Colin Davis
Sunnybank
Hillside West
Rothbury
NE65 7YN

gubbydavis@hotmail.com

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Dear Katie

Rothbury CAN Questionnaire

Thank you for your letter of 8th April inviting responses from the Rothbury Ward candidates to a number of questions.

Like you I'm equally disappointed a Hustings hasn't been organised. I think it is important residents have an opportunity to hear from and directly question candidates who are seeking to represent them. I'm pleased therefore that a resident in Upper Coquetdale has invited me to a meeting at **Harbottle Village Hall on Tuesday 15th April at 7pm**. If you and other members of Rothbury CAN are free that evening and able to come along, I will be pleased to see you and discuss any further questions you may have.

To respond to the specific questions in your letter:

1. Sewage/New developments/Flooding

I trust Rothbury CAN are aware of the Liberal Democrats' proposals to tackle the scandalous discharge of sewage into our waterways at a national level. These include replacing Ofwat with a more effective regulator with new powers to hold the water companies to account and banning bonuses for water company executives until sewage dumping ends.

At a local level I believe we need to keep up the pressure on Northumbrian Water to accelerate the investment needed to clean up our waterways and coast and to identify and tackle problem areas. Better quality data is important. You will be aware of the citizen science project, led by the Coquet River Action Group, to test water quality along the length of the Coquet. This will improve the amount of data available and help identify specific problems areas that need to be tackled. If elected, I will work with CRAG, CAN, parish councils and fellow county councillors to ensure issues are highlighted and appropriate action taken.

As a general principle I believe housing developments should not be approved without the necessary infrastructure to support the development, and that includes sewage disposal. Similarly, they should not be approved if there is an increased flood risk, either for the new

housing or the river catchment area as a whole, or if the development has not planned adequate mitigation measures such as soak aways, green spaces etc. I intend to make this case in considering any new planning proposals.

As I set out in my second leaflet, it is important we have Neighbourhood Plans in place across the Rothbury Ward as these are the documents where these (and other) requirements can be laid down and applied. I consider it a priority to work with parish councils, community groups and residents to progress and sign off Neighbourhood Plans across the Ward.

2. Solar energy/EV charging

Given the proven cost savings for householders and the beneficial impact on climate change, I committed, in my first leaflet, to campaign for all new houses to be fitted with solar panels and adequate insulation as a condition of approval and aim for all new houses to have an EPIC rating of C or higher. This is a requirement I would like to see implemented at County Council level but, at the very least, included in local Neighbourhood Plans.

For our existing, and often old, housing stock, I'm aware some Rothbury residents have taken advantage of the existing Government schemes to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. I think more could be done to raise awareness of the schemes and help residents apply. If elected, I would like to discuss with CAN and others how I could support this activity.

I understand the most efficient method of charging EVs is via a home charger, but I recognise this option is not available to many. As a result, it is often those who can least afford it who will end up with higher charging costs. One way of tackling this problem is more workplace charging and more public chargers at car parks, community centres etc where drivers can use the cheaper slow charging option. If elected I will work with other like-minded councillors and council officials to push the case to increase the availability of charging points at council locations and to encourage other workplaces to install charging points in their car parks. I would also welcome any other recommendations or suggestions from CAN, parish councils and residents.

3. Recycling

I agree the level of recycling in Northumberland is very limited particularly compared with my previous home in Southend which included doorstep collections of glass, food waste, tins and plastics. Clearly that is not a fair comparison given the logistical challenges faced here in Northumberland. But equally clearly more could and should be done.

I'm aware there is a government scheme to extend the doorstep collection of glass nationwide. But we also need to have a conversation and consider options for improving other recycling. This could include more doorstep collections in our urban centres and more recycling points in our rural settings. Residents and community groups should be at the heart of this conversation. I believe it is the role of the county councillor to listen and campaign for improvements, working with like-minded councillors and council officials.

4. Hedge cutting/weedkiller

I'm told the best time for hedge cutting for wildlife is the late winter months before the end of February, leaving some sections uncut for nesting. Personally, I would always recommend being observant about the wildlife in your garden in the weeks before cutting hedges.

I understand Northumberland County Council uses some weedkillers that are based on glyphosate that, although licensed for use in parks and public spaces, could have a negative impact on pollinators. I also understand other councils, including some in the North East, have started using an organic alternative. I think we should be learning from their experience and consider the evidence to present a case for change here and am willing to offer my support for this.

5. Biodiversity at parish level

Parish councils should have biodiversity policies and action plans in place. One of my first priorities, if elected, will be to engage with parish councils across the ward to understand the policies in place and ensure good practice is shared. This applies particularly to biodiversity plans because much activity, such as the need to remove invasive species along the Coquet, cuts across parish boundaries and requires a co-ordinated effort.

6. Purchase of Rothbury Estate

I very much welcome the purchase of the Estate by the Wildlife Trust. All their public pronouncements to date have been extremely encouraging and I'm looking forward to the public meeting with Mike Pratt in the Jubilee Hall on 24th April to hear more about their plans and vision.

General comments

I trust you get a sense from my responses about my approach to the role of County Councillor. I see the role as both a representative and a leader of the community. That means listening to resident's concerns and priorities and bringing parish councils, community groups and residents together to identify solutions. It means campaigning for solutions that need to be applied across the County in the County Council and with council officials.
Having represented the UK internationally, I do not underestimate the commitment this requires. It requires attendance at County Council and parish council meetings and consultation with and communication back to residents of the outcomes. I also know, from experience, that to deliver change it is necessary to build relationships and alliances with like-minded people wherever they come from. That is why it is so important to be present and to engage. I do not see how anyone can fully represent their residents without committing to this basic requirement of the role.

Kind Regards
Colin Davis