

I am the GP councillor for the Botanic DEA in South Belfast. I am the first GP councillor to represent the ward. It's a very diverse constituency. I represent a number of inner city working class PUL and nationalist/republican communities as well as the Holylands student area and some more affluent areas. My constituency also has a significant number of newcomer and BME communities.

I will be honest, issues such as Brexit, the constitutional question don't feature in my day to day life, they didn't feature in my election campaign, I wasn't asked about them on the doors. What people do speak to me about is a lack of trust in politicians, about the lack of housing for their families, about feeling pushed out of their city, about the cruel and inhumane benefit system or why in 2021 we're still putting women and pregnant people on a boat in the middle of a pandemic.

As a Green, our position on the GFA is clear. We support the agreement and we support its *full* implementation. It was, and is, the people's agreement. But what we have seen since 1998 is the altering of its provisions by politicians and for politicians through the various other agreements that have been made as we've lunged from one political crisis to another. That has been done without the consent of the people who agreed the GFA in the first place, and that is something that has failed to be acknowledged. I'm not saying that we do not need to update the GFA, but I don't believe it should be done as a result of closed conversations in backrooms by a small number of politicians.

As a party, we do not designate as either nationalist or unionist. We are 'othered'. We have seen the rise of the 'other' in NI for some time now, yet in the Assembly our votes still count for less. As the rhetoric ramps up, post-Brexit, so do the calls to pick a side, as if the only 2 possible identities in this place is 'nationalist' or 'unionist'. I take great offence at my identity not being considered valid as it doesn't fit the neat binaries that have been entrenched in our political institutions. It may suit certain parties to continue peddling that myth, that there's them'uns and us'uns, as it keeps them in a job, but I can sit here with confidence and say that I am not a nationalist, nor am I a unionist. I am a feminist and an eco-socialist. That's my political identity. That's what is relevant to me and I believe a growing number of other people in NI. And we have a right for that to be respected.

It is not 'sitting on the fence' as I have been told. The constitutional future of NI will be dictated by the people and the people alone, as set out in the GFA. Not by political parties.

We are still fumbling our way through an unprecedented global pandemic, who knows what impact that is going to have on us going forward. Brexit is and will continue to be one of the most complex socio-political and economic shocks that we are going to have to try and make sense of and our world is literally burning. I am going to quote my esteemed colleague Cllr Brian Smyth, if you don't deal with climate breakdown now, you'll be arguing about a United Ireland in a canoe in a few years. I see it as the updated version of John Hume's 'you can't eat a flag'..!