



listening ◆ caring ◆ responsible

THE LIBERAL DEMOCRAT MANIFESTO FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE 2017



A LIBERAL DEMOCRAT CAMBRIDGESHIRE

What a Liberal Democrat Cambridgeshire means

A Liberal Democrat Cambridgeshire will be one which values quality of life for everyone, and the contribution of public services.

A Liberal Democrat council will help local communities rebuild after many years of Conservative neglect. We will invest in and support public health and social care, tackle social isolation, and address educational, social and health inequalities. We will repair roads, protect and restore public transport services, and enhance the environment.

We will consult local people, and be open and accountable. We will manage the council's budget prudently, and seek to share resources fairly across the county and among communities.

Cambridgeshire in context

Liberal Democrats believe that public services in Cambridgeshire are under unparalleled pressure. Many Conservative councils have recognised this pressure, and have acted to protect services as far as possible. In Cambridgeshire the Conservatives have had the opportunity to do so, but have chosen to make deeper cuts in services instead. This has resulted in the county council receiving permanently £10 million each year less than it otherwise would have to keep local services going.

In many cases this has resulted in people paying far more in increased charges than they would have in extra council tax. In some parts of the county bus services offering free travel to pensioners with bus passes have been replaced with minibuses costing £2 per single journey even with a bus pass. The cost of travel for many students to their sixth form college has risen by hundreds of pounds a year - all to avoid a tax rise of 45p per family per week.

We recognise that strenuous efforts have been made by council officers to provide services more cost-effectively. It is clear that demographic changes are increasing the demand for social care services for children and adults. Our transport network is hugely over-stretched. Central government grant to the county council has been significantly reduced over the last five years and will disappear entirely within two years.

The government has allowed local councils a small amount of discretion in setting council tax levels, and the Liberal Democrats believe that this flexibility must be used to protect services for those who currently need them and to reduce the likelihood of even greater costs in the future. In particular, we would work with partners to ensure services are available for children and for frail and vulnerable adults, and improve public transport. Our county council budget proposals of the last two years showed how we would do this. However they have been defeated by a Conservative-led administration which would prefer to cut services than to raise the money their own Conservative Government expects them to raise in council tax. The choice for residents is clear: Conservative cuts, or vital investment in services with the Liberal Democrats.

The introduction of a Mayor and Combined Authority makes it difficult to predict what the county council will take sole responsibility for, and what elements can be shared with new partners. Many of the challenges facing our county are complex and inter-related. A Liberal Democrat-led county council will work with a Liberal Democrat Mayor to make the most of the opportunities available to improve the lives of people across Cambridgeshire.

Our commitment to you is that a Liberal Democrat Cambridgeshire County Council and a Liberal Democrat Mayor will listen, care, and act responsibly.



Cllr Lucy Nethsingha
Liberal Democrat
Group Leader,
Cambridgeshire
County Council

The Liberal Democrats exist to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society, in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community, and in which no-one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity. We champion the freedom, dignity and well-being of individuals, we acknowledge and respect their right to freedom of conscience and their right to develop their talents to the full. We aim to disperse power, to foster diversity and to nurture creativity. We believe that the role of the state is to enable all citizens to attain these ideals, to contribute fully to their communities and to take part in the decisions which affect their lives.

from the Preamble to the Liberal Democrat constitution

Creating and sustaining thriving communities



Driven by Cllr Bridget Smith, the Gamlingay Eco Hub is the country's most energy efficient community building, bringing together parish office, library, sport and social groups.



Liberal Democrat councillor Stephen Court worked as part of the community campaign to stop proposals to build on Estover playing fields in March.



Cambridge Central Library was at risk of losing a whole floor to private enterprise. Liberal Democrat councillors worked with local people not only to stop this, but also to gain sponsorship for services which now benefit the local community.

Using innovation and collaboration to strengthen communities in Cambridgeshire

Liberal Democrats are committed to

- Making help available for people in our communities who need it the most
- Getting people involved in community decision-making
- Breaking down walls between services
- Providing funds to ensure necessary community facilities like children's centres and libraries remain open.

Communities are more than just places where we live. They are networks of people, facilities and skills. The county council has a key part to play in bringing these together to enable communities to flourish.

Years of neglect have seen important community facilities reduced, closed down or transferred to private companies. This has left many of our communities without a lifeline and unable to thrive. Liberal Democrats, both as councillors and local campaigners, work across the county to help local people's voices to be heard and campaign on the issues our communities care about.

A Liberal Democrat-led county council will facilitate and support social enterprises and the many volunteer organisations which do such important work. We will engage with parish and town councils whose role is pivotal locally, and work together as an active partner to build strong self-sustaining communities.

Helping the people who need it the most

We want to support the people in our communities who need the most help. A Liberal Democrat-led County Council is committed to raising the money to ensure social care and county services can help those who need it most.

Getting people involved in their communities

We will ensure local people are actively involved and engaged in decision making for their communities through community-led planning and community engagement. We will work to help young people engage with the political process. A Liberal Democrat-led county council will be committed to equality and diversity, working to ensure *everyone* has a voice and that the council is reflective and representative of the whole community.

Breaking down walls between services and residents

We want to break down boundaries between services, helping the police, schools, health services, social care and other services work better with each other and with local people to meet the needs of their communities in an innovative and collaborative way. We want to make sure that 'ways of working' aren't stopping our communities from thriving.

Many rural communities are increasingly finding themselves isolated from services as a result of cuts to local bus services and lack of access to fast broadband or reliable wifi. We will make it a priority to ensure rural communities are better connected, and also to consider ways in which we can use community buildings and other ways to bring local services to communities.

Securing the most-needed community facilities

We will protect existing funding for community services including children's centres and libraries, and for the people who work in them. We will explore and implement innovative ways to improve access where no current facilities exist, and re-invest in youth services and in day centres. We will also work to find new solutions to ensure value for money and make the most of the money we do spend.

Enhancing and protecting our local environment

A cleaner, greener, healthier and more sustainable Cambridgeshire

Liberal Democrats are committed to

- Recognising and acting on the urgent need to tackle climate change
- Prioritising the improvement of health and quality of life
- Seeking to balance the competing demands on land use
- Addressing the need to increase our nation's food security
- Respecting and protecting our natural and historic environment.

Tackling climate change

Liberal Democrats understand the threat of climate change, and are committed to strong environmental protection legislation and the creation of a 'circular economy' that reuses, recycles and minimises waste. We will:

- Commit to renewable energy, encouraging electric vehicles and installing solar cells on buildings (for example on Park and Ride sites)
- Promote responsible renewable power generation, collective energy buying, and cleantech programmes and businesses
- Encourage generation of energy from waste, and energy saving, energy generation and water capture in construction
- Work with partners to promote proper insulation of domestic properties
- Use planning policy to advance the carbon neutral agenda
- Campaign to ensure the continuation of strong environmental protection measures especially after the outcome of the recent EU referendum.

Improving our health and quality of life

Poor air quality, traffic noise and vibration is a problem in urban and rural areas. Liberal Democrats have championed public transport and campaigned against heavy lorries rat-running through our villages. Liberal Democrats will remove the parking charge for Park and Ride, protect and substantially improve rural bus services, promote cycle paths, restore and maintain safe footpaths, and facilitate public transport and cycling over longer distances. We will encourage appropriate planting along traffic routes to absorb noise and pollutants, and the uptake of cleaner public transport vehicles. We will encourage home working and rural businesses, prioritising the spread of superfast broadband to our rural villages.

Balancing demands on land use

Agriculture, housing, recreation, employment and wildlife all require space in a county with a growing population. We will maintain high quality green spaces, open up access to the countryside, footpaths, and rights of way, and encourage and enable communities to care for local spaces. Cambridgeshire urgently needs more housing. We will focus development where it is sustainable, with higher densities in urban areas, and new towns, and remain sceptical about rural developments that force people to drive.

Increasing our food security

Land that could grow food is increasingly used to feed biomass generators and house solar farms. Liberal Democrats will encourage biomass digesters that use plant waste, rather than requiring the use of large areas of good agricultural land to grow energy crops. We will continue to promote entry to farming through the county council's farms.

Respecting our natural and historic environment

Developments like Northstowe and Waterbeach are being promoted as a way to address housing need. They affect our natural and historic environment, and require significant infrastructure investment. Liberal Democrats will

- Consider the aesthetics of development and its effect on the historic and built environment, and respect the local character of our places
- Encourage gardens, community green space and allotments which support biodiversity and encourage children and adults to be active
- Increase vegetation in urban areas to reduce rainwater runoff.



Cllr Gavin Booth in Roman Bank and Peckover is campaigning against the Conservatives' introduction of charges for green waste 'brown bin' collections, which risk discouraging recycling.



Pauline Wilson in Haddenham has been campaigning for years to reduce the effects of noise, vibration, particulates and nitrogen dioxide caused by all the diesel lorries cutting through East Cambridgeshire villages.



Cllr Philippa Hart is a passionate environmentalist, organising industrial scale village litter picks and managing thriving community allotments on the edge of her Meldreth farm.

Better health and social care



Liberal Democrat MP Norman Lamb has been at the forefront of the campaign for equality of mental and physical health care, and for a commitment to proper funding for both.



Young children are losing out at key stages of their development due to cuts to health visitors. Sarah Cheung Johnson from Longstanton says: 'My one-year-old little girl was initially refused a 12-month check-up'.



Christine and Alison Whelan have been campaigning in Ely for an additional GP practice to keep pace with the city's rapid housing growth.

Living healthier and caring better

Liberal Democrats are committed to

- Improving health promotion and preventative health care and combatting health inequalities
- Achieving equality in mental and physical health and well-being
- Helping and enabling people to help themselves more effectively
- Working more closely with service users and carers, the NHS and our voluntary sector partners to build quality social care services that meet people's needs.

The problems we face

Social care services are in crisis. Demand is growing as the population increases, particularly the number of older and vulnerable people.

Conservatives in government and on the county council have fiercely cut funding year after year, and resources are not keeping pace with demand.

Waiting times for vital health care are lengthening. Social care cuts are making NHS queues longer, because many vulnerable older people have to stay in hospital long beyond their need for acute care. Increasing market failure in the social care sector, and Conservative cuts to health and social care voluntary organisations, have made matters worse.

Cuts to health promotion and preventative health care are storing up future problems, while damaging levels of air pollution destroy health and threaten lives, especially of children and vulnerable older people.

Stopping the cuts and rebuilding services

Liberal Democrats will provide funding to stop the further collapse of social care for vulnerable people, and rebuild social care services. Liberal Democrats will maintain support for parents and young children and special needs support for schools, protect children's centre and other services, and aim to raise our children's health to match Europe's best.

Equality for mental health

Having long led the campaign to meet people's needs for mental health and well-being, and for quality mental health care, Liberal Democrats are committed to achieving equality in mental and physical health and well-being and will do all in our power locally towards this goal.

Investing in health promotion and preventative care

There are serious health inequalities in our county. We will invest more in health promotion and preventative health care, particularly in areas with lower levels of health and well-being, work with district councils to maintain critical sport and leisure facilities, and act firmly against air pollution.

Combatting health inequalities

Liberal Democrats recognise the connections between health, education, transport and housing. We will promote broader recognition of the impact of adverse social, economic and environmental factors in determining health and well-being, and plan investment accordingly.

Valuing staff, supporting carers, and enabling people to use services better

Liberal Democrats will demonstrably value the tireless work of health and social care staff, from the UK, other EU countries, and across the world, who serve us when our needs are greatest.

We will work with local and national companies and voluntary organisations to increase capacity across the county to meet the needs of vulnerable people and their carers. We will help people more easily find the services they need, by better information and signposting, including expanding the county council's community navigator system, thus helping more people to help themselves, and also reducing the need for more expensive interventions.

Education and skills

Learning for every age

Liberal Democrats are committed to

- Investing in children's centre services and nursery schools, to ensure our young children get the best start in life
- Providing schools with high quality specialist support so children with special educational needs, disabilities, and English as an additional language receive the right support, without heavy impacts on school budgets
- Ensuring that sufficient school places are available to enable every child to attend a good nearby school
- Making sure every child has access to the advice they need to make subject choices which will help them into their chosen career
- Ensure skills training and re-training is available for people of all ages.

Early years

Liberal Democrats recognise that early years education takes place in a variety of settings - private, voluntary and public-sector. All have the potential to enable young children to learn, socialise, communicate, and share and play with other children. As well as ensuring that there are sufficient childcare places for all children whose parents require it, we will ensure children's centres stay open to provide support to parents of young children.

Supporting schools

Liberal Democrats have been campaigning for decades for fairer funding of schools. However we are very concerned at the introduction of the new funding formula in a rigid way which will mean some schools lose a significant amount of funding in a single year. We will work with local schools to try to mitigate the impact on schools which lose funding, and lobby government for a longer transition period so no school has to lose teachers.

Planning school places

Children of school age learning together locally is an important way in which communities hold together. Liberal Democrats will ensure that the county council has the resources it needs to manage school place planning effectively. Every child should be able to learn at a nearby school, and we will work to ensure this is possible, despite the constraints placed on the council.

Educational inequalities

There are unacceptably wide variations in the performance of Cambridgeshire's schools, including significantly poorer outcomes in the north and east of the county. Liberal Democrats remain committed to good local schools for all. We value the well-established tradition of comprehensive schools and village colleges serving all pupils from their local communities. We do not support proposals to re-introduce selective education, initiated by the Conservative government and backed by Conservative councillors locally.

Within the county council's remit, Liberal Democrats will support and extend the Community Literacy Project which works with families with young children, and has shown impressive results in raising achievement in areas with poor educational outcomes. And a Liberal Democrat-led county council will work with a Liberal Democrat Mayor to ensure more equal access to good post-16 and sixth form provision in rural areas, including addressing the burdensome cost and time for many rural families of post-16 travel to school or college.

Skills

While excellent school education is a vital component of a fulfilling life, the rapidly changing nature of work requires lifelong opportunities for education and skills development. A Liberal Democrat-led council would play a forceful and active role in coordinating and implementing a skills policy that encompasses post-16, post-18, and adult re-skilling.



Scott Lansdell-Hill and Cllr Stephen Court from March (seen here with Mayoral candidate Rod Cantrill) are campaigning to ensure that every child in every school across the whole of Cambridgeshire receives the best possible start in life.



Lucy Nethsingha, Paul Sagar and other Cambridge councillors have campaigned hard alongside Chesterton School to ensure it can expand and provide enough places for local children. School places are a concern in many parts of Cambridgeshire.



Sixth former Ava Majumdar benefits from a nationally unique 50 per cent discount rail fare brokered by Liberal Democrat Cllr Susan van de Ven and available to all 16-18 year olds in Cambridgeshire.



Brian Milnes from Sawston presenting a petition and questions to the County Council meeting as part of a successful Lib Dem campaign to reverse Conservative cuts to gritting routes.



Public transport is about more than just getting from A to B. Cllr Lorna Dupré in Sutton has been supporting residents in Coveney and Wardy Hill whose weekly bus, soon to be lost, is an important social and community event as well as a way of getting to the shops or dentist.



The Newmarket Road - Barnwell Road junction in Cambridge is a nightmare for drivers, pedestrians and cyclists alike. Nicky Shepard has called for immediate improvements to the most unsafe roundabout in the city.

Keeping Cambridgeshire connected

Liberal Democrats are committed to

- Significantly improving our rail network and rail services
- Rebuilding bus services especially in rural areas
- Making better provision for cyclists, both in Cambridge and in towns and villages across the county
- Better maintenance of our roads, cycle ways and pavements
- Extending the scope of the City Deal consultation to consider all options for solving congestion problems in and around Cambridge.

Travelling affordably, sustainably and safely

The ability to travel around the county affordably, sustainably and safely is vital for individuals and for communities. But everywhere in Cambridgeshire travel is a problem - and for different reasons. Cambridge suffers congestion caused by people travelling in to work; the guided busway is overcrowded; rural villages see their bus services being cut back. The roads in Cambridge are dangerous particularly for cyclists, and roads in the north of the county are dangerous for everyone.

Most people in the county will continue to use the car for many of their journeys. But many others - especially young people, older people, disabled people and the less well-off - do not have access to a car, and it is important that they should not be left isolated or unable to access services and facilities.

Walking, cycling and public transport, though not always appropriate for everyone and for all journeys, are generally healthier and more environment-friendly choices. The only way that the growth projected for Cambridge in particular can be accommodated is if there is a significant change in the proportion of journeys made other than by car. Liberal Democrats believe the City Deal should extend its consultation on solutions for Cambridge and the surrounding area to consider all options for solving the congestion problem.

Improving our rail network and rail services

The growth in the number of rail passengers is a real success story, and the opening in May of the new Cambridge North station will be a significant improvement. A Liberal Democrat county council and Mayor will press for the funding and construction of the east-west Cambridge to Oxford line and the March to Wisbech line as soon as possible. Track improvements at the Ely North junction and at Newmarket will allow a further increase in passenger and freight services, getting lorries off the A14 and local roads. In particular, we would press for additional new or re-opened stations at Cambridge South (Addenbrooke's), Peterborough North (Werrington), Peterborough South (Hampton), Soham and Wisbech, as well as stations along the Oxford line.

Expanding and supporting bus services

If we are to see more people choosing to use buses we need an expanded bus network across the county with more frequent, cheaper, cleaner and more reliable bus services. As more routes and more frequent buses are available, more fare paying passengers will use them. And as that results in fewer cars on the roads, buses will become more reliable.

Better provision for cyclists

Getting more people cycling and walking is healthier, and reduces air pollution and congestion. New housing developments offer a great opportunity to build in cycle routes and facilities for separated cycling and walking.

Maintaining roads, cycle ways and pavements

In addition to being more proactive in repairing our roads we will create a dedicated budget for repairing cycle ways and pavements. Pedestrians are particularly vulnerable to trips and slips on damaged and uneven pavements, so these need to be maintained to a higher standard. Verge cutting also needs to be improved, with more attention given to cycle ways and pavements which can soon become overgrown, and to visibility at junctions.

Delivering sustainable housing, jobs and growth

Building prosperity and opportunity for all residents of Cambridgeshire

Liberal Democrats are committed to

- Delivering balanced economic growth across the entire county
- Continuing to invest in and support the growth sectors of the area such as higher education, bio-tech, agri-tech and information and communication
- Fostering and supporting job opportunities across the county
- Developing the skills of people from across the county, including a focus on high quality and advanced apprenticeships.

Balancing growth

Better jobs are closely linked with better education and health. The current economy of Cambridgeshire is imbalanced, with significant growth in the south of the county but limited opportunities in many rural areas. As a result job opportunities are located where many residents cannot afford to live, resulting in increased pressure on public transport, congestion on our roads, and reduced quality of life and well-being.

Many parts of Cambridgeshire do not have the key elements to support job creation across the area, such as high speed broadband and high quality reliable transport.

Infrastructure for growth and jobs

A Liberal Democrat-led county council will ensure a coordinated approach to the creation of new jobs alongside housing, high quality public transport and key community infrastructure such as schools and health services. We will re-invigorate the delivery programme of high quality digital infrastructure including superfast broadband across the whole county.

Liberal Democrats will promote the provision of small business and start-up premises in housing and commercial developments, and encourage partner councils to provide live-work units to enable people to work from home as part of affordable housing provision across the county.

Skills for residents

Based on the key growth sectors such as bio-tech, agri-tech, information and communication, Liberal Democrats will establish a tech talent pipeline, similar to schemes in London and New York, with young people enabled and encouraged to gain key digital skills and apprenticeships.

Working with partners, we will encourage employers to exercise their leading role in apprenticeships, and work with them to ensure programmes are matched to local need. We will support well-argued cases to underwrite the launch of new training programmes, be active partners in the expansion of degree apprenticeships, and work with industry on high-quality programmes. We will continue to encourage the drive for accurate information about vocational choices in schools, including contact with employers and investment in the employability of young people leaving full-time education.

The high cost of housing - both to rent and to buy - is having a significant impact on the ability of employers to recruit and retain staff. Ensuring there is an adequate supply of appropriate housing will be a key priority for a Liberal Democrat-led county council. This will involve ensuring the infrastructure to support development is planned in a timely way, and investigating how the county council as a major landowner can support appropriate development in partnership with district councils where this fits with their Local Plans.

Cambridgeshire must not lose out as a result of a bad Brexit. The ongoing negotiation is creating a state of uncertainty. A Liberal Democrat-led county council will invest time and effort in understanding how local businesses are likely to be affected, and how the impact can be managed. We will work to understand the potential skills gaps and will lobby government to ensure local businesses and public services can access the staff and resources they need.



(Image licensed under Creative Commons 2.0 by Jim Linwood)
Liberal Democrats in Cambridgeshire have called consistently for Wisbech to be reconnected to the rail network to help spread jobs and prosperity more widely across the county.



Following complaints from Fulbourn residents about broadband access, Cllr John Williams carried out a survey and organised a meeting. Connecting Cambridgeshire, BT and Virgin Media are now working to improve speeds.



Nicky Shepard developed Cambridge Style Week to provide opportunities for local people to develop skills and gain real world experience in creative industries, while helping local businesses, charities and entrepreneurs in a difficult economic climate.

(Image Gareth Davies Photo)

A local government that works for everyone



Liberal Democrat Jeni Sawford (right) is a member of the Cambourne parish plan committee, helping to write and promote the community-wide survey, inputting the results, and preparing the report ready for publication this spring.



Liberal Democrat councillor Mike Shellens from Huntingdonshire says: 'Street lights were dimmed last year in county council cutbacks. Four people I know ended up in hospital after suffering falls. Liberal Democrats made sure those cuts were reversed'.



Liberal Democrats including Nichola Harrison led the Stop Cambridge Road Closures petition, against ill-thought out proposals from the increasingly remote City Deal. Lib Dems are calling for proper consideration of all options to tackle congestion in Cambridge.

Making local decisions in a better way

Liberal Democrats are committed to

- Making local government simpler and genuinely local
- Ensuring that councillors and the Mayor listen seriously and respond to the concerns of the citizens who elect them
- Conducting debates and taking decisions in public
- Communicating clearly, responsibly and regularly about the issues that the council and the Mayor face and the decisions they take.

Simpler and genuinely local government

Since it was set up by a Conservative government in 1974, the two tier system of county and district councils has been inefficient and unaccountable. It continues to leave the public dissatisfied, and confused about who to hold to account. In many places across the UK it has been abandoned.

Meanwhile, the establishment of unelected bodies such as the City Deal and the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership has led to decisions being taken in a way that is even more remote and even less accountable.

The current Conservative government's establishment of the post of Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, assisted locally by Labour, together with yet another layer of 'local' government, suffers from the same failings, and paves the way for further distancing of local decisions from local people.

Liberal Democrats would aim to rationalise the layers of local government by creating a smaller number of multi-purpose unitary councils instead. We would promote local engagement and decision making by devolving appropriate powers and responsibilities further to local town and parish councils.

A listening council

Too often the Conservative-led County Council has forced decisions through without adequate consideration. This has resulted in poor decisions being taken, such as cuts to winter gritting and the switching off of many street lights at night, both of which had subsequently to be reversed under pressure from Liberal Democrats and the public. A Liberal Democrat-led county council will base its decisions on the best available evidence of effectiveness.

Open and accountable

Liberal Democrats have always been committed to genuine openness and accountability. That is why we opposed the Conservatives' county council cabinet system, where decisions were taken behind closed doors, and were finally able to introduce a more open committee system when the Conservatives lost their overall majority on the county council in 2013.

A Liberal Democrat-led county council will

- Actively listen to people
- Work hard to engage younger people in local political processes.
- Genuinely and openly consult individuals, local businesses, and organisations about its proposals
- Pilot the use of Citizen's Juries to advise on highly charged issues
- Hold all meetings in public, broadcast them live, make it easier for members of the public to question politicians and get answers directly from them, and communicate decisions clearly and accessibly.

www.libdems.org.uk/join