



# Buckingham Constituency Liberal Democrats Annual General Meeting

19 November 2022, 11.00 -13.00

## Minutes

Present:

This was a hybrid meeting, partly face-to-face (*Haddenham*) and Zoom.

*Face-to-face:*

Anja Schaefer(chair), Ivo Haest (secretary), Alex Foreman-Peck (treasurer), John Eyres (Campaign Officer), Llew Monger (Exec member), Julian Newman, Andrew Jones, Andrew Ferry(Membership officer), Peter Cooper ( rep BCLD on Bucks Council), Andrew Cross

*Zoom:*

Andrew Pegg (vice chair), Gareth Davies, Dave Frearson (Exec member), Chris Jordan

Apologies received:

Jim Brown, Heather-Joy Garrett

### 1. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were noted.

### 2. Chair's report

Anja Schaefer gave an overview of the local election campaigns this year. The most important election for the LD was the Unitary Council by-election in Bernwood ward in June. This very effective campaign led to the election of Lib Dem councillor Sue Lewin. She is now next to Peter Cooper our second County Councillor in our constituency.

In April we supported the Amersham Town Council election which resulted in a win of a Lib Dem seat from the Conservatives.

In the September, non-party political Princes Risborough Town Council elections Andy Cross was duly elected. This has strengthened our position in an area that will become more important for future elections with the new proposed boundaries.

Two Lib Dem candidates were elected during the Beaconsfield elections in October.

Due to these multiple by-elections we have not been able to carry out many surveys this year. We managed to deliver two Focus leaflets in the Wing and Bernwood wards of our two sitting councillors.

The advert for the election of the Prospective Parliamentary Candidate(PPC) has gone out recently and the closing date for the nominations of candidates will be 9 December 2022. In July 2022 the required Returning Officer(RO) was appointed and in September our Liaison officer, Llew Monger. It has been a rather long process since July 2021 to get to this point. The guidance and responsiveness from the regional office could have been better.

Depending on the date of the next GE, we could be fighting it in the current boundary (the current Buckingham Constituency) or – if the proposed boundary changes go ahead (still under review) – then we could be fighting in significantly changed constituency boundaries.

### 3. Treasurer's report

Alex Foreman-Peck gave an overview of income and expenditure for the year ending 31 December 2021. The report has been approved by the Buckingham Executive Committee, the Central LD Party and the external examiner.

In 2021 our expenditure was £14,252 and our income was £12,816 so ending 2021 with a deficit of £1,435. Income came mainly from marked increase of donations (£9,232) of which 20% from tithes. Expenditure was mainly spent on campaigning for the 2021 local elections (£10,048). The balance sheet at the end of 2021 was £3,220 which is insufficient to run major election campaigns. A priority for 2023 will be fundraising to replenish and increase our reserves. There are both general and local elections coming up in the coming two years.

The cash balance for 2022 at the time of the AGM (November) is around £3,512, mainly in the bank account.

A new bank account (Unity Trust Bank) has been opened which will allow internet banking.

This account for 2021 was approved by the BCLD Executive Committee (February 2022), independently review by Mike Smith, and submitted to the Lib Dem HQ (March 2022).

Cllr Mike Smith has been nominated again as independent examiner for the 2022 accounts.

Alex Foreman-Peck was thanked for his excellent financial overview.

### 4. Membership officer's report

Andrew Ferry updated the AGM on current membership figures. We currently have 200 members (in 2020: 331; 2021: 246) and 81 registered supporters (in 2020: 68; 2021: 61). We had 15 new members but a net loss of 46 members which is around 18%. This loss of membership is a national trend. The membership is now back at the pre-Brexit level of 2016. Imminent Brexit caused a surge in our membership with a peak at the end of 2019. lapsing members were contacted as much as possible through emails and telephoning. The reasons for members leaving is broadly two fault: 1) return to Conservatives and Labour party 2) Brexit was a main reason why people became member of the Lib Dems and they were disappointed that the Lib Dems failed to prevent Brexit.

With the many by-election campaigns this year it has not been possible to organise many social events for members or organise recruitment campaigns. We need to approach new members as early as possible and try to engage them in local LD ward activities.

There is potential to convert some people on that list to become members e.g. by phoning them. This would increase our local income through membership fees which otherwise would largely go to the National Party.

All the details of social events will be on the website: [buckinghamlibdems.org.uk/en/event/month](http://buckinghamlibdems.org.uk/en/event/month)

Andrew was thanked for his contribution to strengthen the local party.

## 5. Campaigning update

John Eyes reported with some slides on a very successful campaigning year with the many by-elections as reported by the chair above. The Lib Dems won all elections in which we participated making it “a winning year”. Throughout the year we increased our percentage of votes at the expense of the Conservatives. In the Amersham Town Council election our share was 58% and a slightly lower percentage in Princes Risborough where Andrew Cross stood as an Independent candidate but was supported by Lib Dems campaigning.

The Bernwood ward by-election was a tough campaign but we just managed to prevent the election of a second Green Party councillor.

An ambitious plan for the coming year was presented:

- Support for sitting councillors Sue Lewin and Peter Cooper, Focus leaflets
- More casework support and building of loyalty with LD
- Continue with surveys by door-to-door knocking + focus leaflets
- More petitions
- Building of a new website with better functionality: expert support requested
- A much better targeted and professional emails system run from a new platform: help requested
- Continued membership campaign
- More social events for members: smaller and more at local level to build teams
- Systematic fundraising, including more online activities eg quizzes
- be ready for parliamentary elections which could be as early as spring 2023 and could be fought along the new boundaries
- PCC fund raising and profiling of the PCC as soon as the candidate is elected
- Social media use to be improved greatly. Andrew Cross offered help

A sustained campaign is taking place to systematically build our name recognition as a party.

It was remarked that the local LD constituencies need to work closer together across the county if we want to run an effective parliamentary election campaign and form an effective opposition within Buckinghamshire Unitary Authority. The joint Kickstart plan of 2021 for better cooperation was never implemented. The large geographical nature of Buckinghamshire is no excuse for lack of cooperation and joint planning, eg for a joint campaign. If we want to make the colour of Buckinghamshire less blue then the local LD groups have to work together. The current Three Constituencies meetings are important and it is hoped that the meetings will become more impactful next year. Through the mutual elections campaign support this year the local parties got to know each other much better, in particular Chesham and Amersham. We should build on that.

It was also recognised that the large geographical nature of Bucks county makes it very difficult to organise a single countywide event, for example for fund raising. It would be much more workable to have more local centres like eg Buckingham, Aylesbury High Wycombe, Amersham, Beaconsfield. However, you could still have a countywide plan developed for fundraising but implement it at a decentralised, in more local level pockets. It was noted that the Conservatives have already started large fundraising activities for their PPCs but that the Lib Dems would never be able to match the 121 local Tory councillors network with related access to financial resources and networks. The largest LD councillors network we have would be Aylesbury. We need a PPC as soon as possible so we can start our fundraising for and with our PCC.

## 6. Report from the Liberal Democrat Councillor of Buckinghamshire Unitary Council

Peter Cooper started his report by sharing his experience of working at Buckinghamshire County level. He felt that Conservatives dominated Council is trying to undermine anything that comes from the opposition parties. They then adapt or kill some of the ideas of the opposition and try to make it their own by rebranding it. This is also done at ward level. He gave an example of his 20 MPH campaign. Another example was a community driven Winslow town plan to revitalise the high street.

It was also noted that the Tory Unitary Councillors try systematically, and apparently as a matter of strategic policy, to pick up as many Parish Council seats as they can. In Aston Clinton for example there are three cabinet members on the Parish Council. There are many places across the county where Unitary Councillors also have a seat on a Parish Council. This close relationship may not be such a problem in larger councils like towns but at Parish Council level it looks an unhealthy relationship. Often it will strengthen the Conservatives local position but it may elsewhere undermine it. As Lib Dems we should monitor this. Many Parish Councils are not elected along party political lines. Actually most Parish Councils don't have elections because there are not enough candidates standing for filling the number of seats available so there is no need to hold elections.

The BC Highways Department will have a new contractor (Balfour Beatty) with effect from 1 April 2023. Currently there is a gap therefore where not much road works is done by the current contractor.

Peter stated that BC is increasing the "autumn budget" by 5% (3% social services, 2% the rest) but this will not cover the costs. It is also relying on legacy budgets of the previous District Councils but that will finish soon. Although BC looks not too bad at the moment, in the near future it likely also to run into financial problems like many other councils.

Peter expressed concerns that recently the Chancellor released a budget press release which showed a rather rosy view of the current financial position of the country presented in the House. Martin Tett, the leader of BC, almost copied this release to publish as his own local press release. This can be seen as distribution of national political material by BC instead of publishing information reflecting BC. It is important that we as LD keep a close eye on such practices, counter them and use it in our campaigning materials.

Peter mentioned that BC Select Committees are cross party committees and a good place to raise questions and more in-depth discussions. Seat allocation is proportionate to number of party councillors so LD have only few seats. There is no time limit to speaking. Reports are mainly written

by officers with more or less councillors input, often less. Such Committees have no decision-making powers but give only recommendations. Peter has a seat on the Communities Select Committee and Sue Lewin on the Children’s Services Committee. Other local LD parties have seats on other Committees. Cross county working of all Lib Dem councillors is very important to share views, support each other, coordinate and develop coherent policies. At the moment there is no cross-county LD councillors group or other structure to which a whip could be used to attend. There is a need for local LD councillors to speak more to LD party policies than presenting their own views. The public can raise questions directly to those committees ,in advance only, but it would be much better for LD members to raise such questions through the relevant Lib Dem councillor on such a Committee. It was also suggested that sitting LD councillors should try to make more use of specific expertise among its local members. It would lead to better engagement of local members and probably to better informed LD committee members.

Peter also sits on the Strategic Sites Planning Committee but that committee is very different from Select Committees and does take planning application decisions.

## 7. Motions

The were no motions submitted.

## 8. Election of officers

The following officers and members of the executive were nominated and elected:

Role	Nominee	Nominated by	Seconded by	
Chair	Anja Schaefer	Ivo Haest	Alex Foreman-Peck	Elected unanimously
Vice-chair	Andrew Cross	Anja Schaefer	Sue Lewin	Elected unanimously
Secretary	Ivo Haest	John Eyres	Anja Schaefer	Elected unanimously
Treasurer	Alex Foreman-Peck	Ivo Haest	John Eyres	Elected unanimously
Membership Development officer	Dave Frearson	Andrew Ferry	Anja Schaefer	Elected unanimously
Data officer	Zoe Russell	Ivo Haest	Alex Foreman-Peck	Elected unanimously
Media officer	Sanchia Davidson	Ivo Haest	Llew Monger	Elected unanimously
Campaign Officer	John Eyres	Ivo Haest	Sue Lewin	Elected unanimously
Diversity Officer	Poonam Gupta	Andrew Cross	Peter Cooper	Elected unanimously
Member of the exec	Llew Monger	Ivo Haest	Peter Cooper	Elected unanimously
Member of the exec	Sanchia Davidson	Anja Schaefer	Andrew Cross	Elected unanimously
Member of the exec	Heather-Joy Garrett	Andrew Cross	Andrew Ferry	Elected unanimously
Representative of the BCLD members of Buckinghamshire Council	Sue Lewin	Andrew Ferry	Peter Cooper	Elected unanimously

## 9. Appointment of the Independent Examiner for the 2022 Local Party Account

Mike Smith was appointed as the Independent Examiner for the 2022 Local Party Account

## 10. Open discussion on new Election Boundaries

The [Boundary Commission](#) is currently reviewing election boundaries. The discussion related to two separate boundary changes: parliamentary elections and local elections. Slides were presented on the proposed boundary changes. The Bucks Constituency Local Party has submitted our thinking for the new boundaries. This is based on a reduction from 147 to 98 County Councillors.

- 1) The parliamentary boundary of the Buckingham/Bletchley constituency will combine wards Buckingham East and West, Winslow, Great Brickhill and 4 wards in Milton Keynes: Bletchley East, West, Park and Tattenhoe.

The chair talked the meeting through a slide showing 2019 general election results for each ward. The purpose was to get some sense in which areas the LibDems would have any chance of winning an election. It showed that if the LibDems do campaign in a ward then the election results are good. Overall the LibDems are in third position. In MK there is an agreement between Labour and LibDems for certain wards not to contest each other. It was remarked that the large number of Tory voters abandoning the party at the moment is completely changing the chances for the LibDems of winning in previously Tory wards.

The second slide showed the area of the proposed Mid Buckinghamshire Constituency: again based on 2019 general election results the LibDems are in second position and therefore in a better position of winning a parliamentary election than in the Bucks/Bletchley Constituency.

- 2) Local election boundaries: further consultation on ward boundaries is still ongoing.

Many of the boundary proposals submitted by BCLD have been adopted by the Boundary Commission but Buckinghamshire County did of course submit several alternative boundary proposals. The guidance is indicating that a ward should have an electorate size of around 4,500 voters. The difference of population density of rural and urban areas results of course in very different geographical size wards. Also the caseload for councillors of rural areas is usually lower than for urban areas.

The boundary changes will also mean that the LibDems Local Party boundaries have to change. Discussions will continue with the regional office and neighbouring local parties how best those local parties can be constituted.

## 11. Closing

The Chair thanked everybody for attending and invited people to enjoy the lunch served.

Special thanks by the attendees of the meeting was expressed to the chair, Anja Schaefer, for taking the local party successfully through another busy and difficult year.