



## Christmas Newsletter 2024

### All change?

After fourteen increasingly gruesome years the Tory government is finally gone and Sussex and the southeast now has a set of more sympathetic MPs. The political landscape has been upended and the chequerboard of colours that makes up our region has transformed dramatically, in ways inconceivable only five years ago.

Brighton and Hove Compass is proud of the role we played in the victory. Along with our friends in the Lewes and Horsham groups we campaigned hard for the most-likely-to-win progressive candidates who supported PR, be they Labour, LibDem or Green. So a huge thank you to our friends and supporters who helped in the campaign.

Half a year has passed now and, like every other commentator in the country at this time of the year, we are starting to take stock of where we are and what we have to do next.

Clearly progressives have made a great victory and bought a reasonable pause. However, five months on, it is clear that forces on the right are growing (see Neal Lawson meeting below) and we need to understand how to consolidate our gains, build resilience and continue to lay the foundations for the good society we all seek.



June: Campaigning in Fiveways, Brighton

## Looking back: the year just gone

It's been a really busy year. We've seen lots of people coming together and making things happen. Lots of new connections. Lots of new energy. We'll present our year under some subheadings, even if this seems a little like a report!



### (i) ***Building our resilience, developing our analysis, convening spaces for our friends: our regular 'Progressive coffee mornings'***

We've been running bi-monthly coffee mornings regularly for nearly 3 years. These are open to all and we pride ourselves on providing decent coffee and excellent biscuits with informed conversation on issues of the moment. We are trying to explore and develop a broad agenda of concerns and proposals that progressive parties can share. This year we stopped to take breath in the autumn but still managed five meetings.

The January coffee morning. Colin Miller and Rosalind Eyben leading a session on democracy and community organising



January 13

#### ***Democracy and the good society.***

In Compass we argue that you can't have a good society without a good democracy. But what do we mean by that and how can we achieve it? After participants explained in one sentence what a good democracy meant for them our own Colin Miller and Rosalind Eyben led a discussion on democracy and community mobilising, drawing on both their academic and community organising backgrounds.

March 16

#### ***The Housing Crisis Revisited - Opportunities and Solutions***

Matt Scott of Thames Life Community Development Trust and Stephen Hill, specialist in community solutions to housing problems, talked to an engaged audience, full of ideas and questions.

May 12

#### ***What to do about the NHS.***

Another packed house with brilliant speakers: Louise Irvine, GP and founder member NHS Action Party, Brian Fisher, another GP and expert on community development and health and Posy Greany, a local Brighton GP.

This meeting really demonstrated the core of what Compass is about, bringing people together to share, debate and develop ideas.



June 8

*How should Compass support progressive politics in the General Election? With Lena Swedlow, Compass National Campaigns Officer.*

This was a big one for us.

We campaigned essentially for 'an election to change elections' so we felt, and still feel, we need a caucus of actively pro-PR MPs in the coming parliament. This meant that Compass wanted to endorse candidates from across the left/liberal spectrum, depending on the local situation. In Sussex, for example, we endorsed (and gave campaigning support to) the LibDems in Lewes, and Labour in Worthing West. The dilemma in Brighton Pavilion was that the two best-placed candidates to win were both from progressive parties and, as a general rule, Compass was staying out of constituencies where progressives were going head to head.



May coffee morning with Brian Fisher (centre) and Louise Irvine. Also Colin Miller and the Brighton and Hove 'Threads of Survival' quilt, part of a national project where local quilters come together to creatively express support for the NHS.

Brighton Pavilion was a unique case and we were heavily swayed by our long-term commitment to pluralism. The loss of Pavilion, the one seat then held by the Greens, would potentially mean goodbye to the only Green voice in parliament and the silencing of the 866,000 voters who voted Green in 2019. In comparison, on average it took 50,000 votes to elect a Labour MP: obviously this unfairness is central to our argument for PR.



The June coffee morning where we discussed who we should endorse as our preferred candidate for Brighton Pavilion

There were 40 people at the meeting and we received over sixty thoughtful emails, mainly in support of our suggested endorsement of the Green candidate, Sian Berry. Inevitably this caused some controversy, although not at the meeting. We then ran a couple of stalls for Sian and set up a vote swap arrangement with Lewes Compass where there is strong support for the Greens but the Lib Dems were best placed to beat the Tories. In the end, of course, they did.

Nov 17

*After the Riots* with Compass Director Neal Lawson talking about his pamphlet. Read it [here](#). 'We needed to catch our breath after the election although there was barely time to do that. *'The embers of hatred, frustration, and alienation still shimmer under the ashes. The violence has subsided for now, but it's not hard to see, given the context, how something similar, worse even, might arise again – and soon'*. Neal led us through a frank discussion of all this from a national and local perspective, asking how we can prevent future unrest. His conclusion: *'Without a comprehensive response, we risk falling into a pattern of "sticking plaster politics," where the true causes of unrest are neglected.... We need to consider the root causes of these riots, including economic disparity, cultural tensions, and political disillusionment.'*



After the riots. Compass maestro Neil Lawson addresses our November coffee morning.

(ii) ***Breaking down the blue wall: campaigning and canvassing***

During the election, Compass groups campaigned in many of the key Sussex constituencies, running events and street stalls, promoting tactical voting and leafleting on behalf of the endorsed candidates (the Lewes groups' activities even caught the attention of the national press). Campaigners also set up a Vote Heart/Vote Smart operation using an online tool to let voters swap their 'heart' vote with someone in a seat where the vote would make the most impact, say Green voters in West Worthing swapping with Labour voters in Brighton Pavilion.

And it wasn't just our hard core. We were joined on the campaigning trail by other local Compass members and supporters. We were also able to deliver packages of leaflets to supporters in both Brighton Pavilion and Worthing, so that they could leaflet their own and surrounding streets.

On the day, the Conservative Party lost nine seats across the 17 constituencies of East and West Sussex. We at Compass wouldn't want to claim **all** the credit for this but we believe that our 'Win as One' campaign and the long running efforts of the three Compass groups in Sussex, with their numerous members and affiliated supporters, had a significant impact in the marginal seats.

In April the B&H group helped out with a stall in Horsham. You might have thought Horsham was a hotbed of Blue Wall Toryism but people were eager to talk to us about the need for PR and



tactical voting. There was an air of people desperately wanting change. It seemed to work. On the day, the Lib Dems took the seat.

In June we campaigned in Brighton Pavilion for the Green candidate and then in West Worthing for the PR-supporting Labour candidate. We leafleted commuters outside the station, dropped leaflets through letter boxes on multiple streets and ran Saturday stalls. We talked to people of all persuasions, including, in Worthing, the sitting MP (see pic on p9).



June. Campaigning at our stall in Worthing

In August, still in the warm glow of the election victory, we had a great time at the Brunswick Festival where we ran a stall for both days and met many people, to talk about democracy, sustainability and equality and to talk up [Compass](#) and what we do. There was lots of interest, support and engagement

At the party conferences, Compass fringe meetings are always popular and this year, in September, the Lib Dems were meeting in Brighton. We were very pleased to attend alongside folk from the head office.

**(iii) Widening and deepening our participation: regular zoom meetings with HQ and other local groups**

Once a month Compass HQ facilitates an online meeting for all local groups. Attendees come from all over the country. At the last one, 18 local groups were represented and there was discussion of more devolution, the need for left/liberal minded types to work together to stop Reform candidates winning in local elections, on-line misinformation, and how to expand participation. These are short meetings where it's fun to see what others are thinking in other parts of the country.

Compass HQ also organises regular online events for members under the rubric [#ItsBloodyComplicated](#). Recent ones have included sessions on Fighting Fracking and Factionalism in Surrey with Paul Follows and Steve Williams; Interpreting the Election Results with Neal Lawson, John Harris and Laura Parker; Failed

**The Sitting Candidate**

Sir Peter Bottomley, exchanging some amicable banter with Compass's Worthing stall in June. "Never mind all the nonsense, vote for the best candidate for the job, and that's me," he said. Voters were not convinced.



State: Why Nothing Works and How We Fix It with Sam Freedman. All really good meetings with lots of people there.

**(iv) Governance**

Brighton and Hove Compass was very glad to expand its Steering Group this year, adding in Mialee Jose and Stephen Young, taking our total numbers to seven.

We have also made a substantive verbal and written contribution to the discussion around improved governance in the overall Compass organisation, including more participation at the AGMs. We were therefore delighted by HQ responding with a full-day in-person AGM this

November where nine B&H members participated. A very productive time we had of it. A major part of the day was spent in discussing, both in small groups and in plenary, as an input to the forthcoming new strategy, how members see Compass now and how they would like it to go forward:

We had several panel sessions with old friends of Compass talking us through different readings of where we are now: Sue Goss, Zoe Williams, Gerry Hassan, Ann Pettifor, Jon Cruddas, Clare Short, Laura Parker, Jon Lansman. And we still had time for a little bit of social lubrication at the Pilgrim pub down the road letting the Brighton contingent have time to catch the return train. It was a very convivial end to a very convivial day.



August. Gorgeous Brighton day and Chris Smith talking with two of many visitors at our stall at the Brunswick Festival.

**SUSSEX COMPASS BACKS BECCY COOPER**

We know how hard it is to put an 'X' in the box for a candidate who isn't your first choice. Under a fair electoral system, we would be able to vote with our hearts.

That's why Sussex Compass is backing Labour's Beccy Cooper in Worthing West. Beccy is the best-placed candidate to defeat the Tories AND she supports a move to a fairer voting system based on Proportional Representation.

But if your heart is with the Lib Dems or Greens, you can swap your vote using our tool - scan the QR code to send your 'true' vote to a seat where it will make the most impact.

So if you want to defeat the Tories AND support fair voting: vote Beccy Cooper on 4th July.

Vote smart in Brighton Pavilion for pluralism, proportional representation and progressive politics.

Join our campaign to change the government, and then change the country.

**BRIGHTON CAN CHANGE POLITICS.**

**ARE YOU IN?**

**BRIGHTON & HOVE COMPASS BACKS SIAN BERRY**

We know how hard it is to put an 'X' in the box for a candidate who isn't your first choice. Under a fair electoral system, we would be able to vote with our hearts.

That's why Compass Brighton & Hove is backing Sian Berry in Brighton Pavilion. She and her party are vocal supporters of Proportional Representation, where seats match votes, and every vote counts equally.

Until we get a fairer system, where all parties are represented according to their votes, we need to make sure we don't lose the UK's only Green constituency. If your heart is with the LibDems or Labour, scan the QR code and swap your vote to send your 'true' vote to a seat where it counts.

So if you want to defeat the Tories AND support fair voting: vote smart on 4th July - vote Sian Berry.

**Compass**

B&H Compass election leaflets for Worthing and Brighton Pavilion

As an input to this process, one of our steering group, Colin Miller, has been working on a paper to cover local group organisation and support; how to get more member contributions published, and; how to optimise meetings both face-to-face and on zoom.

## Looking Forward: building our resilience

We are still digesting the implications of the election and trying to take stock of the uneven performance of the new government in its first six months. We have undoubtedly seen historic changes but a deep dive into the data shows that the



touted progressive successes on the south coast is as much to do with a split of the right-wing vote as with any great enthusiasm for a change from the left, as an article in [Sussex Bylines](#) explores. Jonathan Freedland wrote last week that, [if Starmer fails](#), 'too many British voters will conclude that both the traditional parties, Labour and Conservative, have proved useless and .... what comes next will be Faragism, either hybrid or neat and undiluted'.

With this in mind, the B&H Steering Group has been working on a plan for the next two years. This is still in draft but our aim is to be a vibrant group of local members continuing to engage with the Compass vision for a more equal, democratic and sustainable future. We will do this by strengthening our understanding and selectively campaigning on national policy issues relevant to Brighton and Hove and the

wider locality. We will seek to behave with each other and with other Compass local groups in ways that pre-figure what we want a Good Society to look like. We suggest that, to do this, will depend minimally on the following:

(1) An expanded base of active supporters with a larger steering group which will continue to meet twice monthly, once face to face and once on-line.

(2) Continuation of our bi-monthly coffee mornings on policy issues of concern

(3) Campaigning on a policy issue of concern: with contact with the MPs we endorsed in the 2024 election and a minimum of two street/festival stalls in the year

(4) A timely updated media presence

(5) Influencing Compass national strategy and priorities by pushing for reform of governance structures to give membership more of a voice

(6) Continued interaction and mutual support with other local groups in the Sussex area,





(7) A plan review in January 2025 and again in January 2026.

We also have an exciting schedule of speakers lined up for next year’s coffee mornings. We start on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January with our Brighton Pavilion Green MP Sian Berry and Emma Montlake, environmental lawyer and founder of the Love Our Ouse campaign, talking broadly on the environment. The exact brief for this is still to be firmed up but we hope they will address the implications of Brighton and Hove Council’s recent [Decarbonisation Pathways Study](#), hopefully a major milestone in the town’s progress to Net Zero. Watch this space.



June: street stall in Worthing West

Subsequent events are shown in the table below, note Polly Toynbee in March. We are also talking to Laura Parker, now of Labour for a New Democracy, and Gerry Hassan, author of the brand-new (and excellent) Britain Needs Change (with multiple Compass-associated contributors), both of whom are keen to speak at an event. We just need to agree a date!

Brighton and Hove Coffee Mornings for 2025: scheduled so far		
Date	Subject	Speakers
25/01/25	The environment, Labour Govt policy and progressive thinking. So much to cover: what are the implications of Brighton and Hove Council’s recent <a href="#">Decarbonisation Pathways Study</a> ?	Sian Berry Emma Montlake
22/03/25	It’s the economy stupid, is Reeves right? Is there an alternative?	Polly Toynbee Steward Lansley
10/05/25	Social Care options and possibilities for change	Tristram Burden Brian Fisher
13/09/25	So how’s it going then? Reflecting on Labour’s first 12 months.	

## Final thoughts of a tumultuous year

The electorate is shifting far beyond lifelong party loyalties. Voters are volatile and the party system is tribal and rigid. Something has to change. Not least because you simply can’t govern with legitimacy and authority on only 34% of the vote.

We need a parliament that can debate the key issues to stop the planet burning and poverty increasing, that can disperse power to every corner of our country. To get parliament to unlock democracy we need a system where the voting is fair.

There are many proportional representation- supporting MPs already. We need to start putting some real pressure on them. And urgently. Join the wider Compass campaign and help us spread the word! And, of course, [join us, your Local Group](#).



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

At the end of 2024, Brighton and Hove Compass is congratulating itself on substantially increasing its mailing list. We are now up at over 1200, with 80 of these paid-up members of Compass nationally. We need to increase that proportion now and urge our regular supporters (and readers of these words) to join national Compass. Membership contributions fund publications, campaigns and alliances for a Good Society. Members can also shape local Compass strategy in Brighton and Hove and work with other Compass members across Sussex.

We have a small Steering Group which organises events and develops campaigning tactics. Currently there are seven of us: Colin Miller, Rosalind Eyben, Janet Hewson, Chris Smith, James Joughin, Miale Jose and Stephen Young. We are always looking for new people, to join the SG and to bring new ideas. If you are interested, don't hesitate to email us at [brightonhove@compassonline.org.uk](mailto:brightonhove@compassonline.org.uk)

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