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The Green promises

20 June 2024



Epsom and Ewell Times is publishing the appeals of the Parliamentary Candidates standing in the General Election for the constituency of Epsom and Ewell. This is the appeal from **Green Party** candidate **Stephen McKenna**.

Britain is a wealthy country. Yet underinvestment the last 14 years has adversely affected the country. We have a series of ongoing crises notably in the health care system and in terms of cost of living impacting millions of people. In housing, transport and our energy and water bills, costs are rising to levels that are unaffordable for many. All of this set against a backdrop of growing climate crisis and it's impacts on, drought, flooding, rising food prices, declining biodiversity and so on.

The Green Party manifesto proposes that to "fix Britain" we need to invest significantly more that might otherwise have been the case if proper investment had been undertaken. We do not apologise for being honest about the problems we face and the fact that our plans involve raising taxes.

However it is clear that a lot of investment now will bring solid benefits for the whole of society and avoid further worsening of the situation. We want to progress towards a fairer, greener society.

The main parties are in denial about the scale of these challenges. There is a "conspiracy of silence" about funding what has to be done which amounts to a policy of "no change" for the next five years. This would be disastrous. Independent reports say the NHS will decline further under Labour's plans.

Labour say they will involve the private sector at a time when we spend a lot less per head on health services than other European countries. This is a further step towards privatisation which the Green Party rejects. We need a proper Investment Plan for the whole NHS. Our tax and spend plan is about investing long term in people and capital assets. So for instance recruiting more home grown talent to fill vacancies
will be vital. "Earn while you learn" apprenticeships will incentivise our young people to study whilst full time students should benefit from maintenance grants. The end of tuition fees will help but universities will need to be properly funded as well.

Having said all of this, the state has broad shoulders to carry this weight – after all over £400 billion was raised during the pandemic without the sky falling in and the Institute of Fiscal Studies has made supportive qualified comments about our tax and spend plans. More importantly IFS has not suggested there are any risks to the economy as a result of our proposals. Don't forget, much of what we propose is about spending now to save later.

No party should enter Government without a commitment to ending the housing emergency. Our programme will generate greater tax receipts and will save on things like subsidies to landlords and developers. We want to create 150,000 council homes a year nationally across the country including
conversions, refurbishments, buying empty or houses in disrepair as well as new build. All Councils should produce a five year plan to provide Council or social housing in their areas which should also reduce their current extortionate emergency and accommodation spending.

One of the biggest threats facing this area is the weakening of the planning system proposed by the main parties. Rather than address the core issues of our broken housing market they engage in a numbers game about who can build more unaffordable homes! "Unblocking" the planning system would enable further destruction of our supposedly sacrosanct Green Belts, without reference to any constraint. Nationally building 300,000 homes per annum would amount to two cities the size of Birmingham over a five year period!

This is not sustainable and is unnecessary. Imagine all the consequences that flow from this – new roads and a loss of tranquility is the least of it – traffic congestion, air pollution, noise, water and sewerage discharges into streams and rivers and impacting on biodiversity, a lack of GPs, hospitals, dentists,
school places. This at a time when our Government is supposedly signed up to delivering protection of nature on 30% of our land by 2030. At present only 3% of our land is protected.

So if elected, what would my main priorities be as your MP?

● Protect and expand Green Belts and integrate these with nature recovery and community health based strategies, banning any development in such locations
● I will prioritise NHS and social care funding including an upgrade of Epsom Hospital and community based healthcare
● In education I would advocate for more places for special needs (SEND) children in Surrey and encourage funding for "earn while you learn" apprenticeships
● Support public ownership of water and energy companies

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● Secure better integrated public transport with enhanced service delivery, lower fares and a scrappage scheme in Surrey to support transitioning to ULEZ compliant vehicles

● Support the national programme of retro fitting homes to deliver energy efficient homes and lower energy bills
● Epsom and Ewell has no Council housing and I would require all Councils to produce an annual target for provision of Council/social housing –
● Support our High Streets – such as grants to increase live-work places on upper floors above shops, enhanced broadband in centres to support small businesses find space, providing help to park with
charging points for electric vehicles, environmental and other improvements – of course business rates should also be scaled back to help compete with online offers.
● Help our farmers to grow quality food for the home market with a large expansion of the horticulture sector and nature friendly farming,
● Create green manufacturing jobs in renewables, green technologies and related sectors.

Finally I urge you to ignore the opinion polls. In this election, more than any other in my lifetime, there is no scope for tactical voting. In Epsom and Ewell, for so long a safe Tory seat, a surprise result is definitely on the cards and cannot be predicted. The Green Party is the only party offering a decent and
deliverable vision for the future backed up by realistic spending plans.

Therefore I ask you to vote with your heart and your head for a better fairer country, vote Green on 4th July!

The other candidates:

Conservative who promises to serve “with integrity”

Lib Dems’ Helen Maguire – “Getting Things Done”

A True and Fair view of the world

Reform candidate for Epsom and Ewell

Mark my words for Labour candidate

Green signals from prospective parliamentary candidate

20 June 2024



The most important General Election for 40 years is rapidly approaching and as your prospective Member of Parliament for the Green Party I would like to introduce myself.

I joined the party in 2011, out of disgust for the mainstream parties. The Parliamentary expenses scandals and greed of well-off MPs during the 2008 financial crash, epitomised the gulf between the
governors and the governed. The brazen double standards posed a threat to democracy and switched people off politics. I have always advocated that democratic values of fairness and equity should be front and centre of our politics, and it vital that we carry these values forward in tackling the related environmental and cost of living crises.

Its also always been a key issue for me that nature is not just respected but also restored as ultimately this is our life support system. The Green Party was the first to propose legislation against “ecocide” in 2017 for instance and this is now not only contained in our full policy but is increasingly adopted internationally.

I grew up in West London, in a street where all sorts of families lived alongside each other, in a balanced community where all types of occupations were present including teachers and doctors, builders and craftsmen and other workers on average pay. We believed in the value of education – my father was a train driver who studied and later became a college lecturer and author. In those days everything seemed possible, and in particular homes were affordable in my street for everyone.

Sadly those times have gone and today it would be impossible for a young family to buy a home there. I became a professional Chartered Surveyor and Planner after studying Town and Country Planning at Manchester University and have practised my profession in the public and private sectors for over 30 years.

Epsom and Ewell is a very special place, with its unique and ancient history and really important community and cultural assets that I appreciate which remind me in many ways of the place I grew up in. I know now that these assets cannot be

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taken for granted. Many of the psychiatric hospitals in the Borough were closed under the Care in the Community legislation years ago and redeveloped for housing. A lot of the precious spaces were lost forever, impacting Epsom's green character.

Throughout my career, even where it was sometimes difficult to do so, I have championed environmental, educational and community development in my work, protecting heritage, parks and countryside, biodiversity and other assets. I have also worked at several universities designing and delivering post graduate and degree apprenticeship courses as a visiting lecturer and acting as an external examiner. Following the pandemic we now recognise to a much greater extent the value to our mental and physical health of enjoying nature and outdoor recreation as well as that of Lifelong Learning.

I worked hard campaigning to become a Borough Councillor and in 2016 I was elected to the Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, one of three elected Greens at that time. Since then we have built up our numbers across the Borough so with eleven councillors, we are now the official opposition on the Borough Council. We successfully saved substantial Green Belt from unnecessary development in and around Redhill and many of the issues we dealt with are similar to those in Epsom and Ewell.

My commitment to you and local priorities : If elected as your Member of Parliament as well as continuing to seek the best outcomes for protecting the constituency from the aforementioned pressures I would also focus on other local priorities, including investing in the NHS, social care and new apprenticeships, ensuring young people can get skills, good wages and a step onto the housing ladder, meeting safety and security concerns for all ages with more policing.

I would work to strengthen the vitality and viability of our High Streets and village centres, including reform of business rates so monies raised could be reinvested in the area, helping small businesses and maintaining a retail banking presence not just pushing everyone into online services. I would also support measures to help the farming community through targeted grants schemes, with more emphasis on horticulture and organics, including taxes on some imports.

The climate and cost of living crises demand parallel responses, so for example, retrofitting old homes for energy efficiency not only saves money but also creates green jobs, a win-win for both people and the planet. It is time to acknowledge that achieving net-zero emissions doesn't jeopardize our economy; it revitalizes it.

Politically Greens are making great strides up and down the country, taking control of or acting in coalition to administer some 39 District Councils and have over 700 plus councillors nationally. Our programme is to do the same in Parliament where we need Green MPs to hold the Government to account just as we are doing on local councils. We want to make a real contribution to changing people's lives and with new Green MPs we can do just that.

Money for change exists: The old chestnut of there being no funds in the coffer is selectively applied by those with vested interests. In the 1950s, despite economic turmoil and the country being on the verge of bankruptcy, governments forged ahead, creating the NHS, and building circa 150,000 Council homes every year as part of a new social contract. We are a wealthy country that can generate significant funds for the right priorities.

he Epsom and Ewell Constituency is a prosperous community, yet this success brings with it development pressure which threatens to encroach on the remaining areas of Green Belt and countryside not just in the Borough but also the other constituency areas, Ashtead and Leatherhead.

Home ownership, once a tangible hope, has slipped from the grasp of many. Essential public services are faltering whether this is in the NHS, social care, education or policing. Without action our younger residents will be forced to move away to find cheaper places, we will lose our identity as places experience overdevelopment, leading to a loss of crucial biodiversity and a consequent increase in adverse effects such as traffic congestion in what was once a relatively tranquil district.

My vision is one where these cherished places are protected so our children can enjoy living and working in the area.

Due to the shortage of social housing locally, Epsom and Ewell Council spends a staggering £2m per year on emergency accommodation, with ratepayers footing the bill. The extraordinary high cost of housing is having a corrosive effect on our neighbourhoods, with the elderly unable to afford more suitable accommodation and, as a professional surveyor with a specialist background in urban planning, I know that building expensive unaffordable homes in the wrong place is not addressing need or fixing our broken housing market.

Apart from protecting the Green Belt from unnecessary speculative housing, I have also argued against houses with large gardens being redeveloped since this impacts the character of local towns. We need a balanced community to sustain the whole of this vibrant constituency and to avoid it becoming a run down retirement village with reduced access to a range of public services, boarded-up high streets and where younger people are forced to move away.

Ensuring a positive future for Epsom and Ewell : Local communities are rightly proud of the towns
and villages of this constituency and I respect every ounce of hard work that has gone into their creation and upkeep. I want to complement this effort. Greens work with communities across Surrey, and our party is seen as more trustworthy based on the work we do and the increasing support we are getting from voters. We are working tirelessly to deliver Green councillors in Ashtead and Leatherhead now and in Epsom and Ewell.

I believe there are a growing number of voters in Epsom and Ewell who feel taken advantage of and ignored, and I would greatly value the opportunity to champion their causes. While we don't have proportional representation in this country this election still represents a one-off opportunity to change the political landscape. The usual certainties no longer apply as many voters are dissatisfied with the two main parties and, with so many candidates standing in Epsom and Ewell, a surprise result is entirely possible.

If you have concerns or are dissatisfied about how you have been represented in Parliament, can I
ask that you trust me with your vote? It would be an honour and a privilege to become your Member of Parliament for Epsom and Ewell. I will bring fresh thinking not repackaged stale old ideas passed around between the main parties. I want to make a difference, I need your help, your vote most definitely counts.

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