

NORTHERN INDEPENDENCE PARTY

2021 MANIFESTO



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FOREWORD



We do not live in a normal country. We live in the most unfairly centralised nation in the developed world, both economically and politically.

The level of inequality between the North and the South is not too different from a country recovering from a civil war.

Our party is going to end the centuries-old North-South divide. We believe that this divide is the result of specific decisions taken by the Westminster establishment – both Labour and Tory.

Our towns see no investment. Our public transport is left to rust. Our people are forced to move away. They like to call this 'managed decline' ... but we call it injustice.

The Northern Independence Party began with ordinary Northerners meeting online to talk about how to fix this divide. Among our members we count nurses, doctors, teachers, farmers, forces veterans – the list goes on. We are from North East and North West, Cumbria, Cheshire, and Yorkshire.

We have all reached the same conclusion: the only way to fix the rot at the heart of our country is independence. Not mayors. Not assemblies. Not devolution. And certainly not more establishment politicians. We demand political power – power that is of the North and for the North.

It's time to end Westminster rule.

It's time to free the North.

Philip Proudfoot

– Founding Member, Northern Independence Party

The North-South divide is not getting better, it's getting worse. From Thatcher's government in the '80s, to the austerity of the last decade, to the complete disregard for the North during the pandemic, we all know where this is going.

We can't wait any longer. The 'generosity' of Westminster won't bridge this divide.

The North-South divide can only be resolved by finally reclaiming the voice that has been taken from us. We have the power to decide our own policy and build our own future away from the unequal politics of Westminster.

What affects the North must be decided by the people of the North – not politicians who either don't know or don't care about us. They don't understand our needs and the problems we face every day. They are unwilling to make the fundamental changes we need to put right the North-South divide.

We will stand up for the North. We will rebuild our left-behind towns and communities, devastated by decades of neglect by successive governments. We will ensure that the wealth and resources of the North are used to benefit the North, rather than being drained away to fuel the ever-growing dominance of London.

The Northern Independence Party will finally replace our failed political establishment with people who will work tirelessly to build a free and fair North for all. Together, our future in the North begins on May 6th.

Evie McGovern

– Founding Member, Northern Independence Party

**WE ARE
OUR VALUES**



The Northern Independence Party is different. We are committed to ending the injustice of the North-South divide.

We are campaigning to establish an independent North, to be governed by the people of the North. The historic nation of Northumbria once spanned from the South to Scotland, and so we seek independence for people from Cheshire all the way to the Scottish border. We are a rapidly growing, proudly democratic socialist party, committed to upholding our values:

SHOW SOLIDARITY

The North is vibrant and diverse. We recognise the many cultures across the North, and we want to celebrate the diversity of our people. We are proud of our distinct local histories, dialects, and traditions, which we will fight to protect and preserve.

We reject bigotry and all ideologies of hatred. The North was, is, and will remain international. Everyone who identifies as Northern is Northern, and so we welcome refugees who seek safety and security in the North.

We unite as Northerners to support each other and work together to build a better, fairer, and freer North for all.

BE DECENT

We will restore decency to all levels of government. Establishment politicians have taken Northerners for granted, promising 'regeneration', 'levelling up', and the creation of a 'Northern Powerhouse'. These promises have been broken time and time again. Our representatives will hold themselves accountable to the people of the North. They will be transparent and commit to working for all those they represent, not just those who voted for them.

Our representatives will treat others well, be honest, and act in good faith.

HELP OUT

The Northern economy has been neglected for decades and our industries splintered or destroyed. Northerners have been made poorer and less healthy, are given fewer educational opportunities, and live shorter lives than our southern counterparts. We recognise that the 'United' Kingdom filters people, resources, and jobs to the South. We will end these disparities, reducing the gap between rich and poor to increase the quality of life of every Northerner. We will restore dignity to all and create a just and fair society.

We demand lives worth living.

TAKE PART

We are a talented and generous people with a land rich in resources, yet we have remained impoverished while the world races toward catastrophe. We have a responsibility to each other and to the future generations who will live in the North to ensure that we and our world flourish. The North is made up of people with many callings – science, art, education, healthcare, agriculture, manufacturing, engineering, and countless more. With economic independence we will reindustrialise the North with sustainable, green jobs for all that we and our descendants can take pride in.

We take seriously our responsibility to preserve and protect our environment.

OUR LOCAL POLICIES



Westminster keeps power out of local hands. We intend to take power back, and as a first step there are improvements we can already make locally:

LOCAL ECONOMY

- We pledge to use the principles of Community Wealth Building (commonly known as the Preston Model) to build a prosperous local economy and foster high-quality jobs. These principles are:
 - **Plural ownership of the economy**, by promoting co-operatives, municipal ownership, locally owned small and medium-sized enterprises, and insourcing (where councils bring services in-house instead of outsourcing them).
 - **Making financial power work for local places**, by promoting local pension funds, mutual and community banks, and credit unions.
 - **Fair employment and just labour markets**, by working with local institutions to implement a real living wage, support local unions, recruit locally, and put a stop to exploitative employment practices such as 'fire and rehire'.
 - **Progressive procurement of goods and services**, by making use of local businesses and suppliers wherever possible, and working with local institutions to help them do the same.
 - **Socially productive use of land and property**, by using community land trusts or public-commons partnerships to keep public land available for public use.
- We will pay council workers a real living wage of £12 an hour. Where it can be done without compromising service quality or opening hours, we will trial a 4 day work week, with the corresponding wage of £15 per hour, and will favour more flexible working hours for council employees. We will favour introducing a limit on the number of hours people can work each week to prevent exploitation. We will also remove any zero-hours contracts from council positions and replace them with stable hours.
- We will offer long-term grants to Community Interest Companies and other social enterprises. These grants will come from council funds currently used to offer short-term grants, to save these organisations from having to apply and reapply for short-term grants. We will provide long-term operational grants to these social enterprises so people can actually earn a wage while doing good. Just because something doesn't make a profit, doesn't mean it's not important.

- We will raise funds by taxing empty properties and second homes, which are more likely to be owned by the wealthiest in our community, and use the proceeds to improve our communities. We will also make use of powers to take on the management of long-term-empty homes, and bring them back into use.

SOCIAL DIGNITY

- We will support Universal Basic Income trials to help people now, and build the case for a national UBI. We will expand the trials of UBI currently being undertaken by local authorities in the North. Trials in Scandinavian countries have shown that this improves people's mental health and wellbeing and boosts the local economy.
- All Northerners should have the chance to put down roots in their community and have safe, comfortable and affordable housing. We will follow the lead of councils such as Norwich City Council in building new high-quality social housing that is energy efficient, suitable for everyone from pensioners to new families and young people just starting out in life, and available at affordable social rents. We will also support programs to refit existing housing and bring it up to a high standard of comfort and energy efficiency.
- Housing is a human right. Housing First is an evidence-based approach which has been piloted in Newcastle and Greater Manchester, where there are no conditions around 'readiness' before providing someone with safe housing. Before anyone can address other issues they may be experiencing, they must be securely housed. Issues such as mental health needs or trauma from domestic violence and abuse are often caused or exacerbated by homelessness. We will implement a Housing First policy for tackling homelessness.
- We aim to follow harm reduction principles when it comes to drug use and sex work, accepting these as a part of our world and attempting to minimise harmful effects rather than ignore or condemn the people affected. This will include following the lead of other local councils in safely monitoring and providing resources to sex workers, and increasing funding to harm reduction programmes such as needle and syringe distribution and peer distribution of anti-overdose medication. Similar schemes have been successfully implemented in Glasgow, and piloted in Burnley, Liverpool, and Blackpool.
- Access to healthy food is a human right. Northerners should not have to rely on food banks and we will work to create a sustainable and just local food economy. We will support organisations working to provide tasty, healthy and sustainable food to their communities by providing grants, working with them to create sustainable supply chains, and helping connect residents with their services. Until such time that we can eradicate the need for food banks, our councillors will not place arbitrary restrictions on access to them and will support food justice policies.

- The benefits system is opaque, and difficult for people who are not tech savvy or who don't have a home Internet connection to access. We will improve access to benefits for people who struggle with the claims system by supporting mutual aid and charitable organisations to assist people who need help making claims.
- We will not be party to the monstrous legalised pogrom of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people planned by the Home Secretary, Priti Patel. We will provide adequate campsites for GRT communities, and instruct local police not to enforce the provisions of the forthcoming Policing, Crime, Sentencing and Courts bill that criminalise those communities' ways of life.
- We will make changes to ensure that council-owned buildings, including council housing, are accessible to everyone – whatever their needs. Disabled people should never find themselves unable to access these facilities and services.

EDUCATION

- We will increase the funding available for high-quality special educational needs teaching. We will make devices available to increase engagement with online resources for children from deprived backgrounds or with disabilities that mean they need special interfaces. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the weakness of the current system. We will ensure all pupils have the resources they need to learn.
- We will introduce a resources bank to share best practices among teachers, schools, and home-educating parents, helping them to create structured lessons for learners of all ages and abilities. We believe in giving all pupils a level playing field, and this includes children taught at home. We respect parents' right to educate their children, and will offer support and resources according to their needs, not our wishes.
- We will increase provision of forest schools and land-based education, to increase pupils' understanding of where their food comes from, the natural world around them, and how they affect it. While provision of these schools is up to councils, they are funded by the central government – so this would not place council budgets under further pressure.
- Every child deserves an education. Schools should not be allowed to artificially inflate their performance statistics by discarding children who are seen as 'difficult'. We will end the practice of 'offrolling' and restrict the use of school exclusion to the most disruptive cases, as well as putting a stop to its disproportionate use against children from ethnic minorities.
- We will ensure schools act promptly and effectively to tackle discrimination issues when they arise, and hold them accountable when they do not do so.

- We will implement staggered school holidays to make holidays cheaper for families and reduce unauthorised absences. Dates will be set on a county by county basis to avoid, as much as possible, situations where families with children at more than one school end up having different holiday dates.
- The pandemic has shown us all the drastic difference digital literacy can make to people's ability to work and communicate. We will increase the provision of digital technology education for adults.

COUNCIL ACCOUNTABILITY AND PARTICIPATION

- The minutes of council meetings tell us little about the character of our councillors. This was recently made abundantly clear in the infamous Handforth Parish Council video. And even though the meeting took place in December, it did not go viral until the videos became easily accessible online in February. We pledge to make full video records of council proceedings available promptly, to help improve accountability among councillors and ensure that voters can gain a better understanding of their actions and views. To ensure these records are accessible to all, we will aim to provide BSL interpretation and closed captions.
- Before the pandemic, many council meetings and consultations were held in person. This prevented many people from engaging with their council and making their views heard. Improved digital access to events via video calling and online consultation processes has hugely increased engagement with local issues. However, we recognise that not everyone is able to use, or feels comfortable using, digital technologies, and will ensure that in-person events, consultation and other alternatives are made available to ensure everyone's views are heard.
- We will also commit to consulting communities earlier in the planning process, so that everyone can shape the priorities of local development. We further will commit to using deliberative methods, such as co-production of services, to build long-term conversations about what we want our local areas and communities to be.
- While we would prefer to spend all public money in-house, we recognise that Community Interest Companies and other social enterprises can provide services that local councils cannot feasibly offer through the public sector without increased funding from Westminster. We also appreciate that there are many wonderful community groups in the North all striving to make the world a better place. We will advocate for making CICs more transparent and accountable.
- We will ensure that council pensions and investments are ethically invested, and divest from harmful industries such as fossil fuels, the arms trade, and countries with ongoing human rights crises.

- We support moving councils from a 'strong leader and cabinet' system, where decisions are primarily made by a small group of councillors, to the 'modern committee' system, where all councillors are actively involved in decision making.
- We will adopt Freedom of Information policies which are more open and informative than statute requires.

COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

- Westminster austerity has decimated funding for our libraries and community venues. Ideally, we would simply increase funding for libraries to adequate levels, but that power is in the Conservative government's hands. We will do what we can to replace that funding, and increase library coverage by making commercial tenancy in some Council properties conditional on hosting library branches or other community spaces, freely accessible to all. Where possible, we will also bring libraries back into council or community not-for-profit ownership, and move away from the reliance on volunteers.
- We are dedicated to combating social isolation and supporting vulnerable groups in the community. We will promote the use of libraries, leisure centres, outdoor education centres, youth centres, and other community venues to host free activity groups that support the physical and mental wellbeing of our communities. This will include working with other organisations to revive institutions such as youth centres and community halls which have been decimated by over a decade of austerity. We will support grassroots local sports clubs, which are the heartbeat of their local communities.
- We will support local artists of all kinds, and cultural networks, by offering grants for public artwork, providing council-owned spaces for workshops, events and studios, or working with local property owners to make vacant properties available at heavily discounted rates. We will also provide guidance for local artists who want to set up co-operatives, and where possible work with local institutions to fund long-term residencies.
- We will support mutual aid groups by providing access to public spaces, expertise, start-up grants and facilitating connections between people and organisations who want to help. We will also guarantee the independence that is a key tenet of mutual aid.
- We will support local independent journalism by providing transparency in local government through using advertising space for public information campaigns, and providing grants to new local media organisations. This will include independent online journalism that serves local areas, and will not include newspapers or websites owned by national corporations.

- As the North recovers from the impact of the pandemic, support for pubs and music venues is a must. We will ensure that these venues will be protected from private developers and noise complaints.
- Participating in public life should be available to all and we will ensure that any events or activities funded by the council are accessible to disabled people, including neurodiverse people and those with hidden disabilities. This will include working with organisers to provide accessible venues, training for those facilitating events, and where needed, organising disability-specific groups or activities.
- We will also ensure that our town and village centres are accessible, with accessibility considered as part of any planning process, and a ban on hostile architecture such as anti-homelessness spikes.
- We will work with local libraries, museums, galleries, universities and archives to review their collection's connections to the historic injustices of colonialism and the slave trade. We acknowledge our part in that history, and will aim to follow the lead of the University of Aberdeen in repatriating artefacts, and reviewing what we celebrate in our public monuments.

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Providing essential utilities such as energy and water through a publicly owned or community not-for-profit group helps to ensure that they provide the most beneficial service to the people in the local area, not just profit to shareholders. Bringing these providers into councils could also help to increase long-term and holistic planning.
- The National Bus Strategy essentially requires all local authorities to form 'enhanced partnerships' with operators. These give councils extra rights to regulate services. These include the right to create multi-operator zonal passes, valid on a choice of modes of transport. We will exercise all rights currently held at the local authority level to improve the bus network, and utilise the extra money promised by the National Bus Strategy to improve the coverage of the bus network. We recognise the needs of people living near county borders, and will ensure services or tickets do not arbitrarily stop or start at these lines and instead reflect where people wish to travel.
- The pandemic has shown that many people would like to cycle and walk, but currently feel unable to do so due to road traffic. We will ensure that sustainable travel is at the forefront of every development and road changing scheme as well as ensure there is a continual rolling improvement to existing roads through proper isolation of pedestrians, cyclists, and traffic. We will also introduce more 20 mph zones and increase the number of school streets.

- We know that many people, particularly those in flats and houses of multiple occupancy, are in a position that means they are unable to securely store a bike. We will therefore commit to providing on-street bike hangers to ensure that everyone who wants to cycle, can cycle.
- Everyone has a right to privacy and should not be at risk of being tracked electronically through facial recognition technology while out and about in public. The prevalence of this technology is increasing significantly and it can be easily used in areas without people having any idea that they are being tracked. Therefore we will ban its use in our public spaces.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for good quality internet access – access many, especially in rural areas, do not have. As more jobs move to working from home, people without broadband access are finding themselves faced with reduced options for employment. We will work with service providers to improve broadband coverage, and will provide free internet access at all council properties.
- Many disabled people find themselves unable to undertake day to day activities as the result of poorly designed buildings and processes. We will ensure that new buildings are designed to be accessible for all from the start – refusing planning permission to those that are not, and providing a rolling program of grants to update existing buildings.
- Councils have significantly reduced the number of public toilets available. Use of a toilet is a basic right, and something which everyone needs when out and about. The alternatives that people are sometimes forced into are undignified, unsanitary, and unpleasant for everyone. We will commit to adding more public facilities, and ensuring that they are open all hours, gender neutral, and accessible to those with disabilities.

AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

- We will plant more trees in urban centres, create more accessible urban green spaces, and increase the number of and access to community allotments. By increasing the number of – and access to – community allotments, planting utility fruit trees, and supporting local producers, we will increase food security for the people of the North and increase local biodiversity.
- We will implement food waste recycling. We will reduce the amount of food that goes to waste and recycle that which does in community-owned anaerobic digesters, which will produce biogas to reduce fuel poverty in the North.

- We will meet existing recycling commitments (50% of waste) and ensure all waste sent for recycling is actually recycled and not sent abroad. Furthermore we will make sure that all areas of the North have the same access to recycling facilities, ending the postcode lottery of what you can recycle where.
- We will bring more public space into Commons ownership. Local authorities own vast tracts of land and have the powers to purchase more, and far too much land has been shut off from public use. We will increase the amount of land that Northerners have access to by opening up government-owned land.
- Our councillors will work to expand and join up existing public rights of way to develop a nationwide system of safe, fenced, accessible, walking routes so people can enjoy the beauty of the North no matter where they live. This will provide safe rights of way for the general public and protect livestock.
- We will improve air quality by providing incentives to get diesel vehicles off the roads and reduce the amount of car travel by improving public transport systems and increasing cycling infrastructure.
- We will only grant planning permission to buildings which are environmentally sustainable in the long term.
- Our councillors will push for more recycling bins to be placed in and around urban green spaces and in local tourist beauty spots and ensure that they are regularly emptied so our beautiful natural heritage is not ruined every sunny day.
- We support campaigns such as “No Mow May” to allow wildflowers to bloom and so help pollinator species. Our councillors will push for roadside verges to be left un-mown and seeded with wildflowers as well as planting more native hedges to provide a food source and nesting site for our endangered birds.

OUR NATIONAL POLICIES



OUR APPROACH TO WESTMINSTER

While our ultimate aim is independence for the north of England and the dismantling of the Westminster system, we recognise that for the time being we must fight the system from within.

Until the people of the North vote in a referendum on independence, we will vote in favour of measures to give greater funding and autonomy to local councils to fight against the centralisation of the Westminster system. **Our MPs will stand up for the North** and will work with other parties on policies that improve the lives of those in the North and elsewhere in the UK.

OUR STANCES ON RECENT HIGH-PROFILE BILLS

On several recent bills our MPs would have voted to protect our human rights and prevent the expansion of police powers:

- **The Policing, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill** currently making its way through Parliament constitutes a massive increase in police powers, restricts our ability to protest to the point of uselessness, and turns trespass from a civil matter to a criminal one. These measures only serve to criminalise vulnerable populations, such as Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities and rough sleepers. They also fail to address the root causes of issues such as violence against women. We oppose this bill.
- **The Covert Human Intelligence Sources (Criminal Conduct) Bill**, reported on as the 'Spycops Bill', made it legal for undercover police to commit criminal offences. This increases the likelihood that undercover officers will act as instigators of violence or commit violence against members of the general public. We would have voted against this bill.
- **The Overseas Operations Bill** placed shocking restrictions on prosecutions of crimes, including torture, committed by the UK's Armed Forces overseas. It introduced a presumption against prosecution, a veto for the Attorney General, and a five-year statute of limitations. This has effectively legalised torture for UK troops overseas, including against members of the Armed Forces themselves. We would have voted against this bill.

- **The Environment Bill** currently making its way through parliament could serve to either enhance our environmental protections and give communities more say on their green spaces, or to water-down those protections. Our view is that new regulations need a robust enforcement agency with sufficient powers to enforce the measures proposed in this bill.
- **The Electoral Integrity Bill** is an attempt to disenfranchise voters on the pretext that it will prevent voter fraud, a made-up problem that our tabloids insist is a nationwide scourge but which actually only affects a tiny number of votes. We oppose this bill.

ECONOMY

- **We believe the UK needs a 'Green Industrial Rebirth' to tackle climate change** through reducing greenhouse gas emissions whilst also addressing economic inequality and social injustice. High-paying green jobs are a priority, and we support a **just transition** for those working in high-carbon industries through **dialogue, respect, and engagement with workers and unions** to create localised transition plans for decarbonising the economy. It is the duty of the government to provide job training and to invest in infrastructure to create climate and community resiliency, so no one is left behind. A Green Industrial Rebirth is the only way we can address the current climate emergency and create jobs that don't cost the earth. **We will always vote in favour of increased investment in the green economy we need.**
- **We will vote in favour of progressive tax reforms, such as increased corporation tax, a wealth tax, and will support any legislation that will reduce tax avoidance and evasion.** We will oppose any increases in VAT and National Insurance, which would affect the poorest the most. We are in favour of adding a wealth tax, an annual tax on the net wealth a person holds for those with wealth over £1 million. We believe in progressive income taxation, where the wealthiest in society pay a higher rate of tax, and will support efforts to increase tax rates on the highest earners. **We recognise that the average yearly income for those in the North is significantly lower than the rest of England, and to reverse the damage of the North-South divide and invest in the North we must ask those who earn more to pay their fair share.**
- We will vote for increases to the National Minimum Wage and the National Living Wage, and advocate for a **real living wage to ensure that no worker lives in poverty.** We believe the National Minimum Wage for anyone should be a rate of **£9.50 per hour** and that it should be raised to match increases in the cost of living. The National Living Wage should apply to all workers over 18 and should be a real living wage, at **£12 per hour.**

- We will advocate for shorter and more flexible working hours, without reducing pay, and better stability for those on precarious contracts. Corporations should not be allowed to pretend their workers are 'independent contractors' when they are not – **every worker should have their full complement of rights**
- NHS workers have seen their wages fall in real terms since 2010 and the government's current proposal of a 1% increase in pay for NHS staff, alongside the Labour Party's request for a 2.1% increase is not sufficient. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how vital the NHS is and that we cannot take NHS staff for granted. We recognise that there are thousands of job vacancies on the NHS, as well as thousands of NHS workers who are making plans to leave once the pandemic is over due to their woefully inadequate pay and terrible working conditions. **For this reason, we back the movement for NHS workers to receive a 15% pay increase.**
- **We will advocate for the reversing the increase in pension age for women born in the 1950s to 1960s.** This generation has paid into the system their whole lives and it is not fair to move the goalposts. We believe the pension age should be restored to 65 for all genders and any changes to pension age should be implemented in such a way that they don't leave anyone worse off.
- We will always support unions and vote against any further restrictions on the right to take industrial action.

SOCIAL DIGNITY

- **We will provide free school meals for all students.** Freedom from hunger is a human right regardless of a child's background. Universal free school meals would also be more cost-effective for families who do not currently use the system, since the state can take advantage of bulk price discounts that they cannot.
- **Housing is a human right. We will implement a Housing First policy to tackle homelessness.** The gutting of council housing by both major parties has harmed our communities and exposed people in need of accommodation to years on waiting lists for the chance to be at the mercy of potentially predatory private landlords. We will support efforts to enable the construction of high-quality, accessible council housing.
- **We will expand renter's rights. Everyone should be able to live in a stable home regardless of whether they own it.** We support an end to unfair evictions, stronger regulations on private landlords – including a requirement to ensure homes are of a high standard – and rent controls to bring rents down to 30% of local income.

- **We value mental health equally with physical health and understand that mental and physical health are inextricably linked.** We will increase funding for mental health services on the NHS and improve access to various options for mental health treatment, not just Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, through the recruitment and grant-funded training of mental health professionals, including school counsellors. We care about the mental health of children and young people and will push for every school having access to a full-time counsellor.
- **We will fight any measures to privatise the NHS, and we will reverse privatisation** inflicted by successive governments. **We will increase NHS funding**, invest in the infrastructure of the NHS, prevent hospital closures, and improve A&E departments. **We will increase funding for mental health treatment for NHS workers**, many of whom are living with symptoms of mental illness (such as PTSD) due to working through the pandemic without sufficient support.
- Years of cuts to funding have left older and vulnerable people without the care they need. To put this right, **we will increase social care funding**. We believe that everyone deserves to live with dignity and as independently as possible, and so we will advocate for a social care system that works for older people, neurodiverse people, and people living with disabilities and chronic illness. We believe our carers should receive high-quality training and earn a wage that reflects the hard work they do. We will advocate for better coordination between social care providers and the NHS, so people get appropriate care, informed by medical professionals.
- **The Department for Work and Pensions is responsible for the continued mistreatment, suffering and death of the most vulnerable people in the country, all of which is entirely preventable.** We will put an end to dehumanising and dangerous practices such as the requirement for cohabiting couples to file a joint claim, the use of punitively rigid schedules, long initial wait times, and reduction of benefits during the opaque and unaccountable appeals process. We will advocate for home visits and video calls (as used during the pandemic) as an alternative to needlessly frequent, mandatory face-to-face assessments.
- The Conservative governments' cuts to the courts and legal aid systems have made a mockery of justice, with victims of crime waiting years for perpetrators to be tried, while innocent people are left without the means to properly defend themselves. **We will adequately fund the legal system and legal aid.**

- **We stand in solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community and we will not tolerate homophobia and transphobia in society or within Parliament.** We support a ban on all forms of conversion therapy. The government has promised such a ban for years now and it is outrageous that action has still not been taken. We will push to reform the Gender Recognition Act to allow transgender people to self-identify without the need for a medical diagnosis, to streamline the administrative process, and to legalise recognise nonbinary identities. **We will reform transgender healthcare.** We intend to decentralise care to GPs and specialists by ending the gatekeeping of Gender Identity Clinics. We will adopt an informed-consent model, and we will protect trans teens' access to puberty blockers, which are a proven, safe and reversible way to give them time to decide whether they want to medically transition.
- **We will roll back restrictions on the use of medicinal cannabis for appropriate conditions,** and to allow GPs – not just specialist doctors – to prescribe to those in need. **We believe that cannabis should be legalised,** as it has been across much of the US and Canada, and favour proposals that include restorative justice programmes to reverse the damage done by the war on drugs. **We favour decriminalisation of possession of other illegal drugs** and believe that illegal substance use is a public health issue, rather than a criminal matter. Drug-related deaths in the UK are at the highest level on record and the war on drugs has failed. People who use drugs should be offered treatment rather than punishment, and we favour harm-reduction approaches to tackle the devastating impact of drug-related deaths.
- Sex work is work – what someone does for a living does not define who they are. **We support the decriminalisation of sex work,** using the approach that has been successful in New Zealand since 2003. **We will oppose any attempts to introduce the Nordic Model,** which has made sex work more dangerous. We support harm-reduction approaches to sex work, including distribution of safer sex materials, anonymous testing services, and street outreach. Instead of criminalising those who engage in sex work, we will focus on their rights, health, safety, and wellbeing. **Coercion into sex work is trafficking and will remain illegal.**
- **We reject the demonisation of refugees and the totalitarian Hostile Environment policy.** The UK must abide by its obligations under international law to provide refuge to all those who come to us fleeing oppression. We will also repeal the dehumanising minimum income requirement for family visas. The right to family life is a right, not a privilege reserved for the rich. **We oppose ongoing deportations, in particular cases such as those of the Windrush Generation,** where people who lived most of their lives in Britain are deported to countries they have little to no connection with. We support the safe return of those deported in such circumstances. We will end 'no recourse to public funds', a needlessly punitive policy which stops new arrivals to the UK from fully participating in society. **All who live here should have access to help when they need it.**

- Antisemitism is shamefully prevalent in the Westminster political parties. We will not repeat their disgraceful negligence toward it. **We will call out and shut down all forms of antisemitism – both explicit and implicit, including antisemitic tropes and narratives** – in Parliament, in our party, in our communities and in civil society.
- Islamophobia is a rising danger in the United Kingdom, with prominent voices openly fomenting hate against Muslims. **We stand against Islamophobia, and will not allow Islamophobic rhetoric to go unchallenged in Parliament.** We oppose the Prevent programme, which has been used to discriminate against ethnic minorities, including Muslims, in the UK. It has not improved public safety, and puts people in harm's way by preventing them from accessing public services. We will scrap the programme and against any further expansion of it into public institutions.

EDUCATION

- **We believe that the purpose of education is to help students become skilled workers, responsible citizens, and most importantly, fulfilled human beings.** To neglect any one of those functions is to betray our children and ourselves. We oppose the blinkered view, shared by both major parties, that education is nothing but a job-training program.
- **We will hire and train more teachers, increase the provision of schools, (especially in underserved rural areas), and reduce class sizes.** We will support teachers, students, and parents, by advocating for reductions in arbitrary homework assignments, which research has shown is ineffective at helping children to learn. We will also encourage more free periods for teachers for any planning and marking at school so we can reduce how much work they have to take home.
- **We believe that a level playing field in education is essential. We will strip charitable status from fee-paying schools.** We also support banning fee-paying schools outright and converting the existing private schools to comprehensives.
- **We will scrap Ofsted and restore its responsibilities to local authorities.** This will ensure that those visiting the school understand the areas that the schools serve. Evaluation of schools should be constructive, supportive, and not punitive.
- **We will reinstate the Education Maintenance Allowance,** which provided a ladder out of poverty for young people who would otherwise have been unable to afford to stay in school.

- **We will scrap tuition fees and cancel student debt.** Student loans are in most cases never repaid and tuition fees serve as a barrier to less well-off students attending university. Student debt payments prevent adults from investing in their future, and so student debt must be scrapped. We will increase support for vocational courses and graduate opportunities, particularly in areas struggling to recruit and retain workers, such as healthcare and education. We will also increase provision for life-long learning, as no-one is the same person at 40 that they were at 18. People should not be penalised for wanting to change career, no matter their age.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENERGY

- **We are in a climate emergency.** We must and we will push for an increase in the use of renewable energy sources, electrification of transport, and the development of zero-carbon alternatives to other sources of carbon dioxide emissions.
- **The government's negligence in refusing to address flammable cladding in the wake of Grenfell is shameful.** We will fund the refit of buildings clad in flammable materials as swiftly as possible, before another tragedy occurs.
- Broadband internet access is a basic necessity, not a luxury, and the COVID-19 pandemic has proven it. We believe it must be freely available to all and of the highest standard. **We will bring internet access up to speed, especially in rural areas.**
- To fight climate change, it is vital that we have more efficient public transport and take fewer car journeys. **We will provide more funding to public transport to increase its availability,** expanding the network to ensure that all areas are covered. In particular, we will **improve East-West connections within the North** and increase subsidies to reduce the fares paid by passengers.
- Currently a large proportion of our infrastructure is run for profit, and so is not focused on providing what the public needs. **We will enable councils to run public transport in-house, and reestablish a state-run rail network.**
- **We will protect vital services in rural areas such as post offices, banks and GPs.** We will fund programs to expand them into areas which find themselves without these key facilities.

AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

- **We support our farmers** and will vote for legislation that:
 - Protects our agricultural industry, rural employment and the rural economy,
 - Preserves and enhances soil, including its structure, organic matter, fertility and soil life,
 - Increases renewable energy provision and promotes natural carbon sequestration, in order to minimise greenhouse gas emissions, and
 - Defends and fosters biodiversity.
- We know that many farmers are under significant financial pressure. **The transition to a sustainable mode of agriculture is a public good and the costs should be borne by the government.** We will encourage the development of high-efficiency, low-footprint greenhouse farming methods, and financially support farmers through the capital cost of adopting them.
- **Sheep worrying is a menace.** Dogs being allowed to run free in fields of sheep more often than not results in sheep being injured or becoming so stressed that they miscarry their lambs. This has a direct emotional, mental, and financial impact on farmers. **We will increase penalties for sheep worrying.**
- **The theft of farm equipment damages livelihoods.** We take this issue seriously and will work with farmers to tackle rural crime.
- We must not allow our food standards to be watered down for the benefit of American agribusiness. **We will subsidise grass-fed, low-intensity, high welfare production and oppose 'factory farming'.** We oppose attempts to roll back regulations that protect the incomes of rural people and the quality of our food.
- **We will rewild the North,** planting trees to preserve our natural environment for future generations. To this end we will fund farmers to play their part in these initiatives.
- **We will invest in a climate-proof future.** We will build flood defences, prevent building on flood plains, and provide a government-backed insurance policy so that no one is left to the mercy of the free market. We will invest in natural flood management, including restoring uplands and other natural methods to make sure everyone is safe.

- Our pollinator species are under critical risk of total collapse, threatening our food production. Once they are gone, they are gone. **We will maintain the ban on neonicotinoids** to protect them. We are committed to finding ecologically viable alternatives to these pesticides.
- We will support our independent fishermen. We will remove currently allocated fishing quotas from huge international fishing companies, and return them to sustainable, local fishing communities. **Our fishermen have been repeatedly let down, and we must finally deliver for them.**

COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

- **We will support community venues such as leisure centres, pubs, youth centres, community halls and libraries.** These spaces are vital for creating a sense of community and fighting social isolation, and will be hugely important as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **We value our culture. We will fight the ongoing transfer of our heritage to London.** This requires fairer funding for the arts and the heritage sector in the North, and preventing the transfer of collections, such as the transfer of the photography archive from Bradford's National Media Museum to the Victoria & Albert museum in London. In the same spirit of fairness, we also acknowledge that there are cases where it is appropriate to return artefacts from collections in the North to their homes, and will support institutions taking those steps.
- **We believe that academics should be able to pursue research free from government interference.** The backlash that researchers at the National Trust and other institutions have received for bringing our history of colonialism to light is wrong. We oppose any attempt to make academic funding reliant on following government guidelines.
- **We support increased funding for the arts and humanities.** These are vital fields that are being underfunded due to a misguided emphasis on commercial value in education. Not only is this a narrow view of human worth, it ignores the fact that the creative industries are one of the largest parts of our economy.
- **We believe that everyone should participate in our culture** and will support funding and outreach programmes to increase participation from rural areas and low-income families that would otherwise miss out on the wealth of cultural experiences with which we are blessed.

OUR VISION FOR AN INDEPENDENT NORTH



IN AN INDEPENDENT NORTH, WE WON'T BE IN CHARGE – YOU WILL.

We believe in shifting power away from politicians and putting it into the hands of ordinary people.

The constitution of an independent North should be written by a constitutional assembly – a grand convention in which ordinary people come together to hear arguments from all sides and decide the best way to proceed – and then ratified by a referendum of every Northerner.

Local decisions should be made at a local level, where they are most accountable to local people.

The Westminster system is one of the most centralised in the world. Powers that should rightly belong at the level of the county, city, or town are monopolised by Westminster. Cities in many other countries have more autonomous powers than cities in the North. This centralisation is inefficient, ineffective, and insensitive to local needs.

We want to put an end to that. Whereas at present every power is held by Westminster unless the government deigns to hand it down to a lower level, in the free North we believe every power should be held at the local level unless there's a good reason to loan it to a higher one. **Our most fundamental belief is that we all have the right to determine our own future**, and that's much easier to do when power is local, democratic, and accountable.

The Northern Independence Party believes that through independence, we have the opportunity to decentralise our society and create regional equality, while maintaining our proud, unique, and distinctive local identities. Building on our northern tradition of solidarity, we want to unite the north and reduce regional inequalities through a system of Northern federalism. Regional governments within the North will ensure that local people are in charge of their affairs and that we distribute power fairly, while recognising that we Northerners share common interests. The Northern Independence Party is committed to ensuring that all regions in the North will rise together.

SOCIALISM DOESN'T MEAN THE STATE OWNS EVERYTHING.

We want to reduce centralised power, not increase it. Our vision of the North is one where co-operatives, locally-owned businesses, social enterprises, and community-owned organisations work together in an economic democracy – a democracy truly governed by and for the people. Our government will not ride roughshod over the lives of working people, but give workers and communities the power to come together, decide what needs to be done, and do it.

Where it makes sense for industries to be nationalised – such as our utilities, the NHS, and public transport – we want to make sure they have independent oversight by ordinary Northerners. The infrastructure of our everyday lives should not be a means for Westminster politicians to demonstrate that they're 'doing something', nor a way for them to hand out contracts and kickbacks to their friends. Our democracy will not be ruled by party or bureaucrat, but by the people of the North.

AN INDEPENDENT NORTH WILL PUT THE POWER IN YOUR HANDS.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



WHERE'S THE BORDER?

Our current proposal includes all of the North East, North West, Yorkshire and the Humber, and High Peak.

Constituencies immediately south of the border will be offered the chance to join through referendum.



WHERE'S THE CAPITAL?

We don't want to recreate Westminster, where everything revolves around a single capital and everywhere else lives in its shadow. We're examining a number of alternatives, such as having different capitals for different functions, or having a parliament that moves periodically between major Northern cities. At the end of the day, it will be for Northern people to decide.

WILL AN INDEPENDENT NORTH JOIN THE EU?

The majority of people in the North voted to leave the EU, and this was confirmed by the election of Boris Johnson in 2019. Brexit is done, we have left. The Northern Independence Party is committed to democracy and embracing our new relationship with the EU and the rest of the world. We are keen to see the government keep the promises they made about this new relationship. However, should the people of the free North want to rejoin the EU one day, then that is a decision for the people – and not any political party – to make.

WILL WE KEEP THE QUEEN?

Many people in the North love the royal family, and it is not for us as a party to decide this. If enough people in a free North want to keep the Queen as head of state, as she is in many Commonwealth countries, then she will be invited to remain. If the majority of people want to be a republic, then we will be a republic. Either way, this will be decided by a referendum in a free North.

WILL AN INDEPENDENT NORTH USE THE FIRST PAST THE POST VOTING SYSTEM?

We believe in democracy. The form this takes is for a constitutional assembly to decide. Having experienced the governments delivered by First Past the Post, we will argue against it.

WHY DO YOU PROPOSE “NORTHUMBRIA”?

Northumbria is the historic name of the regions we consider ‘The North’, formed from the merged kingdoms of Deira and Bernicia in the 7th century, and meaning ‘North of the Humber’. We propose it because this period of history represents the last time the North was united as an independent entity.

WHY RED AND YELLOW?

These are the colours of the historic flag of Northumbria, the standard of St. Oswald, the founder of Northumbria. It is one of the oldest flags in the world. Originally it was gold and purple, but this was later changed to our fetching yellow and burgundy!

WHAT CURRENCY WOULD WE USE?

This depends entirely on the political landscape at the time of independence. We don’t know what the relationship between the pound, the euro, and other currencies will look like when we gain independence. What we can say is that decisions about our currency should be based on the will of the people and the advice of economic experts in the circumstances of the time.

IS THIS A PARTY AIMED AT THE WHOLE OF THE NORTH OR DOES IT OPERATE ALONG CLASS LINES?

Our aim is to represent the whole of the North and everyone that lives here. We make no apology for being predominantly a working class party, as the working class feel the brunt of the North-South divide and it is their voices that are routinely ignored. We believe that improving the conditions of the poorest and most neglected among us will in turn improve the conditions of those who are already doing well. To achieve this we seek the perspectives of all Northerners, and we invite people from all backgrounds in the North to join us and contribute to our vision.

ISN'T IT MORE EFFECTIVE TO ADVOCATE FOR THE NORTH IN WESTMINSTER RATHER THAN PURSUE INDEPENDENCE?

We will be doing both. Even with a government programme as radical and transformative as in 1945, until we address how the UK is structured, the power relations within it will never change. The North needs its own voice to stand against the interests of Westminster. We can’t trust a system built on inequality to dismantle that same inequality.

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