



Liberal Democrats for a liberal city

Cambridge Liberal Democrats
2015 City Council Manifesto

Shaping Cambridge's future with optimism

Well orchestrated change has been good for Cambridge over the past 15 years, led mainly by the Liberal Democrats. We believe this will continue only if the city's politicians focus on leadership and enablement and not just control and regulation.

Cambridge's glass is more than half full. Labour's tendency to talk the city down and turn it in on itself is not the engine for improvement and progress we need. Employment, equality, pay, innovation: Cambridge is at or near the top of the national league table and the envy of most of the country.

In addressing the significant challenges that come with success, we need to build on our strengths. The council must focus on where it can really make a difference and avoid tinkering and meddling for political effect.

Talking the city up is the way we delivered the unrivalled £1bn City Deal from central government to invest in our transport infrastructure, tackle congestion and enable much-needed housing.

Leading from the front is how we shaped the growth of the city, exacting new transport infrastructure, the highest level of affordable housing, and the highest standards of energy efficiency in new building.

Working positively with local communities and developers is how we protected and built on Cambridge's brilliantly successful hallmarks: our dynamic economy, high quality architectural and green environment, cycling culture and the strength and inclusiveness of our community.

The past year of Labour in office has been a let-down. Becoming overnight the advocate for 'the Guildhall interest', they have quickly shrugged off the perspective of ordinary people.

The Liberal Democrats' focus on getting results for the people of the city has been replaced by self congratulation over worthy aspirations.

They have brought little new thinking or vision for the city. Fixated by regulation, centralisation and control, they are dissipating the positive leadership the City Council can provide.

The Liberal Democrats' track record and agenda for Cambridge is cogent and compelling. It shapes our strategy which is summarised in sections 1 to 5 below.

Immediate Tasks

On re-taking office our immediate tasks will be to:

- Finance major **new investment in housing at sub-market rent** from windfall council funds. Housing that people can afford is a critical need in the city - not only traditional social housing at lowest rents but also homes at intermediate rents. The market does not meet this need. We have designed a scheme to provide 100 such homes on council land - achieving a good long term return for the general public on the investment too. To do this we will review Labour's decision to pour council funds into commercial property, for which there is no shortage of other investors and little direct community benefit;
- Drive up the quality and supply of **social housing** in the city and its cost effectiveness for tenants. We will expand investment in energy efficiency on changeover between tenancies. And we will resume partnering with the private sector for investment when ageing council housing stock needs redevelopment; enabling it to be achieved faster, with increases in social housing provision. We reject Labour's doctrinaire refusal to work with the private sector to help achieve this;
- Re-establish the council's commitment to **voluntary sector organisations**. Representing people power, they are amongst Cambridge's jewels which should be nurtured. Voluntary organisations have the power to reach parts of the community local government officers often can't and they provide excellent value. We will re-instate most of Labour's 25% cut and move towards a more active commissioning approach to support the vulnerable and the disadvantaged;
- Keep getting people involved in **public decision making**. It's vital that councillors don't cocoon themselves with bureaucrats and listen only to their political friends. As a first step we will reverse Labour's centralisation of local planning decisions and restore them to Area Committees, ensuring the involvement of all neighbourhood councillors and enabling the best chance of public representation. We will ensure the Area Committees continue to receive a budget this year to undertake small scale environmental improvements. We will also put real people back in charge of answering the council's phones;
- Champion the **safety of the community** by working with the police to target the perpetrators of nuisance behaviour without encroaching on the freedoms of everyone else. We want offenders pursued, wherever possible emphasising constructive remedies for sustainable improvement, such as rehabilitation for street drinkers and restorative justice for neighbourhood petty crime. We will ensure the public notices marking Labour's attempted open spaces alcohol ban tell the real truth to the public and we will seek an early review of the effectiveness of their Public Spaces Protection Orders;
- Maintain the focus we originally set in the **City Deal transport programme** on public transport, walking and cycling. We will use our influence to dissuade the County Council from their counterproductive charges at Park & Ride sites. We will insist on wide consultation on the intended transport schemes to better link jobs and housing and will co-ordinate a thorough public debate on radical approaches to tackle congestion and poor air quality in the city centre. We will also seek to ensure that improvements in transport **infrastructure** are accompanied by better and more comprehensive public transport **services**;
- Negotiate with the Police for a **dedicated traffic safety resource**. Speeding, parking around the school gate and in cycle lanes, compliance with weight restrictions: these are all issues residents have put at the top of their list of concerns, and it is clear the police

struggle to find the time. We would fund this by scrapping Labour's plans to increase funding for trade union activities and council PR and by gaining value from the police funding they have cut;

- Vigorously advocate more autonomy and simplified structure for local government, both with partners locally and central government. Increased collaboration between Greater Cambridge councils under the City Deal is big progress, but only a halfway house to a fully integrated approach. Likewise, the Coalition's devolution of incremental business rate growth is a step in the right direction, but so much more remains to be done.

Five key challenges: the Liberal Democrat plan for Cambridge

1. A Place of Your Own

The City Council is a leader and enabler for the provision of housing. The Lib Dems will:

- Fight for approval of the LibDem-formulated Local Plan at the ongoing public enquiry. This will provide 14,000 more homes by 2031 mainly in known urban extensions on the Southern Fringe and North West Cambridge and through re-use of existing sites in the built-up area;
- Uphold the Council's policy for 40% affordable homes within large new housing developments and press the government to allow the extension of this rule to smaller developments; student housing will not be acceptable as an alternative to the affordable housing requirement;
- Insist on high standards of design and energy efficiency;
- Promote diversity of housing supply: in particular encouraging homes at intermediate cost so as to avoid polarisation within our housing stock, exploring options for the delivery of more affordable homes through a co-operative housing association and bringing to fruition the co-housing project we initiated in the north of the city.

The City Council is itself a house builder and landlord. The Lib Dems will:

- Push ahead with plans to build new council homes, utilising the potential to refinance the borrowing that is possible now the Coalition government has removed Labour's block;
- Continue with improvements to the existing council stock, addressing fuel poverty through increased retro-fit investment in energy efficiency and progressive redevelopment of buildings not meeting modern standards, using the best available business plan without dogmatic exclusions;
- Maintain the additional support we introduced to help the most vulnerable tenants to sustain their tenancies;
- Work with the County Council and health authorities to maximise and co-ordinate services to vulnerable older people to enhance their quality of life.

The City Council is a regulator and standard-setter for housing of all types in the city. The Lib Dems will:

- Challenge and prosecute rogue landlords in accordance with the Shelter pledge which the City Council signed under our leadership, utilising the increased resources we put in place - and set high standards through the Property Accreditation Scheme;
- Target the owners of empty homes, insisting they bring the building back into use, using Compulsory Purchase Orders where necessary;
- Promote, and seek further local funding for government Green Deal schemes to incentivise improved energy efficiency, to follow-on from the £7m we won for the current Action on Energy scheme, seeking to improve targeting to the private rented sector.

2. A City that Works for All

By the way it delivers its services, the way it brings the community together and the way it leads, the City Council can be a power for inclusion. The Lib Dems will:

- Press all the companies to which the Council outsources services to observe the Living Wage policy that we established for the City Council's own staff ;
- Target the problems of alcohol and drug dependency, rough sleeping and homelessness wherever possible by helping people improve their lives rather than further criminalising them; working with the health service, police and specialist voluntary organisations;
- Minimise the impact of national welfare reforms on the most vulnerable: keeping the worst-off out of council tax, working with council tenants wherever possible to avoid evictions through efficient and professional use of discretionary housing payments, ensuring the roll-out of Universal Credit does not negatively affect benefit recipients;
- Maintain assistance to people in difficulties through the Council's Customer Service Centre and, independently, through generous funding of the Citizens Advice Bureau and support of Credit Unions;
- Champion the delivery of the skills component of the City Deal we negotiated, increasing apprentices with local employers by 400+ and better matching of careers advice and vocational training to the needs of the growing sectors of the local economy;
- Work with the County Council and NHS to improve services for older people, promoting aspects of health care which avoid the need for hospitalisation;
- Reach out to those communities most in need, both through the Council's own services, such as its Children and Young People's Participation Service(ChYPPS) and funding and commissioning the vibrant voluntary sector;
- Continue to lay on and sponsor events which bring the city together, celebrate diversity, and initiatives which recognise those who have historically been excluded or suffered persecution;
- Ensure that the city's new urban extensions are supported by good community facilities which promote the integration of new and existing communities and that social housing is fully integrated within new developments;

- Monitor Labour's various Anti-Poverty initiatives to ensure they achieve the genuine outcomes they are aimed at, redeploying resources where this is not the case.

3. Keeping Cambridge Moving

The £1bn City Deal which we agreed with government when we led the City Council provides new leverage for the city over transport strategy and better integration with planning. Using this and working with our Greater Cambridge partners, The Lib Dems will:

- Keep the City Deal honest to its agreed priority for investment in public transport, cycling and walking;
- For prioritised investment schemes, insist on full public consultation on scheme design;
- Ensure that while City Deal investments are needed to connect jobs and housing throughout Greater Cambridge, equal priority is given to measures to mitigate congestion within the city itself, rigorously examining all possible behaviour change measures;
- Campaign for the urgent determination of a bus and coach management strategy to ensure the best balance between safety, protection of the historic fabric and convenience;
- Continue to champion the visionary north-south cycleway, the now-funded Chisholm Trail, right through to delivery;
- Advocate co-ordinated parallel improvements in rail services, following the new station in the north of the city with another at the Bio-Medical campus in the south and re-establishing a rail line to Bedford, enabling Cambridge to Oxford services once more.

Under our leadership the City Council contributed independently to transport provision in Cambridge. The Lib Dems will:

- Defend the sustainability theme in the city's local plan: minimising congestion by maximising new homes within the city to the degree consistent with its compact character and landscape setting; requiring new developments to provide high capacity broadband and expecting good cycle parking and cycle links to the rest of the city;
- Maintain the city council commitment we made to mitigate the impact of the enlarged A14; and commence exploration of a new Park & Ride facility near the Girton interchange;
- Review the Council's policy relating to air quality and work with partners to secure a step change to petrol hybrid or electric taxis and latest technology for low pollution buses;
- Promote cycling by investing in better facilities, such as: a third undercover city centre cycle park; pressing to allow more two-way cycling in one-way streets where it is safe; and investigating enforcement against driving and parking in more bus and cycle lanes;
- Promote safety on paths by reviewing signage to give pedestrians and cyclists better awareness of those that are pedestrian only, cyclist only, or for shared use;

- Make sure there are no hold-ups in the implementation of the city-wide 20mph speed limit which we initiated.

4. Quality of Life

The City Council can make a huge difference to the unique quality of life in Cambridge. The Lib Dems will:

- Fight to protect and enhance the city's open spaces – its green lungs - ensuring delivery of equally generous provision in new developments which are openly accessible and managed in the public interest ;
- Equip open spaces to enable uses expected of them by the whole community, respecting the different character of each; including delivery of new pavilions at Nightingale Rec and Jesus Green;
- Continue to invest in the maintenance of trees, securing the future by planting more to provide for succession to those that fail;
- Ensure that allotments have the highest level of protection from the enormous pressure to develop within Cambridge;
- Promote excellence in design as a requirement for development within the city, by encouraging pre-application discussion between the urban design team and applicants, using development briefs as Supplementary Planning Documents for significant new development areas and making best use of public art contributions;
- Reduce Cambridge's carbon footprint and mitigate the impact of climate change here with the use of sustainable urban drainage systems in new developments and protecting biodiversity;
- Promote neighbourhood hubs around the city, funding the Local Centres Improvement Programme which we started, but Labour has dropped;
- Use the powers the council has at its disposal to support independent shops so that a diversity can co-exist; and re-establish the council's campaign nationally to have such powers augmented;
- In discouraging anti-social behaviour, put the emphasis on prevention and education rather than heavy-handed enforcement and regulation which jeopardises reasonable behaviour of all;
- Work with the police and others on the root causes of petty crime and anti-social behaviour and seek to expand the restorative justice scheme – Neighbourhood Resolution Panels - which we started;
- Defend from Labour's revision the innovations we introduced for openness and participation in public business, in particular the area committee system where elected councillors take transparent decisions in their own neighbourhoods at times when most residents can attend;
- Develop the Council's on-line presence and accessibility, working progressively towards a proactive, open data regime.

5. Making Ends meet to protect and improve basic services

The City Council continues to face reducing grant from central government. The strategy put in place by Lib Dems leading the council until last year remains the best approach. The Lib Dems will:

- Follow-through with our initiatives to share back-office and transactional services with neighbouring councils and deliver those currently proposed for ICT, Legal, Building Control and Waste collection and proceed to explore those in HR and Accounting;
- Pursue an integrated planning service for Greater Cambridge, where we are already committed through the City Deal to combine local plans with South Cambridgeshire from 2019; but as a location-specific service, avoid ‘commoditising’ it, diluting focus and democratic accountability, by dispersing beyond this well-defined strategic geography;
- Deliver the alternative models for service delivery which have been defined: “Cambridge Live” for arts provision, outsourcing of building cleaning and placing the tourist service with a partnership organisation;
- Maximise income through an entrepreneurial approach to key local assets, such as the commercial property portfolio and trade waste business;
- Target resources in the council’s discretionary services into activities where only the council can make an impact, elsewhere encourage and help those who are willing to organise for themselves;
- Benchmark the way the council discharges its statutory services to be sure that choices about the nature and level of delivery are consciously made in relation to public need;
- Continue to reduce carbon emissions and energy costs in the council’s operations by investing in energy efficiency and renewable energy through the Carbon Management Plan;
- Protect vulnerable residents in consideration of all changes in council services;
- Fund a new Business Partnership Officer to provide better liaison between the Council and businesses in the city and vice versa, recognising that more income coming to the city council in future is to be linked to the growth in business rates;
- Focus the Council on leveraging partnerships with other organisations to achieve desired policy aims;
- Enhance the council’s capacity to deliver capital schemes more swiftly in preference to Labour’s plan to reduce schemes to the capacity available.

