

**Alan Hilliar - SHLD Supper club speech**

This evening, I'd like to talk to you about change.

Everyone seems to be talking about change these days, but they don't all mean the same thing.

When David Cameron talks about change he means he's offering the "not the Gordon Brown party" or possibly the "I know we've been nasty but now we're nice party".

When Gordon Brown talks about change he means "it's all going to be better in future, so please don't blame me for the mess we're in."

When Nick Clegg talks about change he means "Let's make a fresh start and have a party people can trust. Let's do something meaningful to help young people, the environment, freedom and justice."

I read the Tories 10 pledges yesterday, and the only one that sticks in my mind is that they will reduce the number of MPs by 10% and reduce Ministers' salaries by 5%. And a lot that will do to reduce the national debt.

Despite David Cameron's hugging a husky, there's nothing tangible there about his environmental commitments.

But the Liberal Democrats have been honest about what needs to happen to cut public debt. Cut Trident, scrap ID cards, focus tax credits on the least well off, scrap the multi-billion pound NHS patient records system.

But at the same time, we're honest about the cost of cutting class sizes and getting young people back to work.

Cameron's commitments are not for a land of opportunity, but for a land of inequality, where the wealthy pay less in tax and the poor get less in benefits.

It seems to have become unfashionable in politics to speak out for the poor. For Cameron to crow about a decline in the standards of living for the less well off seems frankly hypocritical in the light of the Tory record. Those of us with long memories will recall the era of rotting classrooms, council house decay and patients on trolleys.

New Labour has pushed inequality issues way down the agenda. It's now only the Liberal Democrats who speak out for the poor with passion.

While the Tories draw on prejudices, insularity and fear, the Liberal Democrats are driven by tolerance, justice and freedom.

But politics has become more than a question of policies. The electorate has become far more discerning, far better at understanding what lies behind the spin, more astute in assessing the underlying motivations of politicians.

You have only to compare Vince Cable talking about the economy with George Osborne or David Cameron to realise that Vince not only speaks with authority and a far greater understanding of the issues, but that he also comes across with a genuineness and openness about the issues which quite escapes the Tories.

And like all the Lib Dem fiscal commitments, our sums add up. Our commitments are always well through through, credible and tangible.

We're now in the time when the distinction between the parties is not whether cuts are going to have in public expenditure to be made to respond to the very challenging economic times in which we live, but how they will be made, and whether the ways forward make sense.

So, we've said that in the post cold war era, we no longer need a Trident style nuclear deterrent. Payments into the Child Trust Fund are nowhere near as important as putting money into achieving smaller class sizes. The NHS patient records project is costing far more than we can afford as a nation at this time.

But let me move on from generalising about politicians and come down to the question which I hope will be on your minds as we approach the hustings (23<sup>rd</sup> October) for selecting the Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Surrey Heath for the General Election next year. And that is "What is it that underpins Alan Hilliar's political views?" and with that "Am I the right person to be your PPC?"

Now given that we're selecting a candidate relatively late, given that Duncan Clark had to stand down from the role, and that the only other person who expressed an interest in the role has now withdrawn from the selection process, having been selected for another constituency, you have a relatively limited choice. You can vote for me to become your PPC, or if you decide that I'm not the right person for the role, you can vote for RON (or Re Open Nominations). I hope I can persuade you that I have the qualities you need for the role.

So, let me try to set out what I believe in, underneath the policies and the campaigning.

I believe very strongly in the need to engage or connect with people. That means going out and asking their opinions and listening to what they say, and it means engaging with them in debate.

We're long past the time when people would simply go along with the views expressed by politicians. We've educated people to challenge received wisdom, to develop their own views and to question whether a national solution is appropriate for their own locality.

And at the heart of Liberal Democracy is a belief that people can take decisions about their own lives and about their own communities.

Equally, I decline to accept that the current disillusionment with politics and politicians in general is something which we should simply accept. I've spent my time in community campaigning, working hard to persuade people that they have the power to change things, and going through that very messy, time consuming and frustrating process called consultation. And I've done so in the belief, founded on my experience, that when people are fully engaged in finding a solutions to a problem that affects them, then you will get a far better result than if politicians (however well meaning) decide that they alone are gifted with the insight that will produce the right result.

In my working life, I'm a business consultant, focusing on helping organizations through the process of change, particularly in the areas of human resources and technology. And I've used the principles of engagement to produce real change in businesses.

Everyone would I'm sure subscribe to the view that politicians should operate with honesty and integrity, and that again is one of my core beliefs. But I think there's a deeper element on integrity, and that's to respect the views that individuals hold, while still seeking to develop support for the positions that we as Liberal Democrats hold dear.

Lastly, I think that politicians in general and PPC's in particular, need to demonstrate leadership in offering a fresh vision, and an impetus for change for the community they represent. That seems to me to be one of the characteristics of a good MP.

But at the same time, you need to have a sense of service in your heart, that wants the best for your patch, and that involves building consensus with other leaders in the area, both councils and community groups.

Those however are generalizations and I'd like to take this down to the next level. I'd like to see Surrey Heath Liberal Democrats become a force for radical, left of centre change in this constituency, where we try to develop a new style of politics.

Welcoming, not avoiding debate. Engaging with people who don't agree with us, rather than sitting on the fence.

Engaging with a much boarder range of people, and particularly those who haven't got involved in discussions about what we would term "political" issues before. Having said that, we may need to find another name to describe discussion on those sorts of issues. "Politics" has become associated with mud slinging and argument, rather than the question of how best we should run our country or our community.

In the constituency party, I think we need to do more campaigning, engaging with people about the national and local issues which are affecting their lives, both informing them, debating different view points and helping them to take a more active role in the way the community and the nation is shaped.

As a constituency party, we need to use technology more effectively. We've started our first Facebook groups, and have refreshed our web site over the past few months, thanks to the e-campaigning group I've helped to form.

We need to get our members and supporters more involved in campaigning for change and in the all important supporting activities that go on behind the public face of the Liberal Democrats.

We need more contact more engagement with more people, inside and outside the party.

I've been privileged to be involved in the development of the four or five year plan for the Surrey Heath Liberal Democrats. That's still evolving, but I will want to get all our members and active supporters involved in looking at those plans and finding their role in making those plans come to life.

I can't bring change about in Surrey Heath on my own. No candidate, no matter how capable, can do so.

So, drawing to a close, I felt we needed some inspirational phrase which would encapsulate the message I'm trying to put across.

Barack Obama used the phrase "yes, we can". I don't suppose I can match that for style, but I thought I'd draw on my (now rather rusty) algebra to give you something to remember.

Change = (U + Me)<sup>2</sup>

Or to put it more prosaically, to create change takes You and Me working together.

And that's my formula for change in Surrey Heath.

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Alan Hilliar