

THE CERIMONIAL MAYOR

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Telos: In the UK the term Mayor is used for different positions. What difference is there, as an example between the Mayor of London, and the Mayor of Brighton & Hove as you are?

Alexandra Phillips: As you know, the Mayor is the first citizen of Brighton & Hove and undertakes an important, although merely ceremonial, role in and outside the city. This role is different from some Mayors and Lord Mayors such as the elected Mayor of London. The Mayor of Brighton & Hove is not directly elected by the people and therefore holds no executive power. The word 'mayor' originates from the French word 'maire' which means head of city or town government. It was the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 that confirmed the Mayor as the first citizen of the Borough and the ceremonial head of the Council, although the Mayor has few actual legal powers.

In 2000 the Labour government, led by Tony Blair, passed a local government reform which changed this system somewhat. Several districts in England now have directly elected mayors with real powers and an advisory cabinet to assist them. The first 'elected' Mayor, in the UK, was in 2000, the Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, the second one, Boris Johnson, and eventually, in 2016, Sadiq Khan. Since 2000, the area of Greater London has also had a Greater London Authority headed by the Mayor of London. This is a separate post to the historic and honorific Lord Mayor of London and may be characterised as a strategic, regional, role rather than as anything analogous to previous local government in England.

Another important figure is the Metro Mayor. Only in May 2017, a number of areas have elected a Metro Mayor for the first time. A Metro Mayor will be voted for directly by the electorate and will be the chair of a Combined Authority that has agreed to a Devolution Deal. These Combined Authorities are made up of several local authorities. A directly-elected Metro Mayor will have powers and responsibilities to make strategic decisions. Seven city regions have reached an agreement with national government on a devolution deal so far, and have elected their first Metro Mayors. Some of the Combined Authorities that have elected Metro Mayors in 2017 have existing City Mayors. Liverpool, for example, has a City Mayor but has agreed to a Metro Mayor for the whole city region. Similarly, Doncaster, as part of the Sheffield City Region, already has a City Mayor but took part in the Metro Mayor elections.

You are the Mayor of Brighton since May 2019, the youngest to hold the office. When you were nominated you said "I want to focus on women, children and minority groups". Besides that, what are the other Brighton & Hove challenges is facing and what solutions do you envisage for such issues?

In the city of Brighton & Hove we clearly have challenges but these may not be similar to those faced by other smaller coastal towns. Our geographical constraints limit availability of land for development, requiring us to extract the most from those available sites, now mostly located along the seafront strip. Victorian infrastructure spanning the seafront poses a unique challenge: it is costly to maintain and is sited in an extreme environment; the Victorian arches underpin a 1.5km stretch of the A259 main arterial east-west route.

Private vehicular transport remains the only way to travel from east to west along the seafront. This limits opportunities for residents and visitors to move around the city effectively, creates bus congestion on the parallel city centre route and also limits the capacity to make a sustainable business case for key seafront sites currently in development.

The last few years have seen a significant increase in rough sleeping in the city; our city has one of the highest rough sleeping rates in the UK. This is a challenge and has a big impact on resources and the visitor experience.

Brighton & Hove has worse than average outcomes in common with many other seaside towns for drug related (heroin and/or morphine) deaths and suicide. The city has a local strategy and an annual action plan to prevent suicides which has been successful in reducing the number of deaths.

Increasing the uptake of electrical vehicle ownership and fulfilling the demand for charging points is limited by local capacity. 5G connectivity is urgently needed in order for the city to capitalise on new infrastructure such as autonomous vehicles particularly in public transport.

Tourism continues to be an improvement in Brighton & Hove's economy – the sector supports about 1 in 5 jobs in the city and expenditure of around £160 million. However, wage levels remain comparatively low and the city has one of the lowest levels of housing affordability of all UK cities, with the average house price nearly 11 times the average salary.

Brighton & Hove is home to a strong civil society, with around 2,300 third sector organisations and 6,900 people working in the third sector. The Council's pioneering approach to engaging with and delivering for its communities was demonstrated by its successful crowdfunding campaign for *Madeira Terrace* which exceeded its challenging target within 6 months.

You served as a Green Party Member of the European Parliament for the South East England from 2019 to 31st January 2020... Brexit day. What will you and won't miss about Brussels?

Friday, January 31st was my last day in the European Parliament. When I was first elected back in May, I had hoped that we'd have five years to make a real positive difference here, so it was devastating to be leaving so soon. Brussels had become a second home and the Parliament provided me with a kind of second family. More than that though, the Greens have had a series of important wins in the past few months – we went out with a bang. But one wonders how much better we could have done had we had more time.

Things I'll miss:

1. My staff. It'd taken a few months but I'd finally got the dream team and I was heartbroken for us all to part ways. They're all young and dynamic so I have no doubt that they'll go on to have amazing careers elsewhere. I wish we had longer to spend together.

2. My colleagues. Within the Greens/EFA group, there are so many incredible, inspirational MEPs, many of whom have become great friends of mine. I often went for dinner in Brussels with my colleague [Magid Magid](#), for example, and I definitely miss that.

3. All the different languages and cultures. I loved walking down the corridors or waiting in line for coffee and hearing all the different languages. It really made me feel connected to something bigger.

4. Speaking French every day. I went to university in Paris and am bringing up my son to speak French, but I loved working in a place where I was able to expand my vocabulary every day.

5. Making a difference to ordinary people's lives. Before I became an MEP, I was a Green councillor (I still am one) and I always loved the fact that I could make real change on a local level. As an MEP though, I've worked on issues and pieces of legislation that will affect millions of people and have set up a cross-party group to work on the Green New Deal.

Things I won't miss:

1. Travelling to and from Brussels every week. Sometimes all you want to do is sleep in your own bed.

2. Being away from my son and husband. Undoubtedly the hardest thing about this job has been working away from my little boy for half of the week so I'm looking forward to being able to spend some proper time with him.

3. Being vegan in the European Parliament. While Brussels has some lovely vegan cafes, I've struggled to find much I can eat during a busy work day and there have been times that I've gone for a salad only to find it has cubes of cheese or salami in it. I love cooking at home and I just didn't get the chance to do it.

4. Not having a social life. Being able to do simple things like going shopping or meeting up with friends for dinners that aren't actually low-key political meetings.

5. Not being able to watch BBC or Channel 4. I had been known to come into the office at night so that I could watch BBC's [Question Time](#)!

You are told to be 'the UK Green Party's radical conscience' What does that mean and how did it happen?

It started with me becoming the highest profile of the left-wing dissenters within Brighton & Hove Green Party during the time the Greens ran a controversial and tumultuous administration on the City Council. And it's continued since I became an MEP in May. My [Twitter](#) account is a go to channel for the radical left in the party, often digressing from central party lines and being unafraid to reproach figures on the right of the party. Most recently, I was one of few prominent Greens to openly [criticise](#) Green Party and Extinction Rebellion activist Rupert Read over his views on migration in the run up to his [appearance](#) on Question Time.

I come from quite a political background in that my mum was a member of the Labour Party. So, from a really early age, you know, when I was eight, nine, ten, I can remember her phone canvassing from our living room, and helping her kind of stuff envelopes and deliver and things like that. So, kind of coming from a politically active family in Liverpool, it was quite normal for me to join the Labour Party, which I did when I was sixteen.

But like many Greens of my generation, there was one four letter word that changed everything – Iraq. When I was about seventeen, there was that massive march in London against the war in Iraq in 2003. And I dragged my younger sister – who's not into politics at all – down to London with me on a coach. And we spent a day marching and then went back up. And I just thought I'd made such an effort to do this and I'm a card-carrying Labour member, yet I'm marching against my own party. So, it didn't make sense for me to carry on at that point. So, I left. I still wanted to remain politically active but, alienated from Labour, so I read the manifestos of all the other parties. And it was the Greens that I settled on. Not because of environmentalism, which was in any case my "lifestyle" at the time. Rather, it was social justice and human rights, civil liberties – that sort of thing which drew me to the Green Party. I'm convinced that the role of the Greens is to ensure we're always more radical than Labour is. Singling out specific policy areas, I suggest the party's policies on drugs and policing remain far more radical than Labour's and need to be better communicated.

Marco Sorsini

Editorial

For those of us who love English TV films, the figure of the town Mayor, wearing all the traditional regalia, is nothing new. And the photo of Mayor Alexandra Phillips, which you will find published in this issue of PRIMOPIANOSCALA^c, indeed portrays her in this guise. To tell you the truth, she is missing the macebearer and mace, which you can admire [here](#). The interview with Phillips, the mayor of Brighton & Hove, a coastal town in southern England, is rather unique. Who would have ever thought that in Great Britain, historically, the Mayor had nothing more than a ceremonial role? And that all the local government decisions were taken by the City Councils? The local British Government is traditionally characterised by its extreme diversity: counties, districts (and parishes in the rural areas), age-old institutions, have been its supporting administrative structures for decades, and they often overlap each other. While in Wales and Scotland some reforms

implemented when the Conservatives were in power led to simplification, with the establishment of unitary authorities, in England different local levels of government still co-exist today under the Regions. However, Phillips explains to us that with the rise to power of New Labour, reforms were introduced in the local English Government, at the local and regional level. First, there was the establishment of the Greater London Authority (GLA, 1999), with the direct election of the Mayor in London (May 2000), in addition to the Local Government Act, passed a few months later. But what powers does the mayor have? Could we say that, in the case of London, decentralisation led to a significant restructuring of the city's government? Not that much. In fact, they still have heightened powers only when it comes to controlling the budget (which must be approved with an absolute majority vote of the Council members), the decision-making process and appointing the members of the four important bodies – created or reorganised after the establishment of the GLA – that oversee policies regarding transport, economic development, the Police and the Fire Department.

Another leap forward occurred, again under the umbrella of devolution, but with a view to *regionalism*, with the creation of the Metro Mayor. The 2016 Cities and Local Government Devolution Act is a law, passed by the British Parliament, introducing the direct election of a mayor, head of a Combined Authority, a local UK government structure that aims to better coordinate and develop policies common to different municipalities in densely populated areas. Decision-making authority in the areas of transport, construction and planning is *devolved* to them. The law requires that “Devolution Deals” be made between the British government and the local authorities (or groups of local authorities) to give effect to any transfer of economic resources and powers. The negotiation of these deals led in 2017 to the formation of these new “Combined Authorities” and to the election of some Metro Mayors. So, it is all a complicated, tangled mess that is even difficult to grasp for us Italians, who only have a somewhat vague understanding of the notion of the French-style central State, and for whom local rivalries prevail. A resounding victory for the Brits this time!

The interview with Phillips continues on another level. In fact, she tells us about her particular political history, which culminated in the unique, one-in-a-lifetime experience of being part of the last delegation of British MEPs, who when Brexit struck had to leave their seat in Brussels.

As usual, we would like to wrap up with a quick nod to the cover of this issue.

For Brighton & Hove, we have chosen the two dolphins naient portrayed on the city's **coat of arms** with the motto “*inter undas et colles floremus*”. The first letter of the city also merges graphically with the animal that represents it. Animals, always *genetically* modified by the design, which represent the transformation urban centres must face in complex times like those of today.

Mariella Palazzolo



Alexandra Phillips was first-elected as a City Councillor for Goldsmid ward in Brighton & Hove in 2009. It was a landmark election because it was the first seat the Greens had ever taken there, the first Tory seat they had won in the city and it stripped the then Tory administration of their majority. There hasn't been a majority administration in Brighton & Hove since. Alex was elected as the youngest Mayor of Brighton & Hove in May 2019, and she also became the youngest MEP for the South East Region, always in May 2019. She increased the vote share by 4.5% making it the highest vote share recorded for the Greens in the South East. In the same constituency, another candidate called **Alexandra Phillips** also stood as a candidate but for the Brexit Party. In the election, both were elected as MEPs.

Brought up in Liverpool, Phillips was initially a Labour Party activist with her mother, joining the party at the age of 16. In 2003 she resigned from Labour and joined the Green Party as a result of the then Labour government's decision to invade Iraq. She holds a bachelor's degree in French Studies from the University of London Institute in Paris and a PGCE from the UCL Institute of Education.

Alex is 34 years old. She is married to Tom Druitt, a Green Party Brighton & Hove councillor and managing director of The Big Lemon (a bus and coach operator in Brighton). They have one son, who was born in 2017. She enjoys swimming in the sea, running on the downs, cycling and spending time with her family.

Marco Sonsini