

SIMON BANKS



I joined the Liberal Party as a student and then the merged party. I was a Waltham Forest councillor for twelve years (five as Group Leader, four of those in balance of power), stood for Parliament four times, have been Chair and Chair of Campaigns in my current local party (NE Essex) and am at present a member of Eastern Region Exec and Chair of the Essex co-ordinating committee.

Early in the Coalition I became concerned that the movement I'd campaigned in for most of my life might be moving to tepid centrism and an acceptance of great inequalities provided civil liberties were preserved. So I became active, in a small way, in the SLF. At that time the role of the SLF was clear: Social and Radical Liberalism was in danger.

The challenge now is different and less obvious. The Leader will listen, Conference will pass some SLF ideas, but how much does that matter in the world outside? The SLF needs to be a powerhouse for developing radical and robust policy on key issues – the climate emergency, poverty, the economy, health and social care, education, political reform... It should also play a key role in clarifying the nature of Liberalism and bridging the disconnect between activists who know why they're Liberals and a public which doesn't.

To do that, we need to become more diverse: more minority ethnic members and especially more young people. Too many keen, thinking local activists haven't heard of us (or Liberal Reform).

What can I contribute?

I have the time. I'm good at chairing meetings or, in any case, clarifying what people are disputing and pushing for a clear decision. I'm a good writer and editor of text; I'm used to working in a team. The issues that fire me are the climate emergency and green issues generally; devolution; and emergency planning. I'm an activist and a theorist. I'm a Liberal before all else.

I would like to do what I can for the SLF.