

This constituency needs an injection of energy and enthusiasm – which I can give you; with this I bring plans to create a SME starburst; plus a new focus and direction for our farming and rural communities.

I spent much of my youth in Northumberland and went to school in Newcastle. Later I lived in Haltwhistle and Haydon Bridge on returning to the area after an extremely successful career in the south of England (with Local and Central Governments) saving many lives and reducing injuries on roads, and displacing thousands of unnecessary car journeys in the difficult challenge of modal shift.

Close family live in the constituency and Hexham town continues to be my cultural hub, you may well come across me at the likes of the Queen's Hall. Or you might bump into me, and my dog, at Allen Banks. But it is worth pointing out that I know the whole constituency very, very well.

Currently, I am not a million miles away living in Carlisle, where I am a Cumberland Councillor. I am Chair of the hugely important People Overview and Scrutiny Committee. I am also active in several other committees, panels and groups, and charities, including key subjects such as Environment, Food and Farming, and the steering group of St Cuthbert's Garden Village. Also, a growing and dynamic youth project: The Rock.

In my various roles I have enjoyed extensive media coverage, on TV, radio, and in print. I can honestly boast that I have twice been offered permanent jobs by the BBC. This I raise because I think the constituency deserves a higher but more positive profile and mainstream media is an obvious channel. However, social media can also play its part.

Coming back to earth, I have had two small farms, raising Soay sheep; and I come from a family background of business: businesses that ranged from small to medium to international plc. Myself, I have worked in management for Capita across Cumbria, and the National Trust across the Lake District; and I have also worked for myself, and therefore appreciate the hurdles – but excitement too – of business start up.

My understanding of the priority needs of Hexham constituency should be reflected in my following objectives:

Create an 'Enterprise Zone' which spreads into the rural areas (working with LEP and other agencies but moving to a self-supporting Trust.)

Provide business start up opportunities in the Tech, Culture and Media sectors. These three often don't necessitate large financial investment and can relatively easily be accommodated in rural areas. They are also attractive to young people who wish to enter the world of business.

Speed up an improved ELMS.

Give multiple opportunities of farm to home food purchase.

Start community food growing schemes (as I am doing in Cumberland).

Ensure genuinely affordable homes are produced – moving the emphasis away from small percentages of executive housing estates on offer.

Improve the speed and frequency of trains to Newcastle (and Carlisle).

Develop the extraordinary potential for more tourism in the area and link this to sustainable careers for young people, and Further Education (I have been a Lecturer in FE).

Localise more NHS services; including Mental Health outreach into rural areas.

Forge strong and creative bonds between myself and local government.

Make sure that the ratio of patients to dentists and GPs never falls below a sufficient level.

Set up a subsidised 'dial a ride' taxi service which fills the enormous gaps in bus provision and provides a much better service for the user.

The excellent constituency profile attached to this terrific PPC opportunity highlights some deep problems. I am well known as a problem solver and have a record – I am happy to substantiate – in turning difficult situations around. But the constituency profile also points to several of the ways ahead. This indicates a considered understanding within the Liberal Democrat team. It will be a team effort with MP responsibility and accountability that gets this area moving. I have set up and managed numerous teams and am in contact with several ex-team members from the past. It isn't simply a matter of making friends with people, sometimes detached and tough decisions need to be made. However, I am good at listening. I do think, though, that developing and strengthening the Lib Dem team can be a further objective in the run up to this approaching General Election.

Chris

