

## **Chair's report, Derbyshire Dales Liberal Democrats, 2024**

It's been a privilege to be your Chair during this tumultuous political year, one in which our party has neatly transformed itself nationally from 'the effective opposition to the Conservatives' to 'the effective opposition to Labour'. My particular thanks to all the executive officers for their support and hard work.

Locally of course, we have been delivering far more... as the leading force in the 'Progressive Alliance' giving political direction to Derbyshire Dales District Council. There are separate reports detailing our work on the Council, but essential our goals have been to maximise sustainability, democratic accountability, service efficiency and fairness. This is not an easy task given the personalities of some of our allies, let alone our political opponents. Our team of councillors has done well to maintain a steadfast approach, without deflection or distraction, in the face of extreme provocation, especially from the (much weakened) Conservatives. Their dedication should be applauded.

The role of the Chair is to provide political direction and focus (excuse pun). I'm not sure I have always achieved this. The first six months of the year was rightly consumed by ever more frenetic preparations for the General Election campaign, and the campaign style and approach was largely set by the hardworking and able campaign team led by our candidate Robert Court and agent Mark Ireland-Jones. We were in a difficult position, given the nullifying effect of national opinion polls and tactical voting websites, which effectively neutralised our own messages and appeal on the ground, allowing Labour to project the credibility they needed to win the tactical vote. The result reflected the iron grip of an electorate determined to give a historic rejection to the Conservatives in the most effective way they believed they could, however, our campaign locally was energetic, principled, and represented the greatest canvassing effort our party and its predecessors have mounted since 1986 – the electoral data from this alone should be invaluable in future campaigns.

Not being at the centre of the leadership triumvirate that leads the District Council, and with council officers who do seem determined to operate things in their own way, the Chair's position trying to capitalise on our achievements on that council hasn't been easy. My role has been to try and ensure that the gap between the operation of the administration and our membership is kept at a minimum. Again, I'm not sure that I have achieved that, thwarted perhaps by the council's difficulty itself of delivering clear achievements.

Nevertheless, the political climate has changed since July's election. There is a glimmer of opportunity now. As an organisation and political machine, the Conservatives, locally and nationally, have never been weaker. I am certain that the Liberal Democrats should seize the chance to overtake them in our cruel electoral system, and demonstrate that we have credible, constructive answers to the issues that are most crucial. We can and must show that we are different from Labour, the Tories and Reform – that we are on the side of the people (and the planet). For that to work, we must ALL commit as much energy as possible, wasting no opportunity to talk up our strengths.