CARLA LOCKHART MP

A RENEWED VISION FOR UNIONISM

PRINCIPLE. COURAGE. CONFIDENCE.



AN OPEN LETTER TO FELLOW UNIONISTS

FOREWORD



KATE HOEY

Baroness Hoey of Lylehill and Rathlin

I write without hesitation this short contribution as a foreword to Carla Lockhart MP's renewed vision for Unionism, which is published alongside announcing her decision to resign from the Democratic Unionist Party.

It has always struck me that Carla is someone of deep integrity who genuinely cares about her constituency, and for whom keeping her word means something. That is why she is so trusted by those who elect her with a significant mandate.

I know personally the weight Carla carried over the 'Safeguarding the Union' deal and how that was presented to the unionist community. It is a measure of her honesty and integrity that I note she has herself spoken openly about feeling like she failed to do enough to stand against that deal. Having spent a lifetime in politics, I can only say how rare it is to have a politician willing to speak with such raw honesty.

The path Carla is now on is one I embarked on in 2018. After a lifetime of service to the Labour Party I felt unable to remain due to the abandonment of manifesto commitments. The party had misled the people, and in all conscience I could play no part in that. It was a decision, just like Carla's, which was deeply personal and difficult for me, but one which I knew was indisputably right.

It is not easy to step out alone and stand on principle. There is comfort in numbers, even if you know deep down that the wrong road is being taken. It is difficult to take the road less travelled, and to do so on principle. That is the approach Carla has taken, for no personal advancement or gain, but because she believes it is the right thing to do. For that alone, she deserves admiration.

To the people of Upper Bann you are very lucky to have Carla as your MP. As a member of the House of Lords I get to work alongside Carla on a weekly basis. Now that I live full time In Northern Ireland I see her commitment to working for and with her constituents is unrivalled, coming even at great personal sacrifice given the time spent away from her young son. That should never be underestimated.

This document impresses me for its positivity. In unionism, there is often a circular diagnosing of problems, then inertia as everyone talks around those problems, postulates what to do about them, dithers, and then no one does anything.

Carla Lockhart MP has broken that cycle. She has decided to do something about it, and importantly she has set out positive and exciting ideas for moving forward. I am particularly attracted to her commitment to empowering a new generation of female leaders, and I can pledge my full support to Carla to help open doors, build capacity and empower those voices. I welcome very much her pledge to build a movement from the grassroots who perhaps have been too marginalised in the political organisation of Unionism.

The proposal to set up a Cultural working group at Westminster to better educate and integrate the unionist /pro union identity and cultural expression within the United Kingdom is vital work which I look forward to being part of.

Carla is not just a colleague but a friend. I support her wholeheartedly, and I urge her constituents and everyone else who believes in a strong Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom to do likewise.

Baroness Hoey of Lylehill and Rathlin

Dear Fellow Unionist,

I am resigning as a member of the Democratic Unionist Party. I have set out my reasons in a letter to the party leader dated 2 November 2026, which should be read alongside my letter to colleagues of 29 October.

My first responsibility remains to the people of Upper Bann. You placed your trust in me, and I will continue to work every bit as hard for you, your family and our community. I will keep making your voice heard at Westminster, helping with the problems you bring to my office, and working to make Upper Bann a better place to live, work and raise a family.

For over twenty years, the DUP has been my political home. I have made enduring friendships and worked alongside many good people whose commitment to our country and community I value. This is a difficult and deeply personal decision.

But I want to be a politician whose word means something. When I say I will take a stand, people should be able to trust that I will follow through. The party has chosen its approach, as is its right. I must now act according to my convictions.

From Scarva in June of this year, right through to Drumcree, I've felt the onslaught of lies, abuse and focus on me as a person. I was pushed far beyond my comfort zone, with the whole of nationalism and republicanism against me, and some within unionism too. But my answer was simple: I was not prepared to turn my back on the community I represent. I stood up for them, and I stood over everything I did. I still do.

Through it all, the support of those I stood alongside lit a fire in me. In Hillsborough Castle, I sat alongside men who could have secured almost anything for themselves or their own interests if they would just give in. They refused. They stood firm and resolute behind their principles and convictions.

Their example strengthened my own conviction that our community deserves people who are all in. Pan-nationalism is all in for its cause, as its approach to Drumcree made clear. I am all in for ours, with the courage to stand firm and the determination to build a better future.

I wouldn't change a thing about standing with my community over these last number of months.

A MOVEMENT ROOTED IN OUR COMMUNITIES

All I have known in politics is a party structure. Taking this next step is scary, but exciting too. I have encouraged teachers, professionals and others to be brave, find their voice and stand up for what they believe is right. I cannot ask that of them without showing the same courage myself.

We hold elected office to serve our people. They do not exist to sustain us in office. Their trust must be earned through our actions and our willingness to deliver on our promises.

I look to the future with determination and hope. There is so much talent, generosity and ambition within our community. I want to help bring that together and give people the confidence and opportunities to step forward.

Let me be clear: I am not establishing a new political party. I want to help build a movement, rooted in our communities and bringing people together around shared principles, practical solutions and confidence in our future.

These are the principles that will guide me.

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THE PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE ME

1. THE RULE OF LAW

Everyone must be equal under the law and equally subject to it. Elected representatives have a particular responsibility to uphold it in word and deed. Respect for court judgments cannot be optional and must be a condition of holding office. This must be foundational for participation in our political institutions.

2. DEMOCRACY

Democratic government must be free from terrorist influence or direction. No party of government (or otherwise) should have access to, or be directed by, a proscribed terrorist organisation. Decisions must be made through democratic institutions, free from threats, intimidation or mob rule.

3. A GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT

Unionism is strongest when people have a voice and a part to play. Our community organisations, bands, cultural groups, volunteers and individuals have enormous experience and ability. I want to build a movement that works in collaboration, listens and shares experiences, turns ideas into action and gets things done.

4. EDUCATION AND OPPORTUNITY

Education must be central to our future. I want young people to access opportunities and pursue careers they may never have considered, particularly in law and the media. That means finding mentors, building relationships and creating practical pathways into those professions.

5. UNITED UNIONISM

Our precious Union and Northern Ireland’s place within it give us a common purpose. We should work together across party boundaries and alongside those who belong to no party.

Cooperation must be honest, give the grassroots a meaningful voice and strengthen the Union beyond the electoral interests of any individual or party.

6. STRENGTH AND CONFIDENCE

Too often, unionism begins by asking how our opponents might react if we take a stand on an issue of principle. That inverts the very concept of having fundamental principles, which should act as an unshakeable foundation, no matter the reaction or cost.

We must stand by our principles, but also offer solutions. Our young people deserve a unionism that believes in itself and has something positive to say about their future.

A PROGRAMME OF WORK

Principles without more are just abstract ideals, they must lead to practical action.

Here is the programme of work I intend to pursue:

1. ACCOUNTABILITY

I continue to believe the DUP should take the steps necessary to remove Michelle O'Neill from office. My position remains that this can be done while other Ministers remain in post and the Assembly continues during the period leading to an election. A clear line must be drawn on the standards required of those who govern.

2. LEGISLATIVE CHANGE

I will shortly publish proposals and press for legislative change to strengthen accountability in the future, mindful that these changes are forward looking and cannot provide any sanction for what has already occurred.

These will include disqualification from ministerial office, for a period proportionate to the offence, following conviction for specified categories of criminal offences, including offences relating to parading. These provisions would operate prospectively.

I will also propose an amended pledge of office, with meaningful political sanctions for failing to uphold the rule of law or encouraging others to break it. This must expressly include respect for court judgments, even when the outcome is unwelcome.

My paper will set out these proposals and how they would work.

3. CONDITIONS FOR RENOMINATING

These safeguards must be secured before any renomination to the office of First Minister or deputy First Minister, whether before or after an election. Ministerial standards must be clear and enforceable.

4. ADDRESSING THE IRISH SEA BORDER

Before renomination, unionism must also bring matters to a head over the continued Irish Sea border.

In the coming weeks, I will publish a detailed policy paper setting out my proposed way forward. Our opposition must be matched by a clear plan to address the barriers separating Northern Ireland from the rest of our United Kingdom.

An Anti-Windsor Framework group has been formed at Westminster alongside a new business pressure group. Together, we can and should be pressing for action.

OUR COMMUNITY. OUR FUTURE.

5. CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND EDUCATION FORUM

I will convene a working group involving people from Upper Bann and across Northern Ireland, including community organisations, bands, cultural groups, educators and professionals. Its first meeting will take place before Christmas.

Its purpose will be practical: developing skills, sharing ideas, building relationships and opening doors.

Supporting women to become leaders within our community will be central to this work, through encouragement, mentoring and opportunities to step forward.

6. PROMOTING OUR CULTURE ACROSS THE UNITED KINGDOM

At Westminster, I will seek to bring together a cross-party group of MPs to promote understanding of the Protestant, Unionist and Loyalist community and our cultural traditions.

Our bands, heritage and community work deserve greater recognition across the United Kingdom and globally. There is much to share and much of which we can be proud.

“I want to help write the next chapter.”



NEXT STEPS

I will share more of my thinking in due course, and I want others to help shape this work. Our community has ideas, experience and energy that deserve to be heard.

Throughout this next chapter, my commitment to Upper Bann remains wholehearted. Helping with health, education, cost of living, getting potholes fixed, bins lifted and everyday problems sorted makes a real difference. I will always take pride in that work.

But I want my contribution to reach further.

I don’t want to be a full stop on a page of our history. I want to help write the next chapter. I want to look my son in the eye and know I did everything I could to leave our wee country in a better place for him and the generations who follow.

A place where they can stand tall, have opportunities and look to the future with confidence.

I am ready to take that next step and serve with the determination and vigour I have always sought to bring to public life.

Let’s all get the beat of the drum back in our hearts and move forward together. I look forward to working with all unionists, both elected and unelected, to advance the cause we all cherish and seek to preserve.



Carla Lockhart MP