

## NOTES ON THE HUSTINGS HELD ON 5<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2017 AT POOLE'S CAVERN VISITOR CENTRE

Two candidates were present - Charles Lawley (LibDem) and Ruth George (Labour). Andrew Bingham (Conservative) had been invited but declined to make himself available.

The session was chaired jointly by Charles Jolly and Simon Fussell, and attended by over 50 people. An attendance register was not taken.

Questions submitted in advance were taken first followed by additional questions from the floor.

Questioners are identified where known, otherwise referred to as UQF - Unnamed Questioner from the Floor.

### INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair thanked everyone for coming, introduced the candidates and invited them to speak for two minutes on their background and policies.

#### **Ruth:**

It feels like a job interview - which is exactly what it is. I am delighted that Transition Buxton and Amnesty organised this evening, it would have been a real shame for Buxton to have had no hustings. This is what Glossop face, there have been no hustings north of Hayfield.

I have not stood for parliament before. I have lived in the High Peak since leaving university, all of my adult life, and brought up my four children here. I live in Whaley Bridge now, before that in New Mills. I have been involved in campaigning for the Labour Party, schools, health issues since my early 20s. I joined the Labour Party aged 18 because I wanted to change the world, as we all do at that age, and as I still do 30 years later. I still want to change the world for the good of the community and for a better future for our children. The Labour manifesto is based on fairness and an end to the injustice that has built up over the last seven years.

I was horrified to see that the Buxton Job Centre was in the top few, not for finding jobs for people, but for imposing benefits sanctions. I'm horrified at the increase in Food Banks and that so many people now rely on them. We're the fifth richest country in the world, it shouldn't be like that. I'd love to talk globally but there are so many issues in our own country that need resolving. As a trade unionist for the last 25 years I am committed to this.

I look forward to hearing your questions and views on what High Peak wants of its next MP.

#### **Charles:**

Thank you for coming and thank you Transition Buxton for organising this.

Having children changes your life, it gives you a different perspective and priorities. I used to work in TV, and I didn't care about much, but with my little boy that changed. I took a drop in salary and went to work for a humanitarian aid charity. I joined the Remain campaign because I could see the damage Brexit would do. We pushed it close, it was predicted to be 55% leave in High Peak and we pushed it close to 50:50. I also joined the Lib Dems because of three issues: they were right about Iraq in 2003; they were the only party that predicted the economic crisis in 2008; they were the only party that took climate change seriously, back in the 1990s.

A Tory Brexit will be just as damaging as a Labour Brexit. The Tories will slash environmental standards and other protections, reduce tax and cut services. Labour would have the highest rate of corporation tax in the world which will result in unemployment, and we'll be less able to afford schools, the health service ... The Lib Dems are the last line of defence, against populism and reactionary politicking. I want a world worth leaving to my children.

### QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

**Rosemary:** What are your views on the Brexit negotiations. Is it to leave the EU even if the outcome will be catastrophic? Do you support Brexit hard or soft?

**Ruth:** I campaigned for Remain and that's how I voted. But we live in a democracy and the majority decided they wanted to leave the EU. Yes, OK - the majority of those who voted. A year later we hear that more people are committed to Leave, they want to move on, the referendum was very divisive, it was not a good time to be in politics. The key thing now is to get the best possible deal to protect the

economy, jobs, rights at work, environmental standards, social welfare. We want the best possible access to tariff free trade ... We will end the free movement of labour because that's what most people said they wanted. We need to invest in the economy and in young people, so we don't need to import skilled workers from countries who need them more than we do. We want to bring back nurses bursaries, free education and to grow the skills we need here. We will invest £250 billion over 10 years to get the infrastructure we need, including digital infrastructure.

**Charles:** I too campaigned for Remain. Power lies in global co-operation against terrorism, organised crime, environmental pollution ... we need to work together. And I don't think immigration is a bad thing. We shouldn't capitulate to Nigel Farage's demands that we close the drawbridge. I will always defend the rights of immigrants. My family come from Ireland, my great grandfather came here and had to change his name to Lawley because with an Irish name he couldn't get a job. There was demonisation then against the Irish, it's time we stood up to not let immigrants be demonised. One in 7 jobs in the High Peak depend directly on access to the Single Market, and could be lost if we leave. None of you voted to be poorer. During the campaign Leave was abstract, it could be whatever you wanted it to be. But you can't have your cake and eat it, we know we can't have access to the Single Market without free movement of people. So we believe that you should have the final say, only the Lib Dems trust you to do that. You will have a say on how or if we leave the EU.

**Rosemary:** The referendum as you say was extremely divisive - but you want us to have another one? We will see the same divisiveness all over again. We elect MPs to represent our wishes, and we want then to have the courage to stand up and do their best for the electorate, rather than creating more division. I want to know that if the deal isn't good enough, MPs will stand up and say no, we should stay - not call another divisive referendum.

**Chair:** Assuming we do leave, how do you propose to ensure protection for the environment, will the EU Habitats Directive be embedded and even improved on?

**Charles:** In coalition we led Europe on the environment, it was championed by the LibDems. We would incorporate the Habitats Directive into UK law.

**Ruth:** Absolutely. We would transpose EU regulations into law and underpin them to be long-lasting, because without the EU we won't have that protection. The Labour Party is extremely environmentally committed, we would keep the habitat regulations, and protect wildlife. We have been working with farmers on how we can support food production so it can be sustainable and we can be self-sufficient.

**Janet:** With Brexit, Theresa May has indicted she will repeal the Human Rights Act and has also toyed with the idea of pulling the UK out of the European Convention on Human Rights. What are your views on this?

**Charles:** We will fight against that. We will also be looking closely at the Digital Bill of Rights, as we believe the government is answerable to the people not the other way around.

**Ruth:** The Labour Party supports keeping the Human Rights Act in full and in keeping the UK a party to the European Convention. We too will look very carefully at the Bill of Rights. We need to ensure the police have the power they need to investigate potential terrorism and that whatever protection is in place to protect privacy doesn't impinge on this.

**Pat:** What would your policies be on the control of arms, nuclear and conventional?

**Ruth:** The Labour Party has signed up to keep the Trident system, but Jeremy Corbyn is very cautious about nuclear weapons. It shows how ridiculous it is when you get politicians arguing about who is willing to launch a pre-emptive nuclear strike. I would prefer to have a pacifist in charge, who is committed to negotiation, rather than Michael Fallon as Minister of Defence who says he is willing to launch a pre-emptive strike. As for our land forces, yes we need to be able to rely on them. We have just recently seen them out on the streets, but that isn't where they should be, they aren't trained for that. We need to control the sale of arms and would suspend sales to Saudi Arabia straight away. Britain should not be supporting dictatorships or regimes that are deploying weapons against innocent people. But unfortunately we do have a lot of jobs in the arms industry, we want to use those skills in for example renewable energy, use our scientists and engineers in that, not defence.

**Charles:** The Lib Dem manifesto is the only one to address nuclear warfare. We would replace three not four of the Trident submarines, and reduce the time out on patrol. We would encourage the international community to do the same. We don't believe unilateral disarmament will work. We will spend 2% of GDP on defence. We will control arms sales especially to regimes guilty of human rights abuses, with immediate suspension of sales to Saudi Arabia because of their use on civilians in Yemen. As for foreign interventions, Tony Blair was wrong on most of them; we would only intervene to stop mass loss of life.

**KateW:** Would you ensure all refugees in the U.K, including children, have access to family reunion rights?

**Ruth:** Yes, we would change the current regulations which say that family members have to demonstrate a minimum level of income to be allowed in. We think it is wrong that the right to family life is only for people with a high income. We would just ensure that families were self-sufficient and would not make claims on state facilities, family members could be invited in and help support each other. It is appalling that on unaccompanied child refugees the Tories have had to be pushed, and even then have only allowed in a tenth of what they committed to. We would accept the full number of children proposed by Lord Dubbs, and put in place the support needed for them.

**Charles:** I work with refugees on a daily basis. There's a blue plaque at Stockport station that commemorates the children who escaped the Channel Islands when they were under Nazi occupation. I want to go back to the UK being a country that celebrates offering asylum to those who need it. Turkey takes more refugees than the whole of Europe. In Lebanon 1 in 4 of the population are refugees from Syria, there's Palestinian refugees on top of that. In Jordan 25% of the national budget is spent looking after refugees. We would open the borders to 50,000 refugees from Syria. As for the 3,000 children under the Dubbs Scheme, yes. Refugees should be processed early and humanely, they don't need to be humiliated. We would end the detention of refugees, speed up the process, set a 28 day limit, and accept anyone fleeing from countries on the basis of persecution because of their gender or sexuality.

**KateW:** Would you let them work?

**Ruth:** Absolutely, yes, they need to work to support their family members.

**Charles:** Yes. The sad thing is that the demonisation creates such a negative picture. Most refugees who make it here are professionals, doctors, people with an incredible contribution to make to this community. We should welcome them with open arms.

**Question by email (name withheld):** Given the aging population and cost of health care, what is your position on euthanasia and one's right to refuse medical treatment eg resuscitation, blood transfusion. And how do you see the practicalities?

**Charles:** This is horrible, the hardest question you can face. I'm very passionate about Brexit, about human rights - this is a tough subject. I have a colleague works for a charity in this area, I've spoken to him about it. I support assisted dying in appropriate cases, but it's not blanket support, it has to be case by case, it's a hard thing to be sure about.

**Ruth:** The balance now is wrong. It's a hard policy question, an even harder life question. My grandmother died slowly and painfully and towards the end was indicating the pain was just too much. We asked for more pain relief and were told no, they could sedate her - but that wouldn't mean she wasn't still suffering the pain, she would just be unable to indicate it to us. It's an appalling system, no-one wants to have to suffer like that, we want everyone to have the best death possible. So I support appropriate pain relief so people can slip away without pain and where doctors don't risk being sued. I also support what some hospital trusts are looking at, an end of life care plan, where you can talk it through with family and professionals beforehand and make your wishes clear.

**JohnW:** What proposals would you support to stop increasing discrimination against mainstream Christians and Orthodox Jews in the workplace? For instance not being allowed to wear say a cross, or being forced to promote values that a sincerely held belief does not allow you to go along with.

**Ruth:** As a trade unionist I support workers rights for their religious beliefs to be accommodated as far as possible. I spent a lot of time over the last 10 years arguing for the right to not work on Sundays, and for reducing Sunday hours, because we are a Christian country. I've also fought for the right for Muslims to not work on Friday and to take time off for prayers. In work places with minority faiths this is usually practical to do, where there's a majority faith it can be more difficult. But all employers can support it and it's not right to discriminate against a majority faith.

**Charles:** I am a Roman Catholic so I can sympathise, Catholics are still the largest target for hate crimes of all religious groups. We need to guarantee religious freedom for all faiths. I work closely with Muslim community in Manchester, women wear the niqab, the burqa, the hijab, and there's a lot of islamophobic rumour, we're told it's oppression but it's more an act of rebellion. In the current climate it's very frightening to walk through the streets, it takes a lot of courage. We need to break down barriers and accommodate each others beliefs, and defeat ignorance. Education is the key to an inclusive society.

**JohnW:** The court judgement in the Asher bakery case was the result of the side-lining of religious education in schools. The judges can't empathise with people ...

**Intervention:** But huge numbers of our schools are Church of England schools!

**JohnW:** The Equalities Act needs to be amended.

**UQF:** But is it OK allowing Christians to discriminate against gay people?

**John W:** No not at all, but you should be able to refer them to another provider.

**Chair:** Are there any other issues of discrimination anyone wants to raise?

**JohnC:** There should be no discrimination against Muslims or anyone else. But there are extremists in some organisations. Most will say no you should not kill, but in Islam, can we say certain parts are wrong? How do we get through to extremists?

**Ruth:** There is this in most scriptures, you can read extremist views into the text of any faith. It's not about religion, it's about being a fair and inclusive society, where people don't feel bitterness and exclusion. We need to invest in young people. The most exclusive are schools, we need to end free schools that segregate communities. I have a friend in Preston where the children all used to go to the same school, now all the Muslim children go one way down the street to the free school, all the white children go the other way. This perpetuates segregation. I wish there was more cross culture here for my children, to promote an understanding of all faiths, by mixing with other faiths. We're all human beings, we need to respect and treasure our differences, not feel that others are better or worse than ourselves. We will restore the Immigrant Impact Fund to give support that is needed for instance for English as a Second Language teachers. Only by interacting can we be outward looking and stop exclusion.

**Charles:** I work with the Manchester Muslim community, I know people who knew Salman Abedi. No amount of investment would have stopped him. He went very introverted, then on line he found people who supported the worst of his views. As happens with the EDL and similar. The Prevent Programme makes things worse, you can be reported for anything, like the child who said she lives in a 'terrorist' house (meaning terraced). Prevent is working to promote extremism. Everyone wants to tackle extremism, the Muslim community raised £26k for the victims of the recent terrorist attack in Manchester. We need to embrace them, it was an attack on all of us, we need to stand united. We need to stop making concessions to the far right; we need to help integration through community engagement; we need funding for English lessons.

**UQF:** There's a common theme here, that affects especially young people who are vulnerable, and that's grooming - for various purposes, radical, sexual - it's a safeguarding issue. Society is in denial, we're all vulnerable, we can all be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

**Ruth:** I absolutely agree, as the mother of young children it's imperative that we look again at how the security services can access on line accounts, of terrorists and others. No Snooping is not categorical, sometimes it's important.

**Charles:** It's education. We need to be honest, sit down with young people and talk things through, both parents and schools. We need to identify warning signs and know what to do about them. We need to work with them not just snoop on them.

**UQF:** Discrimination against black, gay etc are all equivalent, no-one has the right to discriminate against others. Transphobia, there's a lot of discrimination now against people who are trans, how do we put a stop to that in the workplace?

**Ruth:** We've led the way in the shops union in recognising this problem. But translating policy from a large unionised employer to a small workplace is very difficult. It would help to get more trades union representation, people would benefit in all sorts of ways.

**Charles:** We need to lead by example, for instance with official documents and passports, stop offering just a binary choice. We need to recognise what's happening and take action and we need a right to gender reassignment. Under the Equalities Act you have to publish the gender pay gap for instance, we would extend that to cover transgender people as well.

**Pat:** Should all fossil fuels be left in the ground rather than their use adding to greenhouse gases?

**Charles:** Yes, they don't need to be taken out, we can use renewable energy. In coalition, renewable energy use trebled and we were on course for 100% renewable electricity generation by 2025 till the Tories reversed it. We were world leaders in offshore and tidal generation. Fracking is so dangerous, especially in this area where we don't know what mines we have, a housing development discovered one recently no-one knew about. Very dangerous. There's much we can do. Renewable electricity doesn't damage the environment, and has so much potential. And it brings down the cost of home energy. We support investment in anaerobic digestion using food and farm waste to produce bio-methane. It's a lot cheaper than fracking. We don't need that.

**Ruth:** Yes we have to leave them in the ground and in the long term aim for zero carbon. At the moment the aim is 80% reduction by 2050, we want to bring that forward to 2030. Under the green policies of the last Labour government, there were subsidies for solar and renewable energy, till the

coalition government stopped them. That's why renewable energy production was so high in the early years of the coalition government, due to the policies Ed Milliband introduced, in large part now gone. We need to rebuild that. I'm opposed to fracking not just because of the effect here and now but because it locks you in to fossil fuel use for the next 10-20 years for companies to see a return on their investment. We need to invest in the infrastructure for renewable energy, and I want to see the skills and research aimed at green and renewable energy.

**Janet:** What are your views on the different types of renewable energy and their suitability for the High Peak area?

**Charles:** Anaerobic Digestion certainly, with so much agriculture around, I'd like to see us take a lead there. I wish we had more sun and could take a lead in solar as well. Can we use rain to generate energy somehow? Tidal obviously not here but LibDem policy is to allow the Swansea tidal barrage to go ahead straight away. Wind, I'm all for it, it's either that or take fossil fuels out of the ground.

**Ruth:** We can make solar power work if it's subsidised. I did put panels on my house and took out a mortgage to do it, and the 43.5p/kWh I get pays that mortgage. We see solar farms in the South West and it is doable. In the High Peak, unless wind farms are of considerable magnitude you don't get the return. I value our landscape but it shouldn't be one here, one there, you don't get the return, so it has to be planned if we are having onshore wind. Offshore has less impact on communities. I love the fact that we have the hydro scheme in New Mills, though it doesn't seem to turn a lot; community generation projects is one way, if we can get the technology to work better, that's very important.

**Dave:** I'm very pro green energy, but what policies do you have on research into using fossil fuels without releasing greenhouse gases. There must be a way - Carbon capture? - any ideas?

**Ruth:** We need research and development to bring the technology forward. It won't happen with private companies, so we will start taking over licences and set up private energy companies in each region. We will ensure use of renewable energy via the Innovation Investment Bank so we can put the money into research and work together. This is only possible with state run industry.

**Charles:** At £1.4 billion turnover, the industry doesn't need to be nationalised. The energy market was being run by the big 6 and that was a problem, but we introduced more small independent companies and encouraged switching and now energy prices are lower. I support research into Carbon Capture and Storage as well as into tidal etc.

**UNQ:** How can any party justify £100 million a year on a weapon that we can't ever use? That would solve all our problems, why waste all that money. We should spend that money on green energy and solar, not Trident.

**Marc:** If Donald Trump was sat there where Andrew should be, what would you say to him, now he's pulled out of the Paris Climate Change Agreement? In one sentence.

**Ruth:** How short-sighted and destructive can you be?

**Charles:** I don't know - give it a rest? There's so much, I couldn't say it in a sentence - Paris, Muslim ban, refugees ... he's so dangerous. I couldn't do it justice.

**Laurie:** What are your two highest domestic environmental priorities and how will you ensure these are addressed when in government - by law, regulation, campaigns or other means?

**Charles:** N° 1 - Air pollution: We have 40 thousand premature deaths a year and it costs the NHS £15 billion. We would introduce a diesel scrappage scheme, ban the sale of new diesel cars by 2025, and extend ultra-low emissions zones. All private hire and buses would have to be low emission or electric, we'd encourage the sale of Low emission and electric vehicles and invest in the infrastructure for electric vehicle charging points. N° 2 - Zero Carbon, we passed an act to drop carbon use by 80% by 2040. All new houses should be built to Carbon neutral standards, followed by all new buildings. And now of course N°3 - defend the Paris agreement.

**Ruth:** Very similar. It's disgraceful the Tories are attempting to suppress the Air Pollution Report. People are dying from air pollution and it's spreading, it's not just London. Glossop High Street was checked recently and NOx levels were 1.5 time higher than EU standards. It's important we invest in hybrid and electric vehicles, and also increase public transport. We will nationalise the railways and cross subsidise buses to retain services in rural areas. N° 2 - Carbon emissions, we can't hide from the fact that we need to reduce them and aim for much lower emissions, it impacts us here and internationally, it will be catastrophic otherwise. If we think we have immigration problems now, with 1.5C increase it will be even more.

**UQF:** That's a bit idealistic surely, I'd happily change my diesel car for an electric one but I can't afford to. How can you reduce the cost?

**Ruth:** We'd subsidise it and invest in the technology. It's not in the interest of the car industry now to invest in the research, there's too much invested already. We also need to set up an investigation into

the diesel emissions fraud, it's not just one company. And we need to look at having a scrappage scheme more widely, not just in London.

**Charles:** Yes, a scrappage scheme. Also Green Investment Bank funding to encourage switching, and reform of the road tax system as an incentive. We need to protect the science budget and invest in renewable projects.

**JohnC:** What about nuclear power, what position does that play?

**Charles:** It's still needed now but it will be phased out. We'd say no to Hinckley C, it's not cost effective.

**Ruth:** We can't do without it yet but we need to look at nuclear decommissioning as an industry. We'd look closely at Hinckley C, and the contract with France and China, and make sure that the technology is going to work before it's trialled here in the UK.

**Roddie:** What are your views on building a relief road for Buxton, with particular reference to the potential environmental impact of doing this?

**Ruth:** One of the biggest causes of pollution is traffic, especially stationary traffic. I've been working with the Whaley Bridge community against traffic congestion. One problem is that once Fairfield Road clogs up traffic diverts through Whaley Bridge and Long Hill. Delays are extreme now, we want to attract more tourists, but if they sit in traffic for an hour waiting to get into the town ... So I do support a relief road for Buxton, to take heavy traffic out and improve quality of life. But I also want investment in public transport to reduce the number of cars.

**UQF:** But where would you put it?

**Ruth:** You'd come off the A6 and go round behind Waterswallows, it's not easy but it will help. There's land put aside for housing there but there's a problem with access, it would help for that as well as being an alternative route in and out of the town. You'd put in that relief road initially and then look at the rest. Free up the land behind Waterswallows, if you can get in behind Morrisons, we can use that for housing, if not it will be greenfield land elsewhere.

**Charles:** Ruth makes some excellent points but I'm sceptical. We had a bypass for Chapel but there's still problems with congestion in the town. And it goes through the green belt. I'd like to see more investment into public transport, we should electrify all the railways. I can see the arguments but I can also see it not working, it needs more thought.

**KateD:** My interest is in the historic built environment. I want to know how, if elected, you would protect investment in heritage: will your party maintain Lottery investment levels in the Heritage Lottery Fund, and reverse the imposition of VAT on listed building repair works?

**Charles:** I have no idea what the party policy is on this. I assume we would keep the HLF. We plan a Nature Act which will put targets on bio-diversity, clean air etc and designate community parks, so people can access green space. I can't see any reason why we'd reduce the HLF.

**Ruth:** I support the HLF for the built environment, it's very important, especially in Buxton. We haven't made a commitment on reversing VAT on historic buildings but if you get government funding then VAT would come back into the community programme.

**Marc:** But if you leave the EU we lose Regional Development Funding; the LibDems won't if we don't leave Europe.

**Ruth:** Realistically it will be either Labour or Conservative, who are both looking for a way forward through Brexit. We'd support putting funding in to replace EU money. But Lib Dem policy is that a referendum might go against the deal and negotiating a deal that you're going to ask people to reject isn't credible.

**Charles:** Yes we would lose Regional Development Funding and it will hit us hard. We see a lot of investment from the EU in High Peak and we will lose it. I want to see the closest possible relationship with Europe.

**UQF:** We've seen the NHS at its best in the wake of the terrorist attacks, and A&E departments coping over the winter. How can we ensure we retain it?

**Charles:** A baby born today has a 1 in 3 chance of living to 100. That's great but it costs more. Illnesses that used to kill us are now treatable, so we have to pay more to sustain the NHS. So our policy is to add 1p to Income Tax to pay for it. We also want to include mental health. We need to take the politics out of this, the issue has been weaponised for political gain. We need a discussion with all parties, and with doctors, surgeons, nurses ... we need the NHS run for us not for political gain.

**Ruth:** We need to keep the NHS. We need to stop the Health & Social Care Act, I lobbied against it, it forces trusts to go out to tender for services. We can't have a whole NHS unless we integrate health and social care. So yes we will raise taxes, on corporations and the top 5% of earners. We'll reverse the reduction of corporation tax that dropped from 28% to 17% and put it back at 26% which is the

average for Europe. And we'll invest in bursaries for nurses. NHS staff are under pressure the whole time not just in a crisis, at the end of their tethers, we're losing experienced staff and relying on agencies, we lose continuity of care and experience. We have to end that, and stop selling off services. And the Nailer Report, that the Tories support, will see the NHS asset stripped.

**UQF:** Back to the immediate business in hand. There's an election on Thursday. We know the Conservatives can be ousted but it won't happen if the LibDems take some of the vote. Why not get together to get rid of the Tories?

**Charles:** Because Labour are backing a hard Brexit, they're giving Theresa May a blank cheque, there's no greater threat and there's only the LibDems telling her we aren't with you.

**Ruth:** Everyone will have to make up their own minds on Thursday, but the latest YouGov poll for High Peak has Labour on 48% and the Tories on 46%. In part that's down to the support of the Green Party, and I welcome the progressive alliance from them, and also to counter a hard Brexit. High Peak is a bellweather constituency, it tends to go the way the government goes. So we have a chance to get Labour MP and a Labour government. And we're absolutely not going for a Hard Brexit.

**UQF:** I'm one of the 48% and one of the biggest issues for me is that the Labour Party is supporting Brexit. I'm glad to be able to vote for someone who expresses that view. I understand the concept of the progressive alliance but you need to be able to vote against Brexit.

**Dave:** If there is a chance of a second referendum, how will you ensure we actually get some facts? We never got any facts last time.

**Ruth:** This was the problem and it would be again. I'd love a policy that enabled us to stay in Europe. But if a serious party of government went forward to negotiate a deal while committed to rejecting it - well there'd be a loss of trust. We need to go forward with a reasonable view of Brexit and keep the best we can, certainly for jobs and investment.

**Charles:** It's a tough question, since Blair we've had spin. All it takes is if people make principled arguments and stand up for their beliefs.

**UQF:** I get Brexit, but the real issue is poverty. Food Banks, homelessness, drug and alcohol addiction. People can't afford to feed their families. How will you combat this?

**Ruth:** Absolutely. There should not be, in the 5<sup>th</sup> richest country in the world, a million people reliant on Food Banks. It's the result of policies over the last 7 years, there weren't none before 2010, but we didn't have a systematic reliance on Food Banks. We've seen cuts to in work support, tax credits have fallen by £1k, average wages are less now than they were in 2010. Meanwhile inflation has gone up by 16%. There's been victimisation of people who are unable to work either through disability or just there being no jobs. We need to end the punitive sanction system, it has hit people very hard in High Peak. People have been forced to travel 90 minutes to a job offering only 3 or 4 hours work. We'd get rid of zero hour contracts. People shouldn't have to choose between heating and eating. Restricting housing benefit for 18-21 year olds, it just causes long term problems and ends up costing far more. I'm sorry Andrew Bingham isn't here to justify these policies, I've been raising them with him for 7 years and got no answers. In the end I decided the only thing was to stand myself. I am absolutely committed to fighting poverty and homelessness. And we need to invest in young people as a way to tackle poverty.

**Charles:** Actually we're now the 7<sup>th</sup> richest country because of the fall in the pound due to Brexit. One in seven jobs in the High Peak depend on single market access. If we leave ...? We have a manifesto commitment to unfreeze benefit caps. We will also invest £9 billion, and produce apprenticeships ...

**UQF:** Apprenticeships are no good if there's no job at the end of it!

**Charles:** Apprenticeships are vital to get people into careers! We also increased tax allowances to take 3 million people out of paying tax altogether. But poverty under Brexit will rise. Labour are running with a list, but if 1 in 7 in the High Peak are out of work it's not affordable. It's vital we have a competitive Britain and stay in the single market. It's ridiculous to increase corporation tax, businesses will just go to Ireland. We can't shy away from it, we need to fight against a hard Brexit.

**UQF:** But if we have corporation tax at 26% it's still less than it was. And if you compare with rates globally it's still favourable.

**Ruth:** Absolutely. It's about fairness, it's the average rate of tax for our size of economy. Ireland is 11%, Hungary is 9%, some companies will always chase the lowest rate. Sure we could join a global race to the lowest tax rate, and be unable to afford services - I know which sort of a world I want to live in.

**Charles:** As part of the EU we have full access to the market and could have a 28% rate. But you're both going for a hard Brexit ...

**Ruth:** No, we'll negotiate to retain the benefits of the single market while ending free movement.

**UQF:** That's impossible!

**Ruth:** The EU is looking to reform. Unless we try how will we know?

**UQF:** Germany has a 40% rate of corporation tax. Why are their companies not leaving?

**Charles:** Because they're in the EU. It's OK to raise the rate if we're in the EU, but if we aren't it will cripple us. Jobs that are here now will move.

**UQF:** There are many tax variables, you have to scrutinise macro and micro levels. One of the reasons Europe has moved, it has a different framework, like the way industry and workers work together. I'm very upset that we're leaving so I understand how you feel, but the only way to go is to change the way we do things. Like nationalisation. Other countries own those industries now, and are making a profit, we want that money staying here, with us.

**Ruth:** We have to look to the long term and invest in young people, in services. To nationalise the railways, we don't need a big budget to do it. When NE Rail was taken back and run by the government it was making a profit, the government made millions, that's now going to the private sector. I don't want to see that happen in the health sector, in education, water, energy... I want to make sure the wealth stays in this country, and doesn't go to other countries.

**Charles:** I disagree with nationalisation.

**UQF:** No, we could do it!

**Charles:** But what incentive will anyone have to invest in the UK if corporation tax is so high and there's no access to the single market?

**UQF:** There won't be No access!

**Charles:** There will be tariffs. It's in the EU's interests for us to suffer, if we go for a hard Brexit they will make it hurt.

**Chair:** I'm going to draw it to a close there. Thanks to both of the candidates for coming along, and to all of you too. We were afraid with it being short notice that there wouldn't be many, but we're delighted that so many of you came along for the debate and the discussion. We hope it was helpful and enjoyable. And we're only sorry that it's been the only hustings in Buxton when there should have been two or three.

**UQF:** I want to express my dismay that the third candidate could not find the time to be here as well.

**UQF2:** Well I have been tweeting the questions to Andrew Bingham, in case he felt like replying!

JCMM  
6June17