

A large, stylized graphic of orange leaves or petals, arranged in a fan-like pattern, occupies the lower half of the page. The leaves are a solid orange color and have a smooth, curved shape.

# **Council services shaped for you**

**St Albans Liberal Democrats District Council Manifesto**

**2018**

# Introduction

This election you have the chance to vote for a 21<sup>st</sup> century council, one that makes your life better and easier.

St Albans City and District should be a council which

- is shaped around the services you use
- is easy for you to communicate with
- learns from its mistakes to save you time and money.

The Liberal Democrats will put three things at the core of our administration:

1. Liberal Democrats will deliver a **“you-shaped council”** which provides services which are flexible, personalised and resident-focused.
2. Liberal Democrats will deliver a council which is serious about **getting things right first time.**
  - o Too many of the 500,000 phone calls which the district council receives every year happen because of amateur mistakes which waste your time and money – bin collections being missed, unclear communications and failing to sort basic problems with council housing.
  - o Getting things right first time not only improves your services, it also saves the council money which can be reinvested in further improvements.
3. Liberal Democrats will deliver a council which invests in the local area, making it **an (even) nicer place to live, work and play.**
  - o Young people and people on lower incomes in St Albans are being failed by the lack of social and affordable rented homes.
  - o Families are suffering the consequences of the failure of the Conservatives to develop a workable Local Plan. The resulting shortage of school places means children have to travel across the district and beyond simply to get to school.
  - o Local businesses, and home-workers, are being failed by patchy high-speed broadband and the loss of city centre office space.
  - o Business rates rises penalise pubs, pharmacies and other local businesses.
  - o Local people suffer from expensive, unreliable and infrequent bus services
  - o Commuters suffer ever-increasing rail fares.

## A place to live

There are too few council and social-housing homes available locally.

The national planning system is broken, but the Conservative administration in the St Albans City and District is making a bad situation worse by failing to work constructively with the neighbouring district councils and the county council.

The council has a time-wasting and reactive, rather than collaborative, approach to working with developers and residents seeking to extend or build.

The council provides a terrible repairs and maintenance service for its leaseholders and tenants, because it has been handed over to the private sector without proper thought about quality of work and value for money.

Communications with tenants and leaseholders leaves a great deal to be desired – and sometimes don't happen at all.

Liberal Democrats will **build significant numbers of social rented and affordable homes.**

Liberal Democrats will **attract responsible developers, and the investments they make into local infrastructure such as roads and schools.** By working with them, we will make the process of development more dependable, and more in tune with local housing and infrastructure needs and capacities.

Liberal Democrats will **make the planning process for homeowners and those wanting to raise concerns about plans easier to navigate.** Making council planners available to work with architects and residents will reduce the need for repeated rounds of failed planning applications, saving local tax payers and home-extenders money.

Everyone deserves to live in a decent home. Tenants and leaseholders have the right to expect the council to maintain council homes properly so that current and future generations of residents have access to social housing when needed.

**Liberal Democrats will work with tenants and leaseholders to ensure council housing stock is safe and is maintained to a good standard.**

**Liberal Democrats will ensure that the council treats tenants and leaseholders with respect and properly keeps them informed of issues affecting them.**

Residents' associations and town and parish councils are vital to ensuring the council stays in touch with local people.

St Albans has a worsening homelessness problem, not helped by the clumsy introduction of Universal Credit.

Gas and electricity prices are increasing and many local families struggle with energy costs.

Liberal Democrats **will work with town and parish councils and actively encourage the creation of residents' associations. We will** ensure that they are fitted into the structure of decision-making, especially in relation to developing a workable Local Plan, rather than being treated as marginal players.

We will continue to invest in the network of homelessness support in this district and provide adequate and appropriate temporary accommodation.

We will promote cost-effective ways of insulating homes and reducing energy waste. We will explore green community energy schemes.



## A clean, healthy environment

Air pollution, from cars, lorries and buses, is a blight in much of the District, increasing the number of children growing up with asthma and other health concerns.

The police are under pressure through budget cuts and the inappropriate spending priorities of the Conservative Police and Crime Commissioner: residents are becoming increasingly concerned about the level of response they receive.

The Conservative county council has abandoned bus passengers.

Our trains are set to become even more crowded because of the Conservative Government's insistence on changing the terms of the East Midlands rail franchise.

Fly-tipping continues to worsen, especially since the Conservative County Council curtailed the opening hours of household waste sites.

Liberal Democrats have already been leading on getting an anti-idling policy through the council. On taking charge, we will follow through to **ensure that local and visiting drivers are aware of air pollution** caused when engines are left running at lights and in traffic. We will also create anti-idling zones.

Liberal Democrats will work with car companies, electricity suppliers and investors to **develop and deliver a pioneering plan to electrify road transport, especially taxis.**

We will work with the county council to target **bottlenecks which cause traffic congestion and increased pollution.**

Liberal Democrats **will overhaul the council's work with the police at local and county level to ensure that your local policing priorities are understood**, and that where possible working closely together to decrease costs and improve responsiveness.

Liberal Democrats will explore new means of providing bus transport, looking at successful schemes in other parts of the country.

Liberal Democrats will work with other councils to **lobby the Government to understand the needs of local commuters.**

Liberal Democrats will not hesitate to prosecute offenders and clear up the area.

## A place for work

Our vibrant local economy makes this a great place to live. However, business rate increases have threatened our small and independent businesses and the conversion of offices into residential units has damaged the viability of the town centre.

Businesses need access to modern communication infrastructure.

Both St Albans and Harpenden lack strong and coherent brands – it is astonishing how few people know what our area has to offer.

Liberal Democrats will continue to develop **policies to protect pubs and small businesses from excessive business rate rises**. The district needs to maintain a strong economy to avoid St Albans, Harpenden and the villages turning into dormitory towns.

Liberal Democrats will establish a plan to ensure the **efficient installation of superfast broadband**.

Liberal Democrats will **market the district** as a significant place to visit, spend money, and in which to set up businesses and work.



## Leisure and green spaces

Our parks and leisure facilities are some of the most loved services delivered by the district council but sorely lack investment.

Liberal Democrats will work with local donors and funds such as the National Lottery to **provide new capital investment for our green spaces and leisure facilities**.

Liberal Democrats will consult residents served by local parks about whether additional facilities, such as **children's playgrounds, exercise equipment, and facilities for young people** should be installed.

## A well-run council

St Albans District Council has an old-fashioned approach to talking to its residents. The council relies on leaflets and letters and fails to give people the information and services they need online. This wastes huge amounts of staff time and frustrates residents by making office hour phone calls the only mode of contact.

The way the council conducts its business is opaque and bureaucratic – there are over 250 meetings a year involving councillors.

The Conservatives' commitment to fund a speculative development in the city centre involves borrowing £75 million. This irresponsible decision shows poor financial judgement and puts the viability of future services at risk.

The Conservative administration is giving us poor value for money in the way it manages and commissions services. There is a noticeable lack of responsiveness to local people, especially in parking and housing repairs.

Liberal Democrats will **modernise** the process **so it is much easier to do things online**, leaving the phone lines clear for those who don't want to or aren't able to use the internet.

We will make the council's website mobile friendly.

Liberal Democrats will work to **make the council more efficient, with fewer meetings** but dealing with matters which are of importance to the public.

The Liberal Democrats will have the proposed debt position reviewed by external experts and **seek to ensure that borrowing is directed towards housebuilding for local people** rather than commercial tenancies.

The Liberal Democrats will **end the presumption that external, semi-monopoly operators are naturally superior to running services in-house.**

