

DAISY COOPER MP

DELIVERING FOR YOU AND ST ALBANS



ANNUAL REPORT 2020

CELEBRATING OUR COMMUNITY



Helping launch Tap2Donate, raising funds for homeless shelters



Supporting our local foodbank with its appeals



Supporting Black Lives Matter at the local protest



Hosting an event to showcase five inspiring St Albans women for International Women's Day



Joining the St Albans Teds virtual PRIDE event as a trustee of local LGBT+ charity 'Ask for Clive'



Supporting St Albans for Refugees 'reverse Santa'



Joining the local Jewish Hannukah celebration



Supporting Herts Young Leaders at the Black History Month market



Judging the Sopwell Community Trust Ramadan lantern competition

MY FIRST YEAR AS YOUR MP



Thank you again for electing me in December 2019 as your MP. I'm profoundly honoured to represent you here in St Albans and in Westminster, and I'm really proud of what I've been able to deliver for St Albans in my first year.

I set out to hit the ground running, but this was not the first year in the job that I was expecting. It's been unbelievably tough for everyone, and I've been working hard to support local families, businesses and the St Albans community.





In my first year as your MP, I've successfully campaigned to change government policies and I've lobbied to change the law. Through my local surgeries, I've been able to help a lot of people individually with housing, benefits and immigration issues, and in some cases, have helped them to change their lives. Within the Liberal Democrats, I started out as the Spokesperson for Justice, and Digital Culture Media and Sport, but am now our Spokesperson for Education. I was also elected by my fellow Lib Dem MPs as Deputy Leader of the party, a platform I've used to push our local issues onto the national agenda.

I pride myself on keeping you informed about what I'm doing on your behalf, and being transparent and approachable. If you want to hear more from me throughout the year, then please sign up to my email updates via my website.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daisy".

CONTACT

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Note: some photos are pre-COVID.
All photos taken during the pandemic were compliant with the rules at the time.

I FIGHTING TO SAVE LIVES, LIVELIHOODS AND LIBERTIES DURING COVID-19



This has been an incredibly difficult year for so many people. Many of us have had to deal with illness, bereavement, 'long COVID', job loss, financial uncertainty, family separation or personal loneliness.

But there has been a silver lining: the brilliant sense of community spirit as people volunteered to help, clapping for carers and the rainbow trail, walking and cycling through quieter streets, a chance to reconnect with nature, and a new-found appreciation for the frontline workers in our midst.

I set out to help local people who'd been affected, and to call on the government for more support and greater transparency. And at the height of the crisis, I sent out daily COVID-19 updates to residents with links to new guidance and advice.

4

→ Helping repatriate families stuck abroad

Helped repatriate 52 individuals or families stuck abroad in 20+ countries, some of whom had run out of money or medicine

→ Supporting vulnerable constituents

Supported vulnerable and elderly constituents shielding from COVID-19 to access food boxes, volunteer support and social care

→ Helping care homes

Brokered emergency supplies of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for care homes and supported them to access COVID-19 testing kits

→ Fighting for jobs and businesses

Supported local businesses impacted by the crisis including lobbying the Government to fill the gaps in their support packages and working with local business groups

→ Supporting families

Made arrangements for some families to have the chance to say goodbye to loved ones under difficult circumstances

→ Sharing breaking information about COVID

Worked closely with Lib Dem district council leader Chris White and joined scores of meetings with Ministers to ensure I had the most up-to-date information to share with residents

→ Fixing Watford General oxygen supply

On the first weekend in April, Watford General Hospital had to close A&E. There was a known issue with their oxygen supply but works had been put on hold. I secured an urgent phone call with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and asked for the works to start as a matter of urgency. The engineers turned up on Monday morning. I won't lie: I cried with relief!

→ Scrapping parking fees for NHS workers

I wrote to the Mayor of London asking him to stop the congestion zone and road user fees (congestion charge) for NHS and emergency workers. He announced the suspension of the charges shortly afterwards, helping our St Albans-based NHS workers in London

→ Fighting for COVID testing data

MPs from all sides called for better testing data to be shared with local authorities. After I and many other MPs raised this issue repeatedly, county councils finally started getting daily postcoded data, including here in Hertfordshire.

→ Ending care homes access scandal

In response to heartbreaking stories of inhumane levels of separation in St Albans and across the country I was a driving force behind national calls for family



carers to be given key-worker status, like paid carers, to allow safe visiting in care homes. Just a few weeks before Christmas, the government agreed to roll this out.

The plans were disrupted in some areas by the move to new Tier 4, but I'm proud to have helped move this issue up the agenda and will continue to campaign for families to once again care safely for loved ones in care homes

➔ **Getting No10 social distancing warnings**

I asked Number 10 why its daily briefings failed to issue social distance warnings for any religious festival except Easter. They then delivered the same message for Ramadan.

Working with local Muslim community leaders in St Albans, we got the message out locally via WhatsApp and in the HertsAd, to help protect some of those most at risk from COVID



I SUPPORTING JOBS AND LOCAL BUSINESSES



Our high street hospitality and retail businesses are absolutely on a knife-edge.

6 My top priority in working with businesses this year has been to help as many as possible make it through the pandemic and into recovery. The business rate system was already broken. Earlier this year, the government announced a review but put it on hold during COVID.

At the start of July with the support of twenty MPs, I urged the government to turbo-charge the review, start the call for evidence and keep to the same timeline. Just as Parliament broke for the summer recess, the government had done just that so it was nice to have an 'end of term' win!

Our local pubs and restaurants, run by families in our community, have struggled with incomplete and confusing government guidance. I have tabled scores of questions to get clarity for them and the hospitality sector as a whole, so they could re-open safely.

I also led the successful national campaign to scrap the "10pm pubs curfew". The public was rightly outraged to see groups of people being turfed out onto the streets, onto public transport and into supermarkets, all at the same time.

I exposed the fact that the government had not conducted a business impact assessment after learning it had not consulted its medical advisors either. The 'curfew' has now been amended, handing a much-needed lifeline to our local restaurants and some pubs for when they can re-open.





In the first lockdown, pupils didn't just miss months of teaching and learning. They lost the routine and support, and couldn't see their friends.

Teachers continued to teach children of front line workers, prepared home-schooling lessons, and contended with multiple last-minute changes of guidance. In the autumn, many university students suffered too, especially with anxiety. As your local MP, I have held several Q&As with St Albans Mums and

consulted with local headteachers about the support they needed from the government.

In September, Ed Davey, the new Lib Dem Leader, appointed me as Education spokesperson.

Since then, I've been speaking up for students, parents, teachers and universities - calling for the guidance, financial resources, and mental health support that schools need to operate safely and with certainty.

7

FREE SCHOOL MEALS CAMPAIGN

There are almost 1,400 children in St Albans who receive free school meals during term time, but whose parents may struggle to find the money in school holidays.

I used my first chance to ask a question at Prime Minister's Questions to ask the prime minister to continue free school meal provision in the school holidays so that no child would go hungry at half term or at Christmas.

And across the country, I supported Liberal Democrat teams demanding that their councils step up where the government had failed.

Here in St Albans, I joined our local Lib Dem councillors in collecting food supplies for our local food banks to help families here over half term. And I'm still calling for free school meals to be extended to all families living in poverty.

Thank goodness for Marcus Rashford, whose amazing campaign forced not just one, but two U-turns on this issue!





I TACKLING THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

I've asked questions in Parliament on a range of climate related issues, demanding urgent action to stop irreversible damage to the planet.

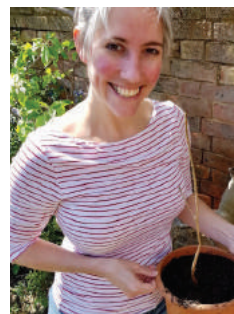
One of the first things I did once in Parliament was become Vice - Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Climate Change—an issue close to my heart.

I share the huge public appetite to build our country back up after the devastation that the COVID pandemic has left.

Working with local groups here in St Albans I've pressed the government to

go further and faster on everything from setting up deposit return schemes, to creating proper penalties for companies involved in deforestation.

I've campaigned cross-party to protect trees and chalk streams from potentially damaging government policies, and to call for much greater ambition from the UK government ahead of the global climate summit, which the UK is hosting in 2021.





I GAPS IN GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

An estimated three million workers fall between the cracks of the government's furlough scheme and its self-employed income support scheme, including hundreds here in St Albans.

Many have had no income for months and their situation is now dire. My Lib Dem colleagues and I have been leading the fight: setting up the biggest cross-party group of MPs in Parliament to fight for them, securing vital debates and pressing Ministers for answers.

I myself have now asked the Government –six times –whether it will allow limited company directors to submit dividend certificates as proof of income and still haven't had a proper reply. I will continue to fight for local residents on this.

Campaigning for our creative industries

Given our proximity to London and Elstree studios, there are hundreds of St Albans residents who support the creative industries.

From video games designers, stage managers, wig makers and make-up artists, these are the people who make up the fastest growing industry in Britain – before lockdown. But many of them are self-employed company directors, the forgotten



freelancers, and agency workers who didn't benefit from government loans or grants.

In mid-April, an amazing 130+ MPs & peers – including some big-hitters from the world of television and theatre – backed my call for the government to support the creative industries: in June I convened a virtual roundtable of representatives from 30 industry bodies covering a wide range of creative industries and interest groups within them–theatre, festivals, intellectual property, music, arts venues, creators, writers, artists, video games and more.

The result was a serious plan of action which I shared with the Government: a plan to protect the creative industries from COVID and Brexit, and kick-start the sectors which could help drive Britain out of recession.

I FIRE SAFETY

Three years after the horrific Grenfell fire, the government still hasn't taken any meaningful action to address the cladding scandal. Hundreds – possibly thousands – of residents in St Albans are affected.

Leaseholders and tenants are living in homes that aren't safe, feeling scared and trapped. Leaseholders can't sell up, but can't afford the spiralling remediation fees they're being forced to pay either.

Some leaseholders are now declaring bankruptcy. Other residents who have invested savings or pensions, are now realising that for now, those investments are worth nothing.

I've been a driving force behind the campaign to stop leaseholders from having to pick up costs for fire safety defects for which they are not responsible.

To help residents, I joined the committee that scrutinised new fire safety laws, tabled amendments to improve it, and continued to call on the government to act more quickly. We must never let that awful tragedy ever happen again.



I TV LICENCE FEE

The BBC's decision to scrap free licence fees for the over 75s (except the few on pension credit), is a result of savage Tory cuts. Now some of the poorest pensioners will face a cruel choice between having a TV for company, or being able to afford food or heating.



Cooper on BBC licence fee for over-75s and job cuts

I managed to secure an Urgent Question about the decision to end free TV licences for most over-75s. This might sound routine, but it actually required me to submit a request every day for nearly two weeks to get it on to the schedule.

Even the Government minister responding had to admit I'd been persistent! I didn't of course get a totally satisfactory answer.

Whatever anyone thinks of the licence fee, or the BBC's impartiality, there is a serious debate to be had about pensioner poverty. Making the BBC ask people questions about their benefit status makes no sense. Our national broadcaster is not an arm of the Department of Work and Pensions.

I got rather better news on the licence fee renegotiation: I'd asked for the broadcast regulator Ofcom to be involved in the next stage of the process, and secured a commitment that Ofcom would have a chance to 'input'.

After years of backroom deals on BBC funding, I'll continue to push for a more transparent process.

ABBEE FLYER PASSING LOOP

Earlier this year, I was pleased to co-sponsor a successful application to fund a business case study into restoring the passing loop (thus increasing the frequency of trains). It's a huge testament to the Abbey Flyer Users' Group, the numerous residents' associations along the line and politicians of all parties who have kept banging the drum for this much overdue investment. The funding to develop a business case is an important step forward.

BREXIT

This year saw the UK give up its EU membership, and after a torturous transition year of uncertainty and anxiety, finally agree a trade deal in December. I still believe that this has been the wrong course of action for our country. All UK citizens are losing freedoms and the government's own predictions say that this deal and its excessive bloom of red tape will leave us all poorer in the years to come.



Throughout the year, I have been pressing the government to be more transparent so that businesses and residents could have clarity well in advance. I called on the government to extend the transition period in order to focus on the COVID-19 crisis first and voted to maintain environmental standards and workers rights in law.

When we reached mid-December and the deal was still unknown, Liberal Democrats called on the government to negotiate a 'grace period' so that businesses would have more than a handful of days to adjust.

On that last part, I'm relieved that the UK government has seen sense and agreed a 12-month relaxation of some of the trade-related paperwork for some businesses.



FIGHTING THE RAILFREIGHT INTERCHANGE

There is a very real threat that a massive Strategic Rail Freight Interchange – the size of 490 football pitches – will be built on greenbelt.

This will affect our village communities and infrastructure around Park Street, London Colney and other nearby villages.

This year, the freight terminal was thrown back into the limelight as the Planning Inspectors gave St Albans District Council an impossible choice - to withdraw plans to build something else on the site, or to lose all power to decide where to build homes.

I swiftly secured a debate in Parliament and challenged the government to rethink its position. Unfortunately it says it can't - the decision lies in the hands of the developers and the land owners. But I'm not giving up the fight.

There are plenty of reasons to oppose the new freight terminal and similar proposed sites have been dropped elsewhere in the country. I will keep a close eye on developments and am committed to fight this until the bitter end.



DAISY'S 2020 RECORD OF ACTION

- ✓ 13,100 emails to and on behalf of constituents
- ✓ 8809 constituents helped with personal or political issues
- ✓ 132 advice surgeries, meetings and visits in St Albans
- ✓ 301 questions and speeches in Parliament

JOIN THE WINNING TEAM

At the 2019 General Election Daisy Cooper made history as Hertfordshire's first Liberal Democrat MP – winning St Albans from the Conservatives. Helping her was a remarkable team of volunteers.

www.stalbanslibdems.org.uk/volunteer

