland only 36% of those on public boards are women, and less than 35% of MSPs and 24% of Councillors.

It is estimated that unless radical change is actively pursued, we'll not see an equal parliament in the next 50 years. That is why I have been proud to continue working with the [Women 50:50 campaign](#), of which I am co-founder with Kezia Dugdale MSP, and I wholeheartedly support the drive for equality across society.



*Speaking at the Women 50:50 national conference, with Angela Constance MSP.
(Photo credit: Jannica Honey)*

Campaigning for better housing

I have asked parliamentary questions on topics including the impact on the Greenbelt of [local development plans](#), the risk of building on previous mining land and the need for third party right of appeal. I have been proud to support the excellent work done by Living Rent and Shelter in campaigning for better standards in housing and stronger protections for tenants.

Land matters and tenants' rights



With Patrick Harvie MSP and Councillor Steve Burgess at a Living Rent demonstration.

In November there was an excellent turnout for a demonstration outside a very rainy Holyrood (pictured below), calling for [urgent action over the eviction](#) of tenant farmer Andrew Stoddart.

On the evening of the demonstration, I hosted a cross party meeting in Parliament attended by Angus MacDonald MSP (on behalf of the Scottish

Government Minister), Labour's Land Reform spokesperson Sarah Boyack MSP, together with

Andrew Stoddart, other tenant farmers, representatives of the Scottish Tenant Farmers Association, and the Scottish Green Party's own land reform expert, Andy Wightman.

Thanks to the more than 19,000 people who signed the petition that was handed in at the event - and also to Our Land, 38 Degrees and the Living Rent campaign who helped to organise the demonstration, MSPs were left in no doubt (if any still were) about the strength of public feeling on this issue.

It's clearly high time we saw real land reform and tenants' rights, in order to deliver the fairness and transparency so clearly lacking at present.



With the crowds protesting against the eviction of tenant farmer Andrew Stoddart, and in favour of strong land reform.

Parliament House

Since it transpired that Edinburgh Council transferred [Parliament House](#) in Edinburgh from the collective ownership of constituents to Scottish ministers without knowledge or recompense to the common good fund, I have worked with Andy Wightman and Cllr Gavin Corbett to question this shocking display of incompetence and complacency.

I have asked for details from the Government and I will continue to work with colleagues on this issue.

Supporting communities in Edinburgh and across Lothian

As ever, the past year has seen many communities faced with unsuitable development proposals, and I have worked with residents across Lothian opposing a number of applications affecting historical buildings and greenbelt land.

The success of **Allan Park** residents who managed to [stop the demolition](#) of a perfectly sound family home (in order to open up access for large scale development on a local green space) is evident in the photo below. They are concerned at the impact of increased traffic on road safety, pollution and loss of a cycle and footway.

The Planning Committee (including our own Cllr Nigel Bagshaw) rightly refused permission, but the developer has appealed and I will continue working with Cllr Gavin Corbett (second from right) and the local community as the case is now in the hands of the Scottish Government's reporter.



Lorne Street

I lodged a motion in Holyrood calling for financial support for the Lorne St tenants facing eviction by the charity that owns their homes.

While it is welcome that the Agnes Hunter Trust has now agreed that there will be a moratorium on evictions until July, it must extend this if needed, so that nobody is faced with the threat of losing their home. You can find more information on this issue and see the full text of my motion [here](#).

Old Royal High

I was delighted that members of City of Edinburgh Council's planning committee were not seduced by proposals for a luxury hotel on the site of the [Old Royal High School](#), recognising that so much of our visitor economy is based on the landscape of our city: an inheritance which the proposed development would have squandered. A perfectly feasible alternative is waiting in the wings in the shape of a new music school which much more respects the building and setting.



There are many more development proposals that I am in frequent contact with constituents about, from Midmar Paddock (right) to Craighouse and Burdiehouse, and I look forward to an increased number of Green Councillors in Lothian in 2017, so that we as a Party can help deliver more positive outcomes for communities across the region.

With Councillor Melanie Main and local residents campaigning to save Midmar Paddock

Animal Welfare

Among the many issues arising in the past year, perhaps the most high profile was the situation regarding fox hunting. When the SNP made clear their strong opposition to UK government plans to relax the laws south of the border, it [exposed the inconsistency](#) in presiding over weaker regulations presently in Scotland.

I lodged a motion calling for an urgent review of the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002, in light of the very low numbers of prosecutions associated with mounted fox hunt activities, and I am working with campaign groups to follow this up in the hope that legislation will soon be improved.

Committee scrutiny of the Smith Commission and Scotland Bill

I am a member of the Devolution (Further Powers) Committee and last year the Committee's unanimous report on the Smith Commission's draft clauses was published, with an agreement that there were significant areas that didn't live up to the spirit or letter of the Smith agreement. You can read the report [here](#).

The Committee then moved on to consider the UK Government's Scotland Bill. We have focused scrutiny on the need for a fair fiscal framework, meaningful welfare powers and better inter-governmental working. I've also highlighted the need for unambiguous crown estate devolution (Fort Kinnaird in Edinburgh will remain reserved to Westminster under current proposals!) The Committee has published a [short guide to devolution in Scotland](#), containing information and facts and figures on devolution to date and the key features of the Scotland Bill 2015-16.

So far this year we have taken evidence on the implications of the UK Government's Trade Union Bill, and the impact of the fiscal framework on welfare.

Thank You!

I hope you have enjoyed this snapshot of the year in Parliament and in Lothian, and I am grateful to those whose support made it possible. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions you might have, or to arrange a visit to Parliament.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alison Johnstone". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Further Information

- My parliamentary work, with quick links to my recent questions, motions and speeches:
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/mmps/currentmmps/Alison-Johnstone-MSP.aspx>
- Receive notification by email of all my parliamentary contributions:
http://www.theyworkforyou.com/mmp/25091/alison_johnstone
- The Green MSPs website:
<http://greenmmps.org/>
- My blog:
<http://alisonjohnstonemmp.com/>