



**Manifesto for
Northamptonshire County
Council 2005**

Free

Green

Fair

Honest

10 good reasons to vote Liberal Democrat locally

1. More police and community support officers to tackle crime hotspots.
2. Community based services for elderly and vulnerable people.
3. Value for money; keep the council tax down before it is abolished.
4. Better maintenance of roads and pavements.
5. Improved early year's education & fair schools admissions policies.
6. Promote public transport to reduce congestion.
7. Resist green field development.
8. Review PFI schemes.
9. More and better facilities for young people.
10. A council which is closer to the people

10 good reasons to vote Liberal Democrat nationally

1. Put patients first - faster diagnosis so your NHS treatment can start more quickly.
2. Free personal care when you need it - no one forced to sell their home to pay for care.
3. No tuition fees, no top-up fees - university affordable for every student.
4. Cut primary school class sizes - spend the £1.5bn Child Trust Fund money when it matters most
5. 10,000 more police on the streets - cutting crime and the fear of crime.
6. £100 more on the pension every month at 75 - a million pensioners off means-testing.
7. Free off-peak local bus travel - for all pensioners and disabled people.
8. Axe the Council Tax - Local Income Tax is both fair and affordable.
9. Tackle climate change – cleaner transport, cleaner energy and a cleaner environment.
10. We should not have gone to war in Iraq - it's time to restore trust in government.

Time for a Change

After 12 years of Labour control, it's time for a change on Northamptonshire County Council. Labour have made Northamptonshire one of the worst performing County Councils in the East Midlands, with 'Weak' status according to the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2003. Since then, the council has struggled to improve as a hopelessly divided administration has lost direction.

Meanwhile the Labour government have steadily stripped powers from local authorities, reducing democratic accountability and burdening councils with new regulations and inspections. Labour regards local government as little more than an administrative arm of central government.

The County Council has a key role in giving local communities a voice. Liberal Democrats believe that the best way to guarantee rights and opportunities for individuals to run their own lives and influence their surroundings is through power at local level.

People should be able to participate in and feel proud of their local communities. Many of the policies we promote in this manifesto are to revitalised communities dispersing power so decisions are taken at the lowest practical level, not dictated from above.



The Liberal Democrat Approach:- Free, Green, Fair and Honest

The Liberal Democrats stand for freedom from poverty, ignorance and conformity. We begin with freedom for every individual. Everyone should have the right to live their lives as they choose, without trampling other people's rights. For freedom to be real for everyone, it needs fairness.

We demand social justice, with equality before the law and public services which are funded properly and honestly.

Freedom comes from good education, so that people can make their own choices and realize their potential. Freedom needs good health, which must be safeguarded by a decent environment both for people today and for future generations.

A free democracy needs decisions to be taken openly, with as many people as possible having a say. To build freedom, fairness and a green future, people must work together - locally, nationally and internationally.

Local government is vital to that free, green, fair and honest approach. Putting our principles into practice, Liberal Democrat Councillors will use their powers and influence to:

- * Increase freedom and opportunity in people's lives by giving them the best education and tackling the threat of crime.
- * Promote environmental sustainability by involving the community in action to protect the local environment and boost public health.

- * Build fairness and social justice by tackling disadvantage, providing good care and championing local employment.
- * Make the council open and honest, providing good quality services which are value for money and giving power to the people.

Closer to the people

There is much that the council can do to open up its structures and give people a voice. Many people still see the local council as a faceless bureaucracy.

- * We will strengthen Area Committees by devolving more money and decision making powers to them.
- * We will form Area Partnerships with District Councils (as already established in Northampton) in the rest of the County, and include representatives of the local Police.
- * We will work in partnership with District and Parish councils, seeking, where appropriate, to delegate decision making to the lowest appropriate level.
- * We will review and improve the council's complaints procedure to ensure that problems are dealt with promptly and effectively.
- * We will encourage the public to speak at meetings of the council by removing unnecessary bureaucratic hindrances, such as the requirement on the public to give notice to speak at council.
- * We will develop use of the Internet to involve and inform the public, such as developing a more interactive website so that residents have a method of detailed on-line contact and participation rather than just basic information and transactions. We will seek to broadcast all meetings held in the council chamber via the Internet, and enable members of the public to question and debate with councillors via the Internet. We will make copies of such broadcasts available on DVD.
- * We will appoint an internal ombudsman to deal with complaints against the council and examine establishing User Forums to monitor performance and complaints.
- * We will strive to achieve proportional nominations to outside bodies and seek to introduce a proportional voting system for any elections held to bodies within the Council's influence, such as school governors.
- * We will explore the possibility of setting up IT kiosks in main shopping areas to provide 24 hour information on Council services and enable e-mails to be sent to councillors and officers.
- * We will support community development projects which enable local people to play a more active role in their community.
- * We will examine ways for the council to introduce 'shadow' programmes to encourage people to become councillors.
- * Local authorities need to take on the role of community leadership, to defend local people and to promote community action.
- * The County Council should play a more pro-active role in holding other public bodies to account by inviting them to public forums to answer for their actions.

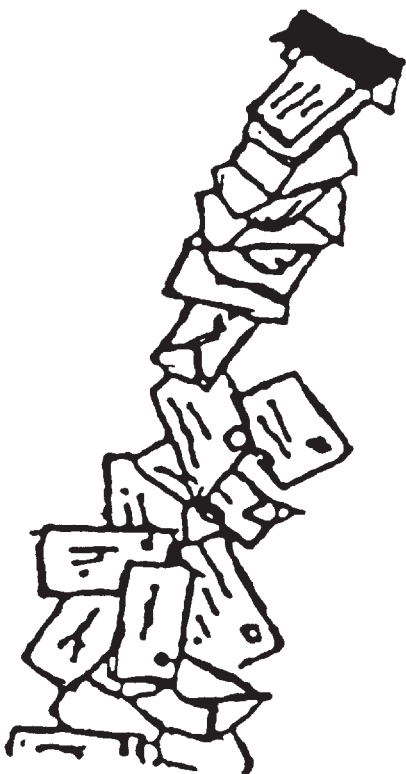


Consulting Local People

Putting our principles into practice

Northamptonshire Liberal Democrats have been consulting local people before writing this manifesto. We have asked people to rank key council services in order of importance. This is what they said:

1. Preventing Crime & Fire
2. Care for elderly and disabled people
3. Keeping the Council Tax down
4. Road and pavement repairs
5. Schools & Education
6. Protecting the environment
7. Public Transport
8. Protecting green spaces from development
9. Youth & Community facilities



Education

Quality for all, not choice for the few

A high quality education is essential to enable every citizen to have the widest possible opportunities. For too long, educational achievement in Northamptonshire has fallen behind national standards. We have an ambition for every child in the County, to interest, stretch and challenge every pupil to enable them to reach their potential. Education is central to Liberal Democrat principles.

Early years

- * Early Years Education is essential to later success and should be a priority. All families with a child under 7 should have access to an Early Years Centre, offering childcare, education, health and social services support to those that need them.
- * We believe that every child should have the right to quality education in or near the community in which they live. We will seek to implement the Lib Dem national target for all Primary class sizes to be below 25.
- * We will reform education for 5-7 year olds to recognise the importance of play and exploration in developing learning skills.
- * We would give full backing for a diverse curriculum, supporting school-based assessment at seven and supporting the reduction of national tests to the minimum. We take seriously the right of all children to develop skills and to make informed choices about their own opportunities to study.

Admissions

- * Liberal Democrats will challenge current schools admissions arrangements, and will work for common, open and transparent admission policies across all schools to create equality of access to education.
- * We would require all teachers to be qualified in the subject or age group that they teach.

Community schools

- * We want to see all schools become true Community schools with multi-agency access (police, libraries, social services, housing advice etc.). We will encourage evening and weekend access to school facilities.



Behaviour

- * Poor behaviour at school by a few harms the education of many. We would work with head-teachers, school staff and their representatives to re-examine and improve the support available to enable them to improve classroom behaviour. We will seek to share good practice in behaviour management.
- * We would improve school discipline by supporting Inclusion Zones to allow disruptive pupils to be removed from the classroom, setting up specialist units to address their specific needs.
- * We must relentlessly tackle bullying. We must address issues that matter to children in order to boost their security and dignity, eg clean toilets with locks. We must ensure that pupils fears and needs are properly heard and acted upon.

Special Needs Education

- * We would ensure that pupils with Special Educational Needs benefit from the full range of support to meet their individual needs, either in mainstream or special schools.
- * We must ensure there is equal access to assessment for Special Needs Education, and that parents are supported and advised about the rights of their children.

School Transport

- * We will resist the imposition of charges for school transport for those people living more than 3 miles from their school. Lib Dem MPs have opposed the move in Parliament.
- * We will encourage the use of “walking buses” for travel to school. We will press all schools to put travel plans in place by May 2007. We will expand the Safer Routes to Schools budget to make walking and cycling to school safe for all.
- * Promoting public transport to get to school improves the quality of the environment and reduces the costs to the council in congestion and traffic management. We support the case for a council subsidy to promote school transport.

Education for healthy living

- * Education needs to promote healthy living and parenting skills.
- * We support free swimming for local schools at council pools, and we will seek affordable school access to council owned sports facilities and will promote healthy living across the extended curriculum.
- * Community leisure needs must be fully considered before playing fields are disposed of for development.



Secondary education

- * We will bring all secondary schools in Northamptonshire up to the highest standards, resisting the two tier standard of education created by specialist school status.
- * The establishment of specialist schools and academies in Northamptonshire has created a confused pattern of education which has compromised equality of access to education with schools choosing their pupils put before parental choice.
- * We would give maximum support to reforms in education for the 14-19 age range, ensuring that informed choice about where, what and how they study is openly available to all.
- * We will encourage secondary schools to enable all their pupils to remain at school until 6 o'clock pmt to continue studying and support the provision of Breakfast Clubs at all schools.

Higher Education

- * We would ensure the best local support possible for access for all students with the right qualifications to go on to Higher Education.

A Liberal Democrat government will ensure that average primary class sizes are less than 25, scrap national tests at 7 and replace them with ongoing teacher assessment. We will scrap university tuition fees and will support maintenance grants to those on low incomes.



Safe communities

All People have the right to expect to live in a safe and secure environment. Strong communities, in which people are able to care for one another, and in which young people are valued and provided for are safer communities in which the needs of all are respected. Liberal Democrats seek to strengthen communities through effective community policing and the involvement of people in the safety of their own communities.

- * We will work to improve the Youth Service, currently rated 'poor' compared with other authorities. We will work with young people to ensure that youth clubs and other facilities provide the facilities they will use when they need them.
- * We will promote diversionary activities for young people at risk of engaging in anti-social behaviour
- * We will Design Out crime in planning new developments and regeneration.
- * We will support the work of the police in the community by working with our partners to employ more Police Community Support Officers and Neighbourhood Wardens.
- * We will investigate the opportunity provided by the 1996 Police Act for the Council to buy in extra police officers from the Police Authority to patrol priority areas with particular crime problems.
- * Neighbourhood watch, shop watch, school watch, farm watch – all designed to encourage communities to work with the police to tackle specific problems will be encouraged.
- * We need to ensure that services for young people are geared to ensuring that those who need them most are given priority. 'Hard to reach', disaffected young people are those who are most likely to cause social nuisance and crime. Youth Services have an important role to play in building self-confidence and social responsibility, in turn helping to tackle the culture of drug use, leading to drug dependency and crime.
- * The County Council should work with District and Parish Councils to maximise the use of community facilities available to young people, and ensure an integrated approach to the provision of facilities for young people.
- * Expand the use of traffic calming around schools and in residential areas by the provision of alternatives to road humps eg chicanes, road narrowing, on-street parking, gateways, built up mini roundabouts and other options.
- * Expand the gritting of roads where there is a local need.
- * Many unauthorised traveller encampments cause a nuisance to residents. We will work with District Councils to identify managed sites for travellers, to where they can be directed by the police, and where they will pay the costs of providing the site.



A Liberal Democrat government will recruit an extra 10,000 police nationwide.

Care for elderly and vulnerable people

The County Council exists to provide effective support for people in particular need, such as older people, people with disabilities, people with special needs and young people. A Liberal Democrat council will, in principle, promote independent living where people can live as valued members of their local community, with adequate support available when needed. Support services must be tailored to meet the individual needs of the citizen. All service users have very individual needs and there should be no 'one size fits all' model of social care or social care service. Services must provide individual responses and solutions to meet those individual needs. We will improve communications between managers and Council to ensure that never again does a Cabinet 'discover' that it has been under funding Social Care (or any other service) significantly and for a number of years.

Elderly and disabled people

- * The Council must work co-operatively with providers of residential care to ensure that there is adequate high quality care for those who need it.
- * We will continue to develop community based services, including home helps, care attendants, domestic repair and adaptation schemes, aiming to be flexible and innovative to meet people's needs.
- * We support the promotion of healthy living programmes, such as the Healthy Communities Collaborative to promote healthy lifestyles amongst older people.
- * We must to break down the 'Berlin Wall' that exists between health and social services. Liberal Democrats nationally and locally will continue to fight for local authorities to be given clear responsibility for purchasing community and health care, with the resources to meet locally determined needs.
- * We will consolidate the rights of service users to be consulted and involved in decisions that affect them. The Council must ensure that advice and support is continually available to enable service users to express their needs.
- * We will seek more support for carers by developing respite care and other support services.

A Liberal Democrat government will increase the pension to those over 75 by £25 per week, take a million pensioners out of means testing, and introduce free personal care for the elderly.



Young people

- * We will work to ensure that resources are targeted at preventing young children suffering the worst problems of poor care and abuse at home, instead of merely reacting after the problems have occurred.
- * We must provide good quality, responsive support to foster carers in order to reduce the number of children living in institutional care. We must ensure that applications to foster are processed speedily, and foster carers matched to children as quickly as possible.
- * A recent major independent report into a child care case highlighted inadequate resources at a number of points throughout the report. We would work to ensure that case worker posts are not frozen to meet budget shortfalls. Each caseworker vacancy is more than a number on a report. It's a home visit to a troubled home that does not take place and a child or children left without the help that they desperately need.

Voluntary help

- * Voluntary organisations make a vital contribution to the provision of care and support to vulnerable people. Liberal Democrats recognise that role, and seek to support voluntary organisations, not just as providers of care to vulnerable people, but as bodies that enable people to make a valuable contribution to their community. Many voluntary organisations operate without council funding, but they can all benefit from the council's support in encouraging and developing volunteering and community service.



The Environment

Concern about the quality of the environment we live in extends from our own street, to the local park, our ability to get about, the quality of the air we breathe to the future of our planet. The County council has a role in all of these things, and environmental issues impact upon every other aspect of the council's work.

Promoting public transport and other alternatives to cars are essential to reduce congestion, noise and air pollution and to promoting a healthier lifestyle and reducing global warming.

Northamptonshire is facing massive development pressures. In some areas, regeneration and investment in new development is welcome, in other areas there is a need to resist greenfield development that will produce unsustainable urban sprawl.

Development

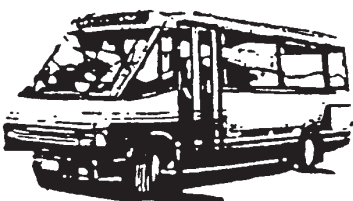
- * We oppose the unrealistic targets for new development imposed by the government on Northamptonshire by the Milton Keynes & South Midlands sustainable communities plan. We recognize that some new development and urban regeneration is both necessary and welcome, but we will resist Greenfield development that will create an unsustainable urban sprawl.
- * Liberal Democrats have opposed the creation of an undemocratic Urban Development Corporation for Northampton, Towcester and Daventry. However we will seek to work co-operatively with the UDC to achieve high quality investment in the infrastructure that must support new development.
- * We support the 'Catalyst Corby' regeneration project in Corby, and will press the County Council to become a full participating board member.
- * For new development to be sustainable there must be full community engagement. We will go beyond statutory requirements for consultation to ensure that the views and wishes of the local community shape development plans.
- * We will seek to reduce dependence on the car in new developments by ensuring developer contributions to public transport infrastructure and adequate provision of cycle and pedestrian routes.
- * We will use sustainability tests to assess planning applications and strategic planning proposals.
- * We will promote the use of recyclable materials in construction in order to reduce demand for gravel extraction, and promote energy and water efficiency in new developments.
- * We will actively promote the establishment of community based pocket parks in urban as well as rural areas.
- * We propose an environmental assessment of school buildings to promote the use of better insulation and alternative energy sources.
- * We will make the removal of Graffiti on all NCC owned properties and places a priority.



Liberal Democrats in Government will introduce a greenfield development tax, to discourage development on greenfields, and we will use the proceeds to bring brownfield sites back into use.

Transport

- * We support the establishment of quality bus partnerships with bus operators to ensure a more reliable and co-ordinated public transport system.
- * We will encourage public transport operators to use green fuels.
- * Safer routes to school backed by good access to good quality local schools are essential to reduce congestion and improve safety on the roads.
- * We will promote dial-a-ride and other door to door services, particularly in rural areas.
- * We will encourage community based transport initiatives, particularly in rural areas.
- * The County Council must take full responsibility for all bus route subsidies, including those currently being provided by Northampton Borough Council.
- * We support the re-opening of a through train service for Corby and the re-opening of the Northampton to Bedford line.
- * Pedestrian facilities have been neglected. Priority from the highway budget should be given to pavement repairs and maintenance, particularly where they are heavily used by elderly and disabled people.
- * Under funding of road maintenance has created a huge backlog in repairs which will take years to catch up. We will not allow short term savings to interfere with the long term maintenance programme.
- * We need a proper network of routes for cyclists. We would seek developer contributions, together with public investment to help fund this.
- * The council should support employee car share schemes, starting with its own employees.
- * We will improve the look of “gateway” routes into towns in Northamptonshire.
- * We will conduct a thorough and regular Green Audit of all NCC spending.
- * We will actively encourage and facilitate the removal of freight transport from Northamptonshire roads and onto railways.
- * We will closely scrutinise the operation of the highways contract with WS Atkins Ltd to ensure that it is delivering quality and value for money with proper consultation with local communities for all projects.
- * We support the introduction of a Park and Ride system to reduce congestion in Northampton Town Centre.



A Liberal Democrat Government will introduce free off-peak bus passes for the elderly and infirm.

Waste

Disposal of waste in landfill brings huge costs to the County, both financially, and by damaging the environment.

- * We will campaign against unnecessary packaging, and use minimal packaging and reusable containers in council premises.
- * We will relax regulations on the use of recycling centres. Regulations currently make it difficult for small businesses to dispose of waste and lead to more fly tipping.
- * Trading standards deserves a higher profile in order to ensure that people are treated fairly, and to promote healthy and environmentally friendly products and packaging.

Liberal Democrats in government will set a long-term goal of zero municipal waste, through waste minimization, re-use and recycling. Producers will be held responsible for disposing of their products and materials that are difficult to reuse or recycle.



Finance and Organisation

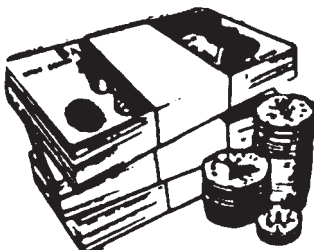
We, like the Liberal Democrat-run councils up and down the country, will base our approach to managing the County Council budgets on sound financial management aimed at providing Northamptonshire residents with excellent value for their money in the short and long term. We will ensure that services are delivered in the most flexible and cost effective way, whether by working with the private sector, in partnership with others or by the council providing the service directly itself.

The Council Tax is an unfair tax. It hurts the elderly and those on low incomes hardest. Until it is scrapped we have a responsibility to ensure that it is kept to the minimum, while recognizing that the level of the council tax is dependent on government grants. Repeated under funding of the council by government, and poor management of the council has led to increases above the rate of inflation.

The Gershon Report requires councils to identify efficiency savings of 2.5% per year, primarily from the use of Information and Communication technology. The Labour Government is taking these savings from local councils, depriving them of the choice to reduce the Council Tax or to improve services.

The forthcoming revaluation of Council Tax Banding has commenced in Wales and has seen over 80% of homes, mainly in bands C and D, paying yet more in Council Tax. Add these two things together and the majority of Northamptonshire residents will be significantly worse off with those just above the means tested benefit limits, many of whom are pensioners, significantly disadvantaged. Liberal Democrats would replace Council Tax with a local income tax ensure that people pay according to their means to do so.

- * Employing people takes up the lion's share of the council's budget. Ensuring that the council employs the right number to deliver services to the required standard is essential. The council needs to monitor vacancies at all levels as they arise to ensure that justification is provided before they are filled, and where they are not, the consequences in delivery of the service is understood.
- * We will introduce a Contracts Gateway group to scrutinize all large capital expenditure projects to ensure a robust process.
- * In addition we will make further savings through the procurement system and the use of commercial standards in our buying process.
- * We will review the structure of the council's Management Board to ensure openness and accountability.
- * We will seek to ensure that Council Tax levels increase by no more than the rate of inflation, while recognizing that the level of council tax is now largely determined by central government grants.
- * We will clamp down on waste relentlessly. We will seek to make full use of unwanted or under used assets or dispose of them.



- * We refute the notion that cheap is necessarily efficient. Wise investment can in some instances mean spending slightly more to maintain assets, rather than allowing them to fall into disrepair and building up larger bills for the future
- * We will scrap the newspaper/magazine “IN Northamptonshire” and work with District Councils and others to share ways of communicating with residents.
- * We would review PFI schemes to ensure accountability and value for money, and expect service contractors to allow flexibility to respond to local decisions and needs.

A Liberal Democrat Government will scrap the unfair Council Tax and replace it with a local income tax

