Katie Scott
Co-ordinator
Rothbury CAN

Karen Weech

8th April 2025

Dear Karen

Election of County Councillor for the Rothbury Ward

I am writing to you on behalf of members of Rothbury CAN. We are a group of residents who aim to do what we can to help mitigate climate change and help nature. You can find out more about us here: www.rothburycan.org

We are surprised, and delighted, that so many candidates have put themselves forward to represent our community. However, we are disappointed that it has been impossible for a Hustings to be organised. We feel we need to know more about what you stand for, in terms of environmental matters.

Because there are so many candidates, we decided to write to you all with the same set of questions, which are of major importance to us. We look forward to reading all the replies, so we can make a balanced judgement about who is likely to represent our views, most sympathetically.

Please find my answers below in blue.

Questions

1. What can you/ do you intend to do to help remove sewage from our waterways?

Our rivers and streams are vital to both our ecosystem and our way of life in rural Northumberland. It is completely unacceptable that raw sewage is still being discharged into our waterways in 2024.

As a councillor, I will:

- **Advocate for greater transparency and accountability** from water companies, including the publication of real-time discharge data.
- **Support stronger local monitoring** of river health, working with citizen science initiatives and climate action groups.
- **Push for the County Council to hold water authorities to account** – including using its planning powers to challenge developments that risk making things worse.

This is not just an environmental issue – it's a **public health issue**, and I will treat it with the urgency it deserves.

Do you feel developers should share the cost of upgrading sewage treatment plants that are beyond capacity to get planning permission?

Yes, absolutely. If a development will place further strain on an already overstretched system, it should **only be approved if the infrastructure is upgraded to cope** – and the developer must share the cost of that upgrade.

We can no longer accept development that prioritises short-term profit over long-term sustainability and resilience. If developers wish to benefit from building here, they must also help to build the infrastructure that protects the people and the environment around them.

What will you do to ensure new development does not increase flood risk?

Northumberland's terrain and increasing severe weather events mean we are already at high risk of flooding in many villages, including Rothbury.

As councillor, I will:

- Scrutinise new developments to ensure they use **sustainable drainage systems (SuDS)** and do not worsen existing risks.
- Work with residents and flood action groups to advocate for **natural flood management** strategies – such as tree planting, peatland restoration, and upstream slowing.
- **Push for better local oversight** of planning decisions to make sure **developers are held accountable** when they put our community at risk.

We need planning that is based on long-term resilience – not short-term gain.

2. How would you ensure that all residents, particularly those in social or rented housing, have access to solar energy and battery storage to reduce their household bills and reduce global warming?

   Access to affordable, renewable energy **should not be a luxury** – it should be a basic right. Solar power and battery storage are critical tools in both **tackling climate change** and **reducing household energy costs**, especially for those already facing fuel poverty.

   As councillor, I will:
   - **Push for community-owned energy solutions** such as solar schemes on village halls, schools, and shared roofs – allowing the benefits to be shared locally, especially with tenants who can't install systems themselves.
   - Advocate for Northumberland County Council to create a **Green Retrofit Fund** to support **solar and battery installation in social housing and low-income homes**.
   - Partner with national grant bodies and sustainability charities to secure external funding and **pilot off-grid energy hubs in our most remote villages**.

   I'm particularly interested in how we make our villages more **self-sustainable and energy-resilient**, with smart battery storage, renewables, and even microgrids for critical infrastructure:

A Community Energy System for Rothbury Ward

1. What's the Vision?

A local, decentralised energy system where **electricity is generated, stored and shared within the community** — with surplus energy sold back to the national grid. This reduces bills, improves energy security, and creates local jobs and skills.

How Could It Work in Practice?

Solar Power

- Rooftop panels on homes, schools, halls, barns, businesses
- Ground-mounted solar farms on underused land
- Shared ownership models through a **Community Energy Co-op**

Wind Power

- One or two small to mid-scale wind turbines, ideally community-owned
- Sited where wind is consistent (Northumberland has huge potential)
- Feed power directly into a **local microgrid**

Micro-Hydro

- Small turbines on appropriate stretches of the River Coquet or its tributaries
- Generates a constant trickle of power, particularly in winter

Anaerobic Digestion (AD)

- Uses **waste food and farm slurry/manure** to generate **biogas**
- Biogas is converted into electricity and heat via micro gas generators
- Digestate byproduct can be used as **natural fertiliser**

Battery Storage

- Stores excess electricity generated during the day
- Powers homes overnight or during poor weather
- Creates **grid independence** and energy resilience

How Does It Benefit the Community?

- **Lower energy bills** for residents, especially low-income households
- Reduced **carbon emissions**
- **Energy resilience** during storms and outages
- New **local jobs** in installation, maintenance, education
- **Profits reinvested locally** (e.g. community fund or EV charging network)

Governance & Funding

- Run as a **Community Benefit Society (CBS)** or co-operative
- Funded via:
    - Government grants (e.g. **Rural Community Energy Fund**, **Shared Prosperity Fund**)
    - Community investment (e.g. shares or bonds)
    - Local authority support
    - Partnerships with universities or environmental charities

---

Real-World Examples

- **Tamar Energy Community (Devon)** – community-owned renewables + battery storage
- **Hebden Bridge (Yorkshire)** – hydro + solar + peer-to-peer energy trading
- **Applecross (Scotland)** – hydro-funded community centre & broadband

---

Next Steps

1. **Feasibility study** (cost, grid connection, planning)
2. Form a **community energy group or working party**
3. Secure funding & identify early adopter sites (village halls, farms, schools)
4. Phase 1 rollout: solar + batteries
5. Phase 2: wind/hydro + shared grid infrastructure

EV Charging: residents who cannot park near enough to their homes to have a home charger. What will you do to ensure these residents can cheaply and efficiently charge their cars?

This is a growing issue in the Rothbury Ward where **some homes have no off-street parking**. We must ensure the EV transition is fair and accessible.

As your councillor, I will:

- Champion the rollout of **shared village charging hubs** in car parks, laybys, and central locations, prioritising areas with older or terraced housing.
- Work with the County Council and private providers to secure **affordable, rural-specific EV charging investment**, including slower overnight charging for long-stay vehicles.
- Support bid-writing and partnerships with energy groups to deliver **grant-funded solutions**, especially in smaller settlements that may be overlooked.

EV access shouldn't depend on your driveway – it should be available to every resident.

3. Compared to many other counties, the provision for doorstep recycling in Northumberland is extremely limited. What will you do to improve this and increase the proportion of waste that is recycled?

This is an issue I've heard around the ward, and I completely agree – **Northumberland is falling behind** when it comes to recycling, particularly doorstep collection.

As your councillor, I will:

- **Push for a doorstep collection of a wider range of recyclables**, including food waste, soft plastics, and glass – which many other counties already provide as standard.
- Advocate for **localised recycling initiatives**, including community drop-off points for rural villages where doorstep logistics are more difficult.
- Work with local schools and organisations to support **education campaigns** around waste reduction, composting, and circular economy principles.
- Back initiatives that enable local businesses to **reduce and reuse materials** through grants and sustainable procurement partnerships.

We need a recycling system that matches the commitment of our residents – many of whom are already making great efforts despite the lack of infrastructure.
We also need to **invest in innovation**, such as smart bins, mobile collection schemes, and local sorting facilities to reduce the distance recyclables have to travel.

4. Hedge-cutting and chemical spraying. What are your views on when hedges should be cut, and how? Will you join with us to request an end to the spraying of pollinator killing weedkiller, by NCC on our paths and building edges, etc?

Absolutely – I fully support the move toward **nature-friendly land management**, especially when it comes to protecting biodiversity, pollinators, and natural habitats.

Hedge cutting:
Hedges are critical nesting sites for birds and habitats for insects. I believe hedges should **only be cut outside of the bird nesting season (March to August)** unless there's a safety issue (e.g. overgrown road junctions). I would support clear local guidance and monitoring to ensure this is followed in practice.

Chemical spraying:
Yes – I would support efforts to **end the routine spraying of herbicides**, especially those known to harm pollinators, on verges, pavements, and around public buildings. These practices are outdated and harmful.

As councillor, I will:

- Work with NCC and local groups to **phase out the use of harmful chemicals** and explore **nature-based alternatives** like mechanical weeding and wildflower-friendly verge maintenance.
- Champion policies that **support pollinators and wildlife corridors**, including reduced mowing, community rewilding, and bee-friendly planting.
- Push for more **joined-up land management policies** across the ward that reflect both conservation priorities and community wellbeing.

I would be happy to join with you and others to campaign for a more sustainable, ecological approach in how our green spaces and roadsides are maintained.

5. What would you do to increase biodiversity at the Parish level?

This is a cause close to my heart – my husband & I have recently taken on an **allotment in Callaly**, and I'm passionate about working with nature, not against it. Seeing the difference that even small planting decisions make to pollinators and soil health has only deepened my commitment to restoring local biodiversity.

At a parish level, I would advocate for a range of initiatives, including:
Pollinator-friendly planting – supporting bee corridors, wildflower verges, and community gardens in underused spaces
No Mow May & reduced verge cutting to allow wild habitats to thrive
Tree planting and native hedgerows to support birds, insects, and biodiversity corridors
Ending the use of harmful pesticides and herbicides in public spaces
Encouraging schools and community groups to get involved in habitat creation and nature education
Supporting local food growing initiatives and sustainable land use, including protecting and enhancing parish allotments

I believe that parish and county councils have a responsibility to set the tone when it comes to caring for our shared environment. I would work closely with local groups and residents to help **create a joined-up plan for biodiversity and climate resilience** across the Rothbury Ward.

6. How do you feel about the purchase, by the Wildlife Trusts, of the Rothbury Estate?

I welcome the purchase of the Rothbury Estate by the Wildlife Trusts as a **huge opportunity for conservation, education, and community access** — if it's handled in the right way.
The Trusts have a strong track record of restoring habitats, protecting biodiversity, and opening up spaces for people to enjoy nature. If their plans for the estate reflect those values, it could bring real benefits to the area — from improving environmental resilience to creating local jobs and learning opportunities.
However, I believe that **any major land ownership change must also involve genuine community consultation**. It's important that local residents, farmers, and businesses are **actively engaged in shaping how the estate is managed**, and that existing access and land use rights are respected.

If elected, I will:

- Push for **clear, ongoing dialogue between the Wildlife Trusts and the Rothbury community**
- Ensure local voices are represented in discussions about land use, education, access and conservation goals
- Support projects that increase **biodiversity and climate resilience**, while also benefitting local people

This could be a transformational moment for the area – but it must be rooted in **transparency, collaboration and respect**.

Please could you respond to this email by Tuesday 15th April. This will give our members time to digest and compare the views of you all.
We plan also, to publish the responses, so that the wider community may also know how you view environmental issues.

Do please take this opportunity also, to tell us what you feel are the most important aspects in representing the Rothbury Ward?

For me, the most important aspect of representing the Rothbury Ward is **listening to every part of the community – and acting on what I hear**. This ward is made up of many villages and hamlets, each with its own character, strengths, and challenges. Good representation means making sure **no voice is left out**, and no area is overlooked.

Here's what I believe matters most:
1. Truly listening – to everyone
Not just those who agree with me, and not just the loudest voices. I've committed to holding **regular drop-ins, quarterly assemblies, and ward-wide polls** so that people shape decisions, not just respond to them after they're made.
2. Getting results, not just promises
I come from a business background, not politics. I know how to deliver. I want to help bring in **funding, investment, and support** for affordable housing, transport, road repairs, and climate resilience.
3. Standing up for all parts of the ward
From Netherton to Snitter, Alnham to Thropton, I believe in **fair representation across the whole ward**, not just Rothbury centre. Every community deserves to be heard and supported.
4. Protecting what makes this place special
Whether it's our environment, our public services, or our local businesses – I'll work to ensure we can pass on a vibrant, sustainable Rothbury Ward to the next generation.
5. Doing politics differently
I'm independent. I'm here to represent *people*, not parties. That means no party whip, no hidden agenda – just honesty, openness, and a genuine commitment to serving the community.

What do you feel the main role of a County Councillor is?

The main role of a County Councillor is to **represent their community's needs and priorities** at the county level — and to do so with **integrity, transparency, and accountability**.

A good councillor acts as a **bridge** between the people and the council, making sure that local voices shape decisions around key services like:

- Highways & transport
- Planning & development
- Housing
- Social care
- Education
- Environment & waste management
- Economic development

But it's more than just sitting in meetings. A great councillor is also:
A **listener**, staying in regular contact with residents
A **voice**, speaking up for all parts of the ward — not just the loudest
A **collaborator**, working with community groups, parish councils, and local businesses
A **scrutiniser**, making sure spending and decisions are in the public interest
And most importantly — a **servant of the people**, not a party or personal agenda

If elected, I'll approach this role with real commitment to our community — doing everything I can to be accessible, responsive, and effective in delivering what matters to the Rothbury Ward

We really look forward to hearing from you, and we thank you in advance for your response.
With all good wishes
Katie Scott
Co-ordinator, Rothbury CAN