

# Politics or personality puzzles Claygate voters

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It's a grey day in Claygate but the mood among the Lib Dems who have gathered at a micro pub next to the village station is anything but gloomy.

In a bright yellow jacket she said was a "hand me down" via one of her sons, the party's parliamentary candidate for Esher and Walton reacted to the news that **Dominic Raab** had resigned from the cabinet.

**Monica Harding** called for Mr Raab to resign as the area's MP, and said residents "deserved better".

Mr Raab said he had set out his position, and appreciated the "hundreds of messages of support" he had received. He added: "My overriding focus now is on delivering for the people of Esher and Walton, with our economic plan and support with energy bills."

In the 2019 general election, Ms Harding took 45 per cent of the vote in Esher and Walton, cutting the Conservative MP's majority from 23,298 in 2017, to 2,743. It is therefore a key seat the Lib Dems have their eye on for the next general election, which must be called before January 2025.

But with local elections taking place in Elmbridge on May 4, could Mr Raab's resignation in the wake of an investigation into bullying also impact on those voters?

The Lib Dem leader, **Ed Davey**, also the MP for neighbouring Kingston and Surbiton, told the LDRS that in parliamentary constituencies across Surrey, including Esher and Walton, Guildford, Woking and Mole Valley, the party was sensing a "real opportunity". He added: "This chaos and indecency in the Conservatives is what's putting off a lot of life-long Tories."

The village of Claygate has around 7,000 people, an average house price of more than £1.1million and three Liberal Democrat councillors. Elmbridge Borough Council, the area's local authority, is run by the Residents Associations' 18 councillors, in coalition with the 13 Lib Dem councillors.

The Conservatives are the second largest party, with 15 councillors, five of which hold seats that are up for election on May 4 when a third of the members are up for election.

Current Lib Dem councillor **Alex Coomes** is up for election, standing against **John Charles Burns** for the Conservatives and Sue Cope for the Labour Party.

One voter told the LDRS Mr Raab's resignation would not impact on how she would vote in the borough council elections.

An investigation into Mr Raab by **Adam Tolley** KC looked at eight formal complaints against the MP from his work in three separate government departments.

In his resignation letter, Mr Raab said all but two of the claims had been dismissed in the report and raised concerns the inquiry would "encourage spurious complaints" against ministers.

**Peter Szanto**, chairman of Esher & Walton Conservative Association, said: "Dominic has continually worked to support our constituency and all those that live here. He has always been professional, kind, thoughtful and tenacious in his work. I, and the Esher & Walton Conservative Association, fully support him."

**Ann Hennings**, who said she had met Mr Raab "several times at various functions", had found him to be "very kind" and said she didn't have "a bad thing to say about him". She said she was glad she was not at work anymore, and asked: "What is bullying? Getting somebody's job done, is that bullying? I think anybody who's in charge of anything might be accused of that sometimes." She said that the local Liberal Democrats, who run the council in a coalition with Residents' Association councillors, "seem to get things done" but added that her voting habits were not the same on national and local ballots.

"If you have parents that are a certain party, I think a lot of people tend to be the same, it goes down with families," she said. "My family were staunch Conservatives. I've always voted Conservative but never locally. I've only ever voted liberal."

Another resident said Mr Raab's resignation from his roles as Deputy Prime Minister and Justice Secretary was "good riddance", but said it would not change how she would vote locally.

While the Liberal Democrat leader on Elmbridge Borough Council, and Claygate councillor, Cllr **Bruce McDonald**, said on the doorstep the constituency's MP came up "from time to time" he didn't think Mr Raab was "at the front of their minds". Cllr McDonald said: "I and my colleagues are much more interested in talking about our positive vision for Elmbridge, what we're getting on with doing because, ultimately, that's what people want from us."

But the national picture isn't far from some people's minds on the doorstep. **Lynne Murray** opened her front door to find Ed Davey, Monica Harding and a raft of journalists on her doorstep. She told Mr Davey there was a "very high chance"

the Lib Dems may be lucky and get her vote in the future elections.

With issues including the country's economic prosperity, a "holistic, long term" look at the NHS needed and wanting people to feel "hope again" she said she thought that aspiring to "have a great life" was "so far away from so many people at the moment." She added: "I'm looking back at 12 years of Conservative government and I can't think of a single aspect of life in the UK that's been better."