

## **Rob Earnshaw – Local Issues. Real Answers**

*Delivering for Corbridge & Riding Mill: Priorities, Plans, and Pledges*

### **Introduction**

Corbridge and Riding Mill are communities full of character, history, and pride – but they're not without challenges. From road conditions and housing pressures to healthcare access and school places, people here care deeply about what happens next. I've spent time listening to residents, speaking to local groups, and looking into the issues that matter most to you.

This document brings together a series of FAQs and summaries that reflect the key concerns I've heard across the ward – and more importantly, what I'll do to help. Whether it's backing our brilliant local businesses, protecting the River Tyne, improving rural bus services, or supporting young people and older residents alike, I'm ready to work hard for our community.

Inside, you'll find sections on:

- Local Economy & Connectivity
- Healthcare Access
- Education & Youth
- Sport & Recreation
- Housing & Planning
- Transport & Roads
- Environment & Climate

Each section outlines the current situation and my commitment to action. I believe in positive, practical politics – not empty promises. If elected, I'll work with you, not just speak for you.

Let's protect what's special, fix what's broken, and build a better future – together.



Rob Earnshaw

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# Local Economy & Connectivity in Corbridge & Riding Mill

Our local economy is built on a mix of independent shops, tourism, rural businesses, and increasingly, remote workers. Corbridge's high street is a vibrant hub, but traders face challenges around footfall, parking, and business rates. Events like the Tynedale Beer & Cider Festival, local markets, and cultural attractions bring in vital visitors – and need ongoing support. In Riding Mill and across rural parts of the ward, digital connectivity is crucial.

While full-fibre broadband is being rolled out, some homes and businesses still struggle with slow speeds or patchy mobile coverage.

Farming and rural enterprises are the backbone of our countryside economy, but they face complex challenges – from changing grants and planning rules to rising costs and environmental pressures. Their success supports food security, jobs, and the landscape we all love.

*As your local councillor, I'll back local shops, fight for better broadband and mobile signal, support cultural and tourism events, and stand up for farmers and rural businesses – ensuring our local economy stays strong, connected, and rooted in the needs of our community.*

## How important is tourism to our local economy?

Tourism brings life and income to the ward – from Roman history and heritage buildings to festivals and events. Corbridge hosts cultural highlights like the Tynedale Beer & Cider Festival, local markets, and seasonal fairs that attract visitors and support local jobs.

*As councillor, I will support cultural events, heritage promotion, and initiatives like Visit Corbridge – helping to keep our village thriving, welcoming, and on the map.*

## How will you support Corbridge's independent shops and local businesses?

Footfall, parking, and business rates are major concerns for traders in Corbridge. Local businesses are the lifeblood of the village and vital to tourism and community identity.

*As councillor, I will work with local businesses to promote the high street, push for fairer business rates, and back sensible parking solutions to help shops and eateries thrive without compromising village charm.*

## What support will you give to farmers and rural businesses?

Farming is at the heart of our local landscape and economy. Our rural businesses – from family farms to independent producers and countryside services – face major pressures: fluctuating food prices, post-Brexit policy changes, rising costs, labour shortages, planning restrictions, and uncertainty around environmental schemes and grants. Many farmers are also looking to diversify – setting up small-scale tourism ventures, selling direct to consumers, or branching into renewable energy or rural crafts. But planning and bureaucracy can make that difficult. Others simply want a fairer deal for the work they do to keep food on our tables and protect the land.

*As councillor, I will:*

- Listen directly to local farmers and rural businesses to understand their needs and fight their corner at County Hall.
- Support sensible farm diversification that protects the countryside while creating new income streams – such as small glamping sites, farm shops, or rural workshops.
- Push for clarity and fairness around grants and rural support schemes, including proper communication with landowners about eligibility and deadlines.
- Encourage local food and drink initiatives, linking local producers with pubs, cafés, and events like the Tynedale Beer Festival, helping keep value in the local economy.
- Back policies that protect working farmland, promote sustainability, and keep rural jobs viable for future generations.

## **What about businesses and connectivity in Riding Mill?**

Riding Mill has fewer businesses but relies heavily on good digital infrastructure. Poor broadband and patchy mobile signals have held back home workers and small enterprises

*As councillor, I will press Openreach and mobile providers to complete full-fibre broadband rollout and improve 4G/5G signal across the ward – making sure no community is left behind in the digital age.*

# Healthcare Access in Corbridge & Riding Mill

Access to healthcare is a top concern, especially with our ageing population. Corbridge Medical Group does a brilliant job and already offers extended hours – but many residents still face challenges, particularly in Riding Mill where there's no GP practice. People are also struggling to find NHS dental care, with long-standing rural shortages creating real worry for families. Social care is another key issue, with growing demand for home support and high-quality care facilities. The Charlotte Straker Home is a fantastic local example of care done right – but services like these need long-term support.

*As your local councillor, I'll work to support and strengthen our existing services, improve access for outlying villages like Riding Mill, and push for fairer funding for rural care. This isn't about fighting the system – it's about backing what works and making sure it works for everyone.*

## Why is it still hard to get a GP appointment sometimes?

Corbridge Medical Group does a great job, including offering extended hours through the local healthcare hub – but demand is high, especially with more people relying on it from surrounding villages.

*As councillor, I will support the excellent work being done at Corbridge Medical Group and work to improve access for residents in Riding Mill and outlying areas – making sure no one is left behind due to distance or limited transport.*

## Why can't we get an NHS dentist anymore?

NHS dental care has become almost impossible to access across rural Northumberland – a county-wide issue that's affecting residents here too.

*As councillor, I will back the Lib Dem pledge to guarantee access to NHS dental care and push for more local provision so that people don't have to travel miles or go private to look after their health.*

## What can be done to make health services feel more joined-up and accessible?

Healthcare isn't just about doctors and hospitals – it's about transport, social care, carers, and communication. Rural communities often feel forgotten in the system.

*As councillor, I will work to strengthen coordination between services, help signpost support more clearly, and ensure Corbridge and Riding Mill have a stronger voice in county-level decisions about health and care.*

## What about care for older people in the area?

Many families are rightly concerned about social care – especially access to home care and support for ageing relatives. The Charlotte Straker Home in Corbridge is a fantastic local facility that plays a key role.

*As councillor, I will support services like Charlotte Straker, push for better funding for community care, and champion the Lib Dem plan for free personal care – so older people can live with dignity and stay independent.*

# Education & Youth – What Matters to Local Families

Education in Corbridge and Riding Mill is something we can all be proud of – with excellent schools and dedicated staff. But local families are worried about the future. There's real concern over potential school reorganisation, pressure on high school places in Hexham, limited school transport, and a lack of activities for young people outside the classroom. Recent delays to the Corbridge Skatepark project have only added to frustrations, highlighting the need for better communication and more consistent support for youth services. Mental health and wellbeing in schools is another growing priority for parents.

*As your local councillor, I'll work to protect what's working, push for improvements where needed, and ensure local voices are at the heart of every decision.*

## Are our local schools under threat from reorganisation?

Not currently – but there's understandable anxiety. In other parts of Northumberland, like the Coquet Valley, the council moved from a 3-tier to a 2-tier school system, causing disruption. Parents here value the First and Middle school system, especially Corbridge Middle which was rated Outstanding in 2023.

*I will fight to protect our First and Middle schools and ensure that any proposed changes come with full consultation.*



## What will you do to ensure there are enough school places in Hexham?

Queen Elizabeth High School is popular and generally has space, but I share parents' concerns about future feeder changes.

*I'll work with the council to safeguard local access to QEHS, and push for better school place planning across the Tyne Valley so that families in Corbridge and Riding Mill aren't left in limbo.*

## Will you support youth mental health in our schools?

Absolutely. The Liberal Democrats want to see a qualified mental health professional in every school.

*I'll campaign to ensure that schools in Corbridge, Riding Mill, and the wider Tyne Valley are part of this – with on-site support for pupils' wellbeing.*

## School buses are limited - will you help fix that?

Yes. I'll advocate for affordable and reliable school transport.

*Rural families rely on these services, and I'll fight to ensure that cost or distance doesn't stop any child getting to the right school.*

## What's happening with the Corbridge skatepark?

The skatepark has been closed for refurbishment, but delays have caused frustration. It's now expected to reopen by August 2025. I will press the council to stick to this timeline and improve communication. No community should need FOI requests to get basic updates.

*I'll also support more youth activities – sports clubs, Scouts/Guides, and creative projects – so young people have safe, fun spaces.*

## **What's your wider plan for education in our area?**

- Protect our 3-tier structure unless the community clearly wants change.
- Secure funding for school facilities and fair access to high schools.
- Improve school transport and youth provision beyond the classroom.
- Champion mental health, inclusivity, and lifelong learning for all.

# Sport & Recreation in Corbridge & Riding Mill

Sport & Recreation in Corbridge & Riding Mill Sport and recreation are a huge part of community life in our villages – not just for fitness, but for connection, wellbeing, and youth engagement.

Tynedale Rugby Club is a cornerstone of the area – home to players of all ages, and host to major community events like the Tynedale Beer & Cider Festival. It's more than a club – it's a hub for families, fundraising, and village pride.

Corbridge Tennis Club offers coaching and competitions throughout the year, while Riding Mill Sports Club provides tennis courts and versatile space for clubs and classes – right in the heart of the village. There are also thriving cricket, bowls, football, and walking groups, giving people of all ages the chance to stay active and connected.

he Corbridge Skatepark, which has been closed for refurbishment, is now due to reopen in August 2025. Local young people have pushed hard for its return – a sign of how much it matters. Delays have been frustrating, and we must do better.

*As your councillor, I will: Support grassroots sports at every level – from junior rugby to walking groups. Protect and improve public recreational spaces. Ensure that facilities – from playing fields to skateparks – are funded, safe, and future-proofed. Champion the role of sport in building stronger, healthier, more connected communities.*

## Valued Cultural Spaces in Corbridge & Riding Mill

Community spaces are the beating heart of village life – where people come together for learning, creativity, celebration, and support. In Corbridge, the Parish Hall plays host to everything from performances and local group meetings to fitness classes and charity events. It's a space that adapts to the needs of the community, young and old alike. In Riding Mill, the Millennium Hall is equally vital – home to village clubs, social events, classes, and private functions. It's a trusted, flexible venue used week in and week out by people across the village. Our historic churches – St. Andrew's in Corbridge and St. James's in Riding Mill – are more than

just places of worship. They are important cultural venues, hosting music concerts, exhibitions, and community gatherings throughout the year.

*As your councillor, I will: Support investment in these essential community buildings. Help ensure they remain accessible, well-maintained, and supported by the county. Promote their use for arts, education, and inclusion – keeping them open to all and central to village life.*

## **Key Events That Bring the Community Together**

Corbridge and Riding Mill aren't just beautiful villages – they're alive with events that bring people together, celebrate local talent, and support the local economy. The Tynedale Beer & Cider Festival, held each year at Tynedale Rugby Club, attracts thousands of visitors, raises funds for local causes, and showcases the best of Northumbrian food and drink. It's one of the region's best-loved summer festivals. The Corbridge Festival offers a family-friendly mix of music, arts, food, and crafts – a celebration of local culture that brings the high street and the village green to life. Alongside these, there's a wide range of other events throughout the year – from seasonal celebrations and open gardens to farmers' markets, concerts, and vintage shows – all adding to the rich cultural life of our community.

*As your councillor, I will:*

- Support and promote these events, recognising their role in fostering community spirit and boosting the local economy.
- Assist organisers in navigating council processes, ensuring they have the resources and permissions needed for successful events.
- Advocate for infrastructure and services that accommodate visitors, such as improved parking and public amenities.
- Encourage new cultural initiatives, making Corbridge and Riding Mill vibrant destinations for cultural tourism and local celebration.

# Housing & Planning in Corbridge & Riding Mill

Housing is one of the most talked-about issues in our area. People recognise the need for more homes – especially for young families trying to stay local and older residents looking to downsize – but they're also rightly protective of our countryside, village character, and the Green Belt. There's been real debate around the Neighbourhood Plan in Riding Mill, particularly about whether to allow new homes on Green Belt land. At the same time, high house prices are making it harder for local people – including our own grown-up children, teachers, and NHS staff – to afford a place here. Some residents have expressed concern that “affordable housing” might mean a drop in standards or safety, but for me, it's about providing high-quality homes for people who already belong in our community.

*As your local councillor, I'll protect what makes this place special, ensure any new housing is built for local need – not developer profit – and make sure the community always has the final say.*

## Do we actually need more homes in our area?

House prices are high, and many young families and older residents struggle to stay in the village. I'll support small, well-designed homes that help people stay close to their roots – not large estates or executive builds. The goal is to keep the community thriving, not to change its character.

*As councillor, I will champion modest, locally-appropriate housing that strengthens our community and helps families stay local.*

## **Will affordable housing damage the character of Corbridge and Riding Mill**

Some residents are understandably protective of Corbridge's and Riding Mill's character and worry about the wrong kind of development. But affordable housing doesn't mean lowering standards – it means creating space for local people we already know: teachers, NHS staff, small business owners, and the next generation of families who grew up here. These are the people who make the area work. I'll only support housing that is high quality, in keeping with the look and feel of the area, and rooted in local need – not driven by developers or absentee landlords.

*As councillor, I will ensure that any affordable housing is well-designed and does nothing to compromise the safety, pride, or character of the area.*

## **What's your view on protecting the Green Belt?**

The Green Belt around Corbridge and Riding Mill is precious. I'll protect it from large speculative developments. If there's a case for small-scale housing to meet local need, it should only happen with residents' support through the Neighbourhood Plan process – not decisions made behind closed doors at County Hall.

*As councillor, I will fight to protect the Green Belt and ensure local people have the final say on any development proposals.*

## **Can't we just bring empty homes back into use?**

Yes – and we should. I'll push the council to do more to bring long-term empty homes back into use before building new ones. It's common sense, and it eases pressure without eating into green space.

*As councillor, I will push for action on empty homes and ensure they're prioritised in any local housing strategy.*

## **How will you make sure development benefits locals, not just developers?**

Too often, decisions feel imposed. I'll work with parish councils and residents to make sure local voices shape what gets built, where, and why. Development must serve our community – not developers' profits or county-level targets.

*As councillor, I will make sure every development plan starts with a conversation in the community – not a backroom deal with a developer.*

# Transport & Roads in Corbridge & Riding Mill

In a rural area like ours, good transport links and safe roads aren't a luxury – they're a lifeline. But too often, residents are left dealing with potholes, overgrown verges, and unreliable public transport. The new 20mph zone in Corbridge has been introduced to improve road safety, but its impact will need to be properly reviewed. With rural bus services cut back and trains too infrequent for everyday use, many feel isolated – particularly those without a car. There's growing demand for better connections, including a community minibuss or smarter rural transport solutions. Meanwhile, parking in Corbridge remains a hot topic, especially during busy tourist seasons.

*As your local councillor, I'll fight for properly maintained roads, stronger rural transport links, and sensible parking solutions – all while protecting the village's unique character and ensuring your voice is heard.*

## What are you going to do about the parking problems in Corbridge?

Parking, especially during busy periods, is a real challenge. A new car park by Corbridge Middle School is welcome, but more work is needed.

*As councillor, I will look at options to ease parking pressure – including better signage, managed parking zones, and small extensions where appropriate – while protecting the historic charm of the village.*

## Will you support cycling and walking routes?

Yes. A new walking/cycling route between Hexham and Corbridge is being discussed. It would help with connectivity, promote healthy travel, and reduce car use.



*As councillor, I will support safe active travel routes, work with parish councils to move the Hexham–Corbridge path forward, and ensure it's done in a way that works for all ages and abilities*

## **What's being done about rural buses and public transport?**

Bus services in rural Tynedale have been cut back, and many residents feel left behind. Trains are too infrequent for daily needs.

*As councillor, I will campaign for better bus connections to Hexham, Prudhoe, and Newcastle – and explore flexible options like community minibuses or demand-responsive services to serve isolated residents.*

## **Is the new 20mph zone in Corbridge actually working?**

The 20mph speed limit was introduced in late 2023 to improve safety, but it's still early days. Some residents support it, others are watching closely to see if it makes a real difference.

*As councillor, I will monitor its impact, gather community feedback, and make sure it's enforced fairly – adjusting if needed to keep both residents and visitors safe.*

## **Why are the roads in such poor condition?**

Potholes, overgrown verges, and worn-out road markings come up again and again in Corbridge and Riding Mill. Residents are rightly frustrated.

*As councillor, I will push the county council to prioritise rural maintenance funding, make better use of the FixMyStreet system, and stay on top of repairs – not just respond when things get bad.*

# Environment & Climate in Corbridge & Riding Mill

The natural beauty of the Tyne Valley is something residents care deeply about – from the health of the River Tyne to the protection of green spaces, footpaths, and local wildlife. People are concerned about sewage in the river, the effects of climate change, and the impact of overdevelopment on our landscape. There's a strong appetite for practical environmental action: supporting biodiversity, tree planting, and maintaining public spaces. Flooding remains a long-term concern, especially near the river, and local pride in keeping our village clean and safe is evident across the community.

*As your local councillor, I'll fight for a cleaner River Tyne, protect green corridors and woodland, support local climate initiatives, and ensure our waste and recycling services are up to scratch. I'll make sure we look after our environment – not just for today, but for future generations.*

## Will you take action on climate change locally?

Climate action isn't just national – it starts at community level. People here want to do their bit, from greener transport to energy-efficient homes.

*As councillor, I will support local climate projects, back renewable energy initiatives, and help residents and businesses reduce their carbon footprint with practical advice and support.*

## What's being done about pollution in the River Tyne?

The River Tyne is central to our local environment – used for fishing, walking, and recreation. But concerns over sewage discharges and water quality have rightly caused anger.

*As councillor, I will support the Lib Dem plan to give councils stronger powers to monitor river health, hold polluters accountable, and push for clean, safe water in the Tyne.*

## **Is flooding still a risk in Corbridge?**

Yes – while the village has good defences after the 2015 flood, climate change means resilience must remain a priority.

*As councillor, I will press the county and Environment Agency to maintain and improve flood defences, and make sure emergency planning is in place for homes near the river.*

## **How will you protect green spaces and local nature?**

Green space is vital for wellbeing, wildlife, and the rural character of our area. From riverbanks to woodland paths, people want these places protected.

*As councillor, I will support local tree planting, promote biodiversity, and explore 'Wild Belt' protections to safeguard areas like the Tyne's riverbanks and nearby woods as natural corridors for wildlife.*

## **What about waste, bins, and recycling?**

Northumberland has strong recycling rates, but people care about bin collections, access to tips, and litter in public spaces.

*As councillor, I will make sure any changes to waste services reflect residents' needs and push for better maintenance of footpaths, parks, and public spaces.*

**END**