

Championing Change

Our futures matter. My future's here. My present's here and my past has been here for over 20 years.

I'm dedicated to this region having lived and breathed business and worked to improve people's lives.

I'm not a millionaire. I am not a career politician. And there is no big party machine. I'm a local with local values.

And I'm standing here as the Liberal Democrat candidate. The LibDems are the only Party prepared to fight the hard Brexit that this Tory government is trying to inflict on the West Midlands and the UK.

I've spent the last 20 years brokering consensus between industry and government, social enterprise and universities, and working with our communities as a councillor. So I know that there's so much more to do.

Here are three things I want to highlight. Three things that will be at the very top of my agenda as Mayor for our region.

I'm standing as **the champion for change**. I'm the leader we need, here and now, because I'm passionate about this region;

I say we need **a strong unifying voice** where everybody counts. That's my promise to you as mayor.

I stand for **a future made by us, for us**. That's my vision...

Grown from our strengths: our young people, our diversity, our innovation, our investment in business, both small and large, creating jobs and developing better prospects for all our people.

But I'm angry. I'm angry that we're passed over all the time. The 'middle child'. Plenty of attention for the North and South. But we're the neglected Middle, left to fend for ourselves.

Well, you can't have a powerhouse without an engine.

I will ensure that we put the West Midlands where it should be, at the heart of our country. We are the heartland of UK makers and creators, and we need to be at the heart of the great European Single Market.

As mayor I will champion the change we need and give it the strong voice we need.

YOUR CHAMPION FOR CHANGE

I am your Champion for Change.....So why do we need change? What aren't they telling you?

They're not telling you about the years of underinvestment under both Tory and Labour governments. They keep shuffling the cards but never dealing us a good hand. The deck is constantly rigged against us.

Because it doesn't end with the under-investment in essential services and infrastructure we've had for decades. Now we've got a devolved finance deal that doesn't stack up. And what's coming next is worse.

Don't be fooled by the sudden rush of announcements of money for us that the government is bound to make – it's all a smokescreen. We're getting less, not more.

It doesn't take into account the neglect of our region for years.

It doesn't take into account the ferocious cuts currently being made.

And it doesn't take into account the future cuts that we will have to make – far bigger than anything that the government claims to be giving us.

It's not good for us. And it's not even good for our national economy.

As Mayor I will stand steadfast on your behalf to stop the cuts.

We need more investment, not cuts. More jobs, more housing, and a world-class transport system.

A STRONG UNIFYING VOICE

I am standing today as a strong unifying voice.

How you vote in this mayoral election really matters.

If you put a Labour Mayor on top of a Combined Authority that's largely Labour nothing will change.

If you put a Conservative Mayor on top of a Combined Authority that's almost all Labour nothing will get done.

If you put me as Chairman of that board, you will get the voice of unity, of consensus and the change we desperately need.

Over the last four months, I have met people in business, charities, community leaders, traders, schools and universities, and everywhere I go I hear the same thing.

Everyone I speak to wants long term plans. They're sick of quick fixes that don't work. Soundbite policies that come and go. A muddle of initiatives that lead nowhere.

They want an economy that's socially inclusive, yet entrepreneurial. They want to respect our communities. They want an education that prepares our young people for work giving them the best chances in life.

In fact, they want a liberal, inclusive and fair agenda. They want moderation in radical doses. Not the extremism of today's mainstream politics.

This Party has always been the home of tolerance, openness and unity. I'm not about to sacrifice my values for a short-term gain.

This region's place in Europe must be preserved at all costs.

I will demand and get our rightful seat at the table in the forthcoming negotiations. Our economy is tied into Europe. I don't want to see that pointlessly sacrificed.

We don't need to turn the clock back in any attempt to overturn the democratic decision.

But we do need to make certain that this is the future we want.

There must be a second referendum so the public can vote on the facts, not the propaganda dominating last year's referendum.

I will fight for this region's future and look to build whatever links to our continental neighbours we need to ensure our prosperity, our security, and our access to the wider world.

And I will build a future made by us, for us.

A FUTURE MADE BY US FOR US

Our region is one of the youngest in Europe. With nearly half of our population under the age of 25. What a human goldmine!

I will ensure every young person gets the careers advice they need. And whether they choose vocational or academic routes, or both, that these are equally valued.

My job in higher education has shown me that both routes can lead to future personal success and will be the bedrock for the change we need.

Here are a few concrete proposals.

Through a one billion pound innovation fund I will develop our human goldmine creating a 'mind to market' gold rush.

I will provide bursaries to young people who stay and work in our own manufacturing and SMEs.

I will provide them with free transport up to the age of 25 years old.

Growing our self-made place. Growing our homemade success: with our young people growing up, living and working here fulfilled and happy. With jobs, homes and in time families of their own. Able to pay it forward to the next rising generation.

And once we have done this, then all this investment needs to be directed into building up our own army of medium-sized businesses. The growth engine of the West Midlands. Powering our economy and prized as such.

But there's too much in our region that doesn't work.

In our public sector cuts have been harsh. 50% cuts to public service budgets. Services need to be properly funded and properly designed.

Public sector reform is right up there on my agenda. Despite the best efforts of those diligent front line staff there have been too many high profile examples of failures in social care, in education and in elderly care.

If we're not careful the Mayor's office could just be another layer of bureaucracy that you don't want. I will ensure that we in the West Midlands Combined Authority are accountable to you.

I will drive performance through effective monitoring using a scorecard published and updated regularly to ensure the effective delivery of services.

But this is not just about business and services. This is about you, me and us, creating a better place to live.

I want to champion change in my West Midlands' home. And I want to do it the West Midlands Way.

Why do I care so much?

I'm a local who's championed our region at home and abroad. As regional director of the CBI and CEO of the Heart of England Tourist Board.

I have founded and led Birmingham Made Me, Midlands Excellence and West Midlands *First*.

But my biggest joy has been to help start-ups succeed.

I've also run my own business and been one of the few female CEOs of a FTSE 250 manufacturer, AGA Rangemaster.

I've spent the last 10 years helping to promote our emerging talent. Linking new ideas to business.

Why? Because I love the energy and enthusiasm of our young.

I love our tradition of innovation, of design and of our wish to make things, better things that improve people's lives here and around the world.

I'm proud of our great brands – Jaguar, Land Rover, Pashley, AGA, Rayburn, Rangemaster and Acme Whistles! Our beautiful countryside and rivers that have inspired so many poets and writers, our canals, our diversity.

**Beverley Nielsen Lib Dem Candidate for West Midlands Metro Mayor
Campaign Launch Speech Monday 30th January 2017**

I have been round the world in the past four months and never left the West Midlands and the vision of a life that is truly great for everyone is within our grasp.

I stand here today because I believe in this great region. I am angry that we have been overlooked for so long and left to get on with it whilst handed so little to invest in our people and their services.

I am the Champion for Change. I am the unifying voice of this region. I am not going to put up and shut up. Our future will be made by us for us.

So it's time to blast the whistle on successive governments and say enough is enough. We will not put up with it any longer.

END

30 January 2017