

eastern Agenda



Newsletter from Andrew Duff MEP
no. 16 Spring 2007

Andrew Duff becomes leader



Andrew meets with representatives of the Kashmiri community in Watford. Lib Dem Cllr Qurban Hussain writes on the Kashmiri conflict on page 2

Andrew Duff has been elected Leader of the British Liberal Democrat MEPs. In the election, which took place at the mid term of the parliamentary mandate, Andrew beat Chris Davies (NW Region) by a two to one margin. In a statement following his election, Andrew said:

"I am grateful to all my Lib Dem colleagues for electing me to lead the delegation into the second half of this Parliament. The individual talents of Lib Dem MEPs are well known. They are a fantastic team to work with, and we will continue to achieve much across a wide front within the ALDE Group and the Parliament at large.

"My main goal is to get as many Lib Dem MEPs as possible elected in June 2009. The Liberal Democrats are uniquely well placed to put the European dimension back into British politics. Labour has lost its way on Europe, and the Tories are making an historic mistake by turning their backs on Europe.

"Under Ming Campbell, the Liberal Democrats make the connection between Britain's membership of the EU and its ability to tackle reform at home. Europe provides the context for many of Lib Dem policies - such as green taxes, civil liberties, constitutional reform, and new foreign policy orientations."



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The future of Kashmir

Writes Cllr Qurban Hussain

Sixty years after the messy partition of India, the problem of Kashmir continues to dominate the politics of the region. Upwards of 50,000 have lost their lives over the future of the territory. Recently, as a sign of its growing footprint in international affairs, the European Union is becoming much more involved. Deeply concerned about the growing level of terrorism and religious conflict in the region, and well aware that both India and Pakistan now possess nuclear weapons, the European Parliament is enquiring into the heart of the matter - the future of Kashmir.

Emma Nicholson, the redoubtable Lib Dem MEP for the South East of England, takes a tough line against raising false hopes of self-determination or plebiscites when the conditions for a mature settlement involving all Kashmiris in territory controlled by India, Pakistan and China are simply not present. Her draft report is controversial, especially among those of us who believe that her fears about the rise of Islamist fundamentalism in Pakistan are exaggerated.

Lib Dem MEPs, led by Andrew Duff, are working to reach a decent and impartial compromise. They are right to welcome the recent revival of talks between India and Pakistan with the aim of reconciling their disputes. Helpfully, the European Union and Pakistan agreed a joint declaration of 8 February which seeks to develop mutual understanding based on commitment to democracy, peace and stability, development, the enhancement of trade and respect for human rights.

Lib Dems should emphasise that the EU's relationship with the whole region must address interfaith dialogue, counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, non-proliferation, human rights and good governance. As far as Kashmir in particular is concerned, all sides should focus on ways and means to achieve eventual self-government for all the Kashmiri people, to be guaranteed jointly by India and Pakistan under the auspices of the UN.

In the short-term, there must be large-scale demilitarisation on both sides of the border, as well as the opening of more border crossings. Political prisoners must be released and torture stopped. Local Kashmiri leaders must be allowed to take part in the process of conflict resolution on both sides of the line of control.

The EU could offer its services in actively promoting the peaceful settlement of the Kashmir conflict in accordance with international law, existing bilateral agreements and the principles of the UN Charter. It should strengthen its own humanitarian aid to the victims of the terrible earthquake in 2004.

The European Parliament could usefully develop parliamentary and civil society contacts with Kashmir on both sides of the line of control. And the British

government, which has done very little in recent years to contribute to a lessening of the conflict, should take the lead in the UN Security Council by tabling a new initiative on Kashmir.



Qurban Hussain (centre) fought Luton South at the 2005 general election, where he doubled the Liberal Democrat vote.

Change in the NHS

Norman Lamb, MP for North Norfolk is the Liberal Democrat spokesman on health

Since my appointment as Liberal Democrat Shadow Health Secretary in December I have hardly had time to draw breath. The NHS seems never out of the news at present, both nationally and in the East of England. Hardly a week goes by without a debate in Parliament on health issues. Since the start of January we have debated Superbugs, maternity services, NHS reconfigurations and community hospitals. It has been a rapid but fascinating learning curve.

We are currently in the midst of some quite remarkable changes to our health services. Though the Secretary of State may claim – with an apparent lack of irony – that the NHS is witnessing its best year ever, wards are still closing, staff numbers are being cut, and so-called ‘soft targets’ such as mental health services are suffering unacceptable cutbacks. Thousands of people around the country are protesting about the changes to their local health services. Bizarrely, these protests have even included government Ministers on occasion.

In the East of England the situation is particularly bleak. We have the highest deficit of any region and the situation has actually got worse in the last quarter. With the government demanding that Trusts achieve financial balance within a tight time scale, we are in for a very challenging year with local health services under threat. Liberal Democrats must be at the forefront of campaigns to safeguard those services.

My vision is for local people to have a stronger voice in their local NHS. There is a growing view that the NHS is just too vast for a model in which so much is directed from the centre. We need to learn the lessons from other European countries. In Denmark, where health services maintain popular support, the service is organised on a county basis. We also need to consider whether we could enable local areas to vary the amount they spend on their health services; power resides where the money is raised. We have to break the central government dependency culture which prevails in this country.

The central command and control approach of this government is further highlighted by the “*Connecting for Health*” IT project. This grandiose scheme is likely to run billions of pounds over budget and is of questionable value. The Swedish approach of developing IT systems from the bottom up seems so much more sensible. The government has bitten off more than it can chew.

I am keen to meet Liberal Democrats around the country. I have already been invited to visit a number of hospitals in coming months with local campaigners. It is a sad inevitability that many centres I have been asked to visit are under threat.

As a party we can campaign vigorously against cuts to services imposed as a result of financial crisis. Liberal Democrats supported the extra investment in the NHS. After years of chronic under-investment from both Tory and Labour governments, it was badly needed. But too much of it has been wasted or mismanaged.

The Tories, by contrast, voted against the increased investment. If they had had their way, the NHS would be in a more dire financial state. Over £30 billion extra has been injected into the health service. We must keep reminding people of this extraordinary decision by the Tories and of their dreadful record when in government.

At both local and national level we must highlight what is actually going on in the NHS. Where local services are being cut or closed, where ‘reconfigurations’ are driven by the need to clear massive deficits, we should be at the forefront of the campaign to expose this government’s mismanagement of our NHS.



Norman Lamb MP with Simon Wright and April Pond in Whitehall to present a petition on health cuts in Norfolk

TOGETHER®

SINCE 1957

Andrew Duff chairs the all party Federalist Intergroup in the European Parliament. Although federalism has become a much abused term in Britain, the Federalist Intergroup is much respected for its part in driving the Parliament's agenda on constitutional affairs.

The Treaty of Rome which established the original European Economic Community, forerunner of the European Union, was signed on 25 March 1957. To commemorate the occasion, the Federalist Intergroup has issued the following declaration:

"Europe is healing itself from hostilities and division. Learning from the bitter experiences of the 20th Century, European states and citizens now foster human rights, cherish the rule of law and work together to develop new forms of democratic governance. Former enemies are now loyal partners. Dictatorships and authoritarian regimes have been replaced by pluralistic liberal democracy. Equality of status is guaranteed for large and small states alike. Few areas of European public life are now untouched by the success of practical integration. And the peoples of Europe have more in common with each other than not.

"The establishment of the European Economic Community played a key part in these developments, and the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome fully merits to be celebrated across Europe and in the wider world.

"Throughout the post-war period, federalism has been a powerful driving force behind European integration. Federalists inspired the founding fathers of the European Union and have not ceased to work towards the goal of a close union of Europe's states and peoples in which no single level of government is subordinate to any other but all are coordinate. In 2007 the Federalist Intergroup of the European Parliament is also commemorating the centenary of Altiero Spinelli who made a particularly important contribution to the constitutional development of the Union.

"While Europe has achieved much since the end of the Second World War in creating and then gradually extending the political scope of unification as well as in widening membership of the Union, there remains much work to be done if the mission of the founding fathers is to be wholly fulfilled.

"We Members of the European Parliament who are proud to call ourselves federalists believe that 2007 will be decisive for the success of the democratic project. We are convinced that the European Union needs to complete its constitutional process in order to be fully equipped to meet the demands of the 21st Century and the aspirations of a large majority of its citizens. With no constitution, Europe will lack internal cohesion and external strength, and the EU's development into a mature, post-national democracy will be impaired.

"Europe's federalists commit themselves anew to the task of building a united, democratic Europe which will deliver peace, tolerance, prosperity and freedom to our own peoples and which may act as a beacon of hope worldwide."

New Europeans Initiative

When Nicolas Sarkozy came electioneering to London recently, he claimed there were 300,000 Frenchmen and women in the city, enjoying the sweet scent of capitalism. He certainly attracted a crowd. But the truth is that nobody has an accurate picture of how many non-British EU citizens are now resident in this country. Because Britain has declined to join the Schengen area, EU citizens are not obliged to register their residency. Only the Inland Revenue, for obvious reasons, appears to be interested in 'capturing' the working non-Brit European.

What is clear, however, is that of the several million European citizens eligible to vote in British municipal or European Parliamentary elections, relatively few have bothered to register themselves as electors. Local authorities are obliged by law to encourage the registration of electors, including eligible non-Brits. In practice, some councils are good at this, some bad, and many indifferent.

New Europeans Initiative is a joint campaign of the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors (ALDC) and Lib Dem Euro-MPs whose goals are to ginger up council electoral registration officers, to identify registered European voters and to appeal to them to vote Lib Dem.

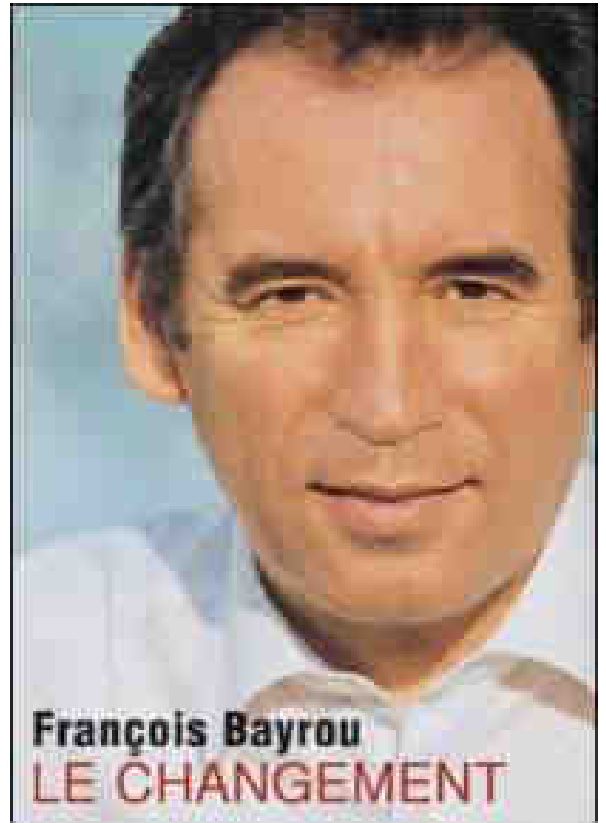
Our party stands to gain more support than our opponents from such a campaign. Many of Britain's 'New Europeans' are young professionals with children whose natural concern for better local services will be sharpened by their ability to make invidious comparisons with their home countries. British schools, transport and hospitals are not the reason why foreigners come to live here!

As far as the European Parliament is concerned, some New Europeans will be able to vote at home by post, proxy or in person at a nearby consulate. But for many who have chosen to live and work in the UK, the future of Britain's European engagement will be a question of key importance. Whether it's the euro, the constitution or the environment, the choice of representative in Brussels and Strasbourg matters very much. Equally, the future shape of British culture can hardly be ignored by Europeans who live here. If England is suffering one of its periodic fits of ugly, petty nationalism, who better to counter this than the Liberal Democrats?

The profile of our Westminster party in the continental media is fairly low. The fact that we have seldom played to our strength as Britain's European party has done us few favours. If we are now to rectify that problem, we must promote our existing European connections through the Alliance for Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE).

We should be more readily identifiable with our continental partners: François Bayrou's current presidential election campaign in France, for example, has much in common with our posture and policies in Britain. We strongly support Romano Prodi's government in Italy and Guy Verhofstadt's government in Belgium. French, Italians and Belgians residing in Britain should be made aware of these loyalties.

A vigorous pro-European campaign by the Liberal Democrats coupled with continued effective activism in local government will comprise an attractive package deal for Britain's New European voters.



MEPs back waste recycling against incineration



Across the East of England, local authorities are battling to meet EU targets for waste reduction and recycling. To incinerate or not is one of the key issues which divides council groups, with Liberal Democrat councillors bravely tending to follow party policy – which is to give the robust answer ‘not’.

In February, the European Parliament gave its first reading to a revision of the original (1975) Waste Framework Directive. Naturally, the European Commission proposes to toughen up EU policy in order to tackle more effectively the mountains of waste which reach new peaks each year. At present only a third of household waste is recycled or composted. The average EU citizen produces more than 500 kg of waste annually.

Industry produces another 3 tonnes of waste per person. The new draft law seeks to stabilise both domestic and industrial waste production by 2012 at the level reached in 2008, and to reduce it thereafter.

But MEPs showed themselves to be more ambitious than the Commission. Parliament insists on maintaining the classical hierarchy of waste control: first, prevention, second, recycling, and only last, disposal. In the key vote, supported by all the Liberal Democrats, incineration was classified, with landfill, as disposal rather than as a re-use operation. However, waste processing was recognised as a potential source of energy generation. It is difficult to legislate for harmonised standards across the Union. At my Brussels apartment, I get fined if I am careless with my waste disposal – mixing up glass, metals, paper, textiles, plastics and biodegradables - and there are regular special disposals for batteries. At home in (vigorously run Lib Dem) Cambridge, recycling gets better, but is still more lax than in Brussels. In some parts of Eastern Europe recycling has barely begun!

Until now, British government policy – like Tory council policy - has tended to favour incineration. It remains to be seen how the Labour ministers will react to the Parliament’s advanced position when they meet up with their colleagues in Council to take the next step in legislative process.

In the meantime, Lib Dem councillors should draw moral and political support for their campaigns against incineration from the action of their colleagues in the European Parliament.

Our MEPs will continue to be in the vanguard of upgrading and recasting EU environmental law. It is striking how the goals of this legislation has changed over the years: in 1975 waste management was about pollution control; in 2007, it’s about combating climate change.

East of England under new boundaries

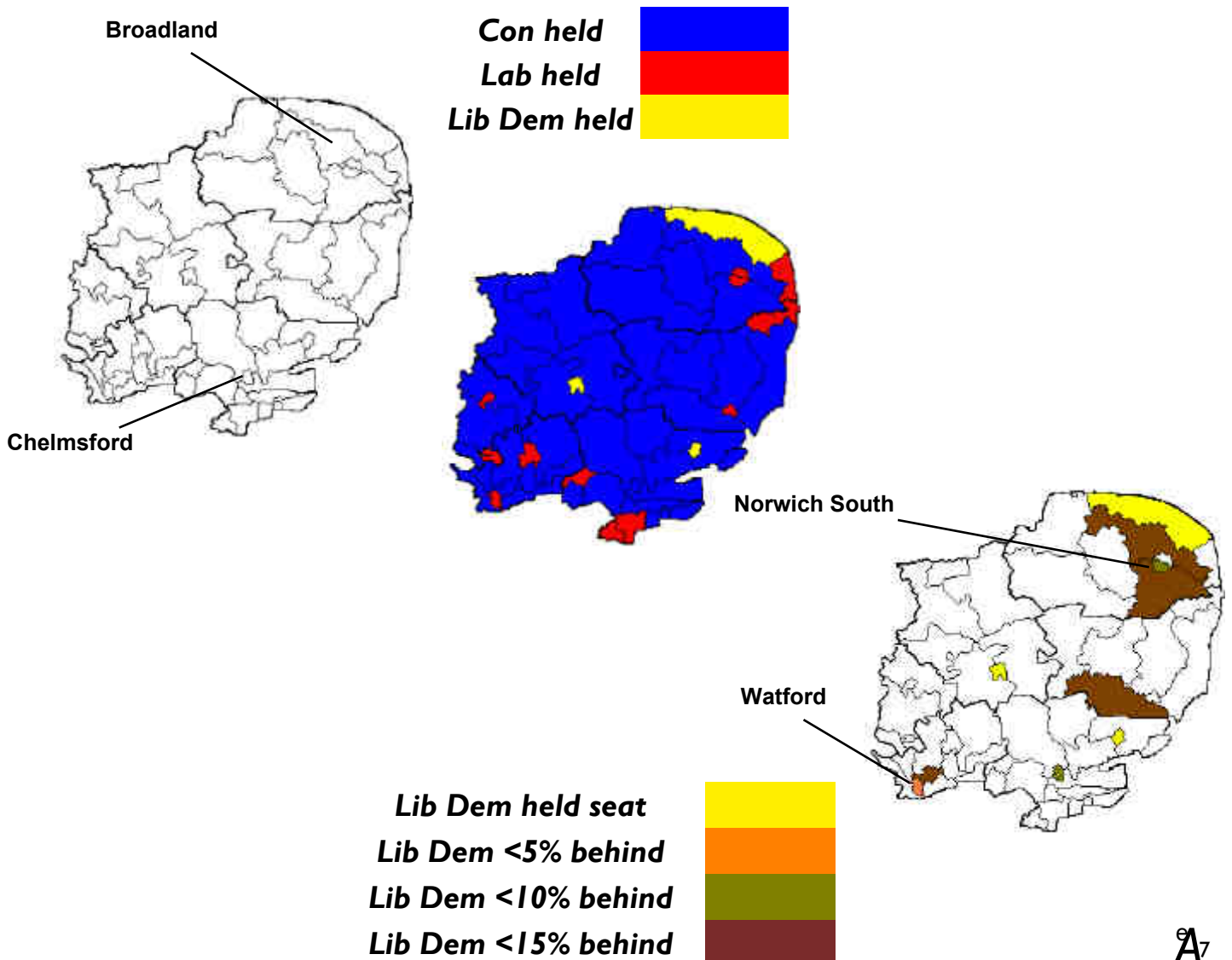
Under the terms of the new constituency boundary review, the East of England gets an extra two seats - in Essex and Norfolk. Minor boundary changes take place elsewhere. Across the region, Bedfordshire will have 6 seats, Cambridgeshire 7, Essex 18, Hertfordshire 11, Norfolk 9 and Suffolk 7.

Tories up two?

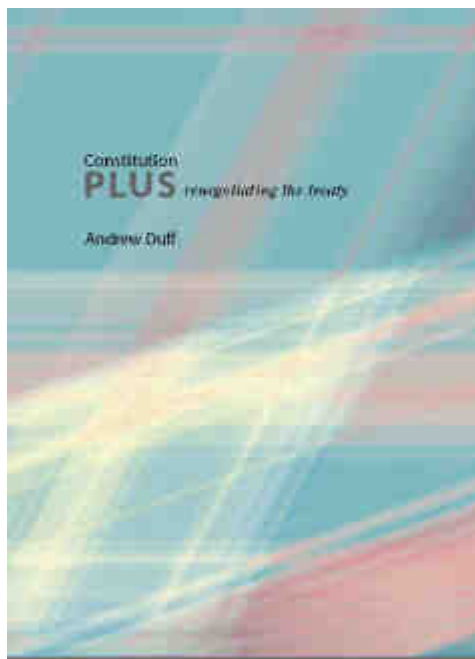
Notionally, the results based on the 2005 general election put the Conservatives on 42 (+ 2), Labour on 13 and the Liberal Democrats on 3 (both unchanged). However, both the new constituencies created, Broadland in Norfolk and Chelmsford in Essex, have a strong Lib Dem challenge in second place (over 30% of the vote) and a significant Labour vote in third place (over 20%) ripe for squeezing.

Lib Dem prospects

The best prospect in the region for the Liberal Democrats is Watford where a swing of less than 2% will win us the seat from Labour. Next is Norwich South where a swing of 4% will gain the seat from Labour, and Chelmsford where a swing of 4.1% will gain the seat from the Tories. Broadland and St Albans would be won with swings of less than 6% against the Tories. All these seats need considerably smaller swings than was achieved in Cambridge last time.



Andrew launches new pamphlet



In his latest pamphlet, Liberal spokesman on constitutional affairs Andrew Duff spells out in detail his proposals for the renegotiation of the constitutional treaty.

The pamphlet, which was launched in Brussels on 28 February, builds upon Duff's earlier *Plan B* in which he argues that the EU constitutional treaty will only be rescued if it is improved to address the dissent expressed by key elements of public opinion in France, Holland and elsewhere.

In '*Constitution Plus*', Andrew Duff rejects the arguments for a 'mini-treaty' as being "dubious law, poor tactics and bad politics".

Instead, he proposes to ring-fence the key constitutional bits and, instead, to negotiate a "small number of highly significant improvements" to certain common policies of the Union. These include economic governance, the European social model, enlargement, the financial system, and the common policies on energy, environment, agriculture and fisheries.

The pamphlet can be downloaded from www.andrewduff.eu or ordered from Tim Huggan.



Andrew Duff gets up to speak at a recent Bury St Edmunds 'Pot Luck supper.' On the platform with Andrew are Cllr Carol Millward and Dave Chappell

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BRUSSELS TRIP

Andrew will be hosting his annual trip to the European Parliament in Brussels on 26-28 November this year. This should be an early chance to try the new Eurostar service from St Pancras.

The schedule will include in addition to meetings in the Parliament, a briefing by the Portuguese presidency of the Council of Ministers, a briefing at NATO HQ - and a visit to a Belgian brewery.

Places are limited so please express your interest soon. PEPCs and PPCs will have priority.

Contact Tim Huggan on 01223 566700 or email tim@andrewduffmep.org