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on 01865 425500**FRONT RUNNERS:** From left, Labour's Laetisia Carter, Conservative Robert Courts and Liberal Democrat Liz Leffman; right, county council leader Ian Hudspeth

Five candidates confirmed to stand in Witney for the June 8 General Election

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PARLIAMENTARY candidates who will be standing in Witney in June 8's snap General Election have been officially confirmed.

The details were published by West Oxfordshire District Council last week after the 4pm deadline for nominations on Thursday. Witney is currently held by the Conservatives, with incumbent Robert Courts set to run again after winning last October in a by-election.

There are five parliamentary candidates standing overall, with Laetisia Carter standing for Labour, Alexander Craig standing for the UK

POLITICS: Tories, Lib Dem, Labour, UKIP and Greens to battle it out, while Conservatives complete a deal to take County Hall

Independence Party (UKIP), Claire Lasko for the Green Party and Liz Leffman for the Liberal Democrats.

Mr Courts commands a majority of 5,700 and Witney is considered a 'safe' seat for the Conservatives, although other parties such as the Liberal Democrats have claimed they are well-positioned to make gains because of the Brexit vote.

West Oxfordshire – which contains most of the constituency – voted to Remain by 53.7 per cent.

Last week the Lib Dem candidate said she believed local people would oppose 'Theresa May's hard stance on Brexit'.

Labour is also campaigning on issues such as funding for schools and the NHS, with its candidate Laetisia Carter, district councillor for Chipping Norton, saying the Conservatives and Lib Dems had done 'great damage' to public services in the Coalition Government of 2010-2015.

The mum-of-two added: "I understand the struggles that local families face and under this Government it is getting worse.

"Labour has costed plans to invest in the skills, health and future of everyone – for the many, not the few."

Elsewhere in the county, county

councillor for Witney North and East, Suzanne Bartington, has been named the Conservative Party candidate in Oxford East for the parliamentary election.

The deadline to register to vote for the General Election is Monday, May 22.

Registering does not take long and can be done by visiting the Government's website.

Meanwhile, the political shape of Oxfordshire County Council began to emerge after this month's local elections.

Yesterday, Ian Hudspeth, councillor for Woodstock, was re-elected as

leader of the authority for another four years.

After cutting a deal with the Conservatives – who fell one seat short of gaining control – an independent councillor will take a new senior post on the authority.

Mark Gray is set to become cabinet member for 'community and inclusivity', he told the *Witney Gazette*.

The role will oversee so-called 'community hubs' across the county, such as libraries and children's centres and will encompass work being done by multiple council departments.

It comes after talks between Mr Gray and Conservative group boss Ian Hudspeth, whose party is one seat short of a majority after this month's elections.

Election candidates battle it out in heated hustings event

MAY 24th 2017

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CANDIDATES vying for the Witney parliamentary seat debated foreign aid, Brexit and austerity during a heated hustings event.

The five prospective MPs were quizzed on a wide range of local and national issues during the event at High Street Methodist Church on Monday evening.

Answering questions from the audience were Robert Courts, of the Conservatives, Laetisia Carter, of Labour, Liberal Democrat Liz Leffman, the Green Party's Claire Lasko and Alan Craig of UKIP.

Kicking off the debate was a question about foreign aid and whether much of it would be better spent investing in Britain's own dwindling services.

Most of the candidates agreed that overseas spending was a moral as well as practical obligation.

Mr Courts said: "We in Witney have challenges but I still think we should be open to help those who require our help."

Mr Craig, however, said he believed foreign aid should be exclusively designated to disaster areas.

At one point the candidates were questioned on their understanding of Theresa May's popular soundbite: 'strong and stable leadership'.

Mrs Leffman said she could not understand how Mrs May could be described in those terms when she had U-turned on some of the party's decisions, such as the plan to increase National Insurance earlier this year.

Mrs Carter agreed, saying the Conservative Party seemed more 'weak and wobbly' than 'strong and stable'. She went on to talk about small businesses in West Oxfordshire struggling as prices rise as a result of Brexit.

She added: "This talk of Brexit being a Utopia isn't being experienced locally."

Mr Courts hit back to emphasise the need for a strong economy, with investment in schools and hospitals, and said the Conservatives

I do think it's a shame that it's such a small audience for such a huge constituency



ISSUES: From left, UKIP candidate Alan Craig, Liberal Democrat Liz Leffman and Green Claire Lasko at the general election hustings in the Methodist Church in Witney
Pictures: Ric Mellis

QUIZZED: Five prospective MPs face questions on wide range of local and national issues in debate



CONSERVATIVE: Candidate Robert Courts were the only party able to deliver that.

Later, when asked about the uncertainty Brexit has placed on the lives of EU nationals, Ms Lasko said that a group of 'old men' were 'shaping the future of a country against its young population'.

Mrs Carter said Labour would guarantee the rights of EU citizens while Mrs Leffman said their treatment was 'shocking' and 'disgusting'.

Mr Craig, of UKIP, said there was a problem with people from overseas coming into the country to make use of its welfare system.

Speaking afterwards, many



LABOUR: Candidate Laetisia Carter people attending said they were pleased with the range of debate.

Helene Grygar, 73, of Bampton, said: "I thought it was excellent and they covered a good range of issues. I support the Liberal Democrats and I thought Liz Leffman was excellent. I just think she's the best candidate."

"I came to last year's event

and Robert Courts has marginally improved since then. But ultimately I just think he doesn't get it."

Paul Kinchesh, 51, of Cogges, Witney, said: "It was interesting. I didn't really hear too much I wasn't expecting to hear but then I've been following the manifestos and what everyone has been saying."

"I'm with Labour and I thought Laetisia Carter answered all of the questions very well. I think she seems to be more in touch with the public than the other candidates, so it's done nothing but confirm the way I'm going to vote."

"I think it's a shame that it's such a small audience for such a huge constituency. It would be great if it could have been televised or broadcast."

People in the Witney constituency and across the country will take to polling stations on Thursday, June 8.



CROWD: Some of the voters packed into the general election hustings in Witney

LIZ LEFFMAN LIB DEMS



LIZ lives in Charlbury. She was the Liberal Democrat candidate in the 2016 Witney by-election when she achieved a strong second place with 30 per cent of the vote.

In May this year she won the Charlbury and Wychwood County Council seat with a majority of over 500.

Liz is an award-winning businesswoman. She has run a clothing business based in Eastern Europe since the 1990s, so she knows first-hand the impact Brexit will have on jobs and businesses.

She is a Trustee of West Oxfordshire Citizens Advice Bureau, and of Young Dementia UK Homes.

Liz has a proven track record of standing up for services in West Oxfordshire including working to save the Post Office in Charlbury and helping to fight the closure of Chipping Norton Hospital.

Liz has helped to set up a co-op which will re-commission bus services locally, after the recent cuts to rural routes.

Her priorities include increasing the number of GPs in Witney, following the closure of Deer Park Medical Centre, and reversing cuts to school budgets across West Oxfordshire.

She is supporting an initiative to restrict HGVs on the A361, which would significantly improve traffic volume and air quality in Burford, Shipton-under-Wychwood and Chipping Norton.

LAETISIA CARTER LABOUR



I AM proud to be standing as your Labour candidate.

Proud because I live in West Oxfordshire, where I was born, raised and educated.

Proud to stand for the humane, intelligent and inclusive values of the Labour party. Proud to stand for the many, not the few.

I am a seasoned campaigner. As a hardworking district councillor, I get the issues.

I listen to people, and I get things done. After 13 years working for Thames Valley Police and in the NHS, I know the problems facing frontline services. As a mother of two, I understand the struggles local families face.

I have fought against the unthinking Tory cuts to public services – to children's centres especially.

As your MP I will battle to reverse damaging cuts across the NHS, cuts in our school budgets and teacher numbers.

I will battle for funding to repair our crumbling roads and for a properly funded police service.

And Brexit looms. We must get a good deal, maintaining our close security and trading relationships.

A deal not for the 48 per cent or the 52 per cent but for everyone.

I have an open, collaborative approach and so I get things done. I will be a passionate, energetic, dedicated West Oxfordshire MP.

ROBERT COURTS CONSERVATIVE



IT HAS been a privilege to represent West Oxfordshire since the October by-election.

Since then, I have been to every corner of the constituency, visiting pubs, parish councils, businesses, charities, churches, listening to residents' concerns and raising many of them in Parliament.

In only this short time, I have corresponded with over 1,700 constituents, met with over 80 businesses and charities, already visited over a fifth of West Oxfordshire's schools and over a quarter of parish councils.

I live in Bladon with my wife and baby son and so share local people's priorities; I have spoken up on everything from mental health to bus services, from the A40 to flooding and from health services to the challenges and opportunities of Brexit.

The election on Thursday June 8 is a defining moment in our country's history as we prepare to leave the European Union.

In order to get the best deal, we need a strong and stable government with the strongest possible hand in the coming negotiations.

I am totally focused on representing West Oxfordshire and will continue to work hard, ensuring that you have a strong local voice speaking up for you – both here and in Parliament.

CLAIRE LASKO: GREEN PARTY

I HAVE lived in West Oxfordshire for 25 years. Both my daughters were born here and went to local schools.

This is our home and I want my children and their children to be able to live in a fairer, kinder, more equal and more sustainable world. A Green world.

This snap general election is a response to the politics of the past in which the government is holding the country hostage to a small, self-interested, ideological sub group in parliament. Our platform is simple.

Scrap tuition fees and restore the Education Maintenance Grant so that those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds have a fairer chance of a good education.

On housing there's little or no point in building privately owned houses in our area.



No-one who earns an Oxfordshire wage can afford them. We stand up for renters and we will build 500,000 council houses to provide new, affordable homes for people who can't afford to buy yet, or at all.

We have consistently said that we will hold a referendum on Brexit once we know the terms of the Government's deal.

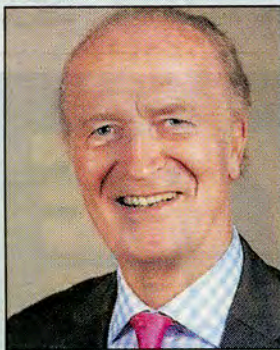
The country might have voted to leave the European Union but it hasn't voted on the hard Brexit favoured by May and Farage.

ALEXANDER CRAIG: UKIP

EDUCATED at grammar school, university and business school, Alan has had a varied career.

He has been successively chief executive of a stock exchange-quoted international manufacturing group with 2,500 employees around the world, live-in warden of an after-care home for young offenders on their release from prison, and director of a church and community centre in the most deprived neighbourhood in the country.

He is a Christian family man and social conservative who is passionately interested in the UK achieving full Brexit and rejoining the world; in promoting the traditional family as the best place for the healthy nurture of



children and the next generation; and in challenging growing political Islam without Muslim-bashing.

Alan is happily married with two mid-20s stepsons and two mid-teen daughters.

He swims regularly, sings in a choir, walks the dog and enjoys a pint.

JUNE 7th 2017

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Courts bucks trend by strengthening Tory grip

Stuart Rust

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RE-ELECTED Conservative MP for Witney Robert Courts has hinted at his support for Prime Minister Theresa May amid calls she should step down.

Mr Courts cruised to victory in last week's General Election and said he was flattered by his increased majority but understood the responsibility that came with the residents of West Oxfordshire placing their trust in him.

But his win did not reflect the national picture as the Conservative Party lost its majority, leading to a hung parliament and political uncertainty.

Mrs May has since opened talks with Northern Ireland's Democratic Union-

ELECTION: Conservatives hold Witney seat as PM Theresa May loses her overall majority

ist Party on securing a deal that would give her a majority in the House of Commons.

The Witney MP shared an article on Twitter detailing why Mrs May should stay on as Prime Minister earlier this week.

Locally he has pledged to tackle the problem of the A40 and to support shops and businesses.

His 33,839 votes far outreached those of his two nearest competitors, Laetisia Carter, of Labour, and Liz Leffman, of the Liberal Democrats, who received 12,598 and 12,457 votes respectively.

Mr Courts said he was eager to return to his role as MP and begin tackling some of the key issues facing the con-

stituency.

Speaking after his victory was declared in the early hours of Friday he said: "It's wonderful to be re-elected and to have an increased majority.

"I'm flattered by it but also conscious of the responsibility that comes with that.

"The first priority of any MP is to represent people with individual case-work but also I'll be working on all of the things I've campaigned on: the A40, rolling out broadband and support for local shops and businesses."

The MP said he would continue his work with councillors across the district and keep his door open to any residents who wanted to raise their issues

with him.

He continued: "I have a background on the district council and know how much work parish councillors do.

"They are where you go for local knowledge and they understand the issues, and I want to be in direct contact with them.

"As a constituency Member of Parliament I'm here to help people with whatever issues they have."

Mr Courts secured a majority of 21,241, much bigger than the 5,702 he won in November's by-election, which was triggered by the resignation of David Cameron.

The real fight of the night was between Labour and the Liberal Democrats for who would secure second place.

Supporters on both sides said they were confident right up until the count, but in the end Mrs Carter, the Labour candidate, pipped Mrs Leffman to the post.

Mrs Carter said: "I'm absolutely elated. We will continue to fight for Labour's values and for better lives for the people of West Oxfordshire.

"We ran an honest campaign. People were constantly told it was a two horse race but that was never the case.

"I think Labour offers people real hope away from austerity measures. We offer a really positive future and our manifesto was an easy sell."

Behind the Liberal Democrats were Claire Lasko, of the Green Party, with 1,053 votes, and Alan Craig, of UKIP, with 980 votes.

Turnout was 73.82 per cent.

With Labour and the Liberal Democrats competing so fiercely for second place, some questioned why the parties did not come together to take on the Conservatives.

Green candidate Claire Lasko said that 'tribalism' was a thing of the past

and that a 'progressive alliance' should be formed to present a real challenge to the Tories.

Candidates for Labour and the Liberal Democrats, however, suggested such an alliance was far from happening any time soon.

Liberal Democrat candidate Liz Leffman said: "Wouldn't it be nice? But I don't think that's ever going to happen. "Labour are not interested in that at all.

"We stood down a candidate against Caroline Lucas in Brighton and the Green Party did the same in Oxford West and Abingdon.

"But I doubt very much the Labour Party would ever do that."

Labour's Laetisia Carter said the two parties were simply too far removed to come be able to together against the Conservatives.

She said: "People say why don't you get together and form an alliance but only Labour will fight for Labour values - and the values are too different."

Since his convincing win Mr Courts has been back out in the community attending various events, including the Abingdon & Witney College Country Fair and the Ramsden Village Fete as well as meeting residents in Witney on Saturday morning.

His cryptic support for Mrs May was followed by the Prime Minister's meeting with the party's backbench 1922 committee.

She reportedly told the group of Tory MPs: "I'm the person who got us into this mess - and I'm the one who will get us out of it."

It is believed to have calmed the committee and secured her immediate future at least.

Mrs May met with DUP leader Arlene Foster in London yesterday as discussions over a deal to prop up her minority Tory Government continued.

WITNEY

Turnout: 73.6%

CONSERVATIVE

Robert Courts



Candidate	Party	Votes
Robert Courts	Conservative	33,839
Laetisia Carter	Labour	12,598
Liz Leffman	Lib Dem	12,457
Claire Lasko	Green Party	1,053
Alexander Craig	UKIP	980

It's all to play for as rivals seek to break dominance of Tories

JUNE 7th
2017

WITNEY is one of the safest Conservative seats in Britain.

But with the resignation of its previous MP, former Prime Minister David Cameron, that was put to the test again last October.

The contest saw Mr Cameron's successor Roberts Courts hold the seat, but the Conservative vote share fell from 60 per cent to 45 per cent – owing to

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resurgent support for the Liberal Democrats.

Liz Leffman, the Lib Dem candidate and county councillor, still lost by 5,700 votes – no easy mountain to climb – but her party will be hoping for another strong show tomorrow.

Meanwhile, the Tories will be hoping to use higher turnouts

typical of General Elections to win a more comfortable victory.

Labour candidate Laetisia Carter, a district councillor who ran unsuccessfully last year to be the Thames Valley police and crime commissioner, will also be mounting a challenge against Mr Courts.

Alexander Craig is running for UKIP, while Claire Lasko is standing for the Green Party. Meet the candidates, left.

JUNE 14th 2017



WINNER: Conservative Robert Courts chatting to supporters at the Witney count

Pictures: Ric Mellis

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LABOUR'S Laetisia Carter at the Witney count



GREEN candidate Claire Lasko at the Witney count

JUNE 14th 2017



LIB Dem Liz Leffman at the count

June 14th
2017



● Pointing to victory

ON what was a disappointing night for the Conservative Party elsewhere, Robert Courts MP managed to increase his majority as he held on to the Witney seat for the Tories in Thursday's General Election

Picture: Ric Mellis

● See Pages 4-5