



# **The Cameron Effect**

*The electoral threat to the Liberal Democrats  
and how to combat it*

by Mark Littlewood and  
David Preston

**LIBERAL** vision



## Introduction

The purpose of this pamphlet is to consider the size and scale of the potential electoral threat posed to the Liberal Democrats by David Cameron's Conservative Party – and to tentatively consider some means by which this threat could be mitigated or repelled.

Since the “cancelled” General Election in the autumn of 2007, the Conservatives have established commanding, indeed often enormous, national opinion poll leads. On some projections, if these figures were repeated in an actual vote, David Cameron would be elected Prime Minister with a majority that dwarfed even that of Tony Blair's in 1997 and 2001. These same projections show that the impact on the Liberal Democrats could be to reduce the party's representation in the House of Commons by a half or even two thirds.

In this pamphlet, we profile the 53 constituencies in England which either have a Liberal Democrat MP or would have had a LibDem MP if the 2005 election had been contested on the 2010 boundaries. Most of these constituencies – 41 of them – have the Conservatives as the principal challengers, very often in a close second place (in twelve LibDem constituencies, the Tories are less than 5% behind the LibDems). In three other LibDem constituencies– Camborne, Hampstead & Kilburn and Leeds North West - the Conservatives are in a very credible third place.

Even in those constituencies in which the Conservatives do not pose a direct challenge, there is always the possibility that a measurable leakage of votes from LibDem to Tory might just gift the seat to Labour.

We conclude that David Cameron's Conservatives represent a very serious threat to the Liberal Democrats' present Parliamentary Party and that a “steady as she goes” electoral strategy is not a credible option for the party's leadership.

Without a determined and concerted effort to turn the tide, a swathe of LibDem seats could turn Tory blue at the next election.

Although the Liberal Democrats might well expect to make net gains from Labour, we argue that the number of such gains would be relatively limited – unless support for the government crumbles even more substantially than it has already.

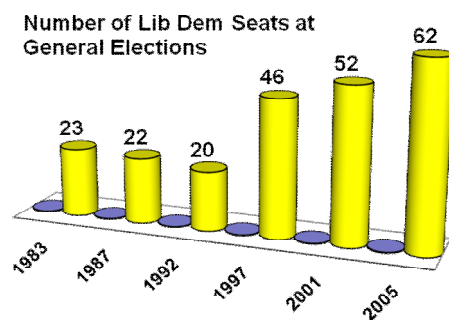
But even in a scenario in which Labour polled as little as 23% or 24% at the next election, there are unlikely to be huge tranches of Labour heartland turning LibDem

In the authors' view, the Liberal Democrats are a genuinely national party. They have a strong local government base and MPs (or serious targets) in most of Britain's great cities. However, the key electoral battleground for the party is in England - mainly south of Birmingham - in seats in which the Conservatives are the principal challengers.

## A rising Tory tide usually spells trouble for the Liberals

Recent British electoral history shows a very strong negative correlation between the performance of the Conservatives and the performance of the Liberal Democrats.

In 1970, when Edward Heath's Conservatives surprisingly defeated Harold Wilson, the Liberal Party lost half its seats and was reduced to just six MPs. Four years later, when Labour returned to power, Jeremy Thorpe led the Liberals to a post-war high securing nearly 20% of the popular vote. In the Thatcher years – and despite the high overall vote secured when in alliance with the SDP – the party was unable to bring about any meaningful Parliamentary breakthrough.



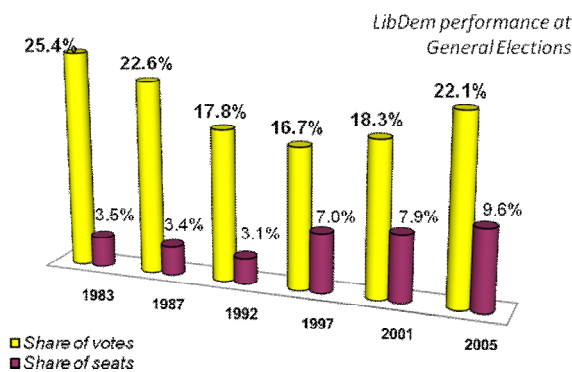
The impressive growth in LibDem parliamentary representation in the last decade or so has been achieved in the face of truly dismal Conservative electoral performances.

The obvious fear is that an upswing in Tory fortunes will bring with it a return to pre-1997 levels of Liberal representation in the House of Commons.

An analysis of the last six general elections underscores this point. In the last three elections won by the Conservatives – 1983, 1987 and 1992 – the party won an average of just 22 seats. In the last three elections won by Labour, the party has won an average of 53 seats.

**“but it is not just absolute vote share that matters but relative vote share”**

A look at the voting figures makes this reality starker still. At the last three Tory election victories, the party scored an average of 22% of the vote, but at the last three Labour victories, the party has averaged 19% of the vote.



So, the party's number of MPs has **increased dramatically** since 1992, despite popular support for the party actually having **declined** since the mid-1980s.

This is because – under Britain's byzantine electoral system – it is not just **absolute** vote share that matters but **relative** vote share.

The party failed to win many seats in the 1980s and early 1990s because inter alia – even with a historically impressive 22% of the vote – the Conservatives were securing over 42% of the vote. In round terms, for every Liberal/Alliance voter there were two Tory voters.

From 1987 onwards, the LibDem vote had **dipped a little** following the merger with the SDP, but the Tories went in to **meltdown**. So, the LibDem average of 19% in the last three elections has to be seen in the context of the average Conservative vote falling to just 31 ½ %. Instead of being in a 1:2 ratio with the Tories, the LibDems were now in a 2:3 ratio.

This meant that Conservative-held seats which were previously seen as long-shots were suddenly within the Liberal Democrats' reach.

Only when one grasps the importance of the ratio of vote shares – as opposed to absolute figures – do recent opinion polls make such daunting reading for LibDems.

The polling data suggests that the Conservative vote share is comfortably twice that of the LibDems and some polls suggest that it might be as much as three times as high. In short, the problem for the Liberal Democrats is not that their vote share is down a little since the last election, but that the Conservative vote share is up a lot.

## The statistical analysis and methodology used in this document

The centrepiece of this document is a profile of the 53 “nominal” Liberal Democrat seats in England. A “nominal” LibDem seat is one which either presently has a LibDem MP or would have had a LibDem MP elected in 2005 if the 2010 boundaries had applied.

The “new” seats, which are not presently held by the LibDems, include Chippenham, Devon West and Torridge, Guildford, York Outer and an additional seat in Cornwall. Sarah Teather's constituency of Brent East is abolished and divided into Brent Central and Hampstead and Kilburn. The former – which she will be fighting – is nominally Labour. The latter is nominally Liberal Democrat. Both seats are included in this analysis.

Each seat profile includes the “supposed” 2005 result, as posited by Electoral Calculus. This differs from the actual historical result at the last General Election (sometimes substantially) because of the impact of boundary changes.

We then superimpose onto these results a “uniform national swing” based on an average of 30 recent national opinion polls.

These thirty polls are those which have been published in national newspapers, and in which fieldwork was completed between 1<sup>st</sup> June 2008 and 4<sup>th</sup> September 2008.

The thirty polls include two from BPIX, seven from ComRes, five from ICM, three from MORI, four from Populus and nine conducted by Yougov.

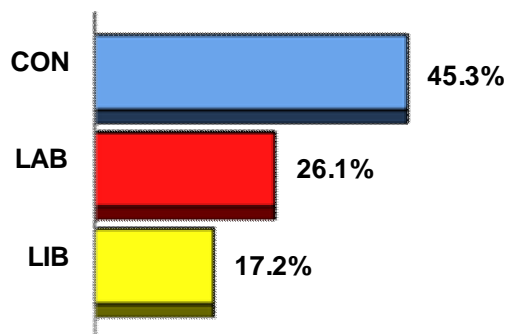
This obviously means that some polling companies have been given greater weighting than others - and there are a whole series of highly sophisticated statistical debates about the different methodological approaches deployed by each polling organisation. But a feature of these thirty opinion polls is how consistent they have been.

All thirty polls put the Conservative vote between 41% and 49%, the Labour vote between 24% and 30% and the Liberal Democrats between 14% and 21%.

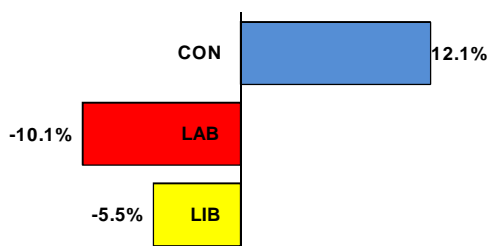
The Conservative lead over Labour has always been between 13% and 24%.

Even if you are convinced that one polling company is less reliable than another, the impact of excluding polls from one company - or giving greater weight to the research of another - would be utterly minimal when it comes to calculating the expressed voting intentions of the electorate.

The mean averages for the main parties in these thirty polls are as follows:



Compared to the results of the last General Election in Great Britain, this represents a change in vote share of Conservative +12.1%, Labour -10.1%, Liberal Democrat -5.5%.



## Uniform national swing

The uniform national swing model is the most simplistic - but by no means the least controversial - means of extrapolating changes in national vote share onto individual Parliamentary constituencies.

It assumes that changes in national vote share occur consistently in each and every seat. So, if your national vote is up by, say, 3.2% since the last election, then in a seat where you got 37.1% last time, you'd be projected to get 40.3% next time.

In practice, of course, as every seasoned Liberal Democrat campaigner will tell you, "All politics is local". The skill and effort of local campaign teams, the popularity and fame of the incumbent MP, an ability to "squeeze" the vote of the party in third place, the importance of specific local or regional issues will all have a measurable and variable impact. A "uniform national swing" is a blunt instrument in predicting what will happen in any specific constituency.

A cursory glance at some of the results from 2005 pays testament to this. In once true blue Solihull, Lorely Burt achieved a monumental 10% swing from the Conservatives.

Norman Lamb was able to increase his wafer thin majority over the Tories in North Norfolk from a paltry 500 to a titanic 10,000. In Manchester Withington, John Leech obliterated a Labour majority of 11,500 with a truly jaw-dropping swing of 17.4%. In contrast, Guildford, Newbury and Devon West all switched from the LibDems to the Tories, despite a national swing of 1.6% in the opposite direction.

In addition to these variations in local results, there may also be some grounds for assuming that incumbent Liberal Democrat MPs are better placed to resist a swing against the party than LibDem PPCs who are challengers. Their famed commitment to constituency work and their ability to make themselves into admired local champions can often secure them a substantial level of support as independent personalities.

The remarkable vote shares achieved by LibDem MPs who had originally been elected in Parliamentary by-elections, but then gone on to fight the seat in a General Election, highlights this point. Even when these MPs have failed to successfully defend their seats, they have always achieved a vote share far in

excess of that anticipated by the “uniform national swing” model.

Furthermore, it might be assumed that this incumbency effect is greater still for those MPs first elected in 2005. Having won the seat as a “**mere candidate**”, they will have had five years of conducting casework, meeting constituents and working with community groups as the **actual Member of Parliament**. If there really is such a thing as an “incumbency bounce”, this could well enable them to build a measurable personal vote considerably in excess of that they commanded of 2005.

Finally, there is one very glaring statistical problem with the uniform national swing model. If the Labour vote is down 10% since the last General Election, how should one treat constituencies in which Labour scored **less than 10%** of the vote last time?

The Labour vote might be in serious decline, but it is obvious nonsense to assume that in the seat in which they scored 9% last time, they will score -1% next time! It's also unlikely that a seat in which Labour scored 11.5% last time would see a score of just 1.5% next time – a party's vote hardens the smaller it gets, given that it becomes increasingly made up of diehard supporters.

For the purposes of this study, we have therefore assumed that the Labour vote is incapable of falling below 5% in any of the constituencies profiled. Where the opinion poll's projection of a fall in the Labour vote of 10.1% would imply a Labour vote of less than 5% in a constituency, we have therefore adjusted the Labour vote upwards.

In order to ensure that the final figures add up to 100%, we then adjust the LibDem and Tory figures down equally and accordingly. This has no impact at all on the swing between LibDem and Tory or on the percentage majority projected.

We could have used an alternative to the uniform national swing model, of course.

The most obvious alternative would have been to use “proportional swing”. Under a proportional swing model, if your vote has fallen from, say, 30% to 20%, rather than postulating this means it is falling by 10% in every seat, the assumption would be that it is falling by a **third** in every seat. This gets round the problem of projecting a party getting less than 0% of the vote in certain seats.

The impact of the proportional model can be devastating for incumbent MPs, if their party with a falling vote share. If you are an MP who scored 48% of the vote at the last election, and your party's national vote share has declined from 20% to 15%, the uniform national swing model projects that your vote also falls 5% to 43%.

But – in simple terms- a proportional model would posit that as the party nationally is losing a quarter of its vote, you will lose a quarter of your vote locally too. That would mean your vote falling from 48% to just 36%.

The difference between the 43% projected on a uniform national swing and the 36% projected on a proportional swing could well be the difference between holding your seat and losing it. If a proportional model was used here, the outlook for the LibDems would be much, much bleaker.

So, the uniform national swing model is simplistic but far from perfect. And for all reasons given above, the “uniform national swing” shown in each seat is emphatically **NOT** a prediction as to the result at the next election. It is merely superimposing the apparent prevailing national mood – as shown in recent opinion polls – on to the very specific constituency electoral data.

That said, Liberal Democrat MPs cannot be assumed to be wholly insulated from the national swing. If the Conservatives were indeed to advance by 12% of the vote at the next election, they'd need to be making these advances somewhere and it would be pretty bizarre to suggest that they would not be advancing at all in English seats held by the LibDems – especially as many of these seats have a long tradition of relatively sizeable Conservative support. Similarly, if the Liberal Democrat percentage of the vote does fall by four or five points, it would be a rum thing if none of this drop-off occurred in seats held by the party.

So, whilst the “uniform national swing” shown for each seat is **NOT** a prediction, it is a fairly good guide to the scale and nature of the task facing the Liberal Democrat candidate in that constituency.

Seats which – on the face of the 2005 result – seem relatively secure may be less so than first expected. Seats which already seem very close may require heroic efforts by the LibDem candidate and their campaign teams to resist an advancing Tory tide.



## The methodology in our comparison of local election data

In order to try and make a better judgement about the circumstances on the ground in each constituency, we have compared the local election results for the main parties in the 53 constituencies in this Parliament compared to the last.

With regard to these local election results, a raft of riders again applies. Local elections are decided by a whole series of determinants which cannot be directly extrapolated onto a Parliamentary election. There are also a plethora of tactical factors. For example, a ward which votes Labour in local elections might be solid for the Liberal Democrats in a General Election as Labour voters switch to the LibDems to “keep the Tory out” at Parliamentary level.

Comparing the performance of the main political parties in local elections can also be enormously complicated by the presence of independents or minor parties with a particular strength at local level. I have also even heard it argued that it might be in the narrow interests of a LibDem PPC for the local council to be run badly by another party, rather than well by the Liberal Democrats!

Although the local election results are presented in simple graphical and percentage terms in this pamphlet, the background numbers include thousand of pieces of data from dozens of different sources and therefore it behoves us to explain the methodology we have used. Our key guiding principle has been to do everything possible to ensure that we are comparing “like with like”. Because of this guiding principle, in some cases, this means that not all of the available electoral data has been included.

To give an example of the sort of difficulty that may arise, suppose that in 2003, the Bloggsthorne ward in the constituency of Smithstown was contested by the LibDems and the Conservatives and the result was LibDem 1250 votes, Conservative 300 votes. However, when the seat comes up for re-election in 2007, the Conservatives don't bother to put up a candidate at all – so disillusioned are they by their pitiful result in 2003 and so resigned are they to the LibDem councillor being re-elected by a thumping margin. The Liberal Democrat is therefore elected unopposed. This would mean that the 2007 numbers for Bloggsthorne would be LibDem 0 Conservative 0.

The impact on the global numbers for Smithstown as a whole would now be “unfair” on the LibDems; because the total aggregate numbers would – all things being equal – show a fall in the total LibDem vote of 1250 in comparing 2003 to 2007 and a fall in the Conservative vote of just 300. The impression would be that there had been a swing from the LibDems to the Conservatives when, in fact, all that had happened was that the Conservatives had given up entirely in a Liberal heartland ward. In such circumstances, we delete Bloggsthorne ward entirely from the record. In this instance, that has the impact of making Smithstown look a bit less Liberal and a bit more Conservative than it really is – because a strong Liberal ward is no longer being factored in to the overall numbers. However, it does mean that the comparison between 2003 and 2007 is now a fair one because it compares voting numbers from the same geographical areas of the constituency, even if not from all of the constituency. This approach ensures that our measurement of “swing” is robust.

Another key consideration is that the comparison that we are concerned with is usually that between the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives.

So if, for example, the result in Bloggsthorne in 2003 was LibDem 1250 Conservative 300 Green 200 but in 2007, the Greens didn't contest the ward and the result in 2007 was LibDem 1400 Conservatives 350, then we keep Bloggsthorne in our records on the simple grounds that there was still a “match-up” involving the LibDems and the Tories on both occasions. To start excluding seats because a minor party candidate or independent got e.g. 1.3% of the vote this time but didn't fight the seat last time, would lead to too many results being expunged. If the LibDems and the Conservatives are consistently on the ballot paper then **the results stay included**, whatever the presence – or lack of presence - of other parties.

Fourthly, in a tiny number of cases, we have included results that don't involve **both** the LibDems and the Conservatives - as long as the ballot paper remains broadly consistent. For example, if the result in Bloggsthorne in 2003 was LibDem 1250 Green 350 and in 2007 it was LibDem 1400 Green 280, then these results **stay in**. The LibDems have **consistently** contested the seat and the Conservatives have **consistently** not contested it, so we would be comparing “like with like” and feel it would be fair – in this instance – to reflect growing LibDem support in Bloggsthorne ward between 2003 and 2007, and thus in the wider Smithstown constituency picture.

We have had to take a judgement about how to treat vote shares in multi-member wards. In such wards, voters can vote for as many candidates as there are available council seats. By and large, the evidence suggests that many voters will vote for an entire “slate” of candidates from the same party. But this is certainly not universally true.

Quite commonly they vote for fewer candidates than they are entitled to – often believing they can only place one cross in one box, like in a General Election. This misconception tends to have the impact of favouring candidates whose surnames are early in the alphabet – e.g. a Liberal Democrat voter runs their pencil down the ballot paper, they stop at Biggins, one of the Liberal Democrat candidates, put an X in the box and place their paper in the ballot box. They seem to be utterly oblivious to the fact that Jones and Wallington – the two other LibDem candidates, further down the ballot paper – would both have welcomed and been entitled to their support.

The issue is further complicated by parties running just one candidate when they are entitled to run three. Most commonly, this is done by parties who have no chance of winning the seat but still seek to have a standard bearer in their name. It now becomes very difficult to judge how supporters of this no-hope party might cast their second and third votes – or indeed, whether they cast them at all.

Having considered all these problems, we have adopted a methodological approach that strikes a balance between being simple and being fair. In all cases, we take the **highest vote** for a candidate of a party to be the **actual vote** for that party.

If Bloggsthorne was a three-member ward and the result was LibDem 1230, 1120 and 1080; Conservative 925, 890 and 840; Labour 450, 440 and 390; Green 275; UKIP 240; BNP 190, then we treat the “real” result as having been LibDem 1230; Conservative 925; Labour 450; Other 275. We appreciate that this is an unsophisticated analysis with regard to “other/minor” parties, but the impact on the overall statistics is limited – and on the crucial LibDem-Conservative comparison it is very minimal indeed.

Finally, we have not been able to collect or interpret the election data for all wards in all constituencies in all elections since 2001. Sometimes, pre-2003 results are not available. Sometimes, complex changes to ward boundaries or mergers of wards make it difficult to be certain that one is making a like-for-like comparison without highly detailed local knowledge. At all times,

we have done everything practically possible to ensure that we are making fair and accurate comparisons. In the event of doubt, we have excluded certain wards or certain years from our analysis. In the case of a couple of constituencies, we do not believe we have robust enough data to make a meaningful analysis of the local elections, and these are explained in the constituency profiles.

Because we have collected, tabulated, cross-referenced and tallied literally thousands of pieces of data from dozens of different sources, we cannot rule out the possibility of one or two errors having crept in. We have poured over the statistics and tables for hours on end. We have double and triple-checked apparent anomalies. But we are only human and it is possible that we have fallen short of our ambition to be 100% accurate in 100% of cases. Because of this, we would be delighted to hear from anyone who believes any aspect of our data is inaccurate or wishes to challenge the means by which we have produced our analysis and we undertake to make any subsequent changes to this document on Liberal Vision’s website.

As with the uniform national swing projections, it is vital to underline that the local election results are **NOT** a prediction of the General Election result. But they surely provide another useful indicator. If the Liberal Democrat vote is holding up or even increasing, this might provide grounds for optimism. If The Tories are flat-lining or falling backwards, perhaps there is absolutely no “Cameron effect” in that constituency. However, if the Conservative vote has surged while the LibDem vote has dropped, this may mean the seat is at risk.

We have deliberately avoided attempting to determine whether the national opinion polls or the local election results provide a more accurate basis for predicting the outcome in a Parliamentary constituency. This is for you, the reader, to decide for yourself. We do, however, feel the need to highlight a key difference between the two measurements in order to guide the reader through the constituency profiles.

***The local election results make far, far better reading for the Liberal Democrats than the national polls.*** The Conservatives have generally performed relatively well in local elections in recent years, but their advance has been modest under Cameron in comparison with the enormous advance in the national opinion polls.

We anticipate that Liberal Democrat “optimists” will argue something like this:



*“The national opinion polls are not to be trusted for a whole range of reasons. Real votes in real battle boxes show the LibDem vote holding up quite well in most areas. When responding to opinion polls, voters think about the “national picture”, but when it comes to an actual election, the party will be able to retain or increase its 2005 vote share – at least in seats where the party is a major force and the “wasted vote” complaint against the LibDems holds less sway. In a seat such as Solihull, the voters are actually moving towards the LibDems. A task that looks hopeless for Lorely Burt if you believe the opinion polls suddenly looks much more achievable if you look at the council elections. Far from losing her seat, she would actually increase her majority to a healthy 10% if the swing at local level applies at Westminster level.”*

But a LibDem “pessimist” or Conservative “optimist” could point out:

*“Of course the Liberal Democrat vote is still reasonably high in local council elections. That’s what LibDems are especially good at. They are experts in the “ground war” – leafleting, canvassing and carrying out casework diligently. The LibDems have always enormously out-performed their national poll ratings in council elections. In the late 1980s, after the collapse of the Alliance, the LibDems were on the floor – within a margin of error of disappearing from the opinion polls. But they still retained around 20% of the vote in local elections. In council elections, a lot of people are happy to elect a hard-working Liberal councillor or a LibDem council, but many such people will desert the party when they have to decide on who should run the country. Recent council elections show the LibDems getting around 27% of the vote, but no one seriously suggests that they will get anywhere near this score at a General Election. You should reduce the LibDem local vote share by a third – at least – to get a picture of their likely General Election vote. The General Election will be decided by an “air war” and will be dominated by the question of whether the public want David Cameron or Gordon Brown to be Prime Minister. If they decisively pick the former, the LibDems will be obliterated.”*

The authors of this pamphlet suspect that the electoral truth lies somewhere between these two extreme analyses. But exactly where that midpoint lies is open to debate.

### The Tory Threat Rating

ZERO    MINOR    MEASURABLE    HIGH

## Tory threat rating

For each of the 53 constituencies, we have calculated a somewhat subjective “Tory threat rating”. We have attempted to build in considerations such as the national profile of the MP/candidate, recent performances in local elections and any known strengths or weaknesses on the part of the local Conservatives. We assume throughout that a LibDem seat is easier to defend if the incumbent MP is seeking re-election rather than being contested by a new candidate.

The “Tory threat” rating ranges from Zero through to Minor and Measurable and on to High.

**“Zero”** means just that. The chance of the seat falling to the Conservatives is, in all practical terms, zilch. Of course, this doesn’t mean that the Conservative performance is without interest or relevance – in seats such as Rochdale or Brent Central, the LibDems will need to “squeeze” the Tory vote to see off Labour. 7 of the 53 seats have a “zero” rating

A rating of **“Minor”** means a very optimistic Conservative – or very pessimistic LibDem – might just think the seat could conceivably turn Tory blue. The chances of it doing so are not infinitesimally small, but they are certainly not very great. It would require a large number of things to go in favour of the Conservatives and/or against the Liberal Democrats between now and the election for the seat to slip out of LibDem hands. 15 seats have a “minor” rating.

A rating of **“Measurable”** means the Conservative threat here needs to be taken very seriously indeed. Almost all of the LibDems seat with a “measurable” rating would fall to the Conservatives on the uniform national swing projected by the present polls – sometimes by a sizeable margin. 16 of the seats have a “measurable” rating.

A rating of **“High”** means the Liberal Democrats have their work seriously cut out to hold the seat. If the Conservatives are not winning most – or all – of these seats, they have almost certainly failed to win the General Election and have probably lost it quite badly. A very measurable swing back to the LibDems from the Tories compared to present polls and/or a truly magnificent effort locally will be needed to keep these seats in the LibDem column. Without exception, every one of these seats would fall to the Tories on a uniform national swing, often by enormous margins. 15 of the seats have a “high” rating.

## A note on Scotland and Wales

This pamphlet does not consider the electoral position of the Liberal Democrats in Scotland or Wales for three reasons. Firstly, the electoral situation is vastly complicated by the presence of the nationalists – particularly in Scotland. If the Scottish opinion polls are to be believed, the LibDem vote has fallen dramatically since 2005, with the SNP as the main beneficiaries.

However, it is difficult to extrapolate how this might affect individual LibDem-held constituencies – few of which are at obvious risk from the SNP.

Secondly, there is considerably less opinion poll data available for Scotland and Wales, so it is much more difficult to establish changes in the electoral situation on the ground.

Thirdly, the advance of the Conservatives in these countries has been negligible, if it exists at all and the purpose of this pamphlet is to consider the electoral impact of Cameron's Tories, not Salmond's nationalists.

It is worth just reflecting on the last of these points though. If David Cameron's Conservatives are failing to make any meaningful headway in Scotland and Wales – or indeed in the great Northern cities of England – then they are making disproportionate progress somewhere else.

If this "somewhere else" includes London, southern England and the rural south west, then this constitutes bad news for a majority of the LibDem MPs and candidates profiled in this pamphlet.

## A cautionary note about polls, predictions and volatility

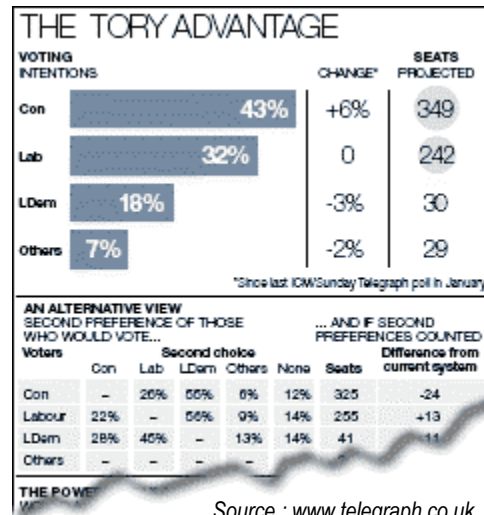
It is only a year since the polls were showing a small but measurable lead for the Labour Party and pundits were drafting David Cameron's political obituary.

New Prime Minister Gordon Brown was supposedly within a month or so of being re-elected on a wave of post-Blair euphoria and the Conservatives would dump Cameron and reflect on whether they could ever win an election again.

Less than 52 weeks later, Brown is now a write-off (who may even be subject to a coup rather than

removal by the electorate) and David Cameron is being hailed as "Prime Minister designate" with only the exact size of his impending and crushing majority yet to be determined.

So volatile are contemporary British electoral politics that it seems any analysis can be rendered obsolete between being written and being printed. If a week's a long time in politics, a year is an eternity. And there could be nearly two years until the next election.



The statistical analysis in this pamphlet is therefore entirely of its time. The next 18 months provide the Liberal Democrat leadership with ample opportunity to plan and execute its electoral and communications strategy for the next General Election campaign.

Once it has done so, the party's polling position might improve markedly at the expense of one or both of the other two parties.

For those with the party's interests at heart, they will surely hope that it does. Because the bald truth is that if public opinion does not shift away from the Tories and towards the LibDems, the electoral outlook is not at all good.

To admit this is not treason or treachery on the part of LibDem members or supporters, it is a recognition of reality.

And a problem can only be solved once it has been recognised.

There may not yet be grounds for panic at the recent rise of Cameron's Conservatives, but there are few grounds for electoral optimism either.

## Bath

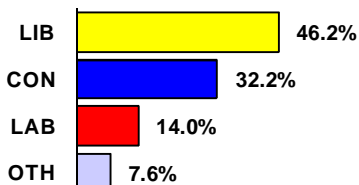
## TORY THREAT: MEASURABLE

### Don Foster MP

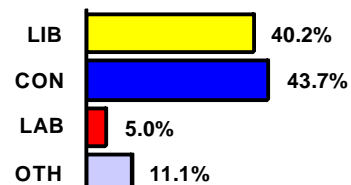


#### NATIONAL

2005 result

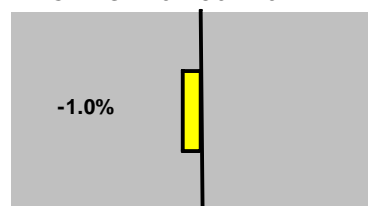


Uniform national swing



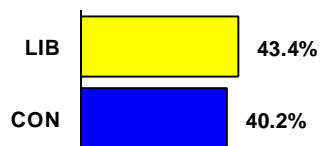
#### LOCAL

SWING FROM CON TO LIB



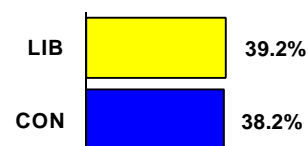
Local Election results *last* Parliament

2003



Local Election results *this* Parliament

2007



This seat was won in 1992 as a consolation when Chris Patten lost here - despite delivering the Conservatives a national victory. Previously the SDP had been within a whisker of winning the constituency. Don Foster has therefore had more than 15 years to build a local following. In the event of a Cameron landslide, Bath would turn Tory blue. But with an aggressive campaign, Foster may well hold on to this instinctively liberal city. Just.

## Bermondsey and Old Southwark

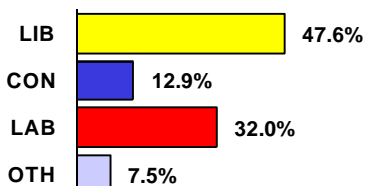
## TORY THREAT: ZERO

### Simon Hughes MP

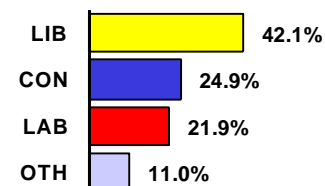


#### NATIONAL

2005 result

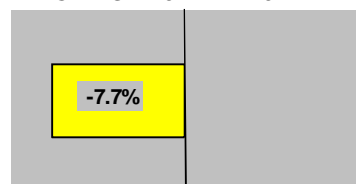


Uniform national swing



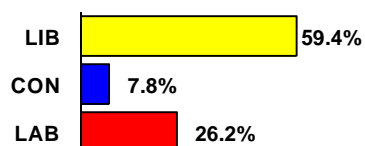
#### LOCAL

SWING FROM LAB TO LIB



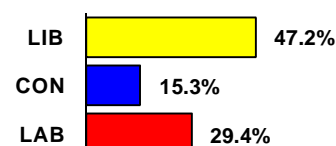
Local Election results *last* Parliament

2002



Local Election results *this* Parliament

2006

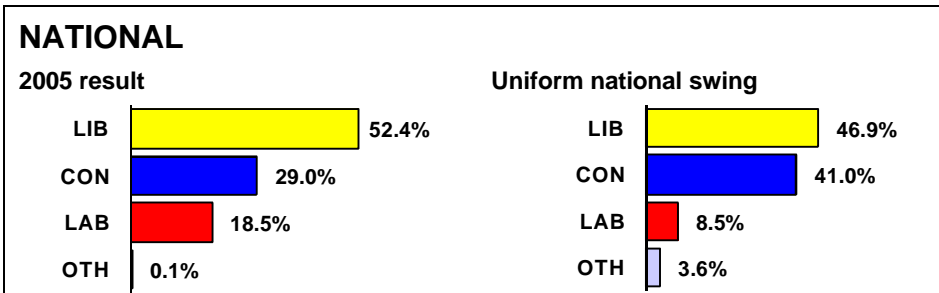


Simon Hughes has succeeded in turning this seat into a fiefdom, but in the last few years, LibDem dominance has slipped. Labour has started to claw back votes in a once socialist heartland and increased gentrification means the Tories are no longer a complete joke. Simon should be re-elected here with some room to spare, but the long term electoral position looks less certain.

# Berwick-upon-Tweed

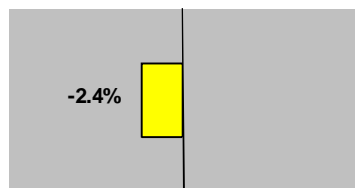
**TORY THREAT: MINOR**

## Alan Beith MP



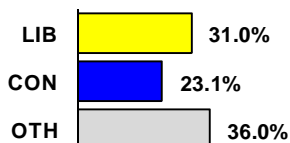
### LOCAL

SWING FROM CON TO LIB



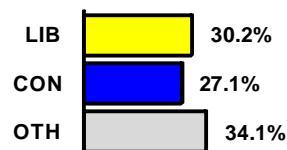
#### Local Election results *last* Parliament

2003



#### Local Election results *this* Parliament

2007

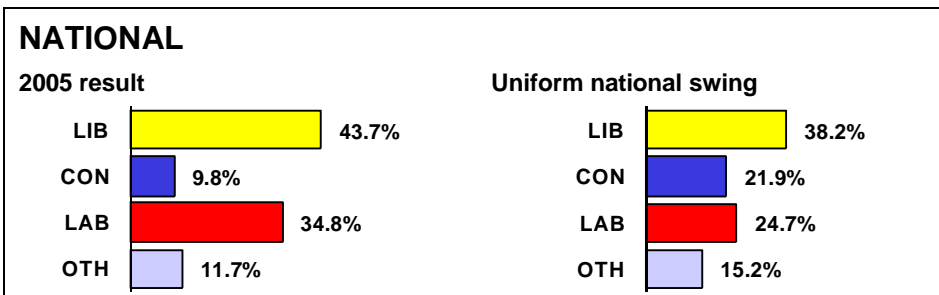


One-time leadership contender and Liberal elder statesman Alan Beith has made his borders seat something of a fortress. The Conservatives are a serious electoral force here however and a shock Tory gain cannot be wholly ruled out. But in all likelihood, this seat is likely to remain in LibDem hands for as long as Alan Beith continues to contest it.

# Birmingham Yardley

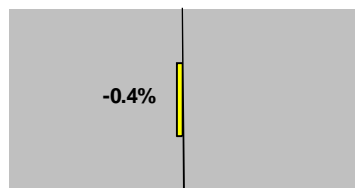
**TORY THREAT: ZERO**

## John Hemming MP



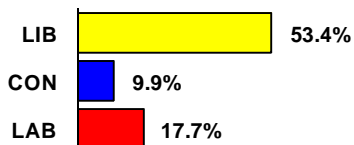
### LOCAL

SWING FROM LAB TO LIB



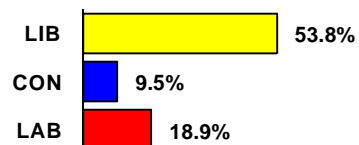
#### Local Election results *last* Parliament

2004



#### Local Election results *this* Parliament

2006-2008

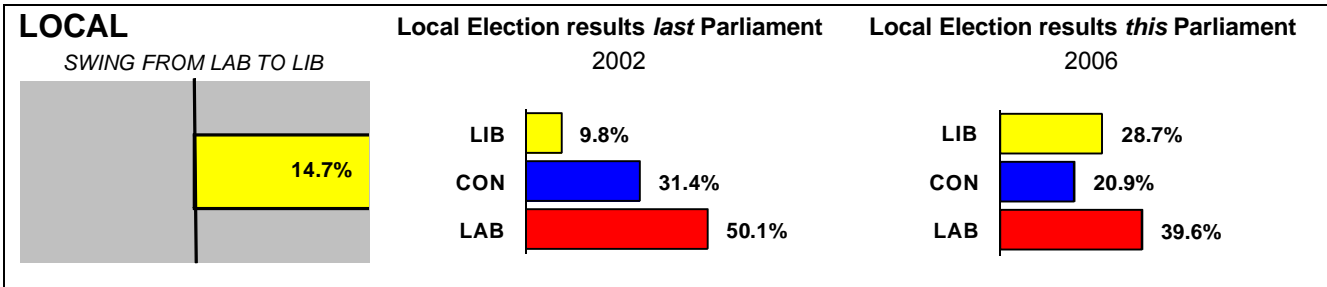
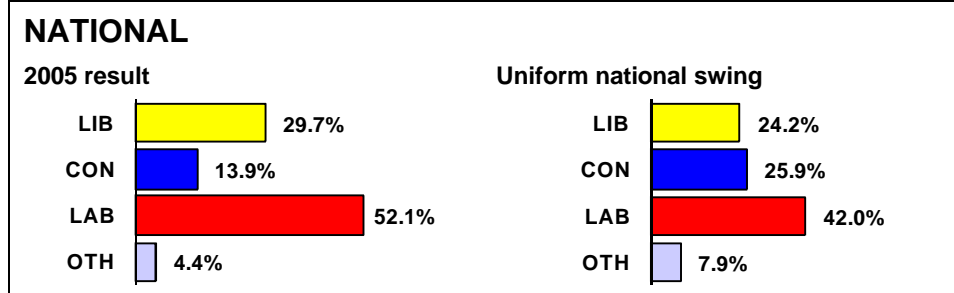


Maverick millionaire John Hemming steadily worked his way up in this seat from a distant third, through to making it a three-way marginal and eventually winning the seat at the last election. His independent and idiosyncratic style mean he is considered quirky and "unclubable" in Westminster, but local support for the LibDems here is gob-smackingly huge. With the local Conservatives smashed and Labour in retreat, this is a comfortable LibDem hold.

# Brent Central

## Sarah Teather MP (Brent East), PPC

**TORY THREAT: ZERO**

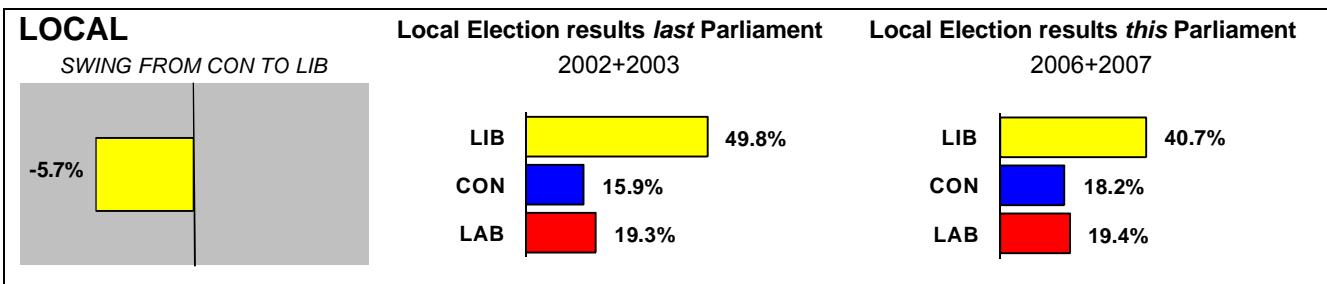
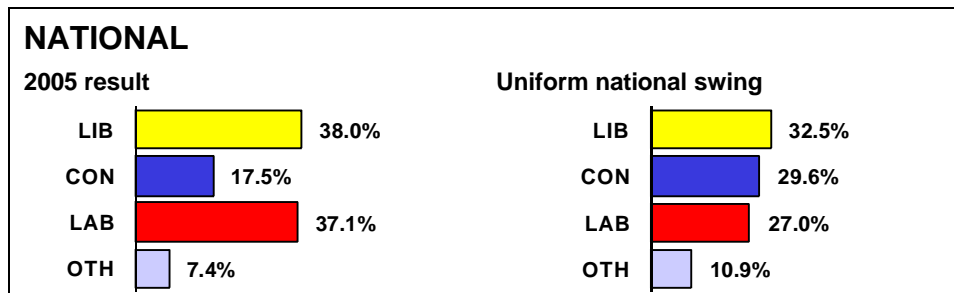


Sarah Teather is building a reputation for winning in apparently impossible circumstances. Having triumphed in the famous Brent East by-election, she held the seat in 2005 despite an intense Livingstone-supported Labour onslaught. Her constituency gets sliced up under the boundary changes and she therefore contests the tricky new seat of Brent Central. If she can squeeze the Tory vote mercilessly, she may well prevail against an unpopular Labour Party.

# Bristol West

## Stephen Williams MP

**TORY THREAT: MINOR**



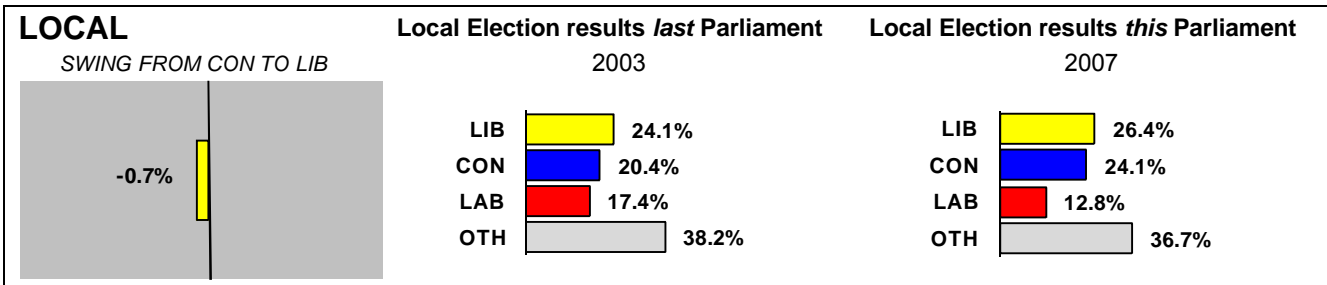
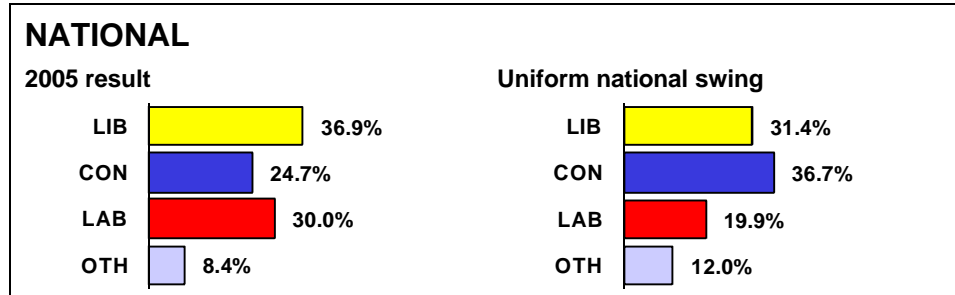
It is hard to believe that this seat was held by William Waldegrave for the Conservatives until 1997, so pathetic is the recent Tory vote share. This is a seat where all three parties have vied for ascendancy in the last twenty years. Hard-working campaigner Stephen Williams should be able to increase his majority over Labour in what can be portrayed as a "two horse race" on the 2005 figures, but a major Tory resurgence could pose problems.



## Camborne and Redruth

### Julia Goldsworthy MP

**TORY THREAT: MEASURABLE**

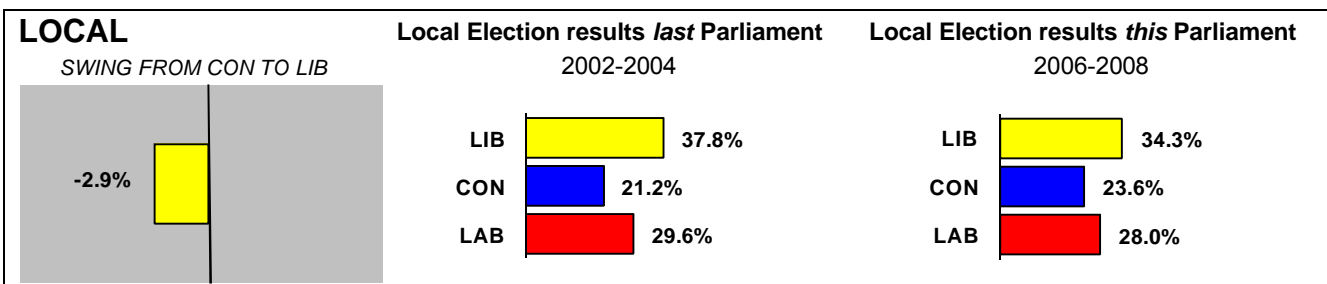
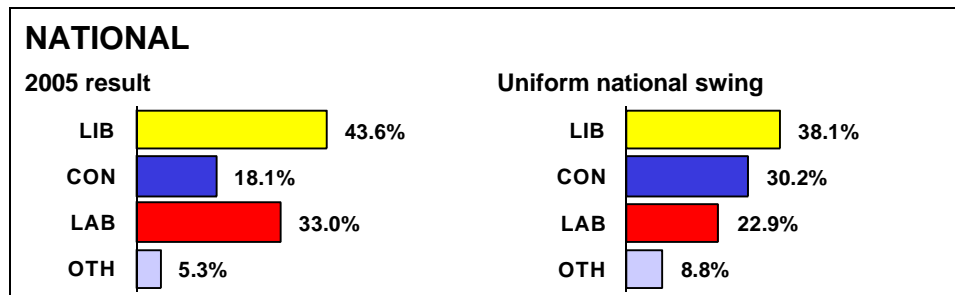


This is another seat that has been represented by all three parties in recent times. In 2005, a hapless Labour campaign and a bitterly divided local Tory party saw Julia Goldsworthy take the seat from third place. Seen by many as a very credible candidate to be the first ever female Liberal leader, Julia's enhanced national profile and media-friendliness should give her a great chance to consolidate her majority in this seat. But if the Conservatives get their act together, she will have a major battle on her hands.

## Cambridge

### David Howarth MP

**TORY THREAT: MINOR**

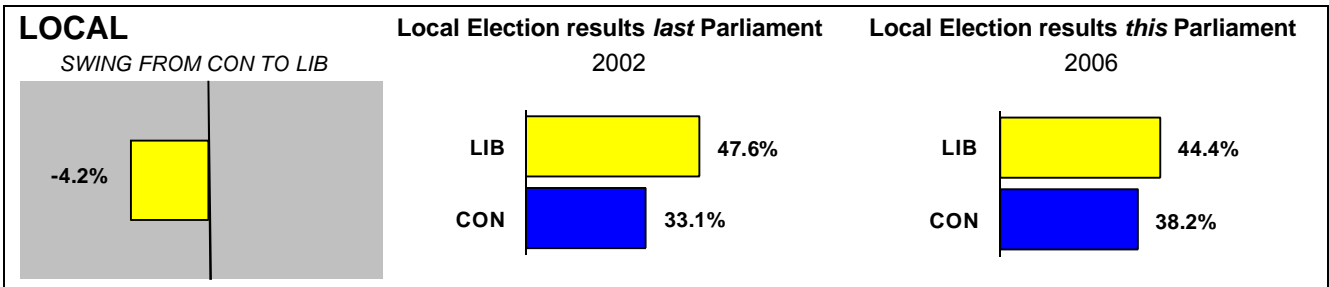
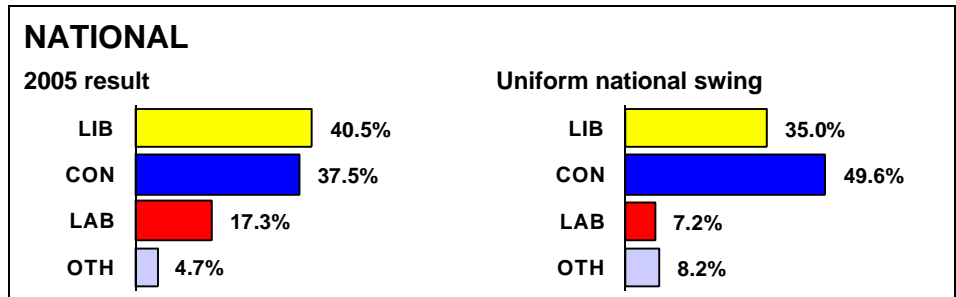


Yet another seat that has been won by all three parties in the past couple of decades. The anti-war, anti-tuition fees narrative of the LibDems in 2005 helped the rumbustious, fiercely intellectual David Howarth take the seat from Labour with a massive swing. So diminished is the Conservative vote that only a monumental swing to Cameron would put this constituency at threat.

# Carshalton and Wallington

**TORY THREAT: HIGH**

## Tom Brake MP

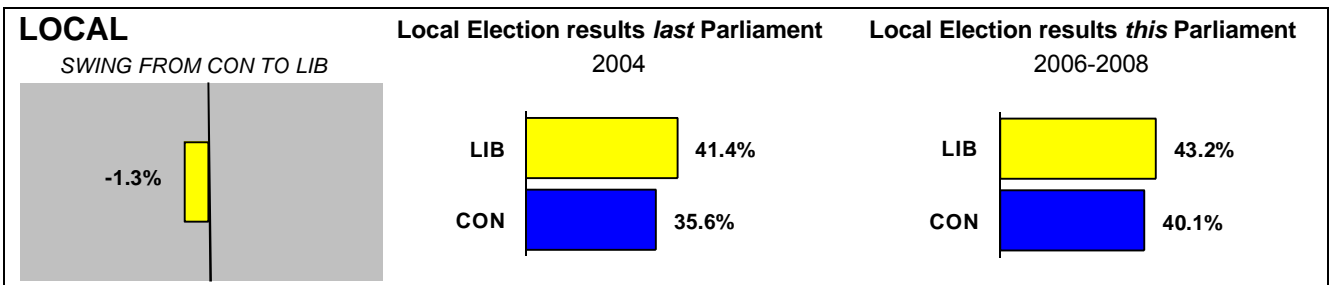
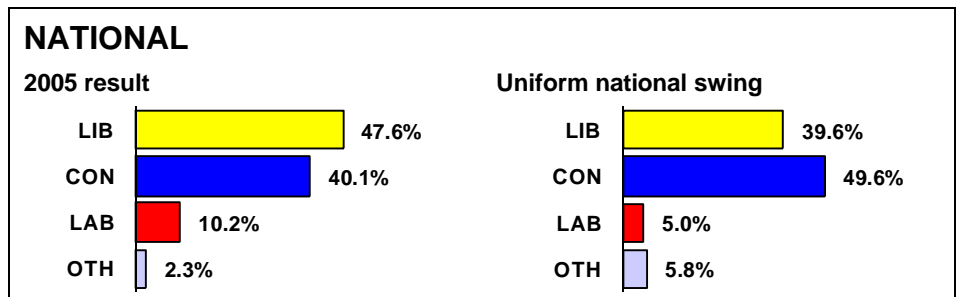


The LibDems went backwards here in 2005 and the electoral picture since the election is not pretty either. The Conservatives have advanced in local council elections and the very poor mayoral and London assembly vote for the LibDems in south west London provide little grounds for optimism. Tom Brake's inexplicable and idiosyncratic campaign against the sale of marijuana seeds in Carshalton's shops suggests a local communications infrastructure that has lost its way. This will be seen as a "must win" seat by the Conservatives.

# Cheadle

**TORY THREAT: HIGH**

## Mark Hunter MP

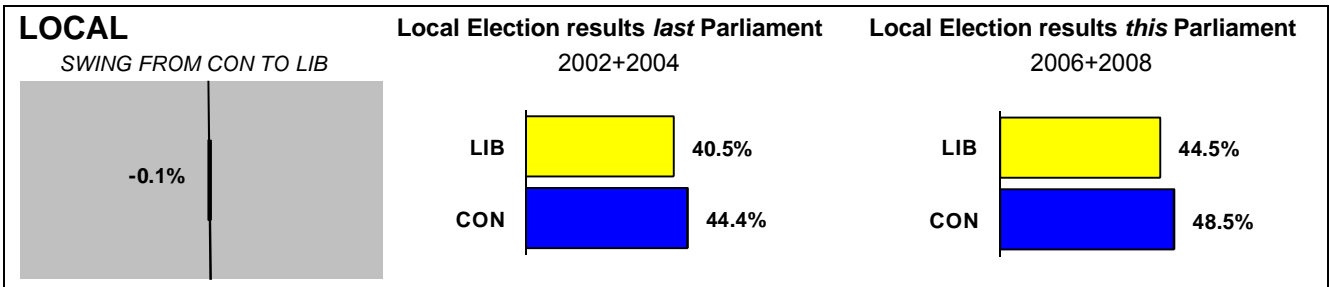
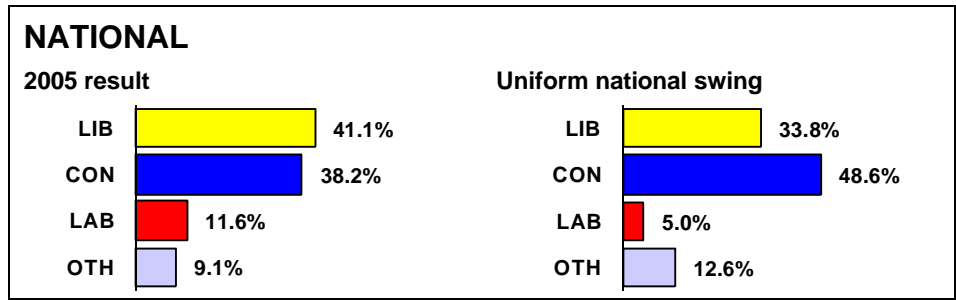


Mark Hunter successfully defended this seat in the 2005 by-election – actually increasing the LibDem majority. The boost to the local party machine that such a campaign effort brings will be needed in full to keep Cheadle in the LibDem column. A vigorous and well-funded Tory effort is a certainty in a seat which Conservatives consider to be their natural turf.

# Cheltenham

**TORY THREAT: HIGH**

## Martin Horwood MP

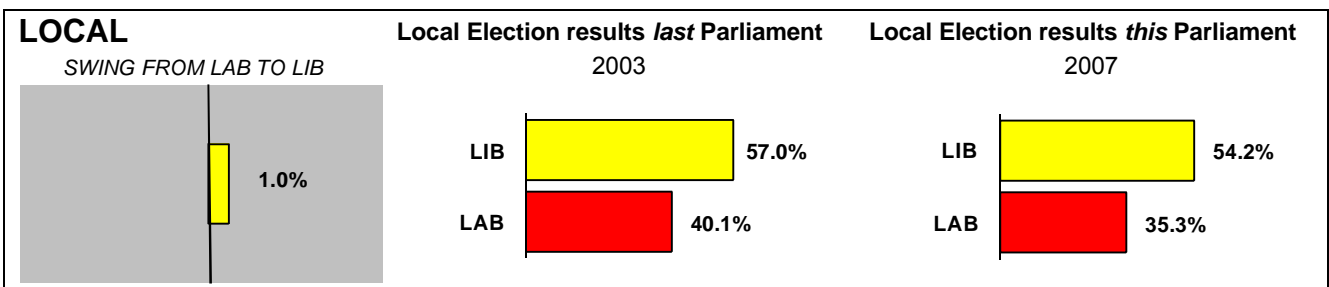
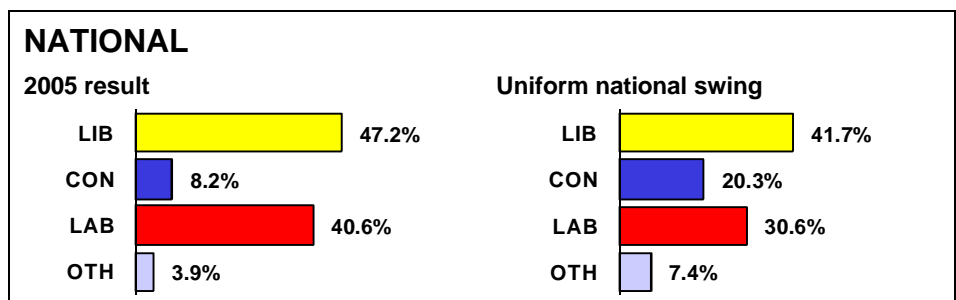


Martin Horwood narrowly held this seat when Nigel Jones stood aside. The selection process was held relatively late in the day and he has now have had more time to make himself a locally recognised name. Nevertheless, if the Conservatives win the General Election, they would be expected to take this seat. When the LibDems first won the seat in 1992, it was against the unfortunate backdrop of sections of the local Conservative Association being unable to reconcile themselves to the fact that their candidate was black.

# Chesterfield

**TORY THREAT: ZERO**

## Paul Holmes MP

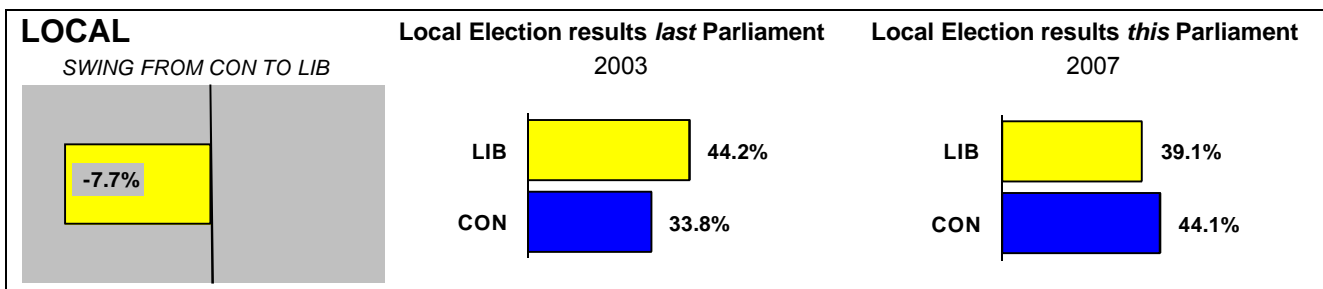
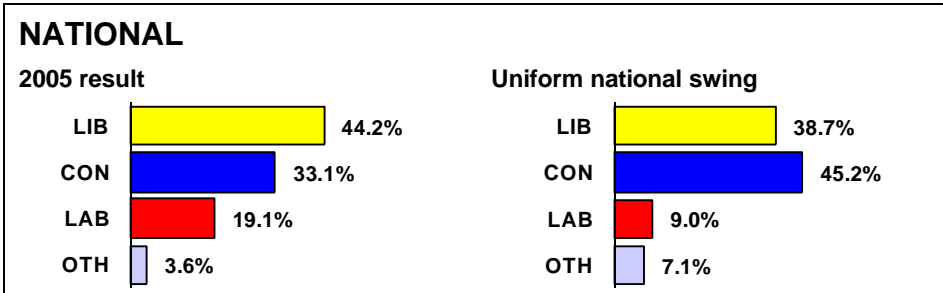


Orange Bookers joke that when Paul Holmes replaced Tony Benn as the Chesterfield MP, it should have been listed as a "Socialist gain". But however much Holmes's unapologetic, pro-public sector approach might grate with free marketeers, it is unlikely to cause him any electoral difficulty in this seat. The Conservatives are practically non-existent here and Paul can be expected to hold the seat with a handsome - and probably increased - majority.

# Chippenham

**TORY THREAT: HIGH**

## Duncan Hames PPC

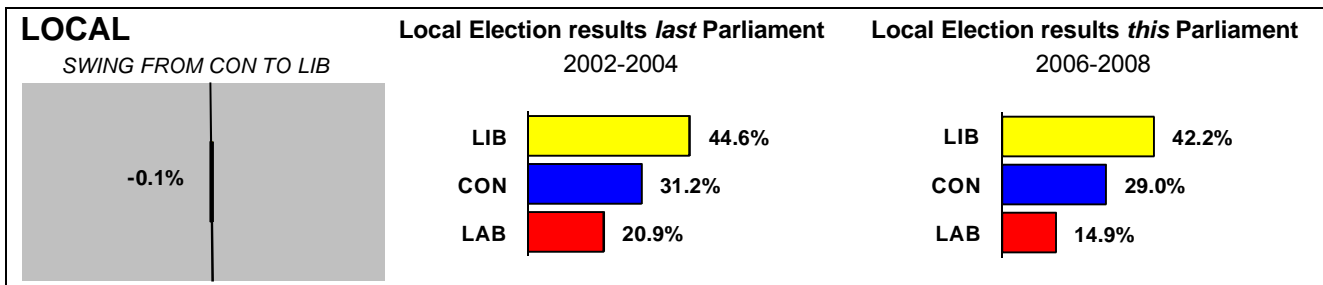
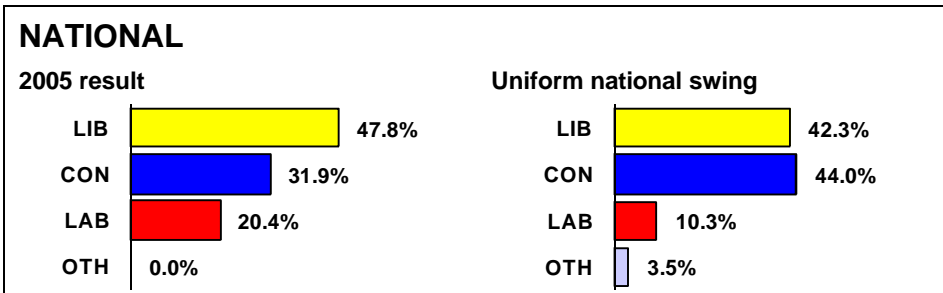


On the new boundaries, this seat would have been a comfortable LibDem win in 2005, but Duncan Hames has to fight it as a challenger not an incumbent. Local election results suggest a measurable shift to the Conservatives and the Tories will be treating this as another seat that they would expect to win if Cameron is to secure an overall majority in the next House of Commons. Duncan is a savvy and determined campaigner, but the electoral challenge here will test him to the limit.

# Colchester

**TORY THREAT: MINOR**

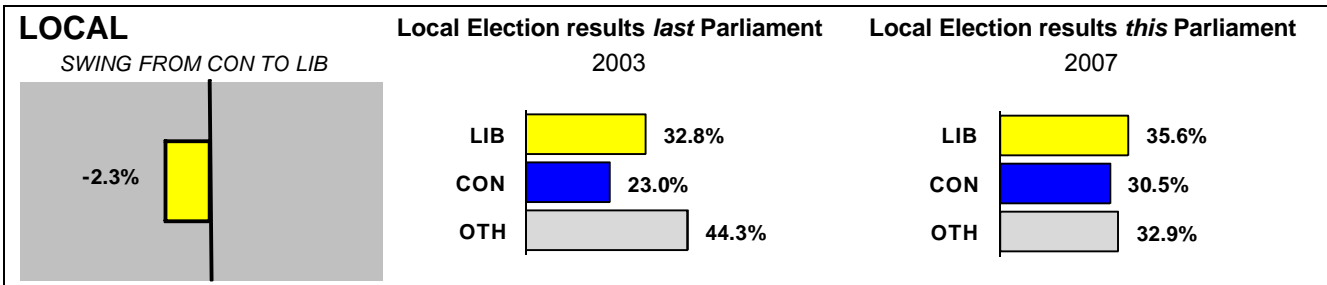
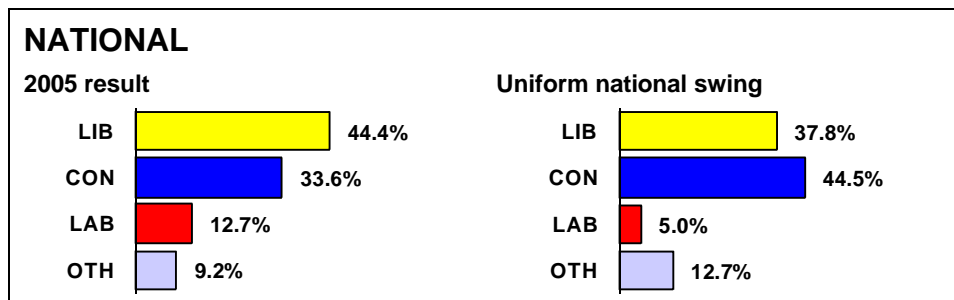
## Bob Russell MP



The self-styled "Voice of Colchester" has succeeded in converting this constituency from a three-way marginal into a safe LibDem seat. The Conservatives remain a serious electoral force here, but not an indomitable one. With a sizeable Labour vote available to squeeze, Bob Russell should hold on here unless the swing to the Tories is truly enormous.

## Cornwall North Dan Rogerson MP

**TORY THREAT: MEASURABLE**



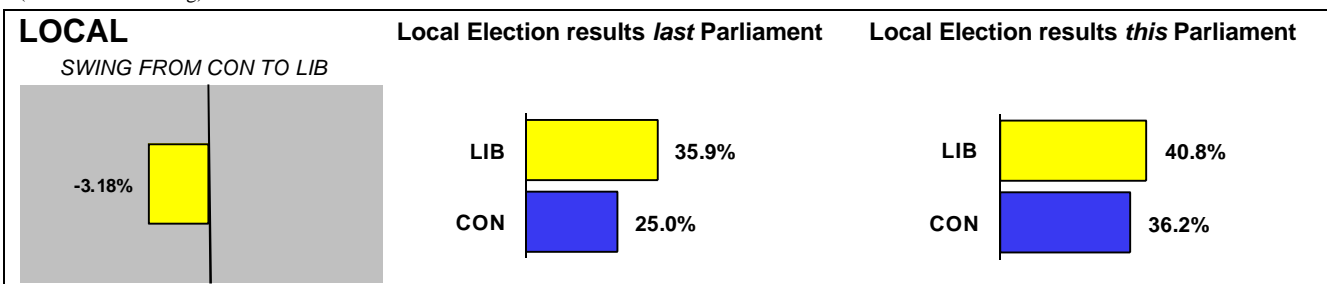
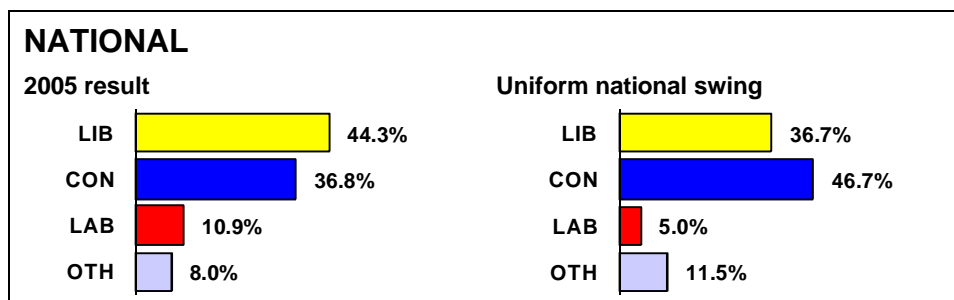
Dan Rogerson held this seat with a greatly diminished majority in 2005 after Paul Tyler's retirement. The boundary changes are kind to the LibDems but there are no grounds for complacency. Dan will need to continue to build his local profile if he is to resist any serious national swing to the Conservatives.

## Cornwall South East Karen Gillard PPC

**TORY THREAT: HIGH**



(Colin Breed retiring)

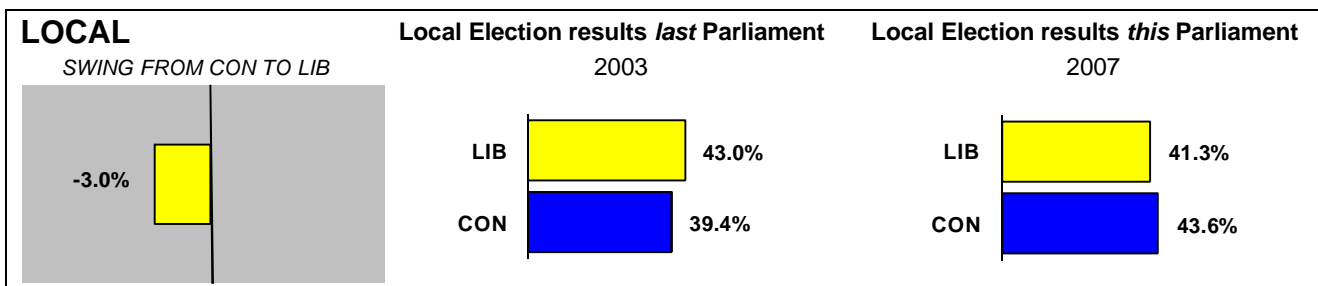
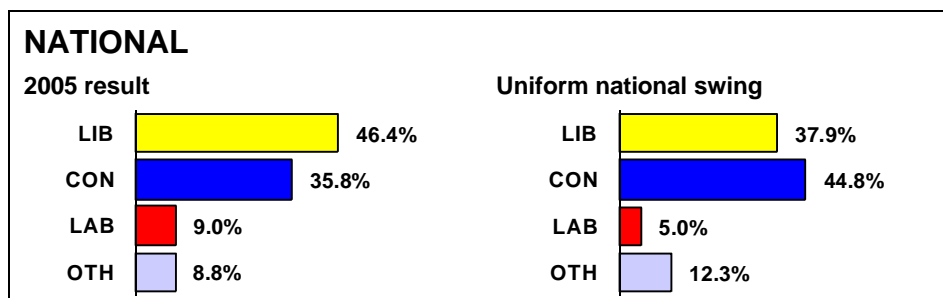


Karen Gillard faces the substantial challenge of defending this seat following Colin Breed's retirement. An unknowable factor is how much of Colin Breed's personal vote is transferrable to a new LibDem candidate. Karen is an ex-Conservative. She will need to rely on everything she knows about her former party to prevent a slippage of votes from LibDem to Tory.



## Devon North Nick Harvey MP

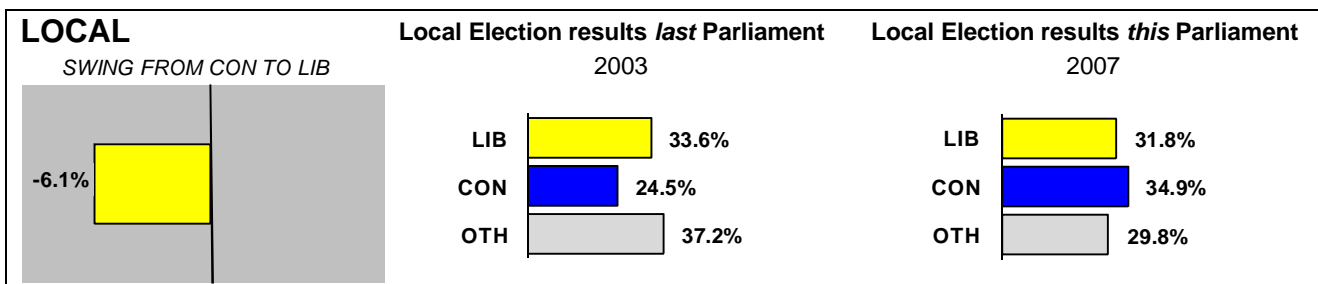
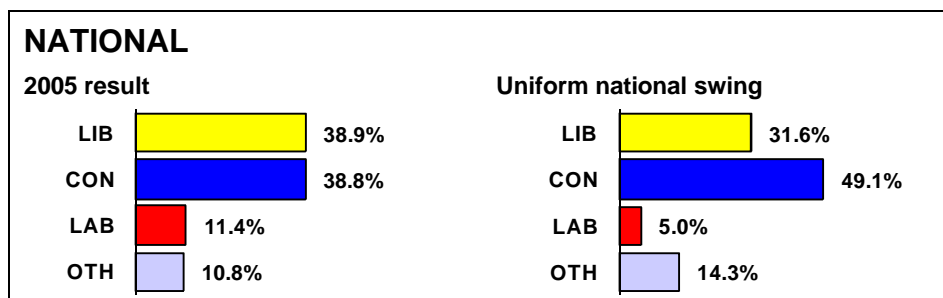
**TORY THREAT: MEASURABLE**



Once touted as a possible future leader of the party, Nick Harvey has the sort temperament and attitude that should appeal to Tory voters. This seat fell into the Conservative column in 1979 after years of representation by former Liberal leader, Jeremy Thorpe. It has always been a Liberal-Conservative marginal and the recent local election results reinforce this. Nick will face a major challenge here if there is a national Tory revival.

## Devon West and Torridge Adam Symons PPC

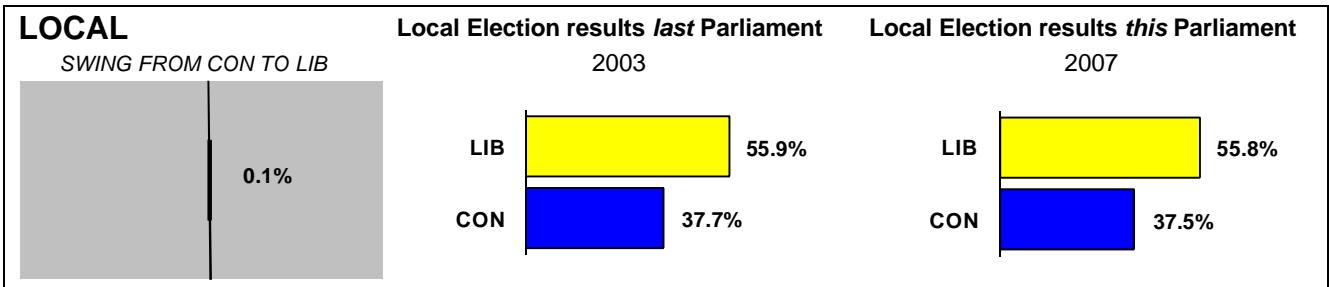
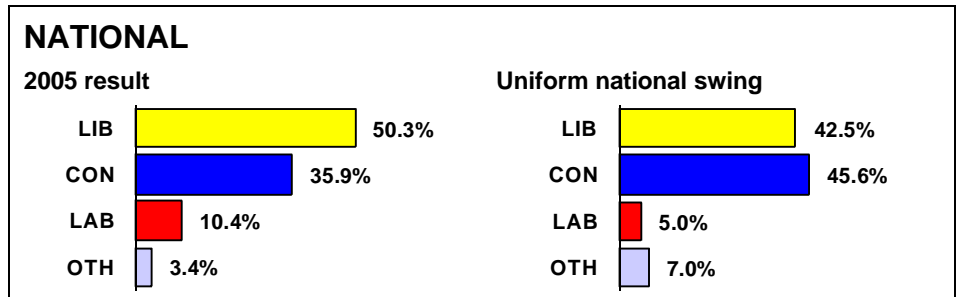
**TORY THREAT: HIGH**



This seat actually switched from LibDem to Conservative at the last General Election, but on the new boundaries it would have stayed in the LibDem column by a whisker. However, the evidence on the ground suggests a substantial dose of optimism would be necessary to feel confident that the seat will be lost by the Conservatives. Any form of national swing to the Tories would imply this seat staying blue.

## Dorset Mid and Poole North Annette Brooke MP

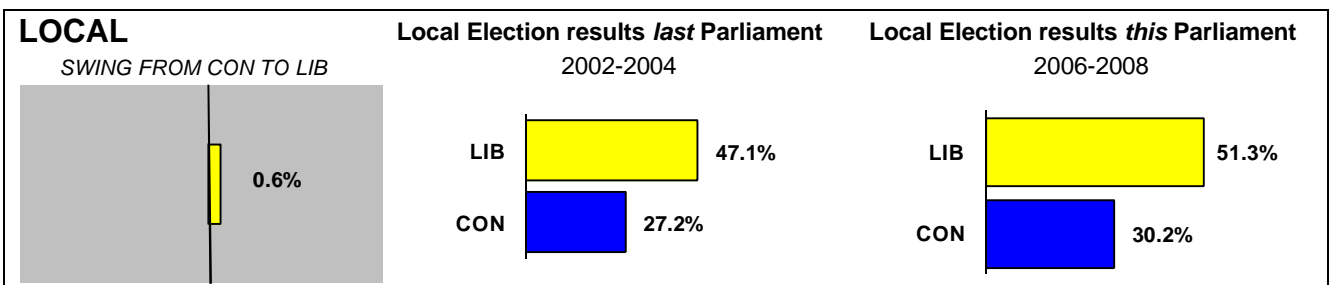
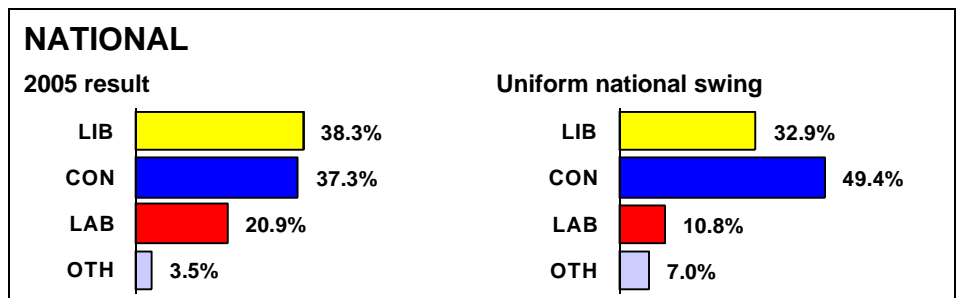
**TORY THREAT: MINOR**



Some thought that this seat was vulnerable to the Tories in 2005, but Annette Brooke was returned with a handsome majority. Local election results also point to substantial LibDem support. Annette has probably built a big enough majority to see off her Tory challenger. A big swing to the Conservatives could make things close though.

## Eastleigh Chris Huhne MP

**TORY THREAT: MEASURABLE**

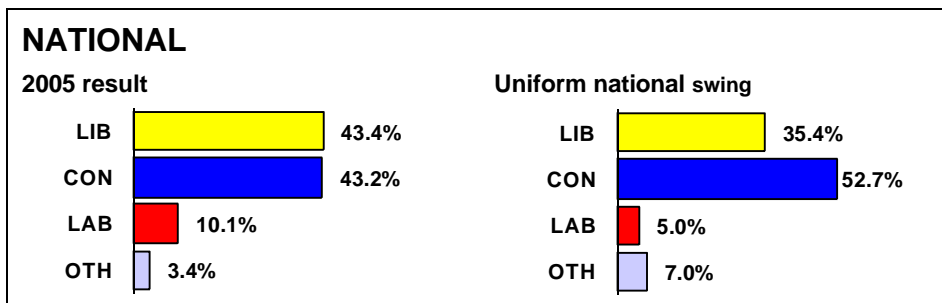


The raw national numbers here are deceptively bleak for Chris Huhne. There are many reasons to believe his prospects are better than his microscopic majority would suggest. As a two times runner-up in the recent leadership elections, his national profile has soared. Local election results remain impressive and the local Conservatives are something of a mess. There is also a pretty sizeable Labour vote to squeeze. For all these reasons, Chris must stand a pretty good chance of defying a national swing to the Tories, but the 1% majority really is terrifyingly small.

## Guildford

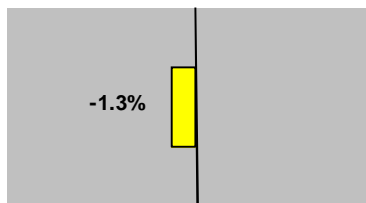
**TORY THREAT: HIGH**

### Sue Doughty PPC

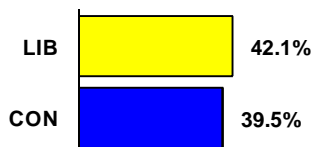


### LOCAL

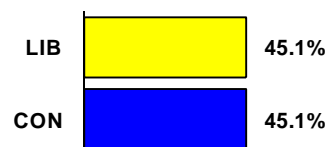
SWING FROM CON TO LIB



Local Election results *last* Parliament  
2003



Local Election results *this* Parliament  
2007

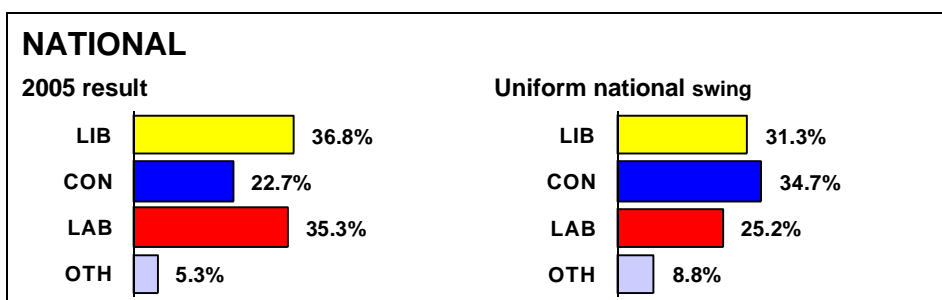


Sue Doughty would have just held this seat in 2005 – rather than just lost it – if the new boundaries had applied. But her prospects for reclaiming the seat in 2010 cannot be considered good. This is exactly the sort of seat that requires chronic Conservative unpopularity to fall into LibDem hands. The incumbency factor will also be working in the Tories' favour.

## Hampstead and Kilburn

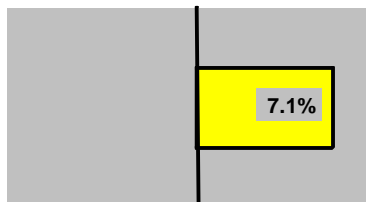
**TORY THREAT: MEASURABLE**

### Ed Fordham PPC

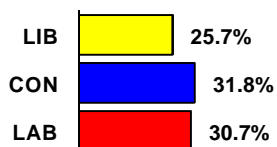


### LOCAL

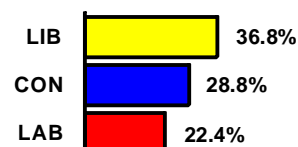
SWING FROM CON TO LIB



Local Election results *last* Parliament  
2002



Local Election results *this* Parliament  
2006



This constituency is bound to excite national interest at the next election – it's in the capital city and all three parties will be making a very serious effort. Ed Fordham inherits a chunk of Sarah Teather's abolished Brent East seat. Local election results here provide grounds for optimism, but the two big questions will be whether Ed can mobilise Sarah's personal vote and persuade local Tories that they should vote tactically for the LibDems. This seat probably isn't a "must win" for the Tories, but it is certainly on their radar screen.

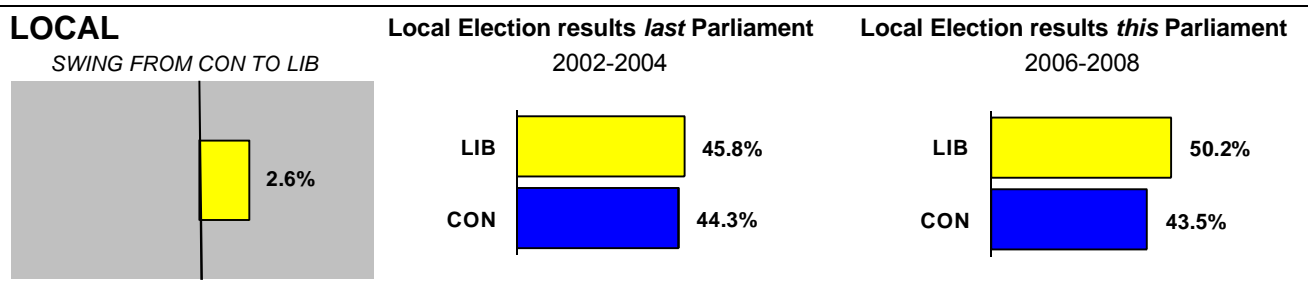
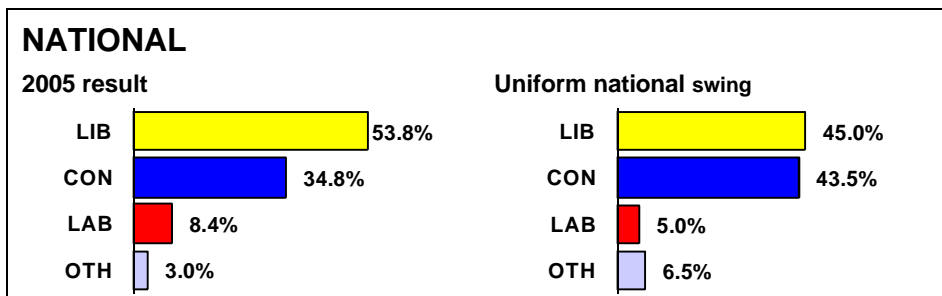
# Harrogate and Knaresborough

**TORY THREAT: MEASURABLE**

## Claire Kelley PPC



Phil Willis retiring

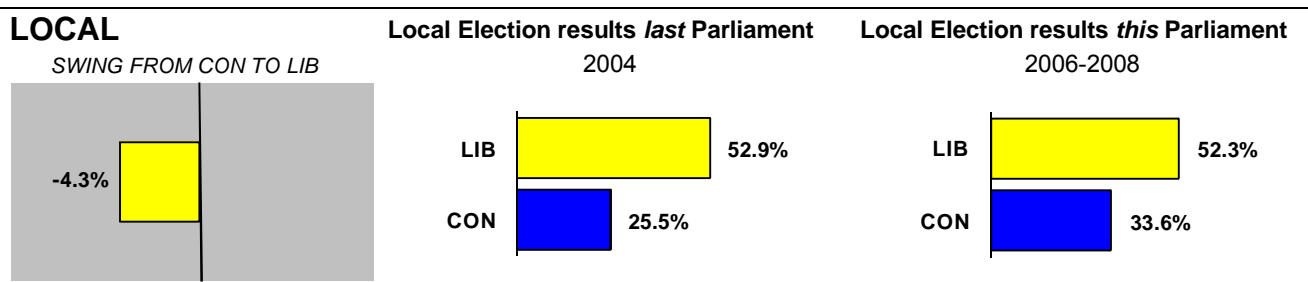
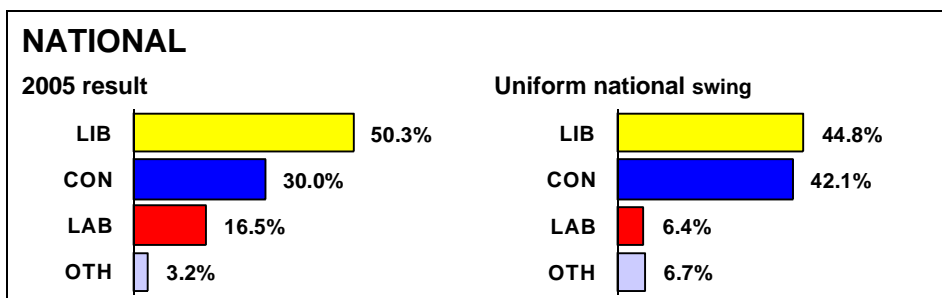


Since taking the seat from Norman Lamont, Phil Willis has established an impressive majority here. The local election figures show a robust LibDem vote, but the Tories consistently out-score their Parliamentary vote share. As a major local personality, the worry is that a large number of "Willis Tories" revert to type. If they do so, this seat will be much, much closer than in 2005.

# Hazel Grove

**TORY THREAT: MINOR**

## Andrew Stunell MP



Former chief whip Andrew Stunell has made Hazel Grove a LibDem safe seat. As a stalwart of the party's local government campaigning arm, it's unsurprising – but still impressive - to see the party securing over 50% in local elections. The Tories may recover their position here, but there are many more LibDem seats at risk before this one might be seen as a credible Conservative target.

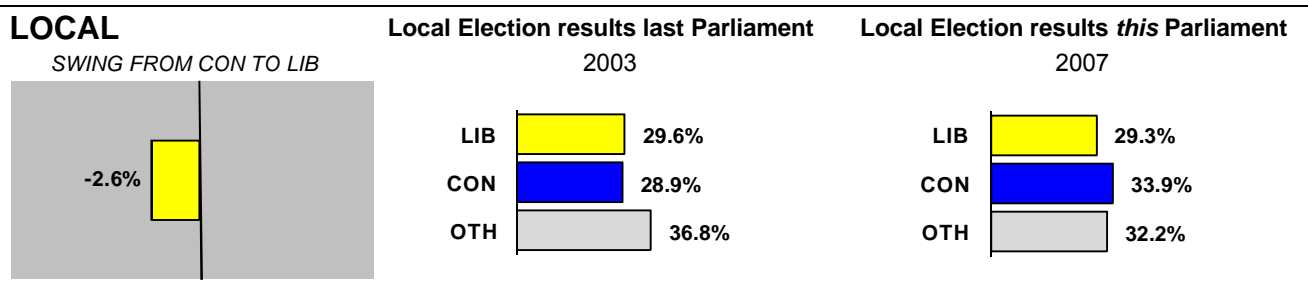
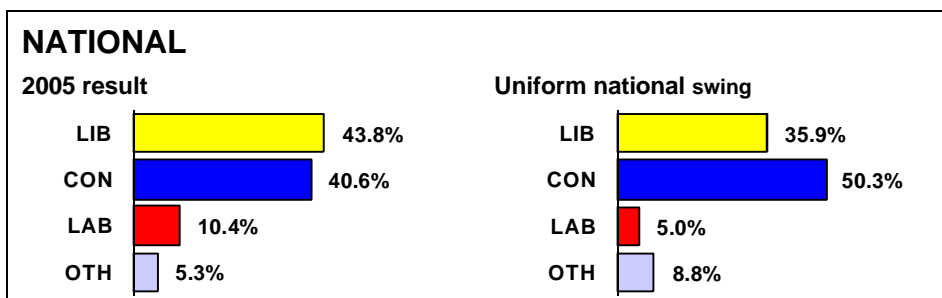
# Hereford and South Herefordshire

**TORY THREAT: HIGH**

## Sarah Carr PPC



Paul Keetch retiring

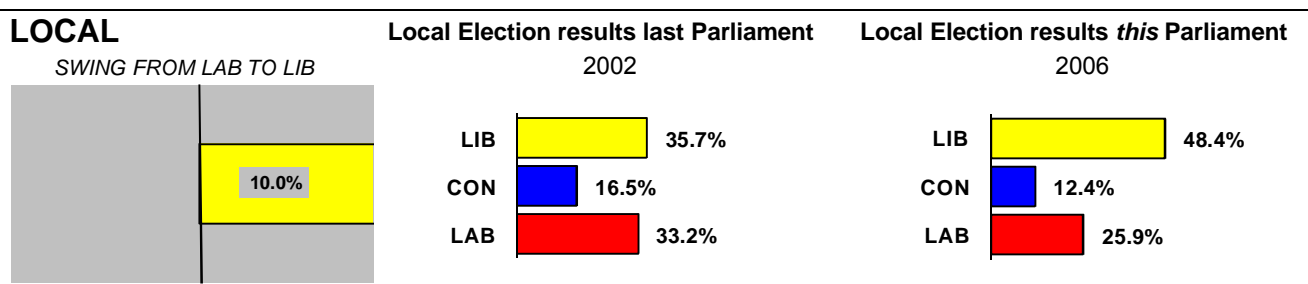
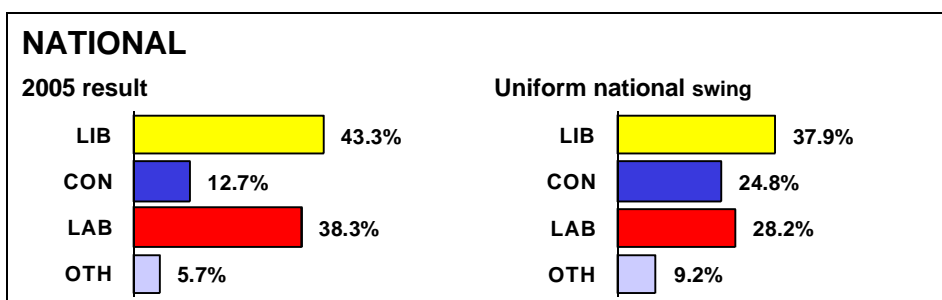


A knife-edge seat where the LibDems lose the incumbency factor, with Paul Keetch retiring from the Commons. The local election results suggest growing support for the Conservatives. This will require a titanic effort on the part of candidate Sarah Carr to hold the seat in the face of any Tory advance.

# Hornsey and Wood Green

**TORY THREAT: ZERO**

## Lynne Featherstone MP



Lynne Featherstone unseated Labour minister Barbara Roche with a huge swing in 2005. The local elections since then show continued Liberal advance. This – combined with Lynne’s national media profile – means Hornsey can no longer even be considered a marginal. It is worth noting that this constituency used to be seen as natural Tory territory. Their obliteration in this seat is surely the stuff of Conservative nightmares.



## Kingston and Surbiton

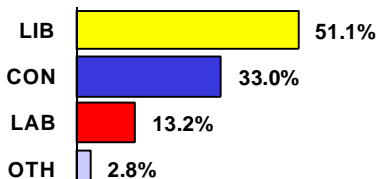
### Edward Davey MP

## TORY THREAT: MEASURABLE

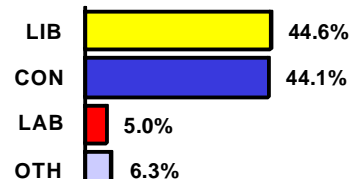


### NATIONAL

2005 result

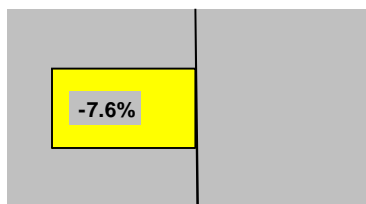


Uniform national swing



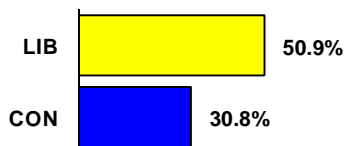
### LOCAL

SWING FROM CON TO LIB



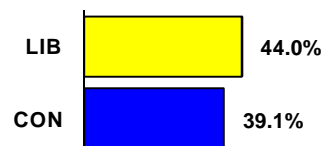
Local Election results last Parliament

2002



Local Election results *this* Parliament

2006



In 2001, Ed Davey converted Kingston from a wafer thin win into a landslide. But, as he focused increasingly on his national duties, his majority fell back in 2005. Along with three other seats in south west London, recent local results do not look good. The woeful LibDem performance in the London mayoral and assembly elections reinforce this. Ed's majority is substantial here, but this cannot be treated as a safe seat.

## Leeds North West

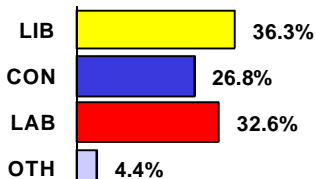
### Greg Mulholland MP

## TORY THREAT: MEASURABLE

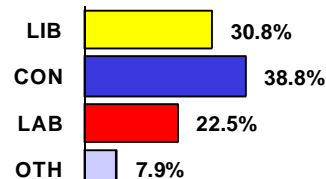


### NATIONAL

2005 result

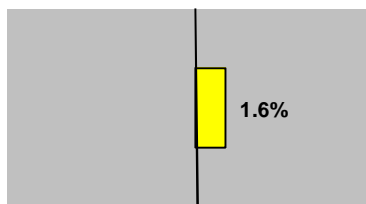


Uniform national swing



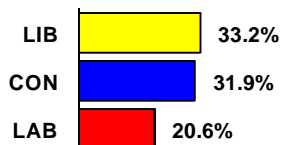
### LOCAL

SWING FROM CON TO LIB



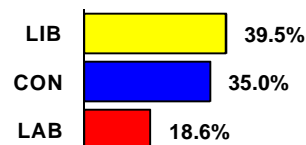
Local Election results last Parliament

2004



Local Election results *this* Parliament

2006-2008

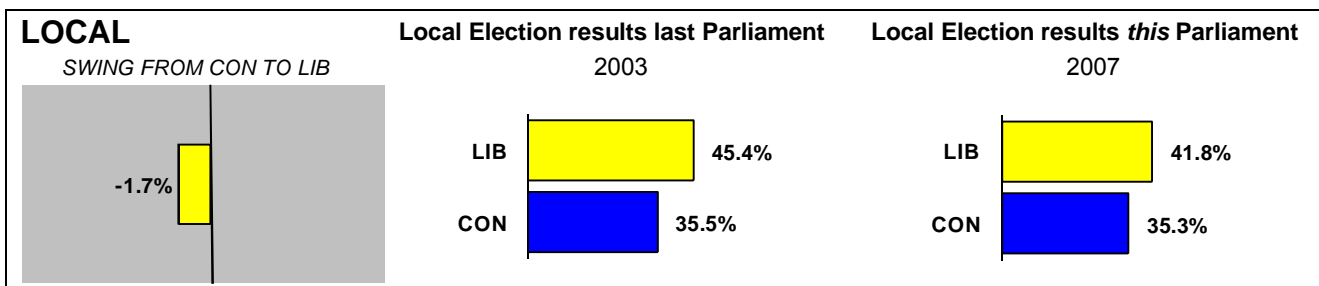
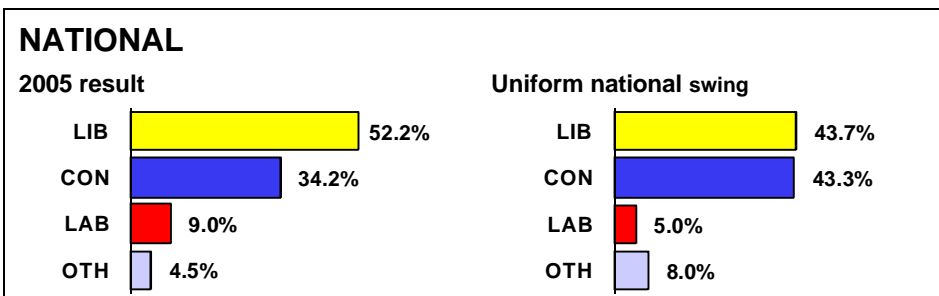


This is a LibDem seat with the characteristics of a three-way marginal. If this becomes a LibDem-Labour fight, then the new, young and ambitious LibDem MP should make it. But the Conservatives are a meaningful force here - so it's difficult to know which party Greg Mulholland can "squeeze". Bewilderingly, despite his presentational skills, Greg has not been deployed extensively by the party on the national stage. But he may just have enough about him to keep this seat Liberal Democrat.

# Lewes

## TORY THREAT: MINOR

### Norman Baker MP

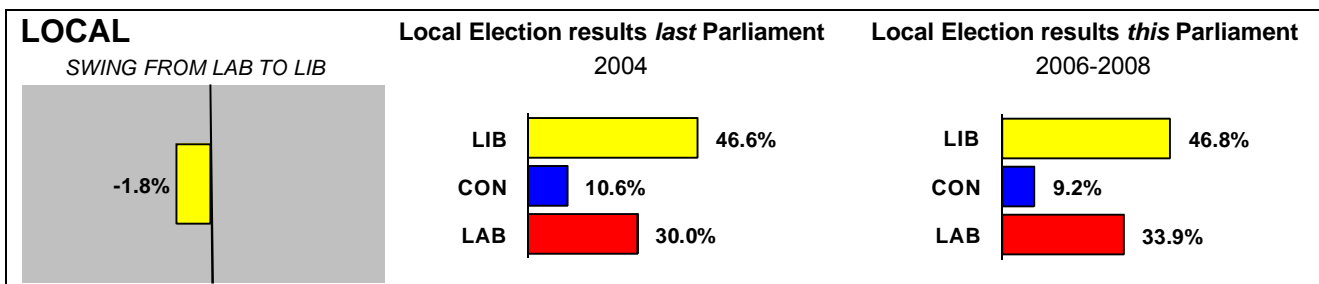
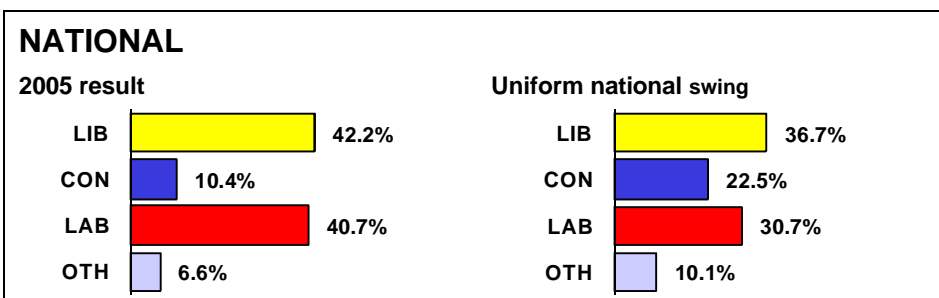


Crusading MP Norman Baker should comfortably retain this seat even if there is a major Tory surge. This is one of the most naturally small "l" liberal constituencies in England and the sleaze-busting incumbent is a popular local figure. The Tories would have to making huge inroads in the local elections here to be considered to have a real chance - and they have failed to do so.

# Manchester Withington

## TORY THREAT: ZERO

### John Leech MP

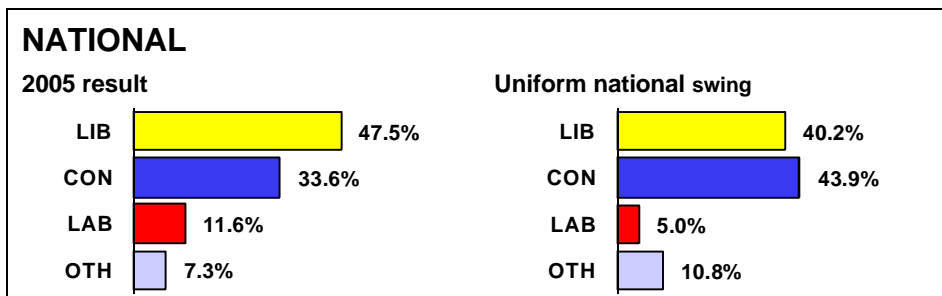


This was perhaps the biggest surprise gain of 2005 – so much so that even the Liberal Democrat press office did not consider it necessary have a biog of John Leech at the ready for the media. The only relevance of the Conservatives here is their "squeezability" to ensure that the LibDems stay ahead of Labour.

## Newton Abbot

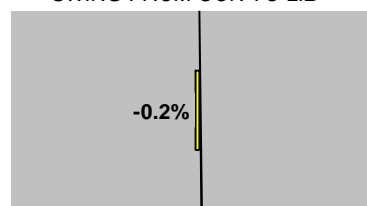
**TORY THREAT: MINOR**

### Richard Younger-Ross MP



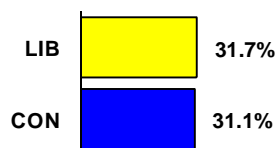
### LOCAL

SWING FROM CON TO LIB



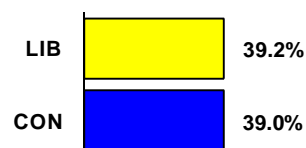
#### Local Election results last Parliament

2003



#### Local Election results *this* Parliament

2007

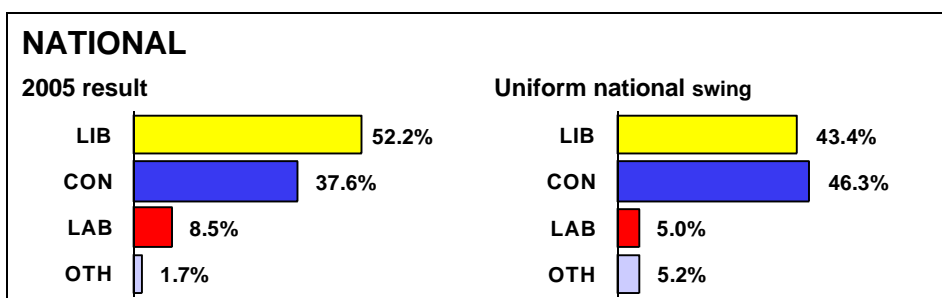


Richard Younger-Ross has built a fairly healthy majority here and can withstand a swing of up to 7% to the Conservatives. The council elections don't provide any great evidence of a Tory surge, but the seat is vulnerable if the Conservatives win the next election with by a landslide.

## Norfolk North

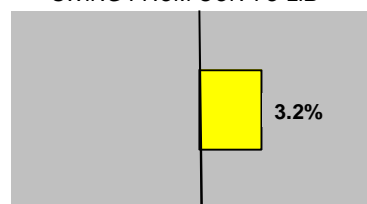
**TORY THREAT: MINOR**

### Norman Lamb MP



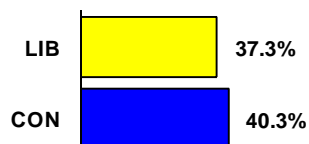
### LOCAL

SWING FROM CON TO LIB



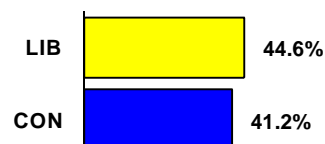
#### Local Election results last Parliament

2003



#### Local Election results *this* Parliament

2007

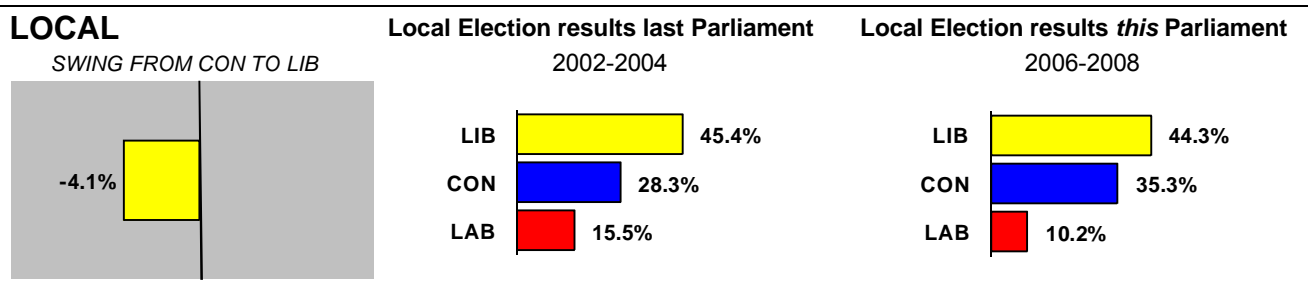
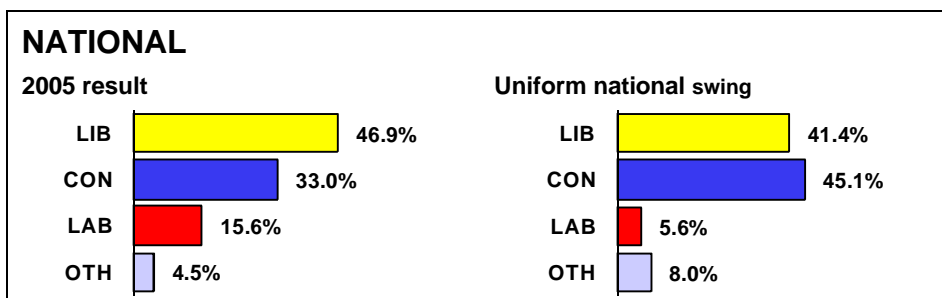


If the LibDems want to know how to see off the Conservatives in tight seats, they should ask Norman Lamb. In 2005, he annihilated Tory blogger Iain Dale, securing an 8.6% swing from the Conservatives. One interesting feature will be whether Norman's increased focus on his national profile, as opposed to his local constituency work, will hurt or harm him in North Norfolk. This seat would only fall to Cameron is there is a full-scale LibDem collapse.

# Oxford West and Abingdon

**TORY THREAT: MINOR**

**Evan Harris MP**

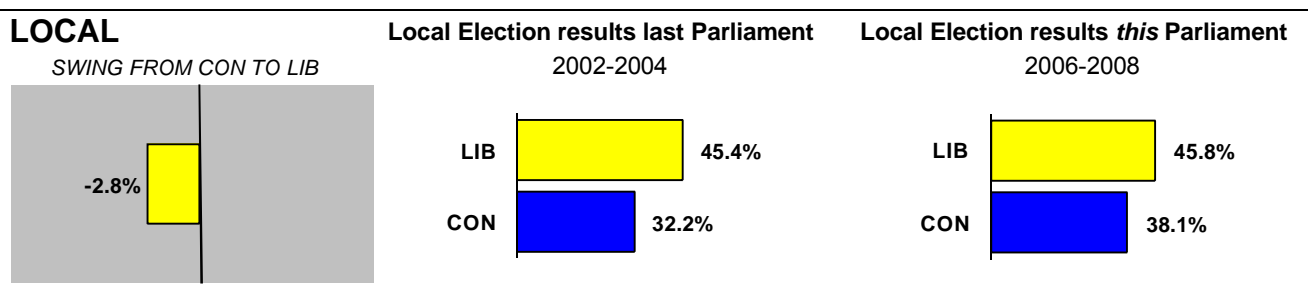
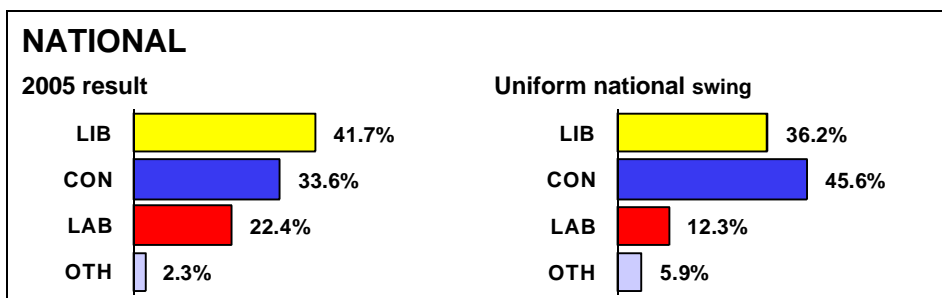


Evan Harris retains a national media profile as a prominent civil liberties campaigner. A long-time target of the SDP (Chris Huhne narrowly failed to take the seat in the 1987 election), Evan has won with measurable majorities since 1997. This part of the world is, in some ways, a microcosm of the LibDems' electoral dilemma. The Conservatives are a strong second here, but in next door Oxford East, the Liberal Democrats have a great chance of taking a seat from Labour.

# Portsmouth South

**TORY THREAT: MEASURABLE**

**Mike Hancock MP**

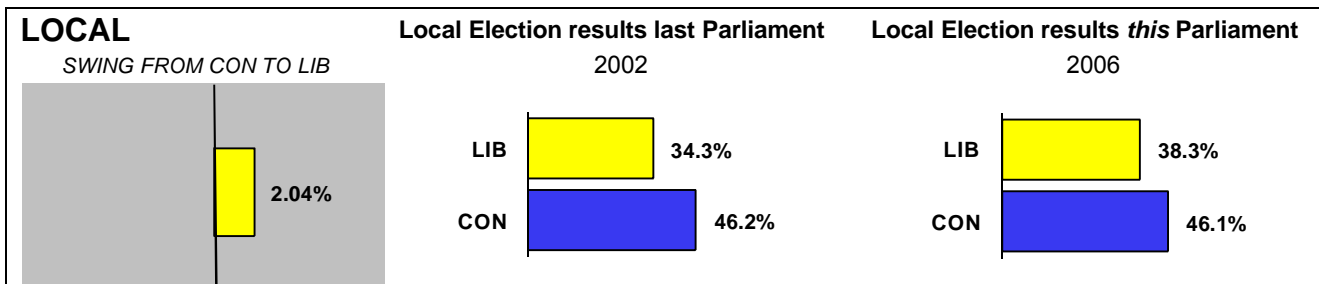
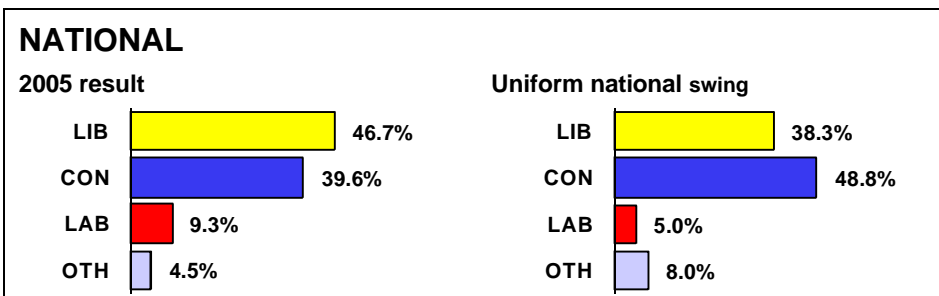


Mike Hancock first won this seat for the SDP in a 1985 by-election. He narrowly lost in 1987 and 1992, but retook it in 1997. As an independent and outspoken maverick – he is a vociferous campaigner for a referendum on the EU treaty – he may just be able to insulate himself against a national swing to the Conservatives.

## Richmond Park

## TORY THREAT: MEASURABLE

### Susan Kramer MP

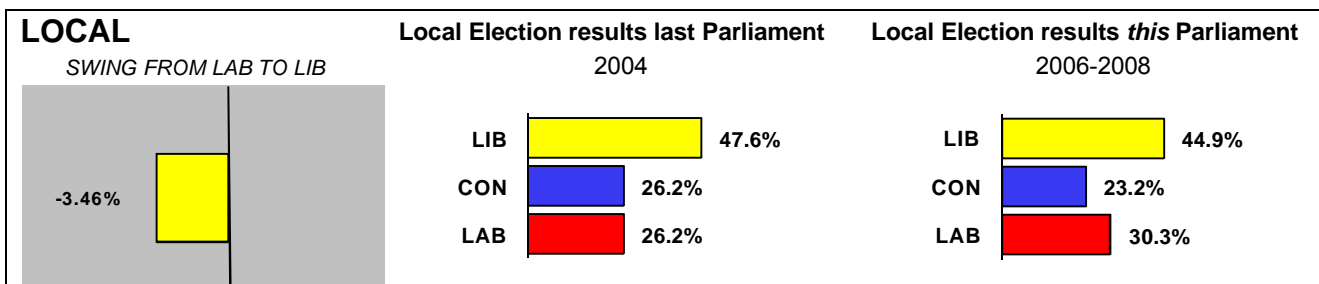
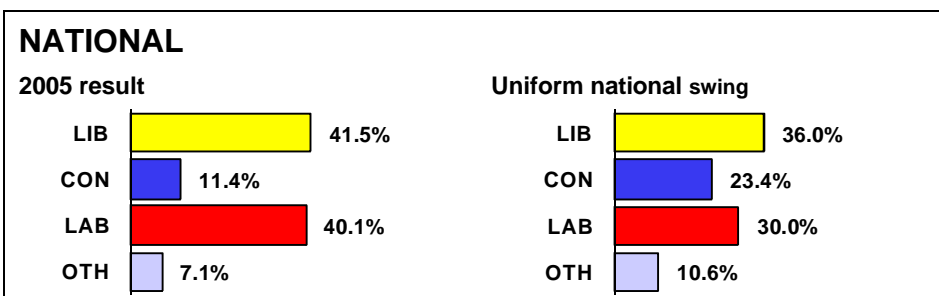


This seat's location, marginal status and the fact that the Conservative candidate is Zac Goldsmith is bound to ensure that Richmond Park gets more than its share of the media spotlight. Although Richmond Council switched from Tory back to LibDem control here in 2006, the Conservatives' raw numbers in the local elections are impressive. An intriguing, high-profile and close fought battle is a certainty.

## Rochdale

## TORY THREAT: ZERO

### Paul Rowen MP



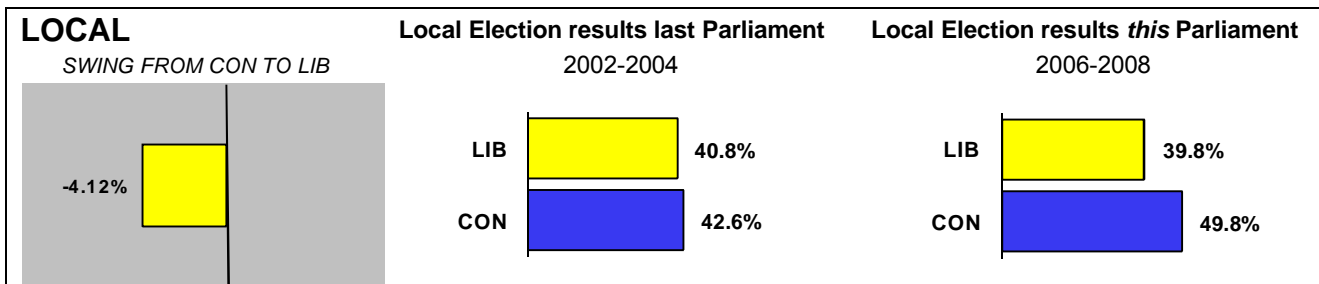
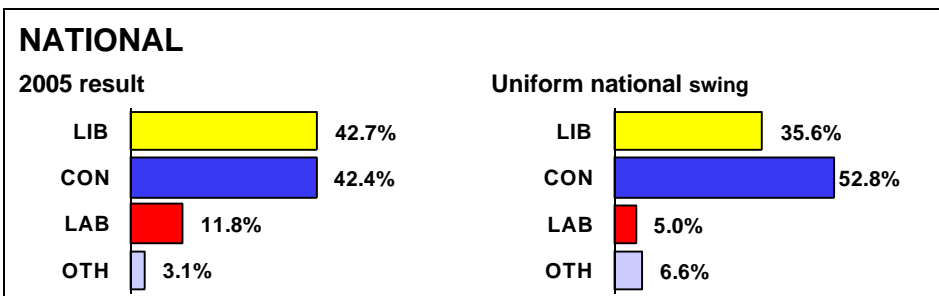
A substantial anti-war vote helped Paul Rowan reclaim Cyril Smith's old seat in 2005. If the Labour vote declines, he should be able to increase his majority as long as he can squeeze the Conservative vote. The relatively sizeable Tory share in local – as opposed to Parliamentary – elections shows how important a tactical anti-Labour message is in Rochdale.



# Romsey and Southampton North

## Sandra Gidley MP

**TORY THREAT: HIGH**

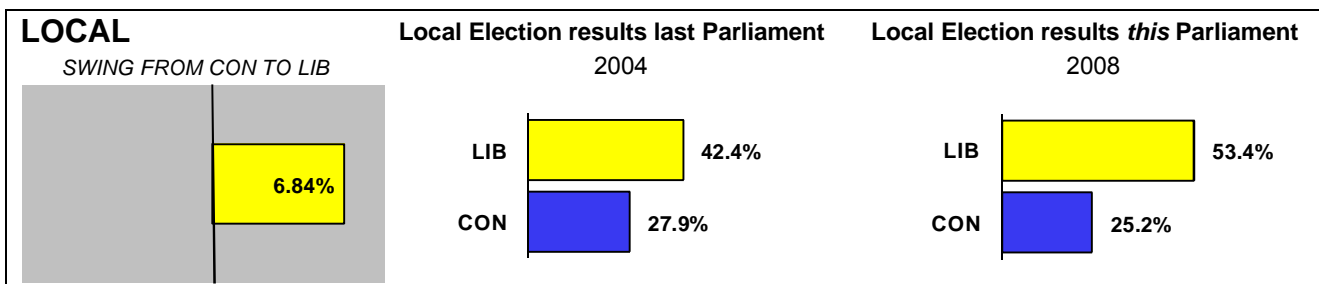
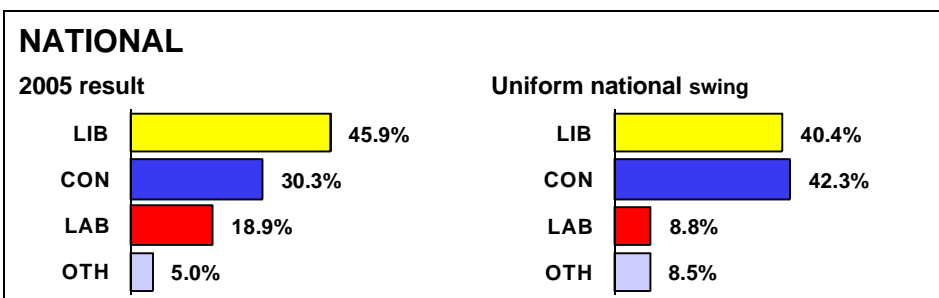


Very few punters are likely to back Sandra Gidley to hold this seat next time. That said, it is true to say that many people expected her to lose it in 2001 and in 2005. The council election results here are not good for the LibDems and the Conservatives only need a minute swing to take this seat.

# Sheffield Hallam

## Nick Clegg MP

**TORY THREAT: MINOR**

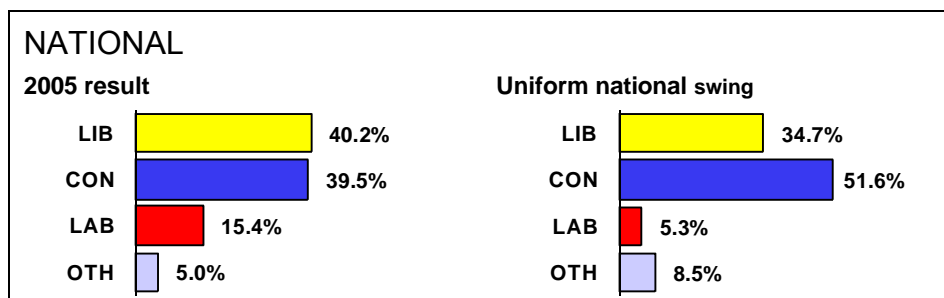


Okay, the uniform swing shows the Conservatives taking the LibDem leader's seat, but this is surely one constituency where that can be wholly disregarded. Having gone from little-known PPC to party leader in under three years means you can expect a big Clegg bounce here. Nick should win this seat with a large majority – almost irrespective of the wider national picture.

## Solihull

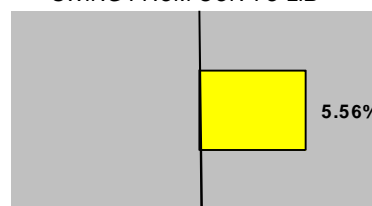
**TORY THREAT: HIGH**

### Lorely Burt MP



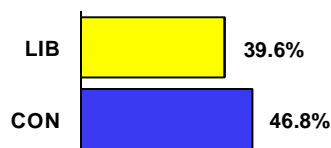
### LOCAL

SWING FROM CON TO LIB



#### Local Election results last Parliament

2002-2004



#### Local Election results *this* Parliament

2006-2008

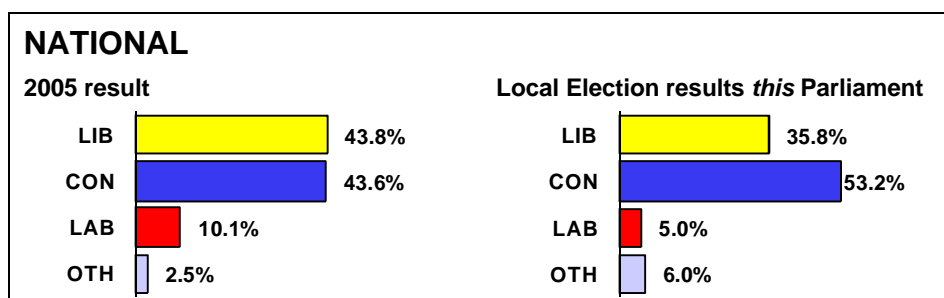


The amazing 10% swing with which Lorely Burt won this seat at the last election would have obliterated Michael Howard's Conservatives from the map if it had been repeated nationwide. In any normal circumstances, this would be considered a safe Tory seat – even in the Blair landslide of 1997, the Tories won here with a majority of 11,000. The council elections results for the LibDems have been strong here, but one can't get away from the fact that the majority is close to zero.

## Somerton and Frome

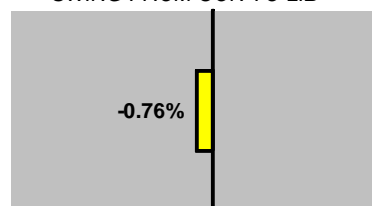
**TORY THREAT: HIGH**

### David Heath MP



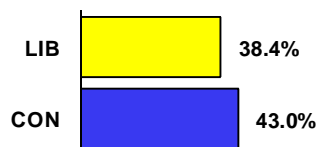
### LOCAL

SWING FROM CON TO LIB



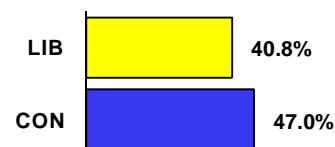
#### Local Election results *last* Parliament

2003



#### Uniform national swing

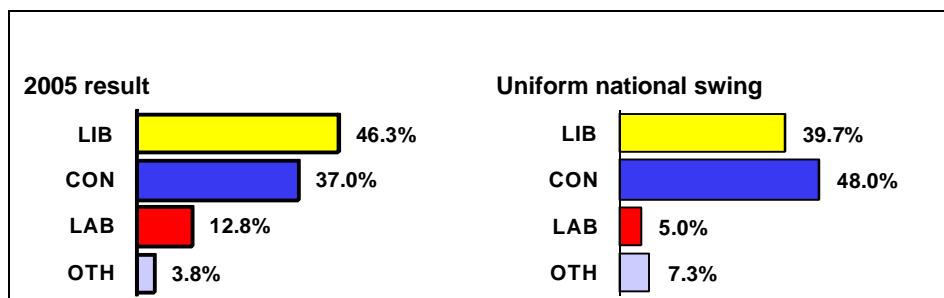
2007



David Heath has won this seat with a micro-majority in the last three elections. Unlike some of the other seats taken in 1997, the LibDems have been unable to construct a "buffer" majority in Somerton. David may hope that his resignation from the frontbench on the issue of a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty will appeal to some Tory eurosceptics, but this seat is very high on the Conservative target list.

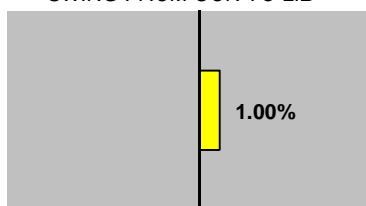
## Southport John Pugh MP

### TORY THREAT: MEASURABLE



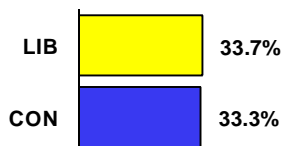
### LOCAL

SWING FROM CON TO LIB



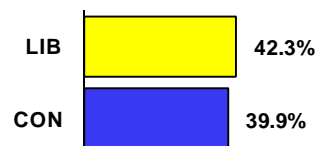
#### Local Election results *last* Parliament

2002-2004



#### Local Election results *this* Parliament

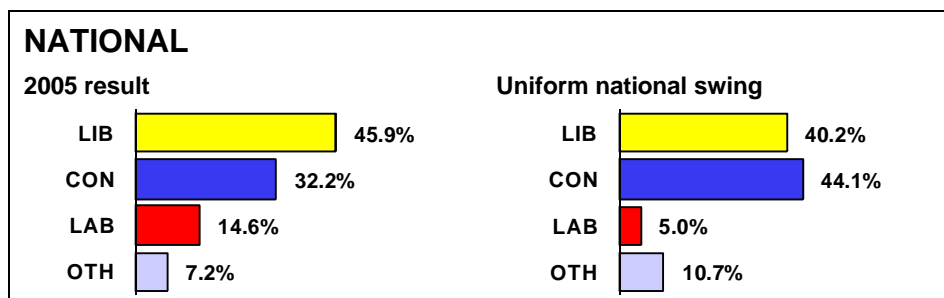
2006-2008



This seat has switched back and forth between the Conservatives and LibDems. It was held by Ronnie Fearn for the Liberals at the height of Thatcherism, so it does not have the characteristics of a constituency which is a "must win" for the Tories. However, John Pugh's majority is not substantial enough to be anywhere near impregnable.

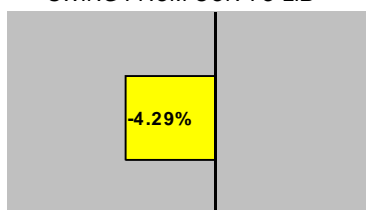
## St Austell and Newquay Stephen Gilbert PPC

### TORY THREAT: MEASURABLE



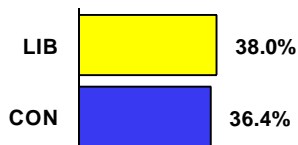
### LOCAL

SWING FROM CON TO LIB



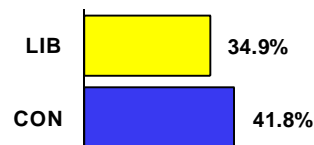
#### Local Election results *last* Parliament

2003



#### Local Election results *this* Parliament

2007

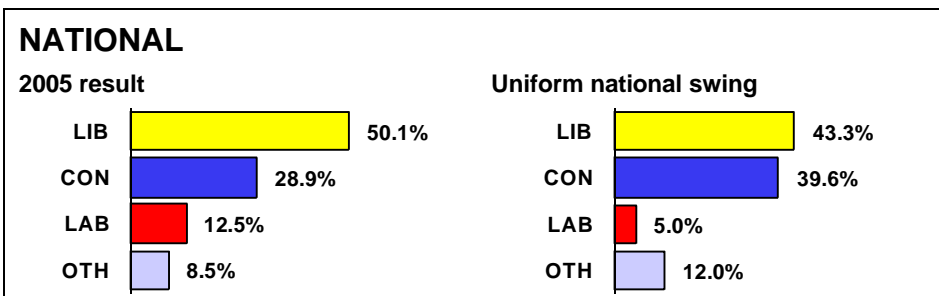


A new Cornish seat which includes large tranches of Matthew Taylor's constituency. This area has a strong Liberal tradition. The challenge for Stephen Gilbert will be to ensure that he retains Matthew's high personal vote and can stop an erosion of support to the Tories which appears to have occurred in the local council elections.

## St Ives

**TORY THREAT: MINOR**

### Andrew George MP

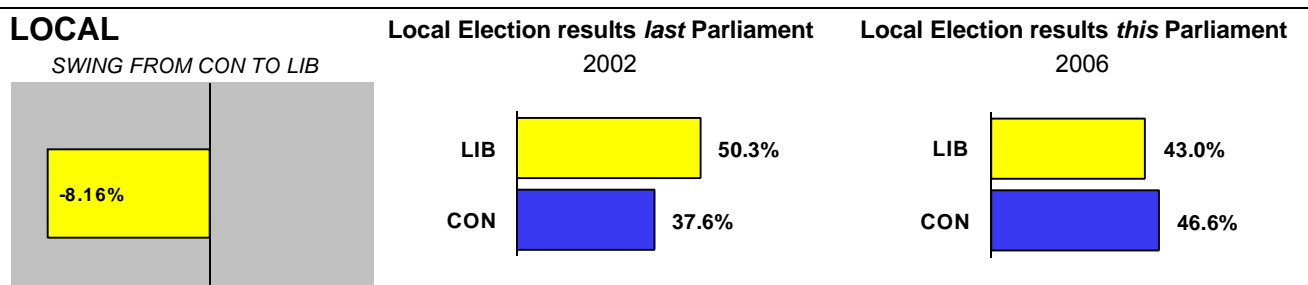
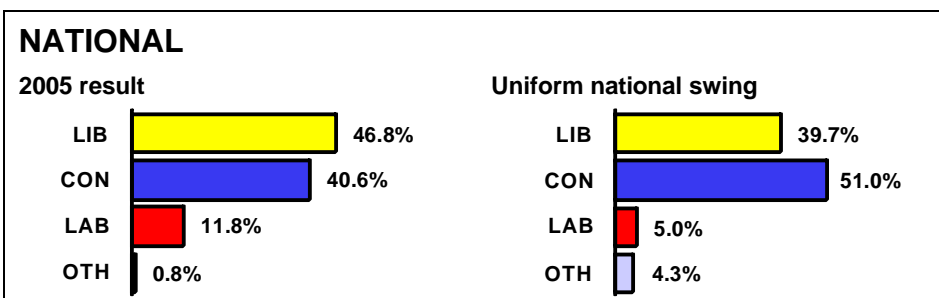


The western tip of Cornwall is almost certain to stay in LibDem hands. Andrew George has built up a very substantial majority here and should be immune to anything but an absurdly gigantic swing to the Tories. The local election results here include too many complicating factors to get an accurate picture of the ground war.

## Sutton and Cheam

**TORY THREAT: HIGH**

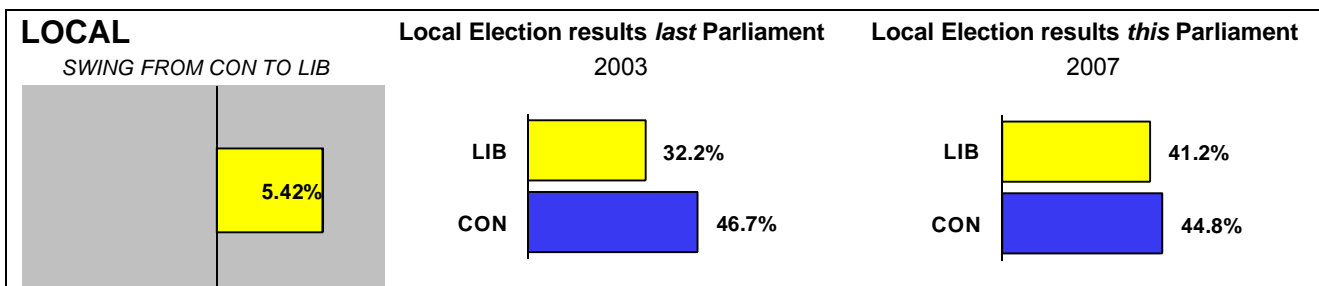
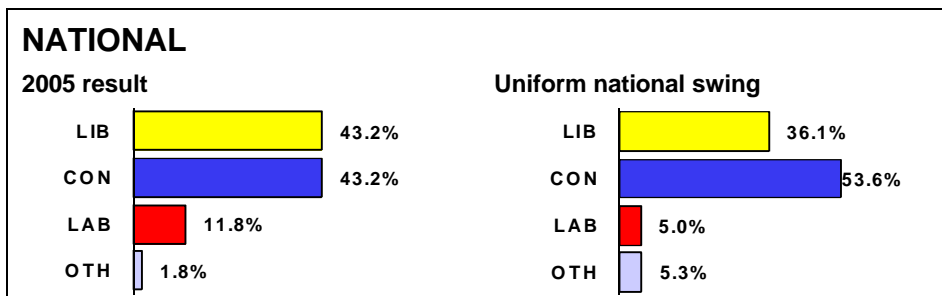
### Paul Burstow MP



Paul Burstow's role as chief whip affords him major influence within the LibDem Parliamentary Party but precious little in the way of national profile. He is recognised as a hard-working local MP, but there are grounds for concern. His majority was cut back by the Tories at the last election. The local election results – and the recent mayoral and assembly elections – show a continuing, and measurable, shift to the Conservatives.

## Taunton Deane Jeremy Browne MP

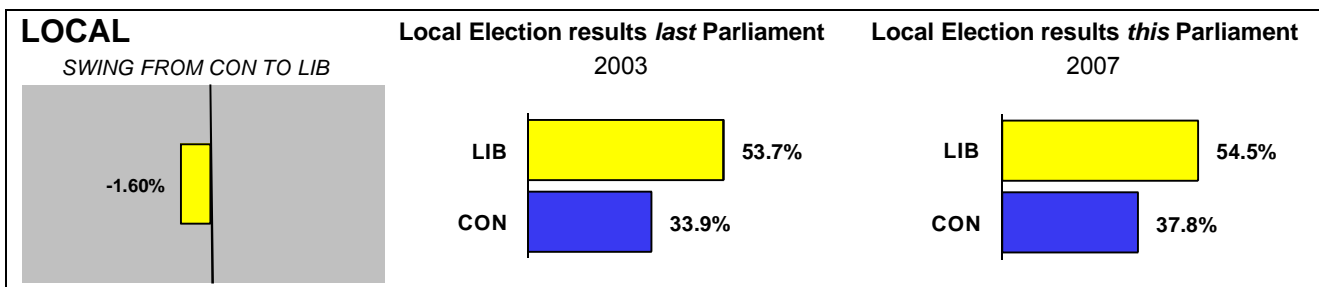
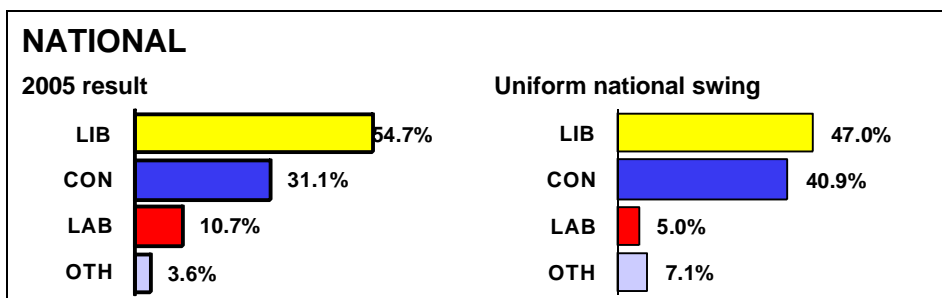
**TORY THREAT: HIGH**



A very marginal seat in all recent elections, Orange Booker Jeremy Browne recaptured Taunton in 2005 by a handful of votes. The local elections pay testament to the Conservatives' strong base here, but if you are looking for a candidate who is personally and ideologically appealing to moderate Conservative voters, Jeremy fits the bill perfectly.

## Thornbury and Yate Steve Webb MP

**TORY THREAT: MINOR**

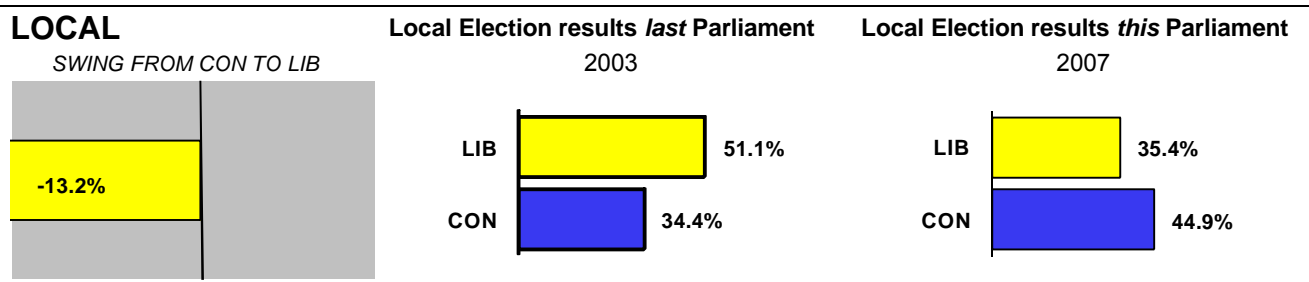
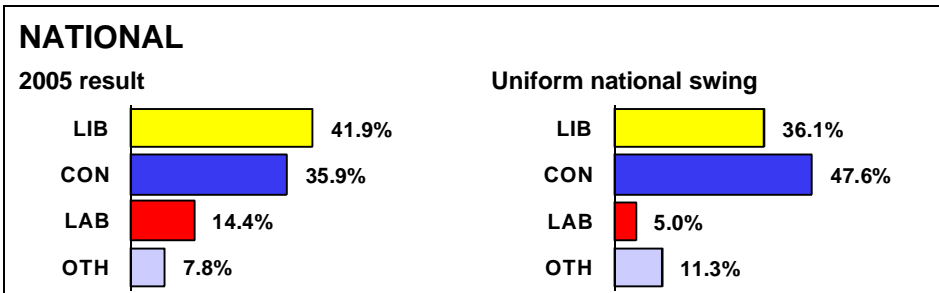


Intellectual left-of-centre Steve Webb has managed to make this area safe Liberal Democrat territory. The boundary changes make it safer still. He is one of very few MPs to exploit new technologies to maximum campaigning effect and the council election results pay tribute to a well-oiled and hyper-efficient local party machine.

# Torbay

**TORY THREAT: HIGH**

## Adrian Sanders MP



Adrian Sanders won this seat in 1997 by just a dozen votes. He has managed to build on that majority measurably since then, but the local elections seem to point to a very large shift to the Conservatives. The Tories also won the election for a directly elected mayor here – albeit on a microscopic turnout.

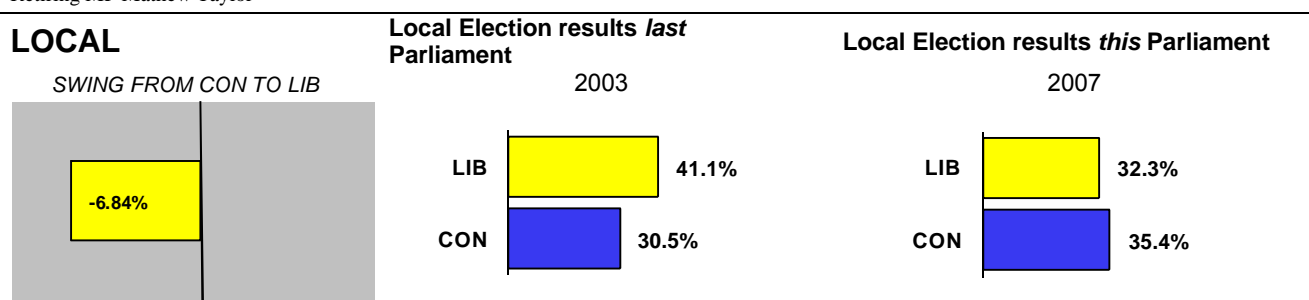
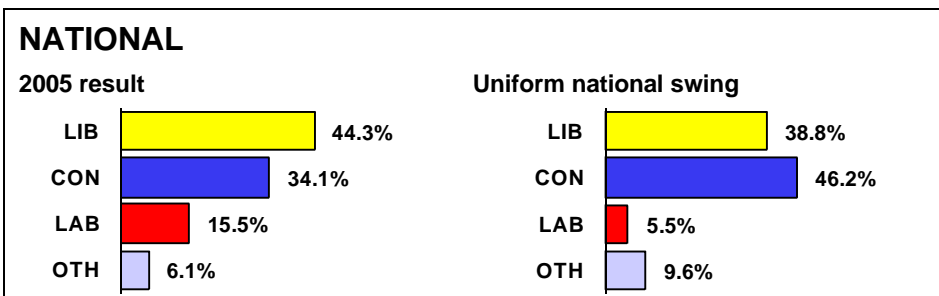
# Truro and Falmouth

**TORY THREAT: MEASURABLE**

## Terrye Teverson PPC



Retiring MP Mathew Taylor

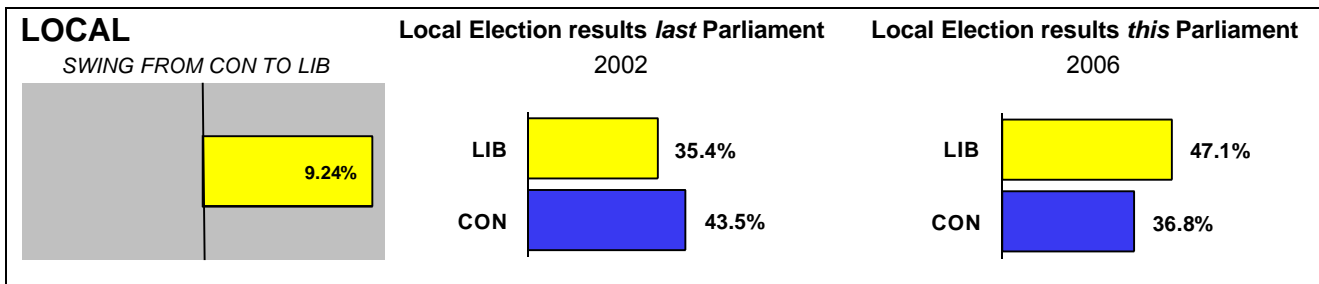
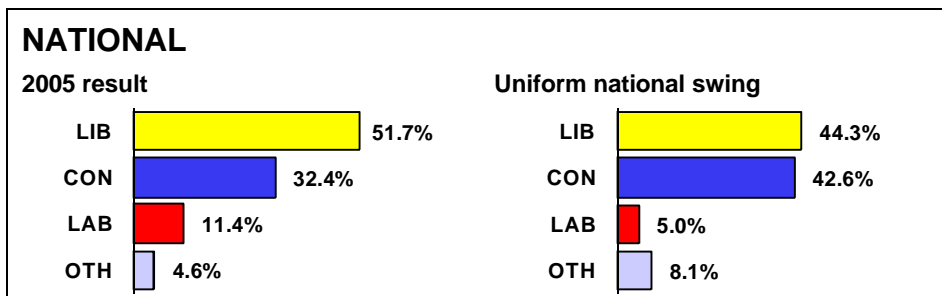


This newly-created seat includes parts of Matthew Taylor's and Julia Goldsworthy's present constituencies. As with St Austell and Newquay, the challenge for the new LibDem PPC here will be to try to ensure that personal votes for the previous LibDem MPs are transferable to the candidate. The local election results suggest the Tories are on the up in this constituency and a close battle is in prospect.



## Twickenham Vincent Cable MP

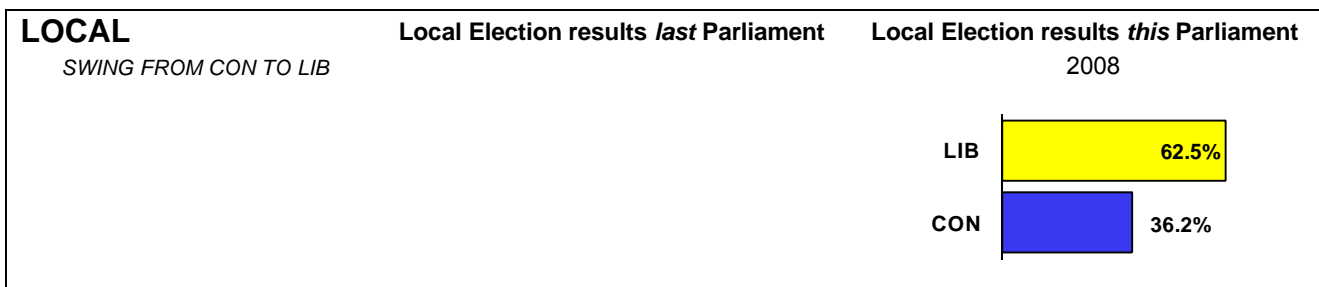
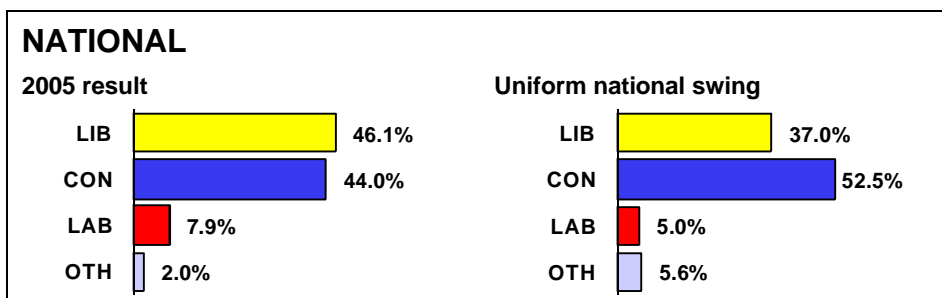
**TORY THREAT: MINOR**



This is the one seat in south west London (of the five the party holds) that should be clearly beyond the reach of the Conservatives. Vince has built a tidy majority here and his national profile and reputation have soared since 2005. The council results here show measurable signs of a Cable-effect locally. Vince was chronically under-used by the LibDems at the last election. Although he won't want to neglect Twickenham, surely this time round, the LibDem Treasury spokesman will be deployed as a key part of the "airwar"

## Westmorland and Lonsdale Tim Farron MP

**TORY THREAT: MEASURABLE**



Tim Farron "decapitated" Tim Collins at the last General Election, albeit only winning with by a margin of 267 votes. On the face of the basic figures, this should be a seat at high risk of falling to the Tories. But Tim could well buck any national trend. The local Conservatives are in turmoil here. And - although it is complex to compare local election results with those of the last Parliament - we include the 2008 results here. Tim Farron has had a phonemonal impact on the strength of the LibDems locally.

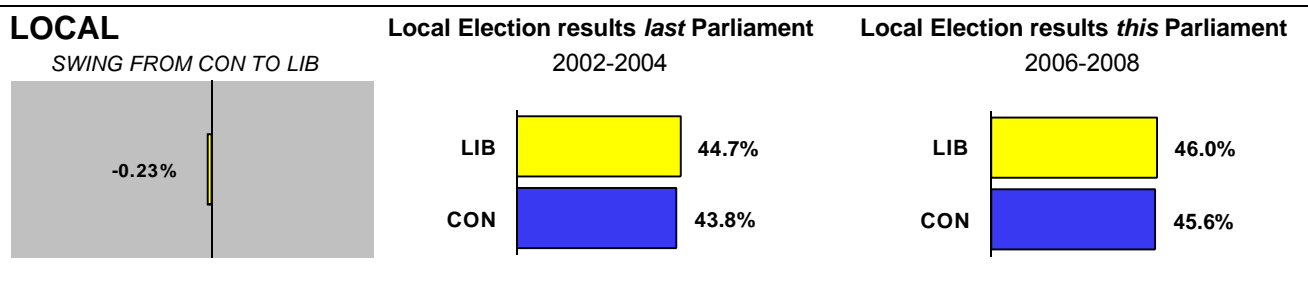
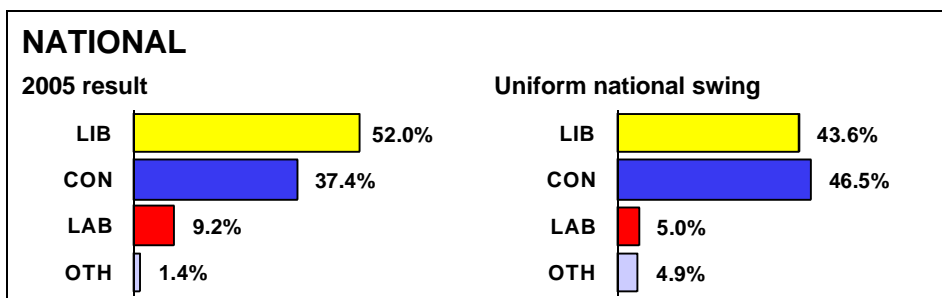
# Winchester

## Martin Tod PPC

### TORY THREAT: MEASURABLE



Mark Oaten retiring

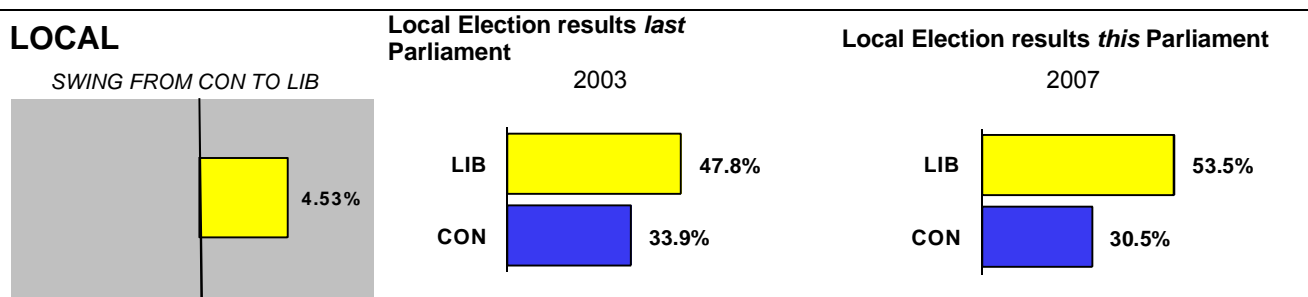
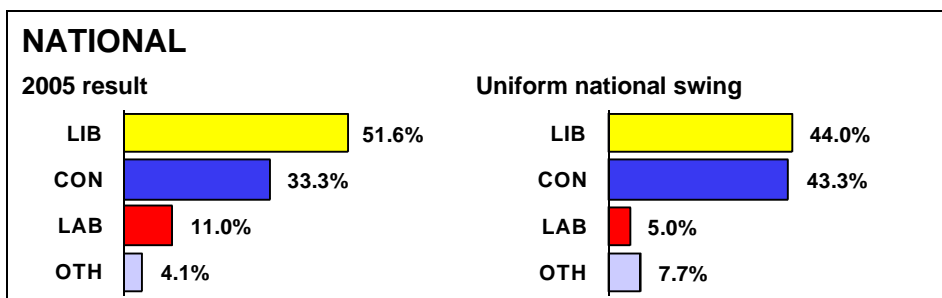


Boundary changes provide some help to Martin Tod in defending the seat represented by Mark Oaten since his win by just two votes in 1997. But the local elections show just close this fight might be. How much of the LibDem majority was down to a pre-2005 Oaten personal vote? And given the subsequent revelations surrounding Mark's personal life, how much of this personal vote is left and transferable to a new LibDem candidate?

# Yeovil

## David Laws MP

### TORY THREAT: MINOR



The is one seat in Somerset where the LibDems should be supremely confident is Yeovil. David Laws has built on the Paddy Ashdown legacy to make this a LibDem stronghold – reflected in the local election results. His high media profile and the fact that he is an Orange Book LibDem who appeals to moderate Tories should see him comfortably returned. Only a political earthquake would see the Conservatives winning here.

## York Outer

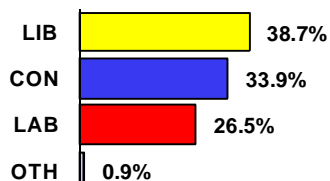
TORY THREAT: HIGH

## Madeleine Kirk PPC

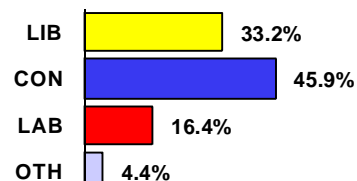


## NATIONAL

## 2005 result

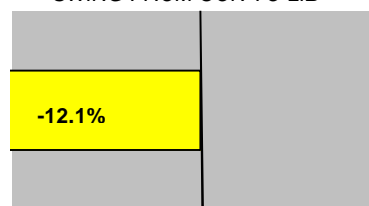


## Uniform national swing

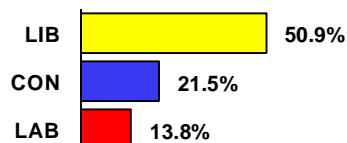


## LOCAL

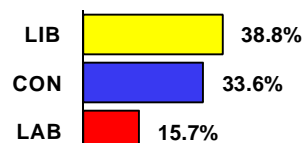
SWING FROM CON TO LIB

Local Election results *last* Parliament

2003

Local Election results *this* Parliament

2007



This is a new seat with measurable support for all three main parties. But the Conservative advance here is substantial. Although the LibDems secured more votes than the Tories in the 2007 local elections, the swing to the Conservatives was dramatic. If this seat does not turn blue, it is extremely unlikely that David Cameron will be the next Prime Minister.

## SUMMARY

## HIGH

15

Carshalton and Wallington	Tom Brake
Cheadle	Mark Hunter
Cheltenham	Martin Horwood
Chippenham	Duncan Hames
Cornwall South East	Karen Gillard
Devon West and Torridge	Adam Symons
Guildford	Sue Doughty
Hereford & South Herefordshire	Sarah Carr
Romsey & Southampton North	Sandra Gidley
Solihull	Lorely Burt
Somerton and Frome	David Heath
Sutton and Cheam	Paul Burstow
Taunton Deane	Jeremy Browne
Torbay	Adrian Sanders
York Outer	Madeleine Kirk

## MEASURABLE

16

Bath	Don Foster
Camborne and Redruth	Julia Goldsworthy
Cornwall North	Dan Rogerson
Devon North	Nick Harvey
Eastleigh	Chris Huhne
Hampstead and Kilburn	Ed Fordham
Harrogate and Knaresborough	Claire Kelley
Kingston and Surbiton	Edward Davey
Leeds North West	Greg Mulholland
Portsmouth South	Mike Hancock
Richmond Park	Susan Kramer
Southport	John Pugh
St Austell and Newquay	Steve Gilbert
Truro and Falmouth	Terrye Teverson
Westmorland and Lonsdale	Tim Farron
Winchester	Martin Tod

## MINOR

15

Berwick-upon-Tweed	Alan Beith
Bristol West	Stephen Williams
Cambridge	David Howarth
Colchester	Bob Russell
Dorset Mid and Poole North	Annette Brooke
Hazel Grove	Andrew Stunell
Lewes	Norman Baker
Newton Abbot	Richard Younger-Ross
Norfolk North	Norman Lamb
Oxford West and Abingdon	Evan Harris
Sheffield Hallam	Nick Clegg
St Ives	Andrew George
Thornbury and Yate	Steve Webb
Twickenham	Vincent Cable
Yeovil	David Laws

## ZERO

7

Bermondsey and Old Southwark	Simon Hughes
Birmingham Yardley	John Hemming
Brent Central	Sarah Teather
Chesterfield	Paul Holmes
Hornsey and Wood Green	Lynne Featherstone
Manchester Withington	John Leech
Rochdale	Paul Rowen

## Liberal Democrats v Labour

Nick Clegg's professed electoral strategy is essentially to try and hold on to the ground that the LibDems have gained from the Conservatives over the past decade and target fifty Labour seats. The analysis on the preceding pages indicates that the former of these will be a substantial task if present polling figures are anything to go by.

But could any losses to the Tories be offset by taking seats from Labour? Could the LibDem Parliamentary party be swelled by making sweeping gains from an unpopular government at the next election? Shown opposite is the list of the forty seats in the UK where the Liberal Democrats are closest to unseating the Labour Party. We have once again used Electoral Calculus' projections regarding the impact of boundary changes.

The good news here is that whilst the polls indicate a sizeable swing away LibDem to Conservative, they also point to a net swing from Labour towards the Liberal Democrats. Although the LibDem vote share has fallen since the last election, the Labour vote share has fallen further still. Our average of thirty recent opinion polls shows a swing of 2.3% from Labour to the Liberal Democrats.

But – on a uniform national swing model – this doesn't get the LibDems very far down this target list. Edinburgh South, Oxford East, Islington South, Watford and Aberdeen South would fall out of Labour's hands, but the Liberal Democrats gains would stop there.

And there are reasons to be little cautious about even two of these seats. Edinburgh South and Aberdeen South are two of ten Scottish seats that appear in this "top forty" list. In Scotland, the polls show a net swing away from the Liberal Democrats to Labour, the Tories flat-lining and a huge increase in support for the SNP. On a pure uniform national swing basis, not a single Scottish seat would switch from Labour to LibDem.

Another concern is that fully a dozen of the seats in the top forty actually have the Liberal Democrats starting from third place.

To gain any of these seats would require not just the incumbent Labour Party to be very unpopular, it would need the other opposition parties to be performing badly too.

TARGET LABOUR SEATS	Majority	Swing required
Edinburgh South	405	0.48%
Oxford East	686	0.74%
Islington South and Finsbury	486	0.79%
Watford	1147	1.16%
Aberdeen South	1348	1.62%
Edinburgh North and Leith	2153	2.53%
Durham City of	3273	3.69%
Norwich South	3272	3.98%
Leicester South	3729	4.39%
Ochil and South Perthshire	✓ 8427	4.95%
Oldham East and Saddleworth	4474	5.45%
Colne Valley	✓ 5728	5.66%
Glasgow North	3338	5.98%
Aberconwy	✓ 3,270	6.08%
Birmingham Hall Green	5,189	6.25%
Liverpool Wavertree	4249	6.27%
Bradford East	4627	6.35%
Swansea West	4269	6.45%
Northampton North	✓ 4782	6.46%
Blaydon	5,609	6.81%
Pendle	✓ 5,719	6.95%
Sheffield Central	4709	7.06%
Bristol North West	✓ 6512	7.13%
Burnley	5,779	7.41%
Stirling	✓ 6677	7.64%
Brentford and Isleworth	✓ 6769	7.80%
Edinburgh East	6,202	7.81%
Derby North	6399	7.95%
Newcastle upon Tyne North	6754	8.28%
East Lothian	7,620	8.33%
City of Chester	✓ 7541	8.51%
Warrington South	✓ 8100	8.58%
Streatham	6446	8.58%
Manchester Gorton	5453	8.62%
Plymouth Sutton&Devonport	✓ 7372	9.01%
Holborn and St Pancras	8092	9.25%
Aberdeen North	6795	9.28%
Milton Keynes North	✓ 9,310	9.33%
Newcastle upon Tyne East	6338	9.35%
Edinburgh South West	✓ 8224	9.37%

= LibDems in 3<sup>rd</sup> place

In Colne Valley, for example, the 5.66% swing needed to defeat Labour might look eminently achievable with a strong local campaigning effort – but the LibDems would also have to leapfrog the Conservatives. If the first of these sounds like a pretty measurable challenge, the second is greater still.

Furthermore, ***one doesn't have to travel very far down this list of target seats before the scale of the swing needed to defeat Labour is truly awesome.***

Birmingham Hall Green, for example, is less than halfway down the list. Yet the LibDems need a 6.25% swing here. To put that into a national context, such a swing would imply a national vote share for Labour and the Liberal Democrats that was pretty much equal or had Labour just marginally ahead – for example Labour 24% and LibDems 22%. No recent national polls show the gap between the two parties to be anywhere near this small.

Towards the bottom of the list, the swings required are truly heroic. Streatham requires an 8.58% swing to switch to the LibDems. Such a swing on a national scale would put the Liberal Democrats ahead of the Labour Party in national vote share. Again, no recent opinion polls suggest such an outcome.

The essential psephological truth is this: Whilst there are a large number of genuinely competitive LibDem-Conservative marginals, there are only a few LibDem-Labour marginals.

This means that it is very difficult for the Liberal Democrats to take Labour seats even if the Labour government is hugely unpopular as it is at present.

Of course, in individual constituencies, it is possible for a well-run campaign to generate a gigantic swing – especially against a complacent incumbent. The 17.4% swing in Manchester Withington has already been mentioned. Lynne Featherstone and Julia Goldsworthy both secured swings from Labour of around 10% to win their seats in 2005. The point is that these are the exceptions not the rule. Every election is sprinkled with a few sensational wins and disappointing losses. There may well even be the odd Labour seat not on this list that will elect a LibDem MP.

But to expect all – or even many – of these seats to turn from red to yellow would not be the result of a clever LibDem targeting strategy, it would be the

consequence of a political earthquake the likes of which has not been seen since the end of the Second World War.

Perhaps – just perhaps – such an earthquake will happen. Are we witnessing not merely the slow, drawn-out death of this government but the total obliteration of the Labour Party itself? The answer would have to be an emphatic “yes” for these forty seats to turn Liberal Democrat.

But, if the opinion polls are broadly accurate, ***then the size of the Liberal Democrat parliamentary presence at the next election will be decided much more by the battle against Cameron*** -where a sizeable proportion of our MPs face serious opposition from the Tories – than by the fight against Labour.

This realisation has substantial implications for the party's electoral and communications strategy. Because the key principle that should be guiding both is that “Conservative votes count double”. To all intents and purposes, it is twice as valuable to persuade a voter to switch from Tory to LibDem as it is to persuade a Labour voter to switch to the LibDems.

This isn't true in all key seats, but it is true in most. In Eastleigh, for example, Chris Huhne can increase his majority by one for every Labour voter who can be “squeezed” into voting LibDem, but he increases his majority by two for every Conservative he converts. Similarly, every vote that slips away from Chris to the Conservatives is twice as deadly as every vote he loses to Labour.

Even in those LibDem-held seats where the Conservatives appear to be an irrelevance, we should not write off “latent” or “sleeping” Conservative support. At the last election, the Liberal Democrats made more net gains from Labour than from the Conservatives, but a look at the recent political history of these seats makes interesting reading. Bristol West, Cardiff Central, Leeds North West, Birmingham Yardley, Hornsey & Wood Green, Falmouth & Cambourne and Cambridge were all gains from Labour - but all have been represented by the Tories until relatively recently. The Conservative Party in these seats may well have fallen into disrepair in terms of campaigning infrastructure, but this doesn't mean – to use simplistic terminology – that the voters here are “centre-left”, they may well be “centre-right” but now voting LibDem rather than Tory.



## A Liberal Vision for the Liberal Democrats

Liberal Vision, as an organisation, is committed to lower taxation, less government and more personal freedom as a matter of political conviction.

But we also believe such an agenda represents the best electoral strategy for the Liberal Democrats. If one was merely interested in maximising the Liberal Democrats' parliamentary strength – and was wholly indifferent on questions of principle, ideology or policy – Liberal Vision's agenda would be the best agenda to pursue. The case we put here is couched entirely in terms of votes and seats *not* because that is all we care about, but because we believe that the things we do care about are also in the LibDems' own electoral self-interest.

We welcome Nick Clegg setting a new direction on tax policy. In his interview with the Sunday Telegraph on 7th September 2008, the LibDem leader talked of "bearing down on ballooning government budgets" and, with the regard to £20bn worth of expenditure cuts already identified, he was clear that "the vast bulk of it [should be] given back through tax cuts."

He also indicated a desire to be very much more creative between now and the next General Election. Asked if this meant going further than the current pledge of a 4p cut in the basic rate of income tax, he replied simply "Yes"

This represents both a continuation and an acceleration of the direction of travel established under Ming Campbell's leadership, when the party dropped its commitment to a 50p rate of income tax on high earners. At the last General Election, the Liberal Democrats supported the highest level of overall taxation and public spending of the three main parties. At the next General Election, the LibDems could very well be supporting the lowest.

This might, in part, be argued to be a reaction to changing economic circumstances, but it surely cannot be denied that it is also a dramatic philosophical shift. It is one that is warmly welcomed by Liberal Vision and not one which the Liberal Democrats should be remotely ashamed of or embarrassed about.

However, a number of doubts remain – both about the likely content of the Liberal Democrats' final proposals and the way they are communicated to the electorate.



On the 3rd September, communications chief Ed Davey and conference chair Duncan Brack briefed the press ahead of the party conference.

According to the politics.co.uk website, Ed Davey said "we may be able to reduce the cost to the taxpayer". But, he warned, net tax cuts could not be guaranteed. The first priority would be to switch money from Labour spending priorities to Liberal Democrat spending priorities. Only after that process had been completed would the overall tax burden be quantifiable.

Now, Ed Davey is certainly not an instinctive tax-and-spender. And, in fact, there may not be any exact logical contradiction between what he said at the press briefing and what Nick Clegg said to Melissa Kite of the Telegraph. But at the very least, it comes across as a rather mixed message. There is the world of difference in the minds of voters between an aspiration to cut the overall tax burden and it being a promise.

Any confusion can probably be explained – and, to some degree, excused – by the fact that the party is moving towards a new policy rather than unveiling the entirety of its tax proposals more than a year ahead of a General Election.

But in communications terms, the LibDems inevitably struggle to secure equal media billing with the other two parties. It is therefore vital that every minute on the airwaves is used to transmit a message which is totally unambiguous and clear.

***A core part of that message should be "we, the Liberal Democrats, will reduce the overall burden of taxation."***



According to opinion poll research conducted by the Taxpayers' Alliance last year<sup>1</sup>, a tax-cutting approach could gain considerable traction amongst the wider electorate.

64% of the electorate agreed that the government spends too much and taxes too much – this figure was 85% amongst Conservative sympathisers. 37% identified a rising tax burden as a major financial worry for themselves and their family – including 50% of Conservative supporters.

Asked whether they believed that - over the last decade - money had been spent well or badly on public services, 19% said “spent well” and 65% said “spent badly”. Amongst Tory sympathisers, the figures were 5% and 89%.

The evidence from the TPA's survey is pretty clear – ***a tax-cutting message could be very popular amongst the wider electorate and hugely so amongst the Tory-leaning voters that the Liberal Democrats must win over.***

The Liberal Democrats must make the case for lower taxes clearly, simply and repetitively. The last of these is particularly important given the (accurate) impression that the electorate will have formed of the LibDems over recent years – namely, that they are the party of high taxation. Nick Clegg's stance on tax is a counter-intuitive way for the Liberal Democrat leader to behave in the minds of most voters. So, the old adage that your message is only just starting to get through when you have bored yourself sick with restating it must be doubly or trebly true in the case of the LibDems and lower taxes.

The craven caution of Cameron and Osborne means the taxation debate is an even greater opportunity for Nick Clegg. The LibDem leader is correct – perhaps even rather generous – in asserting that the Conservatives are the “flaky party” on this issue. They are obsessed with repeating the word “stability” and have underscored their determination ***not*** to promise overall tax reductions a number of times.

So historically mistrusted are the Conservatives on the issue of public services that they fear any pledges on tax cuts would be immediately associated in voters' mind with the bad old days of unelectability. This

means that it would not be very easy for the Tories to “reclaim” the low tax mantle if the Liberal Democrats seized the opportunity to make it their own.

There is, however, an important part of the low tax case that the LibDems seem to have failed to grasp – at least thus far. The party has continually couched its tax messages in terms of “fairness”.

It would be ludicrous to argue against “fairness” of course. But there are serious questions about whether the current policy and narrative strike the right note, if the party need to appeal to centre-right, Tory-leaning voters.

The Liberal Democrats' tax cuts would be aimed overwhelmingly (probably exclusively) at low and middle earners. From an electoral point of view, we believe this to be misguided.

It is a matter of stark electoral reality that the LibDems' tax policy will be presented in terms of a cut-off point at which households are better or worse off. It is imperative that this threshold is not set too low.

The orthodox opinion sometimes seems to be that if you can show that your tax plans make 75% of people better off and just 25% of people worse off, this must of necessity be a vote-winning policy – there being three times as many “winners” as “losers”.

But we believe that this orthodoxy is wrong. It assumes a remarkable lack of aspiration on the part of the electorate.

Just because you are earning £15,000 per annum now does not mean that you can't reasonably seek to earn £50,000 per annum in a few years' time. Frankly, even if such an aspiration is unrealistic, the individual concerned will not necessarily look kindly on a political party who wishes to cap or limit it.

A tax policy that penalises the richest quartile of society is ***only*** attractive to the other 75% if you take the patronising view that three-quarters of the population are uninterested in striving, working and sweating their way to becoming rich.

***We believe that the Liberal Democrats need to complement the “fairness” message with a heavy dose of aspirational rhetoric.***

<sup>1</sup> a Yougov poll conducted between 28th and 30th August 2007

This is especially the case when you consider many of the seats that the LibDems are defending against the Conservatives. Whilst a full-scale demographic analysis of each constituency is well beyond the remit of this publication, it is fair to say that – in large part – we are looking at leafy suburban areas, with relatively high levels of owner occupancy, low levels of unemployment and a predominantly white collar workforce. It may be true to say that salaries in excess of £50,000 a year are a statistical rarity across the country as a whole, but it seems fair to assume that such income levels are more common in a good number of the constituencies held by the LibDems. Furthermore – and without wishing to heap speculation upon speculation – it seems a reasonable guess that the voters earning these sorts of salaries are exactly the sort of voters that the LibDems need to win over – or win back – from Cameron.

Given that “Conservative votes count double”, constructing a tax policy that cuts the overall tax burden, but does not offer tax breaks for households with an annual income in excess of £60,000 or £70,000, could prove to be of very limited electoral assistance.

We recognise and welcome the substantial change in approach to tax by the Liberal Democrats since the last election. To have moved from supporting higher taxation to calling for lower taxation in just three years indicates credible and enlightened leadership. However, we would urge Nick Clegg and the party to go further and faster down this path. The Liberal Democrat message at the next election should not merely be “**We will reduce the overall tax burden**”.

It should be “***The rich should pay less tax, middle-earners should pay much less and low-earners should pay massively less.***”

Although the electoral threat posed by the Conservatives is very real indeed – it is not inevitable that they will capture swathes of LibDem seats.

If Nick Clegg can continue to take the party in the direction of cutting waste and lowering taxation, and if he can communicate that message boldly and bravely to the electorate, then he could stop the advancing Tory tide. And – who knows – he might even reverse it. We wish him every success.

Mark Littlewood & David Preston, September 2008



Liberal Vision is a campaigning organisation for Liberal Democrats who wish to see the party pursue an agenda of low taxation, a smaller state and more personal freedom. Liberal Vision is affiliated to Progressive Vision, the cross-party classical liberal think tank

About the authors:

#### **Mark Littlewood**

Mark was Head of Media for the Liberal Democrats from December 2004 to May 2007. He has previously worked as Campaigns Director of the human rights group Liberty and was the founding national director of NO2ID, the campaign against ID cards and the database state. He is Chairman of Liberal Vision and Communications Director of Progressive Vision.

#### **David Preston**

David Preston is a New Zealander of British descent. A graduate in Political Science from the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, he is particularly interested in the relationship between security, conflict and climate change. He has worked as a researcher for Progressive Vision since July 2008. David is sympathetic to the aims and ideals of the Liberal Democrats, but is not a party member. For this reason, the party is referred to by name throughout this document, rather than in the first person plural.

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