

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
- 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