



greener  fairer  working for you

the LIBERAL DEMOCRAT MANIFESTO FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE

2021



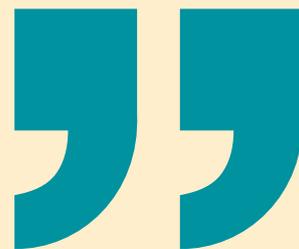


The Liberal Democrats exist to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society, in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community, and in which no-one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity.

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.



A GREENER AND FAIRER CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Our vision of Cambridgeshire is of a county that is greener and fairer.

A greener Cambridgeshire means acknowledging the threat of the climate emergency, acting to prevent or reduce carbon emissions, adapting to existing and future impacts of the climate emergency, and enhancing and protecting our natural environment. A fairer Cambridgeshire means sharing prosperity, and supporting those facing greater challenges to their physical, mental, and financial wellbeing.

This manifesto for Cambridgeshire in the years ahead prioritises these two objectives and holds them equally. We believe that Cambridgeshire can be both greener and fairer, and that these two goals do not conflict.

The climate emergency is the biggest challenge facing Cambridgeshire and the rest of the world. 2020 was one of the hottest years on record, and 2015-2019 were all in the top five hottest years. We need to act fast to limit the damage we are doing to our planet. We will invest in renewable energy, making our energy networks more resilient as well as greener. We will ensure new public transport systems are clean and green, and work closely with partners from the public and private sectors to support them to move to a greener future.

We have seen great changes in how people work and travel during the past year. Some of these changes have been good, with more people encouraged to work from home, meaning less congestion on our roads.

More people have chosen to walk and cycle, which is good for the environment and for our health. We must encourage and support these changes to make it easier for those who would like to work from home, or near home to do so. We will support the development of community workspaces where those working from our towns and villages can access office-style facilities. We will make it easier and safer for people across Cambridgeshire to walk and cycle to school and work when it suits them.

Covid-19 has been a challenge for those who use public transport, and many have understandably chosen not to use buses or trains if they can avoid them. While this is sensible during a pandemic, we must plan to encourage more people back onto public transport, and to improve and extend the public transport options available to Cambridgeshire residents. The climate emergency, along with pollution and congestion in our towns and cities, require a shift towards a better and more reliable public transport system. This means public transport which is both deliverable in the short term, and which works as an integrated network. The Combined Authority's proposals for CAM Metro in their current form are not deliverable, and we will support a mass rapid transit system that can quickly provide green reliable transport for Cambridgeshire.

We will also work to increase biodiversity across Cambridgeshire, doubling nature by the way we care for our land. We will set a target for the planting of a tree for every primary age child in Cambridgeshire by 2025. We will work closely with partner organisations, landowners, and our tenant farmers to promote the vision of the Fens Biosphere, holding in balance the agricultural role of the fens with new economic opportunities, enhancing their amazing and precious natural habitat and their potential as an important carbon sink. And we welcome the recommendation of

the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Independent Commission on Climate Change to establish a committee on peat to investigate these issues further.

Communities have worked together in amazing ways over the past year to provide new types of support for vulnerable residents during the pandemic. We believe communities know their own needs best, and we will do all we can to help them in creating and maintaining durable support networks across our towns and villages.

The pandemic has highlighted the weaknesses of so much of our social care system. We must make sure we do better in caring for vulnerable members of our community. The frail elderly, those with dementia, and younger people with care needs, have all been let down by our underfunded care system. We must not let them down again.

Young people have suffered disproportionately in the past year, with cuts to jobs falling heavily on those under 30. We must make sure the twin shocks of Brexit and the pandemic do not lead to a blighted generation. We have significant skills shortages in specific employment sectors across Cambridgeshire, and must ensure that we are supporting our young people with the training which will enable them, and our businesses, to thrive in the future.

Now that we have left the EU, our health, social care, and agricultural sectors will no longer be able to rely on recruiting workers from EU countries. For some of these sectors, making sure our colleges and universities are providing the skills and training to support businesses and public services in our area is a key priority for the coming years.

We will improve fast access to the internet across Cambridgeshire, whether through Fibre To The Premises or other technologies, and seek to ensure that residents in rural areas are not excluded.



Cllr Lucy Nethsingha

Liberal Democrat Group Leader
Cambridgeshire County Council

Ambitious for our environment

The climate emergency is the most significant challenge facing our area. It was the Liberal Democrats who proposed in 2019 that Cambridgeshire County Council declare a climate emergency, and we have contributed actively since then to the creation of the County Council's climate change and environment strategy.

We welcome the interim report of the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Climate Change Commission, and the priority actions it assigns to the County Council as well as to the Combined Authority, district councils, and other agencies.

Under the Liberal Democrats, the County Council will pursue an ambitious path to net zero carbon, manage and enhance our natural resources, and accelerate the doubling of nature in a way that creates an outstanding environment where nature and people thrive, and businesses prosper. It will take a leadership role in supporting partner organisations and local communities to tackle the climate emergency and improve biodiversity.

Greenhouse gas emissions in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough are 25 per cent higher per person than the UK average, much of this resulting from transport. We have just six years to address this if we are to play our equal part in enabling the UK to reach its net zero carbon target.

We will prioritise alternatives to car use and road building, working with the Combined Authority to promote attractive public transport provision and joined-up opportunities for walking and cycling. We will ensure provision of electric vehicle charging infrastructure on the County Council's own estate, and work with partners to do the same.

We will press ahead with the Council's existing programme for the decarbonisation of public buildings including schools, and seek to accelerate and expand this where possible. And we will continue to promote schemes that assist villages reliant on oil heating to make the move to low carbon heating (and cooling as the County gets warmer).

We will pursue options for a circular economy that minimise waste without resorting to incineration. And we will increase monitoring and accelerate action to address poor air quality in urban centres and in villages with high levels of heavy traffic.

Water management, whether through scarcity in chalk streams or excess in increased flood risk, is an increasingly urgent issue. We will support the regional water planning bodies, statutory agencies, and voluntary bodies in removing barriers to action to reduce damaging abstraction from chalk aquifers, restore natural flows, find alternative water sources, and tackle pollution and habitat modifications. A Liberal Democrat-run County Council will resume regular maintenance of gullies and drains to remove surface water effectively, and work with partner agencies to reduce the vulnerability of communities to river flooding.

We are ambitious for our natural environment. We will increase biodiversity across all areas of the County Council's activity, from farms and parks to highways and schools. The County Council has an extensive farms estate, and we will work in partnership with the Council's tenant farmers, other landowners, and the agritech sector to encourage and support innovative land management techniques that contribute to our area's climate ambitions.

The role of peat in carbon emissions is fast emerging as a national issue, and Cambridgeshire contains large areas of peatland. We welcome the recognition of this challenge by the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Climate Commission, and also the work done by Cambridgeshire ACRE to achieve candidate status for the proposed Fens Biosphere. We believe both these initiatives offer opportunities to consider how to reduce carbon emissions from peat while protecting the unique character of the fens and their importance for food production, agriculture, wildlife habitats, and the rural way of life. We will work actively with the Climate Commission's proposed new committee on peat, and listen to residents particularly including Cambridgeshire's farming communities.

Under the Liberal Democrats, the County Council will do more to decarbonise its investments and stop investing in fossil fuels. We will further develop the emerging recommendations from CUSPE research for a Cambridgeshire Decarbonisation Fund, progress work on carbon pricing for council projects, and consider a programme of grants for environmental and climate-related community projects.

Finally, we await further recommendations from the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Climate Commission, and would welcome long-term the retention of an independent body to hold the County Council, and other local authorities and agencies, to its climate commitments.

Regaining opportunities for learning

With more and more schools now 'academies' within multi-academy trusts, the County Council's relationship with local schools is largely one of partnership.

Many academy schools have turned to the County Council for help and advice on managing Covid safely in school, and the pandemic has demonstrated the importance of close working between the Council and schools in a crisis. A Liberal Democrat run council will enhance this close partnership work, building a stronger relationship with all Cambridgeshire schools. We believe that schools need to be closely integrated with their communities, and will lobby government for more local accountability for academy schools.

The lives of most children and young people have been totally disrupted for a whole year as a result of Covid. For those towards the beginning or end of their school career this is a particularly important time. It is crucial that the impact on children is recognised, and additional support offered to schools to help children regain lost opportunities for learning. We will work closely with schools to ensure that the Covid recovery program is focused on emotional and social recovery as much as ensuring children are supported in academic work. Many teachers feel exhausted following a year of bad decisions and U-turns from the Conservatives in government. We will work with schools to support improved retention of the experienced staff on whom our schools depend.

Young people at the end of full-time education are entering an extremely challenging job market as a consequence of the recession caused by Brexit and the pandemic. With opportunities for apprenticeships down by over 50 per cent this year, at the same time as many Cambridgeshire employers are struggling to find employees with the qualifications they need, Liberal Democrats believe it is time for a major re-investment in careers advice and support for young people. Our community hubs youth service will help with careers advice for young people, and provide advice on training for people of all ages, not just those leaving school.

We also recognise that the pandemic has had a major impact on the number of apprenticeships available across Cambridgeshire and we will work with Further Education colleges and the Combined Authority to link businesses and apprenticeship providers to expand apprenticeship numbers quickly as the economy recovers.

The early years sector has also been hit by the pandemic, with many providers reducing numbers as fewer families sent young children to nursery. As people return to work, we will ensure that support is available to early years providers to expand again. We will also support Cambridgeshire's nursery schools, and use their expertise to improve the quality of early years provision across the county. The youngest children have also suffered loss of opportunity to socialise and develop language skills during the pandemic. Government have failed to provide a similar level of support to early years providers as has been provided to schools. We will work with child care providers and schools in Cambridgeshire to help the youngest children recover from the pandemic, with a particular focus on early language support, and lobby government for increased funding for training of early years professionals.

Cambridgeshire's schools remain some of the lowest funded in the country. Conservatives in Cambridgeshire have totally failed to improve this situation, with funding for Cambridgeshire's

children and schools still well below the national average. We will lobby hard on this issue at national level, demanding a fair deal for Cambridgeshire's children.

Liberal Democrats strongly oppose the planned imposition by the Government of a 'free school' in Soham. This plan threatens not only provision at Soham Village College, but also educational provision across Cambridgeshire more widely. We will do all in our power to prevent this damaging Conservative decision being implemented.

Cambridgeshire is facing a funding crisis for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, with a budget black hole of over £7 million. Liberal Democrat councils have succeeded in getting government support to resolve this issue, yet Cambridgeshire's Conservatives have failed to get a penny from the Conservative government to help support the most vulnerable children in Cambridgeshire. A Liberal Democrat run Cambridgeshire will lobby relentlessly for funding for Cambridgeshire's most vulnerable children, who deserve better.

Early help and ongoing support

Many of us will need support and help at some stage in our lives, and increasingly Cambridgeshire residents are finding that support and help just isn't there when they need it. Liberal Democrats believe it's time to move from crisis intervention to early help and ongoing support accessible to everyone.

A Liberal Democrat run County Council will rebuild universal support services for young people, adults, and carers through a network of community hubs across the whole of Cambridgeshire—centres where residents of any age will be able to drop in to find help and support. These will vary depending on the size of the community, levels of need for support, and what is already in place locally. These community hubs would provide somewhere residents could come to find information or support. They would also coordinate a universal youth service offer so young people would have somewhere to go with trained staff supporting a programme of activities. This youth offer would be linked to improved careers advice.

Increasing numbers of children and young people are struggling with their mental health, and many parents of young children have been left feeling unsupported at a time of great need. We recognise the growing need for mental health support for young people and a Liberal Democrat run County Council will work closely with schools and the NHS to ensure all families get support and advice when they need it.

The pandemic has brought the fragility of our care sector into focus, and we must tackle this issue locally and nationally if we are to improve the quality of care for Cambridgeshire residents. The Conservatives have totally failed to tackle the crisis in Adult Social Care. We will lobby hard for action to ensure the care system is fairer, backing the Local Government Association Green Paper *The Lives we Want to Lead*.

Carers in particular have carried a huge burden over the past year, and often felt let down by the system. Liberal Democrats nationally have been campaigning for a fair deal for carers, and for a £20 a week rise in carers' allowance. We support this call and will continue to lobby government for fair recognition of the work of carers.

Many carers have had almost no respite from caring during the pandemic. Under the Liberal Democrats, the County Council will work fast to understand the impact of this on those providing care, and to get support back in place to give carers a much needed break.

Our proposed community hubs will provide support for carers and respond to the needs of communities. We will work closely with the third sector and other partners to understand what support is most needed for individual communities.

Children's social care services in Cambridgeshire have been judged to require improvement by OFSTED in three out of four categories. This is not good enough. Liberal Democrats are deeply concerned about the quality of social care services for children in Cambridgeshire, and a Liberal Democrat run council will set up an external independent review of services. We will invest in social care teams and give them the resources they need to support Cambridgeshire's children well.

A green recovery for our economy

Cambridgeshire is a complex county in economic terms. The Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Independent Economic Review posited three distinct geographical economies within the area: the academic and high-tech Greater Cambridge economy, the manufacturing economy of Greater Peterborough, and the agricultural and agri-tech economy of the Fens. All of these economies should be equally respected, encouraged, and supported.

Cambridgeshire is rich in small businesses which particularly need our support if they are to thrive beyond the pandemic. Liberal Democrats are the party of small business.

Parts of Cambridgeshire's economy are dynamic and growing. But there are also significant areas across the county with high levels of deprivation where employment prospects are limited. And the pandemic has impacted the economy in ways that we are only beginning to understand.

The Liberal Democrats want a green recovery as we find new paths for the economy after the pandemic along with a transformation in sustainable travel.

We will help shape a post-Covid recovery that is green and fair. The local economy and local communities will benefit from more skilled green long-term jobs and help for smaller businesses. We can work with partners like regional colleges, schools and employers on developing more apprenticeships, especially in growing green industries like photo-voltaic panels, heat pumps and retrofitting energy-saving measures.

Transport is a major contributor to the climate emergency. The transport system in Cambridgeshire is no longer fit for purpose. It does not serve the needs of all residents. Its failings, especially high levels of congestion, are starting to damage the strength of the economy. We will make sure that public authorities listen better to what local communities say about their transport wants and needs.

We will work with our partners to move as much freight as possible away from roads and on to rail as well as supporting the decarbonisation of the railway network.

We will improve the quality of life and of the environment in our villages, towns, and cities by seeking to reduce rat-running, to reroute HGVs away from settlements where possible, and to cut the speed of traffic, empowering communities, for example through Speedwatches.

We will raise standards for cycling and walking infrastructure, and invest in making movement within communities better as well as improving links between places, ensuring existing cycleways are properly maintained and providing new cycle routes where existing roads are not safe for cyclists.

The pandemic has seen enormous reductions in the use of public transport, resulting from both successive Government lockdown regulations and loss of confidence by passengers on public health grounds. A public transport system that was financially insecure before the pandemic is now at risk of complete collapse. We will work with public and private sector partners to seek to restabilise public transport networks and encourage a return to more sustainable travel options as the public health situation improves.

As the Highways Authority and as a member of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and the Greater Cambridge Partnership, a Liberal Democrat-run County Council will prioritise high quality buses, and a public transport system that is deliverable and that fits with our roadmap to zero carbon. We will also make walking and cycling easier and more attractive, so that residential and commercial areas become low traffic.

With the Combined Authority and the Greater Cambridge Partnership, we will develop a transport policy that is capable of funding much improved public transport across Cambridge's travel to work area, that deters car use and reduces space devoted to it in the congested urban area, thus enabling public transport to become the most efficient and affordable option.

We will explore ways in which 'mobility as a service' can increase residents' transport options, reduce isolation, help people work from or near home and enable low traffic zones.

We will minimise potholes, inadequate footways, and blocked drains, committing to existing highway maintenance budget allocations, and seeking to increase them from 2021 levels.

We will make it easier and more attractive to work from or near home with a range of measures, including improved access to faster internet, whether through Fibre To The Premises, 5G or other technologies. We will focus on areas with particularly constrained connectivity, opportunities for community hubs to provide touch-down sociable work-spaces, and diversification of services in village, town and city centres. We will consider appropriate and well-planned alternative uses for premises in urban centres which have become less attractive as commercial spaces.

As landlords of commercial property, we need to balance both financial and social returns from our investments. There are long-term benefits of working with businesses to plan their way through the pandemic.

Restoring trust

Recent years have seen increasing concerns over the health of our democratic structures, both local, national, and international.

As Liberal Democrats we have always believed that a strong democracy should be based on decision making which is as open as possible and at the lowest level possible.

People need to see how the taxes they pay relate to the services they receive. People also need to be able to see the way in which decisions about their area are being made, and understand the arguments for and against controversial decisions.

The move to remote meetings during the pandemic opened up local government to many more people, who through online platforms were able to view the workings of their local authorities. Some council committee meetings attracted hundreds of viewings, far more than the number of members of the public who would attend a meeting in person. We disagree profoundly with Conservative Government plans to ban online meetings from 7 May, and will lobby hard to reintroduce them as far as possible in the interests of accountability.

The Conservative administration at the County Council has not demonstrated a strong commitment to the openness and transparency we believe is crucial for good decision making. The efforts to cover up the report into the Manor Farm tenancy, combined with regular decisions to hold meetings in private, particularly in the Commercial and Investment Committee, have led to a lack of public trust in the financial management of the County Council. Liberal Democrats will commit to holding meetings and discussions in public wherever possible. Where it is necessary to hold some aspects of a discussion in private, we will always ensure as much as possible of any report was made available for public scrutiny.

To restore public faith in the way in which the County Council is managing its finances a Liberal Democrat run council will request an urgent corporate peer review from the Local Government Association, and publish its findings.

With the move of the County Council to Alconbury, Liberal Democrats fear that public scrutiny and engagement with County Council decision making will be reduced. In order to bring decision making back closer to local people we will aim to devolve significant areas of County Council spending to local liaison meetings, so decisions which affect local communities can be made close to those communities.

These meetings should work closely with partner councils, at district and parish level. Because we want these new structures to be designed in partnership with others a Liberal Democrat County Council will consult with district and parish councils during 2021 to find the right structure for such liaison meetings. Our preference is for liaison meetings to take control of locally held budgets, such as those for Local Highway Improvements, and our new community hubs. And our expectation is that a higher proportion of County Council spending will therefore be managed locally.

We will consider additional ways of ensuring that residents' voices are heard, including for example the use of citizens' juries to make recommendations on contentious local issues.

The local government landscape in Cambridgeshire has become complex following the introduction of the Combined Authority. We will work with partner councils to establish whether a move to two or more unitary councils might improve accountability and transparency across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

While in control of Cambridgeshire County Council, Conservative councillors voted themselves a 13 per cent pay rise, with far higher increases for more senior Conservative councillors. The cost of these increases was £200,000 per year higher than the proposals of the Independent Remuneration Panel. Liberal Democrats voted against these rises, and would commit to never paying councillors more in total than the recommendations of the Independent panel.

Focusing on quality

Under the Conservatives a huge amount of County Council time and energy has been focused on a commercialisation agenda which has brought significant risks and limited returns.

Commercialisation of council activities has meant more decisions falling within the scope of commercial confidentiality, limiting public scrutiny and presenting *faits accomplis*.

The Liberal Democrats will redirect the energy of the Council on improving the quality of the services the Council offers to residents, rather than on risky business ventures. We will re-focus the Council's wholly owned companies on delivering on current projects, and on new projects which would support the core business of the Council.

The County Council has been talking about building its own care home for years, but there has been little progress. Liberal Democrats will put real energy into investing in our care sector, to ensure suitable provision is available for all Cambridgeshire residents who need additional support.

In order to ensure a better quality of service for Cambridgeshire residents across all sectors from the quality of our roads to the standard of care for looked after children, Liberal Democrats will take a balanced approach to taxation. Year after year Cambridgeshire's Conservatives have prioritised keeping taxes low, even when to do so has meant closing children's centres and failing to clear gullies. Their choices have let residents down, as houses flood and mental health problems increase. Liberal Democrats will fight hard for a fairer share of funding from government, and we have no desire to raise taxes, but we will sometimes be willing to ask residents to pay a little more for a fairer society and a better quality of life.

www.libdems.org.uk/join-local