

# **Memo: Green Party mass mobilisation for May 5 2016**

## CONFIDENTIAL

By Rupert Read (with contributions by many others).<sup>1</sup>

### *Introduction:*

- There are some ordinary members of the Party whose attitude post-GE2015 seems to be: ‘We’ve just had a General Election, and there won’t be another one for 5 years. Therefore, we ought now to turn our attention more to issue-based campaigning and mobilisation.’<sup>2</sup> >This attitude involves a misunderstanding: Because, if we are going to win additional seats at Westminster in 5 years time, which we must, then we need an ambitious 5-year strategy for targeting and taking those seats, starting with (some of) the seats in which we were second this time. >But, more important still, this attitude is unaware of the enormous opportunity presented by elections between now and 2020 for us to grow our strength and support. We will not get anywhere in 2020 unless we have worked hard at gaining ground and winning in the elections between now and then. >This memo concerns principally the enormous opportunity presented to the Green Party by the unique confluence of elections in May 2016. Most activists (let alone ordinary party members, or journalists; let alone ordinary citizens) have not yet realised that this has the potential to be the most significant non-general-election election-year for the Green Party ever, more significant even than 1989 or 1999. >I will now seek to explain this...

### *Background and diagnosis:*

- The Green Party is now for the first time in its history a mass political party. We need to ‘put our members to work’... We

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to all who have contributed toward the thinking in this memo, especially Chris Rose, Chris Williams, Rob Telford, Alex Dunn, Oscar Hughes and Eamonn Ward. However I take full responsibility for the contents of the memo: if there’s something you don’t like in it, please be sure to blame me, not them...

<sup>2</sup> An anecdote, courtesy of Chris Williams: “Many of our newer members have been focussed only on the General Election and don’t really know about getting members elected to Council and other non-MP posts. A new local party told me they’re going to spend the next 5 years building their party and planning for 2020. When I asked, what about the other years they had elections in, they said “What elections?”.”

need to start to reap the benefits that historically Labour and Conservatives have enjoyed from their mass memberships - in particular, very large numbers of leafletters / activists on doorsteps etc. (and on the phones and on the internet), as well as a reliable financial base to get the most out of. This is especially crucial for us given that we get less media coverage than others and given that we still have far less money than others. We need to get *ahead* in the 'ground war', and in every way to make the most of our members.

- The 2016 elections are very very important for us. In *Wales*, we are poised to break through onto the Assembly for the first time: a historic moment, which will arguably make us for the first time a truly British-wide Party. In *Scotland*, polls indicate that we could go from having two MSPs to approx 10! In *London*, we are poised to improve drastically on our vote-share in our (respectable) 3rd place in the Mayoral election last time, and to increase our number of AMs significantly, perhaps doubling them to 4, or possibly even more. In the rest of England, there are important local elections for us in a number of places with annual elections, including in parts of the West Midlands, Norwich, etc. etc. - and above all in *Bristol*<sup>3</sup> and *Sheffield*,<sup>4</sup> where massive vote-share gains this year, and 2nd-places in Parliamentary constituencies provides a huge opportunity for capitalising. Fortuitously, uniquely and crucially, *multi-seat elections in 2016* - because of all-up elections after boundary changes - in these two cities mean that (*with judicious use of 'Green Party 1st Choice' as a ballot paper descriptor*) there may even be a chance of the Green Party emerging as the largest Party on the Council in these two cities; and we should take it for granted that at minimum we are aiming to finish these elections as the main opposition party, which is a good basis for a Parliamentary bid.

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<sup>3</sup> It goes without saying that the potential for Council gains in the unique all-up elections in Bristol in 2016 is unprecedented. There is nowhere, not even Brighton, where the Green Surge has been greater.

<sup>4</sup> Sheffield have all-up elections due to boundary changes in May. We have 4 councillors in Sheffield but the local Party there expect to win 10+ and will have at least 6 target wards (18 seats). Greens could easily become the official opposition if it goes well. This can provide the platform to seriously contest Sheffield Central in 2020 – Sheffield Greens hope to win at least 9 of 15 seats there next May!

- The 2016 elections are less important for other Parties (with the exception of the SNP). Most may tacitly regard this as a 'year off', after the General Election, and they will to some extent be focussed on internal rebuilding (especially Labour). This provides us with a great opportunity: to seize the opportunity to leap ahead in these elections, in part through sheer hard work and intelligent effort and targeting. (Some Green members may have been dismayed that our large opinion-poll-gains and (smaller) vote-gains did not translate into seat-gains at the General Election. Any such members should be galvanised especially by the opportunity presented to us by the *PR* elections in Wales, Scotland and London.)
- Insofar as the other Parties are bothered by the 2016 elections, part of their energy will be directed onto the Police and Crime Commissioner elections which take place *everywhere* that day. This will helpfully prevent them from targeting as much as *we* can and *should* and *must* target.
- Furthermore: the other Parties will by May 2016 be increasingly preoccupied by the probably-then-impending European referendum. I would argue that that referendum is less important for Greens than for most of the other Parties: in particular, Ukip [on one side] and the Libdems [on the other] and the Conservatives [split, but focussed on the issue] will be heavily focussed on the referendum campaign. We should of course take some part in the referendum campaign (though it is now becoming clear that our Party too is likely to be split on the issue, and that it will not be an easy issue for us: the referendum will most probably be happening very much on Cameron's terms, which do not work well for us), and we should of course milk whatever media opportunities it provides throughout - but, if we are more focussed on moving ahead in the May 2016 elections, we could really steal a substantial march on the other parties, and make a decisive advance in our key hunting grounds: *Wales, Scotland, London, Bristol, Sheffield* (plus, *at a lower level*, Solihull, Liverpool, Leeds, Oxford, Norwich, Cambridge, S.E. Essex...).
- I would tentatively suggest therefore that we commit to 5 national targets (which I now list, with rough suggestions of areas

near them where local parties should commit to helping them):

1. Welsh Assembly - from Wales, plus the borders.
2. London Assembly - from London, plus South East, parts of East Anglia.
3. Scottish Parliament - from Scotland, plus North East, parts of the rest of the North [This will of course require unprecedented co-operation with our sister party in Scotland - a welcome outcome.]
4. Bristol - from Bristol, plus South West, parts of West Midlands.
5. Sheffield - from Sheffield, plus Yorkshire, East Midlands, Manchester.<sup>5</sup>

*Proposed course of action:*

*Suggested actions:* The Green Party should invest heavily in the 2016 elections. 2016 should be treated as a kind of equivalent of General Election year, for us. It is no ordinary year, no ordinary election, for us. *It is the first chance to turn the Green Surge into large numbers of important bums on important seats.*

We should invest heavily in it in terms of staff (incl staff time and effort), spending (we should aim to end the 2016 elections without any money in the bank: saving up should be left to the following 3 years), fundraising, inspiration, mobilisation, action...

We should set high goals in all the elections we stand to win in. And then mobilise the whole Party to achieve those goals.

We now have local parties almost everywhere in Britain. Too many of those local parties, to be frank, focussed on 'no-hoper' campaigns in their own constituency, in May this year. That needs to change. The focus in 2016 must be resolutely on where we can win. And, for the reasons explained in this memo, achieving that change in focus should in this case be relatively easy to achieve.

**Those local parties in England that do not stand to WIN Council seats next May should be mobilised to achieve breakthroughs elsewhere. The aspiration should be for every single Green Party member to become active in this campaign: > As many members as possible should be mobilised to visit and help in a target area.** In this cause, it helps (as outlined above) that

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<sup>5</sup> Plus the following additional regional targets - the regional party should direct members here *if they can't travel to a national target:*

Oxford, Norwich, Solihull, and also Liverpool, Leeds, Cambridge, S.E. Essex - apologies to anyone with realistic prospects of gains at next year's annual elections that I have omitted!

the main targets are geographically distributed: Most Greens in the northernmost parts of England should aim to visit Scotland and help there, at *least* once; other northern Greens should pitch in in Sheffield; Greens in the west of the country should aim to help in Wales; SW Greens should pile repeatedly into Bristol; pretty much everyone else should aim to go and help in London. (Those with genuinely-winnable Council elections in their own patch should naturally primarily focus there: e.g. Most East Anglians should probably come and help in Norwich at some point. But everyone should be urged to make giving some help to the 5 national targets a priority.) *Suggested action:* Local parties should 'pair up' with a target area, and help there regularly. *Suggested action:* The Welsh and Scots and London and Bristol and Sheffield Green Parties in particular need to be ready to start not only to appeal widely for help from Greens, but also to be ready to *receive* such help, both from their own members and from outside. These Parties should also make clear from an early point what kind of help they most need: do they prefer phone canvassers or in-person canvassers?; cash or visits? Etc. It cannot be stressed often enough that, besides the 3 big PR elections next year that should enable us at last to go beyond the 'waster/tactical' voting arguments, there really is a huge opportunity in Bristol and in Sheffield, our two best prospects for (Parliamentary) gains after the seat we hold in Brighton, which both happen to have, uniquely, all-up elections in May 2016 — Bristol and Sheffield need to be worked toward as a kind of national project, for the next 10 months. Alongside the national projects of breakthroughs and expansions which are uniquely feasible for us now in the PR elections in Wales, London and Scotland.

> Those who for whatever reason are relatively immobile should help from their home. The principle two ways of achieving this are: (1) Phone-canvassing from home. *Suggested action: It is essential that key targets - such as Bristol, Sheffield, plus perhaps Norwich and winnable Welsh sub-regions - make available phone canvassing opportunities, during the election campaign proper but also earlier, in fact asap.*

(2) Giving to the 2016 TTW Fighting Fund: the national party and those parties targeting to win seats in 2016 should appeal boldly and explicitly to members and expect that ALL members who do not help on the ground or on the phone give something extra financially at some point to help us win in May 2016.

*Conclusion:*

The opportunity in 2016 is palpable, and enormous. Many Greens are feeling a sense of terrible disappointment, even disillusionment, at the General Election result. Promulgating the central contents of this memo widely through the Party should help radically to change that situation, by giving people a new focus and common purpose: a set of goals that are realistic and exciting and important. The strategy sketched here will almost ensure that Friday May 6 is a happy day for us and for the country. A strong set of election-outcomes for us - and the benefits in terms of increased staff, membership, media-attention, money etc. that likely victory in May 2016 will bring - will more than repay the effort and discipline that will be required to determinedly Target To Win in this special set of elections that we have this coming year... In this sense, to put maximal resource into the election campaign over the next 10 months is among other things a sound *investment*.

*In sum:*

>There can be substantial, unexpected, historic electoral progress for the Green Party next year, if the party is focussed. Such focus can of course motivate and excite members if communicated carefully and determinedly. This will require national leadership to "big up" the prospects of vital major Council gains and of historic Assembly and Scottish Parliament gains. The key thing is communicating clearly and repeatedly to all members the kind of ideas that are present in this document, so that they understand their essential role in making it happen... To mass-mobilise the Party for May 5 2016... But of course, what that actually means is: the mass-mobilisation has to begin NOW. This summer and autumn.

>The Green Party is the electorally-focussed wing of the broader green / global justice / social justice etc. movement. We have a responsibility to advance electorally, and politically, so that changes can be made and so that agendas themselves will change, in the corridors of power. 2016 is in practice a much bigger opportunity to make this happen than 2015 was. Let's not blow it - let's *seize the day*...

[*N.B.* For maximal likelihood of this strategy succeeding, we should publicise the thoughts herein maximally within the party, but *minimally* outside the party, except to supporters and potentially-interested media...]

p.s. As noted earlier, Police Commissioner elections will also be occurring on 5 May. This should be a positive in that, while Greens will be in contention in very few places if any to win (though there may be scope for profitable co-operation with Independent candidates), and while there will probably thus be little to be gained in most places in England from Greens working in their local areas, the fact of there *being* an election will at least be unavoidable to all Green Party members. **The task then is: to get those members to focus on applying TTW strategy, which in this case will virtually always suggest focussing efforts determinedly on where we can WIN: That is, principally, in Wales, Scotland, London, Bristol, Sheffield.**

pp.s. This opportunity *will not come again*... In 2020, these elections will *coincide* with the General Election, rendering them much more difficult; and the Bristol and Sheffield situations are a one-off. The time to take this opportunity is NOW.