

Draft Green Party Manifesto for Oxford City Council 2021

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Foreword

Oxford is a great city and an exciting place to live. It is a city built by generations of migrants – both from within the British Isles and the wider world. The Green Party has been active in this city for decades and continues to be an influential force. In 1993, Caroline Lucas became the first Green Party councillor on Oxfordshire County Council and in the 2019 European Parliament elections 23% of the Oxford electorate voted for our candidates.

In the 21st century, our city faces new challenges. Like all communities across the planet, it is menaced in various ways by environmental, social and economic deterioration. We see wide and growing gaps in one of the most affluent cities in the UK, there is visible (and less visible) poverty and social exclusion. These threats require a response at all levels from organisations ranging from the United Nations to the communities we live in.

The Green Party believes that local councils, working with their citizens to make a difference, will play a major part in building a better future. We don't take the view that the menace is so vast that we are helpless before it. Like the great Irish politician Edmund Burke, we say: "Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little."

The Green Party has consistently stood up for people and the environment, and has formed part of a powerful opposition against a domineering Labour group. We want a more inclusive society in which everyone feels they have a stake. We want a council whose composition reflects the diversity of opinions within the community it serves. We want more transparency of Council procedures and for the Council to be open about the pressures it faces from powerful vested interests.

In this Manifesto, we set out policies to address these challenges. They are bold, involving change all round, but also realistic. We will involve everyone in Oxford – those of all genders, ages and faiths, and people from all cultures who make our city so dynamic. With your help, we can fight the many issues Oxford faces and build a brighter future.

Our Policies at a Glance

We aren't just another political party. We are a party of social and environmental justice. We support a radical transformation of society for the benefit of all humanity and our planet. We understand that the threats to economic, social and environmental well-being are part of the same problem. As a result, we recognise that solving one of these crises cannot be achieved without solving the others. We will introduce a Green New Deal for Oxford to provide a fairer and more secure future for all.

Policies

1. Oxford to be carbon-neutral by 2030, not the complacent 2050 target favoured by the current Council. All our environmental policies follow from this.
2. We propose that the City Council develops an alternative economic strategy based on encouraging a more localised economy based on local ownership of businesses, one which is more resilient in resisting the projects of speculative property developers.
3. We propose that poverty be recognised on the scale that it actually exists in our city, and that the council both take action itself, and works with local civil society to end social exclusion.
4. We propose an increased effort to provide social housing for rent, encouragement of responsible private landlordship, and action to root out rogue landlords.
5. We propose radical action to counter traffic congestion and the pollution it causes, and to develop traffic management strategies that make getting around our city more pleasant.
6. We propose to celebrate our city's cultural diversity, and to fully support its identity as a City of Sanctuary.
7. We propose a more democratic Council, more fairly elected, more transparent in his operations, working for all the inhabitants of our city.

A Green New Deal for Oxford

Introduction

Local councils all over the world have declared climate emergencies. On the 28th January 2019, Oxford City Council passed a motion to declare one. We believe Oxford should stand up to its reputation of being a world-leading city and share with many communities across the world the aim of becoming carbon neutral by 2030 or earlier.

Electing Green councillors is the most effective way to ensure our city has a wide range of effective policies to fight the climate emergency. Here, we lay out our vision of the policies in the Green Party of England & Wales Manifesto 2019 and how they work at local level.

We will no longer base the success of our city on conventional measures of economic growth. They derive from a social and economic model that is failing. Instead we will look to measures of real prosperity and well-being. We believe that a stable, decent income and financial security lay the foundations of a stable society. We will seek to improve health, reduce inequality and enhance the environment on which we all depend.

The Green New Deal for Oxford will not only cover the climate emergency. We live in a city facing a housing crisis and shocking inequality. Food bank use has increased. Homeless people are suffering on our streets while many live in insecure and poor-quality accommodation. The Green New Deal for Oxford will address structural inequality, provide more sustainable housing (see "Homes for All", p.8) and create new jobs in the process.

Oxford should be known for good quality, well rewarded work in both the manufacturing and service sectors. We will encourage social enterprises and cooperatives as a larger part of the employment mix and protect local businesses. We will work to ensure a successful future for the Covered Market – a popular local

and tourist destination - as a home for a wide variety of independent businesses. We will continue to run Green Fairs each year, giving participating local businesses the opportunity to attract new customers.

We will ensure that Oxford is protected against the worst effects of the climate emergency through addressing flood risk. We will ensure energy generation is local and renewable. Buildings will be made more efficient, not wasting water, heat and energy.

We will work with unions and employers to ensure there is a just transition from old, inefficient, polluting industries to clean and sustainable industries. We will continue to support the campaign for an Oxford Living Wage. We will work towards the creation of a circular economy, expanding re-use and minimising waste.

Energy

The climate crisis demands that the City moves further and faster; driving forward with local energy efficiency schemes and supporting new renewable energy generation that can sit alongside larger regional and national schemes.

For example, Oxford is well placed to make use of its fast flowing rivers and canals for hydro generation and roof spaces and canopies over car parks for solar power.

We support the development and expansion of Energy cooperatives, schemes like the Osney Lock Hydro scheme and solar arrays such as those installed by the Low Carbon Hub on schools and commercial buildings.

Of course, vast amounts of heat and power are wasted through poorly insulated buildings which are fitted with inefficient electrical appliances. This not only needlessly adds to climate change but costs money that the poorest in Oxford can ill afford.

Not only is the city taking a very piecemeal approach to tackling energy efficiency in its own Council housing, community buildings, leisure centres and commercial properties, it is also – through the planning system – allowing the continued construction of poor quality buildings that are not fit for the future.

Improving the built environment, the biggest source of emissions in the City, would not only ensure we played our part in tackling the climate emergency – it will also create skilled jobs, improve the efficiency of our economy and save money.

We will:

- Divert £6m a year away from speculative investment in commercial property outside of the City in to local renewable energy scheme
- Ensure that all new residential and commercial buildings in the city are built to Passivhaus standards, changing the Local Plan as required
- Fully support the recommendations of the cross party climate emergency review group
- Improve the efficiency of council buildings to an equivalent of (or better than) an Energy Performance Certificate A rating.
- Seek to expand schemes such as Cosy Homes to Retrofit buildings with enhanced insulation and other energy saving measures using lessons learned from Energie Sprong projects in Nottingham and elsewhere
- Work with landlords in the private sector to improve Energy Performance Certificate ratings building high standards into the new Registration Scheme , issuing notices of improvement and providing supporting funding where needed.
- Improve heating infrastructure across communities through energy sharing loops and other methods to replace natural gas based boilers.

- Investigate the feasibility of expanding energy generation from our rivers and canals, and solar farms in open spaces.
- Support the development of local energy companies

Homes For All

Oxford is in dire need of high quality properly affordable housing. There are currently in excess of 3000 households on the waiting list for social housing. We believe that access to affordable, secure and decent housing is a human right, not a privilege. Nobody should be left homeless, or have insecure accommodation in the 21st century.

Our Area Action Plans and revised City Plan will ensure that new developments have a high proportion of social and affordable housing (100% if on council land). Developers should use creative energy and water saving measures so that new builds meet Passivhaus standards. Developments should be of quality design that fits with the surroundings, enhances species biodiversity on-site and provides access to safe green spaces, improving residents' wellbeing.

In addition, the use of low-carbon, modern building materials will be encouraged. We will also ensure developed sites reduce flooding risk across the whole site compared to the present day, helping to prevent worsening floods downstream of Oxford.

We will seek to purchase properties that have been vacant for a long time, using Compulsory Purchase Orders where necessary. We will then return these properties to social housing, with conversion to accommodation and retrofitting with resource saving measures as needed.

We recognise that the use of riverboats for accommodation provides a cheaper and cleaner way of living. We will work to improve residential moorings and increase their number, including on Castle Mill Stream.

We believe it is important to preserve this heritage in waterside developments such as Jericho Wharf, ensuring river-users are given fair consideration as well as the need to build housing for social and economic reasons.

We will:

- Ensure housing need is met utilising brownfield sites as soon as possible.
- Revise the Oxford City Plan to reflect the declaration of the climate emergency.
- Expand the number of secure residential moorings.
- Purchase property that has been vacant in the long term, returning it to use as social housing.
- Oppose evictions which result from cuts or delays in benefits or Universal Credit.
- Investigate the feasibility of a social housing rent freeze to help our poorest households and of controlling private rents to make lower rents possible.
- Introduce new Council-backed letting agency offering fairer rents and more secure contracts
- Offer more support to organisations that offer 'safety net' services such as the *Oxford Homelessness Project*.

Sustainable Transport

Transport is the only sector in the UK in which carbon dioxide emissions have grown since 1990, and the transport sector is far from ready for a net-zero 2030 vision. While transport infrastructure and planning in Oxford is primarily the responsibility of Oxfordshire County Council, the City Council must play a key role in developing a sustainable transport vision for Oxford.

A range of policies are urgently required to tackle the acute challenge Oxford faces and these policies need to be adhered to, not left as they have been for the past three decades, as words on pages. There needs to be a greater focus on increasing journeys made on foot and by bike in particular – walking and cycling needs are currently under-funded, with poor infrastructure and inconsistent provision.

Buses should be an effective form of mass transport around the city, but journey times are slow, cross-city journeys are difficult, and congestion is a major problem in High Street. We will work with the bus companies to improve journey times of the city's buses and ensure a fairer and cheaper pricing policy, particularly for young people.

We will:

- Work with the County Council to implement cycle and walking-friendly transport improvements and to improve the 'Connecting Oxfordshire' proposals.
- Introduce electric shuttles to deliver goods into and around the city and examine the possibility of expanding goods freight by cycling within the city.
- Support the creation of a real Zero Emission Zone in the city by 2030, not a compromised one.
- Improve cycling infrastructure by creating joined-up cycleways, improving cyclists' priority on the roads and developing a completely connected cycling network.
- Introduce policies that aim to keep parked cars off pavements and footways.
- Introduce docked-bike sharing schemes with commercial partners.
- Work with the bus companies to speed up the flow of buses in the city and develop fairer ticket pricing.
- Expand the proposed workplace parking levy across the whole of Oxford to fund transport improvements in the city, and examine road pricing options for the city.
- Promote teleworking and other forms of working at home, and improved broadband internet access to decrease the need to travel.

Public Spaces

Streets and open areas in the city should be treated as public spaces that are open to a range of uses – not just as thoroughfares for motorised traffic. Roads designed primarily for the use of private vehicles above all other means of transport, discourage people from using more sustainable methods of transport or for using public areas for other uses.

We will redesign minor roads with chicanes and pinch points, utilising trees and flowerbeds as major features, and speed-humps where possible. We will work with the County Council to ensure that all entrances to minor roads from major roads have gateway treatments such as Copenhagen-style crossings, where the pavement is extended across the whole intersection. These features will reduce the incidence of rat-running whilst making navigation by bike and on foot much easier.

In addition to creating safer streets, these changes will promote well-being, fostering a sense of community through the introduction of features such as raised communal growing beds, and make areas more pleasant to live in. The built environment around the street should also reflect the mixed use of the space, not just as a highway. We will seek to introduce cooler areas in new pedestrianised zones in the city centre by making use of fountains, tree planting, green spaces and 'green walls'.

We will:

- Reclaim roads, such as Broad Street, for use as 'liveable streets', creating spaces that encourage play and a sense of community, not just a need to get from A to B.
- Introduce traffic calming measures on minor roads to reduce rat-running, and create safer roads for cyclists and pedestrians.
- Improve the Connecting Oxfordshire proposals using Copenhagen-style crossings and other Mini-Holland road features.
- Create attractive areas in the public spaces of our city by adding fountains, benches, green spaces, green walls, and more trees.
- Promote public open spaces for health and recreation, and protect sites against encroachment from unwanted development.

- Continue to update and extend playgrounds, play equipment and recreational facilities for younger citizens; and develop facilities to maintain active lifestyles for older citizens including maintaining footpaths, walkways and providing seating, all of which can aid access.

A University City

Life in Oxford is intricately wrapped up with the city's two universities: as well as being major employers in the city, they represent to many people the essence of the city.

However, with their special relationship comes responsibilities: the demand for accommodation caused by the increase in student numbers has been a contributing factor in the housing crisis in the city, and as many of Oxford University's colleges are major landowners they have a direct interest in development around the city.

Students in Oxford are a vital part of our communities – sustaining the local economy by providing employment and often staying here to work themselves, and contributing to local culture by participating in society and bringing new people to the city. We also recognise that the many students who work during their studies often do so in low paid and harsh working environments where little attention is paid to their needs. However, they are often neglected by local authorities who consider them a transitory population whose needs are less.

We will:

- Require students to be supported on equal terms by council services and welcomed as members of their local communities.
- Campaign to ensure that City Council housing policies reflect the needs and aspirations of students to live in decent accommodation which they can actually afford throughout their studies.
- Fight for greater transparency and accountability by the universities and their constituent colleges, particularly regarding development and use of land that they own.

Food & Biodiversity

The climate emergency and the biodiversity crisis are inextricably linked and must be addressed in tandem. The movement of food goods around the world significantly contributes to an individual's carbon footprint. Locally grown food significantly cuts down these emissions and supports British farmers, keeping more money in the economy. The methods of farming we use need to be addressed with an emphasis on organic and compassionate food production.

In addition to creating new public green spaces, we will develop community gardens and enhance allotments. The use of growing beds for wild flowers, trees and other plants will create biodiversity havens, helping to combat the biodiversity crisis, supporting bees and other pollinators in the city. We will encourage groups within communities to take an active role in developing council verges and green spaces, building an environment that is designed by communities in their interests.

We will:

- Reverse cuts to the city's environmental budget.
- Protect and enhance the diversity of species within Oxford, via habitat protection and other measures.
- Increase biodiversity in the city through the use of new community planting beds and planting in pedestrianised areas.
- Review the criteria used for felling trees in Oxford, with a view to retaining trees wherever possible.

A Fair Oxford For All

Oxford is widely known as a wonderfully diverse city. We are proud that Oxford has declared itself a City of Sanctuary and stands up for the rights of asylum seekers and other vulnerable migrants. We intend to protect, welcome and celebrate our BAME, LGBTQIA+ and international residents. The Green Party has consistently opposed Brexit and campaigned for a People's Vote. Now that we are entering the transition period, we will work to ensure that the many residents of and visitors to our city who come from the EU and beyond feel welcome and are supported where needed.

We recognise that trafficking, modern slavery and county lines flourish where people have no rights or power. We also recognise that many minority groups are afraid to report crime. We will use our role in shaping police work under the Police & Crime Commissioner to lower the barriers to these groups reporting crime, helping them to feel safer in our city.

We Will:

- Raise awareness and promote the needs of domestic violence survivors.
- Make anonymised CVs mandatory within the local public sector to ensure that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) candidates are treated fairly.
- Work with BAME, LGBTQIA+ and women's communities to protect them from discrimination and lower barriers for their reporting of crimes.
- Support annual celebrations of the civic contribution of BAME, LGBTQIA+ and women's communities
- Ensure young people have places to meet where they are safe and welcome.
- Address issues of safety and protection for victims of modern slavery, by ensuring people have access to and know their rights.
- Raise awareness of the plight of asylum seekers and 'stateless' people who have no rights to work or claim benefits.
- Work with front-line services to ensure charities and local welfare groups are adequately supported in their work.

Power to People

Power within the city council should be held to account and processes should be transparent, not inaccessible and based on the undemocratic cabinet system. We will push the council to return to a democratic committee-based system. We believe a more proportional voting system would give a wider and more balanced representation of communities on the Council.

In a democracy, people should have the power to shape their own lives. We firmly believe the highest form of democracy is direct participation of the electorate in issues that affect them. Decisions should be made through face to face discussion and real debate. We propose to bring back Area Committees which allowed council policy to be shaped more directly by those it affected. We believe that nothing should be done centrally if it can be done equally well, or better, locally. We will push for people to have more say in decisions that affect their communities including shaping plans and sharing out money.

We support the Oxford Citizens' Assembly on the climate emergency as a model of democratic process. We want to see its recommendations incorporated into council policy and we will push for similar processes for other issues.

We Will:

- Ensure that suggestions of the Citizens Assembly form part of Oxford City Council's policies on responding to climate change.
- Re-establish the Area Committees with local devolved decision-making and with adequate financial resources.

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- Reintroduce the Committee System of decision making so that all councillors have a say and stop the concentration of power in a few individuals.
- Introduce a Charter of Citizens' Rights to give people more of a say in decision making.
- Increase the use of Citizens Assemblies to inform council policy.