



Demanding Better for South Gloucestershire



Liberal Democrat Local Election Manifesto 2019

Clr Claire Young

Leader of South Gloucestershire Liberal Democrats



Dear friends,

On May 2nd you have the opportunity to help put South Gloucestershire back on track.

Over the following pages you will see an outline of the type of administration we would seek to lead if you elect a Liberal Democrat majority on May 2nd.

A Liberal Democrat administration would:

- fix our crumbling residential roads
- deliver more truly affordable housing where communities want it
- defeat the Conservatives' plans for five unsustainable mega-developments
- prioritise improving the state of local schools and health facilities, and
- seek to step up the council's efforts to fight the damaging effects of climate change and reduce waste and air pollution.



The Conservatives first gained overall control of the Council in 2015 on the back of promises to phase out green bin charges, keep council tax low, protect the green belt and improve the state of local roads. They have broken every one of those promises to local residents.

The green bin charges are still with us, they now plan to build thousands of houses to in the green belt, and our roads are in a worse state than ever. After all that - why would anyone believe anything the Conservatives promise this time?

It's time to demand better for South Gloucestershire.

A Liberal Democrat win at the election on May 2nd would send a strong message to Theresa May's Government that they cannot take South Gloucestershire for granted anymore.

Together, we can change the direction of the council, and make South Gloucestershire an even better place to live and work, for us and for the next generation.

Yours faithfully,

Putting South Glos Back on Track



Our Six Top Priorities

- 1** We would send **the Conservative plans for five mega-developments** - at Buckover, Coalpit Heath, Charfield, Iron Acton and Thornbury - **back to the drawing board.**
- 2** We would use council-owned land to build more **truly affordable homes** where communities want them - and use the proceeds to **mend our neglected residential roads.**
- 3** **We would be champions for our young people** - making their wellbeing and personal development a top priority. We would lobby for extra school funding and seek to put more resources into counselling and resilience courses in schools.
- 4** We would work to **get our neglected local public transport moving.** We would investigate using bus franchising to improve bus services across our area, deliver more Park & Ride and Park & Share sites, and lobby for more frequent trains with more carriages.
- 5** We would push for **better health services** - the delivery of Thornbury Health Centre after years of setbacks and delay under the Conservatives, a full walk-in service at Yate and a wider range of services at Cossham Hospital.
- 6** We would help the **fight against climate change** by increasing South Gloucestershire's renewable energy target - bringing it in line with the binding international standard of 32% by 2030. We will also take action to combat air pollution.

Children & Young People



A Liberal Democrat administration would seek to be a champion for our children and young people - making their personal development and wellbeing paramount. South Gloucestershire has long suffered from poor school results, but the answer to this is not to turn our schools into exam factories where both pupils and teachers are under constant pressure. We will invest in the mental health & wellbeing of local children – putting money behind counselling and resilience courses in our schools to make sure that every child can have a happy and healthy school life.

We believe that more needs to be done to support LGBTQ young people across our area. Currently most support is concentrated in Yate. We will look to increase funding and expand support to other parts of South Gloucestershire.

Under the Conservatives, South Gloucestershire schools are among the very worst funded per-pupil in the entire country. Our area has become the national symbol of underfunded and struggling schools as a result of the BBC's documentary series.

The Conservative Leader of Council has responded by putting his head in the sand, claiming that those who believe the BBC are “naïve.” But parents and teachers in South Gloucestershire know that it painted an all too familiar picture.

Headteachers have reported that half of local schools are facing cuts to teaching hours due to lack of funds. Our children are being let down and change is urgently needed. A Liberal Democrat-led South Gloucestershire would vigorously lobby central Government to address the funding crisis in our schools including the chronic underfunding of support for Special Educational Needs and nursery provision. We would listen to the experiences of parents and teachers, instead of dismissing them.

We oppose the Conservatives' 'one-size-fits-all' insistence on academization and top-down management of our schools. We will promote cooperation between schools to avoid the lack of joined-up working that has been caused by academy chains.



Health & Social Care



Under the Conservatives, South Gloucestershire is one of 14 areas across England where the NHS are being forced to cut millions from its spending as part of the so-called capped expenditure process. Meanwhile the Conservative-run council is taking away millions of pounds from South Gloucestershire's social care budget, at a time when the need for care is greater than ever. The Liberal Democrats oppose Tory cuts to our local NHS and care services. A Liberal Democrat administration will work with NHS colleagues and social care providers to improve local health and care services across our area, in spite of Government cuts.

A Liberal Democrat-led council will make the delivery of the long-promised Thornbury Health Centre a top priority, and put an end to years of dithering and delay under the current administration.

We will build on our campaign to improve the range of services available at Yate Minor Injuries Unit. We believe a full walk-in service with longer x-ray hours would benefit residents and also help reduce pressure on A&E. We will work with NHS colleagues to improve the availability of information about what health services are available where and when, to reduce confusion and hassle for residents.

We would push for additional health services to be provided at Cossham Hospital. We believe Cossham should get its long-promised minor injuries service and that the birth unit, currently closed due to staff shortages at Southmead, should be reopened and retained permanently.

A Liberal Democrat administration would seek to more to support and acknowledge South Gloucestershire's thousands of carers and the huge, and often unsung, role they play.

We strongly believe that there should be an increased emphasis on wellness as well as illness. We want the local NH'S and the council's public health and social care teams to work more closely together to help residents to remain healthier for longer. We believe that mental health is equally as important as physical health and that the two are closely linked. We want to encourage a greater emphasis on good mental health at all stages of life. We will prioritise improving services for children's mental health and facilities to help combat loneliness among elderly residents.

Transport & Roads



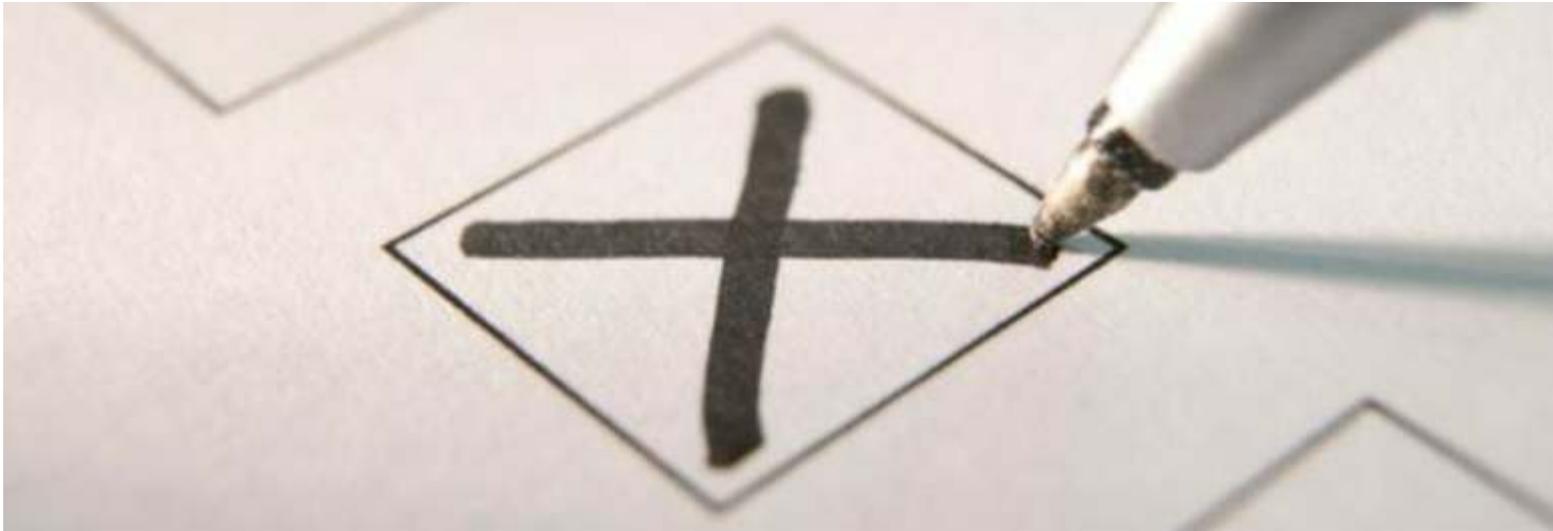
Despite the election of a Metro Mayor for the West of England in 2017, transport in South Gloucestershire is stuck in the slow lane. The Liberal Democrats believe we need a much more joined-up and ambitious approach to transport to get South Gloucestershire moving.

A Lib Dem administration would use its seat on the Combined Authority to push for a full investigation into the introduction of Bus Franchising across the West of England, as currently operates in Greater London. Bus franchising could give us the power to put on bus services when and where residents want them to go - rather than the current situation where politicians are at the mercy of the bus operators. This would allow us to insist on greener, lower carbon buses, and for the introduction of Fairer Fare zones for Thornbury and Yate, so that residents are not overcharged compared to Bristol bus users. We will also push for Yate buses to be allowed to use Metrobus routes that they are, ridiculously, currently prevented from doing.

A Liberal Democrat administration would:

- Increase the budget for resurfacing our crumbling roads to help motorists, cyclists and other road users. We will reintroduce our plan to make at least an extra £2 million available for estate road maintenance - a plan voted down by the out-of-touch Conservative administration earlier this year.
- Continue our longstanding commitment to improving the frequency and capacity of trains into Yate railway station and investigate reopening of other stations, such as at Coalpit Heath.
- Help people get out of their cars and encourage healthy living by pushing for greater investment in cycling and walking infrastructure - including the completion of the Yate Spur.
- Ensure that parking remains free at our town centres to help our local businesses, residents and retail workers.
- Push for more Park & Rides in locations where they will actually be used - not miles out of town. We will push forward with plans for the long-promised but still undelivered Park & Share at Tormarton.

Democracy & Community



Democracy and empowering local communities is at the heart of the Liberal Democrat approach to local government. Under the Conservatives, more and more power has been concentrated in the hands of just a handful of councillors - we want to give power back to local ward councillors and to the people they serve. Liberal Democrat councillors believe in being champions for our local communities. We want to create a South Gloucestershire where everybody is valued and feels valued.

A Liberal Democrat administration would:

- Restore Area Committees to make sure that the handing out of community grants happens in an open and transparent way and support unparished areas in setting up parish councils, where residents want them, so that local communities can take more power into their own hands and focus on local priorities.
- Abolish the anti-democratic Leader & Cabinet system on the council and restore the more democratic Committee system, under which all elected councillors play a part in running the council and decisions are made at open public meetings.
- Bring South Gloucestershire Council into the 21st Century by introducing the recording and webcasting of meetings, so that decisions are more transparent and accessible to the people we serve.
- Work closely with the local police and PCSOs and with the Police & Crime Commissioner to tackle the worrying increase in anti-social behaviour, which blights communities in parts of our area.
- Continue to lobby for the roll-out of superfast broadband to those communities in South Gloucestershire who, ludicrously, are still living with dial-up level connection speeds in 2019.
- Strive to ensure that South Gloucestershire is an inclusive and welcoming place for everyone to live. We oppose the hostile environment the Conservative-run Home Office has created for immigrants, and we will take steps to improve community cohesion and ensure that all South Gloucestershire residents feel at home here, no matter where they were born.

Environment & Economy



Unchecked climate change presents a huge threat to our economy, our natural environment, and our way of life. We need to take urgent steps to cope with its impact and mitigate its worst affects. We believe that, under the Conservatives, South Gloucestershire Council hasn't been ambitious enough in its Climate Change Strategy. The UK has a binding international commitment to produce 32% of its energy from renewable sources by 2030. South Gloucestershire's target, on the other hand, is only to meet 25% of local energy demand from renewables by 2036. We will look to revise our Climate Change Strategy so we commit to at least the same renewable energy targets as the UK as a whole.

In order to help local businesses take a lead on climate change, we will look to offer rate relief for local businesses that invest in renewable energy technology and energy saving adaptations. We will look to improve support and access to information for local businesses, so that we can improve take-up of new and existing renewable energy schemes, such as Go Ultra Low grants for electric car charging points. We will lobby WECA to make more funding available for local businesses, particularly smaller businesses, to adapt to make more use of emerging technologies.

We will seek to expand the use of electric vehicles and charging points beyond the scope of the current Go Ultra Low programme in order to help tackle dangerous emissions and improve local air quality. We will look to make the whole of the council's vehicle fleet electric as vehicles come up for replacement and technology improves.

South Gloucestershire has made good strides towards reducing the amount of waste we send to landfill in recent years. We will redouble those efforts to try to bring this figure as close to zero as possible by 2023. This will save taxpayers money spent on landfill charges, as well as helping the environment. We will take steps to tackle the nuisance of littering across our area, including increasing enforcement to fine the worst offenders, and seeking sponsorship from fast food outlets to help keep South Gloucestershire tidy.

We will follow the example set by other local authorities in banning the Government's senseless and cruel badger cull from taking place on council-owned land.



Housing & Planning



Since Day One we have opposed the Conservative administration's unsustainable plans for thousands of new houses at five mega-developments (at Coalpit Heath, Charfield, Iron Acton, Buckover and Thornbury) as part of the Joint Strategic Plan. A Liberal Democrat administration would scrap these plans and bring them back to the drawing board. We vehemently oppose the Conservatives' plans to build over the Green Belt at Iron Acton and Coalpit Heath. We would undertake a comprehensive review of the Green Belt and look to add new land to it to compensate for any land lost to development.

While we oppose the Conservative administration's unsuitable development plans, we do acknowledge the pressing need for more affordable housing across South Gloucestershire. Too many local people are currently getting priced out of their communities. Working with social housing providers, we will use council-owned land to create a number of 100% affordable housing developments at a scale that will complement existing communities, rather than overwhelming them.

We will take lessons from other local authorities which, like Liberal Democrat-run Eastleigh, have managed far higher rates of affordable housing completion than South Gloucestershire. We will use the council's own housing development company and 'borrow to build' to help keep prices down, rather than relying only on big housing developers - who have to extract the highest value possible for housing to satisfy their shareholders. Where private housing developers are required to build affordable housing as part of their planning consent, we would like to see a requirement for some of those affordable housing units to be turned over to housing associations for use in the social rented sector.

Transparency and accountability is at the heart of the Liberal Democrat approach to planning. A Liberal Democrat administration would reverse the Conservatives' anti-democratic curtailment of residents' rights in the planning process. We would restore the right of members of the public to attend site inspection meetings and bring back planning committee meetings to Thornbury, to ensure that residents in the West of South Gloucestershire are better able to access meetings that affect them.