

Liberal Democrats - The Effective Opposition

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Hexham Town Twinning Association

Did you know Hexham is twinned with both Noyon, France and Metzingen, Germany? Derek represents the council on the association, however, the association is organised by private individuals. A group of 43 people from the Hexham area enjoyed a visit to Noyon at Easter.

The group is always looking for new members of all age groups, if you are interested in joining the group please contact Derek.

Your Hexham Leazes Councillors

Cllr Derek Kennedy

2 Alemouth Road, Hexham, NE46 3PJ
01434 607669

Derek is 36 and is married with a 2-year-old daughter. He is a qualified internal auditor working for national government. He is a member of the Development Control and the Resources scrutiny committees.



Cllr Colin Moss

Hallgarth House, Hexham, NE46 1XD.
01434 601274

Colin is an artist who along with his wife runs an Art Gallery and Tearoom in the town. He is a member of the Economy and Health and Culture committees.



Hexham FOCUS



Focus Team: Councillor Derek Kennedy, Councillor Colin Moss and Victor Ball

£30 million at risk!

Tynedale District Council sold its council housing stock in January 2000 to Tynedale Housing for £25 million. The Council's coffers have now swelled to £30 million following a further sale of assets, leaving Tynedale as one of the most cash rich councils in the UK.

Derek Kennedy was concerned that the Council had no documented strategy for managing or spending the money. Derek raised a motion at the Council in January 2004 to request that the Council "draw up a series of options" so the councillors could decide on what the council's priorities are. The main risk to the money (in our opinion) is that there is an increasing likelihood that the District and County Councils will be replaced by a single local authority. The result would be that the £30 million of Tynedale's money would be lost and sent to the new single authority for the benefit of the whole of Northumberland.



The motion was debated by the council for 90 minutes and the LibDems voted in favour of identifying the options. However, the controlling Conservative Party argued "It's better to receive the interest the £30m generates". A Conservative block vote against the motion resulted in a defeat.

The £30million is the equivalent of 8 years worth of council tax charged to the public, or £1,146 for every dwelling in Tynedale. We are paying our London bankers £46,000 p.a. to administer the money. This is your money, which the Council holds on your behalf. Unfortunately the money cannot be used to pay your council tax bill, but it can be used to pay for capital products (such as buildings, car parks, sports and play areas).

The LibDem councillors are not willing to sit idly and watch the council money being put at risk. We want to identify the priorities and spend the money on important, useful and sustainable projects in Tynedale. Therefore we are asking you to offer your opinion. What do you think the money should be spent on? Please contact Derek with your views. (Address at back of this leaflet.)

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TOP-UP FEES - VOTE FACTFILE

- ◆ Labour's plans for "top-up" fees will go forward after they won a narrow vote in Parliament
- ◆ Of the main parties only the Liberal Democrats had every MP voting against the bill.
- ◆ Two Conservative MP's abstained and one voted with the Government.
- ◆ If all Conservative MP's had opposed the bill it would have only taken ONE Labour MP to abstain to see the bill defeated.

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ROADMAP TO A REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

The Case for Change

Lib Dems have long supported decentralising decision-making to the lowest effective level, believing that all tiers of government should be elected and accountable. A Regional Assembly conforms very much to this principle, and would mean many more key decisions being taken here rather than at Westminster. It would be an authoritative and credible voice for the North East, enhancing pride in the region, driving economic advancement and reducing regional disparities. Quite simply, if it's good enough for Scotland, Wales, London and Northern Ireland then it's good enough for the North East too!

The Tories carp about a Regional Assembly being another tier of government, but nothing could be further from the truth. A huge tier already exists in the Government Office of the North East, One North East and scores of other unelected quangos that are responsible for spending millions of pounds of public money. These, and the two tiers of local government in Northumberland and Durham, would be replaced by the Regional Assembly and by new Unitary Authorities, thus removing one layer of government altogether! Neither is there any truth to the charge that rural areas would lose out to urban ones. With voting by PR, no area could dominate a Regional Assembly. And it's not a Euro-plot either!

The Regional Assembly should cost us less too. Though this has been estimated at £25m a year, £5m would be the existing cost of staff transferred from other public bodies and money would also be saved because of more efficient decision making within fewer tiers. The cost of just 25-35 elected Assembly members should be more than offset by reducing the numbers of highly-paid quango board members, of whom there are now hundreds in the North East. And with around only 30 members, a huge and expensive new HQ should not be necessary. Indeed, the Assembly could meet regularly in town halls and other venues across the North East - taking strategic decision making to all parts of the Region.

Interestingly, the North East currently has 30 MPs approximately the same as the proposed number of Assembly Members. It will be interesting to see if the parliamentary constituency boundaries are used to determine the new Regional "wards" as well.

The Regional Assembly will have annual control of £350 million a public expenditure and influence over a further £500 million. As Liberal Democrats, we would like it to have more powers, but the present proposals are a reasonable start. I will do my bit to put Tory mis-information in its place and would urge all of you, through letters in the press or any other means at your disposal, to do the same.

Andrew Duffield



Andrew Duffield

Andrew Duffield

is a Northumberland County Councillor and was recently selected by Hexham Constituency Liberal Democrats to stand for them at the next general election.

Leazes Lane

Finally the "worst road in Hexham" has been resurfaced. County Council had consistently overlooked Leazes Lane although it had been on the "list for repairs" for several years. Local resident Martyn Howat organised and led over 100 petitioners demanding repairs. Derek supported and presented the petition to the council. The petition and resulting press coverage helped influence the council to decide, at last, to undertake the work. Although there were wild rumours circulated that only half of the road was to be repaired, the speculation was proved to be unsubstantiated as the JCBs rolled in and repaired the entire stretch of road.

The photograph shows Derek congratulating Martyn during the resurfacing.

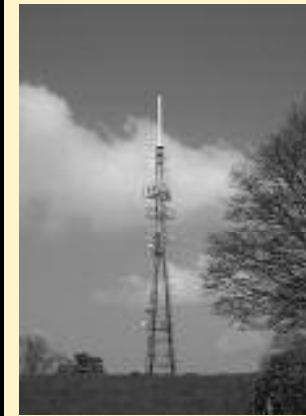


New Swimming Pool for Hexham?

Colin Moss believes that a new swimming pool for Hexham would be an excellent idea to spend some of the council's money on. Colin says, "The old pool requires £330,000 worth of vital repairs. It has been a good servant, but is now tired and needs updating. A new pool would improve the health and well being of the people of Tynedale and be a tourist attraction." Colin goes on "The current Safeway is to close and move to a new building next to the railway. The new pool would be perfectly sited in the old Safeway building, next to the sports centre. This would provide Hexham with an integrated pool and sports facility under one roof, easily accessible, and with plenty of car parking."



BBC - Digital Service



Derek raised the issue at the Town Council that most people in Hexham can not obtain a digital TV and radio signal. The service provides extra TV and radio stations which can be received via a set top box, which costs around £50. He said "We pay the £116 licence fee to the BBC like everyone else, yet can't get the service. The BBC advertises the service as free but its not free if you can't get it".

Derek recommended that the council write to the BBC and demand that the Newton transmitter be upgraded. We await the BBC's response.

Schools - 2 or 3 Tier

Colin, as a member of the Community scrutiny committee, has been involved in many long and protracted discussions on the potential reform of education in Northumberland. Colin says "This complex and sensitive issue requires the widest possible consultation as it has a wider impact on society than just education."

"Schools play a vital role in the community and any proposed change needs to be delicately considered with the pros and cons of the 2 and 3 tier systems assessed." The County Council will make the final decision and Colin, a teacher with 30 years of experience, says "As a District Councillor, I will use my voice to ensure that all the issues have been thoroughly debated and the public fully consulted. However the final decision is in the hands of the County Councillors."

Street lighting at Maidens Croft

Derek was contacted by a local resident on the poor state of the street lighting in the Whetstone Green/Maidens Croft area. Derek surveyed the area and agreed that the lighting needed improving, as it was dangerously poor. Derek negotiated with the County Council for the replacement of the old dull white lights with the more effective modern lights. Our thanks go to the County Council for a quick resolution to this problem.