Manifesto 2019

The Lib Dem plan for our area

BECAUSE THE COTSWOLDS DESERVES BETTER

1. A record of action
2. A plan for the Cotswolds
3. Energy, experience and diversity

www.cotswoldlibdems.org.uk

Published and promoted by C Twells on behalf of the Cotswold Liberal Democrats, all at Unit 3 Global Business Park, Wilkinson Road, Cirencester, GL7 2EG.
Contents

Foreword

Better Housing

Better Planning

Better Health and Wellbeing, Social Mobility and Community Safety

Better Governance and Management

Better Economy

Better Environment, Facilities and Tackling Climate Change

Better Parking

Better Services
The Cotswolds is a good place live, work and visit. Our towns and villages are vibrant, our communities strong and despite the uncertainty of 10 years of austerity, our local economy is resilient.

There are, of course, annoyances and issues that get under our skin such as lack of parking, the state of the roads, lack of planning control and half-hearted consultations on decisions that affect our lives.

Beneath the generally shiny surface though, there are further issues that Cotswold residents are becoming increasingly concerned about:
Solving the growing housing crisis
Responding to the decline in the high street
Tackling rural isolation

Many of these issues should have been dealt with years ago, such as providing more parking, completing a local plan and investing in local people - but they weren’t. It is also worth noting that some communities feel neglected, overlooked and left behind and Liberal Democrats are committed to ensuring that this changes.

A recent report by the Social Mobility Commission found that Cotswold District was one of the worst places in England for social mobility - if you are born poor in the Cotswolds, it’s hard to escape poverty. This is due to a number of factors but poor public transport and lack of employment opportunities were key considerations. This has to change and this manifesto will set the Cotswolds on the right path.

Over the past 16 years, the Conservatives have controlled the District Council - we think you deserve better.

If you read our manifesto and you agree our policies are reasonable and pragmatic, then please support us so we can help guide the district from being good, to being better, ensuring it is the best place to live in the UK.

Councillor Joe Harris
Leader of the Liberal Democrats on Cotswold District Council
Everyone deserves a decent roof over their head. The recent work done by volunteers to help rough sleepers in our towns shows local people do care and this view is widely shared by Cotswold residents.

We should be putting people before profit when it comes to delivering housing. Under the Conservatives we’ve seen thousands of houses built across the Cotswolds by big developers whose sole objective is to turn a profit from house building. Putting social housing at the heart of the solution to the housing crisis will be our priority.

The plan for 2350 houses on the edge of Cirencester will deliver just 70 social rented units.

House prices are well beyond the means of most people in the Cotswolds and high rents mean that most people who grow up here are priced out of staying here. This in turn harms the diversity of our communities.

A Liberal Democrat run Council would take the initiative on delivering social rented housing to help young people, families, members of the armed forces and those in the emergency services. We would do this whilst recognising that many communities have grown significantly in recent years and development might not be appropriate in particular areas.

The last time the UK hit its house building target was when Councils were delivering Council houses; we believe that this is the only way to make a dent in the area’s housing crisis.

The Conservatives’ failure to put in place meaningful energy efficient building policies has left us with a legacy of thousands of houses that are not fit for the future, leaving residents vulnerable to overheating and paying higher bills for life.
If the Liberal Democrats are elected to run the District Council, we will:

- Get the Council building homes again (using existing Government initiatives ignored by the current District Council)
- Invest in community land trusts and smaller housing providers
- Implement a robust planning policy framework to ensure new homes achieve high sustainable construction standards
- Learning from Cheltenham Borough Council we will deliver homes directly for military veterans
- Develop a robust Empty Homes Strategy and use Empty Dwelling Management orders to bring empty properties back into use
- Scrap the self-build registration fee and promote self-build as a mainstream choice for everyone seeking a home of their own. (See https://nacsba.org.uk/)
- Put policies in place to ensure that all new builds are as environmentally friendly as possible making use of schemes such as solar panels, grey water systems and electric car charging points
- Work with Parish Councils, community groups and local charities to identify social housing need beyond what the District Council already knows
- Stop planning permissions for holiday homes until the housing waiting list is reduced by 50%

Did you know?

- The average house price in the Cotswold District is £372,539 (UK house price index, April 2019)
- As of April 2019 there are currently 1829 people on the social housing waiting list in the Cotswold District
- Just 70 social rented homes delivered by the ‘Chesterton development’ on the edge of Cirencester
Better planning

Good planning can deliver real benefits for local communities. It can mean high quality affordable homes, infrastructure upgrades, more jobs, better public transport and vibrant town and village centres.

Since the Conservatives started running the District Council in 2003 planning has spiralled out of control.

Under their management the area’s ‘local plan’ was seven years late being implemented and this, coupled with a failure to demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply as required by government, meant that for years it was open season for predatory developers to turn green fields into housing, often without the adequate infrastructure to support them and without paying due regard to the threat of climate change in how these homes are built. Communities like Fairford, Moreton-in-Marsh, South Cerney and Tetbury and other settlements are testament to this.

The Cotswold Conservation Board has plans to designate the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty as a National Park. This has the potential to significantly worsen affordability of housing in the Cotswolds and could also strip the local authority of planning powers handing decision making to unelected bureaucrats.

In the planning department there is a large backlog of planning applications waiting to be processed due to a lack of staff and the planning enforcement team has been reduced to just two dedicated staff resulting in planning breaches often going unpunished.

Stratton Place in Cirencester where numerous planning breaches over the years have gone unpunished
Better planning

If the Liberal Democrats are elected to run the District Council, we will:

- Begin a review starting in 2020 of the Cotswold Local plan 2011 - 2031 in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework; tackling climate change will be a central theme of the review
- Develop supplementary planning documents on low-carbon construction, retrofit and renewable energy
- Ensure the planning enforcement team has more staff and resources to enforce planning breaches
- Adopt Historic England’s ‘Stop the Rot’ guidance as policy to ensure adequate safeguards are in place to protect historic buildings, and develop robust guidance on improving the energy efficiency of heritage buildings, learning from best practice by Councils such as Bath & North East Somerset
- Campaign against plans to designate the Cotswolds as a National Park
- Ensure that all new developments are built with superfast broadband as standard
- Review the Cotswold Design Code to ensure new housing respects our locally distinctive building style, materials and craftsmanship while promoting innovation. (The current code is too restrictive in some ways and not enough in others. This leads to generic housing as developers use it as a tickbox exercise rather than really engaging with what people want and need. In other ways it hinders the use of new materials, methods and design)

Did you know?

- The Conservatives were 7 years late implementing a a ‘local plan’
- Thanks to the lack of an up-to-date local plan 82 planning appeals have been lost since 2012 costing taxpayers hundreds of thousands of pounds
- At time of writing (April 2019) there is currently a backlog of 62 unprocessed planning applications
Better health, wellbeing, social mobility and community safety

There are many sensible ways a council can help communities. With massive austerity cuts to local councils and cuts to Gloucestershire Police resulting in 250 fewer police officers we all have to pull our weight and work together - complaining is not a strategy.

If the Liberal Democrats are elected to run the District Council, we will:

- Explore ways that the District Council can help deliver better bus services for residents across the District and also review existing bus services with a view to filling gaps and creating an holistic timetable
- Work with mental health charities locally to increase their capacity and set up a Counselling prescription fund to provide hundreds of residents with Counselling
- Provide rough sleepers with mental health support to ensure that when they are rehomed that they don’t end up back on the street
- Become a dementia-friendly Council in line with the Alzheimer’s society’s guidelines
- Reinstate the youth activity fund of £1500 per Councillor
- Help towns and villages with the cost and logistics of delivering youth provision
- Look to directly employ youth workers so every community has access to one
- Promote healthy lifestyles by working with the District’s leisure centres, gyms and fitness clubs
- Look to provide financial assistance to organisations such as the District’s food banks and Citizens Advice Bureau
- We will help to reduce ‘period poverty’ in our schools by providing sanitary products free of charge in our secondary schools and colleges
Better governance and management

For many residents, the way Cotswold District Council has been run over the last 16 years has felt like a dictatorship with all the power held by the leader and five other cabinet members.

We've seen a culture of secrecy develop where backbenchers, opposition councillors and residents are left out in the cold and the need to protect the reputation of the Council trumps public interest and transparency.

Because of the Conservatives the Council now holds the unwelcome record for the most appearances by one authority in Private Eye's 'rotten boroughs' section - you deserve better!

If the Liberal Democrats are elected to run the District Council, we will:

- Start the process of securing a Unitary Authority in Gloucestershire by working with colleagues across the County to seek common ground and consensus
- Restructure the senior management to include a Chief Executive for the Council to champion and deliver the Council's priorities at officer level
- Set up a review into Council structure looking at the benefits of the committee system vs cabinet and other systems with findings to be implemented in 2021.
- Explore the creation of ‘area committees’ supported with budgets to improve localities. These committees could be made up of District Councillors, Town and Parish Councillors, members of community groups and other residents
- Employ ‘district liaison officers’ whose role is to be the conduit between residents, parish councils and developers to ensure that any issues raised by these groups are investigated and followed through by the Council where possible
- Review the Council’s position with ‘Publica’ and which services should be directly delivered by the District Council
- Adopt a transparency charter underpinned by the principle that the Council's job is to inform and involve the public not defend the Council against the public
• We will review the structure of democratic services to ensure Councillors are well supported by staff and that the staff supporting Councillors are well resourced to respond quickly
• Review the Council’s definition of efficiency learning from other similar-sized Councils
• Whilst the Council remains under the cabinet system we will appoint a Cabinet member with responsibility for Parish Councils
• Abolish the rule which forces residents to submit questions a full week before council meetings. Residents will be able to submit questions on the day of full council meetings and demand answers from council spokespeople.
• Start the process to enable webcasting of all full council and committee meetings
• Use social media to engage with residents so they can report issues and be informed about the work of the Council
The Cotswolds has thousands of micro businesses and thriving small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The Council needs to take an active role in promoting economic growth and this should be reflected in the Council's policies.

Under the Conservatives we've seen parking charges hiked with no reinvestment into the local economy, a failure to plan for the future of high streets in our towns and villages and an unwillingness to take a serious role in economic development.

Tourism is an important part of the local economy but tourism often creates the lowest paid jobs and can turn our towns and villages into places only visitors enjoy spending time in.

A priority is delivering high quality employment and community-driven business opportunities in the District so residents don't have to commute to larger population centres which only adds to congestion, pollution and people having less spare time and spare cash.

The scandal-hit Cotswold Water Park is a big part of the local economy which needs rejuvenating and this will require strategic and political direction.
If the Liberal Democrats are elected to run the District Council we will:

- Actively work with local residents, businesses and Town and Parish Councils to develop ‘high street’ plans and action teams to ensure that our market towns and villages remain vibrant
- Use the influence that the District Council has to lobby the government for lower business rates and to reform the business rates system
- Develop a district-wide strategy to support the development of community-owned enterprises, particularly focusing on key local services such as pubs and shops, and promoting community-owned renewable energy generation projects
- Set up a residents card which gives Cotswold residents discount on parking, leisure facilities and exclusive offers from local businesses
- Aggressively bid for Local Enterprise Partnership funding for the North Cotswolds, in particular with the aim of setting up a North Cotswolds Growth hub like the facility in Cirencester.
- Create a marketing fund with the aim of promoting our towns and villages as shopping and leisure destinations
- Work with the Cotswold Water Park trust and neighbouring Councils to create a strategic management committee to clean up and improve the Water Park as well as plan for the future of the area

Did you know?

- The Cotswolds has one of the highest proportions of home workers in the UK
- The Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty has over 38million visitors a year
- Tourism is worth £1 billion to the local economy
Better environment, facilities and tackling climate change

The planet is facing a climate emergency and Councils must do their part in order to prevent irreversible damage to our climate; a Lib Dem run Council will make this a priority.

Local residents say they want the Cotswold District to be the cleanest and greenest in the UK and we agree.

Our area has an excellent recycling rate which is testament to the efforts of local residents who sort their recycling ready for collection. We want to take this to the next level in order to be the best in the Country when it comes to recycling.

Dog fouling, littering and fly-tipping are growing issues our area and more robust enforcement is one way we can help tackle these issues.

Our roads and pavements aren't swept enough and as a result grit and detritus builds up in the kerb channels leading to weeds growing in the kerbs, our drains getting blocked frequently and the Cotswolds looking very unsightly!

The District Council owns a number of historic buildings that are falling into disrepair: we should be enhancing and upgrading them for the community to use and enjoy.

We can improve our environment in the Cotswolds and our plans provide a good foundation to achieve this.
If the Liberal Democrats are elected to run the District Council, we will:

- Declare a Climate Emergency, following the lead set by councils such as Bristol, Manchester and Kirklees, and set associated targets for the council to be carbon zero by 2030, and to end single use plastics at the council by 2021
- Reinstate Green waste collection all year round and review the garden waste service and pricing
- Make ‘Reduce, reuse and recycle’ a priority for the District - we will review the current recycling contracts and push for a targeted effort to improve recycling rates and make it easier for residents living in flats to recycle
- Review air pollution levels at strategic areas throughout the District, to inform the County Council's Strategic Transport Plan and identify locations for new footpaths and cycleways especially focusing on main roads near schools and community facilities
- Improve environmental planning and enforcement at the Council with the appointment of a Corporate Sustainability Manager and more environmental officers
- Empower Town and Parish Councils to issue on-the-spot fines for dog fouling and littering
- Explore the set up of a community skip scheme
- Invest in and bring back into use the historic buildings that the Council owns, through exemplary energy-efficiency retrofit programmes
- Invest in and bring back into use the historic buildings that the Council owns
- Increase the frequency of street cleaning on current routes and work with the County Council to start sweeping main roads throughout the District
- Work with the County Council to identify where the District Council could help with minor road or pavement repairs or general highways maintenance
Better environment, facilities and tackling climate change

Continued...

- Create a ‘rapid reaction team’ to deal with environmental issues reported to the Council within 24 hours such as fly tipping or a vehicle shedding its load across the carriageway
- Install ‘changing places’ along with revamping public toilets

Lib Dems get stuck in!
We will do more to tackle litter, dog fouling and flytipping
The Conservatives have hiked the price of parking in our District over the last 16 years and not reinvested in car parking capacity in that time.

In fact the previous local plan (2001 - 2011) earmarked locations for increased parking, but nothing was done.

In the absence of decent public transport, it is vital our towns and villages are ‘easy to use’ and that means being comfortably accessible by car.

If the Liberal Democrats are elected to run the District Council, we will:

- Deliver a new car park for Cirencester as soon as possible
- Rezone our car parks to include dedicated spaces for businesses, shop and drop spaces, visitor spaces and spaces for residents
- Scrap Sunday parking charges in all car parks
- Make the ‘free after 3’ scheme permanent in Cirencester’s Forum and Brewery Car Parks and look to extend it in other car parks
- Make parking for up to an hour free to encourage shoppers to the town
- Use technology to phase out traffic wardens and to make charges fairer and easier
- Start parking reviews in market towns and villages across the District that want them
- Install more electric vehicle charging points in District Council owned car parks

Better parking

Lib Dem Councillors helped secure free parking in Cirencester and would extend this!
Local residents want good services, no hassle and to feel they are being listened to. At present the Council’s priority is “to be the most efficient council in the country.”

But the Conservatives wrote their own test paper for that, and awarded themselves the grade. We don’t agree that Cotswold District Council is the most efficient in the country – we believe that we can do better.

The best measure of success is not in how little you put in, but how much you get out. Crucially, all those involved (residents, councillors and staff) need to agree the measures by which the Council will be judged.

If the Liberal Democrats are elected to run the District Council, we will:

- Produce a corporate plan based on delivering a high quality, proactive services to Council tax payers. Good, better best model.
- Council tax increases should clearly demonstrate the resulting benefits
- Assess all Council-owned land assets and how they can pay and contribute to the community
- No savings will be made on the backs of the very poorest in our District