



## Christmas Newsletter 2023

### What a year!

We are reaching the end of what sometimes seems to have been a desperately long year but with every day that passes we are that much closer to an election in which we can throw the latest iteration of Tory swindlers into history. From our side, it has been a very full 12 months and we have been building our capacity and spreading

our message, getting ready for the poll which is surely less than a year away now.

Compass's Executive Director, Neal Lawson, talking at our July coffee morning: *"Is the Blue Wall really collapsing or is it just a bit chipped?"*



Being Christmas, we've got an excuse to tell our many supporters about our successes this year and lay out plans for the months ahead. Once we get into the New Year, politics in Brighton and Hove, and in the country more widely, will start to fizz.

We will be using our platform to campaign for a progressive majority across Sussex, one that can truly make a positive impact on people's lives. In this we will be playing a key part in Compass UK's ['Win-as-One'](#) campaign. In case anyone doesn't know, this is an ambitious plan not just to get power back but to change the shape and distribution of power in this country for good. A Christmas present for **next** year, let's hope.

## Looking back

It's been a really busy year. Lots of people coming together and making things happen. Lots of new connections. Lots of new energy.

### Our regular progressive coffee mornings

We have continued with our bi-monthly coffee mornings where we informally discuss local and national issues. These are open to all and we pride ourselves on providing decent coffee and excellent biscuits with informed conversation between progressives. We are trying to explore and develop a broad agenda of concerns and proposals that all the progressive political parties can share. This year we have had:

**January: Getting PR Done!** Compass supporters packed tight into the Cornerstone's loft room to hear Jess Garland from the Electoral Reform Society and Lena

Swedlow from Compass Head Office (see pic) talk about the benefits of proportional representation and how we need grown-up politics to tackle the complex, long-term problems that affect the UK. Full report [here](#).



**March: Winning as One In Sussex.** A joint meeting with Lewes Compass on how to defeat the Tories in those three Sussex constituencies where the current incumbents were chosen by a minority of those voting. Full [Report Here](#)



**May: There's No Place Like Home.** A meeting on the housing crisis, both nationally and in Brighton and Hove, with Andy Winter, former CE of the Brighton Housing Trust and Kelvin McDonald, current Chair BHT. The discussion focused on what we would like to see in a progressive housing manifesto – full report [here](#).

**July: To Be Truly Radical is to Make Hope Possible Rather than Despair Convincing** *or Is the Blue Wall really collapsing or just a bit chipped?* With Emily Robinson University of Sussex and Neal Lawson Director of Compass (who also talked about recent events in the Labour Party which still have him threatened with expulsion). See [here](#) for full report.

**September: The Green New Deal, What We want from a Progressive Government.** With Charles Secrett former director Friends of the Earth and Cathy Shutt, University of Sussex. With his experience as a former Director of Friends of the Earth Charles was especially interesting on building a broad movement through local, non-tribal, inclusive organising, drawing on a wide constituency, from church groups to local business associations and the women's institute. He emphasised the importance of framing the narrative, talking also about how words matter, something critical in sensitive discussions around recycling, carbon taxes and fairness (see our website for more).

**December: This Year, Next Year, and Compass as Well.** With Ivor Gabor, Professor of Political Journalism at the University of Sussex (see pic) and with seasonal mince-pies and mulled wine (and tea) to celebrate Compass's work in 2023. Ivor helped



us to look back on the developments of 2023 and to think about how we should approach 2024.

## Sort the System rally, Westminster

Several of us took part in the Sort the System events of 24<sup>th</sup> May, lobbying our MPs for PR. We had face to face meetings with Caroline Lucas

(Pavilion) and Lloyd Russell Moyle (Kemptown) who were both in support and hardly needed lobbying. Our third local MP (Peter Kyle, Hove) is still holding the line for the old FPTP system (but see below). Great get-together in Victoria Gardens afterwards (see pic).



## Trainings

In October, we had our first Sussex-wide Compass meeting with reps from Brighton & Hove, Lewes (formed this year and already active and vibrant) and West Sussex (new and gathering momentum) and with three staffers from London HQ. We spent a morning planning our next 12 month's activities.



Throughout the year several members took part in Action Network trainings, learning to undertake mass mailings of various kinds to our growing membership. We now have 800 plus supporters and getting material out to them (and not drowning them in repeat emails!) requires careful planning.

## Stall

In August, we ran a stall at the Brunswick Festival launching our 'Postcards for Peter' campaign. We helped people write postcards and sign for a petition for Peter Kyle, MP for Hove, requesting his support for a fairer electoral system. The day was a great success. People queued to sign up and very few of those approached demurred. Indeed we thought it went so well that we did it again, in perhaps less balmy surrounds, on an autumnal day in November, in George St, in Hove. Passers-by were still enthusiastic and we took our total tally to 180 "Postcards for Peter". When Peter talked to us in Brunswick Square, he laughed that *"My brother is a postman so he might even be delivering the cards! I'll look forward to getting them soon."* He did get them soon but we didn't need a postman to deliver them, taking them to his office ourselves and getting some nice snaps of him receiving them.

Postcards for Peter: Our stall at the Brunswick Festival



Delivering the cards to Peter (i)



Delivering the cards to Peter (ii)

## Looking Forward: Dates for the Diary

For at least the first part of next year, we are intending that our Progressive Politics Coffee Mornings should have a theme and this will be 'The Good Society, what is it and how do we create one?' We will explore the topics of Equality, Sustainability and Democracy.

**Saturday 13 January:** [Cornerstone Community Centre](#), 10.30 am. This will be on democracy with Nick Cardham and AN Other (maybe Frances Foley from Compass HQ or Emily Robinson, University of Sussex). Nick is the CEO of Community Organisers and Director of the European Community Organisers Network. He has spent the last 12 years working in some of the most economically disadvantaged communities in England and has also worked in Europe sharing these experiences. Nick has worked as an advisor to various government departments and national community sector bodies on citizen participation and community organising. He also serves on a number of committees in an advisory capacity supporting the development of community policy and programmes.



**Saturday 16 March:** Matt Scott (CEO, Thames Life Community Development Trust) and Stephen Hill (expert on Community Land Trusts and community initiatives) talking about the housing crises and ways forward based on Community Ownership, Community Organising and Local Democracy.

**Saturday 11 May: The Economics of the good society.** Exciting speakers have been approached!

### Compass at work for a Progressive Sussex

We want to help launch more Compass groups in Sussex. We want to work together with them to demolish the so-called [Sussex Blue Wall](#): the three Sussex constituencies that already have 'progressive majorities' but a Tory MP; and the three further constituencies in which a small swing could deliver a non-Tory majority. This year a new group got up and running in Lewes and had 70 people turn out for their inaugural event (see pic below). It was a terrific night and we want to see more such groups.

Since last February Compass membership in Sussex has increased by over fifty percent. This is tremendous giving the opportunity for new members to form their own local groups. One has just started up in the Horsham/Crawley area and we will be assisting them in March with street stalls in Crawley.

**Saturday 13 July:** Daniel Chandler, researcher at the LSE and author of the excellent new book *Free and Equal: What Would a Fair Society Look Like?* talking about the case for a new progressive liberalism grounded in the ideas of the philosopher John Rawls. He has already done a Compass 'It's Bloody Complicated' online conversation and it is stimulating stuff.

Some time after all that we are also delighted to announce that Caroline Lucas, MP for Brighton Pavilion, will join us to talk about her experience as the only Green MP (and many other things). Date also still to be confirmed.

### **Become a Compass Member and/or join the Steering Group**

In March 2023, out of a Brighton and Hove Compass mailing list of 714, fifty were paid up members, some of whom braved a howling gale for a drinks and nibbles get-together on the 23 March.

Our paid-up membership has now risen to 77, or about 10% of our mailing list. In the coming year, we aim to increase that proportion and especially urge our regular supporters to join national Compass. [Membership contributions](#) fund publications, campaigns and alliances for a good society. Membership also allows you to shape our local Compass strategy in Brighton and Hove and to work with other Compass members across Sussex.

We have a small Steering Group here which organises events and develops campaigning tactics for the months ahead. Currently there are five of us: Colin Miller, Rosalind Eyben, Janet Hewson, Chris Smith and James Joughin. We are always looking for new people to join the SG and to bring new ideas. If you are interested, email us at [brightonhove@compassonline.org.uk](mailto:brightonhove@compassonline.org.uk)

## **Final thoughts for 2023**

As we sign off another year, an election is coming, possibly faster than we think. Labour is ahead in the polls but the party needs to gain 125 seats just to get a majority of one. As ever, the challenge is that the progressive, or anti-Tory, vote can easily split. It's possible this could work to the advantage of those with more ambitious agendas if, say, a hung parliament was to force a Labour prime minister to adopt a more far-reaching position on proportional representation and addressing the climate emergency. Our campaign is seeking to deliver the swing needed to get the Tories out but we need to keep an eye on what transpires as the election timetable ticks down. Various kinds of tactical voting may still be able to deliver a more effective result. So, join the wider [Win-as-One](#) campaign and help us spread the word! And [join us, your Local Group](#).



## *Christmas Reading*

# The impending battle for the Brighton Pavilion Constituency

## The Challenge for Compass

Progressive voters in Brighton Pavilion constituency face a unique quandary in next year's General Election. Currently we return the only Green Party MP in the country but she is retiring. Different progressive traditions are already preparing for the race, so we in the B&H Compass group need to be clear about where we will give support.

## The Problem

As political commentators from all sides agree, Caroline Lucas' time in the seat has been one of genuine consequence. As well as being an excellent constituency MP, she has single-handedly been able to push several key progressive causes higher up the national agenda. Not least:

- The impending climate emergency;
- The growing threat to democracy across the world, manifest in the UK by the unfair FPTP voting system with its side-lining of millions of voters;
- The limits of political tribalism that fails to engage with the electorate, especially excluded groups and the young.



Compass's Executive Director, Neal Lawson, talking at the Lewes group's inaugural event: How can the Lewes constituency elect a progressive MP at the next election?

When Caroline goes there will be a vacuum both at the national and the local level. Voters in Brighton Pavilion will need some guidance as to how they should respond to this.

## Recent history

Caroline has been the member for Brighton Pavilion since 2010. Before that Labour held the seat for 13 years. Even though the Greens achieved well over twice the vote of Labour in 2019, Labour will fancy their chances of winning the seat back. Labour have not selected a candidate as yet and appear to be waiting to see how well the Green candidate, Sian Berry, a prominent figure in the Green Party, manages to establish a local presence. It is

very possible Labour will pick a media friendly celebrity in a move to play up to what they think is Brighton's reputation as a city of young people with a party-town history.



For the moment, Labour is content to push a line about what they say are the failures of the Greens' recent time in control of the council: from closed public toilets to potholes in the roads to weeds growing through the pavements. Whether this is fair or not, Labour seems to have successfully lodged this narrative in the public consciousness. Once the election countdown starts, the campaigning could become even more brutal.

B&H Compass has supporters in both camps (and other camps) and it would not be appropriate to take sides. However, there is considerable sympathy for the Greens who will find it very hard to win constituency seats anywhere else in the country and who have made considerable investment of their limited resources building party capacity here. To lose this seat would be a catastrophe for the party, for pluralistic politics generally, and for focused action against the climate emergency in particular.

### **Brighton and Hove Compass' position**

Brighton and Hove Compass needs to demonstrate that we are taking a principled position on this issue. It is therefore suggested that, in these very particular local circumstances, we follow a long running formulation of prioritising "the best placed candidate who supports Proportional Representation". Support for PR has to be the decisive factor. At Compass, committed as we are to being a *'home for everyone who wants to be part of a much more equal, democratic and sustainable future'*, we will want to interrogate all candidates as to their position on PR. We may at some point want to try to organise hustings.

We might anticipate that, as the Labour leadership is firmly opposed to PR, whoever the party selects for this key seat, will want to toe the party line, or, at the very least, keep their head down on the subject. By contrast, we know that the Greens are strongly in favour of PR and we can expect that that they will showcase it as a key plank of their manifesto.

If this is how it remains once the General Election campaign is underway, we will also be able to demonstrate how support for the Greens, indeed the successful return of a Green candidate, will show the way to more pluralistic politics, a more adventurous progressive agenda, and genuine action on the climate emergency.



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