

Dates for your diary

Thursday 5 February, **Executive Committee** meeting, Aspey Lawrence (corner of Gloucester Road and Tewkesbury Road), 7 pm. All members welcome. Contact Nigel Britter on 224889.

Friday 20 February, **Tewkesbury Constituency Annual Dinner**, King's Head, Bishop's Cleeve. 7.30 pm. Three course meal with coffee £20. Speaker Jenny Willott MP Contact Bob and Jenny Jones on 230235.

Thursday 5 March, **Executive Committee** meeting, Aspey Lawrence (corner of Gloucester Road and Tewkesbury Road), 7 pm. All members welcome. Contact Nigel Britter on 224889.

Saturday 28 March, **Quiz Evening**, Swindon Village Hall, 7.30 pm. Tickets £7.50 to include supper. Phone Heather Turner on 574227 to let us know you are coming.

Saturday 27 June, **Quiz Evening**, Swindon Village Hall, 7.30 pm. Tickets £7.50 to include supper. Phone Heather Turner on 574227 to let us know you are coming.

Saturday 24 October, **Quiz Evening**, Swindon Village Hall, 7.30 pm. Tickets £7.50 to include supper. Phone Heather Turner on 574227 to let us know you are coming.

For a full listing of events see the website at www.cheltlibdems.org.uk

If you don't trust the Tories to represent you, fill in the form today!

In this newsletter, there is a standing order form. It's an easy thing to drop into your recycling box but before you do, think about three things:

- That recycling box wouldn't be there if Lib Dem councillors hadn't introduced the door-to-door recycling scheme in Cheltenham and Lib Dems nationwide hadn't made the environment a mainstream political issue. Just as neighbourhood projects to help the least well-off areas in town wouldn't exist and Cheltenham Housing Aid Centre wouldn't have been given a helping hand in its fight for survival if your Lib Dem MP and councillors hadn't supported them.
- Each year the Tories are probably spending hundreds of thousands of pounds on turning Cheltenham blue - some of it from their new headquarters in Gloucester Business Park but much of it hidden from view by the use of national telephone calls and mailshots from outside Gloucestershire..
- **A standing order of just £2 a month would pay for a Lib Dem mailing on a key local issue to more than three hundred people. A standing order of £50 would do the same to two whole local government wards.**

If you wouldn't trust a Tory councillor or MP or EuroMP to represent you, please fill in the form and return it in the envelope provided. We badly need your support and appreciate anything you can afford to give in this election year.

Spring quiz

There will be a quiz on Saturday 28 March 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.

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 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

February 2009
The newsletter of Cheltenham Liberal Democrats
Free Speech

INSIDE THIS EDITION

Photo archive - more photos of us all looking much younger!

Bank Bailouts - Read what Lib Dem Treasury spokesman Vince Cable MP has to say

Lib Dems balance the books - news on the borough council's budget

Palestine - sign Martin's petition to Parliament about Gaza

Dates for your diary - all the events that are coming up in the next few months

Can you help? - we need YOU to increase the vigour of our campaigning

Welcome to 2009 - election year and a crunch year for Cheltenham.

Happy New Election Year!

by Martin Horwood

The big election that might be in the offing is of course the **General Election** and the **journos in the Westminster village** are already obsessed with **Gordon naming the day**. But we also have two other big and crucial elections scheduled for **4 June: for Gloucestershire County Council and the European Parliament**.

At county level, the election will be our verdict on four years of Tory rule. Are Cheltenham's roads and pavements in better shape after they scrapped one of the greenest local transport plans in the country, shifted spending onto rural roads and took decision-making off to Gloucester? As a long-suffering cyclist I know what my answer is. Were they right to close the hugely popular Monkscroft Primary School and bounce Kingsmead secondary school into closure just as its results were improving sharply and well before their replacement Academy opens? How incompetent was it to botch negotiations on countywide recycling solutions, even when they controlled both the county council and almost all the district councils too? Was it good for Cheltenham for them to back the Parkway railway station on Green Belt land that would have taken services away from Cheltenham Spa? And was it good for Cheltenham for them to jeopardise our 'Civic Pride' scheme to upgrade the town centre just as our retailers face the double whammy of a recession and increased competition from Bristol and Gloucester? Your answer on a ballot paper in June please.

And across Europe voters will be taking part in by far the world's largest democratic election, a proud moment in many Europeans' lives. A shame that in Britain the campaign is again likely to be dominated

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Stay in touch via the world wide web

You can always keep up to date with the latest news and find out about forthcoming events at the Cheltenham Liberal Democrats website: www.cheltlibdems.org.uk

Facebook

If you are on Facebook you can sign up to the Gloucestershire Lib Dems group or become a supporter of 'Martin Horwood for Cheltenham', just type Martin Horwood into the Facebook search box and then sign up as a supporter.

Vince Cable to visit Chelt

Treasury spokesman Vince Cable will be in Cheltenham on 25 April.

You can come and hear Vince and ask him questions at Bournside School. We will confirm the time later on. Phone 224889 or check the website for details .

Martin demands MPs expenses pledge

CHELTENHAM MP Martin Horwood, who has been outspoken on the need for more openness on MPs' allowances and expenses, has again challenged the government on this sensitive issue.

This week the government dropped another move to exempt MPs from of the Freedom of Information legislation in return for a package of proposals which will give the public access to

information about what MPs spend in unprecedented detail. Now the details will still be provided but without any

exemption from the law that would have inhibited future requests.

But Martin asked for an assurance from Leader of the House Harriet Harman that there would be no future attempt to exempt MPs. 'If the new regime is going to be as

open as we would all want' he said, 'surely there will be no need to exempt MPs from the Freedom of Information legislation' and went on to demand that she gave a categorical assurance to the House that no future attempt would be made to bring the measure back.

In her response the minister very obviously failed to give any such assurance.

Martin commented afterwards: 'this was a very disappointing reply. At the very moment

"The government risks undermining public confidence yet again."

when we are about to reveal details of MPs' expenses in more detail than ever before, the government risks

undermining public confidence yet again by giving the impression we are still trying to wriggle out of full disclosure. It is time they accepted the inevitable, embraced openness and agreed to MPs being subject to the same rules as everyone else.'

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 and costs just £1 a month.

It is also a chance to win two cash prizes every month.

If you would like to join please contact Heather Turner on 574227 and she will send you a form.



Would you like a tour of Parliament?

Martin 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 on 224889 or email martin@martinhorwood.net.

Martin says: "It has been a pleasure to see so many constituents up in Westminster - do come along if you can."

There is no charge for tours but places are limited so please let Martin have as much notice as possible.

Free Thinkers

Local member MIKE PICTOR writes about the Humanist and Secularist Liberal Democrats

Free thinkers are people who devise their own path in life free from religious or other pre-conceived ideas. This is the humanist outlook. The freedom to live our own life as we please without conforming to outside interests.

The great Liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill argued that society and individuals would only flourish if the State left space for each adult to carry on their own 'experiments of living' free from interference, provided that they didn't harm others in the process. ("On Liberty" 1859). We say that this principle should apply to life in general.

The Humanist and Secularist Liberal Democrats (HSLD) are bringing their influence to bear within the Party. We hold that all State services such as education, health, social care should be secular. They should be open to all from whatever background or belief. In particular we are currently campaigning for the Party to adopt a policy in favour of non-faith community schools. There are social harms arising from separatist faith schools; for instance religious discrimination and divisiveness, ignorance of others and their beliefs, and reserved places for children from families of a particular religion.

To find out more about the Humanist and Secularist Liberal Democrats please contact the Secretary, John White, on John.White@concore.co.uk, or write to 77, High Street, Chalgrove, Oxford, OX44 7SS.

Cable on the bank crisis

Deputy leader of the Liberal Democrats VINCE CABLE on the latest bank bailout

The announcement of a second round of bank bailouts was, unlike the first, badly received both politically and in the markets. This partly reflects growing pessimism about the state of the banking system and the state of the UK (and global) economy.

But there is also widespread scepticism about whether the Government is still on the right track - it now looks like someone giving the kiss of life to a corpse. Yet it is only a few months since the Government "rescued" failing banks with interbank lending guarantees and a £37 billion recapitalisation package for RBS/NatWest and Lloyds/HBOS.

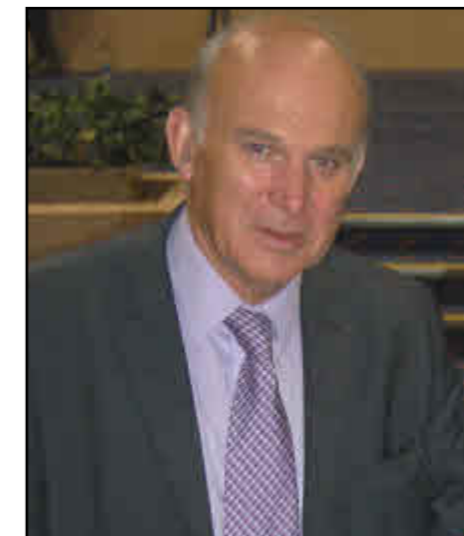
The new bank lending that was expected to materialise has not done so. Large numbers of perfectly sound small, medium and large companies are being starved of working capital, aggravating the recession. The withdrawal of foreign banks is clearly a factor. But, in addition, UK banks have broadly taken the view that capital should be held against future losses, a strategy that may reassure shareholders but undermines the economy.

It is clear that the conditions set by the Government over the original capitalisation were a sham. No effective monitoring and controls were put in place to ensure that the money went where it was intended. The banks do not even seem to have been required to give a full, transparent declaration of their bad loans.

But it is easy to blame wicked bankers. The Government also sent contradictory signals: to lend more but also (via the Financial Services Authority) to constrain lending to build up capital to offset bad loans. The FSA has now beat a retreat on capital adequacy, months late.

The Government's big new idea is to insure the banks' bad loans so that banks can have the confidence to lend. No one doubts that in the mix of

policies needed to counter this crisis there will have to be an organised writedown of bad assets. But a government insurance scheme cannot be operated prudently unless risks can be quantified and the bad assets meaningfully valued. There is a real risk that a government insurer could suffer massive losses on its proposed £100 billion scheme as a result of defaults in the current falling asset markets. There are big losses ahead that have not yet been absorbed.



A big consequence of the new proposals is that the Government's shareholding in RBS/NatWest rises from 58 per cent to 70 per cent. The bank becomes, de facto, a nationalised institution; the market response to the proposals suggests that shareholders are reconciled to seeing the bank taken over. There are serious implications, however, which the Government has yet to address, yet alone deal with. RBS is a global bank with a balance sheet bigger than the British economy. It has massive loans to Russian oligarchs, among other dubious assets. It has hundreds of billions (not millions) of paper - derivatives - much of it toxic, in its investment banking arm.

The big question now to be faced is whether the Government remains a passive investor, putting in taxpayers' money and hoping that normality returns soon, or restructures the bank to meet the needs of sound UK borrowers. The latter is becoming

increasingly preferable, perhaps inevitable, if new lending is to be maintained. A similar set of questions may soon face the Government in relation to Barclays if the markets' negative verdict on its underlying health is borne out.

As an economic liberal I am instinctively suspicious of dirigiste solutions. But there are times when collective panic - with the markets not trusting the banks; the banks not trusting each other; and the banks unwilling to lend - when the State has to take over responsibility for as long as is necessary (but not longer).

The Government dithered for far too long before concluding that Northern Rock had to be nationalised. Now, the question is whether the Government needs to acquire the remaining 30 per cent of RBS shares. This will only become an issue if minority shareholders pull in a different direction. But, unlike at Northern Rock, there is good, new management already in place.

The arguments about the future of the banks have to be placed in wider context. All main Western countries are heading for deep recession. That is why continued expansionary monetary and fiscal policy is crucial to keeping economies from a vicious spiral of decline. But Britain - a middle-sized economy without an effective reserve currency - is looking increasingly vulnerable.

Beyond this crisis there are, of course, other big issues looming. Banks will eventually have to be reprivatised but probably as regulated utilities serving UK businesses and personal customers. We will also have to face up to whether the City - Iceland-on-Thames as it has been called - is simply too big for the British economy in its present form. But the issue for now is getting the stricken banking system lending again. Taboos about public ownership of banks have to be broken.

Cheltenham Community Recycling Champions!

Cheltenham Community Recycling Champions are a team of volunteers promoting recycling in Cheltenham.

Learn more or become involved in their projects:

- Become a community battery box holder. Their domestic battery collection/recycling initiative has been responsible for collecting 38,000 batteries since January 2008!
- Project Yellow (Cheltenham) collecting unwanted Yellow Pages, as new editions arrive. Last year 9 tonnes of Yellow Pages were collected and recycled by the Champions. Project Yellow 2009 will commence in March, contact Vision 21 for details.

- Slim your bin campaign. Promoting the 3 r's - Reduce, Reuse and Recycle
- Reducing Junk Mail. Helping to reduce take away and suchlike leaflets and free newspapers. Champions have "NO JUNK MAIL" "NO FREE NEWSPAPERS" stickers to put on letter boxes and are giving them out to friends and neighbours.

The group meets once every six weeks to discuss current and new campaigns, a buffet is provided. Interesting presentations are also arranged. New people are always welcome to join.

A Vision 21 Project, funded by Cheltenham Borough Council. For info call 01242 224321, email office@vision21.org.uk

Spring Conference

It may not feel like it, but spring is just around the corner and that means the Liberal Democrats national Spring Conference in Harrogate is fast approaching.

Early signs indicate that this is set to be our biggest spring conference yet, so if you've not had a chance to register, book your place now! (And if you've already registered, thank you!)

To contact the Conference Office about Spring Conference in Harrogate please email conferences@libdems.org.uk

Photo archive!



- Paddy Ashown was a regular visitor to Cheltenham when he was leader of the Liberal Democrats - here is outside the Municipal Offices with Jeremy Whales and Derek Brown.

Work for the Liberal Democrats

Based in Cheltenham a small telemarketing operation is looking for flexible and committed staff to join their team.

Maximum of 15 hours per week, £6.50 per hour

Call or text Richard on 07946 614464

or email rpinnock@cix.co.uk for more information.



- Ed Fordham was our Campaigns Officer for a while and wasn't always surrounded by beer and wine - he's now a parliamentary candidate in one of our most winnable seats in London.

Happy New Election Year!

(Continued from front page)

by small-minded Tory anti-Europeanism and New Labour's usual pale imitation of it.

Will the fact that the Eurozone appears to be weathering the global downturn rather better than the Anglo-Saxon boom and bust economies or that almost every other EU state is leaving us standing on environmental measures persuade them that positive engagement with our European partners might actually be more productive?

Look out for our own Paul Massey to make that case as one of our European parliamentary candidates.

And will Gordon add a General Election into the mix some time this year? It's possible - the

economic gloom could be even darker if he waits till the last possible minute in 2010 and he may hope to pick up some reflected glory from Barack Obama's UK visit this spring.

If he does go for it this will be a crunch election in Cheltenham. **After unkind boundary changes are taken into account, the Tories are just 300 votes short of stealing the seat.**

Would you trust a Tory MP to fight for a free, local NHS if his party in government went back to its old habits?

Would you trust him to fight overdevelopment in the countryside when his county colleagues toyed with 'Growth

Point' status that would have accelerated it?

Would you trust him to oppose a Parkway station when two years ago he supported it?

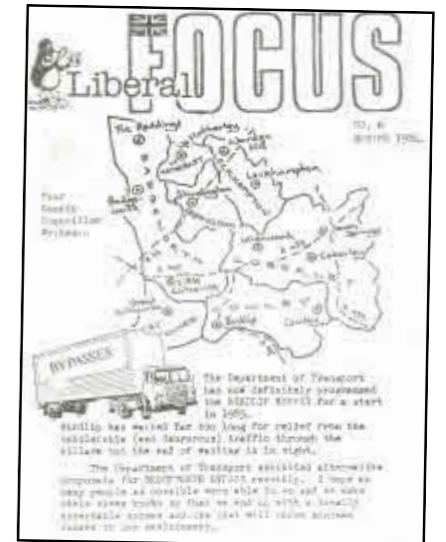
Would you trust him to take on his Tory councillors and back investment in the town? It's no exaggeration to say we'll need an MP who'll really stand up for Cheltenham's future or it could look very bleak.

Would you trust the Tories again?

I'm sure your answer's no but we need to get out there stuffing that message through every letterbox, telling it to every voter we can find and finding the money and people to see them off.



- A collection of Councillors and candidates with Euro election candidate John Thomson and MP Nigel Jones in 1994. From left to right: Alexis Cassin, Carol Hawkins, Pat Thornton, Hazel Langford, Clive Lloyd, Nigel Jones, Kit Brauholtz, John Thomson, Dave Prince, Charmian Sheppard, Steve Jordan, Alistair Cameron, and Chris Britton.



- Not strictly a photo, but Martin Horwood claims to have drawn the map on this Focus from 25 years ago in his first incarnation as a young Liberal activist in Cheltenham!