

Chair's report, Derbyshire Dales Liberal Democrats, 2025

This has been a difficult year for our party in the Dales. National and local political changes have made effective campaigning harder, and the future structure of local government remains uncertain.

The most serious challenge is the dismantling of our current local government system by Labour. We are watching our district council be wound down before it is replaced by a more distant and less accountable unitary authority, alongside the slow creation of a new, remote, so-called 'regional' body. By mid-2027, these changes will end our position as the largest group on the Council and significantly reduce our campaign funding.

We also face pressure from the rapid rise of Reform UK. Their strong performance in May's county council elections and their national-level disruption have added to the instability of the political landscape. I witnessed the result of their hate-inspired extremism first-hand at a demonstration against migrants in September.

Despite this, our local Liberal Democrat position still has real strengths: dedicated and respected councillors delivering meaningful improvements for residents, a determined group of activists, a weakened local Conservative establishment, and a deeply unpopular Labour government. Reform, despite its momentum, has little to show for its first six months running County Hall.

My own work this year was heavily focused on the county council elections. I continue balancing my role as a district councillor with ongoing campaigning. In June, I attended the ALDC Kickstart weekend in June thanks to local party support. A key lesson was the value of very local communication—street letters and surveys—which we have begun using in Darley Dale and Derwent Valley, and elsewhere.

Looking ahead, I want to prioritise recruiting and developing new helpers and potential future candidates, including those not ready to become full members yet.

I remain grateful to our executive and wider team. Their hard work delivered an excellent result in Matlock in May. They continue to champion our social liberal values—supporting individual resilience, community empowerment, and sustainability—in both our campaigns and our council work. We will keep challenging the democratic weaknesses of Labour's imposed structures and make increasing use of Facebook and other tools to communicate effectively.

Next year's major task will be using our data more strategically as we build toward the unitary elections in May 2027, and begin selecting our next parliamentary candidate.