

Members' Newsletter



Labour Party —
Droitwich and Evesham Branches

February 2024

From the Evesham Vice-Chair: Sue Wood-Griffiths

Thank you to all members who responded to our new Call to Action feature in the January newsletter. As we approach a General Election there will be more work to do and more opportunities for members to get involved either face-to-face with the electorate, or in a backstage capacity. As I write this, we are about to distribute the first batch of our 'Rising 18' letters, and we hope that this initiative might gather interest from some younger voters.

As a CLP we have been 'twinned' with Worcester and you are probably receiving emails from the Worcester branch looking for support with their campaign. They are viewed as a winnable seat and, if you have time, we encourage you to get involved with their campaigning. It is a brilliant way to learn and build confidence. The latest electoral calculus data still has Droitwich and Evesham predicted as a Tory hold, although their vote share is now down

from 66% to 39.6% as Reform are predicted to secure 12.6% of the vote and Labour 31.3%. These statistics do fluctuate but the picture is becoming more optimistic for us, as the predicted majority is now less than 5000.

This month we are including some news from the Droitwich branch (thank you, Alex) and, from March, we hope to rebrand the Evesham branch newsletter into a CLP newsletter. Thank you to those who have provided material for this month's edition and we encourage all members to contribute news, pictures and forthcoming events. These can be emailed to:

newsletter@droitwicheveshamlabour.org

I must also issue an apology for mis-spelling Brian Chilver's name last month when sharing the news of his birthday. I inadvertently added an 's'. Apologies Brian!

February Evesham branch meeting

Thank you, too, to the members who turned out to the Valentines Day branch meeting. We had a well-attended meeting where we welcomed Diane Bennett from *Caring Hands* as speaker. Diane outlined the work that *Caring Hands* does to support some of the most vulnerable in our town. It is several years since Diane came to speak to us and, unsurprisingly, the scale of need in the town has escalated. *Caring Hands* is a registered independent charity that originally operated out of the Vale of Evesham Christian Centre and provides several resource banks for those in need.

Caring Hands works on a referral basis and provides a Food Bank for emergency food needs, a Household Bank providing cleaning materials and toilet rolls, a Toiletries Bank providing toiletries such as period products and toothpaste, a Clothing Bank for those who need basic clothing – especially those who are homeless or need clothes for interviews or family occasions, a Homelessness Bank providing sleeping bags, housing pods, tents and essential backpacks for those sleeping rough (it is not a

lifestyle choice!) and a Baby Bank providing nappies and baby formula.

In 2021 *Caring Hands* acquired their own building, The Lighthouse, through the generosity of the Ken and Hilda Farr Trust.

The Lighthouse building has enabled the charity to establish a place of safety and help where people can seek support and discuss the issues they are facing, be these debt, budgeting, cooking skills, or addiction issues. It also provides a haven for the



Diane Bennett with Sue Wood-Griffiths and Mary Tasker

February Evesham branch meeting (cont.)

homeless, to receive guidance, companionship and help towards finding accommodation. The showers and laundry facilities provide temporary help, basic hygiene and self-respect, while people try to get their circumstances in order and the staff and volunteers support them as they do.

Diane works tirelessly to support these vulnerable people and aspires to reach a point where her services are not necessary.

Caring Hands is one of four food banks operating in the town and while many argue that they are not the answer, the people who rely on them for a plethora of reasons are ever grateful for their existence, particularly those with children to care for.

The Evesham branch regularly support *Caring Hands* with seasonal donations at Christmas and Easter through our Cuppa and Cake events and have done one-off collections at our branch meetings. We have a Cuppa event coming up on 22 March and had planned to collect Easter eggs at the March branch meeting but, in light of what we learned, we agreed at the meeting to have a 'spring cleaning' collection and collect cleaning and hygiene products instead.

Thanks are extended to members and the staff at The Hawthorns for their generous donations brought to the meeting. Diane left the meeting with a car-full of contributions and was very appreciative.

As with the last meeting, members left with more information about how the cost-of-living crisis is impacting on local people and can draw on this when campaigning.

In the second half of the meeting Sue and Neal outlined how we are developing the *WhatsApp* Call to Action, for members to like and share Facebook posts. This strategy is key to gaining visibility with the groups we are targeting to campaign. Labour needs to get the under-50s out to vote.

Evesham Gazebo outing

It was a lovely sunny Sunday for our first Gazebo outing of the year and we had a great turnout from members and supporters. This outing was really a warm-up exercise as we intend to get the Gazebo out every two weeks in the run up to the General Election. We had some good conversations and detected a notable shift from last year with people much more willing to engage. Another change was the wider adoption of red Labour logo'd fleeces – and we have matching hats on order too! If you are

Evesham Reading Group

This month's meeting aimed to compare our thinking on environmental issues with those of the local Green Party. Unfortunately, for various reasons, none of the invited Greens was able to attend but the ELP attendees had a lively and wide-ranging discussion.

Councillor Mary Tasker updated us on progress with the 'Intelligently Green Plan' for Wychavon, from progress on the social housing planned for Offenham, to greener bin lorries. Less positive was information on the poor quality of some Rooftop housing, in environmental terms, and their slow response to complaints. Also, some funding is available from Wychavon, such as the Rural Fund and the funds to improve shopfronts, which have had poor take-up. We also discussed how some of the initiatives from across the UK, reported in the magazine we have been discussing, could be built on locally. This included the scope for a non-party-political 'Community Climate Conversation', along the lines of some reported in other areas, to explore what environmental priorities local people have in Droitwich and Evesham, which could guide local campaigning.

The next Reading Group meeting will be on Thursday 21 March (7.45–9.15 p.m.) with the text yet to be agreed.



looking to join the Gazebo team then we encourage you to get a Labour fleece: this can be obtained from David Tasker who seems to have taken on the role of branch outfitter. A big thank you to all those who turned out to support us. We will run some training at the next Branch meeting to help put people more at ease when approaching passers-by. Look out for the full Gazebo calendar which will be shared at our next meeting.



All of the Evesham District Councillors are scheduled to update the Town Council on ongoing issues, and to feedback on actions and initiatives. It was my turn to feedback on 12 February.

I had attended previous meetings of the Town Council as a member of the public, and saw how other councillors addressed the meeting in their own style. There is no fixed agenda, which I initially felt was quite daunting.

The Council chamber is (over)crowded and hot, and it felt uncomfortable. When I presented my feedback, I was aware that I was talking to the backs of people in front of me. This is unavoidable, due to space in the room, but I found that it felt very rude. I persisted though and tried to make the best of the situation I was in.

My feedback consisted of reporting on:

- The new housing development in Offenham.
- The apprenticeship scheme; celebrating the successes and encouraging participation.
- The project work I did on the budget and scrutiny committee.
- The proposal to buy the Grade 2 listed building from the private landlord of the Red Lion and turn it in to a community-owned building.

The feedback was well received which gave me some confidence and I felt really supported by members of our Labour Party who came to the meeting. The Labour community is very close knit and welcoming and I really felt encouraged by the people who attended and motivated to do my best to make the change we need to really help our constituents.

Mary is available to meet constituents at her monthly surgery on the last Tuesday of each month. Going forward she will be accompanied by a member of the executive who will be available to pick up any enquiries about the local branch.

On Saturday 27 January, Mary and David Tasker, Sue Wood-Griffiths, Joan O'Hagan and Anne O'Hagan joined around 5,000 people on the streets of Cheltenham to protest against the Tories' new anti-strike laws.

The date marked the 40th anniversary of GCHQ's ban on trade unions when Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government attacked trade union rights in 1984.

Unions, say there are parallels between this historical event and the new Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023. The Minimum Service Levels Act could restrict the right to strike for over five million workers. The new law stipulates that, when workers in certain public sectors vote to strike, they could be forced to attend work and sacked if they don't comply.



Just as it was a Labour government in 1997 that overturned the GCHQ ban, unions hope that a new Labour government will repeal the Tories' anti-strike legislation.

Union branches from across the country travelled to Cheltenham to join the thousands-strong march which started at Montpellier Gardens, then proceeded through the town centre culminating in a mass rally at Pittville Park. Leaders of all major unions then addressed the crowd at the rally.

UNISON general secretary Christina McAnea, who spoke at the rally, said: *'Rather than fixing the problems that force workers to take strike action, government ministers want to threaten public sector workers with the sack.'*

The biggest risk to the public is not striking workers, it's more years of a Conservative government, and more years of cuts.'

From the Evesham Chair: Matthew Rea

Last month I learned from my local parish council meeting that Worcestershire County Council will push ahead with a 4.99% council tax rise this year. Worcestershire are not alone in doing this — of 128 local authorities that have published their budget plans, virtually all have no choice but to make the maximum allowed increase. For Worcestershire, this 4.99% rise will reduce a £70m deficit to perhaps a more manageable £40m, with the real threat of more cuts on already stretched services.

This situation reminded me of a discussion I had with fellow Labour member Neal Cartwright about how the Tories have driven us to the highest level of taxation since 1968, and yet everything remains broken. After thirteen years of near-zero GDP growth, national productivity plagued by low business investment, and very unfavourable rates for government borrowing (thanks Liz!) you'd be excused for worrying that when our new Labour government take charge, they will inherit an economic 'perfect storm'.

Can we be optimistic? You don't have to look too hard to see the underlying cause of why we get so little for our tax pound. The Tory obsession with outsourcing and privatisation means that nationally, £250m of taxpayer money is wasted every week paying companies to do the things we used to directly do ourselves. Add to this PFI — where, in the NHS alone, £13bn of initial borrowing will cost a staggering £80bn to repay. And where does all this money go? Often into dividends and exorbitant salaries for those who run these 'public services', some of which perform shambolically.

In Worcestershire alone, 70% of council tax is spent on Child and Adult Services, much of which is outsourced to 'for profit' providers. Figures in 2023 for the top 20 'for profit' service providers show profits of £330m (at a profit margin of 19%) whilst several of these companies deliver services rated as 'inadequate' by Ofsted. Much of Worcestershire's current financial pain is now down to these companies raising their fees again.

It is clear is that we cannot continue to squeeze taxpayers just so that we can distribute 19% of tax as dividends to shareholders whose wealth and privilege often means they never personally consume these services. Polling shows that four out of five voters want many of these services back under public control.

I believe the next election will be fought on economic 'principle' — voters no longer believe that any party can magic a solution out of the current broken model. I am optimistic this model will finally die, along with the 40-year-old Thatcherite 'unconstrained free market' dream. In the meantime, I sincerely hope we still have libraries and bus services in Worcestershire by this time next year!

Forthcoming events

02 March Gazebo, 11.00–13.00 High Street, Evesham.

13 March Branch Meeting Campaigning training, and please bring donations of cleaning products or toiletries for Caring Hands.

17 March Gazebo Outing for the Big Evesham Town Spring Clean (10.00–12.00).

21 March Reading Group (see also page 2)

22 March Cuppa and Cake Easter Eggs for Caring Hands. 14.00, Old School Café, Merstow Green.

20 April St Georges Day Music event at The Valkyrie, Market Square, Evesham.

23 April National Theatre Live are showing 'Nye', starring Michael Sheen at both Number 8, Pershore and The Regal, Evesham. Book your own tickets and we can arrange car sharing nearer the event. See extra Film Group information below.

Film Group

If you are interested in film nights or outings please email david.tasker@eveshamlabour.org to make sure you get the emails about 'What's on'.

Contacts: Matthew Rea (Evesham branch Chair):
Sue Wood-Griffiths (Evesham Vice Chair):
Newsletter submissions:

General enquiries:

Call us:
Facebook/Instagram:
X (formerly Twitter)
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NEWS FROM DROITWICH:

From the CLP Chair: Alex Knudsen

Aside from standing in a by-election for Dodderhill Parish council last year, most of my work has been in the background of late, including working with Brian to streamline our social media and improve our reach and starting on improvements to the website — it is now:

<https://www.droitwicheveshamlabour.org>

As Matthew mentioned last month, I have also put myself forward to be our next Parliamentary candidate. We have not received a shortlist as yet but, as soon as we do, we will send an email out so we can get the CLP side of the selection underway.

Elsewhere, in Droitwich there are plans to cut the fire engine and all eight of the firefighters at the local fire station. A public consultation is underway currently but, from what we've been told, it seems a decision has already been made despite the consultation still ongoing. We will hopefully be meeting with those from the local fire service in the next week to discuss how we can support them in fighting these cuts.

Social media update

As the constituency has been renamed Droitwich and Evesham, the CLP Executive Committee have agreed that, moving forward, we shall be shutting down the branch-specific pages across Facebook, Instagram and X (formerly Twitter). The reasoning behind this is to make the content we put out more focused and to be available from one central point per channel, but also to save us time to be utilised better elsewhere, especially with a General Election on the horizon.

From the date this newsletter goes out, the Branch pages will have one month until they are closed, to allow time for you to head over to the Droitwich and Evesham Labour Party Pages and give those a follow. (See the panel at the bottom of page 4).

Council news from Town Councillor Val Humphries

On Droitwich Town Council, the opposition councillors are now working together well as a cohesive opposition group against the conservatives.

On the Westlands, a defibrillator is being installed which I will be the 'guardian' for, once it is in place.

A guardian is the person responsible for carrying out regular checks ensuring it is always ready for use.

Elsewhere on the Westlands, the only place the Air Ambulance could land is in the grounds of the primary school. However, over Christmas, paramedics had to scale the fence, as a key to unlock the gates could not be found. Since then, I have worked with the local community to ensure that a named person living locally will hold a key which they can provide should an emergency situation arise in the future.

In Droitwich as a whole, one of the biggest issues recently has been the increase in antisocial behaviour, including graffiti. The local councils and police are working together with the public to tackle this.



Who would you like to see and hear speak at future Droitwich branch events?

Following the success of Evesham's monthly branch meetings, we are looking at replicating this format in Droitwich. While we are sourcing a venue that will be fully accessible for members, supporters and friends alike, we would like to know who you would like to be invited to come and speak at these meetings in the near future.

Any suggestions are welcome and these can be emailed to:

alex.knudsen@droitwicheveshamlabour.org

CALL TO ACTION



Winning elections requires team work. It isn't just about an electable candidate and some compelling policies. It is about getting people out to vote and getting them to understand why they should vote Labour, and that is something everyone can help with.

There are activities you can help with even if you can only make a small time commitment. The benefits are huge: you'll get to work with a highly-motivated group, be a part of delivering change, and have some fun along the way. To support us please contact Brian Gregory by email: brian.gregory@eveshamlabour.org or call us on 01386 293035

Action: Promoting us on Social Media.

Commitment: just five minutes per day.

Facebook can deliver Labour's message to a lot of people, with just a few minutes of your help. Campaign organisers Brian Gregory & Alex Knudsen publish persuasive posts (words, pictures and videos) to our Facebook page weekly.

You can vastly increase the reach of these post with just a few clicks. All you need is a Facebook account and a WhatsApp account. We will alert you over WhatsApp every time a message is posted to the Droitwich & Evesham Facebook page, then you go into Facebook and like and share the post. If we can get fifty or more members liking and sharing, then our messages will be seen by thousands of locals.

Next Steps: Ask to join the Evesham Labour Party Action Whatspp community, so we can notify you every time a Facebook post is made.



Action: Join the Gazebo Outreach Team.

Commitment: Two hours, twice a month, usually on a Saturday.



Getting the Big Red Labour Gazebo out and about is one of the best ways to raise Labour's profile. We'd like to build a Gazebo team for Evesham and a team for Droitwich. We go out armed with leaflets to explain Labour's pledges and highlight issues. At the same time, we gather real on-the-ground feedback from locals and encourage people to get involved with our branches.

We provide training and can usually help with transport. Whilst this isn't everyone's cup of tea, it is one of the most exciting ways to be at the heart of delivering Labour's agenda for change.

Next Steps: Get in touch with Brian (see above).

Action: Phone Banking and Door Knocking.

Commitment: One to two hours per week.

Even though current polling shows that Labour are on course for a landslide victory, this is all based on research which involves speaking to people who are sat in their comfy armchairs in a warm house. The reality of turning this into a real victory is very different, especially in a complacent traditional Tory stronghold like Droitwich and Evesham. What we have to do is get people out of their armchairs and down to the Polling Station to vote. All the evidence says that doing this requires real in-person interaction. Once we have met people, spoken with them and mailed them a few times they are going to feel a much stronger allegiance to

Phonebanking vs Doorknocking

Phonebanking	Doorknocking
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accessible and from home• Can call from anywhere in the country• Governed by some legal regulations• Limited to collecting data• Get through data quicker	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be visible in communities• Get to know other members and socialise after• Conversations can be freer and engaging• Ability to persuade• Can combine with leaflets

Labour

our cause and will be more likely to vote. The two main methods for speaking to voters that we can use are **Phone Banking** and **Door Knocking**. With phone banking you can contribute as much or as little time as you like – you simply use one of the Labour party comms tools to call people from your home, following a simple script. With door knocking you do the same thing but in

person, so the commitment is a little higher, and you go out in teams.

At the March branch meeting we will be running training sessions and providing more details on both of these tasks; then we will ask for volunteers. Please come along if you think this sounds like something you can help with.

Thank you to Carol Wade for responding to last month's Call to Action. Carol has been a member for just a little over a year and bumped into Sue Wood-Griffiths at one of our Cuppa & Cake events in December. Since then Carol has attended the reading group and been out on the Gazebo. Carol responded quickly to our request for someone to manage the "Rising 18's comms" process and from next week she will start sending out our Happy Birthday letter to young people in Droitwich & Evesham who turn 18. Thanks Carol for throwing yourself into active membership – it is greatly appreciated.

Action: Leafleting.

Commitment: Max about 90 minutes per session, as few or as many sessions as you like — and lots of fresh air!

We are targeting renters and those people who have recently moved house to ensure they are on the electoral register. Typically, renters are younger and therefore much more likely to vote Labour. In the next month we need to get about 3500 leaflets distributed around Evesham. There is no deadline (other than before the election!) and you can do as little or as much as you like. We provide leaflets and delivery area details — and include the all-important dog-proof letter-box utility tool (and yes, it does look like a spatula!).

CALL TO ACTION