

## Election 2024 hustings

Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> April ♦ 2.00pm at Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Ave, BH9 1TW.  
Please RSVP via Meetup or email.



Humanists are interested in creating a society which works for the common good. Which political party has the best policies and political philosophy to achieve that? Humanists are also interested in specific policies to reduce religious privilege in Britain. Where do the political parties stand on issues of interest to humanists?

We've had two very interesting recent events at Dorset Humanists to get our thinking caps on. Now we have the opportunity to hear real Parliamentary candidates and spokespersons tell us why they think humanists should vote for them.

Confirmed guest speakers: Jon Nicholas (Liberal Democrat), Tom Hayes (Labour), Joe Salmon (Green Party), Martin Houlden (Reform UK). The Rt Hon Tobias Ellwood is unable to attend but we hope to have a Conservative Party spokesperson.

## AGM feast

We had a fantastic free nosh at our AGM in March, superbly created by our talented catering team headed up by Aaron. Around 32 members attended our AGM and a 12-committee was elected to guide Dorset Humanists over the coming year. Report inside...





# Love is in the air!

Many congratulations to Sandra Lucie-Smith and Simon Whipple who are engaged to be married.

Sandra was sporting a beautiful new ring at our AGM and rumours started flying!

We can now confirm that the happy couple are indeed to be wed and they have asked David Warden to conduct a humanist ceremony in about a year's time.

Sandra and Simon met about eighteen years ago so cannot be accused of making a rash decision.

They are both members of Dorset Humanists committee. Simon is our 2024 Humanist of the Year for managing our events programme.

# RIP Timmy the dog

We were very sad to receive the news that Dean Robertson's dog, Timmy, has died at the grand old age of 17. Timmy was well-known as a mascot on Dorset Humanists walks and he even climbed Ben Nevis when he was 15 years old. Dean described him as a "bloody hero". He will be sadly missed by Dean and his family.



# Dates for your diary

|                                                                                                                                       |                  |                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Saturday 13 <sup>th</sup> April                                                                                                       | Moordown         | Election hustings with local Parliamentary candidates   |
| Wednesday 24 <sup>th</sup> April                                                                                                      | West Cliff Hotel | The Ethics of War – Edward Hadas                        |
| Saturday 11 <sup>th</sup> May                                                                                                         | Moordown         | Death Café: Breaking the Taboos Around Death and Dying  |
| Wednesday 22 <sup>nd</sup> May                                                                                                        | West Cliff Hotel | Humanism and Human Flourishing – a talk by David Warden |
| Plus other social events and walks which will be announced on Meetup. Please check all events nearer the time in case of any changes. |                  |                                                         |

# Summer trip to Down House



***Seats going fast! Book by 5th April to reserve your place.***

Simon Whipple has kindly offered to organise a Dorset Humanists trip to Down House – the historic home of Charles Darwin near Orpington in Kent.

Visiting Down House allows you to explore the very rooms where Darwin lived and worked, including his study where “On the Origin of Species” was written. The house is set within beautiful gardens that Darwin used as a “living laboratory” for his experiments. Highlights include a guided tour, an observation hive to watch bees, and Darwin’s “thinking path” through the gardens. For more details, you can visit English Heritage’s page on Down House.

## **Provisional details are as follows:**

Tuesday 3rd September

Pickup1 : Westbourne at 9.00am.

Parking: £5.80 for 24 hours in Milburn Road Long Stay. If you go far enough away from Westbourne itself, you may find free off street parking. Eg West Overcliff Drive.

Pickup 2: Ringwood (timing tbc)

Comfort break at Fleet services

Arrival at Down House approx. 12.00

One-hour separate guided tours arranged to visit the house and garden. Picnic lunch in the garden (bring your own sandwiches).

Departure time: 15.30

Going to: The Bridge Inn, Shawford, Winchester SO21 2BP ETA 17.30

Departure time: 18.30

Returning to pickup locations

Vehicle size: 34-seater

We regret that there are no provisions for disabled persons other than that the coach can sit down a little when people enter it, and wheelchairs are available for use at Down House.

Cost £36.80 per person. Free entry to Down House for English Heritage and National Trust Members, otherwise £12.33 for adults, and £10.80 for jobseekers and those aged over 65. Dorset Humanists Hardship Fund grants may be available to members without the means to pay. Contact David Warden or Cathy Silman.

## **To book:**

Deadline to book and pay a deposit of £10 is 5th April.

Email [simon.whipple@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:simon.whipple@hotmail.co.uk)

Or phone 07740 432159 or 01725 238237



# Humanist perspectives from right, left and centre

*Thirty people attended the second of our election special events with presentations by Aaron Darkwood and David Warden on humanist perspectives from the conservative right and across the political spectrum.*

## Aaron Darkwood

Aaron explained that his political beliefs are “broad spectrum” and he may not know who to vote for in the next election. He feels that left-wing ideology is too combative and partisan, only speaking for the underdog and the downtrodden. He wants to support a leadership that views the country as a whole, not one that takes a one-sided approach.

Aaron explained that he is against protests, especially outside MPs’ homes. He is in favour of borders, lamenting the fact that that seems to make him a “fascist” in the eyes of some people. He said there does seem to be a “mass hatred” of Conservatives based on them being Conservatives and that this is prejudice, pure and simple, which should not be acceptable in a modern society such as ours.

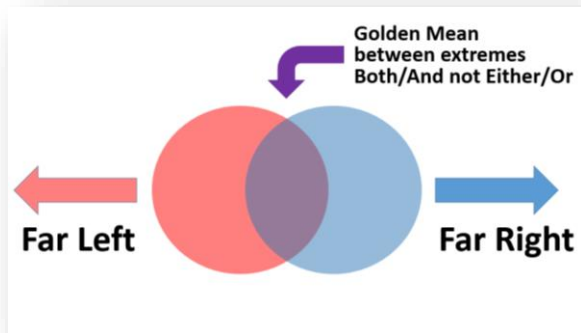
He said that Conservatives are typically proud to be British, want to promote Britain on the world stage, want the country to be economically strong – then its citizens benefit when all that falls into place. Labour, he said, seems to want to help the individual, lift the struggling person up, provide what they need, but seemingly they don’t love the country, are not proud to be British, and want to invite the entire world here. They seem to hate the rich,

call them names, yet then want to tax them hard. Isn’t this parasitic behaviour?

Aaron said he feels most at home with “one-nation, compassionate conservatism”. The aim is to build everyone up, allow people to flourish, to contribute, to be as good as they can be. If a person has a good education, access to healthcare, and career opportunities then they can feel valued and they can add to the nation and contribute to the whole. If a country is unified, working together for a common aim – everyone benefits. The idea that conservatives are only for the rich or in it for themselves just doesn’t make any sense. Why would the rich want to neglect half the country and then have to carry them?

Aaron said that conservatism is about choice and that humanism is about free will and choice. Is it wrong to buy a better education for your child? How many of us don’t buy the basic food in Tesco? We willingly pay extra for better baked beans, branded bread, or a nicer steak. We all pay more when offered choice all the time, so why would you not buy a better education if you could afford it? How many of you have a private healthcare plan, have paid for a first class ticket on a train, or bought a better car?

On public ownership, Aaron agreed that some essential services such as energy and water should be nationalised but he was concerned that this might not give the most competitive price. On housing, Aaron said that the nation needs one million affordable rental homes built by tomorrow, yet no political party has drawn up a realistic solution for this as yet. ►



David suggested that the sweet spot in politics is the Golden Mean between extremes, where ideas from both left and right may be explored.

### David Warden

David is a member of the SDP which is a hybrid left/right party. David started his presentation by talking about “red” and “blue” and he sang the opening verses of *The Red Flag*! He responded to some of the ideas which were presented by Dorset Humanists’ “Practical Progressives” group last month, many of which he agrees with. He also said that people should not be hated on account of their political beliefs.

**Constitutional reform:** the SDP wants to abolish the House of Lords and establish an English Parliament outside of London. David does not want to lose the wisdom of elder statesmen and women.

**Proportional Representation:** the SDP supports PR. David has some reservations about this but if it could be shown that PR leads to better government he would support it.

**Public ownership:** The SDP supports renationalisation of rail, energy and water.

**Education:** Establish new grammar schools across the country in regional towns with relative disadvantage.

**Economy and investment:** An active industrial policy which has a key role in creating global competitive advantage for Britain. A Sovereign Wealth Fund and Local Development Banks.

**Energy:** Increase the contribution of nuclear energy and support nuclear fusion start-ups.

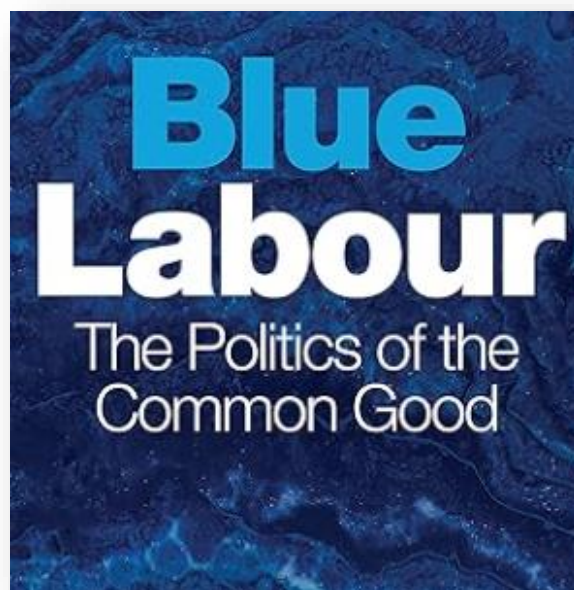
**Immigration:** David explained why he believes in nations as coherent communities and why this means we should have secure borders and lower immigration. SDP policy is to reduce net migration to 50,000 per annum in the interests of integration and social cohesion, and to withdraw from the 1951 UN refugee convention, the ECHR and all other international instruments which deny UK border sovereignty. For unsolicited asylum applications via breaches of the UK border, detention in a British Overseas Territory until repatriation can be arranged. The UK will contribute to humanitarian resettlement of genuine refugees.

**Defence:** Spend more on defence although the UK already spends slightly more than the NATO target of 2% of GDP.

**Smartphones:** Ban smartphones for children. Smartphones are addictive and harmful to children.

**Prison reform:** We should have prisons which are humane and fit for purpose.

David argued that unlimited liberalism is a bad thing and that we need a balance between liberalism and conservatism to build a good society. We need a “politics of the common good”.



David said he supports hybrid political positions such as Blue Labour and Red Tory (Blue Labour book by Maurice Glasman)



**2024 committee:** Back row: Roger Mann, Sally Hawksworth, Daniel Dancey, Dean Robertson, Phil Butcher, Simon Whipple; bottom row: Simon Bowden, Lyn Glass, David Warden, Sandra Lucie-Smith, Steve Neel. Barry Newman was also elected. Photo by Aaron

## AGM report in brief

Our AGM was held on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> March at Moordown Community Centre, following a delicious buffet lunch organised by volunteers Aaron Darkwood, Cathy Silman, Daniel Dancey and many more choppers, spreaders and helpers. We are very grateful to all of them.

### 1. Accounts for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023

The accounts were presented by our treasurer Daniel Dancey. Member Chris Smith confirmed that she was highly satisfied with the accuracy of the accounts and members voted to approve them. We are very grateful to Daniel and Chris for their work on the accounts. We have a healthy bank balance of £8025.

### 2. Uganda Humanist Schools Report

Chris Smith, trustee of the Uganda Humanist Schools Trust, gave a presentation on the schools. Please see more details on another page of this bulletin.

### 3. Dorset Humanists committee

Twelve members of Dorset Humanists were elected to serve on the committee (see photograph above) and David Warden was elected to serve as Chairman. A special welcome to newly-elected committee members Simon Bowden, Sandra Lucie-Smith, Steve Neel and Roger Mann. Cathy Silman and John Kingston retired from the committee and George Askwith has moved to Peterborough. David thanked retiring committee members for their very greatly appreciated contributions to Dorset Humanists over many years.

### 4. Humanist of the Year 2024

Simon Whipple was awarded Dorset Humanists *Humanist of the Year* 2024 in recognition of his commitment to Dorset Humanists and his ongoing work in creating a varied and interesting events programme for us.

### 5. 2023 Appeal

We raised £1617 for Hope for Food Foodbank and £993 for the Uganda Humanist Schools. We voted to continue supporting these two charities throughout 2024.

### Further information

Please email [chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk](mailto:chairman@dorsethumanists.co.uk) if you are a paid-up member of Dorset Humanists and would like a copy of the minutes.

# Uganda Humanist Schools

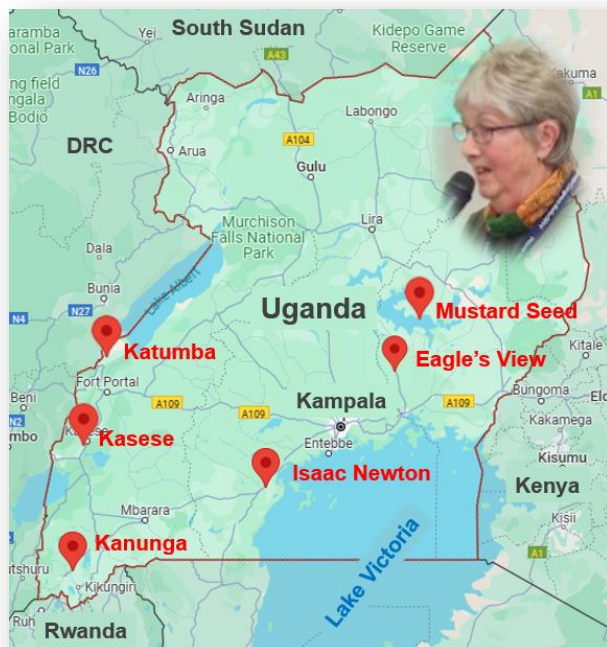
*AGM report by Chris Smith*

February 2024 was a first for the Trust. Steve and Hilary Hurd, chairman and scholarships respectively, were first in Uganda as young graduates, in the late 1960s. This year their son Dan, also a trustee, visited for the very first time. Although the visit was short, much was accomplished. There were visits to five of the now eleven schools (three secondary and eight primary) with over 4,200 enrolled at the start of this academic year. There was networking in Kampala, as well as visits to the source of the Nile and two game parks. If that sounds inviting there is a Friendship Visit planned for 2025. I spoke about some challenges faced by the schools:

- Security in the West, bordering the Democratic Republic of Congo
- Firewood is becoming expensive. Solar, electricity, Calor gas, biogas...
- Exam centres
- Primary boarding?
- Books for the new curriculum, for compulsory project work, reading for pleasure
- Better libraries and reading rooms (secondary)
- Off line Rachel+ intranet and technician to install, Mustard Seed
- Support for school bursars in use of Quickbooks, helped by our auditor
- Improving even further the accountability and governance
- On-going maintenance
- New scholarship sponsors

And the many positives and plans for the future:

- St Louis Ethical Society is continuing to fund Afripads, reusable sanitary protection, and scholarships, focusing on girls' education
- Exam results in O level and A level are well above average in almost all schools
- Positivity of students, staff, and communities



- Including community funds for a house for a deputy head and maths teacher so they are available to students all the time
- Idea to buy slow-moving titles from Aristoc at a discount
- Suggestion to give each new student a book, to read and exchange

There are many ways to support UHST – every penny goes to the schools:

- Scholarships for secondary boarding, youngsters with exceptional achievement, from the most impoverished families.
- One-off or regular donations
- Buying *Thoughtful Tales for Growing Minds* children's story books
- Donating for particular projects, such as books or infrastructure
- Un-assigned donations are most useful because money then goes to whatever is the most pressing
- Like our posts on Facebook

If you have any questions at all, ask me questions any time you see me, or contact me by email – David Warden has the address.

**You can give money to our Dorset Humanists appeal or donate direct:**

<https://ugandahumanistschoolstrust.org/donate/>



# Letters & Emails

*It's your column...*

## **From Aaron**

If you weren't there, look what you missed out on! Yet another fantastic social event on the Dorset Humanists calendar, where we all came together in a celebration of oral indulgence. The delicious buffet provided by our very own in-house team offered the culinary delights, whilst David delivered his oratorical annual summary of what we have collectively achieved.

If you've not attended one of our AGMs yet, do stick it in your diary for next year (8<sup>th</sup> March 2025). Whilst we're on the topic, have you joined up yet? We have over a thousand supporters, and hundreds of followers, so we warmly welcome you to join our 189 subscribing members to become a closer part of our humanist family.

Why not speak to member secretary Steve at our next meeting, or follow the link below to join on the website right away. No time like now to make a change to your future.

<https://dorset.humanist.org.uk/wp/subscribe/join/>

## **From Roger Mann about our "Perspectives from the Right" event**

Thank you, David and Aaron, for an interesting and engaging evening. Very thought provoking. As stated in the introduction there are many areas where there are common goals. I think we would all agree that the goals and aspirations of any movement would be to maximise the wellbeing of all citizens. Although what that means and how to carry that out there is naturally difference of opinion; but that is not a bad thing. Given more time it would be nice



**"I'm free!" Aaron masterminded the chopping and spreading operation in Moordown kitchen as well as being our official photographer.**

to take a deeper dive into some of the areas such as energy, environment, immigration, business of government etc.

What was also apparent, thanks to Barry's insightful question at the end was the wide-ranging views on what "left" and "right" actually mean. Left v Right could mean:

- Social Equality v Social Hierarchy
- Collectivism v Individualism
- Equality v Liberty
- Socialism v Capitalism
- Big Government v Small Government

Some of these definitions will naturally pull towards each other and some will pull away – they are not always opposite ends of the same scale – like hot and cold.

On a final note, Both David and Aaron raise the question on whether the last 14 years ►

of conservative government can be blamed for all the problems we face, in other words could labour or anyone else do any better given externalities like covid, the energy crisis, and Ukraine. Maybe to an extent they are but in my humble opinion Labour would probably have done the same. Put aside their ethics, opinions, or their party's position, how many cabinet or shadow cabinet members can you name who have the specific experience and knowledge to run their ministries? How many MPs, especially when entering parliament for the first time know and understand what the job entails, what their primary job as MPs even is. Do you?

In my opinion it is the system that is failing us not the individual MPs or even the parties themselves. In short, we are setting ourselves up for failure due to a number of factors. The way MPs are selected to run, the way the parliamentary whip is used and exploited. The limited amount of support given to MPs, the unrealistic pressure and workload put on MP (yes there are lazy MP who drift through or are self-serving, but the vast majority I am sure are genuinely committed to serve and do their best). I think this is a topic that deserves a deeper dive and I think we, as a society, need to make gradual steps that build for success, where MP can be respected, given the proper guidance and support and demands individuals of the highest calibre, where there is increased transparency and accountability.

This country is like a sleeping lion, full of untapped potential, capable with some slight adjustment to take on the global changes of today and tomorrow. Because of our unique situation in the world, geographically, economically, and politically there are a lot of technologies we can develop and help lead and guide the world into a better tomorrow, regenerating instead of destroying; step by step.

### ***From Cathy Silman***

May I echo the praise for a very entertaining and thoughtful presentation from David and

Aaron last night. Also to Roger Mann for his equally thoughtful suggestions for further discussion and study. I do believe we are all passionate about striving to find a pathway to a society where everyone has the standard of food, housing, utilities, opportunities to access work, health care and education above the poverty line for a country in the West. Labelling can be a bar to understanding.

I would like to ask why do all countries measure their prosperity by GDP? This allows the UK, with high levels of poverty, to be seen as prosperous. I think a more realistic picture would be given by comparing the child poverty, health (including mental), education, levels of employment, housing security, longevity etc. of the population as a whole, alongside their carbon footprint (see *Doughnut Economics* by Kate Raworth). This would help us all see our true situation.

I think unless we personally, and the political parties, face the reality that it may not be possible for everyone to have the kind of comfortable life the majority of our Humanist Group enjoy without all of us reducing/ changing our consumption- and ceasing the passing our homes on (in the main untaxed) to our children it may well be impossible for any political party to lessen the harm we are currently doing to others.

### ***From Steve Laughton***

David suggested that the left focuses on "stateless individuals" (the anywheres) whereas the right focuses on community and the nation state. We didn't push back on that! It is global markets that move investment and people around the world in search of profit maximisation, leaving individuals in many communities powerless. To the extent that the left has gone along with global markets and oligopolies, it has ceded the nation state to the far right. That is why the far right round the world is on the march.

*Steve Laughton raised many more topics of interest which we hope to discuss in future.*



# View from the Chair

David Warden

Chairman of Dorset Humanists

Aaron and I are very grateful for appreciative comments and emails about our “Perspectives from the Right” event. As a presenter, there’s always a certain amount of anxiety arising from the question “How did that land with the audience?” especially given that right wing or conservative views tend to attract a lot of opprobrium. So it’s a relief to get positive feedback afterwards! What humanists have in common is our aim to create a good society that works for everyone and, as Barney said on the night, the strength of Dorset Humanists is having the courage to tackle controversial and divisive issues in a spirit of dialogue.

Barry asked us to encapsulate the difference between “right” and “left” and Roger has suggested some ways of doing that in *Letters & Emails*. I would add that socialism is, in some respects, a secular version of Christianity in its longing for justice. Jesus said: “The first shall be last, and the last shall be first” in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 20:16). This longing for economic and social justice is a foundational theme on the left. The right, on the other hand, tends to argue that this project ignores human nature and that it ultimately leads to economic stagnation, violence and tyranny. The philosopher Isaiah Berlin would probably characterise this situation as one of “incommensurable values”. The best we can do is settle for trade-offs and compromises, rather than imagining we can create a perfect utopia. I think that’s right – trying to create Utopia is dangerous. But I also think we can do a lot better than we are currently managing, and organised humanism can facilitate some of the discussions we need in order to try and understand the deep structures and flaws in the way the world is run. Is it true to say, for example, that democracy no longer works and that whatever government gets into power, it will essentially run things in the way dictated by global forces beyond the power of individual nation states? If so, this goes a long way to explaining the allure of “populism” – a kind of Peasants’ Revolt against global elites which run things according to their interests. Unless global elites respond to these pressures from below, the pressures will continue to build.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF EATING TOGETHER

There’s an upmarket frozen food shop in Westbourne called “Cook”. A recent purchase featured a message from one of their chefs called Bijal who was quoted as saying: “We believe if more people eat together, more often, the world would be a better place – there’s no better way to connect people and help them feel cared for than over a good meal”. Dorset Humanists has just had two of its main feast days in our calendar. Our food is lovingly prepared by our own members and volunteers and lunch is either a fiver, or a tenner, or completely free. All we ask in return is for you to pop a donation in our Appeal bowl to help feed others less fortunate. It’s a great celebration of friendship and being part of the “humanist family”. My sincere thanks to everyone who made it possible.