



# Godalming and Ash VOTING TOGETHER FOR CHANGE

## Candidate endorsement assessment, 5th June 2024

### Executive Summary

[Godalming and Ash Elections](#) was established for the purpose of encouraging people to vote tactically for a single progressive<sup>1</sup> candidate who has the potential to gain enough votes to defeat the Conservative candidate Jeremy Hunt and become our new MP in the forthcoming general election.

To identify this candidate, we assessed the Green Party, Labour Party and Liberal Democrat candidates and Parties against six criteria.

### Assessment of criteria

#### 1. Constituency established as a target seat by the relevant national party

Godalming and Ash is a '[non-battleground](#)' seat for the **Labour Party**. The **Green Party's** overall election strategy is to focus on a [small number of target seats](#) which it hopes to win - Godalming and Ash is not one of these. There is clear [evidence](#) that Godalming and Ash is one of the seats targeted by the **Liberal Democrats**.

#### 2. Ability to conduct an effective local political campaign

Although the **Green Party** has some capacity to run an effective campaign it is unlikely that they will devote significant resources to Godalming and Ash as it is not a target seat. The **Labour Party's** national position on Godalming and Ash also makes it unlikely that significant resources will be put into planning and running a local political campaign. The **Liberal Democrats** have a serious and relatively well-funded campaign plan which has been publicly active for some time.

#### 3. Well known in the Godalming and Ash constituency

The **Labour Party** candidate was only named after the announcement of the general election date. The candidate, James Walsh, is a councillor on Guildford Borough Council representing a ward which is not within the Godalming and Ash constituency. The **Liberal Democrat** candidate, Paul Follows, is the Leader of both Godalming Town Council and Waverley Borough Council. He regularly posts on

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<sup>1</sup> In this context we use the term "progressive" to [stand for](#) centre Left positioning, socially liberal, in favour of redistributive economic policy, protects the interests of the worst-off in society; and is guided by the values of democracy, sustainability and equality.

local social media platforms and has had some [national media coverage](#). The **Green Party** candidate, Steve Williams, is Deputy Leader of Godalming Town Council and Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability for Waverley Borough Council. He has worked alongside Paul Follows on the [Dunsfold campaign](#) to stop gas drilling and undertakes media interviews on local environmental issues.

#### **4. According to recent voting patterns and polls/analysis, has the best chance of winning against the Conservatives**

In the general elections held so far this century the [closest challenger](#) to the Conservatives from a progressive party in the South West Surrey constituency (part of which will fall into the new Godalming and Ash constituency) has been from the **Liberal Democrats** (four times) the National Health Action Party (once) and the **Labour Party** (once). Recent polls and analysis<sup>2</sup> that we looked at showed, when they were accessed on 5th June 2024, a lead for the **Liberal Democrat** candidate in Godalming and Ash.

The **Liberal Democrats** became the [largest group in opposition](#) on Surrey County Council in 2021, and the biggest party on Waverley Borough Council in [2023](#).

#### **5. Strong local political base**

Support for the **Liberal Democrat** candidate Paul Follows and **Green Party** candidate Steve Williams has grown during the last seven years through their work with the [South West Surrey Compass group](#), and their involvement in local community projects and pressure groups such that they both now have access to a strong and broad political base within the constituency. The **Labour Party** candidate is not widely known in Godalming and Ash and we are not aware that he has worked with local groups. He may therefore not be able to rely on a broad base of local support to the same extent as the other parties.

#### **6. Good appeal to target voters**

To win, the identified candidate will need to attract new voters including Conservative switch voters, voters inclined to vote for other progressive parties who have decided to vote tactically, and first time voters.

[Polling data](#) suggests that Conservative switch voters are more likely to support a **Liberal Democrat** candidate than another progressive party. Loyal supporters of progressive parties who vote for their party regardless of chances of victory are most likely to be Labour voters in Godalming and Ash. If they were voting tactically an [Electoral Calculus Poll](#) showed that 48% of Labour voters would choose the **Liberal Democrat** candidate as their first alternative choice. In terms of young first time voters a recent [YouGov poll](#) showed that 18-24 year olds were most likely to vote for the **Labour Party** (56%) with the **Green Party** taking 14% and the **Liberal Democrats** 12%.

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<sup>2</sup> Electoral Calculus, YouGov and Stonehaven.

## Discussion and conclusion

The **Liberal Democrat** candidate has strong support from the national party and, in contrast to the other progressive parties, Godalming and Ash is regarded as a target seat.

The evidence of a serious, forceful, well resourced and carefully-designed local **Liberal Democrat** campaign which has been up and running for weeks, versus the absence of public campaigning from the **Green Party** and **Labour Party**, suggests that they are the party in the best position to run an effective campaign in this election.

From the compiled evidence it seems clear that Paul Follows, the **Liberal Democrat** candidate, is best known locally which likely gives him an [advantage](#) over the **Labour Party** and **Green Party** candidates.

The results of past general elections, local elections and polling data suggest that the **Liberal Democrats** have the best chance of beating the Conservatives in Godalming and Ash, with the **Labour Party** having the next best chance.

The **Liberal Democrat** and **Green Party** candidates can both rely upon the support of a strong, active and broad political base.

The **Liberal Democrats** are likely the 'best bet' in terms of having good appeal to target voters (and in particular voters switching from the Conservative Party).

In conclusion therefore, given that the **Liberal Democrats** come out top in five out of the six criteria we have assessed, **we consider that Paul Follows is the candidate with the best chance of beating the Conservative Party candidate and being elected MP in Godalming and Ash in the forthcoming general election.**

## Introduction

Given increased awareness of the effectiveness of tactical voting and the very unpopular Conservative government there may be many voters now prepared to lend their vote to the local candidate with the best chances of defeating the Conservative candidate in the forthcoming general election.

But, given our [unfair electoral system](#), if the non-Conservative vote is split between the other parties then a Conservative candidate could win in Godalming and Ash with much less than 50% of the vote.

[Godalming and Ash Elections](#) was established therefore, for the purpose of identifying, supporting and encouraging people to vote tactically for a single progressive candidate who has the potential to gain enough votes to defeat the Conservative candidate and become our new MP.

To identify this candidate we have established the following criteria to be assessed in respect of the Green Party, Labour Party and Liberal Democrat candidates (and parties where relevant):

1. Constituency established as a target seat by the relevant national party
2. Ability to conduct an effective local political campaign
3. Well known in the Godalming and Ash constituency
4. According to recent voting patterns and polls/analysis has the best chance of winning against the Conservatives
5. Strong local political base
6. Good appeal to target voters

## Assessment of criteria

### Criterion 1. CONSTITUENCY ESTABLISHED AS A TARGET SEAT BY THE RELEVANT NATIONAL PARTY

We know the following from a mixture of informally-conveyed local information from reliable and well-informed sources and from publicised media reports which have unattributed sources but are nevertheless quite widely spread.

Godalming and Ash is listed in a document emanating from the **Labour Party** as a '[non-battleground](#)' seat. This means that party activists from outside the constituency will not be brought in to support the Labour campaign here, and that Labour activists from the constituency may be invited to assist Labour campaigns in more 'winnable' areas. A few days after the general election date was announced the local Labour party identified James Walsh as their candidate. He is a Councillor on Guildford Borough Council representing a ward which is not within the Godalming and Ash constituency.

The **Green Party** has approved the selection of a local candidate - Steve Williams - who as the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability with Waverley Borough Council has a high profile in the local party. The Green Party's overall election strategy is to focus on a [small number of target seats](#) which it hopes to win. Godalming and Ash is not one of the Party's target seats.

The **Liberal Democrats** have approved the [selection of Paul Follows](#) - who is currently leader of Godalming Town Council and Waverley Borough Council - as its local candidate. It is clear from

recent [media articles](#) that Godalming and Ash is regarded as a target seat by the party. This means that local party activists will not be asked to support the campaigns of candidates in other constituencies and will be encouraged to focus their energies on the campaign here right up until the election. It may also mean that campaign resources from some less 'winnable' areas are diverted here during the later stages of the election campaign.

## Conclusion

The **Liberal Democrat** candidate has strong support from the national party and Godalming and Ash is regarded as a target seat. The stance of the other Parties suggest that they do not see this seat as a useful place to put campaign resources.

## Criterion 2. ABILITY TO CONDUCT AN EFFECTIVE LOCAL POLITICAL CAMPAIGN

The local parties for the **Green Party**, **Liberal Democrats** and **Labour Party** are all long-established, well-organised and experienced in political campaigning. But there are important differences in terms of the amount of resources available to each local party and their capacity and readiness to run an effective general election campaign. Information about this is not in the public domain, but has been available to us through communications with reliable local sources and through observation.

The **Liberal Democrat** campaign has already been active for some time. This has included multiple unaddressed deliveries of leaflets across the constituency and deliveries of addressed materials in some target areas. Door to door canvassing has also taken place at a significant number of homes within the constituency. We know that there is a detailed, properly budgeted and adaptable plan in place for the remainder of the campaign and that sufficient funds are available to resource it. The **Liberal Democrats** have a good number of local party members, many of whom have been actively supporting this campaign, with the additional support of some volunteer leafletters who are not party members.

Although the local **Labour Party** has a healthy number of members the local party has yet to do any campaigning. The party's national position (see Criterion 1) makes it unlikely that significant resources will be put into a local campaign or that local activists would devote strenuous efforts to one given the late nomination of a candidate who sits on a Council outside of the constituency.

The **Green Party** locally also has a good level of membership plus a number of activists from local environmental pressure groups likely to be ready to devote energy to helping the **Green Party**, thereby increasing their capacity for a political campaign. But as with the **Labour Party**, there is no evidence of any local campaign so far and the national Party strategy as we understand it (see Criterion 1) makes it unlikely that one will develop. Although the **Green Party** campaigns vigorously and effectively for local elections in the Godalming & Ash area its local members have not, in recent general elections, put any significant energy into campaigning, presumably from a recognition that under the current electoral system their chances of victory would be extremely low.

## Conclusion

All three local parties have the potential to be able to organise and conduct an effective campaign, as they have all done in recent local elections. The **Liberal Democrats** locally have greater financial

and human resources available to them than do the other parties. The evidence of a serious, forceful and carefully-designed local **Liberal Democrat** campaign which has been up and running for many weeks, in comparison to the absence of any obvious campaigning so far from the **Green Party** and **Labour Party**, suggests that they are the party in the best position to run an effective campaign in this election.

### **Criterion 3. WELL KNOWN IN THE GODALMING AND ASH CONSTITUENCY**

The **Labour Party** candidate, James Walsh has very little local profile in Godalming and Ash as he sits on a Council outside of the constituency and has not taken part in local campaigns.

The **Liberal Democrat** candidate, Paul Follows, is the Leader of both Godalming Town Council and Waverley Borough Council. Since becoming a local Councillor in 2017 he has established a regular presence on social media platforms, posting frequently on X (formerly Twitter) and community Facebook pages. His involvement with the local campaign to legally overturn the government's decision to allow drilling for gas at Dunsfold has given him some [national media coverage](#), as has coverage of the electoral vulnerability of [Jeremy Hunt](#) which has profiled Paul Follows as the main challenger.

The **Green Party** candidate, Steve Williams, is Deputy Leader of Godalming Town Council and Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability for Waverley Borough Council. He has worked alongside Paul Follows in the [Dunsfold campaign](#) and regularly undertakes media interviews on local environmental issues. He is less active on social media than Paul Follows.

### **Conclusion**

From the compiled evidence it seems clear that Paul Follows, the **Liberal Democrat** candidate is best known locally. Although some voters may be deterred from voting for a candidate whose political record they perhaps dislike, we know from anecdotal evidence from our street campaigns that there will be many more local voters who will vote for Paul Follows because they approve of his record as a local councillor. Having a recognisable name or 'brand' is widely accepted as a general [advantage](#) in political contests (as well as in other promotional campaigns) particularly in attracting the votes of those voters with a low level of political awareness. This recognition factor would be likely to give Paul Follows an advantage over the **Labour Party** and **Green Party** candidates.

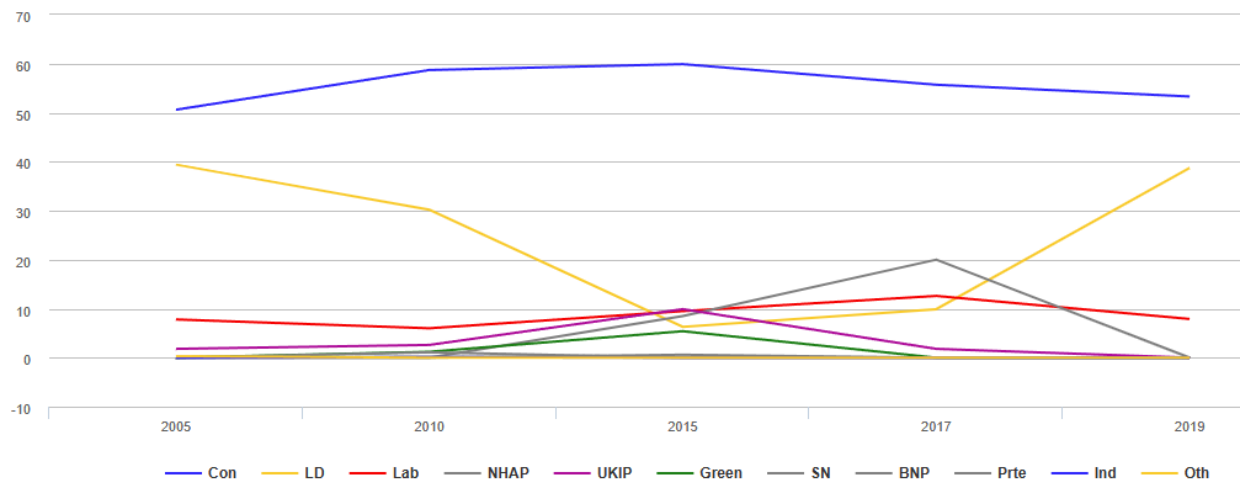
### **Criterion 4. ACCORDING TO RECENT VOTING PATTERNS AND POLLS/ANALYSIS HAS THE BEST CHANCE OF WINNING AGAINST THE CONSERVATIVES**

In general elections a Conservative majority in the South West Surrey constituency (part of which will fall under the new Godalming and Ash constituency) has ranged between [50-60%](#) in the last 20 years (see graph below). Over the six elections this century the closest challenger from a progressive party has been from the **Liberal Democrats** (four times) the National Health Action Party (once) and the **Labour Party** (once). The **Green Party** have registered very low percentages or not stood a candidate, opting to openly support other progressive candidates (e.g. Louise Irvine of NHAP in 2017, Paul Follows of Liberal Democrats in 2019). The highest percentage of the vote achieved by

the **Labour Party** during this period was 13% (2017). On each occasion that they came second, the **Liberal Democrats** achieved over 30% of the vote ([43.6% in 2001](#) and 39% most recently in 2019).

### Share of the vote by party 2005 - 2019

The percentage share of the party vote by election year.



Source: [South West Surrey \(Constituency\) 2019 results - General election results - UK Parliament](#)

We looked at three polls/analysis regarding the forthcoming general election. These were all conducted by companies that are members of the British Polling Council and, when they were accessed on 5th June, all showed a lead for the **Liberal Democrat** candidate (see below).

### Results of recent general election polls and analysis (accessed 5th June 2024)

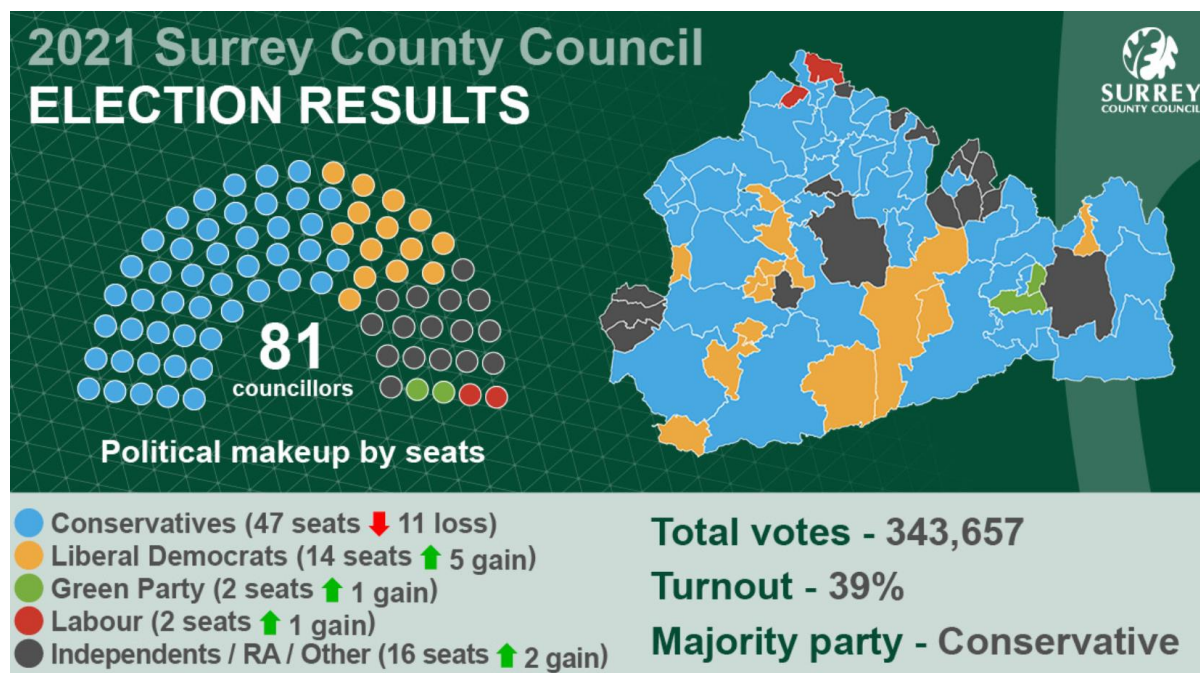
	<a href="#">Electoral Calculus</a>	<a href="#">YouGov</a>	<a href="#">Stonehaven</a>
Conservative	35.5%	30.6%	31.8%
Liberal Democrat	36.4%	45.7%	35.5%
Labour	17.2%	12.2%	14.5%
Green	2.3%	3%	11.6%

Recent local (Godalming Town Council and Waverley Borough Council) and [Surrey County Council \(2021\) elections](#) saw the balance of political power shift significantly, with large Conservative majorities reduced or reversed.

The **Liberal Democrats** are now the [largest group in opposition](#) on Surrey County Council (where the number of councillors increased by 5 from 9 to 14 out of a total of 81 seats in the 2021 election).

Two [Labour Party councillors and two Green Party](#) councillors were elected (a gain of 1 seat in each case).

## Results of 2021 Surrey County Council election



Source: [2021 election results | Surrey News \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/news/2021-election-results)

The Conservative Party lost control of Waverley Borough Council (and Godalming Town Council) in 2019 to a coalition of parties led by the **Liberal Democrats**. The **Liberal Democrats** made further gains in the [2023 election](#) taking full control of Waverley Borough Council (with the **Green Party** keeping 1 seat and 2 **Labour Party** councillors being elected) (see below).

### Waverley Borough Council 2023 election results

Party	Total	Change	Councillors elected in 2023	Councillors overall
Liberal Democrat	22	+5	22	22
Residents' Association	13	-1	13	13
Conservative	10	-8	10	10
Independents and Others	2	+2	2	2
Labour	2	+2	2	2
Green	1	0	1	1

Change since last election

Source: [Waverley result - Local Elections 2023 - BBC News](#)



## Conclusion

Based on the results of past general elections and more recent local elections, plus polling data, the **Liberal Democrats** look like the most likely contenders to beat the Conservatives in Godalming and Ash in the next general election, with the **Labour Party** having the next best chance.

## Criterion 5. STRONG LOCAL POLITICAL BASE

Both the **Green Party** candidate Steve Williams and the **Liberal Democrat** candidate Paul Follows enjoy approval and support from a broad political base within the constituency, including from people who are neither members of nor regular voters for a particular political party. This approval and support for Steve and Paul has been developed and grown during the last seven years, through collaborative work within the cross-party progressive group South West Surrey Compass and through their involvement in and support for local community projects and pressure groups. Much, although not all, of this activity has been undertaken by them in their roles as local Councillors, through which they have developed strong working relationships with Councillors and activists connected with other political parties or no particular party. Both of these candidates have a strong local political base which could be expected to translate into active political support during an election campaign if they were identified as the progressive candidate most likely to win here.

The **Labour Party** candidate, James Walsh, has not been involved with local political or pressure groups, community projects or voters within the Godalming and Ash constituency. He does not enjoy a local profile and may hence not be able to rely on a broad base of local support to the same extent as the **Green Party** and **Liberal Democrats**.

## Conclusion

The **Liberal Democrat** and **Green Party** candidates could each rely upon the support of a strong and enthusiastic broad local political base.

## Criterion 6. GOOD APPEAL TO TARGET VOTERS

To win, the candidate will need to attract those Conservative voters who have decided to switch, voters who would normally prefer to vote for another progressive party and people who rarely or have never voted.

Conservative switch voters have the choice of their personal preference, voting tactically for the progressive candidate most likely to win, registering a 'protest vote' for another candidate, or not voting at all.

From our perspective, any of these options take a vote away from the Conservative candidate, although clearly a vote for the progressive candidate most likely to win is preferred. Conventional wisdom backed up by [polling data](#) suggests that these Conservative switch voters will be more likely to support a Liberal Democrat candidate (46%) than a Labour candidate (12%) or a Green candidate (12%). This may be because of their perception that the Liberal Democrats are 'closer' to the

Conservatives or that Labour has 'more extreme' policies, or because they hope that the potential of an incoming Labour government will be 'moderated' by a Liberal Democrat influence.

Some of these voters would not only withhold their vote from a Labour candidate but might decide to cast their vote for a Conservative in order to avoid having a Labour MP.

Those inclined not to vote or who have not voted before may possibly be encouraged to vote for any progressive candidate who offers a perceived prospect of change (whether this is by apparently having a chance of winning in the constituency or because their party offers attractive policies). This group includes young, first-time voters. It seems most likely that such voters, usually with limited political knowledge and awareness, would be most motivated to vote for a candidate associated with a party or a set of policies which they find 'recognisable'. In terms of progressive party votes a recent [YouGov poll](#) showed that 18-24 year olds were most likely to vote Labour (56%) with the Green Party taking 14% and the Liberal Democrats 12% in the general election.

Loyal supporters of progressive political parties in Godalming and Ash who vote for their party regardless of chances of victory are most likely to be Labour voters. If they are going to be persuaded to vote tactically for the selected progressive candidate, they should be reassured that, in removing a Conservative MP, they are doing more to increase the chances of a Labour Government, than voting for Labour in a safe Conservative seat. An [Electoral Calculus Poll](#) shows that 48% of Labour voters would choose Lib Dem if they were voting tactically.

## Conclusion

It is of course not possible to predict how any individual 'floating voter', switch voter or potential non-voter will react to each party and/or candidate. No candidate could claim to be the most appealing to all the target voters. Switch voters (switching from Conservative) are a crucial group in that their votes can effectively be counted twice if they are subtracted from the Conservative total and added to the total for the strongest progressive candidate. This makes the **Liberal Democrat** candidate the 'best bet' in respect of this criterion.

## Overall conclusion

In conclusion, in order to identify the progressive candidate in Godalming and Ash with the best potential to defeat the Conservative we have analysed the differences between the progressive candidates and parties based on six criteria. Our analysis has concluded the following:

1. The **Liberal Democrat** candidate has strong support from the national party and Godalming and Ash is regarded as a target seat. The stance of the **Labour Party** and the **Green Party** suggest that they do not see this seat as a target for campaign resources.
2. The **Liberal Democrats** locally have greater financial and human resources available to them than the other progressive parties. There is evidence of a serious, forceful and carefully-designed local **Liberal Democrat** campaign already up and running, in comparison to the absence of any campaigning so far from the **Green Party** and **Labour Party**.

3. Our compiled evidence makes clear that Paul Follows, the **Liberal Democrat** candidate is best known locally. This recognition factor would be likely to give Paul Follows an electoral advantage over the **Labour Party** and **Green Party** candidates.
4. Based on the results of past general elections, more recent local elections, and polling and analysis data predicting the next general election outcomes, the **Liberal Democrats** look like the most likely contenders to beat the Conservatives in Godalming and Ash in the next general election, with the **Labour Party** having the next best chance.
5. The **Liberal Democrat** and **Green Party** candidates could each rely upon the support of a strong and enthusiastic broad local political base.
6. Electoral Calculus has shown that Labour and Conservative voters choosing to vote tactically are most likely to vote Liberal Democrat. Conservative switch voters are a crucial group as their votes can effectively be counted twice if they are subtracted from the Conservative total and added to the total for the strongest progressive candidate. This makes the **Liberal Democrat** candidate the 'best bet' to target these voters.

As a result of this analysis, Godalming and Ash Elections has clearly identified **the Liberal Democrat candidate Paul Follows**, as the candidate with the best chance of beating the Conservative candidate and winning this seat to be elected as our MP at the general election.

**A note on evidence:** In addition to credible web based sources of information, we have also used some anecdotal evidence gathered from street outreach activities, and some detailed evidence that has been provided to us confidentially through communications with reliable local sources (specifically in relation to Criterion 2).