

Green for go as conference season begins

The Green Party meets in Birmingham this weekend. Political editor **ANNABELLE DICKSON** speaks to local members about what the future holds.

Conference season kicks off this weekend when the Green Party meets in Birmingham.

Like Labour and the UK Independence Party, they have been choosing a new leader over the summer – and members will find out tomorrow who has been chosen.

It seems likely that the party's most famous member – Caroline Lucas – will return to the helm of the party. She is the favourite in the contest with a joint bid with the party's work and pensions spokesman Jonathan Bartley.

Whoever takes over will no doubt be paying close attention to what is going on in Norwich. It was the fifth strongest constituency at the 2015 general election, and it still has a larger group of councillors than in Brighton, where the party has its only MP.

But as they meet in the Midlands, the party will have to confront the fact that they unexpectedly lost seats to Labour in the Norwich City Council elections earlier this year.

With county council elections looming, Andrew Boswell, the Nelson ward representative, said they would be



■ Andrew Boswell, county councillor for Norwich's Nelson ward.



■ Conference season starts with the Green Party this weekend.

Picture: DANNY LAWSON/PA WIRE

better at communicating why choosing effective local councillors was more important than voting along passing national trends.

He also claims that Labour's weak EU referendum campaign, and subsequent in-fighting between irreconcilable factions, had disappointed many people.

Former Norwich South parliamentary candidate Lesley Grahame agreed that the county council elections were going to be "very important". She said while they had done "nothing wrong" in May's city elections, they had underestimated the need for change which had previously been expressed in a Green vote, which was now going to Labour.

"Some progressive people who would normally vote Green switched this time through a wish to give Corbyn a success story. I only hope that the outcome of Corbyn-mania is more positive than Clegg-mania," she added.

The party's police and crime commissioner candidate Martin Schmierer, and the city council group leader, said it was important to remember that the Green Party's vote



■ Norwich city councillor Ash Haynes. Below right, Dr Rupert Read, Green Party spokesman for transport.

share remained strong at 21pc of the popular vote across Norwich.

"This shows that there is a solid base of support, which we have worked hard to gain over the years by responding to residents and taking up

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Ash Haynes, pictured left

issues on their behalf.”

But Ash Haynes, the former City Hall Greens leader, who is backing the Caroline Lucas and Jonathan Bartley duo, said they needed a more national focus.

"I think we tend to assume that because we're good at getting stuff done locally, that's what people will base their vote for us on. It's not, and we need to be far better at talking to people about the bigger things. We also need to form a proper Green vision for what Norwich should look like, involving the people who actually live in the city and are affected in making it, which is something I've worked on previously."

She said that the national party did

Leadership candidates

■ Caroline Lucas and Jonathan Bartley
 The party's only MP and its work and pensions spokesman are standing on a joint ticket to do the role as a job share.

Ms Lucas was leader from 2008 to 2012, and has held the Brighton Pavilion seat since 2010. Mr Bartley has been a candidate and runs Ekklesia, a religious think-tank.

■ Simon Cross
 A former candidate for Rochford and Southend East, Mr Cross is a long-serving Green campaigner and has worked in neighbourhood and community schemes including a three-year spell with Side by Side, a group supporting refugees and asylum seekers.

■ Clive Lord
 Joined the party five months after its formation. At 80, he is its longest-serving activist. He was a major contributor to the party's first Manifesto for a Sustainable Society, drafting the section outlining the crucial link between social justice and preserving the planet's life support systems.

■ David Malone
 A member of the Scarborough and Whitby Green Party and its candidate in the general election, the documentary maker has also published a book, *The Debt Generation*.

■ Martie Warin
 The 29-year-old describes herself as an eco-socialist. She is a parish councillor in County Durham.

■ David Williams
 An Oxfordshire councillor, Mr Williams is a former member of the Labour Party. He stood for Labour in Rochdale in 1992.

not always take them seriously enough.

"We have had Green councillors for so long here in Norwich that I think sometimes they forget we need support too. But then, wouldn't every branch of every political party like more support? Links between the centre of a political party and its branches have to be two-way to be successful."

Rupert Read, another prominent Green figure locally, is upbeat. He says it is an exciting time for the Green Party.

"We have 60,000 members; Labour is in disarray; the Lib Dems are damaged; we are the party of the future.

"Norwich matters; it is one of the places the Green Party is strongest in the entire UK. If we are to run a council, or win an MP, here is one of the places where it must happen," he added.



History of the Green Party

The roots of the party can be traced back to the 1970s when Lesley Whittaker and her friends were inspired to form the People Party after reading an article by a Stanford University professor which predicted a famine caused by rapid population growth. The name later changed to the Ecology Party. It won its first election in 1976 when John Luck won a seat on Rother District Council in East Sussex. Jonathon Porritt was instrumental in moving things

forward, when its 53 candidates meant it was entitled to radio and TV broadcasts. It won 1.5pc of the vote in 1979. It became the Green Party in 1985 and just over a decade later Caroline Lucas and Jean Lambert became the first European parliament members in 1999. The party had a long-standing tradition of not having a single figurehead, but Ms Lucas took the helm as leader in 2008, before winning the party's first parliamentary seat in 2010.

