

Transcript of Robert Eggleston's speech at the Mid Sussex Liberal Democrat Hustings on 6th April 2018

Keep two numbers in mind – **FIFTEEN AND ONE HUNDRED.**

If we hold what we have and get 15 out of every 100 Labour voters and 15 out of every 100 Tory voters to back the Liberal Democrats in Mid Sussex. We win. Put that way it doesn't seem such a huge task does it. But how?

It, inevitably, starts with Brexit.

Unless parliament blocks it, by 29th March 2019 we will have left the EU and moved into a Transition Agreement. A Transition Agreement where we cease to be a rule maker and become a rule taker. Nothing else really changes. It's more of a "Kick the Can Further Down the Road" Agreement.

By the end of 2021 we are out of the Single Market with all the consequences that flow from that. Frictionless trade in the Customs Union is gone. The government will round up Unicorns to patrol the border in Northern Ireland. It may as well be Unicorns - their plan so far to stop a hard border has been the stuff of fairy tales.

Outside the EU and with, say, a Canadian style FTA, UK GDP will be 5% lower after 15 years. We will spend that period, at least, renegotiating the 759 treaties the EU negotiated on our behalf; and have to face up to employment gaps in business, agriculture and public services.

All in the name of taking back control but at the cost of creating a divided and bitter nation. And all for what? Blue passports..... printed in France.

I want an exit from Brexit and Pro EU voters have really no-one else to back in Mid Sussex but us.

The Labour leadership does not support EU membership and on Brexit its intentions are the same as the Tories.

Make no mistake the Labour Party is a Brexit party. So if you're pro EU the Labour party is not for you.

A key reason for its position is nationalisation. At a minimum that will cost us £176bn. It is no wonder that the CBI has said that Labour's nationalisation plans are as damaging as a "no deal" Brexit. That's the ideological purity of state socialism for you.

£176bn - money that can be used more sensibly elsewhere. It would fund 2.9m new homes. There is no good economic case for nationalisation. So if you're a social democrat, and not a socialist, the Labour Party is not for you. Your best political home is with the Liberal Democrats.

But we can't rely on a landscape just constructed by others. So what does my Liberal Democrat vision for Mid Sussex look like?

It will be a place which values education and vocational skills; encourages enterprise in a modern connected economy; it will be green and manages development in a way which protects communities; and provides properly funded health and social care; and it is open, tolerant and outward looking, embracing international partnerships and obligations.

Take Education: As part of a national injection of an additional £7bn Liberal Democrats would establish fair funding for Mid Sussex schools; raise early years' pupil premium to provide additional support for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and for those with special needs; protect further education funding generally and fund post-16 education in Mid Sussex specifically; scrap mandatory Sats at key stage 1 and key stage 2 relying instead on the skill and judgement of teachers. Regain the trust of young Mid Sussex people entering university by reforming the funding of degrees and re-introducing maintenance grants for students from poorer backgrounds.

In Health and Social care: From the shortage of GPs in East Grinstead through the growing pressures of an aging population we cannot deal with the rising demands in health and social care unless we will the means. We need to build a national consensus for a dedicated Health and Care Tax which people understand and trust. That they will accept is the price to pay for a universal health care system, free at the point of use covering both physical and mental health conditions on an equal footing.

On Enterprise: Supporting the creation of a science park in Mid Sussex but recognising that it will only succeed if, as a nation, we invest more in R&D and innovation. So we'd protect the science budget in real terms and have a long term goal of doubling innovation and research spending. Reform and replace business rates which bears unfairly on local SMEs. Through the British Business Bank provide more support to young businesses. Re-invigorate the apprenticeship programme and support the knowledge, digital and creative economies (including a new arts venue in Burgess Hill). We will increase our physical capital by building houses, especially affordable and social housing. And, unlike the Tories, we'd call them homes not investments.

On the Environment: Expand renewable energy with a target of producing 60% of our national electricity needs by 2030 from green energy; I'd encourage the development of community energy projects to reduce the power of the energy oligopolies; keep the High Weald AONB frack free; and crucially work with international partners to tackle the problem of plastic pollution in the world's oceans and create initiatives to reduce one-time only plastic use in Mid Sussex.

In Our world: I am pleased that Burgess Hill and East Grinstead are Fairtrade Towns. I was part of the team that helped get Fairtrade County status for West Sussex last year. I am

delighted that Mid Sussex has a new member of the Fairtrade family because Lindfield achieved Fairtrade village status this week.

Liberal Democrats will continue to support the commitment to international aid because it allows girls in poor countries to stay in schools, stops babies dying from preventable illnesses; ensures that farmers can sell their crops at a fair price and helps to build stable communities. We can be proud of our stance on international development aid.

How do we change hearts and minds and win?

By shining the light of truth into that dark place called Brexit,

being the voice of reason and tolerance in a nation that has become more bitter and divided,

becoming the architects of progressive reform in education and healthcare;

being the hand that reduces the power of the over mighty and lifts up the defenceless and disadvantaged,

being the vehicle for change in a nation in need of change,

being the pathway to a greener and fairer land,

and being the force that releases the enterprising spirit and potential of all individuals in all nations.