



Brentwood & Chelmsford Green Party Meeting

Minutes of Meeting of Members

Date: 22nd January 2025, 19:30 hrs

Location: Hybrid Meeting at Hey Joe Record shop, Brentwood and Zoom

Chair: Julian Goode

Secretary: David Hale

Present:

In Person: Alan Dittle, Julian Goode, David Hale, John Hamilton, Edward Massey, Marc Sardinha, Meryl Spinks, Adam [Didn't get his last name]

Zoom: Ronnie Bartlett, Reza Hossain, Emma Randall, Angela Thomson, William James

Apologies for absence: Paul Jeater.

1. Speaker

Unfortunately, the scheduled speaker Rachel Eburne from Mid Suffolk Greens was not able to attend the meeting.

2. Proposed changes to Local Government Structure

Our understanding is that the structure of Local Government will be changing and Essex County Council has applied to be in the first round of devolution. The discussion concluded that there will probably be an elected Mayor overseeing a Strategic Authority for the whole of Essex, with the county then divided into three or four Unitary Authorities, each of about 500,000 people (the population of Essex is c.1.5m people in 2023). Beyond that we think there will possibly be Town and Parish councils, but the format, size and scope of those is not clear.

Marc Sardinha attended a Brentwood Borough Council meeting on 21 Jan 2025 where some of the councillors seemed to believe there would be Town Councils for Witham, Brentwood and Chelmsford, but no other details were available to the councillors.

At the time of writing, it is probable that the local elections in May will be cancelled but this hasn't been confirmed. If this is the case, it will mean elections being delayed until 2026/27 meaning that some councillors will have been in post for seven years. Angela Thomson suggested that in that case there may be several by-elections in the case of councillors stepping down as they don't wish to continue any longer, or dying in-post which happened recently in Stock.

David Hale suggested that it is difficult to discuss what to do as there are too many unknowns; all

we can really do is prepare for snap by-elections as they arise. On this point Angela thanked Edward Massey for standing in the Stock by-elections in early December.

Julian Goode mentioned that the proposed changes as understood so far will see the end of the current local council boundaries – this may affect the Green Party organisation as it tends to follow local council boundaries, whereas the other parties follow parliamentary boundaries.

Ronnie Bartlett said that the population of Essex is predominantly rural, not many live in the towns that we are based around.

Meryl Spinks said that presumably the government will give a timeline for the changes to happen and the order in which they are undertaken. Julian said that the devolution would roll out nationally over a period of years but that Essex could be in the first tranche. David said that he was aware that none of the Essex MPs supported the change or changing the date of the local elections; the local Essex conservative councillors were in favour of delaying the elections as they were fearing Reform sweeping them away.

Alan Dittle works for the Essex County Council Library Service, operating the mobile library. He is obviously very concerned about how this will affect his job and the library service overall, particularly if Essex is divided into three or four sections. When Julian asked about staff morale he said there were deep concerns, mainly because of the many unknowns. David wondered if the library service would come under the Strategic Authority. Alan said the Suffolk library service was funded by all of the authorities and used to provide a single service. The Suffolk funding model was felt to be a good system.

Emma Randall wondered if the Mayoral and councillor elections would use some form of PR. Adam said the Mayoral elections used to use a preferential vote form of PR where voters indicated their 1st and 2nd choices but that had been moved back to a first-past-the-post system. This was generally felt to be less democratic and a retrograde step. Alan suggested that there probably won't be PR at these new elections as that would encourage change at the national level and it is known that the Labour leadership team are not in favour of PR despite the Labour Party members voting in favour of PR.

Alan said that Mark Francois MP (Cons) had suggested a referendum regarding the local council changes. This was met with general amusement and that 'referendum' didn't really have a good reputation following the Brexit debacle, however Emma suggested that the introduction of Peoples Assemblies would be a useful form of democratic discussion, along with broader politics teaching in schools. It was also noted by Ronnie that Labour is proposing to reduce the voting age to 16.

3. AOB

3a. Local events

There wasn't initially any AOB so David Hale asked the new members what they would expect when they came along to this sort of meeting as it would be interesting and useful to know.

Meryl said that it was difficult to find local groups like ours and that there was a general lack of visibility in the local community. We had a discussion about how the national strategy of "Target to Win" had been very successful with four MPs and hundreds of local councillors but that this

distracted funding away from the immediate locality. In future we need to find a local candidate that we can concentrate our efforts on – this has worked in the past, with some breakthrough evident when tried.

We can endeavour to attend and create local events – Marc said we can use his venue (Hey Joe music and coffee shop) for other events and speakers, not just Green Party events but more Green and Eco events generally. He will have an alcohol licence soon which will mean we don't have to adjourn to the local pub by default at the end of a meeting! Edward suggested having a stand at the Writtle summer fete and other similar events – we have previously attended Chelmsford Pride, so this is something we should restart. Marc also said that the International Festival will be taking place in Brentwood throughout September; his shop will be a central part of that and a Green Party presence would be welcomed.

Emma said Chelmsford XR will still be undertaking their Free Palestine events, details to follow via social media.

3b. American elections

It was noted that this week saw the inauguration of the 47th President of the USA. It was generally felt that this is an appalling turn of events with dire outcomes predicted following the election of this odious human being. We decided not to discuss this any further.

4. Next Meetings

The Green Drinks will be on Wednesday 26th February at The Ale House, Chelmsford from 19:30 onwards. All friends and family welcome!

The next meeting will be on 26th March 2025 at 19:30 at the Hey Joe music + coffee shop, Brentwood and via Zoom. We thank Marc Sardinha again for generously allowing us to use his shop for our meetings.

Meeting finished at 20:50.

Julian Goode, Brentwood & Chelmsford Green Party Chair

David Hale, Brentwood & Chelmsford Green Party Secretary