

Laurent Coffre

I am absolutely delighted to introduce myself to the residents of Alton Rural as the Green Party candidate for the upcoming County election on May 6th.

My name is Laurent Coffre. As my name suggests (and my accent if you could hear it!) I was born in France, but I am a bi-national and I have lived in the UK for the best part of the last 25 years, first in Dorset, then London and finally in Hampshire since 2016.

I work in Finance for a large company and became politically involved with Green policies back in 2018 when the withdrawal of the US from the Paris accord by D. Trump made me realise that we could never take any progress for granted, and it was up to us all to do something about it.

I joined the Green Party then and was elected Parish Councillor for Clanfield in May 2019. I am now the Convenor for the East Hampshire Green Party, covering the Alton and Petersfield areas, as well as a number of other towns and parishes in between. My job as a convenor, therefore, takes me to defend the interests of all East Hampshire residents and fight where we are most needed. It is my great honour to represent our Green vision in Alton Rural which I chose to ensure that Green policies had a chance to be on the ballot there: I am acutely aware of the controversy surrounding the proposal for an incineration centre near Alton; this alone deserves active contribution from the Green Party and it would be a tremendous boost to our fight if I could represent you at the County Council.

I am pleased to answer the questions that were sent to me, below. I am sorry we could not organise proper hustings so that we could have exchanged face to face and get to know each other better. Nonetheless, I hope this goes some way in helping you decide in a few weeks' time of where you want the future to take us.

If I may, I would also like to share with you the link to an interview I did with Petersfield Shine Radio, alongside my fellow candidate Pippa (Petersfield Butser): perhaps hearing our voices might be a good way for ACAN members to know us a bit better.

[Generation Green – Pippa Lee and Laurent Coffre | Petersfield's Shine Radio](#)

1. Describe any actions you have taken in the last 5 years that demonstrate leadership on climate change issues.

I was first elected to public office in 2019 when I became Parish Councillor for Clanfield. In the last two years I was fortunate to work with a fantastic team of councillors who clearly understand the Climate Emergency and were happy to support the introduction of several measures which I proposed in 2020:

- The Parish Council declared a Climate Emergency in June 2020, thereby accepting that all Parish's business should be managed through the prism of reducing greenhouse gasses emissions. This should, in time, be translated into

a “Green Charter” to help the Council make decisions consistent with the Climate Emergency.

- We are now in a process of conducting a Green Audit of the village (planned May 2021) which is an essential step in establishing a base line against which progress can be measured over time.
- The Council is taking steps to protect the biodiversity on the land it owns: we are establishing a wildflower meadow and introducing beehives, and we are promoting a tree planting scheme.
- Finally, all environmental activities are managed through the Council’s “Community Working Group” which I chair. This working group includes projects that complement our green initiatives through the involvement of the Community, notably the establishment of a Youth Council, which will be focused on green projects. We also intend to promote awareness of Climate Change issues through the village so that all actions we take are understood in the context of the Climate emergency.

What we have been able to do in only two years, and although the pace is still too slow, demonstrates the importance of having a “Green in the room” who can crystallise efforts and prompt our public officials to act in a coordinated manner. There is only so much that a Parish Council can do so it is of the utmost importance that such influence is felt in levels of government that actually have the power to act on such important matters as energy generation and transport, for example.

2. If elected, what actions will you take in order to ensure that HCC commits to managing its pension investments to align with the Paris target to limit temperature rise to 1.5°C?

This will depend if a majority of likeminded councillors is elected. If so, I will push for an immediate divestment from fossil fuel and request a full audit of HCC assets to understand what businesses it has invested in: fossil fuel industries are the main culprits when it comes to GHG emissions but there are others which heavily contribute to it, directly or indirectly (through deforestation for example). The mining industry comes to mind here.

If we cannot command a majority on the matter, and if elected, I will seek to build alliances and coalitions on the issue so that we can effectively lobby HCC, and raise public awareness on an unacceptable state of affairs. For too long the current administrations in HCC and EHDC have been operating without effective opposition: the East Hampshire Green Party accepts that we must move from pressure group to an active political force if we want to influence public policies; I am ready to work with whomever share our immediate priority which is to achieve net zero by 2030.

Finally, any divestments achieved through the above measures would release funds that can be invested to support green objectives, such as renewable energy. There are examples of councils in the country who have built solar farms that are now generating

a steady revenue stream. If possible, I would also support investments in companies or projects that are local in nature, rather than relying in the stock market.

3. If elected, what specifically will you do to help decarbonise transport - including aviation, rail and road?

Not all the transport network falls within the competencies of the County Council but some actions can certainly be taken.

Planning permissions on any transport network need to be reviewed in the light of the Climate Emergency. This includes the proposal of lengthening the runway at Southampton airport to accommodate new routes. It goes without saying that this would be a disaster in the current situation, at least until such time as planes run on electricity or find a way to offset the carbon emissions. My first proposal, therefore, is to review the planning permission process and ensure that the main measure against which a proposal is evaluated is the impact on Greenhouse Gases emissions.

Being tough on aviation means that we must offer clean alternatives to this type of transport. The privatisation of the rail network means that Councils may not have a direct influence on the decision making without the involvement of the government. It is especially difficult when you look at a cross country journeys such as the one from Southampton to Glasgow, for instance. Flying is direct, but taking the train is nothing short of an epic journey and terribly expensive. This is why any action on aviation must be accompanied by the development of a credible and reliable alternative. The Council, here, has a role to play in engaging with the government and escalating the concerns of its residents. We can no longer take a back seat and wait for the government to come up with a solution as and when it pleases.

But the most direct control the Council has on transport is on the road network. Here much can be done to electrify the network and promote a shift to electrical vehicles. For example:

- Criss-cross the entire Hampshire network with fast and cheap charger points. We need more than just 2 or 3 chargers per car park in the odd supermarket; we need to find a way to ensure people will always find an available charger.
- Subsidise the purchase of an electric vehicle, subsidise charging costs on public chargers, subsidise parking fees for all electric vehicles (go as far as “electric cars park for free, anywhere, any time”).
- It must be noted that the electrification of the road network must be accompanied by a renewable energy generation strategy or the electricity consumed by electric cars will only generate Greenhouse Gases somewhere else than the road.

All in all, the problem of transport must be looked into in a holistic fashion. Hampshire must put in place an ambitious plan that tackles emissions where it counts and to benefit most of the residents who, in the countryside, rely on a car.

4. If elected, what actions will you take to help and encourage businesses and individuals to adapt in order to decrease carbon emissions?

In the words of a famous prime minister: “education, education, education”.

It strikes me that over the last 40 years, despite mounting scientific evidence, the message either does not land or, if it does, is ignored by vast swathes of the population. We need to up our game and tackle the way we communicate.

Climate Change is scary, and its effects are remote for most of us. To raise awareness and change our behaviours, the alarmist message has not worked, incentives have not worked, political action has not worked. What must we do?

First of all, it is true to say that effective lobbying from large corporations, and their desire to maintain profit streams (by offloading the pollution costs to society), as well as our socio-economic paradigm based on consumerism, are both major keys to understand why a rational conversation on Climate does not get the time it deserves. In this the County has a vital role to play in promoting constant and continuous, fact-based information. Despite budgetary constraints, it seems to me that investing in such awareness campaigns is the right thing to do, to offset negative messages and ask us to have a good look at the way we live our lives.

The message must be positive. Scaring people has not worked, does not work and will not work. Period. We should present it along the line: “what have we got to lose by embracing a greener way of life? Don’t we want clean air? Don’t we want to support local business and short supply chains? Don’t we want clean and open green spaces, safe roads for our children with reduced traffic? Don’t we want clean, cheap and inexhaustible energy?” The list is endless and pretty much offers nothing but upsides, and yet I rarely see that as a case being made to our residents.

The message must be complemented by proper nudging actions and incentives. For most people, investing in solar panels or heat pumps in their home, or even insulating them properly, is prohibitively expensive. Here, I would promote the Council borrowing money to invest in such scheme: the investment would be secured on the house, not the owner, and repaid through Council Tax contributions up to an amount equal to the energy savings generated by the installation of solar panels and / or heat pump. The impact on the owner is nil (the increase in his Council Tax is offset by energy savings), and the Council enters a 25-year funding scheme which could see the whole of Hampshire fossil fuel free in a few years and, once repaid, could generate net income: the possibilities are endless if we consider that all these solar panels can be connected, and the energy not used by the houses either sold to the grid or used to subsidise various public owned properties.

Finally, we need to organise effective political action, and here I am ready to work with any individual who shares our core principle, the understanding that Climate Change is the one and only issue of our times. Green minded people are not heard; the Green Party does not get elected in numbers sufficient to impact decision making in a timely

fashion. I want to build coalitions, and to have the chance to prove to our residents that the Green Party does not work against businesses or their way of life. Our political message must carry a tangible and attractive project, not the prospect of moving back 50 years. I, for one, look with anticipation to the technological and scientific benefits a Green revolution would bring. It is this forward-looking attitude which I want to translate into a political manifesto for Hampshire: a Green New Deal which roots investment in Green technology in social justice.