



## **Chris Huhne MP**

### **Liberal Democrat Shadow Secretary of State for Environment and Rural Affairs**

Constituency: Eastleigh

Majority: 568

A leadership contender after just eight months as an MP, Chris Huhne could hardly be accused of false modesty. But he could justify his decision by the outcome, a strong second place behind Sir Menzies Campbell, with 42 per cent of the final vote.

The party's assistant Treasury spokesman since his election 2005, it also ensured him promotion to the Liberal Democrat "Shadow Cabinet", as chief spokesman on the Environment.

Seen as one of the brightest of the new intake of MPs, he was the "dark horse" last contender to emerge in January 2006, after helping to force the resignation of Charles Kennedy. He overtook Sir Menzies as the bookies' favourite and beat the veteran party president Simon Hughes by a wide margin. But he only had the support of about ten MPs, and the party membership preferred their senior grandee to the presumptuous newcomer.

A selective liberal, he centred his campaign on environmental issues and the defence of civil liberties against what he called the Labour Government's "serious slide towards authoritarianism". He called for the protection of the law for minorities. The night before he had voted for a total ban on smoking in pubs and private clubs.

He laughed off evidence that as a student he had written an article in his university magazine extolling the virtues of cannabis and even harder drugs. He said he had been "a revolting teenager".

Considering a highly impressive CV and an almost unbroken record of success in several careers, it is almost surprising that a Westminster seat eluded him for more than two decades. Even in 2005 it was a close thing.

An award-winning journalist, successful economist, businessman, author and professional Europhile, he stood twice for Parliament in the 1980s, but had to wait until

the European Parliament elections of 1999 for his first electoral victory, when he won a seat in the South-East, at the top of his party's list.

In Brussels he pursued an energetic career, becoming deputy leader of the Liberal Democrat European Parliamentary Party, economic spokesman for the European Liberal grouping ELDR, and a member of the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee. Re-elected in 2004, he stood down on his election to Westminster.

He inherited a Liberal Democrat majority of more than 3,000 at Eastleigh on the retirement of David Chidgey, but held the seat by only 568 votes. He has described the electoral system as "a rigged fruit machine".

The term "high-flier" seems hardly adequate for Chris Huhne. Born in 1954, and educated at that nursery of talented non-conformists, Westminster School, he went on to study French at the Sorbonne, nursery of revolution. He won a scholarship to Magdalen College, Oxford, where he took first class honours in philosophy, politics and economics, and found time to edit the university magazine *Isis*. He was a member of the Labour Party at the time, telling friends he would one day be a Labour Prime Minister.

He spent a year travelling incognito in India, after Western journalists were expelled, filing stories for national outlets, and then a year as graduate trainee on the *Liverpool Post and Echo*, before landing the job of Brussels correspondent for the *Economist* at the age of 23, just in time for the launch of the European Monetary System.

He moved on to be leader writer and economics editor of the *Guardian*, and a string of posts and journalistic awards culminated with his appointment as business and City editor of the *Independent* and *Independent on Sunday* in 1991. He continues to write for the *Financial Times*, *Guardian*, *Independent* and *New Statesman*.

In 1994 he left to become an investment analyst, making a fortune advising pension funds. Five years later, the year of his election as an MEP, he became managing director and chief economist with Fitch IBCA Ltd, a global debt-rating agency. In 2002 he reduced this to a non-executive, advisory role.

Meanwhile his political career was developing more slowly. He left Labour to be a founder member of the Social Democratic Party. He ran unsuccessfully as a Liberal-SDP Alliance candidate for Islington Council in 1982, and contested Reading East, then a Conservative stronghold, in the 1983 general election. He managed to overtake Labour at their electoral nadir, but still came a poor second. In 1987 he challenged the Tory minister John Patten in Oxford West and Abingdon, and cut the Conservative majority to 9 per cent.

In 2004 he was a contributor to the controversial "Orange Book", a series of essays by some of the so-called "young Turks" of the party, advocating policy moves in the direction of free market economics. His essay was about globalisation and reform of the United Nations.

He has written a number of other books and pamphlets on world economics, and was co-author of "Both Sides of the Coin", a panegyric for European monetary union.

He was among the slayers of Charles Kennedy, the 25 MPs who said they would refuse to work under him after he confessed to his drink problem. He first offered to back Sir Menzies for the succession, and infuriated Campbell's supporters when he decided to stand.

He had been dubbed the "Gordon Brown" figure in partnership and rivalry with the party's other former MEP newcomer Nick Clegg, cast as the "Tony Blair". But no deals in restaurants have yet been revealed, and indeed Clegg was among the first to declare his support for Campbell.

He has not received universal approval. The Times columnist Matthew Parris described him as "mysteriously and indefinably ghastly."

His Greek-born wife Vicky is chief economist at the Department of Trade and Industry, a department which would have been abolished under Lib-Dem proposals. He has three children and two grown-up stepdaughters.

#### Voting Record:

- Terrorism bill - 9.11.2005

MPs voted on a government proposal to extend the maximum period for police detention of a terrorist suspect without charge to 90 days. The government was defeated, with 49 Labour MPs rebelling. *Against*

- Terror bill 'intent' amendment - 2.11.2005

An amendment to the government's terror bill. Opposition and rebel MPs voted for the amendment. *For*

- ID cards bill (3rd reading) - 18.10.2005

A government bill to introduce identity cards. 25 Labour MPs opposed the bill's third reading, and others voted for opposition amendments. *Against*

- ID cards bill (second reading) - 28.6.2005

MPs voted to give the ID cards bill a second reading, 20 Labour rebels voted against the government. *No Vote*