

Green Party launches disability manifesto demanding empowerment for d/Deaf and disabled people

29 May 2017

***Jonathan Bartley and Ben Fletcher, first ever Deafblind parliamentary candidate, to highlight struggle against cuts**

***Disabled people entitled to basic rights and opportunities being removed by Conservative Government**

The first Deafblind person ever to stand for Parliament in the UK, Ben Fletcher, will join Green Party Co-Leader Jonathan Bartley today (Monday 29 May) at the launch of the Greens' disability manifesto (1) in Putney, south west London.

Ben, born profoundly Deaf (2) and partially sighted (3), who is standing as the Green Party candidate for Putney, Roehampton and Southfields, said:

"Disabled people are desperately under-represented in public life in Britain. At a time of deep disillusionment with politics in the UK, it is really important for the MPs elected in 2017 to reflect the diversity of the people they are meant to represent.

"There are over 11 million disabled people in Britain. That's one in six. And yet many of us are still prevented from participating fully in education, in employment, and in politics because of inflexible, outdated attitudes, needless barriers to access and a general lack of understanding about what disabled people can really achieve if they receive the support they need."

Jonathan Bartley, who co-leads the Green Party as a job share so he can support his disabled son Samuel, will attack the Government's record on supporting disabled people and present a bold alternative vision:

"This General Election is about the kind of country we want to live in. Is it the kind of country the Tories tell us we must accept, in which austerity cuts are inflicted on those least able to withstand their impact, including disabled people who already face huge barriers to basic equality?

"The Green Party refuses to accept that the UK, as the fifth largest economy, cannot do better. The Government should focus on removing the real barriers to disabled people finding work, and tackle the widespread prejudice against disabled people rather than fostering it."

The Green Party's disability manifesto highlights the daily struggle disabled people continue to face, from their battle to hold on to essential Personal Independence Payments (PIPs), the recent loss of £30 per week for people in

the Employment Support Allowance Work Group, and the scrapping of the Independent Living Allowance which enabled disabled people to live autonomous and dignified lives, to the over 40% reduction in the number of d/Deaf, disabled and older people receiving social care due to slashed budgets.

At the heart of the Greens' disability manifesto is a plan for a community-led Care & Support Service where we will train, support and resource communities to better help each other and the most vulnerable in our society, at the same time saving money by supporting wellbeing and helping communities to identify and meet their needs, alongside councils, the NHS and Government.

Ben Fletcher, 36, who lives in Southfields with his partner Lauren, works as Lead Developer for FT.com at the Financial Times. His first language is British Sign Language (BSL) (4). The Green Party is campaigning for full recognition of BSL as an official language of the UK.

He decided to stand for Parliament despite the closure of the Access to Elected Office Fund (5) by the Conservative government after the last General Election. The fund, which provided financial support to disabled candidates standing for political office, has never been reopened, despite a recommendation to do so by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in September 2015(6).

Fourteen percent of the Green Party's candidates in this election describe themselves as having a disability.

Ben said:

"I have been able to stand for Parliament thanks to the support of the Green Party, who have shown themselves to be an inclusive, diverse and modern political party. I am proud to represent a party that stands up for what really matters. If elected to Parliament by the people of Putney on 8 June, I look forward to doing the same".

Ends

For more information contact: press@greenparty.org.uk / 0203 691 9401

For a contact on the day call Mike Blakemore 07718 570675

Notes:

The launch takes place at Church Square, St Mary's Church Putney, Putney Bridge Approach, Putney SW15 2JQ at 10.30am on Monday 29 May.

1. The disability manifesto will be available at 10.30am at
<https://www.greenparty.org.uk/green-guarantee/all-manifestos-alternative-formats.html>

2. "Deaf" with a capital 'D' is often used to refer to those people who see themselves as "culturally Deaf", members of a cultural and linguistic minority, who tend to use British Sign Language to communicate and are proud of their Deaf identity. "Deaf" with a lower-case 'd' is often used to refer

to people who see their deafness as a medical condition, and who prefer to use speech rather than sign language. They do not tend to see themselves as part of a Deaf community. See:

<https://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/your-hearing/about-deafness-and-hearing-loss/deafness/describing-deafness.aspx>

3. Ben has retinitis pigmentosa (RP), the name given to a group of inherited conditions of the retina that all lead to a gradual progressive reduction in vision. See: <http://www.rpfightingblindness.org.uk/index.php?tln=aboutrp>

4. British Sign Language (BSL) was recognised by the British government as a language in its own right on 18 March 2003. BSL is a separate language from spoken English, with its own vocabulary, grammar and syntax. It is also different from other sign languages around the world (eg American Sign Language). See:

<https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmhansrd/vo030318/wmstext/30318m02.htm>

5. The Guardian, 25 Jan 2016. See:

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jan/25/government-urged-restore-fund-disabled-election-candidates>

6. Equality and Human Rights Commission response to the UN Special Rapporteur on Disabilities' inquiry into the right of disabled people to participate in political and public life, September 2015. See:

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/file/4661/download?token=PIl5W6zL>

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