

#SP2021 – Ben Macpherson SNP candidate in Edinburgh Northern and Leith

Ben Macpherson is another of the 2016 intake who has risen to a position on the front benches. In fact he reminded me he has had three portfolios during the last five years, and said he was glad to have had “three really interesting and meaningful roles within government”.

Macpherson was elected as MSP for Edinburgh Northern and Leith and is seeking re-election there.

He has been Minister for Europe Migration and International Development, then took over as Minister for Public Finance and is now Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment. Lately he has been working on the climate change plan update which is key in the year when COP26 comes to Glasgow.



While the responsibilities of being a Minister have loomed large, Macpherson told us that he and his team have helped thousands of people over the last five years, as well as organisations and businesses. He said that being there for the people in his constituency has been his focus since being elected. This constituency has a population of around 95,000 people, and is large and diverse. One of the more notable things he cast his eye back to included helping the people living in the Lorne Street community.

In the homes there around 150 families were threatened with eviction, and Ben spoke to the landlord, the housing minister and helped the community organise itself.

He said: "Saving these homes meant a great deal to me and it was a great relief for all the people threatened with eviction.

"There were a number of other local issues where I feel I have

made a meaningful impact. We had some issues around motorbike related crime in the north of the city and many different agencies along with the police have worked together to take robust action. I am not saying I was the one who resolved the issue with opportunities and mentorship for young people. It was a real team effort.

“There was also the Save the Walk campaign at Stead’s Place, and the long term issue of the Seafield Waste Water Treatment Works where I took up the role of Chair of the stakeholder group. Together we secured what is called no regrets funding of a significant £10 million of investment to improve the plant’s operational ability. Scottish Water have also committed to build a state of the art facility when the PFI ends in 2029.”



A campaign to stop the owner and developer demolishing this block on Leith Walk was successful.

He also lobbied the government to take action on short term lets and holiday lets and he said he is glad the government has committed to deliver the licensing regime in the next parliament. Before he became a Minister he did some work on the problems of tenement maintenance and repair which he thinks will be important in the years ahead. He helped formulate some of the recommendations which the government accepted. He said: “Particularly in places like Edinburgh North and Leith, this is going to be really important for the quality of our housing stock, but also how we tackle the climate emergency and reduce emissions from from heat production.”

When I asked whether being an MSP had worked out as expected Ben was thoughtful in his reply. He said: “I think what I didn’t quite anticipate was the diversity of issues I have dealt with. First we didn’t expect Brexit to happen – there was some likelihood, but generally we did not think it was going to happen. We didn’t think there would be a majority UK government under Boris Johnson and we did not expect the

pandemic.”

As a backbencher Macpherson was on the Justice Committee. As a former lawyer he found himself working on the domestic abuse bill and also on the sub-committee on policing and was parliamentary liaison officer to the First Minister. But it is the diversity of issues which he has had to contend with which have challenged and which he reflected on as “five years of good experience”.

As for the parliament he hopes that there will be some change about its culture. He spoke about it in his maiden speech to the parliament. He feels there is good constructive dialogue in committees and often in the chamber and hopes that some of the tribalism which he finds off-putting and not his style might get left behind. He said: “Actually, we would all be enriched as a society and as a democracy, if we could just tone all that down a bit. And remember that we do all have the common good of Scotland at heart. And actually, we would do better by the people we serve. I think losing Ruth Davidson to the unelected House of Lords will help in that regard, although her substitution by Douglas Ross does not give huge hope that he will conduct himself differently.”

One of the surprising things that Macpherson has discovered was that having thought he was first in his family to believe in Scottish independence, it was actually his great-great-grandfather who knew Keir Hardie and who believed in home rule. He said: “The fact that we are, I think, on the cusp of taking responsibility and making the absolute most of this country’s potential is hugely exciting, and has been a long time coming.”

In his early twenties Macpherson walked from Edinburgh to London raising money for the charity, Peace One Day, which is an organisation creating actions to save lives. They campaign to have a ceasefire and non-violence on 21 September each year. In some ways it is a notion but it has had lifesaving

effect over the years. One year when the United Nations agreed with the Taliban when the Afghan war was at its height for the Taliban to engage in a ceasefire for 24 hours. And in that period, the World Health Organisation immunised 1000s of children against polio.”

Ben Macpherson is the SNP candidate for Edinburgh Northern and Leith. [All candidates are listed here.](#)



Election night in Edinburgh 5 May 2016