



## POLITICAL CONTEXT

The Norwich North by-election, triggered by the resignation of the Labour MP Dr Ian Gibson following his expenses related deselection, is to take place this Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2009.

Dr Gibson had been accused of selling a taxpayer-funded property to his daughter at a discounted price. He was deselected as a Labour candidate for the next election, by Labour's "star panel" not by the local party. Dr Gibson then resigned from Parliament on the 5th June 2009 in the midst of the Government reshuffle.

Although regarded as one of Labour's safest seats in East Anglia, this by-election is set to be a crucial test for the party ahead of the next General Election. Considering Labour's current position in the polls and the disappointment felt by constituents of Norwich North over the expenses scandals, the Conservatives will be aiming to reduce Dr Gibson's 2005 (5,500) majority to prove nationally that they have the confidence and electoral backing to govern Britain.

Coming only two days after MPs rise for the summer recess, the Government are hoping that a Labour defeat will not spark another internal revolt against Gordon Brown. Recently there has been controversy over whether the Prime Minister would visit the constituency ahead of the by-election. David Cameron has already visited the area several times, but Mr Brown has refused to commit himself; avoiding the question when asked by the press earlier this month.

Although opinion polls for by-elections are notoriously unreliable, one recent poll conducted by ICM put the Conservatives on 34% and Labour on 30%. Surprisingly, the Green Party were on 14%, up 11 points from the last General Election, and only 1 point behind the Liberal Democrats.

Following the local and European elections, the Norwich North by-election will be the latest measure of the depth of public dissatisfaction with the mainstream parties following the expenses revelations.

Norwich North has become a national platform to debate topical issues of the moment, specifically around the handling of the economy, as well as the issues around the bid to clean up politics in and around Westminster.

While the focus is traditionally pointed to the battle between Labour and the Conservatives, the Green Party has emerged as a party to watch in this contest, ahead of the Liberal Democrats. This is the first time that a by-election has been held on strong Green ground, with the Greens being the largest opposition to Labour on Norwich City Council.

Labour's campaign has focused on the Conservatives' alleged planned spending cuts and the potential impact that they may have on Norwich. The Conservatives have responded with accusations of Labour engaging in "dirty tricks," and have made demands that Labour lay bare where they intend savings to be made.

Co-signing a pledge to run a clean campaign with the Greens, the Conservatives have aimed to portray themselves as the party determined to clean up politics.



## THE SEAT

Norwich North includes parts of two local authority areas, Norwich and Broadland. Covering the northern suburbs of the city, the seat is a diverse constituency, including areas such as Sprowston and Thorpe St Andrew, but also some of the city's poorer areas like Mile Cross.

However, boundary changes ahead of the next General Election will see Norwich North lose the wards of Taverham North, Taverham South, Drayton North and Drayton South to the new Broadland constituency, meaning the new Member of Parliament will be serving some parts of Norwich North for a relatively short time.

Ian Gibson has held this seat since the 1997 General Election. Prior to this, the Conservatives held the seat from 1983 but their share of the vote gradually declined as the Liberal Democrats rose in popularity. In 1992 Conservative MP, Patrick Thompson's majority was reduced to just 266 and then ultimately lost the seat to Labour at the next election in 1997. Other changes have taken place in this area since then with the Liberal Democrats losing control of Norwich City Council, now controlled by Labour, in 2004. The Conservatives have had overall control of Norfolk County Council since its creation, except for brief periods in the 1970s and 1990s, where no party had an overall majority.

The county has been subject to the current review of local authority organisation, following a bid by Norwich City Council for unitary status. The unitary review process has been protracted over the last few years and is still not resolved. The Boundary Committee is due to report shortly on its recommendations to government, which will then need legislation to enact any changes. The review has also become increasingly acrimonious, with the Conservative controlled County Council opposing plans by the Labour-led City Council to assume full unitary powers for Norwich. Similarly, the Conservative front bench team in Parliament have also said that they would scrap any changes if they were still underway at the time of the General Election.

### 2005 General Election Results

Labour: 21097 (44.9%) – Majority of 5,459 (11.6%)  
Conservative: 15638 (33.2%)  
Liberal Democrat: 7616 (16.2%)  
Green: 1252 (2.7%)  
UKIP: 1122 (2.4%)  
Other: 308 (0.7%)

## THE CANDIDATES

**Labour**  
**Chris Osterowski**

The 28 year old Labour candidate has aimed to focus his campaign on everyday issues, specifically petty crime in Norwich, but instead it has been plagued by the issue of MP's expenses. He has been continually forced to talk about the resignation of Norwich North's



sitting Labour MP, Ian Gibson despite efforts to centre his campaign around increasing the number of sure start centre and police officers in Norwich. Labour's current poor showing in the national polls indicate that Labour holding the seat is increasingly unlikely. One opinion poll gave him 30 per cent, five points behind the Conservative candidate. However, that almost certainly overstates Labour's current support.

A product manager for the John Lewis Group (now synonymous with MPs' expenses claims due to the so-called "John Lewis List"), he is also a member of Labour's Christian Socialist Movement (CSM) of which he was Treasurer until February this year. Until recently, he was planning to leave the country this autumn to do an MA in International Relations in Madrid.

He was a student locally at the University of East Anglia, where one of his lecturers, coincidentally, was Ian Gibson. Dr Gibson had been reported as saying that he would campaign for his successor although nothing has been heard from him since. Labour's rivals have since argued that the party has not turned up to fight the contest seriously, because it is struggling to motivate its activists.

Interestingly, he was previously, for around about eight months, a member of the Conservative student society whilst at University. He was one of four candidates selected to represent the Conservatives in a 2001 National Union of Students election. Commenting on this, he said: "*I suppose everyone does silly things whilst at university.*"

#### Conservative Chloe Smith

The only candidate to have been previously selected she has focused her campaigning on local issues within the community including the closure of the NHS walk-in centre at Thorpe St. Andrew, fighting for justice following the Greyhound Opening homes scandal and working to improve the quality of council housing.

At the age of 27, Chloe Smith could become the youngest member of the House of Commons. Her career includes working for Deloitte as well as working in Westminster for Gillian Shephard MP the then MP for South West Norfolk and also for Bernard Jenkin MP.

Originally from Norfolk, she is an active volunteer and has recently set up a mentoring scheme to help get more women into politics. She has also been a member of the TimeTogether scheme which helps refugees in the UK and has campaigned heavily in the area for the Norwich Evening News' campaign to 'Love Your Local' arguing that high taxes, red tape and extreme offers in supermarkets, on top of the downturn, make these tough times for Norwich pubs. She has also publicly supported the 'Save our Post Offices' campaign, voicing her concern that it is often the elderly and disabled people who lose out most when a sub-Post Office closes.

In response to the recent controversies in Westminster, she has set out rules about her expenses and has committed to publishing the details of her personal expenses, office expenses and donations on her website. She has also promised to annually appoint a firm of local auditors to sign off her accounts and has pledged never to claim for food, furniture or household goods.

**Liberal Democrats**  
**April Pond**

Until her selection as the candidate for Norwich North, she was the PPC for the neighbouring Broadland constituency, one of the Liberal Democrats' top target seats. Should she not be successful in Norwich North, it is likely she will still contest Broadland at the General Election.

She has been a Councillor on Norwich City Council since 2002, going straight into the Cabinet at the time. On the campaign trail she has expressed a number of concerns surrounding the state of Norwich's Health and Social Services and in particular has campaigned for more beds to be made available at Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital, as well as to keep St. Michael's Hospital in Aylsham open.

A businesswoman who set up her first small catering business at the age of 21, she later moved into retail. She describes herself as "Norfolk born and bred," having gone to a number of local schools before going on to Great Yarmouth College of Art & Design.

Realistically the Liberal Democrats have little chance of winning this seat, having performed badly in past elections, and Ms Pond will undoubtedly be focusing her campaign on those parts of the constituency that will switch to Broadland at the next election.

**Green Party**  
**CLlr Dr Rupert Read**

Dr Read has been a Councillor since 2004 and was re-elected in 2007 with 49% of the vote. He is a Senior Lecturer at the University of East Anglia where his research interests include environmental ethics, philosophical perspectives on propaganda, and the philosophy of social science. His main policies include reforming the House of Commons, creating jobs in green industries and protecting green spaces.

The Green Party have a large presence in Norwich, mainly thanks to the middle-class nature of the seat and the large university population. Following on from their success at the European elections, where in the Norwich City area they received the highest proportion of the vote at 25% they see themselves as very real contenders for this seat. The Party is also the official opposition on Norwich City Council with 13 seats to Labour's 15 and hope to benefit from the public's disillusion and disappointment with the mainstream parties following the expenses scandal.

**Others**

Following on from their recent successes at the local and European elections, both the UK Independence Party, who won a seat on Norfolk County Council earlier this year, and the British National Party have put up candidates.

Glenn Tingle is UKIP's candidate he is a civil engineer and former army medic.

The BNP's candidate is the Robert West, he was instrumental in the founding of the Christian Council of Britain, an organisation which it is claimed exists to provide a religious veneer to



the BNP's racial ideology. It is disputed whether or not he has the right to claim the Reverend title which he uses.

**The results of the Norwich North By – election will be sent to you as soon as they are available on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> July.**