

# BRIGHTON PAVILION BULLETIN

## Update on the recent Parliamentary work of Caroline Lucas

Approximately every two months I produce a news bulletin with details of the work I have undertaken as an MP. This is available via my website at [www.carolinelucas.com](http://www.carolinelucas.com) or as a hard copy from my constituency office (details at the end of this bulletin). You can also sign up to have it emailed directly to you, again details at the end of the bulletin.



### Emergency Budget

As predicted this was a savage attack on public services across the board and any notion that by voting Blue you get Green was nailed by the stark absence of any serious measures to promote urgently needed environmental measures.

A VAT rise, benefits cuts for all, a public sector freeze, and swingeing cuts in most government budgets of 25% possibly rising to 40%, will all hit the poorest hardest. While the Budget contained a small number of welcome measures - restoring the link between pensions and earnings, for one - the overall balance is deeply regressive.

Of particular concern to me was the impact locally of the coalition Government's housing benefit cuts which overwhelmingly penalise the poor. In Brighton Pavilion, you have to earn more than £50,000 a year to afford to buy an average-priced house. No wonder, then, there are nearly 10,000 households on the waiting list for affordable housing in Brighton and Hove. In the city more widely 21% of homes are in the private rented sector, much higher than average, and my surgeries are full of people who are already struggling to pay rent, and to find alternatives to cramped, overcrowded and overpriced accommodation. So during the budget debate I argued that rather than penalising families and individuals and making our housing crisis worse, we need instead to begin a major programme of investment in affordable green homes and bring empty properties back into use.

What about the claim that this was going to be a green budget? The coalition's first Budget offered little more than a passing reference to the Green Investment Bank, and just a few lines about future reforms to the price of CO2 and a renewed promise on energy efficiency. This is something I have followed up with letters to the relevant Ministers about feed in tariffs, support for the Renewable Heat Incentive and written questions about a Green Investment Bank (all available via my website).

I have co-produced a report responding to the planned cuts, which argues that there are alternative ways to reduce the budget deficit. These include fairer taxation so that those who can afford to contribute more do so, strenuous efforts to tackle tax evasion (HM Revenue & Customs themselves admit that tax evasion and avoidance together come to at least £40 billion a year) and investing in the public sector to deliver a steadier economy and protect jobs. I also called on the Chancellor to use the budget to introduce some genuinely progressive measures, like a Robin Hood tax on financial transactions, which could have raised at least £3 billion/year – sadly he wasn't listening.

If you want to read the report please visit <http://www.financeforthefuture.com/TaxBriefing.pdf> or contact my office to be sent a hard copy.

## Education

Good quality local schooling is a priority for the vast majority of parents that I meet in the constituency and I have always made clear my commitment to improving the current provision. One of the first pieces of legislation to be proposed by the coalition government is the Academies Bill and I have been leading on securing amendments which would:

- Guarantee that parents, staff and the local authority are consulted about any plans to apply for academy status
- Force all academies to teach the national curriculum
- Ensure that academies comply with the Schools Admissions Code
- Require maintained schools converting to academy status to drop their selection criteria
- Remove the option for academies to be charities and to opt out of charity commission scrutiny.
- Protect the rights of all staff are upheld when schools become academies
- Give Academy sponsors only 25% voting rights on the governing body of any new school, with parents, staff and the local authority holding the remaining rights

I am opposed to the Academies Bill overall and spoke at a public meeting in Brighton in June organised by the Anti-Academies Alliance because I do not agree this is the best way to improve educational standards. However, if the bill does become law, I want to make sure it is as fair as possible and that academies face proper regulation and are fully accountable.

## Peace and Human Rights

One of my first actions as an MP was to write to the Foreign Secretary demanding an immediate independent inquiry into the Israeli army's attacks on volunteers shipping aid to Gaza. I also gave evidence at the trial of several decommissioners who dismantled weapons components which they believed would be used against the civilian population in Gaza.

I have lobbied the government about the current laws which prevent asylum seekers from working; about the lack of access to publicly funded support for asylum seekers or those with temporary leave to remain who are facing domestic or sexual violence; and taken up the issue of gender pay equality.

I also submitted an amendment to the Queen's Speech calling for a full examination of the Trident nuclear missile system, and any possible replacement to be included as part of its Strategic Defence and Security Review. I followed it up with a letter to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Defence.

## Other parliamentary work

One of the best ways for me to raise the concerns you have is via parliamentary questions and Early Day Motions, so I have been making good use of these opportunities. You can read all the tabled questions to which I have received replies [here](#) and also keep up to date with the EDMs I have tabled, sponsored and signed [here](#). Ones that may be of particular interest are an Early Day Motion on widening football participation in Sussex and one about a criminal investigation into BP and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Questions have covered a Green investment bank, the protection of funding for rape crisis provision, alternatives to animal testing and support for those living with HIV and Aids.

As well as asking questions in the House of Commons chamber I have been writing to Ministers about a number of issues that constituents have raised with me. These include

better support for young people with autism, a ban on point of sale advertising of tobacco, opposing plans to reduce the BBC licence fee and the regulation of letting agencies.

I have also been meeting with Ministers to take forward specific concerns including changes to visa rules which will increase the English language entry requirement even for students coming to language schools in Brighton to learn English. And following the closure of the Refugee and Migrant Justice network of centres I joined other MPs to press the Minister for urgent changes to the way Justice Department funds are administered.

### All Party Groups

These are cross party groups operating within Parliament and influencing policy debate. There are a huge number and I have tried to join those that cover issues I know are important to constituents. I am the Co Chair of a new group on Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency and hope to use that role to press for measures that will cut everyday fuel bills and make our homes warmer and greener.

I am also a Vice Chair of the group on animal welfare so will be following up on the many hundreds of letters I receive each month on issues like the use of wild animals in circuses, beak trimming of egg laying hens, and hunting.

I have joined the groups on planning and housing, and sustainable housing too as a way of leading on issues related to new house building and the quality of existing provision. And I am a Vice Chair of the Public and Commercial Services group, parliamentary CND and the group on Palestine.

Other groups I am involved with include peak oil, West Papua, well being, travellers, children and domestic and sexual violence.

### Constituency work

I have been holding regular weekly surgeries across the constituency and if you want to book an appointment at a forthcoming surgery please call Liz Collis on 01273 201130. She and Romin Sutherland are the new staff in my constituency office and are able to help with most local enquiries.

I enjoyed meeting with a range of groups at the Community Base open day and organised a meeting between frontline service providers and the Minister for Civil Society to explore ways the government can better support the sector. I have also been to see some of the key providers of public services in our city including the housing department at the council, the youth offending team and the Sussex police.

I spoke at an Anti Academies Alliance meeting about plans to turn Portslade Community Schools into an Academy and also met parents at Brighton and Hove Montessori schools to hear about their plans to start a new primary school. The children of Balfour Road Infants and Junior School made me feel very welcome as part of their work on sustainability. And at Varndean students asked me about my new job and what I hoped to achieve as an MP.

During Carers Week I visited one carer in her home to learn about some of the challenges she faces and during June and July I was asked to hand out awards to some of the city's most outstanding adult education learners, both at the UK Online Centre at Brighton Junction and to students from the Friends Centre.

I have attended a number of community meetings and events including a benefit gig for the students and staff at Sussex University campaigning against funding cuts, a meeting of

Lloyds TSB shareholders unfairly affected by the takeover of HBOS and with Hanover and Elm Park residents concerned about parking restrictions.

On August 25<sup>th</sup> I will be holding a surgery and a more informal street meet - a chance for you to chat to me about the issues that are important to you. Please call the constituency office, details below, for more details.

### Media Coverage

As the first Green MP my maiden speech was covered by the Independent on its front page. I spoke about why Brighton Pavilion is so special and about some of the key challenges faced by people living in the city. You can read and watch what I said [here](#). I have also been on BBC Question Time and Radio 4's Any Questions, which was recorded at Brighton University. The Argus has covered my work on housing benefit and the campaign to stop a new Tesco opening on Lewes Road, amongst other things.

### Contacting me

If you are a local resident and want help with case work or to find out more about my activities locally please contact me at the office of Caroline Lucas MP, Brighton Media Centre 15-17 Middle Street, Brighton BN1 1AL. Tel: 01273 201 130. Email: [caroline.lucas@brightonandhovegreenparty.org.uk](mailto:caroline.lucas@brightonandhovegreenparty.org.uk)

If you want to know about my parliamentary work please get in touch at the House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. Tel: 020 7219 7025. Email: [caroline.lucas.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:caroline.lucas.mp@parliament.uk)

If you want to receive this bulletin automatically by email please send a message to [caroline.lucas.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:caroline.lucas.mp@parliament.uk) putting 'email bulletin' as the subject. Your details will not be passed on to any third party and will only be used to send you news bulletins every two months and the occasional additional update.

### Some of Caroline's recent parliamentary interventions

27<sup>th</sup> May 2010

My right hon. Friend says that the challenge of climate change is so great that we need nuclear power as well as renewables and energy efficiency, but given that we have to reduce our emissions in the next eight to 10 years if we listen to the scientists, we need to consider what is the most cost-effective and the fastest way to do that. Is nuclear power not a massive distraction in that debate? Even if we doubled the amount of nuclear power, we would cut our emissions by only 8%. Putting money into renewables and efficiency is far more effective.

2<sup>nd</sup> June 2010

The [Foreign Secretary](#) will know that the terrible siege of Gaza has been ongoing now for three years, with huge suffering caused to people, but given that the condemnations and criticisms of Israel never seem to change the Israeli authorities' actions, what further action does he propose to take? In the EU association agreement with Israel, for example, there is a [clause](#) that provides for its suspension in the light of human rights abuses on either side. Will not his refusal to consider suspending that EU association agreement give the message that we are not serious about taking action with Israel, and that we are not serious about our EU agreements either?

15<sup>th</sup> June

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his election as the Chair of the [Political and Constitutional Reform Committee](#). Hearing him speak makes me think that he is well chosen. He is giving voice to incredibly welcome ideas. As he says, it is an exciting time to be elected to this Parliament—there is a wind of change, and a real step forward in, for example, the election of Chairs and members of [Select Committees](#). I welcome the amendments that would increase the House's transparency and democracy—that is incredibly important—but hope that we can go further. I take comfort from his comments that we are at the beginning, not the end of a process. I would like us to learn from other legislatures, too. That might be a radical suggestion, but there are many legislatures that do an interesting job from which we could learn. I therefore warmly commend that the hon. Gentleman consider other things, too.

17<sup>th</sup> June 2010

Is the right hon. Lady aware of testimony from [British Airways](#) staff that British Airways has run commercially unviable flights in periods of industrial action, with low to zero numbers of passengers, to give the impression that it is unaffected by industrial action? Will you condemn any carrier for such environmentally unsustainable behaviour and investigate any report from [BA](#) staff?

23<sup>rd</sup> June 2010

Thank you for calling me to speak, Mr [Deputy Speaker](#), and it is good to see you in your new position.

The Government's mantra is that this Budget is both unavoidable and fair, yet more and more evidence demonstrates that exactly the opposite is true. In reality, this Budget is neither unavoidable nor fair: instead, it is a massively failed opportunity to shift the economy into the greener, fairer direction that we need.

Devastating public spending cuts of the kind announced yesterday are not unavoidable. They are not some kind of economic inevitability, but an ideological choice. The reality is that there has been no public debate about the choice between tackling the deficit through cuts or through progressive and radical tax reform. Quite simply, that case has not been put. That is hugely significant, because the fact that these cuts will have an enormous impact on generations to come means there needs to be a national consensus that they are the right way forward. There is not that national consensus; there is a growing sense of anger and disbelief about the scale of the cuts proposed, as well as a growing sense that the Government have been economical with the truth.

Let us be clear: we are not in the same position as Greece. Our cumulative national debt is not large by international standards. The structure of our debt is very long term—about 14 years. Much of this year's debt will be sold to British-domiciled individuals and companies, so the international sovereign debt crisis has much less impact on us. Those are the truths of the situation.

30<sup>th</sup> June 2010

Homecoming parades for our very brave soldiers in Afghanistan are incredibly important, but so is an exit strategy from Afghanistan. Given the growing agreement that there is no military solution to the crisis there and that the head of [the Army](#) himself has said that we should start talking to the Taliban soon, would the [Prime Minister](#) not agree that we should start talking now, so that we can save more lives on all sides and bring our troops home?

1<sup>st</sup> July 2010

According to a recent Conservative party report, "Rebuilding Security", the party advocates "policies designed for hunting" new [UK](#) oil reserves as well as offering "the right incentives to explore for and extract the remaining reserves of oil and gas" Will the [Minister](#) agree that a moratorium on all new deep-sea offshore drilling is essential, at least until a full investigation into the spill in the gulf of Mexico has been completed?

13<sup>th</sup> July 2010

The Government's housing benefit proposals demonstrate beyond doubt that they are intent on pursuing plans that overwhelmingly penalise the poor-forget any nice words about our being in this together. As many housing charities predict, the proposals will make thousands of people homeless, as cuts to housing benefit combine with increased repossessions and higher unemployment. It is an absolute scandal that that should happen in one of the richest countries in the world in the 21st century-what a damning judgment on what was supposed to be a new politics.

I am deeply concerned about the impact in my [constituency](#). We have heard a lot about London, and understandably so, but I reiterate that many areas, particularly beyond London's periphery, are also suffering a huge amount. In Brighton, Pavilion, for example, someone would have to earn more than £50,000 a year to buy an average-priced house. No wonder that nearly 10,000 households are on the waiting list for affordable housing in the [Brighton and Hove](#) area. At current rates, that list will take more than eight years to clear.

The increase in housing benefit [bills](#) over recent years is not, as the Government would have us believe, the result of some epidemic of scroungers, but, as others have said, of the considerable growth in the number of people who are being forced into the private rented sector, where rents are almost double those in social housing. Again in my own [constituency](#), the private rented sector makes up about 21% of the housing sector, which is much higher than average. My surgeries are full of people who are already struggling to pay rent and to find alternatives to cramped, overcrowded and overpriced accommodation, and the Government's plans can only make that worse.

If we are to reduce the housing benefit bill in the long term, we should be building more affordable housing, which should, of course, be green, decent and fuel-efficient housing. We need a reduction in [VAT](#) on repairs to encourage people to put older properties to better use and we need to support people in bringing empty properties into use. We also need to support housing co-ops and other forms of affordable housing.....

....Does the hon. Gentleman agree that those on the lowest incomes pay most in income tax, as a percentage of their income, rather than those on higher incomes? The idea that these measures are somehow unfair to taxpayers is completely misguided.

20<sup>th</sup> July 2010

Following the revelations at the weekend that some quite shocking restraint methods are authorised in the "Physical Control in Care" manual for use by staff in secure training centres for children, will the [Secretary of State](#) introduce an explicit ban on corporal punishment in secure training centres and other youth offender institutions? Will he establish a public inquiry, chaired by a member of the judiciary, to establish the compatibility of practices in secure training centres with article 3 of the European convention on human rights?

21<sup>st</sup> July 2010

I am the author of four amendments in this group, and their purpose is to try to make it mandatory for the new academies to comply with the schools admission code. Concerns

have been expressed in this debate that increasing the number of academies will have major implications for admissions planning, and, as I said, the amendments seek to ensure that there is co-ordination and that it is mandatory for academies to comply with the code.

If the Government are serious that the proposals will not open up the back door to selection, as many of us fear-that promise was made in the [other place](#)-why not state very clearly in the Bill that academies should comply with the schools admission code, instead of only stating that academies will have to comply with the codes under their funding arrangements? Although required under those arrangements to meet the code, the levers to ensure that that happens still rest entirely with the [Secretary of State](#). So all concerns about fairness keep being met with the reassurance that it is in the funding agreement, but that is not good enough. Parents must know, through a proper consultation process prior to the setting up of an academy, what the admissions arrangements for the school will be and how their chances of getting into the local schools will be affected. Furthermore, there must be mechanisms to ensure that funding agreements can be changed to ensure that academies follow any changes required in any future code on admissions.

Essentially, voluntary-aided schools, foundation schools, trust schools and academies all operate as admission authorities, able to set their own admission criteria. Research over a number of years has shown that where schools set their own criteria, there is more social segregation. In particular, the fact that grammar schools will be allowed to become academies is a serious concern. Selective academies will be able to expand in a way that grammar schools currently are not allowed to. That expansion will also take place after limited consultation with the local community. I would therefore like the [Minister](#) to reassure the Committee that all new academies, including former grammar schools, will be required to participate in local admissions co-ordination schemes.

Under the 2009 code, the schools adjudicators, as the independent enforcers of fair access to schools, also have a wider remit to consider any admissions arrangements that come to their attention, in addition to any complaints received through an objection. Can the [Minister](#) tell the Committee whether the schools adjudicators will be reporting annually to the [Secretary of State](#) on the admissions of academies as well? We could debate at length the ability of an admission forum to ensure fairness, but will the [Minister](#) assure the Committee that academies will be represented on admissions forums? Currently, regulations allow for the administration of all admissions-in other words, dealing with the key administrative decisions on whether an applicant meets the admissions criteria, even if they are set by the school-to be carried out by the local authority. Is the option to allow the local authority to administer admissions still open to all schools, including academies? Finally, will the Government encourage a role for local authorities in administering admissions in that way?

[Article that Caroline wrote for the Guardian's Comment is Free website](#)

## Europe's new GM laws offer hope – but we must remain vigilant

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○ **Caroline Lucas**  
○ [guardian.co.uk](http://guardian.co.uk), Wednesday 14 July 2010 09.06 BST

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Devolving GM policy to member states away from centralised European control are steps in the right direction - but we need objective science, transparency and tough new laws

Since 2000 almost all of the 54 GM crop trials attempted in Britain have been vandalised to some extent.

GM food remains a hugely contentious issue. Despite more than 12 years of public resistance to GM, knowledge of its drawbacks – from the rampant growth of herbicide-resistant "superweeds," to the loss of insects vital to the food chain – and unknown long-term risks to humans, the debate keeps returning.

Yesterday, the European commission (EC) approved changes to how GM food and organisms are regulated. The EC proposals aim to keep the current authorisation system for GM at EU-level, but would give member states the right to ban GM cultivation at a national level. This is something that the Greens/European Free Alliance group in the European parliament has campaigned in favour of for a long while, as it brings greater democratic control of GM cultivation. Once countries can decide for themselves whether or not to grow GM, it will be much easier for GM critics to make national politicians directly accountable for those decisions.

The changes would also require that any deliberate release of GM organisms into the environment would have to be adopted in co-decision between member states and the commission. This is the normal legislative procedure in Europe, and it would be in contrast to the commission being able to make decisions purely through regulations.

The flip side is that in countries with weak or non-existent legislation on GM, such as the Czech Republic, Spain and the Netherlands, seed and feed that is contaminated with GM will be able to spread around those countries more easily. Farmers that want to remain organic or farm conventionally, will find it harder to do so. It may also present a green-light to the rest of the world, including the US, and South America, to loosen GM regulation in their own jurisdictions. The explicit intent of the commission to bypass the "widespread opposition to the authorisation of [genetically modified organisms] for cultivation both at member states and citizen's level." In its "roadmap" for the legislation, and also in public, the EC wants to achieve quicker authorisations of GM trials, in exchange for member states being allowed to ban specific GM varieties afterwards.

Some aspects of the commission's proposals are still not clear. Would the UK be permitted to declare itself GMO-free? Will member states be able to reject GM that is authorised at the commission level, and not justify it to the EC?

Currently, we have no GM crops commercially grown in the UK. However, Britain has consistently lobbied in favour of lifting GM bans, despite the safety concerns raised by other member states. It tried to end the EU moratorium on growing GM; it was the only EU state to oppose a plan to label food containing minute traces of GM material, and last year it battled to prevent Germany banning a Monsanto maize crop.

We need a government that has a zero-tolerance for GM contamination, as well for unauthorised GMOs. One of the coalition government's first acts, however, was to approve a trial of GM potatoes in Norfolk. Now that the UK will have more control over GM, we need to use the precautionary principle in our assessment of the potential risks posted by GM crops.

To do so, we need a series of measures:

- Access to information currently being kept secret by biotechnology companies;
- Independent scientific research on GM organisms;
- Pesticide-producing GM crops should be treated in the same way as chemical pesticides;
- Strict liability needs to be enforced, so that GM polluters pay for any damage; and,
- Any food produced from GMOs (animals fed with GM-feed; ingredients with GM content) must be clearly labelled (the Co-Op is already doing this).

Opposition to GM crops is hardening in many European governments. Germany banned all GM crops last year, and Austria, France, Greece, Hungary and others invoked a "safeguard clause" in EU legislation allowing them to ban them. The UK needs to join this growing trend.