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11th April 2025

Rothbury Climate and Nature

County Council Elections 1st, May 2025

Thankyou for giving me the opportunity to address your group at the start of this Election Campaign.
I would like to introduce myself to you.

I am Peter Dawson, your "LOCAL " Candidate for Rothbury. I was born in the old "cottage hospital " in Rothbury and lived and worked in Rothbury ever since. In between a full time job with a local building firm I managed to find time to become involved in local politics.
A Rothbury Parish Councillor for over 30 years and granted the Honour of Freeman of Rothbury.
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I also served as an Alnwick District Councillor for 12 years and granted the honour of Alderman of Northumberland. I have been Chaiman of both Councils on numerous occasions.
Both of these awards are for my services to the local community of which I have had the privilege to serve.

I will address your questions and concerns

1. Sewage has been a problem in all our waterways for decades and despite vigorous campaigns by Fergal Sharkey and many others highlighting the problem very little or in some cases NO ACTION is taken Legislation exists to force companies to minimize pollution and OFWAT the supposed regulator seems reluctant to do anything. This must change, If Councils can use their influence, it can only do good.
   Over the years of dealing with planning applications by large construction firms, the question of costs to sewage works improvements arose on a frequent basis. Developers' argument for not paying towards this was always the water companies have increased income of water bills so no additional money was needed by them
   It is a difficult problem to address without Government involvement.
   By law , water companies have to provide sufficient sewage treatment facilities for all new developments. The only concession the water company has is a sliding time scale to do these works.
   It will take government legislation to alter this.

Flood risk is a large problem and concern for many people, look along the riverside in Rothbury, the number of properties built on the flood plain.
The Environment Agency is responsible for rivers and flooding issues. However they are difficult to deal with and do not respond easily to “local “knowledge.
An example of this , LEE SQUARE, houses at Townfoot.
The land on which these houses are built was always wet, part of the problem is Coplish Burn, the little stream that is at the bottom of the Woodlands and runs through to Brewery Lane. This tiny burn in summer can turn into a raging torrent in the winter or after heavy rainfall. It has flooded Townfoot on numerous. Part of the problem is it has to flow into the Coquet just above the mart stepping stones , so when the river is in flood Coplish Burn , backs up and causes serious problems.
The Environment Agency politely informed me as it was not the river they had no control over this problem. However with a lot of persuasion by me and support from the District Council they had a change of heart and now Coplish is classed as a “critical watercourse “ and is now their responsibility.
The houses are built higher than that proposed to help address the flooding problem.
It is difficult to control, the “ SUDS “ sustainable urban drainage system scheme has helped but not all areas can implement this . Ground conditions play a big part but it should not be impossible

2 Solar energies should be a matter of choice and not as seems to be happening imposed by Government directives. The cost of schemes can be prohibitive and many private land lords are not in the financial position to do this.
The house rent would have to increase and that puts further pressure on tenants costs.
Social housing is different, the installation costs are generally from some form of Government Grant, but at the end of the day it is the public purse which pays.
Battery storage in my opinion has never been properly thought through. Many houses will not be suitable for this either internally or externally. Has fire risk been considered ? Are there any harmful fumes if batteries overcharge ?
Does having storage batteries affect your home insurance costs ?

It is never easy adapting older properties to reduce your energy bills and over the years I had discussions with English Heritage, who dealt with Listed Buildings about solar energy and insulation of buildings and they are not very helpful in looking at possible solutions.

EV Charging, this is a very difficult issue in Rothbury. Look at the Main Street and Town foot area. Very limited places to install public charge points and impossible for residents to install them.
As I understand current legislation, new build properties have charge points installed, how this can be done in other areas I have no answer too.
Under the Chancellors new road fund tax policy EV’s will now have to pay like any other vehicle and looking at the cost of electricity to petrol and deisel costs there are very little saving s to be made.

3 I have never understood why there was no standard of containers or contents throughout all the U.K. Everywhere seems to have different colours and collection times.
The Government has decided to standardize this at last and I think it is sometime in 2026 every household will be getting new containers and contents will be separated differently.
How this will work is anybody's guess and time will tell
The biggest problem with any recycling, it is market led, if the demand for certain things is not there , what do you do ?

4 Hedge cutting, We have miles of hedges and I think the cutting season is about right. In the old days when hedges were cut manually it was a winter time job on farms, hedges could be re-laid to make the fields stock proof and nesting birds weren't disturbed. Modern machinery makes a very good job and I think the countryside looks better when this is done.
Weed killer is a problem but in certain areas it must be done. There must now be some form of weedkiller that is less harmful to all wildlife. I am no expert in this but I am certain a solution can be found.

5 Parish land is at a premium, It controls the Village greens and has small areas of Common under it 's ownership.
It is responsible for the closed churchyards, current burial ground and rents small amounts of land from Northumberland Estates which covers, allotments, riverside play area and the right to walk on the riverside.
This does limit what the Parish Council can do. A number of years ago it was decided in the closed churchyards to let nature take its course and not cut the grass, This did not go down well.
Ther may be some small areas that could be used but that is a decision the Parish Council would have to take.

6. This came as quite a surprise to everyone when the Percy Family put this estate on the market. It is difficult to understand why after hundreds of years they chose to do so.
There was much speculation as to who would purchase this and if the new owners would make changes.
Having lived here all of my life I have seen changes to this landscape, Simonside , trees planted by the Forestry Commission, along with Kidlandlee , Thrunton woods and Harwood. Much of this planting now being cut down for the timber crop it was to provide. The reduction of livestock over the last 50 years and different farming practices have altered the area, slowly ,but it has changed .
I sincerely hope the Wiildlife Trusts will talk too and listen to local concerns.
There should be no them or us attitudes taken.
We all want what is best for the area but change is inevitable, it always has been and always will be.

Rural areas can be challenging and living here I am aware of what most of them are. Having experience, I know how to make a case to Councilor's living in Urban areas where they don't have problems accessing hospital care , children travelling miles to school, disruption of power supplies or phone signals. Roads impassable by flooding or snow.
I am aware of what we are missing out on, lack of a pedestrian crossing at Townfoot EV. Charging points NO traffic calming measures at Beggars rigg
. NO speed indicator cameras other than beside the top school.
WHY ? In the 16 years Northumberland County Council was formed has none of this happened.
Better transport and road links, better housing that meets local need , not something Government imposes on us.
Better care for older residents, what can we do to keep the younger generation here
The list is endless
Your Councillor can do these things for you.

A County Councillor's main role is to represent the public, that is YOU.
It is a very responsible position, not only does he take decisions on your behalf, he is your public face and the community's voice.
He must act within the Councils rules and legal duties and also attain higher standards of conduct than the general public expects.

Over the years I have been involved in local politics the decisions I have taken have been for the benefit of the community I was elected to serve. . I have always wanted to get things done, with your support let me try to do so again

Peter Dawson
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