

TDEG Election Priorities and Questions for Candidates

East Midlands Combined Authority Mayoral Election

Response from Ben Bradley (Conservative)

Thanks for your email and your engagement on these issues. A really interesting read, and an awful lot of questions, so I'll try my best to tackle them. Some I've answered individually, others together where it's most appropriate. I hope the below is helpful.

Ben

(No comment from Ben on the first two over-arching questions –

- 1. Will you commit to declaring that the East Midlands mayor recognises both a climate emergency and ecological/biodiversity emergency, and that all strategic plans will take these two emergencies into account in future delivery and target setting?*
- 2. If you could change or introduce one piece of environmental legislation or regulation to improve an aspect of our local environment, what would it be?)*

A – Sustainable Homes and Sustainable Communities

Questions for our Candidates:

- 1. How do you propose to expand affordable and sustainable housing projects in our area?**
- 2. How would you ensure that issues such as energy conservation, water use and biodiversity enhancement are addressed by house builders? Are you in favour of a new, mandatory Code for Sustainable Homes ([more information here](#))**

The Mayor won't directly control planning, but we can use new funding such as for Brownfield development to help bring forward new projects on appropriate sites. By working collectively we can build better, joined up strategies to demand higher quality and better green credentials from developers. It's difficult to do that as individual small Councils, but collectively we have much more clout. That includes things like biodiversity and flood management, as well as renewable energy etc. I'd like to see us develop our own local code and work with developers to see it enforced across the region.

- 3. How will you upskill the retrofitting workforce to help meet legally binding net zero targets?**

I'm already working with local colleges on this, off the back of new funding we secured for retrofitting homes. Our general focus on clean energy etc demands that we create a skilled workforce. Businesses like RRoyce and the UK Atomic Energy Agency are also creating training programmes in clean energy related skills. Colleges are really keen to develop a workforce that can deliver the demand we have for sustainable homes, and the Mayor can help fund and facilitate that.

- 4. How will you overcome the (legislative) barriers to implementing rural community energy generation and storage schemes?**

Inevitably where barriers are legislative, there will need to be conversations with Government. Typically the Mayors work together, cross party on doing that. However if we're to deliver the growth we want to see in key industries, we need to develop local energy sources and grids and not be

reliant on already overwhelmed national energy infrastructure. Again we have good local partners, and opportunities for inward investment, in developing that.

5. How will you enable and incentivise appropriately sited solar panels on industrial and agricultural buildings in the Peak District?

I strongly oppose the development of mass solar on agricultural land, on the basis that we have huge volumes of roof space and brownfield opportunities to develop this in more appropriate places. It's not right that developers do the easy thing rather than the right thing. The Mayor has a leadership role in this both in terms of planning and the shared priorities I discuss above, but also just in public narrative and making the priorities very clear to investors and developers. I'd seek major expansion of solar on buildings and roof space, or appropriate brownfield land. I will oppose sites on agricultural land that are a blight on food production or local communities.

6. How will you fund local authorities and other public agencies to ensure our communities have access to essential services?

Most elements of funding for Local Authorities will not pass through the Mayor. This is restricted to funds related to transport and economic development. However, as a Council Leader I understand both the challenges that Councils face, and also the services. I will work together to ensure the wider public good, not just for my own organisation but for our whole local 'system'.

B – Addressing the Ecological/Biodiversity Crisis

Questions for our Candidates:

- 1. What will you do to ensure biodiversity targets are met in the East Midlands? In particular, how will you ensure more space is made available to help nature recover?**
- 2. What support will you provide to White Peak farmers to help them provide local, sustainable food and enhance ecological systems and wildlife?**
- 3. How would you challenge the over-use of pesticides, herbicides and other chemicals which affect our wildlife and water courses?**
- 4. How would you ensure water companies are investing in infrastructure to prevent sewage overflows and pollution entering our local rivers?**
- 5. How can farmers be effectively supported to ensure their slurry is properly managed?**
- 6. How can the relevant enforcement agencies be adequately funded and supported to ensure the monitoring of environmental quality is fit for purpose, and that air, water and soil pollution is properly regulated?**

I won't pretend to be an expert in all of these areas, though the general issue of biodiversity and protecting our natural environment are important to me, particular in areas like the Peak District. In truth much of what you describe here largely will remain the responsibility of the Environment Agency and not the Mayor, though I would like to seek further powers in these areas in future so that decisions can be more accountable to the public. Similarly accountability of water companies for their record and investment is directly to DEFRA rather than locally. That said, these relationships are important, and collectively as a local 'system' we all need to work together if we're to deliver good outcomes. The Mayor will have funding to support local infrastructure such as water or tackling flooding, and in many ways, regardless of where direct powers lie, the Mayor will be a very influential voice on pretty much everything, given that this is the biggest electoral mandate anyone will have here in the region. The Mayor's voice on these issues will carry weight, and as I said I think my record on prioritising environmental issues in my current role at the Council speaks for itself.

C – Sustainable Transport and Infrastructure

Questions for our Candidates:

- 1. How will you improve public transport to travel to towns, in particular to train stations, including in evenings?**

Now this stuff is obviously directly within the Mayor's gift. Our bus network will be directly managed and funded by the Mayor, including strategic planning and working with operators to fill gaps. I want to roll out the On Demand services in rural areas that I'm delivering already in Nottinghamshire, to ensure that even the most rural communities have access to a bus. I've personally been part of negotiating a four-fold increase in funding for local transport, specifically to help tackle these issues. Where subsidy is appropriate, we can subsidise. Integrating timetables can also help make services more effective, and connect people better. Ultimately I want a network of tap on/off public transport, across the whole region (and the borders in to Manchester/Sheffield) where the timetabling matches up, where the network is more reliable and accessible, and where the villages around the peaks have a good local services, including evenings and weekends. That will cost, but I've secured the money.

On rail, we need decent public transport links to stations themselves - local buses and On Demand - but the Mayor can also work with EMR and other rail operators to improve rail timetabling. Again it's not directly within the Mayor's powers, it's a relationship and a negotiation, but the clear Transport role and access to funding, as well as being THE key voice to Government when it comes to rail investment, means that operators need to work with and support the Mayor's plans.

- 1. How will you enable and incentivise tourists to visit the Peak District National Park without relying on cars?**

Again I don't want to say I have all the answers here, I want to work with local partners to determine what's appropriate, but for the first time we'll have local funding and clout to improve the situation, which I think needs to be one of the Mayor's key priorities. Congestion in tourist towns (and the subsequent environmental impact) is a huge issue, so we need to develop a range of shuttle bus, park and ride, on demand and rail services to help tackle this. There's no one size fits all answer for every community, but we need a network of connected local links that are integrated in terms of timetabling and ticketing, so that they are easy and accessible to both residents and tourists. I want to bring the Peak Park directly in to the Transport decision making functions so that they can input on the strategy and be part of it.

- 2. What can be done to improve the condition of roads? Will you increase funding to local authorities to better improve our roads and consider the management of heavy traffic through our villages?**

This is a huge priority for me, just as I believe it is for many residents. That's why I've made it a huge part of my campaign. We need a major road resurfacing programme, and I am the only candidate with experience in that field, and in what's needed (just as I am the only candidate who runs local transport for a living). I think experience is really important here when it comes to the Mayor's ability to effectively deliver. On traffic, there are a range of public transport solutions as described, as well as all sorts of existing proposals on traffic management and bypasses etc. Some will be appropriate, others not, but the Mayor will need to assess and prioritise these.

- 3. How will you facilitate green charging of electric cars and electric bikes in rural areas?**

Again this is work that I already do, and I'm working directly with both Government and private providers to roll out this infrastructure in Notts. As Mayor I want to reset the relationships with private providers because very often restrictive regulation is actually holding back the infrastructure rollout - particularly planning rules that are downright obstructive. Again, I'm the only candidate with experience in this, and evidence that I can deliver.

D – Establishing a Circular Economy

Questions for our Candidates:

- 1. What steps will candidates take in supporting local communities, urban and rural, in developing their own circular economies? Would `carrot or stick` approaches be more successful?**

Inevitably I always prefer the 'carrots' in the first instance. To change behaviours you have to take people with you, or at least most people. Diving in and forcing things against the will of residents never works well. Again leadership here will be important, but the outcome can only be delivered by the whole 'system' and private sector partners being 'bought in' - hence carrots! - so a large part is bringing those partners together with a shared strategy. As part of a big 'Public Sector Reform' project, I want to bring things like recycling together under shared strategy and improvement plan, rather than duplicating these things 18 times across the region. Part of the challenge with residents is making it easy, so we should seek to have a single, clearly understood and articulated set of processes and requirements rather than the current, complicated systems. None of it's rocket science. In fact much of it is things we already used to do in the past. The Mayor needs to get people on board with large scale, shared plans and attract investment.

- 2. Reducing food miles and reducing unnecessary packaging on food – is this best left to the supermarkets or is it the responsibility of Government?**

I do think Government has a role, and indeed has intervened in a number of ways. For the most part innovation is driven by business but Gov typically steps in to tackle those areas where the minority won't budge. Plastic back charges are one example of a successful Government intervention.

- 3. What would you propose is done to improve recycling rates within the Derbyshire Dales?**

I'd refer you to my first answer on shared recycling processes and strategies.