

#SP16 Alison Johnstone Scottish Greens candidate for Edinburgh Central

Alison Johnstone was first elected as a councillor following a campaign to save an area of playing fields in the south west of the city from a housing developer.

☒ She then became one of only two Green MSPs in Holyrood in 2011 alongside Patrick Harvie who is now Co-Convener of the party.

But campaigning against local issues has been part of her focus. We have met her in the thick of several local campaigns, and she speaks out on cycling, school meals, outdoor learning and the need for a fair society. She is passionate about sport in schools, and was herself a runner.

She told The Edinburgh Reporter that to keep fit during this election she has taken to early morning runs again.

With the Greens widely expected to get many more than just two seats in this election, clearly Johnstone is almost sure to get back to work at Holyrood after 5 May, but is taking nothing for granted : “You’re never guaranteed a seat in politics of course!

“Our campaigning is going really well. We’re getting a really positive response on the doorsteps and in our communities. We are feeling very positive. We are polling well, but we’re experienced enough to know that the poll that matters is on 5 May.

“We are not taking a single vote for granted.”

[The Edinburgh Reporter NEWS #SP16 Alison Johnstone](#) from

[Phyllis Stephen](#) on [Vimeo](#).

Johnstone explained what is contained in the Greens manifesto which is of particular interest to her: “I suppose as Health Spokesperson I am really proud of our policy on care. We believe that Scotland can care for all its people. We want those working in social care to be paid a Living Wage plus, that’s £9 plus an hour. We think we can fund that through progressive taxation rather than through increased care charges.

“We also want to increase the carer’s allowance by 50% to £93.15 which is markedly higher than the SNP and Labour. People who support others through care are the backbone of society. They are saving the economy and the NHS a fortune and they need to be properly rewarded.

Johnstone is also mindful that she did not become an MSP all on her own. She continued : “It takes a huge team effort. We are here because we have worked very hard with communities. If we think about policies that we’ve led on for example calling for a ban on fracking. I led that debate in 2014 and at that point all of the other parties voted against that proposal, whereas now we have a moratorium, a temporary ban in place and I think that is thanks to the work we have done and the work of communities across Scotland.

“I’m proud of that and I’m proud of the work I have done to empower fans to buy their own football clubs. There have been so many cases of boom and bust which has a big impact on communities. Can you imagine Gorgie without Hearts or Easter Road without Hibs? I think this is a really important issue too.

“I also campaign about investment on cycling and walking. Many many Scots can’t afford a car but all our investment goes in that one direction. It’s not about being anti-car it is just to ensure that we invest in our buses and our trains which are

often overlooked. The train from Edinburgh to Perth is slower now than it was in 1895!

Johnstone is standing in Edinburgh Central where she is up against stiff competition from Ruth Davidson the Scottish Conservatives leader. She has been to as many hustings as possible and has knocked on many doors in the city centre. She said: "I am Edinburgh born and bred and have lived here all my life. I know the city really well. I think I understand why it is successful but I also understand the challenges it faces.

"We have some areas of incredible affluence cheek by jowl with areas that still continue to suffer deprivation.

It is clear that the Scottish Greens are not going to be in government and perhaps this gives them some advantage over the other parties. But Alison thinks that no matter the small numbers to date the Greens have been an effective opposition force. "I think we are regarded with respect in Parliament because we are not oppositional for the sake of it. I think there are some MSPs in other parties who will simply stand up and say that everything the government does is bad.

"When you are a party of two you have to gain consensus or you'll get nowhere. I think that we have a reputation for working constructively and being constructive in our criticism.

"What we are hoping to achieve is a significant increase in our numbers and we want to be in a position to hold the government to account. I think we have a real opportunity to do so and I think we are very effective at doing so.

"I don't think we would have seen any movement towards rent controls if it had not been for the Greens, nor do I think we would have the climate change targets we have. So although we have been a minority party I think we have been a significant one."

On her role as a Lothians list MSP in the last five years she recognises it is challenging to look after the interests of 700,000 people across the whole area. But it depends sometimes on the issue in question. She continued: " i still feel that I got involved in politics by accident trying to save a local green space. I think a lot of people appreciate that,

"I was down at George V Park recently which is a notable greenspace in the city centre where there is a proposal to turn a car park into a housing development. This is the kind of campaign which really excites me! So sometimes it is not all about the geography but more about the issue in question."

The job still excites her: "No two days are ever the same. But there are areas in the city centre which are blighted with air pollution. I particularly note the work done by Professor David Newby from the Royal Infirmary Edinburgh about the link between air pollution and heart disease. This is really important. We can make changes here. We could make our streets more people friendly.

"We can make sure that people have access to high quality shopping where they live. I think we need to get away from that out of town model that means our city centre and local streets are not as vibrant as they could be.

"Let's protect good quality greenspace, make sure that we are investing properly in education, that we are taking care of our elderly people.

Scotland Can is in the Greens manifesto and Alison concluded by saying : "Scotland can – and I hope Scotland does vote Green on 5 May."