

Political Profile of the Cambridge Constituency

Politically, Cambridge has a mixed history: in the last thirty years, it has been represented by three major parties: Conservatives in the 1990s, then Labour followed by Liberal Democrat then Labour again. At the moment it is Labour, with Liberal Democrats second and the Conservatives way behind. The surrounding constituencies are a Conservatives / Liberal Democrat battleground while the Liberal Democrats battle it out with Labour in the city.

Historically, a combination of science-based industry and the presence of two universities has tended to ensure that whatever the political party of the MP, s/he has been a liberal progressive within it. It was true of Tories David Lane and Robert Rhodes James, and was also true of Labour's Anne Campbell. The present Labour incumbent Daniel Zeichner is a self-described 'socialist in a modern context' and a vocal pro-European. It is almost inconceivable that a reactionary could be elected as MP for Cambridge.

The continued social change taking place is significant. Except for those in social housing, 'ordinary working people' are being excluded from living in the city due to property prices, and are being replaced by employees in the science/high-tech industries. Many young adults rent, and move out of the city when they come to buy. This, combined with the large student population, contributes to the electoral roll changing by around a third every year. Major extensions to the city have been built but have not kept pace with the need. More housing of all kinds is badly needed, and homelessness is on the rise. Transport is another big issue in this congested city, and recent representatives have been vocal in their support for cycling, walking and public transport. In particular, a proposal to bring forward a congestion charge represented both a political risk and an opportunity to be seen as being on the side of positive change. However, due to loss of conviction, the attempt came to nothing and has left a legacy that some Tories interpret as a "war on motorists" ready to be exploited.

Cambridge is a diverse city, with the 2011 census recording 66% as white British, compared to 80.5% across England and Wales. The remainder of the population includes many from continental Europe, and among those from BAME groups are significant Chinese and Bangladeshi communities. Refugees from Syria and Ukraine have come, been welcomed and helped to settle. Also, recently, a number of Hong Kong Chinese have made their home here. The city is outward-looking and recorded a 73.8% vote in favour of remaining in the European Union.

A brief political history

In the 1990s impressive Labour gains, resulted in them taking the seat in the 1992 General Election and retaining it in 1997. We took control of Cambridge City Council in May 2000. The strategy for the 2001 General Election was to recover our core vote which Labour had squeezed in the anti-Tory circumstances of 1992 and 1997. While this was only achieved up to a point, crucially, and to the dismay of both other parties, we did come second.

The campaign strategy in 2005 was described as "a gathering of the clan", in that it was designed to appeal to the liberal-minded among the voters, even if they did not see themselves as Liberal Democrats. We also set out to convert those who voted Liberal Democrat in local elections only, into reliable Liberal Democrat voters

in all elections, and we targeted the students. The campaign bore fruit in the election of David Howarth, with a margin of 10% points over the Labour candidate. David was a successful and popular constituency MP. He was shortlisted for the “backbencher of the year” award in his very first year, thanks to his work on the Legislative and Regulatory Reform Bill (nick-named the Abolition of Parliament Bill). Locally David helped save Brookfields Hospital but lost the battle to save the Young People's Psychiatric Service. His battle for fairer funding for Cambridgeshire's schools had great support, but much of his campaigning was for causes that are the reverse of populist – such as the mental health service and the problems of adults on the autistic spectrum. He was respected by many who would not expect to vote Liberal Democrat.

Following David's decision not to re-stand in 2010, Julian Huppert was selected as the parliamentary candidate and was elected as MP despite a short lead-in to the campaign. Julian, again, was an active parliamentarian and a well-respected constituency MP. He was involved in several parliamentary groups, including acting as joint chair of the cycling group, producing the 'Get Britain Cycling' report in 2013. His campaign against the 'Snooper's Charter' saw him named 'Internet hero of the year'. Other campaigns included taking up David's campaign for fairer funding for Cambridgeshire's schools and in support of refugees.

In the coalition years the tide began to turn against our party and the effects were felt locally. In 2012, we kept control of the City Council only on the casting vote of the Mayor and in 2014 control was gained by Labour. In the 2015 General Election Julian lost by a mere 599 votes, a huge disappointment for all concerned. In 2017, despite local momentum generated by the popularity of the Party's stance on the EU in this heavily remain Cambridge constituency; and one of the biggest campaigns the city has ever seen, the General Election was a great disappointment. Labour strongly targeted students and younger voters, and generally benefitted from a hope among local voters to oust the Tory government. Daniel Zeichner increased his margin over Julian to more than 12,000 votes.

2019 and the 2024 General Elections.

Local councillor Rod Cantrill was selected as our candidate for the 2019 General Election, which we contested as a target seat. We fought an energetic campaign into the winter, but were again unable to persuade liberal minded “Yellow Labour” voters to support our Party in a national election, as they aimed to avoid Boris Johnson as Prime Minister at all costs. After that election, Labour tightened its grip on the City Council. Whilst several wards were very closely fought and one by-election very impressively won – our numbers dipped to 9 City Council seats, compared to 29 with Labour representatives. However, in the last couple of years and especially since Labour came into power nationally, we are recovering. We won two City Council by-elections this May, bringing our numbers to 12.

Since 2005, the Conservative vote has fallen. There is only one conservative councillor in Cambridge (city or county council). He won at a by-election where the congestion charge featured heavily. Likewise, this May, the recent victory of the Conservative candidate for Mayor won on a slogan of stopping the “War on Motorists”. Since 2021 when the Conservatives lost control of the County Council, the Lib Dems has led a coalition of themselves, Labour and some Independents but now(since May) control it by a narrow margin. holding 31 seats with Labour on 5, Conservatives and Reform on 10 each, the

Greens on 3 with 2 Independents. In Cambridge itself, at the May elections, the Lib Dems won 5 County seats, Labour 4, the Greens 3 but the Tories and Reform won none.

The Green party has increased its activity recently, taking the complete set of four Council seats from Labour in Abbey Ward. They have also won three of the four Newnham seats and one in Romsey.

Our candidate at the General Election in 2024 was again a local councillor - this time Cheney Payne but we did not have the status of a target seat and, as a Labour facing seat, much of the national message was of limited relevance. Many of the activists spent a lot of time in the neighbouring target seats - to good effect. In spite of that, we held our second place though did not run Labour as close as we had wanted to. The most recent boundary changes have meant that two of the City wards (Queen Edith's and Cherry Hinton) are now in South Cambridgeshire not Cambridge; QE usually votes Liberal Democrat and Cherry Hinton Labour, so the effect is about even.

The results of the General Election in 2024 were

Labour	19624
Liberal Democrat	8536
Green	6842
Conservative	5073
Workers Party	951
Independent	891
Rebooting Democracy	265

All three surrounding constituencies, South Cambs, St Neots & Mid Cambs, and Ely & East Cambs were taken by the Liberal Democrats in 2024 - the "golden doughnut with a bit of red in the middle", referred to in the maiden speech of Pippa Heylings, MP for South Cambs. Squeezing that bit of red out at the next General Election is our aim and for which we invite candidates.