



# NORTH DOWN INDEPENDENT

[www.northdownindependent.com](http://www.northdownindependent.com)

# ELECTION SURPRISE

## Brian Wilson to contest May's Assembly election

**There was considerable surprise among local politicians when the former North Down Councillor and Green Party MLA announced that he proposes to stand in May's Assembly elections as an Independent.**

Mr Wilson was a North Down councillor for more than 30 years but did not stand for the new Ards and North Down Borough Council. He was mayor of North Down in 1993/4. He is married to former Alliance Alderman Anne Wilson who also served as mayor in 2003/4. Prior to his election to the Assembly in 2007 he was an economic lecturer at B.I.H.F.E. Having promised the Green Party and his constituents he would serve only one term he did not stand again in 2011.

He topped the poll in Bangor West in six successive elections under various labels Alliance Green and Independent. In response to criticism that he had changed parties Mr Wilson pointed out that the people of Bangor West had appreciated the work he had done in the constituency and voted him top of the poll on each occasion regardless of his party affiliation. The people of North Down put people before party.

Mr Wilson continued "although I may have twice changed parties I have never compromised the principles which brought me into politics in the first place. These include fighting sectarianism and discrimination in all forms, opposing violence, working to create a more just society and to provide a better future for our young people."

North Down has a long tradition of voting for the person rather than slavishly following the party line. Successive MP's Jim Kilfedder, Robert McCartney and Lady Hermon were all elected on their own records following a split with their party. Elections to North Down council have shown a similar pattern with a number of prominent Independent councillors regularly topping the poll.

Voting for an Independent is sometimes considered like buying a pig in a poke. In the case of Brian Wilson we know what we are getting. He has a long record of service both as a councillor and MLA. His web site [brianawilson.com](http://brianawilson.com) first set up in 1999 (and thought be the first set up by a councillor in Northern Ireland) contains a wealth of information on campaigns in which he was involved, Assembly

speeches and copies of the 120 issues of West Bangor News he delivered over the past 30 years.

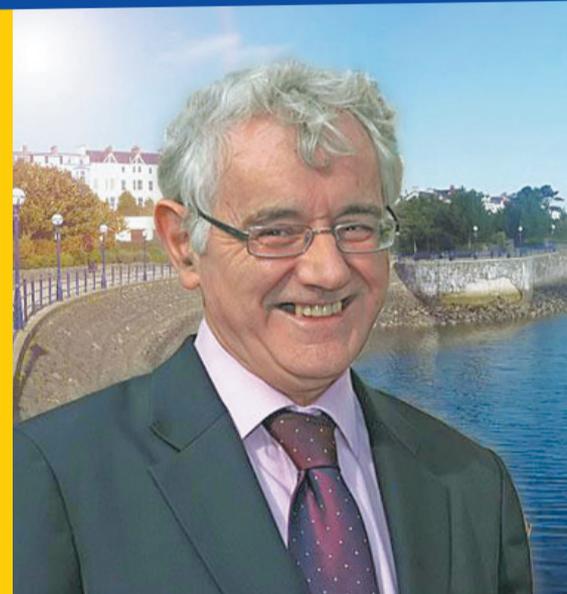
In his press statement Brian Wilson commented "When I left the Assembly in 2011 I certainly had no wish or intention to return but as I followed the action or more accurately the inaction of the Assembly over the past 5 years I began to despair as all the goodwill enjoyed following the Executive agreement was being rapidly lost.

The Assembly has become known for its allowances scandal, gridlock, refusal to hold Executive meetings, petty bickering, insults over language and point scoring over incidents of decades ago. To many particularly the young it has become a sick joke. Instead of agreeing plans for the future the emphasis is on point scoring and blame for events of the past. No wonder our young people are leaving in droves.

The optimists say that we need new blood in the hope this would lead to change. This is not the case as since I left the Assembly 46 new members have taken their seats, almost half the Assembly, and many of them young. Unfortunately there has been no improvement and relations and the workings of the Assembly have actually become worse. Bring back the Chuckle Brothers.

We do not need to change the personnel but change the parties and their policies. The new blood are clones of their predecessors steeped in the same dogma and prejudices and are complacent and see no need to change as their policies have been successful for the past 100 years.

I believe it is pointless to change the people unless we change the parties and their policies. I know that many people agree with me and I am standing on a manifesto of **FOCUS ON THE FUTURE**. A vote for me will show a rejection of the political establishment and its baggage and for a positive vision for the future.



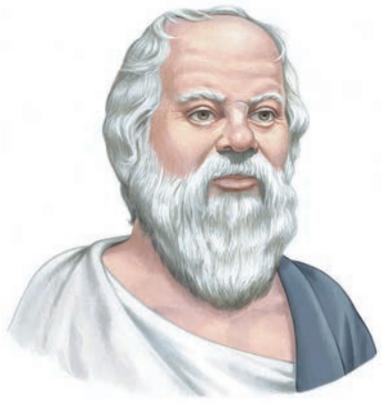
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NORTH DOWN INDEPENDENT

For further details see [www.brianawilson.com](http://www.brianawilson.com)



# The Thoughts of Socrates

## What does an MLA do?

In theory the MLA legislates and holds the Stormont Executive to account for its decisions. There is however little evidence of legislation in the past five years or of the Executive being held accountable for its actions. We have in fact suffered stagnation, gridlock and endless debates on issues which the Assembly is unwilling to act on and often have no power over.



Instead MLA's seem to spend their time getting photographed pointing at potholes, standing in front of things and a recent classic photo of an MLA standing beside a phone box that he claimed to have got repainted.

Well you have to do something to earn your £43,000 per annum.

## Dail election

The recent Dail election has created something of a political earthquake as the two major civil war parties Fine Gael and Fianna Fail which have controlled the government for the past 100 years received less than 50% of the vote between them. In addition over 40 Independents or small party members were elected.



It is clear that the electorate particularly the young were fed up with the failure of the existing parties and wanted change.

Many of our young people feel the same. Is it time for our own earthquake?

## North Down Assembly Election

The main question in the North Down constituency is can the DUP retain the three seats they won in 2011 when the party was at its peak. In the elections in both 2014 and 2015 the DUP share of the vote dropped significantly from 44% in 2011 to 25% in 2015. On this basis the party would lose a seat, for full details see <http://brianawilson.com/dup-to-lose-mla-in-north-down/>

These results also show a slight recovery by the Unionists and they could regain the seat they lost in 2011. In addition the other unionist parties such as UKIP and TUV also increased their share of the vote.

It will be an interesting election and North Down could again surprise the pundits.

## Political Dirty Tricks

It is often said that politics is a dirty business. I recently came across a copy of a press statement sent to the Spectator the week before the 1998 Assembly election. It was signed by Brian Wilson the Independent candidate and in it he states that although he was standing as an Independent he would join Alliance after the Assembly election.

This forgery was clearly designed to undermine Brian's claim to be independent and question his integrity. It was also sent too close to the election to give him an opportunity to respond. A copy of this press statement can be seen on <http://brianawilson.com/political-dirty-tricks/>

Can you identify the handwriting of the forger?

## MLAs undue influence

MLAs have sometimes been accused of interfering and having too much influence over administrative decisions. This is certainly not the case of the South Eastern Health Trust's decision to close the 20 bed care ward at Bangor Hospital. In fact North Down MLAs have had absolutely no influence at all.

This is particularly strange in the case of the 3 DUP MLAs as the budget was cut by the DUP Finance Minister, the decision was agreed by the DUP Health Minister and local DUP MLA Alex Easton was PPS to the Health Minister at the time.

## Designation as Unionist/Nationalist

Designation was part of the Good Friday Agreement and was designed to protect the minority community. However it has reinforced sectarianism and the existing political parties led to gridlock in decision making and encouraged spurious petitions of concern which have been used to protect incompetent Ministers... <http://brianawilson.com/planning-bill-final-stage/.....>

It has also created second class MLAs whose votes do not count in certain decisions as Brian Wilson pointed out in the North Down Independent more than twelve years ago. The operation of the Good Friday Agreement was to be reviewed after 4 years to consider issues like designation. This has not happened and designation has frustrated progress. I believe it is time to look again at the introduction of a weighted majority (say 75%) which would fully protect the minority but still prevent any single party having a veto. <http://brianawilson.com/?s=designation>



**VOTE BRIAN WILSON INDEPENDENT**

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# Columbanus

## The most famous Bangorian of them all

### Brian Wilson - Friends of Columbanus

In 2015 Bangor commemorated the 1400th Anniversary of the death of Columbanus.

It was *designated the Year of Columbanus* and was not only an occasion to celebrate the legacy of the great man but also provided an opportunity to highlight Bangor's long neglected Christian Heritage and the role played by Bangor Abbey at the time when Bangor was recognised as the major centre of learning in Ireland. In his book on the Abbey Ian Adamson refers to Bangor as the "Light of the world" as students came from all parts of the island and beyond to achieve a first class education.

The abbey was established by Comgall about 556AD and attracted thousands of scholars and trained many missionaries foremost of whom were Columbanus, Gall and Mirin. Around 590AD Columbanus left Bangor accompanied by Gall and eleven others and travelled to many parts of Europe where he and his followers established monasteries based on the practices established in Bangor Abbey.

His life was one of total commitment to Celtic Christianity and the promotion of the Rule of Saint Columbanus. He was a man of great courage. Disregarding his own safety he spoke out against the civic and clerical leaders when they strayed from Christian principles. It is clear from his writings letters and sermons that he was a man of great learning faith and intellect.

The monasteries he established expanded rapidly and it is estimated that within one hundred years almost 100 monasteries had been established. Today many churches throughout the world bear his name not only in Europe but also in USA, Australia and Canada.

The North Down Council recognised the tourist potential of its Christian Heritage

and this was reinforced by the Council of Europe's support for the establishment of the Columban Way which would join the various settlements where Columbanus had established monasteries. With financial support from the East Border Region the Council opened the new Christian Heritage Gallery in North Down Museum.

To achieve recognition as a European Cultural Way the application required not only the support of local councils but also evidence of community involvement. To meet this condition the Council organised the setting up of the Friends of Columbanus (Bangor). This was established at a public meeting and a committee was set up of councillors, historians, representatives of all the local churches and others interested in Bangor's history. This committee's first role was to organise events to promote the 1400th anniversary of Columbanus's death.

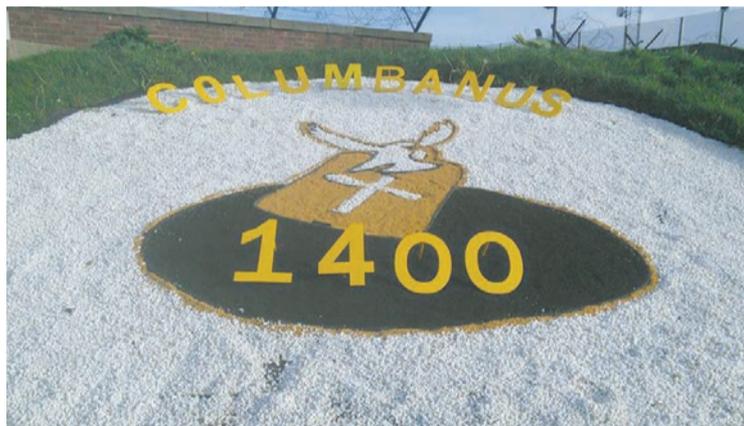
As an historian, a North Down councillor, a member of the EBR tourism committee and a Christian who had been involved in the initial grant application I was asked to take the role of secretary of FoCB.

The FoCB had a very active year establishing a website, providing guides for visitors, organising public meetings, the Columbanus Fun Run, hosting groups of pilgrims and the distribution of a comic based on the life of Columbanus and organising the Columbanus 1400 Festival. This festival was held in November on the anniversary of his death and included lectures, musical events including a concert with Ards Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann, demonstrations in bronze casting and calligraphy, stories for youngsters and a united celebration in Bangor Abbey with preacher Lord Eames.

One of the priorities of the committee was to train guides to enable them to show the many visitors round the Christian Heritage Trail which has been established by the council. This included 150 pilgrims from Bobbio, 50 from Luxeuil and smaller groups from other parts of Europe, the United States and many local groups. Further details can be seen on <http://friendsofcolumbanusbangor.co.uk/>



Ald. Anne Wilson opening Christian Heritage Gallery



## From Bangor to Bobbio



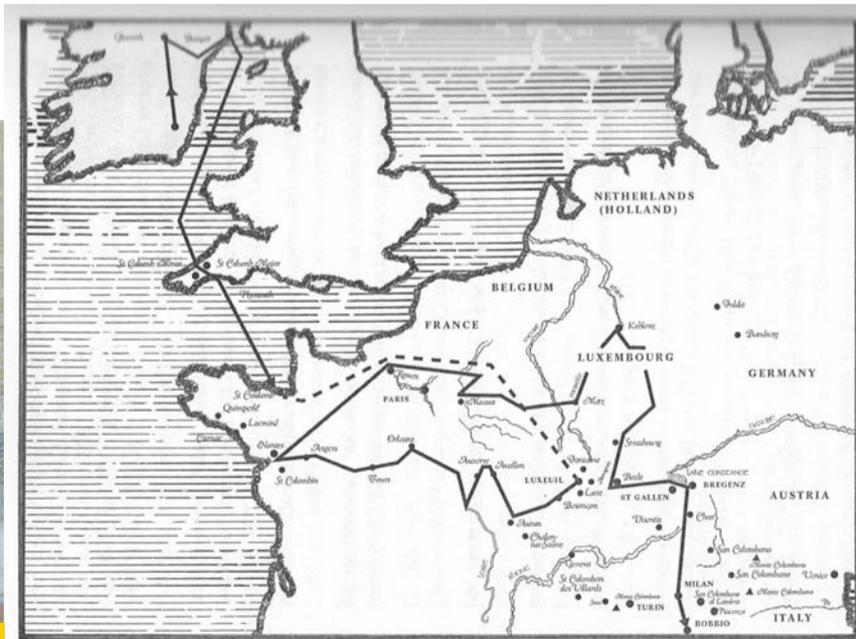
BANGOR



LUXEUIL



BOBBIO



To mark the anniversary of the death of this great Bangorian Anne and I decided to follow the journey of Columbanus. Although it took Columbanus 15 years to complete the journey from Bangor to Bobbio and he travelled more than 4,000 miles mostly on foot we completed the same journey in 15 days by Interrail.

His journey started in Bangor and continued through Cornwall - St Colum Major - St Malo where he landed in Brittany - St Colomb - Tours - Reims - Luxeuil - (still important monastery) - Annegray - Bregenz - (Bangor's twin town) - St Gallen - Milan (home of Bangor Antiphony) Chur and Bobbio where he died in 615.

My major complaint was that Columbanus picked the most remote secluded sites to establish his monasteries. With a lack of public transport this meant that we often had to

cross the most difficult mountainous terrain in temperatures approaching 40 degrees. As we travelled we often reflected on the remarkable fact that Columbanus a man in his 60's and early 70's had completed this journey 1400 years ago. He did not have trains or buses and there were no real roads. The forests were dense and there were continual threats from wild animals and hostile locals. He had to walk or perhaps row the 4000 miles across some of the most dangerous terrain in Europe including climbing the Alps. For full details of our trip see <http://brianawilson.com/from-bangor-to-bobbio-saint-columbanus/> I am proud of Bangor's Christian heritage (and I hope this can be developed). Columbanus and the twelve monks who set out from Bangor Abbey to minister to the people of Europe set a precedent which continues to this day.



# Do we know of the history of Bangor?

The Jenny Watt's Treasure Hunt was devised to encourage children and young people to find out more about the town in which they live. It was broadly based on the legend of Jenny Watt's cave and I found it surprising that many adults living in Bangor West were not aware of it. I was first shown the cave by my grandfather as a child and ever since he told me of the legend of Jenny Watts I still hope to find the treasure as I pass along the coastal path.

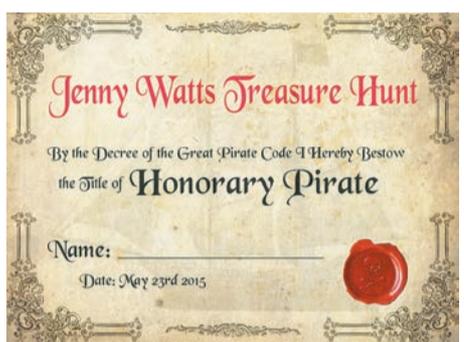
The hunt started in early May when the Jenny Watt's Treasure website was set up and two sets of clues posted. This was to enable the children to do research to help them when the final map would be posted later. The clues covered most of coastal and central Bangor so the contestants would get plenty of exercise.

On completion of these 24 clues the children would have discovered many aspects of Bangor history from the role of Bangor Abbey in spreading Christianity in Europe, the Ward/Hamilton family, the gun, Barry Bingham VC and the Thomas Lipton challenges for the America's Cup.

The final Treasure Map was revealed at 10 o'clock on the 23rd May at the Abbey where the contestants were given the map (or could obtain it on line) and had to answer twelve questions based on the sites in the trail. They had also to collect five numbers at these sites which would unlock the treasure chest containing Jenny Watts Treasure. About an hour later the first contestants arrived at Strickland's Glen, Polly and Patrick McDonald (accompanied by Dad) found the treasure chest in the bushes and keyed in the numbers. The lock opened and the Treasure was revealed. Some minutes later the runners up Ben and Laura Fitzsimons arrived (again accompanied by Dad). It was a beautiful morning and everyone enjoyed the coastal path and all entrants received a certificate and an Easter egg.

Organiser Brian Wilson States: As a lifelong Bangorian and proud of the town and its history I really enjoyed setting the clues. It was also rewarding seeing the young people being active and having fun answering the clues. Since the Treasure Hunt I have had queries on clues and a number of people have been interested in using the questions with their own organisations. If this is the case please go ahead. All the details are on [jennywattstreasure.com](http://jennywattstreasure.com) web site and queries to [baswilson@hotmail.com](mailto:baswilson@hotmail.com)

My aim in organising the Treasure Hunt was to encourage young people to be active, to enjoy the scenery, and learn something of the history of Bangor and most of all to have fun. I believe it succeeded and I hope to repeat it.



Winners: Polly and Patrick McDonald

Runners Up: Ben and Laura Fitzsimons

# Pouring your money into a black hole

## Did we really want a gun range in the new community centre?

In a few months the new Hamilton Road community centre will open to the public. While we will all welcome a replacement of Hamilton House how many residents will be happy to pay for the gun club / projectile range in the basement?

This range was added to the original plans and will cost the ratepayers an additional £1million. This raises a number of concerns as to why the gun club was added without any public consultation and why it was supported by all the unionist councillors including independent unionists (Alan Chambers and Austen Lennon) and the proposed Youth Wing dropped.

Another concern was that all the decisions and debates relating to the gun range were taken in committee which meant that the public and press were excluded. So apart from councillors no one was aware of the council's decision and as it was taken in committee councillors opposed to it were not allowed to speak in public about it.

Some councillors have also complained that they were refused time to read the economic appraisal before the decision was taken to go ahead and that the council had ignored the Local Government Auditors report which was devastating and highlighted two major areas of concern-i.e. the quality of the economic appraisal and the failure to follow good practice? To make matters worse the new Ards and North Down Borough Council unanimously approved the tender and totally ignored the Auditor's concerns and objections from other local private gun clubs? Not a good



start for the new council in terms of council credibility.

Some local councils pride themselves on their transparency and accountability. In this case it would appear that North Down Council went to extremes to avoid both accountability and transparency by taking the decision without any public consultation, allowing minimal debate and by referring it to committee so that the press and the public were excluded.

It is clear that there was considerable opposition to the council's decision to spend £1 million on the gun range.

Comments on the Bangor Residents Against the Gun Club online petition include "Totally bonkers", "Sick of NDBC spending money on ridiculous things" "Guns kill and have no place in a civilised society gross waste of my rates", "Total waste of ratepayers money, there must be more important issues when you look at the state of the town" and "How can this cost be justified? How many people truly need a Gun Club? If they want one, they should pay for it out of their own pocket, not mine." Altogether more than one thousand signed the petitions but the councillors totally ignored it.

The main opponent to the addition of the gun club was Independent councillor Brian Wilson who commented "I was surprised and disappointed that I did not get support from Alliance or Green Party as I believe with a strong public campaign we could have stopped

this appalling waste of ratepayers money". It was by far the worst abuse of council powers I experienced in thirty years on North Down Council.

Unfortunately we could not get a response from the councillors some now MLA's who made the decision to add the gun range. It would appear that rather than justify their decision to add the gun club they should say nothing and hope it will go away. Unfortunately it will not as the ratepayers will be paying for it for the next 20 years.



# Independent Speaks

## Time to move on

Leave the past for historians and look to the future. It is time for some honesty from our politicians. We all recognise that we will never know the full truth and it is unlikely that anyone will be punished for many of the foulest atrocities but our politicians refuse to admit it. The Good Friday Agreement declared the war over but in practice a proxy war has continued with calls for justice and truth the main weapons. For the past 18 years many politicians have in fact used the victims as pawns in the greater political debate. They insist that we must find the truth but they are really only interested in the truth which fits their view of the past and can be used to justify their past actions and place the blame on others. While they call for inquiries these calls are selective. Few of those demanding an inquiry into Ballymurphy are interested having an inquiry into Kingsmill and in fact would probably oppose it and vice versa. The Independent initially supported the Bloody Sunday Inquiry but it achieved little, merely confirming what was already known. It changed few people's views. Those who believed it was a deliberate massacre authorised by British authorities still believe that, those who believe the troops were responding to an attack by IRA gunmen still believe that and those who believed it resulted from confusion / lack of discipline among the troops have not changed their minds. It changed few minds but for 12 years it was a festering sore, the focus of political controversy and point scoring and in the end cost £400m which could have

been better used in improving public services. Only the lawyers benefitted.

The call for inquiries raises many controversial questions.

**Firstly which inquiries?** We have over a thousand to choose from.- Ballymurphy, Enniskillen, Finucane, Kingsmill, McGurks Bar, La Mon. The choice is endless. **Who will investigate and will this lead to claims of bias or whitewash?**

**What funding will be made available and could this not be better used in the Health Service or Education?**

**What documents exist and will they be made available? Can it be balanced as the paramilitaries did not keep records?**

**Which cases should get priority?**

**Is the proposal to set aside £35m to investigate Stakeknife really where we should be going? Will it achieve anything apart from causing distress to many families, opening old wounds and lead to an increase in tension between the communities?**

**Is it a genuine wish for an inquiry or is it for propaganda purposes?**

These questions and many others will provide enough ammunition to continue the proxy war and contaminate the political environment for another 20 years. It's time to move on.

Regrettably any decision to move on will deny justice to some victims but this already happened with the release of prisoners and few victims really believe in their heart of hearts that they will ever get closure. The politicians who suggest otherwise are in fact misleading them for their own political ends.

We would all like to know the truth but it is clear that

will never happen and is becoming even less likely all the time with leaked documents- forged or not- informers (credible or not), agents and double agents, M15 involvement. The truth is what we believe will be shaped by our view of the overall conflict and will not be changed by facts which do not fit. Dwelling on the past has prevented us moving forward and tackling the challenges of the 21st century. It has led to gridlock and stagnation. No wonder so many people are disillusioned by our politicians and our young people are seeking their future elsewhere. We cannot allow this to continue. We should let history take over the past and work together to get agreement on the future. For the sake of future generations we must move on. We must not allow the disputes of the past destroy their future.

### MLA'S need to lighten up

Can you remember the last time an MLA said something which made you smile? No doubt it was a long time ago if at all. As a profession politicians seem to take themselves too seriously and lack any sense of humour. Our local politicians excel. I doubt if anyone has ever accused Jim Allister of being a laugh a minute. Tuning into the View and seeing the panel with bakes the length of a Lurgan spade would have you depressed even before they opened their mouths. Although the lack of frivolity could be expected from the dour but solid Presbyterian on the unionist side but the bug seems to have also affected the nationalists. One possible explanation is the MLA had just spent hours searching diligently through the papers trying to find something that he feels to be offensive so that they

can issue a press statement condemning it. On the other hand his colleague is exhausted having just driven 50 miles to be offended by a parade.

It's time for MLA's to lighten up their gloom and despair is catching. Look at Sammy Wilson who despite his many faults lightens up a room when he walks in even fully dressed.

### The Assembly Election

In May the voters of North Down will go to the polls to elect a new Assembly. The voters will be asked to decide whether to reelect the existing MLA's or whether they should vote for change.

In our opinion change is essential. The record of the Assembly over the past 5 years has been appalling with many disputes leading to gridlock, stagnation and a failure to make any decisions. For many people, particularly the young, it has become a laughingstock or a place of corruption or privilege.

Change is essential. We need to elect MLA's with a vision for the future, an ability to fight for it. We should elect MLA's who are not restricted by a party whip but have the integrity, experience, enthusiasm and energy to fight for the vision set out in the Good Friday Agreement.

**We believe that based on his long record of public service Brian Wilson has all these qualities and we are therefore calling on our readers to Vote WILSON 1 in MAY.**

# Local Government Reform

## A missed opportunity or a total waste of money?

### The review was intended to increase the powers and responsibilities of local government and simplify public administration

In particular the RPA set out to review the number of councils and consider how additional powers could be devolved to them in order to restore democratic control over local services.

### DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT

There had been a significant "democratic deficit" since 1973 when the abuse of council power led to many of these powers being stripped from local government. As a result of the Macrory report responsibility for traditional local services were centralised in another body either a newly formed Quango or a government Department.

### "SUPER COUNCILS"- NOT SUPER AT ALL

This opportunity has been wasted. After more than 12 years of consultation, discussion, and a number of rejected plans we are left with the 11 new so called super councils. This is a total misnomer. They are by no means "super councils". In fact the responsibilities of the new councils are not much greater than those of a parish council in England and fewer than those of a second tier English authority. e.g Maidstone. The opportunity to increase local democracy and local accountability has been lost. It is clear that the Executive Departments and Boards have successfully

resisted the transfer of any significant power to local councils. Indeed this is further highlighted by the DSD's announcement in November 2015 that regeneration powers would not now transfer to the councils as originally proposed but would remain with the Department.

### SUPER COUNCILLOR ALLOWANCES

However the level of responsibility is not reflected in the councillor's allowance for the new councils. This allowance seems high when compared with that payable to a councillor in a **second tier authority in England** which has greater responsibilities e.g. compare Maidstone with Ards and North Down.

There would seem to be no justification in paying Northern Ireland councillors almost £10,000 more than their Maidstone equivalent. See my submission to the Review on Councillors Allowance.

The higher allowance was clearly justified before the Assembly became fully operational. At that time councillors were the only elected representatives and dealt with all the constituency work which is now carried out by 6 MLA's and their full-time office staff.

**It could also have been justified if the RPA had lived up to its original aims and transferred significant new powers to the councils.** Unfortunately this is not the case and the new "super councils" have powers similar to the parish councils in England.



### MAIDSTONE

161,800

£87M

As Ards and ND plus Housing

£4,666



### ARDS / N DOWN

156,000

£46M

Similar to Maidstone less Housing

£14,200

### Population

### Budget

### Responsibilities

### Councillor's Allowance

At best the reorganisation of local government was a missed opportunity to increase local democracy, at worst it was a **total waste of money**. As I pointed out in the Assembly the PWC report predicted that the upfront costs would be £150m which may be recouped over the next 25 years. The main parties ignored the PWC report

and continued with the reorganisation. The new Councils have not achieved any of the original aims of the RPA coterminosity, the transfer of significant new powers to local government, the recruitment of new more professional councillors and in particular make significant savings for the ratepayers. **The answer to the original question must be it is not only a missed**

### opportunity but a total waste of money.

### ANOTHER WHITE ELEPHANT

My campaign against the gun club has much in common with a previous campaign in 1986 to stop the Council getting involved in building Crystals Ice Rink. While the Arena was extremely attractive I pointed out that it could not be economically viable as it was the wrong size, wrong shape (square) and in the wrong place. The council ignored my concerns and supported the new arena. Unfortunately



my concerns were justified and within two years the developer pulled out leaving the ratepayers a bill of hundreds of thousands of pounds. Similarly with the gun club I believe this will be another White Elephant with the rate payers left to pick up the bill. In addition to the fact that few residents will be able to use the facility (requiring a gun licence), and the capital costs of £1million the ratepayers will have to subsidize the running costs which will be high as staff would require special skills in the use of guns.

Brian Wilson

# PROFILE - BRIAN WILSON

## Brian Wilson Councillor (North Down 1981-2015)

Brian Wilson was first elected to North Down Council for Alliance in Bangor West in 1981. He had previously stood as an 'Abolish the 11+' candidate in 1973.

He was re-elected at the next seven elections on six occasions topping the poll. He did not stand for the new AND Borough Council. He was an active councillor and during his years in office he delivered 120 editions of his West Bangor Newsletter keeping residents up to date on local matters and responding to their problems.

He served as mayor during 1993/4 at a time of extreme violence and sectarian tension. Following the Shankill bombing/Greysteel massacre he was involved in organising and speaking at a giant Peace Rally in Castle Park calling for calm and appealing for an end to violence.



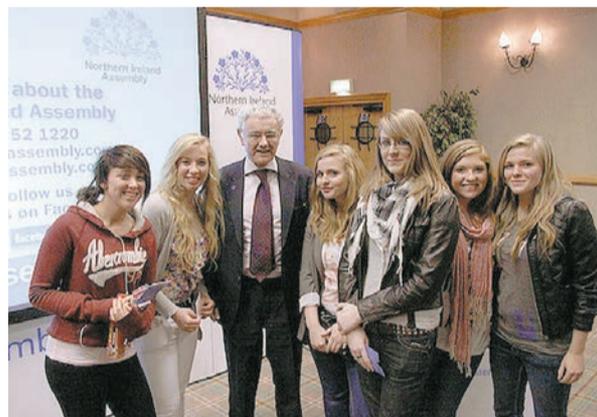
## MLA (First Green Party MLA 2007-2011)

In 2007 Brian Wilson was elected to the Assembly as the first Green Party MLA, quadrupling the Green Party vote.

As the first Green Party MLA Brian Wilson was able to raise issues such as climate change, renewable energy, protection of the countryside, and animal welfare which other parties had previously ignored. He introduced a Private Members Bill proposing the abolition of hunting with hounds which received virtually no support and was viciously attacked by the DUP, Sinn Fein and the SDLP members.

As secretary to the All Party Group on Autism he was a co-sponsor of the Autism Bill. In addition to green issues his main interests were in economics and health. With a background in health he consistently argued that the NHS should not be used as a political football and that it was seriously structurally underfunded.

In his first speech in the Assembly he called for the single household rate reduction applying in the rest of the UK to be introduced in Northern Ireland. In the next budget the reduced payment for single pensioners was introduced.



## Other Bodies

Brian Wilson has served on many outside bodies largely in education and health but also on North Down Development Organisation and the Policy Partnership. He has a lifelong interest in education joining the Department of Education from school, then completing first degree and Masters and lecturing in economics for 30 years in BIFHE..

He also served on the Board of Governors of Rathmore P.S. for 30 years (six as chair), St Columbanus College for past 10 years. North Down and Ards Institute and on the SE Education and Library Board. He has a long established concern that the education system was failing working class children, particularly boys and his first entrance into politics was standing as an Abolish 11+ candidate for North Down Council.

His interest in health began when he became a member of EHSSB in 1981 and he has often expressed concern at the level of health funding in particular mental health and the implementation of the Bamford report.



# Hunting with Hounds

by Jimmy Mutt our Environment Correspondent

In December 2010 Brian Wilson the Green Party MLA brought forward a bill to the Assembly to ban hunting with hounds.

The bill was thrown out with the DUP SF SDLP and Unionist MLA's all defending the right of the huntmen to kill foxes, stags and other mammals. The opposition to the bill was organised by the Countryside Alliance which strongly lobbied the MLA's and prompted the submission of over three thousand objections in response to the public consultation on the bill

Following the vote Brian Wilson said: "I am both frustrated and disappointed it was a genuine attempt to end animal cruelty in Northern Ireland and bring our legislation into line with the rest of the UK.

Despite of the outcome of this Bill I still firmly believe that blood sports are barbaric and that fox hunting, stag hunting, and hare coursing have no place in civilised society and must go the way of cock fighting and bear baiting.

Hunting with hounds is cruel and has no place in the 21st century and seeing animals ripped to shreds by packs of dogs cannot be considered a sport by any right thinking individual."

Since 2010 we have seen a number of appalling incidents when family pets were torn apart by hounds and recently the court

awarded a pigeon owner £60,000 after his prize pigeons were killed by a pack of hounds. The barbaric acts must be stopped and we must follow the rest of the UK in banning hunting with hounds.

I hope one of the newly elected MLA's will introduce a bill to end hunting with hounds.



## Katrina Davidson interviews former North Down Councillor and Green Party MLA on his decision to stand again for the Assembly as an Independent.

**K.D** Why did you decide to stand again for the Assembly Brian?

**B.W.** Like many others I am very disappointed at the failure of the Assembly to move forward. I feel it needs a good shake up and should I be elected it would highlight to the established parties that their constituents are fed up being taken for granted. They are concerned by the stagnation, gridlock and petty bickering at Stormont and wish to return to the vision of Northern Ireland set out in the Good Friday Agreement. I believe I have the experience, energy and commitment to make a contribution towards this.

**K.D.** Why are you standing as an Independent?

**B.W.** The fact is I have fought most of my elections as an Independent and have been largely successful. I don't have any major policy differences with the Alliance or Greens but I am perhaps not a party person. I believe that on certain issues members should have freedom of conscience and be allowed to disagree with the party. Our political parties do not accept this with the DUP and Sinn Fein adopting a Stalinist approach allowing no dissent at all but even the traditionally liberal Alliance has imposed a ban on candidates who do not support gay marriage. I was surprised at this ban as their sister party the Liberal Democrats allowed a free vote and their leader Tim Farron voted against.

**K.D.** I think most people were surprised and thought you had given up politics when you decided not to stand for the new Council. Why did you not stand?

**B.W.** There were a number of reasons. First I opposed the reasoning behind the reorganisation and secondly I

felt I could not make a useful contribution given the nature of the council. I had consistently opposed the reorganisation and spoke against it many times in the Assembly as it would lead to a reduction in local democracy and accountability and it would not save money. It is interesting that expenditure on councillor's allowances is now considerably higher than it was in the old councils.

Secondly North Down Council had become more and more party political with the DUP pushing through its policies regardless of the merits of the case. As a result of party control I was excluded from all significant posts and even voted off the Finance Committee despite my long experience of finance and many years as an economics lecturer.

However I finally decided to stand down when I received no party support in my opposition to adding the gun range to the new community centre. I found it hard to believe that the council would agree to replace the gun range operated by the Clondeboye and District Ulster Special Constabulary Pistol and Rifle Club with a brand new gun range in the new Community Centre. Setting aside any political concerns the decision to spend £1 million on this range to be used by so few people was an absolute disgrace and could not be justified particularly in light of the cutbacks in other public services. I had assumed that other parties particularly the Greens and Alliance would support me in my campaign against this abuse of ratepayer's money. Unfortunately I received no support and the expenditure was agreed by the new council without any dissent.

**K.D.** But do you miss the Council?

**B.W.** Of course I miss being involved in issues affecting the future of the Borough but I do not miss the frustration of being ignored excluded from decision making and seeing councillors voting through often without debate policies with which I totally disagree.



I also miss the opportunity to help people and resolve their problems. Files on issues like parking problems of Bangor West, Carnalea station, speeding on the Old Belfast Road, planning appeals now lie in the garage gathering dust.

Residents still call me asking for passports to be signed, street lights fixed, bins to be collected, dog fouling and concerns over planning applications. Having spent thirty years resolving thousands of such problems it is strange and frustrating to have to say "sorry I can't help".

**KD** Some people wonder why you want to return to the Assembly when you gave up your seat in 2011

**B.W.** The answer is quite simple. Before the election in 2007 I promised the Green Party and my constituents that I would serve for only one term. I kept my promise although had I stood again for the Green Party I have no doubt I would have been re-elected. I stood initially

because I felt it was important that the issues raised by the Green Party required a voice in Stormont. I achieved that. This time I am more concerned at the failure of Stormont to legislate and the inability to set out an agreed programme for government. Many people and organisations have suffered and will continue to suffer because of this inertia. In fact instead of going forward the past five years have seen Stormont go into reverse.

I believe the political parties have become complacent ignore the views of their supporters and take them for granted. The political structure is one hundred years old and has not changed so why should we. I believe they are totally out of touch with their electors particularly the young and like their political colleagues in the Republic the civil war parties who took their voters for granted could receive a mighty shock. I believe I have the experience energy and vision to play a role in delivering this shock.

**K.D** Thank you very much Brian.



# Wilkins Micawber Economics Editor It's the economy stupid.

It is clear that our political parties do not recognise Bill Clinton's famous slogan. Instead they seem to ignore it and find a multitude of irrelevant and inevitably divisive issues to debate and argue over achieving nothing. At the same time our brightest and best talent is leaving to benefit the rest of the world.

The vision of a peaceful, united and prosperous Northern Ireland painted by the Good Friday Agreement has disappeared along with tens of thousands of young people who have given up in despair and left for greener pastures. Many would have preferred to stay but the political gridlock and economic stagnation have convinced them their future lies elsewhere. As Brian Wilson a former lecturer and MLA pointed out in a recent article in North Down Independent,

"As someone who has spent a lifetime in higher education I am saddened when I hear many of my best students say they will not return to Northern Ireland when they complete their degrees. As an MLA I often gave talks to sixth formers on educational visits to Stormont and their response was the same.

Few could see a long term future in Northern Ireland and had decided often reluctantly to go elsewhere. Very few of the visitors to Stormont had a positive view of the Assembly and no one indicated a wish to get involved in politics in Northern Ireland. On the other hand they had many positive views of living in Northern Ireland in terms of education, family and community, the country. But the political culture and its impact on the economy had convinced them they must move elsewhere.



Assembly Education Service for Schools

## EUROPEAN REFERENDUM

On this like many other issues there appears to be a major split between the unionist and nationalist communities and the debate is focussed on how it affects our relationship with the Irish Republic. This is a side issue and is of little relevance to the main issue the economy and the economic advantages and disadvantages of the UK's membership of the EU.



Northern Ireland gets significant grants from the EU particularly through the common agricultural policy and the Regional fund which help sustain many jobs in rural communities. My main concern there is a major doubt how the UK would fare outside the EU particularly in terms of inward investment. On the basis of our economic future I will be voting to stay in.

## DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM

In the past 20 years tourism has been the fastest growing sector of the World economy and we have largely missed out. In recent years the Executive has recognised the potential for expanding tourism and its ability to create jobs particularly in rural areas. However much more needs to be done.

Throughout the "troubles" there was no investment in tourism and our tourist infrastructure is significantly less than those of our neighbours. We have around 40,000 employed in tourism while

in Scotland tourism provides 170,000 jobs, Wales 100,000 and in the Irish Republic 200,000. There is considerable potential for growth and we need to encourage tourism by improving the infrastructure and increasing investment. However this will be pointless unless we can avoid projecting an image of a place steeped in gloom turmoil and conflict.



## A SKILLED WORK FORCE

Any attempt to grow the economy requires a skilled work force and the recent decision by the Assembly to cut back funding for further and higher education is putting short term savings ahead of long term economic expansion. Already we hear of companies complaining of a lack of skilled workers. We need more investment in skills not less.

We should also provide incentives for young people who have left Northern Ireland to return. We often hear of the success of Northern Ireland from young people in creating new businesses in other parts of the world. In this age of IT and instant communications many of these businesses are easily transferrable and if we could create an attractive political and economic environment some could be attracted home.

## CORPORATION TAX REDUCTION

The Government has agreed to the Executive request for powers to reduce the rate of corporation tax in Northern Ireland. I have a number of concerns about this as there is a danger that companies will be registered in Northern Ireland but create no jobs here. Also any reduction in the block grant should be based on companies which have actually set up here and not on the assumption that companies will come in the future. There are many other low tax countries competing for international investment.

## RENEWABLE ENERGY CHEAPEST

It is clear that the new Conservative government has given up on its claim to be the greenest government ever. Its recent restrictions on and cuts to onshore wind energy and the reduction in subsidies on solar power refutes that claim. It would seem that Stormont has followed its lead by ending the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme.

At a time when Denmark now produces 140% of its electricity demand from wind and sells the surplus to the European grid and while the Scottish government strives to generate all of its electricity needs from renewables by 2020, we appear to be giving up.

It is therefore reassuring to read the recent Bloomberg report on energy pricing in which it points out that "Onshore wind energy has become cheaper than electricity from any other source in the UK for the first time, in what could be a landmark moment for renewable energy in Britain."

Seb Henbest of Bloomberg states "There's still a tendency for the general public to believe that renewables are really expensive, while coal and gas are cheap. This is how it used to be not so long ago, but over the past five years technology costs have come down significantly, along with financing costs."



Locally our wind turbine at Balloo has paid off all the capital costs and is generating electricity worth £135,000 per annum with a predicted life span of 20 years. The turbine will therefore generate electricity valued at at least £1million pounds for the ratepayers in the next decade. This is largely as a result of the determination of former Alderman Anne Wilson who promoted and then fought for the installation of the turbine despite considerable opposition from other councillors.