



# The Liberal Democrat Vision for Bedford Borough

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**Liberal Democrat Manifesto for Bedford Borough Council 2009**



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# The Liberal Democrat Vision for Bedford Borough

In this document we have set out a vision of how we would take the real opportunity presented by the advent of a single, unitary authority to improve the services delivered in Bedford Borough and create a Borough of opportunity that is a great place to live, work, study, visit and do business.

Bedford Borough faces many challenges as well as opportunities. The council must turn around many years of failure by the Tory County Council, during which council tax bills soared to the second highest county council level in the country.

We want Bedford Borough Council to be driven by the interests of local residents. To get the best for our area a clear focus on the areas in the greatest need of action is needed. We have therefore identified "Six to Fix" priority areas:

## Six to Fix for Bedford Borough

1. **Education:** raise GCSE results to above the national average
2. **Adult Social Care:** reverse the declining standard of service in the safeguarding of vulnerable adults
3. **Economy:** take action to support residents and local businesses during the credit crunch
4. **Crime:** tackle crime and the fear of crime by working with partners
5. **Roads:** tackle the backlog of repairs and stop the cycle of patching that doesn't last
6. **Environment:** pursue a Zero Carbon Growth policy with carbon neutral developments



# Education

**Improving standards must be a top priority for the new authority. We are committed to improving results, increasing opportunities for children to develop their skills and to access vocational training. Liberal Democrats believe education must work in the interests of children and by working with schools, pupils, parents and other partners we will achieve this.**

- **Raise GCSE results to above the national average.**
- We will improve standards in education across the Borough for children of all ages and abilities. Our Schools must maximise the potential of all children.
- The consultation on the proposed restructuring of the schools system in Bedford Borough from three to two tier must be fair and open to all, actively seeking the views of all those who may be affected by any changes.
- Oversee the construction of high quality new school buildings, fit for education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- We want to see good, well-equipped local schools serving their local communities.
- Support schools in offering a wider curriculum and ensure an improvement in the schooling of every child from the age of 4 through to 19, including more vocational subjects for older pupils.
- Ensure that good quality, healthy school meals are available at all schools.
- Protect and support adult education – we are committed to providing opportunities for adults to access learning opportunities at all stages in their lives, improving individuals’ opportunities and supporting the local economy. Education in Bedford Borough will be there to help everyone reach their full potential, whatever their age.
- Make school facilities community facilities, enabling community use and increasing local engagement with schools. Wherever possible, school facilities should be available for local community use out of hours.

# Adult Social Care

**The Conservative-run County Council has allowed the provision of services to vulnerable adults in our community to deteriorate, as judged by the latest inspection results. Everybody in need of support must be able to access the right care for their individual needs, and be supported in living independent lives where they are treated equally and valued as individuals. Making sure services meet the needs of individual vulnerable adults is central to ensuring that every person is treated with dignity and respect.**

- **Reverse the declining standard of service in the safeguarding of vulnerable adults.** This vital service was recently inspected and judged to have deteriorated to an 'adequate' level.
- Make supporting people to live independent lives in their own homes within the community a priority. This will include providing extra-care housing, self-contained homes with design features and support services available to enable people to live independently in their own homes.
- Work jointly with health partners and others to provide a seamless service between providers which offers expanding options, including near to home treatment and support.
- Work with voluntary organisations and the private sector to ensure that the highest quality and best value for money is achieved for those in need of support, whoever the provider.
- Make sure a full assessment of support needs is available to anyone who may be in need of care, including information and advice to help them make the right choices for themselves wherever possible.
- Provide social care services that reflect the needs of individuals, not the needs of the council.
- Ensure provision of care is fair and equitable right across the borough.
- Work to ensure that *all* Council services are tailored to meet the individual needs of older people, people with mental health problems and those with physical and learning disabilities.
- Give support to carers and the variety of critically important roles they undertake. Establish a carers' forum to make sure the Council is listening to carers' concerns and learning about how it can provide more assistance to carers. A carers' awards scheme will be launched in recognition of their crucial role.

# Economy

**The current recession is unparalleled in recent times, but rather than see it purely as a national and international problem, we believe the council has an obligation and a real opportunity to make a difference locally at this difficult time. We will pursue local priorities such as making sure that individuals and families have decent homes to live in and that the vulnerable receive the essential support to which they are entitled. We are ready to take practical and innovative action to support local residents and the Borough's businesses.**

- **Take action to support residents and local businesses during the credit crunch.**
- Attract more businesses to invest in Bedford and create more local jobs, especially skilled jobs. We will utilise our location in the 'technological arc' to promote the area to suppliers of specialist goods and services.
- Work to ensure all aspects of necessary infrastructure are in place as developments are built, to meet the needs of those who will live there from the earliest possible moment, creating sustainable communities for the future.
- Set up a Benefits Maximisation Service, with specialist advisers in place to help Borough residents receive the benefits to which they are entitled, and draw national funding into Bedford Borough. This service will focus on outreach work, going out to residents in all parts of the Borough rather than waiting for people to come to the council for help.
- Establish an employment scheme to provide advice to local residents who have lost their jobs and to help people into work.
- Ensure that Housing growth is matched by growth in jobs available for local residents.
- Oppose plans for excessive housing development in the borough.
- Make more out of our sporting & cultural events to encourage visitors to stay overnight in the borough, boosting the local economy.
- Seek opportunities for the council to support local businesses, for example by sourcing goods and services from local firms where possible and by paying suppliers within a shorter time period.
- Continue to support a loan scheme to help local businesses to continue to trade within the Borough, and ensure that this scheme and all others apply across the whole Borough.
- Refurbish local shopping parades to make them more attractive, vibrant places to shop.
- Protect local shopping and community facilities and post offices.
- Seek to minimise disruption during town centre development work, whether it be the loss of car parking spaces, loss of rental income or the loss of people's homes. By working closely with developers we will seek to ensure that development is carefully staged so as to minimise disruption to those who work and live in the borough. The Town Centre development should be considered as a whole not several projects viewed in isolation.

- Conduct a small business rate relief take-up campaign, to help local small businesses ensure that they are getting the business rate relief to which they are entitled.
- Create 'telecottages' hubs in new development to increase opportunities for remote working, supporting people to work flexibly and assisting the local economy.
- Tackle the housing waiting list, which is in danger of growing due to the credit crunch.
- Provide more affordable housing. In particular increase the supply of affordable rented housing must be increased.
- Make new homes available to existing Housing Association tenants in the first instance.
- Work with Housing Associations and other agencies to bring empty homes back into use.
- Ensure that within villages the right mix of housing is provided so that young people wanting to stay within the village are given every opportunity to do so.

# Crime and Community Safety

**Crime and the fear of crime are amongst residents' main concerns for the borough. Tough talk and empty gimmicks do not make our neighbourhoods safer. Working with the Police, Neighbourhood Watch, Community Safety Forums, parish and town councils and others we will pursue effective measures that work to reduce crime, anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime.**

- **Tackle crime and the fear of crime by working with partners.**
- Encourage and support local Community Safety Forums to give residents the opportunity to influence crime and community safety issues.
- Work with the police to support the continued expansion of community policing
- Safeguard the future of Street Rangers in the borough.
- Provide lighting and lockable gates for alleys where needed.
- Press the government to extend London salary incentives to Bedfordshire Police Authority to aid recruitment and retention of officers.
- Extend the use of mobile CCTV units, which are now in use following Lib Dem pressure, to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour hotspots swiftly and effectively.
- Create Street Leader awards to recognise outstanding efforts within our community to improve community safety.
- Work with all relevant agencies, including the police, the health service, voluntary organisations and others to ensure that effective domestic violence prevention and practical support for victims is in place.
- Create a scheme for young people to give their input into making communities safer.
- Invest in improved youth services that will increase opportunities for young people in Bedford Borough to take part in constructive activities.

# Better Roads and Footpaths

**The Conservative County Council has left Bedford Borough's road and pavements as some of the worst in the country and have allowed a backlog of essential works to build up. Liberal Democrats have already secured an additional £1million for repairs in the unitary council's first budget. We recognise that continued investment is needed to tackle the backlog. We want an end to the patching of our road and pavements that doesn't last, and see instead lasting, sustainable works to make roads safe for all road and path users.**

- **Tackle the backlog of repairs and stop the cycle of patching that doesn't last.**
- Ensure that road maintenance and repairs are carried out to a high, lasting standard. 'Patching up' potholes only for them to open up again as dangerously as before within weeks or months is unacceptable.
- Tackle the backlog of repairs and establish a sustainable ongoing programme of works in order that roads that need to be repaired get repaired.
- Ensure that road repairs are carried out on the basis of need and that certain roads, for example older or 'harder to repair' roads, are not neglected in favour of cheaper and easier streets.
- Use the extra £1 million for road and footpath maintenance added into the budget by the Liberal Democrats to tackle the backlog and make roads and footpaths across Bedford Borough safer.
- Ensure a fairer distribution of money for road and footpath repairs across the borough.
- Improve street lighting – Broken street lights must be repaired swiftly. Broken street lights make our roads and paths less safe.

# Environment

**The Environment must be at the heart of everything the council does. We are committed to improving the local environment to make Bedford Borough a better place to live for local residents, to do business and to visit. It is essential that the Council considers the impact of its activities on the wider environment, including on climate change. All aspects of Bedford Borough Council decisions should be assessed against their environmental impact.**

- **Pursue a Zero Carbon Growth policy with carbon neutral developments.**  
Alternatively, developers must make financial contributions to a carbon offset fund to reduce emissions elsewhere within the borough.
- Pursue a borough-wide waste reduction strategy as part of an effort to move towards a 'zero waste' Bedford Borough.
- Reject incineration and pursue the environmentally superior mechanical and biological treatment (MBT) of waste instead.
- Increase recycling of commercial waste by the council.
- Increase the range of materials in the doorstep recycling collection scheme, and boost promotion of the scheme.
- Enable all residents to take part in the recycling collection scheme, for example by making the necessary improvements at blocks of flats to allow residents to use the scheme.
- Continue to provide residents with a choice of either a bag or a bin for household recycling.
- Achieve a 50% recycling rate in advance of the national target date of 2020.
- Protect communities' green spaces from development.
- Develop a 'green wheel' around Bedford to enable easy access to green spaces
- Plan in green space for new developments - not pocket-sized space.
- Carry out enhanced street cleaning across the borough, including suburban areas.
- Establish a climate change fund for public bodies, private firms, community groups and individuals to access funding for environmental projects which help tackle climate change.
- Bring to an end the practice of importing waste from outside the area within the shortest possible timescale.
- Conduct a comprehensive green audit of Council services and Council buildings to ensure that the Council's own house is in order.
- Ensure there is regular pruning and maintenance of the borough's trees.
- Ensure that resources are in place to enforce the swift removal of abandoned cars.

- Adopt a green procurement strategy for the Council.
- Reduce the number of throw-away, disposable shopping bags used locally that are so damaging to the environment by establishing an agreement with local retailers to cut their use.
- Prevent continuous development between Bedford and Milton Keynes and preserve green fields in this area.
- Stop urban sprawl, protect greenfield sites and green spaces within communities.
- Provide adequate car parking spaces per house for new developments to prevent verge and nuisance parking.
- Protect open spaces from unauthorised gypsy and traveller encampments, as one part of wider action to tackle the problems of unauthorised encampments, including swift action to remove unauthorised encampments and the provision of new permanent and transit sites.

# **Libraries, Leisure, Sport, Recreation and the Arts**

**We will focus on providing leisure and cultural services for the benefit of all residents, ensuring greater opportunity to access services whilst achieving better value for money for local taxpayers. We recognise the wide range of extremely valuable roles that the Borough's parks, leisure and cultural facilities have, for example in keeping people of all ages healthy, fit and active and in providing activities for young people.**

- Examine ways to make Library Services more accessible to residents to those who do not live in close proximity to the borough's libraries, fostering close links with schools and residential homes.
- Conduct a review of arts and culture services, ensuring that residents are receiving value for money, visitor numbers are maximised and that the services are accessible to all.
- Maximise the benefit to Bedford Borough from the London 2012 Olympics.
- Increase promotion of our parks and open spaces, including better signposting and a wider spread of locations for major events. We would push for more of our parks to achieve Green Flag status so that they are maintained to a recognised high standard.
- Work to make the bold plans for Bedford River Valley Park to the east of the town become a reality.
- Support the planned rowing lake within Bedford River Valley Park.
- Encourage a greater, and more varied, provision of hotel accommodation. More accommodation is needed if we want people to visit the borough. We will work with planners and developers to increase the number of beds available in the town and villages so that overnight stays are possible and look into the development of a leisure campsite in the borough.
- Support the Bedford-Milton Keynes canal project.

# Health

**Liberal Democrats believe it is essential that local residents have a real say in local health services. We will continue to fight to protect Bedford Hospital. We will not tolerate the shocking and unacceptable health inequalities that exist within the Borough. We will bring together all the parts of the council-environment, housing, transport, employment, planning, social services and education – with the community to give people easy access to good services and comprehensive information to enable them to prevent the causes of ill health.**

- Increase joint working between the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and the council, for instance on health promotion and to screening for preventable diseases.
- Include Doctor's and Dentist's Surgeries in planning for large-scale new developments and encourage the creation more primary care facilities across the borough.
- Work to ensure the future for Bedford Hospital, and fight any plans to downgrade it and reduce local services.
- Improve planning and consultation on community health services.
- Support the vital work of the Bedfordshire Drug and Alcohol Action Team.
- Use the Borough Council's leisure facilities to help people improve their health.
- Make sure Adult and Children's Social Care Services work closely with health services to improve prevention of ill health, to ensure early warnings of problems, to avoid any duplication of services and above all to make sure individuals receive the right package of support for themselves, whichever agencies are providing it.

# Transport

**Bedford's road system gets gridlocked for the slightest of reasons and many locations are routinely congested at certain hours of the day. Liberal Democrats will bring forward solutions to make alternatives to car use such as buses, cycling and walking attractive and realistic options for local residents in all parts of the Borough. Traffic congestion is bad for local businesses, bad for the quality of the air we breathe and bad for road users who just want to get to where they are going swiftly and safely. We will take effective action to tackle it, supporting quality public transport, encouraging safe walking and cycling routes to give residents real options and get Bedford Borough moving.**

- Create a real cycling network for the borough, including the rural areas and across the town centre.
- Make bus travel a more attractive option for local residents by:
  - ◆ Ensure that bus services run later to help people make use of employment and leisure opportunities in the borough into the evening, and work with operators to ensure that bus services serve key sites such as the hospital and crematorium.
  - ◆ Repairing and refurbishing damaged bus shelters more swiftly to end the blight of vandalised shells in our communities and provide real-time, reliable bus running information at more bus stops.
  - ◆ Lobbying to reduce young people's bus fares.
  - ◆ Introducing further bus priority lanes on main routes in and out of the town.
  - ◆ Improve bus links for the rural villages.
  - ◆ Demand that current information on services is displayed at all bus stops, and ensure that services are advertised more widely
  - ◆ Conduct a thorough public review of bus services with the major operators to make sure they are serving residents' needs, including investigating council-run bus services.
- Tackle speed and parking issues outside our schools. We would ensure better enforcement of parking laws outside our schools and work with all schools to provide safe walking and cycling routes to schools and the use of walking school buses.
- Support East-West Rail, especially the western section to Oxford as the first stage, and lobby hard to make sure the agreed route does not bypass Bedford.
- Support the re-opening of the Bedford-Northampton rail line.
- Pursue the construction of a New Batts Ford Bridge. This is essential to complete what is currently a missing link for the town centre road network and cut congestion.
- Pursue the completion of the Western Bypass to relieve town centre congestion.
- Pursue a co-ordinated car parking strategy which reflects the needs of local residents.

- Pursue a traffic management strategy to reduce congestion.
- Ensure greater enforcement of bus and cycle lane policies.
- Pedestrianise the High Street and St Paul's Square North.
- Ensure parking enforcement takes place outside the town centre.
- Introduce further weight restrictions to roads where necessary in order to control the flow of lorries through residential areas and make sure they are enforced.
- Lobby for restoration of rail services northbound from Bedford to previous destinations and level of frequency. Lobby for the electrification of the midland mainline north of Bedford.

# Children and Young People

**The need to ensure that our children's services are properly funded and well managed has been highlighted by tragic high profile cases elsewhere in recent times, for example in Haringey and Doncaster. The Council clearly has no function more important than the protection of children from harm. We must ensure that all children from birth are able to grow up in a safe environment and have the opportunities they need to fulfil their potential and to fully engage in our society.**

- Make preventative work with families a priority, to help keep children safe in the family home and prevent children having to go into care or on to the child protection register.
- Improve services for young people after the services were neglected for many years by the County Council.
- Provide the support that foster carers need to provide homes for children, including respite care.
- Work to improve educational performance of children in residential and foster care.
- Seek to establish more youth clubs within communities.
- Provide further funding for youth facilities and more youth clubs for younger children.
- Work with the voluntary sector and community to boost their involvement in youth services.
- Work with partners, including schools, to ensure that more activities are provided outside school hours for young people.
- Provide high quality play schemes, and street schemes for older children, and other youth activities during school holidays.
- Set up a Youth Council with the ability to shape the services used by young people.
- Increase the number of Youth Activity Areas in the borough.
- Make sure all play areas in the borough are built to Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents standards so that our children can play safely. Enforcement powers must be used where they are not safe enough.

# Opening up the Council

**Bedford Borough Council belongs to its residents. It is time that it was run accordingly. We will make it easier to ask questions of those who make the decisions, to petition Cabinet Members and to make comments to the Council and its Councillors. Liberal Democrats will seek to ensure that the Council is open to all its residents and encourage decision-making at a more local, accountable level. Local communities know what is best for their neighbourhoods. We want to put power in their hands.**

- Ensure there is a public question time at meetings, allowing questions from the public & Councillors to the decision makers without notice.
- Ensure that meetings are held in public, not secretly behind closed doors.
- Give real power to communities – introduce area committees/local area management panels with their own budgets.
- Actively support the creation of urban parish councils where desired.
- Encourage people from all sections of the community to get involved in public life, including standing for election to the Council.
- Allocate budgets to local areas to be spent to meet local needs and tackle local problems, and enhance the community leadership role of Councillors so that they can best serve the electorate they represent.
- Make sure as many meetings as possible take place in cost effective locations outside of the town so that people across the borough have the best chance of attending them.
- Introduce a “Can Do” culture so that when an enquiry can’t be dealt with it will be passed to someone else who can.
- Ensure that local residents are properly involved in the decision-making process by consulting residents on important decisions and council services so that local residents influence decision on local matters.
- Make the consultation area for planning applications logical and large enough to ensure that interested residents are kept informed. Reform the planning consultation system to make it easier for residents to exercise their right to have their say.
- Maintain a town centre presence for the Borough Council after the move to Borough Hall, in order to make it accessible to people.
- We will make it a policy of the Council to ensure that national identify cards will not be required to access Council services or benefits unless specifically required to do so by law.
- Redesign the Council website to enable local residents to find information and use on-line services more easily.

# Value for Money. Value for Residents

**It is critical that residents get value for money from their Council Tax. The wasteful spending that has marked the Conservative-run County Council must stop immediately. It charged the second highest County Council Tax level in the country for sub-standard services. Bedford Borough residents deserve better. We will introduce a strict budgeting regime which will ensure that each year every penny of council spending must be shown to be necessary and justified. This will help achieve high quality, good value services and keep council tax down for hard-pressed local residents.**

- Introduce zero-based budgeting to ensure that all council spending is necessary and to cut out waste.
- Oppose millennium dome-style vanity projects, for example the bid for a part-time movable bridge over the Great Ouse.
- Look for opportunities for the council to take up options for trading externally or in partnership where this will be of benefit to the local taxpayer.
- Maintain a 3 year rolling fixed term funding plan in order that we are prepared for the future.
- Encourage more use of sponsorship and partnerships with local business to allow the council more funds to keep council tax low and provide extra services.
- Introduce greater transparency over the operating of DSD and improve the integration of its services within the Council.
- Institute a "suggestion box" scheme for all council and DSD staff in order to reveal real opportunities for greater value for money and cost savings.
- Provide incentives for good ideas that are put in place that enhance services or save the council money.
- Remove the unfair charge on council tax payments at post offices in order to stop punishing people for paying by this means and to support local branches.
- Lobby government to abolish the unfair council tax and replace it with a local income tax.
- Cut out wasteful spending on consultants, making a break from the County Council's record.





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