Dear Ms Scott,

Thank you for getting in touch. It is very much appreciated.

Firstly, you state in your letter to me: ***"However, we are disappointed that it has been impossible for a Hustings to be organised."***

I don't know anything about a hustings being organised and I am not sure which of the candidates you asked about this, but I was not one of them. So, I have no clue what you are referencing when mentioning this.

As set out in your letter to me, you state that CAN is a: ***"group of residents who aim to do what we can to help mitigate climate change and help nature".***

I cannot find anywhere on your website where it gives details as to how many residents you represent, if they all live in the Rothbury ward, how your group is constituted, how your policies and priorities are formulated, ecologically evidenced and decision making agreed by the membership or who actually the "we" is that are referenced in your letter that you have sent me.

"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."

In your post dated the 3rd April 2025, an hour after the nominations had been announced, it was you who stated that you would be contacting the CAN Group Leaders (whoever they may be) and asking them to each send you a question to ask the candidates. I must point out that this does not appear to have been a grassroots exercise from within your membership but would seem indicative of how your group operates from the outside looking in.

However, I will answer the questions you have set out to the best of my ability.

1. *What can you/ do you intend to do to help remove sewage from our waterways? Do you feel developers should share the cost of upgrading sewage treatment plants that are beyond capacity to get planning permission?*
   What will you do to ensure new development does not increase flood risk?

   Firstly, I agree that our local children should be able to paddle and swim in the River Coquet, The River Aln, The Elsdon Burn and their tributaries without having to worry about what they are paddling alongside and if they might end up ill or with an infection as a result. As someone who has swam in the River Coquet all my life and will be in the river again next month for the annual duck race, I don't want to be walking away with ear infections, eye infections or

anything else along those lines, as I am sure many local parents don't want the same for their children.

It is particularly important that the River Coquet, which is classed as a Site of Scientific Special Interest, remains clean given the number of species within in it that rely on clean water such as ranunculus, invertebrates, fish and otters. Not only that, but it is also important for both residents and the local economy that that our rivers remain clean and healthy.

I support making sure that the agencies which monitor the private water companies have sufficient resources that enable them to do so and are able to take action were appropriate but much of this matter remains well outside the remit of a local ward councillor. Aside from adding my voice to calls for private water companies to do their jobs properly. Which I have consistently done by highlighting where local sewage releases have occurred.

With regards to developers paying for the upgrade of sewage treatment facilities; I would have no objection to this, but I cannot see why this is required. Northumbrian Water already make huge profits, why can some of this not be invested in properly upgrading their own infrastructure.

I should point out that Northumbrian have already spent over £12 million upgrading the sewage treatment infrastructure at various locations within this area including Rothbury, Snitter and Whittingham.

In relation to new development increasing flood risk; I will continue to work with the planning officers at NCC and the flood prevention team to make sure any developments in this area are planned and built in the right place and maximise the use of SUDS and other solutions to avoid run off. As set out by the National Planning Policy Framework.

Previously, I have engaged with multiple projects, agencies and partners on catchment level flood prevention and schemes to slow the flow on a dynamic river system. Alwinton and Netherton projects are two good examples of this and if elected and I will keep pushing for these projects that work alongside our local farmers in improving our local rivers and their ecosystem.

It is particularly important in our area given that our local infrastructure, particularly roads and bridges, require future proofing to deal with the harsher weather systems we are now experiencing while also balancing working with nature in our dynamic river catchments.

There aren't easy solutions to this but new opportunities in planning may give us funding from new developer contributions for some really interesting projects

and give us the opportunity to work alongside other agencies and our local farmers on these projects.

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?
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?

Simply put, I cannot ensure anything in that regard, no local councillor has that power, and no local council has the funding with which to carry it out on any meaningful scale. That must come from central government both in the form of legalisation and the proper funding to accompany it. We must also take into account the already limited space for parking that exists with ex council housing and affordable housing stock and be on the lookout for newer and better technologies to assist with this.

However, with regards to new developments and the provision of EV charging points, this can be conditioned as part of new housing developments and has/is done so by NCC planners.

I have recently helped with planning issues that that had arisen in relation to Whittingham and Netherton Village Halls putting solar panels on their buildings. Those issues now overcome; Whittingham is now completed and Netherton will commence very shortly.

I also contributed from within the budget allocated to each councillor; funding to put ground source heating into Elsdon Village Hall as there are many other alternatives to solar energy and we must look at all options rather than putting all our eggs into one basket. The Elsdon project has been running successfully for many years now.

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?

Any kerbside recycling comes down to funding and contracts with recycling companies. There have been some successful trials held within Northumberland that are currently being examined and I would have no hesitation in supporting their roll out in this area but I would first want to make sure that all of the people who live in this area can access all of the council's existing waste disposal and recycling facilities. Garden waste recycling being the perfect example. Easy to access if you live in Rothbury but currently the residents of Elsdon do not have

access to the service. Which in my view needs to be addressed before rolling out new services in other areas. Otherwise, communities like Elsdon will get left even further behind.

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?*

Firstly, if a hedge or a tree that is in the roadside verge is causing a visual obstruction to motorists or damaging vehicles as they pass, this needs to be addressed at the earliest opportunity.

There are also clear rules that are already in place regarding when the council can cut back hedges to avoid bird nesting. I would also consider, subject to my first point, that we also look at avoiding cutting them back in the Autumn when many hedges have berries and fruits on them, something I know many of our local farmers already do.

We could also, subject to my first point, look at a trial of sequential cutting of the sides of hedges to improve bird habitats. Again, there are many great examples of this by many of our local farmers.

In relation to the use of weedkillers by NCC; I must start off by saying that I do not know enough about neonicotinoids to know all of the ins and outs, but pollinating insects are essential to our survival, not least to our local farmers who need them to pollinate their crops.

I would only support the use of pesticides by NCC in certain situations and under strict controls (e.g. invasive species such as giant hogweed control or when buildings or structures maybe damaged) when the benefit outweighs the costs. I would be happy to support the trials of less harmful pesticides by NCC.

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

We are really lucky to have a lot of experienced and qualified ecologists living in our area and as councillor, I have access to the knowledge, experience and advice of a team of ecologists at NCC. Advice that I regularly seek out.

When planning projects relating to biodiversity, I look for evidence, good input from the above ecologists and local residents, particularly those farmers who own and manage many tens of thousands of acres of our area.

We have a lot of amazing things that already exist in our area, pockets of species rich grassland all around, waxcap grasslands on grazing land, an internationally

important grassland up at Barrowburn in the Upper Coquet Valley, hedges, an incredible SSSI river, woodland, peat heath and bogs. Most looked after and managed by our local farmers, including the producer of the famous Northumberland Meadow mix of wildflower seeds. We don't shout about this great work enough and we should.

Understanding how it all works together in the Coquet, Aln and Rede Valleys is so important. What is needed in one place will be totally different a mile away.

- **I have always supported strong mitigation and habitat creation in new development.**
- **Community schemes can be great but clearing wild spaces big or small concerns me. Nature is quite frequently untidy and can sometimes look scruffy but at the same time provide a wide range of benefits to a number of species. What was done at the bottom of Rothbury First School bank is a great example of this. It may look pretty now but from an ecological and biodiversity perspective it's now barren compared to what it was.**
- **Complaints about open views to the river also concern me when riverside trees are so important to stabilise banks, create cool spaces for migrating fish and nurseries for fry.**
- **I support community education and engagement, and I believe a great example of this could be some of our local school children visiting some of our local farms to understand the important work carried out by many of our local farmers to improve our local environment.**
- **I am very keen to see a local toad patrol created similar to what has been successfully developed in the Seahouses and Bamburgh areas to help improve the survival rates of this important species when they come to cross our roads. It is important work like this, that volunteers carry out, that can really help with the survival of our native species. A great example of this is our local red squirrel groups.**
- **I am happy to support the planting of trees in our area, but this needs to be in the right place. We have sites for upland waders that need to be kept free of trees and hedges.**
- **I am absolutely passionate about supporting our farming communities and championing the work they do for nature. The type of farming we have here is not industrial in scale, it's hard work, and the ecosystem benefits are not properly rewarded.**

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

I should point out that the Wildlife Trusts have not purchased the Rothbury Estate, they have purchased 1/7th of the estate thus far and are in the process of trying to raise funds to purchase the remaining 8,000 acres.

My first priority always has been and always will be to the residents I represent. I am very worried about the potential impacts on local farmers and to local businesses. Not least the potential impact for a future visitor centre on the estate would have that would take away footfall to the shops and businesses in Rothbury and Thropton.

There is quite a lot of fear about what the Wildlife Trust have planned for the estate and their failure to alleviate those fears by pandering to their usual echo chamber, of only people who share their views, has done little to help the situation.

This can't be 'us and them' and can't be habitat restoration where local people lose their livelihoods and homes. That worries me. And I am not alone in that concern about finding a balance. It's potentially a huge fundamental change in our community.

But I am open to listening to what the Wildlife Trust have to say, just as I am interested in listening to what other interested parties have to say.

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

The people.

I like how our community is made up of all kinds of people, those who have been born and bred here and those who have moved here to enjoy our way of life.

So many people come together in so many ways to create our community. Volunteering and making things happen. Especially in times of crisis when we all pull together.

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

Helping constituents to make sure they get they support and help they may need. This is easier for me as a local independent who knows the area and is free from the constraints of any party politics.

Yours sincerely,

Steven Bridgett