

The Cotswold Spring

The Cotswolds Lib Dems achieved the biggest seat gain in the country on May 5th. How did they buck the trend? **PAUL HODGKINSON** reports.

It's a good time to be a Liberal Democrat in the Cotswolds. On the 26th April, Nick Clegg spoke to a packed hall at Cirencester College and said he detected a mood for change in the previously safe Tory stronghold. Just over a week later, voters agreed with him, taking our number of councillors from four to 12.

Over the past four years, we have clearly differentiated ourselves from the Tories on key issues e.g. the way a new waste service was rolled out and the proliferation of holiday home development. We were also not afraid to hit them hard in the Council.

Our media presence has been high, with national press coverage around a big local issue – the Cotswold Water Park scandal. Private Eye's Rotten Boroughs has featured the Cotswold Tories no less than 16 times in the last year!

Our diverse range of candidates – including the Western Counties' youngest councillor, Joe Harris, contrasted with the stale image the Tories portrayed after 8 years in power locally. Joe achieved a 25% swing from the Tories in Cirencester Park Ward.



Victory! - Joe Harris was elected as the West's youngest Councillor on May 5th.

Joe says: "I felt I was reaching out to different people who wouldn't normally vote. Many people my age don't understand the process of voting, let alone the part the local council plays in their life. I want to change that by challenging the Council over what they do for younger people."

Now, I and my expanded team must work to show people that we are a cohesive group, holding the Tories to account with their much reduced majority. Our aim next is to gain at least 2 County seats in 2013 and to build on what has been our 'Cotswold Spring.'

Can you help?

We are fighting hard to regain the Somerset County Council seat in South Petherton following the resignation of Tory councillor Anne Larpent who is moving to Australia. We really want to win this seat back and Paul Maxwell is a great candidate so any offers of support would be gratefully received. The poll will take place on **4th August**. Please contact Sam Crabb (tel: 07785 744771) if you can help.

● **South West Conference Reception on Sunday Sept 18, 9.45pm - 11.00pm.**

Room 102 Jury's Inn, Birmingham. Cash bar available, Please come and join us!

● **Western Counties Regional Conference and AGM - Sat Nov, 19th 10.00am - 5.00pm.**

Dorford Centre, Dorchester, DT1 1RR. Registration forms available soon. Please submit motions to Conference. Could your constituency run a stall?

Details from Judith Cole: judithcole@cix.co.uk