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## **Liberal Democrats vow to continue positive engagement despite Conservative blocking tactics on Mid Sussex District Council**

**Mid Sussex Liberal Democrats have renewed their commitment to finding positive ways to improve their communities and the environment, after the Conservatives blocked every amendment at Council last night.**

At the first full Council since the May elections which returned thirteen Liberal Democrats, there were hopes that the Conservative administration would make good on its commitment to work positively for all of Mid Sussex.

However, the Conservative majority proceeded to appoint only Conservatives to represent the Council to a range of outside bodies, then voted down a series of amendments by Liberal Democrats and Greens that were designed to improve motions on the environment and the Burgess Hill Growth Area.

In particular, the Conservatives rejected:

- An amendment to declare a Climate Emergency, with an associated goal of becoming a net-zero carbon Council by 2030
- An amendment to carry out a Natural Capital Mapping that would provide a means to assess whether biodiversity conservation objectives are being met
- An amendment to provide 'fill the gap' support to businesses in Burgess Hill while town centre redevelopment takes place.

***Commenting on the Council meeting, Liberal Democrat Group Leader Alison Bennett said:***

"We are very disappointed at the attitude taken by the Conservatives at Council. We have approached this meeting in a positive spirit and were met with political game playing by the Conservatives.

"Their decision to appoint only Conservatives as representatives to outside organisations means that, for example, the Council is represented on the Adastral Hall Management Committee in Hassocks by a councillor with no connection to the village.

"Their rejection of our amendments suggests they care more about retaining total control of the Council than they do about listening to the ideas of others.

"Despite this, we are resolved to find ways to work positively with reasonable members of the Conservatives and others, to improve the lives of people in Mid Sussex and make a difference on important issues like the environment."

***Councillor Simon Hicks, who proposed the Climate Change Emergency amendment, said:***

"The Conservatives tabled three political motions largely full of self-congratulatory comments on how well they think they are doing and then cried out in horror when anyone had the audacity to dispute their complacency. They voted against adopting slightly more demanding indicators that might show progress on the take up of cycling, measuring biodiversity or reducing carbon dioxide emissions.

"My amendment built on their own proposal on climate change and asked the Council not merely to note a government-declared Climate Change Emergency, but to declare its own emergency with the goal of becoming a net-zero carbon Council by 2030 – in line with other Conservative local authorities like Kent County Council.

“The District Council needs to lead the way and set its own target for zero-carbon and to encourage and promote the adoption by businesses and residents of their own targets. We need more detailed planning guidance to require each new development to estimate baseline energy demand and carbon dioxide emissions, and to provide emission savings from energy efficiency measures and renewable energy micro-generation incorporated into the development.”

***Councillor Benedict Dempsey, who proposed the Biodiversity amendment, said:***

“Our economy and our wellbeing relies on the natural environment. Alongside the intrinsic value of wildlife, it provides essential services for us like pollinating our crops, cleaning our water, protecting us from flooding and giving us space for recreation.

“The Council is committed to delivering ‘no net loss’ of biodiversity, particularly when building new developments. But this risks being an empty gesture because it currently has no systematic way of measuring whether that objective is being achieved.

“My amendment proposed ways to begin to measure our biodiversity more effectively. I’m sorry that it was rejected at this stage, but am committed to continuing to bring these ideas to Council. These issues are too important to be treated as a party-political game.”

***Councillor Robert Eggleston (Lib Dem Burgess Hill) who proposed the Burgess Hill ‘Bridge-the-Gap’ amendment said:***

“At the District Council meeting I highlighted the difficulties that Burgess Hill’s town centre traders would face during what will be a difficult two-and-a-half-year period of change. The Liberal Democrat ‘Bridge-the-Gap’ plan would have brought a number of stakeholders together, including Mid Sussex District Council, to create a package of practical and sensible measures to support Burgess Hill’s town centre economy. It is disappointing that the Mid Sussex Tories, including the two representing Burgess Hill, preferred to play party politics rather than back a plan to protect the livelihoods of local Burgess Hill businesses and support the vitality of the town centre.”

**ENDS**

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:**

**Alison Bennett, Liberal Democrat Group Leader, Mid Sussex District Councillor for Hurstpierpoint and Downs:**

Mobile – 07740 648956, Email – [alisonbennettLD@gmail.com](mailto:alisonbennettLD@gmail.com)

**Benedict Dempsey, Mid Sussex District Councillor for Hassocks:**

Mobile - 07880 747 575, Email – [benedictdempsey@hotmail.com](mailto:benedictdempsey@hotmail.com)

**NOTES TO EDITOR:**

The Liberal Democrat Amendments were:

**13B. Environment and Climate Change**

i) Proposed by: Simon Hicks

Council therefore declares its own 'Climate Emergency' that requires urgent action, and in particular to commit to:

- (a) Making the Council's activities net-zero carbon by 2030;
- (b) Achieving 100% clean energy across the Council's full range of functions by 2030;
- (c) Ensuring that all strategic decisions, budgets and approaches to planning policies are in line with a shift to zero carbon by 2030.
- (d) To take responsibility for reducing the carbon emissions resulting from the Council's activities, taking into account production and consumption emissions, and producing an action plan together with budget actions and a measured baseline to achieve a zero carbon target;
- (e) Work with, influence and inspire partners to help deliver this goal through all relevant strategies, plans and shared resources by promoting the involvement of the public and businesses and to encourage everyone to be involved in taking their own individual steps towards making Mid Sussex a net-zero carbon economy by 2030 and, to determine how the Council's activities might lead the way on this.

### **13B. Environment and Climate Change**

ii) Proposed by: Ben Dempsey

Expanding on the motion's commitment to delivering progress on the Sustainability Strategy, and the District Plan policies on biodiversity, Council further notes:

- That alongside a climate emergency we are experiencing a biodiversity crisis, as outlined by the Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services on 6th May 2019, with an unprecedented decline in global biodiversity and around a million species threatened with extinction;
- That the UK Government's 25 Year Environment Plan (2017) sets out the requirement to recover nature and deliver thriving plants and wildlife;
- That the Mid Sussex District Plan and Sustainability Strategy require the protection and enhancement of biodiversity and, specifically, no net loss of biodiversity in Mid Sussex.

Therefore, Full Council:

- Commits to undertaking a comprehensive Natural Capital Mapping of Mid Sussex that will identify baselines and metrics for the District's natural assets and ecosystem services;
- Commits to using the baselines and metrics identified through Natural Capital Mapping to assess the delivery of no net loss of biodiversity;
- Commits to working with key partners, such as the Sussex Local Nature Partnership and the Brighton and Lewes Downs Biosphere, to ensure biodiversity in Mid Sussex is enhanced at a landscape scale.

### **13C. Burgess Hill Growth Programme**

Proposed by: Robert Eggleston

Seconded by: Janice Henwood

Add NEW bullet point 5

- The delay in the regeneration of The Martlets Shopping Centre has already had an adverse impact on footfall in Burgess Hill's town centre and there is a further risk to town centre trade and the viability of local businesses during the two years of building work to be carried out by New River REIT.

Add NEW bullet point 9

- Agrees to:
  - work with Burgess Hill Town Council, New River REIT and other interested third parties in developing a "bridge-the-gap" programme to support Burgess Hill's town centre economy during this period of change; and
  - instructs the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth to promptly create and convene a cross party and multi-agency working group to develop and implement said "bridge-the-gap" programme."