

SENUG HUSTINGS MEETING A COMPLETE SUCCESS

The SENUG hustings meeting with the candidates for North East Mayor, held last Thursday 11th April, was a complete success – according to Dennis Fancett, Chair of the voluntary group that campaigns for better rail services in South East and East Northumberland.

Just under 60 people packed into Morpeth Town Hall to hear Guy Renner-Thompson (Conservative), Andrew Gray (Green), Jamie Driscoll (the sitting Mayor who is standing as an independent), Thom Campion who spoke on behalf of Aidan King the Liberal-Democrat candidate, and Paul Donaghy (Reform UK) set out their public transport policies and take questions from the audience. Kim McGuinness the Labour Party candidate was also invited but unable to attend and no representative from the Labour party was available to speak on her behalf.

“Normally we have a speaker from one of the train companies or someone closely related to the rail industry,” said Dennis. “However the new Mayor will assume responsibility for the entire North East including public transport policy. As such we thought it important that both our members and the wider community heard what each candidate would do if elected, and had the chance to ask questions and express concerns”.

Topics debated included the strong concern over the service reductions proposed by the train companies for the December 2024 timetable and the need to integrate buses with trains, particularly Morpeth’s new bus route 777 to the Airport, which should serve Morpeth station. The requirement for a better local rail service serving all the smaller stations between Morpeth and Berwick was also raised, as was the need for a simpler fares policy. Candidates also gave their differing views on emission charges for road traffic in Newcastle City Centre, and how to encourage more people to use public transport.

There was praise for SENUG’s work for campaigning for the Northumberland Line for the last 19 years and strong commitment for further extensions to it once opened, as well as re-opening the Leamside Line in County Durham.

The Mayoral elections will be held on 2nd May. SENUG itself is a non-politically aligned organisation that seeks to work constructively with all parties and candidates whether in office or opposition. The group encourages those who want to see better rail transport in the area to join it and help it campaign more effectively – details at www.senrug.co.uk.

Ends (385 words)

Notes for Editors

SENUG – The South East Northumberland Rail User Group - is a voluntary pro rail campaign group: contact Dennis Fancett, Chair, tel 07810 353651, e: chair@senrug.co.uk. www.senrug.co.uk

Attached Photo: Suggested Caption: The North East Mayor Candidates at SENUG's hustings meeting. Credit Andrew Carmichael.

(From left to right: Thom Campion on behalf of Aidan King [Liberal Democrat], Jamie Driscoll [the sitting mayor who is standing as an independent], Dennis Fancett [Chair of SENUG], Andrew Gray [Green], Guy Renner-Thompson [Conservative] and Paul Donaghy [Reform UK]).

