

Report from Labour Party Conference 2019

Hexham Constituency sent their full delegation of four to Brighton for conference this year. The delegates were Joseph White, Brian Singer, Penny Grennan and Holly Waddell. Several other members self-funded to go as visitors and to attend the World Transformed, so was definitely a strong Hexham presence on the south coast! The tone of conference was clearly geared towards an impending general election, aiming to create unity and uplift activists ready for the upcoming campaign.



Our delegates, Brian, Holly, Penny and Joseph waiting for the Leaders Speech.

Green New Deal

Hexham CLP submitted a motion to conference on the Green New Deal. It was selected for debate so Holly and Brian were lucky to attend the compositing meeting, which was the longest in Labour Party history, at just shy of 12 hours long! This was spread over two evenings, and they did not attend all of it. One issue of contention was stating a target of net zero carbon emissions by 2030. Some affiliate delegates argued that using a date of 2030 was too ambitious, and they had concerns over the job losses that may be caused by being bound to this target. Many CLP delegates however, wanted the date of 2030 for zero carbon emissions as this would put Labour in a radical position with a clear commitment to tackle climate change. The motion Hexham submitted had this date in, so we were clear we must as delegates commit to supporting this position. Two composite motions were put to conference. One entitled 'Labour's Socialist Green New Deal' containing the phrase 'working towards' a date of 2030 for net zero carbon emissions. The second motion was simply named 'Green New Deal' and stated that Labour would stick to IPCC recommendations (currently 2050). Both motions agreed to a maximum global average temperature rise of 1.5°C and promised new green jobs for workers in the energy sector. We supported the "Socialist Green New Deal" Motion, as this had the key promises from the motion we had submitted. Both motions passed.

Brexit

Two composite motions on Brexit were put to conference. The first one outlined the position that after a general election, a Labour Government will negotiate a new Brexit deal which will be put to the public in a referendum with remain on the Ballot paper. The alternative motion was to ask the Labour Party to support remain. We felt that the first motion was the stronger as it has meant that it respected the view of more of the electorate and that supporting remain may make campaigning in areas of the constituency difficult. It also seemed that the first motion would make it less likely that we would end up with May's deal or worse, which would be devastating for worker's rights and possibly for the peace process in Northern Ireland. The first motion was passed by conference and the second fell.

Other Key Policy Announcements

- A commitment to integrate all private schools into the state sector, including withdrawal of charitable status and tax privileges
- Fund all rising costs in the NHS, end privatisation and outsourcing in the NHS, Fund through general taxation and ensure that the NHS remains free at the point of use.
- Within its first term the Labour Party should provide a universal system of social care and support
- To restore the resource to public funds for migrant women who have experienced gendered violence. End the detention of asylum seeking women and all migrant women who are pregnant or who have been victims of gendered violence.



Holly and Anya Cook with Dawn Butler MP who had just announced a policy on the menopause.

- To oppose any proposed solutions for Palestinians that are not based on international Law and UN resolutions recognising their rights to self determination and to return to their homes. To adhere to an ethical policy on all UK trade with Israel, including the stopping of the sale of arms that are used in violation with Human rights. Apply international law on the settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories.
- Employment rights: including implementing effective structures for collective bargaining. Lower the threshold for statutory union recognition ballots to 2% or workforce or 500 members. Create legislation giving trade unions unrestricted access to the workplace.
- Royal mail and Post office to be reunited under public ownership with a democratic model of governance and maximum pay ratio of 20/1. Safeguard the Royal mail as the peoples post.
- Yemen Stop arms sales to Saudi Arabia if the arms are to be used in Yemen. Endorse the UN sponsored ceasefire.
- Scrap UC and redesign benefits in consultation with Trade unions , women's groups and users etc.
- Greater rights for women at work including representation of women in negotiations and new proposals for menstrual and menopausal needs at work.
- Corporate governance supporting 2017 manifesto on workers rights and a change in business culture - against asset stripping .
- High Streets Reform of business rates system, Review of leases and rents reform of redundancy law. And other issues
- Reverse local authority cuts.
- Homelessness Some radical reforms re housebuilding proposed , 8000 homes for people with a history of rough sleeping . £100M for Local Authorities to help the homeless in cold weather. Invest more than any previous government on social housing. Support veterans in the community. Repeal of the vagrancy act. Adoption

of a homeless bill of rights.

- Housing: long list but includes Housing should be at heart of campaign for the next GE. 155,000 homes a year . £10 billion for housing grant ring-fenced for social housing. Fund retrofitting of sprinklers and replacements for flammable cladding. Land purchasing powers, Energy efficiency standards in new homes – zero carbon homes. Removal of restrictions on building of Council houses. Abolish the bedroom tax.

From a Youth Delegate's Perspective

I was lucky enough to attend conference as youth delegate for Hexham CLP. Given that this was my first time as a delegate, and first time at conference, it was certainly a learning curve for me. Amongst other things, conference has resulted in our CLP making new links in the Young Labour community across the North East. This initial networking, has led to the creation of a Young Labour group containing representatives from across the region, with the aim of collaborative campaigning on Young Labour issues. Something that was also exciting about conference 2019 is the presence of young people around the conference. Both at fringe events and in the main arena, the youth presence was evident. There were a large number of young speakers who spoke to motions in the debates, which was particularly prominent during the Green New Deal debate on Tuesday. It was also very refreshing to see the youth representation on this issue before Rebecca Long-Biley's speech, where a group of young people gave speeches on climate change. It was fantastic to see that there are lots of other young people who have the motivation to go out and campaign for, and debate the issues that matter to them. Conference has reinvigorated me, educated me, and excited me. Conference 2019 on the whole was a very uplifting experience and I feel ready "to keep the red flag flying here".

Fringe Events

One of the most valuable aspects of conference is often what can happen outside of the conference hall. Several Hexham members self-funded to go as visitors and to attend The World Transformed, delegates were able to attend in breaks in conference and after. Events that members attended included Speakers such as John McDonnell, Diane Abbot, Laura Pidcock, Len McCluskey, Jamie Driscoll and more. We were able to engage in debate on a variety of topics, such as unions, farming, European economics, community wealth building and more. These opportunities will allow members to return to the constituency armed with new connections and ideas.





A few Highlights from fringe events.

This years conference was unique due to the political context that we are currently experiencing. This was demonstrated when the leaders speech had to be brought forward. This was due to the fact that while we were at conference, the supreme court ruled that the Prime Minister was unlawful in pro-rouging parliament. Therefore MPs had to return to Westminster as Parliament was recalled. Jeremy Corbyn gave an excellent leaders speech to conference, which we felt unified the room, and filled us with a sense of optimism. The re-scheduled timing of it reinforced the political turbulent time that we are currently in and that a General Election is looming. Conference is the biggest democratic policy making forum in the party, and our delegation were able to take part in shaping the policies that will make up the next Labour manifesto. We return to Hexham ready to fight in the election for a Labour Government who will implement these radical policies!