

Kirklees Liberal Democrat Manifesto 2019/2020

A Liberal Democrat Approach

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.

Our 2019 local election manifesto stems from conversations with residents, members and supporters across Kirklees. It lays out what Kirklees Liberal Democrats have been working towards and what we want to secure for our communities.

The local elections this year fall on the 2nd May. If you agree with our ideas, vote for us, and together we'll demand better for Kirklees.

Councillor John Lawson

Leader of Kirklees Council Liberal Democrat Group.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Lawson', written in a cursive style.

Health and Social Care

Support the Hands-Off Huddersfield Royal Infirmary campaign

Kirklees Lib Dems support the Hands-Off HRI campaign to save Huddersfield Royal Infirmary, its A&E and Acute Services. However, we have long advocated for a strategic decision to be made about a replacement hospital to serve the needs of Huddersfield and North Kirklees. We believe that a new fully-staffed, fully-equipped and fit-for-purpose hospital should be built to replace the outdated HRI within the next 10 years.

Call for 1p on income tax for the NHS and social care

We support the national Lib Dem party's pledge to raise income tax to help fund the NHS and social care. The NHS is in chaos and a penny-in-the-pound rise on all income tax bands would raise over £6bn a year, which would be used for social care, care outside of hospital, mental health and public health. It's vital that we protect health and care services long-term.

Review of local access to NHS services

We believe that no matter where residents live, they should be able to access good health and social care services. However, we recognise that health inequalities exist, particularly in North Kirklees, and that some patients have different access, experience and outcomes when they use the NHS. We want to reduce these differences and would support a comprehensive review of how our health services are delivered across the whole of Kirklees.

Care Closer to home

We believe that it is a right for everyone to have easy access to health, wellbeing and care services in their local community. We believe that health services can be provided and coordinated more effectively through greater partnership between Kirklees Council, the NHS, Locala and local community groups.

Housing

Building homes that meet our needs

Kirklees Council's Local Development Plan provides a framework for housing and job growth in our borough over the next 15 years and will result in 31,000 new homes being built. Although Kirklees Lib Dems opposed the Local Plan, the Labour administration formally adopted it early 2019. While we recognise the urgent need for more housing, we are concerned that the Local Plan is based on out-of-date population growth figures. The superseded population projections would mean fewer homes would be needed for fewer people, so we believe that the Labour administration is enabling the Council to needlessly build on green belt land and is failing to protect our valuable open spaces. While the Local Plan is going ahead, we will continue to fight to ensure that new homes are built in the right places and take into account the future needs of both the existing communities and the future population.

Infrastructure must follow development

We all recognise that additional infrastructure is required where there is significant new housing. However, we are concerned that communities are not equipped to accommodate the influx of new housing developments and we need to ensure that there is a stronger link between house building and infrastructure. One way of doing this is to ensure that any development includes a contribution to local amenities, but not decided by Labour councillors and council officers behind closed doors. We believe all ward councillors should be asked to lead on discussions about required infrastructure for their wards, in collaboration with local residents. We are fighting to ensure that money generated through development is retained locally and spent on local infrastructure, including roads and schools, and not spent elsewhere.

Investment in affordable homes

We believe that new affordable and social housing is not being prioritised as it should and we would encourage the Council to exploit new rules which allow local authorities to borrow more money to increase housing stock. This would allow us to take a fresh look at our building programmes and build decent homes that people can actually afford. We also recognise that the current

planning system is hindering the ability to secure affordable housing and we believe that the planning system needs to be significantly reformed long-term.

Prioritise brownfield land for development

We are calling for the Government to introduce a genuine 'brownfield first' policy, which would ensure that previously developed or under-used land could be prioritised for housing over green spaces and the countryside.

Councils across England, including Kirklees, have identified enough brownfield land for at least 1 million new homes and two-thirds of these sites are ready to build on. We need a policy that empowers councils to refuse greenfield development where there are suitable brownfield alternatives.

Empty Homes

Bringing empty homes back into use will help to ensure that there are more homes available for families across Kirklees. It is also part of the solution to re-house the growing number of people who are homeless. We believe that Kirklees Council has a key role in this and we have long campaigned for the Council to look at options to bring privately-owned empty homes back into use, in order to increase the number of homes for rent or sale across the district. We have argued that the Council should make more use of its existing powers, such as Empty Dwelling Management Orders, and we support the increase in the empty homes premium, to force owners of empty homes to pay more in council tax and to incentivise owners into bringing property back into use. Furthermore, we believe that the Council could incentivise owners of empty homes to carry out repairs.

Give people power to shape their communities

Neighbourhood Plans give power to local people to shape housing in their communities, for example, in deciding where new housing is built. Kirklees Lib Dems have already helped in developing a neighbourhood plan in Lepton, but we want to extend this opportunity to all communities across Kirklees. We will also encourage the establishment of new town and parish councils to have a meaningful say in the running of local services.

Care housing

We believe that council land should be assessed for extra care housing for the elderly before it goes to market. We have successfully campaigned for land near town centres to be used in this way. We need the right kind of housing for what people need.

The Environment and Planning

Promoting pedestrian-friendly town centres

We support traffic management schemes to discourage unnecessary traffic from our town centres. We recognise the benefits of pedestrianisation, in promoting walking, improving safety and mobility, reducing air and noise pollution, providing more space for planning areas and public realm improvements and improving retail turnover. Our towns need to be able to accommodate vehicles, but we believe that measures can be taken to make them more pedestrian-friendly.

Promote recycling and improve waste policy

We are alarmed that Kirklees Council's currently has a recycling rate of 27%, which is well below the national average of 45%. We believe that the Council should seek to prioritise identifying ways to minimise the rejected recycling loads that currently drive down recycling rates and should raise public awareness about what can and can't be recycled.

We argue that the Council's waste management policy, including restrictions in using recycling centres, is increasing fly-tipping and believe the policy needs to be urgently reviewed. We also believe that there are opportunities for the Council to consider new innovative means of waste collection at future large housing developments.

Promote alternative energy sources

There is still a dependence on fossil fuels locally and nationally, but we believe that the Council can be proactive in promoting alternative energy sources and helping to bring clean energy to our local communities. It can do this in a number of ways, such as encouraging the development of small hydroelectric plants, installing solar panels on council-owned property, supporting new low-energy performance standards and adopting zero-carbon principles in house building and installing more electric vehicle charging points at council-owned car parks, including at council offices and schools.

We are concerned that West Yorkshire Pension Fund (WYPF) continues to invest heavily in fossil fuel assets and put pensioners' money at risk. We are calling for WYPF to divest from fossil fuels and to invest in sustainable energy.

Cut air pollution

Poor air quality is harmful to everyone and long-term exposure is associated with a number of medical conditions. Many of our poorest areas are also those most affected by air pollution. We feel that more should be done to invest in additional infrastructure to measure air quality on all major roads across the district. We also believe that there should be an imposition of stricter conditions in terms of air quality as part of the planning process, in the form of supplementary planning documentation. This would ensure additional checks are carried out where there are new developments. Upgrading our capacity to monitor air quality would help to provide residents with real-time information and warnings where pollution levels are too high.

We also support the fast-tracking of the Northern Forest, a multi-regional scheme to plant 50 million trees in close proximity to the M62 corridor. The scheme has enormous environmental benefits and will improve air quality for our residents and we must look for opportunities to enhance its impact.

Opposition to fracking

We are opposed to fracking within Kirklees and will do everything we can do legally to oppose any attempts to frack locally. Fracking is hindering investment in renewable sources of energy and we advocate the transition to low-carbon energy production instead.

Extend the greenway network

Greenways perform an important multi-functional role as green corridors and travel routes and bring social, economic and environmental benefits, promoting recreation and leisure opportunities and connecting different areas. The Spen Valley Greenway is a fantastic green corridor and art trail, connecting Ravensthorpe, Cleckheaton, Dewsbury and Heckmondwike, while the Calder Valley Greenway is a popular route between Huddersfield and Dewsbury. However, we want to extend the greenway network and link green corridor policy to existing woodland.

Create a new cycling policy

We believe that a new comprehensive Kirklees-wide cycling policy is required, to promote cycling in our town and village centres. In Huddersfield, we believe that there is scope for provision of more segregated routes for cyclists on busy

roads and there is an opportunity to integrate walking and cycling provision into future road improvement schemes. Traffic management principles could be better employed to make cycling and walking simpler.

Promote plastic-free

Single-use plastic items, such as cups, straws and plastic bags, contribute to polluting our environment and we think that the Council could be more proactive in helping to stop using these materials and in moving towards sustainable alternatives. We would undertake an audit of single-use plastics used by the Council and would seek to replace them, where possible, with reusable alternatives.

Tackling road bottlenecks and improving our roads

Road congestion is a big problem in some of our areas and we need to invest in schemes where road bottlenecks and road congestion is most pronounced. We have successfully campaigned for road improvements to Lockwood Bar and Longroyd Bridge. As a priority, we would like the Council to explore options for a new crossing of the River Colne in Milnsbridge and a new access road into Slaithwaite from Manchester Road.

We also support additional investment in repairing community roads, ensuring that money is spent before the roads are damaged irreversibly.

Community Safety and Resilience

Tackling anti-social behaviour and promoting community cohesion

Anti-social behaviour is on the rise across Kirklees. It is committed by people from all age groups and backgrounds. We would ensure the Council uses its legal powers at its disposal, such as Community Protection Notices and Public Space Protection Orders, to help tackle this problem.

We would also work to ensure the provision of more council and community services, designed to encourage people into constructive and creative activity. We would make the reduction of anti-social behaviour one of the Council's key performance indicators.

We would also strive to create cohesive communities. One way to achieve this would be through additional council support for community events.

Portable CCTV cameras

In order to deter crime and anti-social behaviour, we would work to introduce and maintain additional long-term community portable CCTV cameras, which would be installed at crime 'hot spots'.

Working with neighbourhood policing teams

We want council officers and councillors to work closer with neighbourhood policing teams to help tackle issues of crime and anti-social behaviour. One way of doing this is by holding joint ward surgeries and through council area committee meetings. This would allow residents to be able to speak to councillors and police at the same time about ward issues.

Promoting road safety

We would ensure that Council resources are used for traffic calming measures in areas where speeding is a problem. We would promote road safety by increasing the number of speed checks across the district and by promoting use of portable speed indicator devices.

Establishing police boards

We don't believe that crime commissioners are performing what they are set out to do in overseeing how crime is tackled in police force areas. We would support the abolition of the West Yorkshire Police & Crime Commissioner post and would support the creation of accountable and devolved local police

boards.

Restorative justice

Restorative justice is a system which focuses on the rehabilitation of offenders through reconciliation and brings together those harmed by crime and those responsible. It is not an alternative to prison sentences, but can be a way of placing the victim at the heart of the rehabilitation process, targeting those at risk of re-offending and resolving conflict. We would promote use of community justice panels.

Improving the local economy

Developing town centre policies

We feel that the Labour administration is too focused on developing town centre action plans in Huddersfield and Dewsbury, and we would aim to broaden regeneration plans to become Kirklees-wide, encompassing other towns and villages across the district. All residents want vibrant economies, whether they live in town centres, villages or outlying settlements and rural communities.

Local business networking

We believe that Kirklees Council can work closer with Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership and existing businesses, universities and local businesses to help drive strategic economic improvements across the district. Working in partnership could help to generate money to incentivise the clustering of businesses with particular specialisations.

Boosting exports

We would work to support local businesses to access new markets and export more. We would also promote our existing cultural links.

Start-up zones and markets

One of the ways out of poverty is to give people the tools to build, trade, develop and start up their own enterprises. However, the start-up costs can be so high that often only those with existing capital can undertake new enterprises. Through the Council, we would seek to set up enterprise spaces for new start-ups and invest in our local markets. We believe that the more vibrant our markets, the more vibrant our towns will be.

Crowd-funding

We believe in empowering people and communities. That is why we would set up a website that allows people to fundraise for small community capital projects in their own community and also to donate to projects that support the most economically deprived areas in Kirklees.

Pop-up shops

Shops across our district are closing at an alarming rate, particularly in Huddersfield and Dewsbury, and we believe that pop-up shops are one way to

temporarily improve the retail offer and preserve the high street from further deterioration. Of course, the Council needs to be better at supporting and retaining our existing shops and businesses.

Car parking management

We have successfully campaigned to ensure that car parking in a number of our villages and towns is free and we will fight to ensure that visitors can continue to benefit from limited free parking.

We also recognise that our high street is under enormous pressure and our retailers are beset by declining footfall and have to respond to online competition and high costs. While we recognise that the business rates are set by national government, we want councils, including Kirklees, to have greater control over the money that is raised locally. We are also proposing a Huddersfield town centre parking pilot, which would allow free parking after 3pm on weekdays and free all day on Sunday. This would complement physical improvements to the town centre, and provide a greater incentive for people to shop and visit.

Creating vibrant Communities

Local decision making

We believe that in our existing cabinet system, power is concentrated in the hands of senior officers and cabinet members. We also believe that residents are often frustrated at not being able to be heard and not being able to engage with councillors and officers in a suitable public forum. In resolving this, one way is to reinstate Area Committees, which would help to ensure that decisions, such as highways spending, regeneration planning and services, could be taken at a local level. A committee system of governance would help to promote accountability and democratic engagement and promote local decision-making. We would also support the development of neighbourhood forums and neighbourhood planning groups. We want active, vibrant communities and believe in putting communities in control.

Intergenerational fairness

We believe that inter-generational inequality has widened over time and it is no longer true that each generation is richer than the one that preceded, in the context of falling incomes and rising property prices. There are many inter-related issues which are intractable and require long-term solutions for all generations. However, we want intergenerational fairness to be at the heart of the Council's key strategies and policies. We will continue to fight to ensure council services are inclusive of all communities and all residents, all ages and backgrounds.

Ensuring that local communities remain connected

We understand that rural transport is in a state of crisis, resulting in bus cuts and shrinking transport networks and leaving communities isolated. Where we can, we will continue to campaign to protect our bus services from further reductions.

Schools

Our schools need to be properly funded and urgently need more investment and we will continue to fight against central government imposed funding cuts. We also need to ensure that school places are provided in those areas where we know the Local Plan will affect. We will continue to campaign so that every child has a place in a good school close to where they live.

We will also continue to work to raise educational achievement standards.

The Liberal Democrats in government gave Kirklees schools millions of pounds in extra money called the 'Pupil Premium' to help children in our schools. Every infant in Kirklees now has a free school meal, saving families £400 for every child.

Support for new council tenants

We believe that the Council has a vital role in ensuring that vulnerable people are protected. However, the Council could do more to assist new council tenants who have arrived from homelessness. We have proposed a pilot scheme to support those who have recently moved in to a council property. There could be a package offered, including beds, reconditioned fridges and electric cookers, sofas and 'white goods'. These measures, once in place, would provide a stability and break one of the cycles of homelessness that is contributing to rising levels of homelessness across the district.

Kirklees cultural strategy and libraries

We share many residents' concerns that closing museums will result in a loss of local heritage and have been dismayed about the closure of Dewsbury Museum and Red House Museum, as well as uncertainty about the future of Tolson Museum. We are concerned that plans revealed by the Council for new museums will take many years to be realised and argue that more immediate strategies need to be in place.

We also recognise that libraries are a vital service at the heart of the community and we are concerned about the continued cuts in the library service. We would help to protect libraries from further cuts.

More funding for youth projects

We believe that youth services have been cut too far in the past and we need to reinvest in youth engagement programmes and youth projects. These programmes and activities should play an important role in protecting young people from exploitation of all kinds and would also help to engage young people.