

Faith schools debate at Lib Dem conference

There was a debate on faith schools as part of the education debate at last month's Liberal Democrat conference in Harrogate. This is an important and relevant issue in Cheltenham as plans for the new academy in the west of the town continue apace.

As a consequence of the debate the party now has a new policy that can be summarised as follows:

- No faith tests for teachers or heads in any faith school (existing or new)
- No selection of pupils by faith in any new faith school
- Existing faith schools to demonstrate inclusiveness to the local education authority or lose state funding
- Collective worship to be optional (opt in) in non-faith schools and separate from assembly
- Children (if old enough) and parents to have opt out from collective worship and religious instruction in faith schools
- Religious education to be in the national curriculum in all schools but to be about beliefs not what to believe.

The phasing out of state funded faith schools was rejected by the conference with an abolitionist amendment (moved by Calderdale Lib Dems) being easily defeated. A vote to prevent the retention of selection by existing faith schools failed more narrowly.

Instead party policy will require existing faith schools to demonstrate to the Local Education Authority that they are inclusive.

Would you like a tour of Parliament?

Cheltenham's MP Martin Horwood is always delighted to welcome constituents to Westminster and arrange a guided tour of the Houses of Parliament for them.

Whether you want to come along with a few friends or family members, or would like to organise a group to come from your school, place of work or organisation, just let Martin know.

We need your help

Even outside election time, there are always jobs that need doing, either in the office or at home. Please help if you can - training will always be provided where necessary.

- I can help in the office, stuffing envelopes, folding leaflets etc
- I can help deliver leaflets
- I can help with door-to-door canvassing
- I can help with telephone canvassing
- I have computer skills which may be of use
- I can help with fund-raising

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____ Tel: _____

Please return to: Liberal Democrats, FREEPOST SWC0744, 16 Hewlett Road, Cheltenham, GL52 6ZZ

Summer quiz

There will be a quiz on Saturday 27 June at Swindon Village Hall at 7.30 pm. Tickets £7.50 to include supper. Please phone Heather Turner on 574227 to let us know you are coming.

Focus Club Draw

The Focus Club Draw is vital for our fund-raising in Cheltenham. Since it was launched in 1986 it has contributed many thousands of pounds to the local party.

It is also a chance to win two cash prizes every month. We need to increase the vigour and effectiveness of our campaigning and, amongst other things, that costs money.

Please consider joining by returning the form enclosed with this newsletter today. Thanks very much for your support.

April 2009

The newsletter of Cheltenham Liberal Democrats

Free Speech

Come and hear the man who SHOULD be chancellor!

Vince Cable MP, the Liberal Democrat Shadow Chancellor and Deputy Leader, will be visiting Cheltenham on Saturday 25 April to speak to pupils, parents and teachers.

His speech is entitled 'Liberal Democrat Economics: A New Road'. He will be discussing the current recession as well as a Liberal economic solution.

There will be time for questions, with priority given to students.

The event will take place from 9:30am to 10:30am on Saturday 25 April in the Princess Hall at The Cheltenham Ladies' College. Please arrive at reception (Bayshill Road) at least ten minutes prior to the event.

Everyone is welcome to attend but the Ladies' College require names of attendees in advance. If you are planning to attend then please let us know on 01242 224889 or you can email Alex Kendall at alexander.kendall06@imperial.ac.uk



Where? Vince Cable MP
Ladies' College, Bayshill Road

When? Saturday 25 April 9.30 am

Be there!

What the papers say about Vince Cable

"Very occasionally, I come across a politician who stands out from the madding crowd, who actually seems to care about the world, the UK and his constituents (yes, constituents), and who believes in campaigning for justice and the truth. Enter stage left Dr. Vincent Cable. He is everything a politician should be and everything most politicians are not."

Jeff Prestridge, Financial Editor, Mail on Sunday

"... his crisp and donnish delivery marks him out as a heavyweight in anybody's cabinet."

- Matthew Parris, The Times

"Vince Cable is a formidable economist ..." -

Tim Hames, The Times

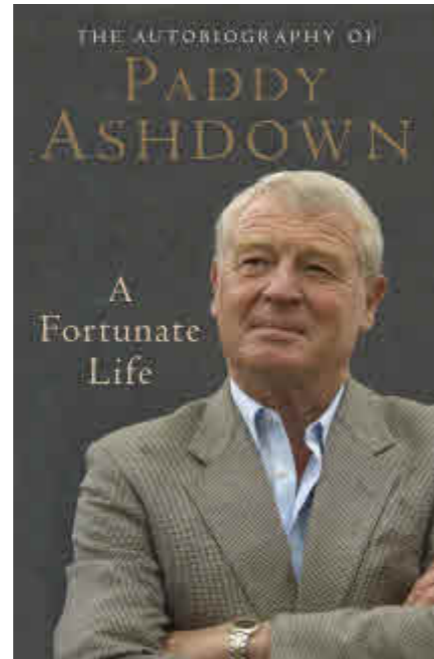
See the back page for more forthcoming events

A FORTUNATE LIFE

The autobiography of

PADDY ASHDOWN

- An autobiography by a politician which is totally unlike the traditional political memoir.
- The story of a life lived to the full, as a Royal Marine Commando, a member of the Special Boat Service and an international peacemaker, as well as an MP and a party leader.
- At a time when politicians are viewed with derision and suspicion, Paddy Ashdown is widely respected and admired, even by his political opponents. This books shows why.



No other British political leader of the post-war generation could have written a book like this for the simple reason that no other modern politician has led a life as varied, adventurous and dramatic as its author. He has been, in turn, an officer in the Royal Marine Commandos, a member of the Special Boat Service, a diplomat, an MP and leader of his party and an international peacemaker in war-torn Bosnia.

He can, and does, write with authority about topics as diverse as evading water bailiffs while fishing illicitly at night (a legacy of his childhood in Northern Ireland); tracking down and destroying infiltrating Indonesian forces in the jungles of Sarawak; landing a raiding party from a submerged submarine; the difficulties of learning Chinese (he holds the equivalent of a first-class degree in Chinese, just one of his

six languages); winning an apparently 'hopeless' parliamentary seat; negotiating with Tony Blair; and bringing stability to a country wracked by civil war. He is deadly serious when writing about the things that matter to him - his family, his country, his party, the Bosnian people whose cause he adopted when it was deeply unpopular to do so - but he also has a refreshing gift for seeing the funny side of most situations and illustrates it with self-deprecating wit and a wealth of anecdote. Although this book covers his years in politics - the chapter on 'The Winning of Yeovil', an eight-year campaign to overturn an impregnable Conservative majority with the help of a second-hand printing press called Clarissa and a supply of potent home-made wine is particularly memorable - it

is hard to imagine anything less like a traditional political memoir. This is the self-portrait of a man who has lived life to the full and whose autobiography would be fascinating, even if he had never set foot in Palace of Westminster - a place whose intrigues and self-absorption, he acknowledges, he often found tedious.

Paddy Ashdown was the founding leader of the Liberal Democrats from 1988 to 1998. From 2002 to 2006 he was the United Nations High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina. His previous books include two volumes of The Ashdown Diaries, which covered his years as party leader, and Swords and Ploughshares: Building Peace in the 21st Century.

My Fortunate Life: The Autobiography of Paddy Ashdown is published by Aurum Press on 23 April at £20.00

Political Faith

Roger Whyborn writes about the relevance of the Liberal Democrats' Christian roots

It used to be said that "Labour owes more to Methodism than Marxism", but did you know that most of the early Liberals were driven by a strong Christian ethos?

As early as 1839 there was a loose coalition of Whigs and Radicals, later to become the Liberal Party in 1859. The leading Radicals were John Bright and Richard Cobden, who represented the manufacturing towns that had gained representation under the Reform Act. Many of them were Nonconformists and that was what drove their policies of social reform, personal liberty, reducing the powers of the Crown and the Church of England, the avoidance of war and foreign alliances, and free trade.

William Gladstone was a High Church Anglican, and a former Whig, whose politics grew ever more progressive as he grew older.

In more modern times we have within our party people like Alan Beith (Methodist), and Shirley Williams (Catholic), and others such as near neighbouring MP Steve Webb in Bristol.

An interesting read from the USA is Jim Wallis' book "God's Politics: Why the Right gets it wrong, and the Left doesn't get it". (He'd make a good Lib Dem!) He argues that only the Christian philosophy of a personal God who is caring of all people can provide the solid substance needed for a joined up political world-view.

The Liberal Democrat Christian Forum can be found at <http://www.ldcf.net/> or LDCF, 4 Cowley Street, London. SW1P 3NB.

Save the Countryside!

"Save the Countryside" has taken off as one of the most effective campaigns Cheltenham has seen for a long time.

The Government's plans for housing will see building on the Green Belt and are based on a population growth model that assumes that the economic crisis we're currently in is just an historic blip, and then it'll be back to 'business as usual'. They see the economy being grown on the back of skilled overseas labour coming into the country - and the 10million increase in population they predict up to 2035 will need 3million houses built by 2025.

We think this is nonsense and oppose it. There is a demand for affordable houses for rent for people who haven't the resources to buy, and these can be built within the current town.



There is a good chance that these government plans can be defeated with a General Election just 15 months away. The Conservatives have their Spring Conference planned for the weekend of 25th/26th April. On the evening of 24th April at 6.00pm a meeting has been organized by 'Save the Countryside' in the Council Chamber at the Municipal Offices with the Conservative Environment spokesman, Nick Herbert and Martin Horwood speaking as a Liberal Democrat Environment spokesman. 'Save the Countryside' intends to make this an issue in the coming County Council elections scheduled for 4th June. For more information, contact Councillor John Webster on 511424.

Palestine campaign

By John Webster

The preamble to the Liberal Democrat Constitution says 'The Liberal Democrats exist to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society, in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community, and in which no-one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity'.

These are not just values for home. They are international values and coming up to the European Elections in June they will be part of what we are fighting for.

One issue that needs to be tackled is the proposed Special Trade Agreement with Israel that was put on hold because of the Israeli blitzkrieg on Gaza over the Christmas period. **The Palestine Solidarity Campaign is fighting for this to be vetoed to put more pressure on Israel to take peace seriously.**

Every day Palestinians are being evicted from their homes and displaced within

Israel. Every day people are being shot in Gaza and the West Bank by the Israeli Defence Force. It's so common, it is no longer reported. This has been going on for years and years.

All the neutral observers accept that it was the Israelis who broke the cease fire they had with Hamas as a pretext for an attack that had been planned long before. They used high tech weapons indiscriminately including white phosphorous, which is a lethal advanced kind of napalm that burns right through flesh.

None of us can stand by and allow this to happen. We need to object and do what we can to try and stop it.

The Palestine Liberation Campaign has organized a meeting for 15th May at which Graham Watson, Liberal Democrat candidate for the south west and leader of the Alliance of the Liberal and Democrats in Europe, will speak. The meeting will be at St. Matthew's Church opposite the main library in Clarence Street at 7.30 pm.

Can you help with canvassing?

Every Saturday morning a team targets different parts of town for canvassing. This means we find out what people are concerned about and where our vote is - and what the views of people are towards the Conservatives, Labour and us.

In summary - our vote is holding up. People are not yet convinced by the Tories - but there are signs that they want to be.

We always need more help. Nothing sharpens our political act more than having to account for ourselves on the doorstep. Almost everyone is glad to see a politician, especially when there isn't an election in the offing. If you want to be involved, contact the office.

For more information, contact John Webster on 511424 or on webster.j@blueyonder.co.uk