

# Liberal Democrats



## MANIFESTO FOR THE 2019 LOCAL ELECTIONS

The Preamble to the Constitution of the Liberal Democrats: “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.”

## **THE CHALLENGE WE FACE**

The Conservatives have been in control of North Devon Council since the last council elections. During their time in power they have overseen:

### **A developer's field day in Planning**

A massive increase has taken place in planning permissions for open market housing without the infrastructure being put in place to cope with increased demand, for example, in the health services and on the roads.

### **A local housing crisis**

There has been a big increase in the number of homeless and rough sleepers. Desperately needed are more affordable homes for local people both for rent and purchase. Around 2000 households in North Devon were in danger of being made homeless last year. Yet hundreds of houses are currently empty and not in use.

### **A cut in support from central government**

The government grant to the council has reduced each year. This is another example of the Conservative neglect for our area. Unfair funding is causing an added burden to rate payers in North Devon.

### **A growth in traffic chaos**

The abolition of park and ride (change) schemes, cuts in public transport and the increase in building open market housing has resulted in more traffic delays and poor air quality. Many roads are becoming worn out and full of potholes.

### **Inefficient management of essential services**

There was the chaos when the refuse collection was remodelled and many collections were missed. Recently we have had the dog bin fiasco with some parishes even removing their bins.

### **Closure of facilities**

Many shops are struggling to stay open, banks have closed and many businesses and farms are struggling. The uncertainty with Brexit is causing major problems with forward planning.

## **MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN**

North Devon's recovery will require closer working between the Council and its residential and business communities. We need a change of culture in the way the council operates. There needs to be more partnership working and the working of the council in a smarter way. At the same time we will vigorously campaign for fair funding from the government e.g. for local government, the NHS, police and schools.

We need to provide value for money services, encourage recycling and green initiatives and provide transparency in local government with all authorities working together as a team.

The council needs to make better use of its assets and generate more income to finance an ambitious capital programme of improvement. If we are to turn the tide in North Devon, we need a

community response, where we can promote measures which will enable people to help themselves and help to grow the prosperity of our area.

Our aim is to have the health and well-being of all our residents and the environment at the heart of our work on North Devon Council showing that we care. North Devon deserves better than what we are getting under the Conservative leadership and we demand more.

## **OUR LIBERAL DEMOCRAT PLAN FOR NORTH DEVON.**

### **HOUSING**

1. We will encourage the provision of sufficient quality energy efficient affordable homes for local people both for rent and purchase. This will include taking measures to bring empty properties back into use, working with housing associations and investigating setting up a council housing company.
2. We are concerned about the increase in homelessness and particularly with the hosting of rough sleepers ending at the Freedom centre as the funding grant has run out. We will help look for further grants and investigate the possibility of short term alternatives such as opening up part of the Barnstaple Civic Centre for the homeless.
3. We will institute a review of how to improve the private rented sector and investigate ways of discouraging the growth of second homes in our area.

### **ENVIRONMENT**

1. We will protect the wonderful asset of our environment and biosphere for future generations as once lost it is gone forever. The protection of the environment presents many challenges for local authorities in areas such as air pollution, traffic, waste recovery and reduction. A Liberal Democrat Council will lead the way in championing the environment and in making sustainability a priority. We will involve the community in these endeavours and support initiatives such as Plastic Free North Devon, work towards zero carbon emissions and champion methods to prevent climate change such as the provision of electric recharging points. We aim to assist residents to take and feel pride in their local environment. We want clean streets, smarter buildings, beautiful parks and welcoming shopping areas.
2. We will protect our green spaces, country and coastal walks and beaches. We are passionate about supporting North Devon's residents in leading healthy and active lives. Green spaces and our country and coastal walks play a pivotal role in supporting both the mental and physical health of their users. We will protect the AONB and encourage applications for funding for schemes to help our flora and fauna.
3. We will start a public consultation concerning how to prevent dog fouling on our pavements. This will improve the quality of our public areas, as well as decrease risks to public health.

### **ECONOMY AND JOBS CREATION**

1. Liberal Democrats value the industries, professions and crafts we already have in North Devon and believe that it is important that they are given every opportunity to thrive even in these uncertain times. We will also encourage firms, who create well paid jobs, to come to our area and support apprenticeships and courses to improve the skills of the workforce. It is the key to long term future prosperity and improved quality of life for all our residents. This will involve both wealth creation and wealth retention in the local area, a more

equitable distribution of opportunities for every citizen and the protection of North Devon's natural environment.

2. We will work with partners to encourage schemes to help regenerate our town centres, coastal and rural communities. This will involve seeking grant funding for capital programmes e.g. to refurbish Barnstaple Pannier Market including the provision of public toilets.
3. We will become more commercially aware as a council and seek to maximise our assets, encourage investment in farming, tourism and business thus creating new jobs and opportunities for all including our young people.

## **ARTS, CULTURE, HERITAGE AND LEISURE**

1. We will encourage and support a range of events, festivals and competitions in North Devon. These will be targeted across the generations, ensuring that North Devon's cultural offer has a broad appeal. It is crucial that we are able to continue to improve our offer to tourists, whilst also retaining our own residents, particularly our young people. We will also seek to make North Devon a year-round destination.
2. We will encourage the provision of a wide range of arts and cultural activities at venues like the Queens Theatre and the Landmark and the setting up of groups like the Arts Destination, South Molton. We have a wide range of artistic talent in the form of sculptors, painters, photographers, singers, musicians, authors, poets etc. who make a significant contribution to the well-being of residents as well as attracting tourists.
3. We will promote opportunities for healthy and active lifestyles. This includes supporting the provision of leisure facilities such as Barnstaple Leisure Centre, Ilfracombe and South Molton swimming pools, outdoor gyms in parks, park and run schemes, sports pitches, South Molton woodlands, bowling greens, community gardens etc.

## **PLANNING AND TRANSPORT**

1. We will oppose opportunistic and unnecessary development which creates traffic chaos or ends up as more holiday or second homes. We will foster vibrant and attractive thriving communities e.g. by encouraging facilities in our villages and towns.
2. We will provide an holistic approach to planning which includes the infrastructure needs such as suitable roads, open spaces, car parking, on street parking, health services, job opportunities and park and change (ride) schemes e.g. replacing the one which has been closed at Park School, Barnstaple.
3. We will campaign and press for improved connectivity including better road infrastructure, public transport, cycle and walking routes. More and more housing in our urban areas is causing delays and frustrations on our roads and is even worse with the influx of summer tourists and yet our bus services have been cut. The A361 from Barnstaple to Ilfracombe (particularly at Braunton), the A39 from Pilton to North Devon Hospital and the A3125 from Sticklepath to Instow are examples of roads which are not coping with current demands and the situation is set to get even worse with planning permission having been given for even more housing. We will campaign for improved bus services and for the introduction of some faster trains to take less time travelling from Barnstaple to Exeter.