

eastern Agenda



Newsletter from Andrew Duff MEP
no. 12 Summer 2005

Breakthrough in Cambridge



Andrew Duff with his new MP,
David Howarth

East of England Liberal Democrats made further advances in the May general election. The headline news was the breakthrough in Cambridge, where David Howarth was elected on a 15 per cent swing against Labour.

Our two existing MPs, Bob Russell and Norman Lamb were returned in Colchester and North Norfolk respectively with increased majorities. Our overall share of the vote across the region rose by 4.3 per cent. The party retreated in only six of the 56 seats.

As in all elections, there were near misses. In Watford, with a swing of 12.8 per cent, Sal Brinton came from third place to lose by only 1100 votes. In Norwich South, Andrew Aalders-Dunthorne finished only 8.7 per cent behind Home Secretary Charles Clarke.

Cambridge was the classic example of how we can manage (sometimes) to translate local government success into parliamentary victory. A well-organised campaign with clear messages produced this very good result.

Norman Lamb converted his North Norfolk majority of 484 in 2001 into one of 10,606. A 9.2 per cent increase in Mid Norfolk shows how infectious our parliamentary success can be in neighbouring constituencies.

Unlike the last general election, 5 May 2005 has delivered several good prospects for next time. Watford is clearly our priority. Boundary changes will help us in Broadland and Chelmsford. With about 600 new members – many of them young – were recruited during or just after the election campaign, our prospects look good.

What is encouraging is that the Liberal Democrats in the East of England continue to make steady progress against both the Labour and Conservative parties. We built successfully on the progress we made in the European elections last year. Those 2004 results proved to be a clear indicator of our performance this year.

At the county council elections held on the same day, the Lib Dems made a net gain of four seats to cement our position as the region's second party of local government.

Nationally, May 2005 was not a straightforward election. It was not always obvious that the Lib Dems were playing to our strengths. Some people, otherwise sympathetic had to struggle to find enough clear reasons to vote Lib Dem. It was a pity, in my view, that our reformist edge was blunted.

In this issue ...

P1. Breakthrough in Cambridge

Andrew Duff comments on the general election.

P3. Statistics

Tim Huggan gives a statistical breakdown on the general and county elections.

P5. Andrew's tour of the region

A snapshot of Andrew Duff's tour of the region during the general election campaign.

P6. Britain takes the chair

Andrew Duff reports on the UK presidency of the Council

P8. Notices



With Andrew Aalders-Dunthorne in Norwich.

In these difficult circumstances, all those thousands of party members and supporters who helped us do well deserve enormous praise – especially our candidates and agents. Ian Horner, regional campaigns organiser, Tim Huggan, my constituency officer, and John Souter, printer extraordinary, deserve a special mention. Thank you all!

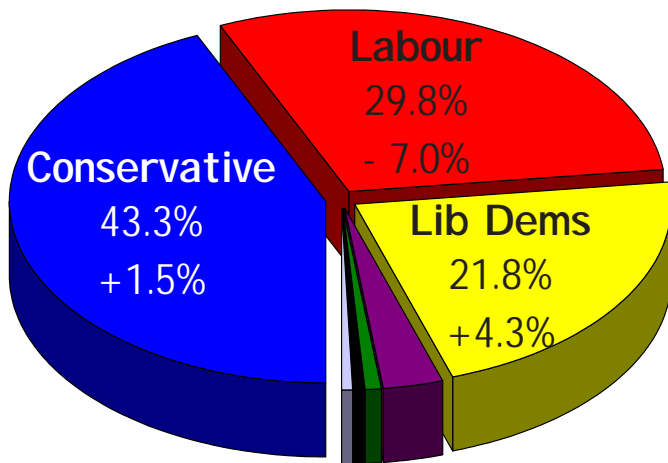
Tim's charts give more details about the result. The photos illustrate a very small number of the places visited and people met on what was, for me, a hectic but enjoyable campaign trail.

Andrew rounded off the election with a sweep through Hertfordshire. Andrew stopped off in Harpenden to campaign with Hannah Hedges and Liberal Democrat activists whilst on the way to Watford.

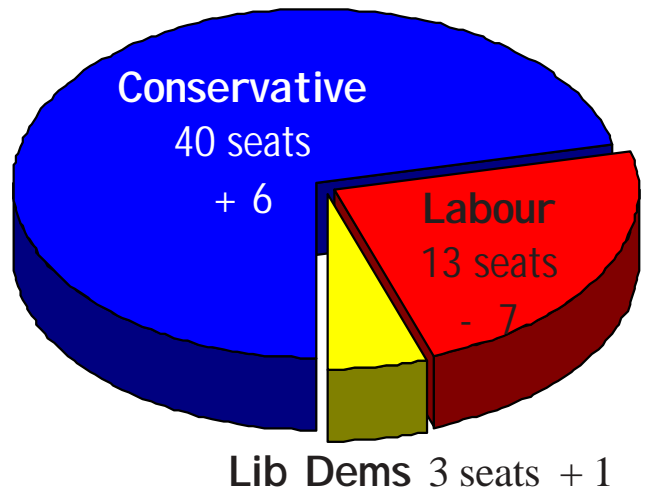


East of England 2005 General Election

Share of Vote



Seats Won

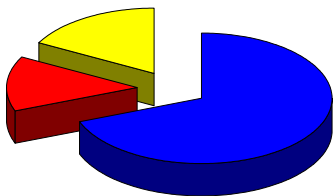


| Party | Seats | Gain | Loss | Net | Votes | % | Change 2001-05 |
|-------------------------|-------|------|------|-----|-----------|------|----------------|
| Conservative | 40 | 6 | 0 | +6 | 1,147,180 | 43.3 | +1.5% |
| Labour | 13 | 0 | 7 | -7 | 790,372 | 29.8 | -7.0% |
| Liberal Democrat | 3 | 1 | 0 | +1 | 578,741 | 21.8 | +4.3% |
| UKIP | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 83,112 | 3.1 | +0.9% |
| Green | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 25,396 | 1.0 | +0.4% |
| Other | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 25,012 | 1.0 | -0.1% |
| Turnout | | | | | 2,649,813 | 63.6 | +1.9 |

County Results

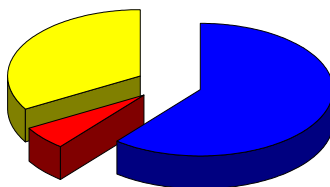
Across the region, the Liberal Democrats made four net gains in the County Council elections on 5 May. We advanced in Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Norfolk, held our own in Bedfordshire, but slipped back in Suffolk and Essex. The Tories took control of Suffolk for the first time in 12 years.

Bedfordshire



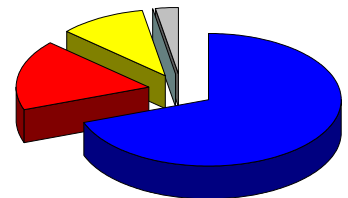
Conservative 36, Lib Dem 9, Labour 7.

Cambridgeshire



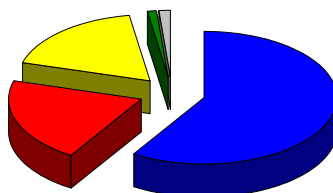
Conservative 42, Lib Dem 23, Labour 4.

Essex



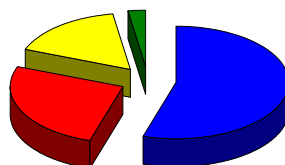
Conservative 52, Labour 13, Lib Dem 8, Others 2.

Hertfordshire



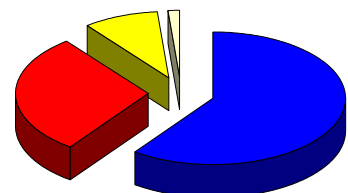
Conservative 46, Labour 16, Lib Dem 14, Green 1, Ind 1.

Norfolk



Conservative 46, Labour 22, Lib Dem 14, Green 2.

Suffolk



Conservative 45, Labour 22, Lib Dem 7, Ind 1.

General Election Statistics from the Region

LIB DEM VOTE SHARE INCREASE

| Rank | Constituency | +/- |
|------|----------------------------|------|
| 1 | Cambridge | 18.9 |
| 2 | Watford | 13.8 |
| 3 | Luton South | 11.7 |
| 4 | Brentwood and Ongar | 11.6 |
| 5 | North Norfolk | 10.7 |
| 6 | Mid Norfolk | 9.2 |
| 7 | Hitchin and Harpenden | 7.8 |
| 8 | South West Norfolk | 7.8 |
| 9 | Rochford and Southend East | 7.7 |
| 10 | St. Albans | 7.5 |

MARGIN BEHIND WINNER

| Rank | Constituency | Margin Behind Winner |
|------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| 1 | Watford | 2.4 |
| 2 | Norwich South | 8.7 |
| 3 | St. Albans | 11.9 |
| 4 | South Suffolk | 13.5 |
| 5 | South Norfolk | 14.9 |
| 6 | South Cambridgeshire | 15.2 |
| 7 | South East Cambridgeshire | 15.3 |
| 8 | South West Hertfordshire | 16.9 |
| 9 | Chelmsford West | 18.8 |
| 10 | Mid Norfolk | 19.4 |

LIB DEM VOTE SHARE

| Rank | Constituency | Lib Dem Votes share |
|------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | North Norfolk | 53.4 |
| 2 | Colchester | 47.1 |
| 3 | Cambridge | 44.0 |
| 4 | South East Cambridgeshire | 31.7 |
| 5 | Watford | 31.2 |
| 6 | South West Hertfordshire | 30.0 |
| 7 | South Norfolk | 29.9 |
| 8 | South Cambridgeshire | 29.8 |
| 9 | Norwich South | 29.0 |
| 10 | South Suffolk | 28.5 |

LIB DEM VICTORS

Norman Lamb was victorious in North Norfolk with a 10,606 majority and a 17.9% margin of victory over the Conservatives.



He becomes Lib Dem spokesman on Trade & Industry.

Bob Russell was victorious in Colchester with a 6,277 majority and a 14% margin of victory over the Conservatives.



David Howarth was victorious in Cambridge with a 4,339 majority and a 10% margin of victory over Labour.



LIB DEM 2ND PLACES

Brentwood and Ongar
Chelmsford West
Hitchin and Harpenden
Huntingdon
Mid Bedfordshire
Norwich South
Saffron Walden
South Cambridgeshire
South East Cambridgeshire
South Norfolk
South Suffolk
South West Hertfordshire
Southend West
Watford

Andrew's General Election Tour

FROM CANVEY ISLAND TO KING'S LYNN



Andrew with his assistants Guillaume McLaughlin and Hanna Siddiqui on Canvey Island to give support to James Sandbach and his small team. This part of Essex can be difficult territory for Liberal Democrats.

During the General Election Andrew visited 36 constituencies across the region. This is a small snapshot of some of the places he visited.



On a very wet day Andrew helps Richard Atkins get the message across in Ipswich. Voters showed a willingness to engage even on days like this.



Andrew joins Kathy Pollard on a factory visit in Sudbury. The need for immigrant labour from central Europe was a key topic of conversation.



Elfreda Tealby-Watson and Andrew Duff receive words of support outside a supermarket in Saffron Walden.



Andrew signs Earnshaw Palmer's petition for a Hospital in Thurrock. Earnshaw collected 10,000 signatures during the course of the campaign.



Andrew Duff and Andrew Houseley face a grilling from pensioners in rural Suffolk.



On possibly the coldest day in the campaign Andrew and Sara Bedford greet shoppers outside a supermarket in Hatfield.



Andrew Duff and the Lib Dem team listen to Simon Higginson explain how the proposed harbour regeneration project will transform King's Lynn.

Britain takes the chair of the EU Council

Andrew Duff reports on how the UK presidency of the Council will cope with the crisis over funding and the constitution

From July to December this year, the UK government takes its turn to preside over the EU Council. In a widely covered appearance before the European Parliament, Tony Blair outlined his plans for the term of office. But MEPs remained far from certain about British European policy.

For many years, no UK government has been capable of putting forward a coherent strategy for developing its European partnership. Although Mr Blair's personal views are known to be 'pro-European', he seems not to know how to put his beliefs into practice. And he remains encircled by Eurosceptic ministers Jack Straw at the Foreign Office and Gordon Brown at the Treasury. Continuing British opt-outs from the euro and the Schengen area (that is, the core group of member states which have abolished internal passport controls) are well known. Less advertised are British derogations from much of European cooperation in justice and home affairs policy, as well as in significant areas of social policy, such as EU law on working time.

Tony Blair astonished the European Parliament with his sudden conversion to a large and deep public campaign about the future of Europe. Is this the same Blair who abruptly cancelled his two promised referendums on Europe? And the same Blair who tried to prevent the constitutional Convention from happening in the first place, and then sought to limit its mandate and minimise its results? If Mr Blair is truly converted why is his government the only one of the 25 member states that refuses to accept EU money to fund public information campaigns?



Andrew discusses with a Bedfordshire farmer the challenge of the new 'Single Area Payments' as part of the reform of the CAP.

Anglo-French row over food and money

The UK presidency got off to a bad start at the European Council meeting in June when Mr Blair and President Chirac quarrelled badly about the future financing of the EU. Put simply, the British government is insisting on keeping its budgetary rebate unless France takes a cut in CAP funding. Unfortunately, this means that the poorest member states, including the Central Europeans recently joined, will have to stump up for the UK, which is now among the top five richest EU countries.

That the CAP is already undergoing radical reform seems to have gone unnoticed at Westminster. Ask sugar beet growers in the East of England - or in the Caribbean - how they are to cope with the Commission's proposed 39 per cent cut in price support, and stand well back. The British case for reform of EU spending is not helped by pouring contempt upon the CAP, which remains the only common policy exclusively funded by the EU. EU funding on R&D, or transport, or regional development, by contrast, merely complements national and local spending.

Nowadays it is misguided to think of the CAP as merely a food policy. The current reforms have meant that CAP spending has shifted from food price support towards countryside management and rural development. Lib Dems welcome this emphasis on social and ecological policy. The Labour government is also ambivalent in its response to the proposal, supported by our ALDE group, that the CAP in future should be co-financed by the EU and the richer, older member states. Such a move would hit France hardest, of course, but would also require a larger contribution from HM Treasury.

Other priorities during the UK presidency rightly include the efforts to extend the single market to services, to progress the regulation of chemical substances (the REACH directive), to advance world trade and climate change negotiations, and to focus the EU's overseas aid development policy on Africa. Many other matters, such as the highly controversial software patents directive (on which more in *eA 13*), will impinge upon the presidency whether Mr Blair likes it or not.

Turkish membership

Britain is also determined to open accession negotiations with Turkey, as scheduled, on 3 October. In the light of the xenophobic sentiment stirred up in the French and Dutch referendum campaigns on the constitution, this is surely a bold objective. But it is the right one.

The EU has established firm but fair procedures to ensure that tough but just criteria will have to be met if Turkey is to complete its path to full membership. The accession process is well designed to protect both the Turkish national interest and the European common interest.

Turkey's membership is in the long-term strategic interests of Europe. Both Turkey and the EU will have changed dramatically by the time the accession exercise is complete in about ten years time. It is perfectly sensible to see if these changes can be convergent and mutually supportive.



Chris Davies, Guillaume McLaughlin and Andrew Duff visit a mosque (formerly the church of St George) in northern Nicosia.

For the EU not to act in good faith towards its neighbour would fuel the forces of ultra-nationalism and extremism in Turkey. Conservatives, especially in France and Germany, should be more generous to the Turks. It was not Turkey's voters who rejected the EU Constitution. In fact, at the moment Turkey is proving to be rather more successful in carrying through its democratic and constitutional reforms than is the EU. And its economy is growing about ten times faster than that of Germany. A second class membership of the Union for Turkey would make Turks second class Europeans. Liberals should not be satisfied with this.

Ratification or reflection?

It also falls to the British presidency to find a way out of the constitutional crisis caused by the No votes in France and the Netherlands. The decision of the European Council to carry on with the ratification process at the same time as pausing for reflection seems to me, and to many people, to be palpably absurd. Perhaps heads will have cleared after the summer break. At any rate, I will report back on what happens next to the EU constitution in the next edition of *eA*.

In the meantime, much of what the UK presidency of the EU Council wants to do is deserving of the critical support of Liberal Democrat MEPs. Mr Blair and his ministers have shown themselves open for a dialogue with us: they will get one. Read more about the government's agenda on the web at eu2005.gov.uk.



Sharon Bowles (2nd left) joins the Liberal Democrat delegation in the European Parliament replacing Chris Huhne, elected to Westminster



Andrew Duff, joined by LDEPP leader Chris Davies, meets Mehmet Talat, President of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

Andrew Duff on the campaign trail in the ill-fated Yes campaign in France



East of England Liberal Democrats Reception

Blackpool Conference

All Liberal Democrat members are invited to attend the East of England Reception at the Federal Party Conference in Blackpool
Imperial Hotel, Blackpool
18.15 Sunday 18 September



And congratulations to Tim and Eleanor on the birth of Alexander

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Regional Conference in the East of England

Saturday 29th October
10.30 to 16.30

Hinchingbrooke School, Brampton Road,
Huntingdon PE29 2BN

Registration details contact Steve Marshall 01223 362044 by email on stephen.marshall21@btinternet.com

eastern Agenda

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