

Liberal Democrat Vision For The Future

**Bedford Borough Liberal Democrats
Policy Programme 2006**



LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

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LIBERAL DEMOCRAT VISION FOR THE FUTURE

“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. We champion the freedom, dignity and well-being of individuals, we acknowledge and respect their right to freedom of conscience and their right to develop their talents to the full. We aim to disperse power, to foster diversity and to nurture creativity. We believe that the role of the state is to enable all citizens to attain these ideals, to contribute fully to their communities and to take part in the decisions which affect their lives.”

Preamble to the Liberal Democrats Constitution

In Bedford Borough, Liberal Democrats apply these principles to working hard to get the best for our area. Unlike other parties, we believe the most important thing about local councils is that they should be both ‘local’ and ‘democracies’. We have a long record of councillors and FOCUS Teams campaigning all year round for the communities they represent.

The ideas included in this document set out Liberal Democrat vision of how we would improve the borough. It draws upon local ideas to solve local problems as well as looking to best practice from other authorities like Liverpool, Islington, Luton, Milton Keynes, Cambridge and many others. Authorities where the Liberal Democrats are already having a major impact improving their local area and giving the council back to local residents.

In 2006 a third of the council will be up for election. Then in May 2007 the next Mayoral election will take place. This document will focus Liberal Democrat action on the council providing the basis for negotiations with others and a positive vision to drive the borough forward.

A Cleaner and Greener Borough

Creating a clean and green environment for all is central to Liberal Democrat thinking. Nationally we were declared the greenest of the major political parties for our manifesto commitments ahead of the last general election. Within the borough we believe it is essential that we increase our recycling levels, clean up our local neighbourhoods and create a sustainable future for generations to come.



Reduce, Re-Use, Recycle,

The new landfill allowance trading scheme tax introduced by the government will see local authorities penalised for every tonne of waste over target that they send to landfill. It is vital then that the reuse and recycling of our waste takes precedence or we'll all face the consequences of further financial pressures on council tax levels as well as creating huge environmental problems for the future. Learning from best practice we would seek to see much higher rates achieved in the borough working with the public to create the schemes best suited to helping them recycle.



We would:

- 1 Support the establishment of an integrated waste management treatment facility in order to make sure as much of our waste as possible is dealt with without the use of landfill. We oppose any new incineration as part of this project.
- 2 Require more efforts to encourage schools and businesses to recycle. Recycling shouldn't just be kept to the home. Encouraging and educating our young people about the need to recycle, makes them great advocates of recycling and waste reduction! Schools and other business create huge amounts of waste that shouldn't be just dumped in the ground. From paper in our offices to the 90,000 tonnes a year of flat glass waste from windows in the domestic sector all this can and should be recycled. We would do everything possible to promote the means for recycling.



We would also:

- 1 Introduce a recycling scheme for batteries.
- 2 Recycle more waste streams from the doorstep. In order to increase our recycle rates it has got to be easy for people to recycle. Currently the borough fails to recycle corrugated cardboard or kitchen waste as part of the doorstep collection.
- 3 Improve facilities for the easy recycling of glass.
- 4 Increase promotion of the reasons why we should recycle and the schemes the borough runs



- 5 Improve the distribution of recycling bags and look at giving people the option of using bins as an alternative.
- 6 Identify areas of trade waste that could and should be recycled and work with local businesses to make it easier for them to reduce the level of waste they send to landfill. This could include glass bottles and waste from the construction industry.
- 7 Introduce incentive schemes to encourage more recycling such as in Lib Dem run Liverpool and Cumbria.
- 8 Encourage the use of non disposable nappies by making it easier to clean them locally and incentivising their use.
- 9 Oppose further landfill and dumping in Bedfordshire – we should work for a phased reduction of waste from other parts of the country, seeking a zero import target in the shortest possible timescale
- 10 Institute a full recycled paper policy (using recycled paper for all publications and recycling all paper used by the council), and a full can and other recyclable materials bin policy in all council buildings where practicable.
- 11 Introduce a green audit to the town hall to ensure we are doing everything we can.



Tidying Our Trees

We would:

- 1 Ensure there is regular pruning and maintenance of the Borough's trees so that they are not allowed to become a nuisance but through their appearance continue to contribute positively to their local environment
- 2 Introduce a fully operational database system to track arboricultural issues across the borough.



Cleaning Up Our Neighbourhoods

Graffiti, litter and disrepair breed a culture of neglect and a feeling that things are going downhill. The Liberal Democrats see challenging that spiral as key in making the borough the Best place to live. We will target investment into graffiti removal equipment and campaigns and work to see repairs effected quickly and dumping, including dumped cars, removed as a priority.

We will:

- 1 Improve the council's hotline service for reporting graffiti, vandalism fly tipping etc. We lobbied for this service from the beginning now we believe extra promotion is needed to raise awareness of this service. Also people should expect their report to be dealt with confidentially but efficiently with a reference number to asses the progress of their call so that they know action has been taken.
- 2 Increase and improve street cleaning in the suburbs. It shouldn't just be the town centre that is provided with extra clean ups. It is just as important that the rest of the borough is well maintained by the council. Liberal Democrats in Luton got tough on litter and commercial waste as soon as they took office in 2003. Within 2 years 500 fly tipping sites had been removed, extra staff brought in to clear up graffiti and vandalism and new dawn clean ups introduced using extra street cleaners in problem areas.

3 Work to improve communication between agencies, putting a value on people representing the council acting in the area's best interests and rewarding those who identify problems and report, or resolve them outside their normal line of duty.

4 Make maximum use of new technology to deliver information and services.

5 Re-vamp and re-launch the environmental clean up squad and system.

6 Ensure that resources are in place to enforce removal of abandoned cars. A 48 hour notice should mean that the car is removed 48 hours later - not a week.

7 Ensure that cars reported as abandoned are inspected and served with a notice within 24 hours of reporting.

8 Expand the 'Poopscoop' programme to make it easier to clean up and continue in our efforts to put an end to the mess, inconvenience and health risks posed by inconsiderate dog owners.

9 Safeguard the continued work of our enforcement officers to help ensure that existing laws on littering and dog fouling are being kept.



Energy Efficiency

We would:

1 Investigate the use of Solar Power technology including Photo-voltaic cells on Council roofs, to generate substantial amounts of our own electricity.

2 Encourage more home grown energy from within the borough. Through the use of wind turbines, CHP boilers and solar power make it possible for houses not only to reduce their energy bills but also generate enough energy to sell back to the national grid and contribute to a reduction in global warming.

3 Introduce planning conditions that would require 10% of energy requirements in all new commercial developments in the borough to be met with on-site renewable solutions.



Making the Borough A Safer Place To Live

Crime and the fear of crime are two of the biggest issues facing society today. Nationally Liberal Democrats have campaigned to see 10,000 more police on our streets. Locally we believe crime must be tackled in partnership with the police and homework to find the solutions that really work for the borough rather than just following the latest initiative from the government. It's about catching criminals not headlines.



Working With The Police

We would:

- 1 Encourage the continued expansion of community policing.
- 2 Work with the police to provide more facilities in more villages and neighbourhoods that are available to be used by the police
- 3 We will also call on the government to extend London Salary incentives to Bedfordshire Police Authority, to end the economic migration of police officers from Bedford to London



Council Initiatives

We would:

- 1 Safeguard the future of Street Rangers in the Borough. Liberal Democrat run Liverpool has recently increased the number of rangers it has on hand to help improve community safety. The rangers we now see in the borough are as a direct result of work by the Liberal Democrats and we are committed to seeing their good work continue.
- 2 Act to tackle nuisance behaviour in the borough.
- 3 Provide further funding for youth facilities and more youth clubs for younger children. Providing facilities and things for young people to do has been identified by the Police, the Home Office and local residents as key to reducing Anti-Social behaviour incidences.
- 4 Put pressure on the Conservative led County Council to increase funding for youth services. They have a very poor record having been rated the lowest authority in the country for spending on youth facilities. This is letting down our young people and letting down everyone who has to deal with the consequences.
- 5 Lobby the Government to review the practice of extending licensing hours and seek to reduce the binge drinking culture in the borough.
- 6 Introduce mobile CCTV units that can be used to monitor short-term problem areas to seek to resolve isolated problems.
- 7 Create Street Leader awards to recognise outstanding efforts within our community



Better Transport Through The Borough

Bedford's transport network is poor and fails the needs of residents living in the borough and those who we would seek to visit the area. For too long negotiations between the borough and county councils and local transport providers have failed to meet our needs. We believe it is essential to meet our environmental commitments that viable alternatives to car journeys are available. We support more and later buses, more suitably located dedicated bus lanes and the best deals locally on pensioner and children's fares. Aside from public transport we believe whether you are a cyclist, pedestrian or car user you shouldn't need to take your life in your hands because of defects to our roads caused by under funding from the Conservative led county council.



We would:

- 1 Work with transport providers to improve public transport links so that it is easier to get around the borough and further afield. We would seek co-operation between providers to create an integrated system so that trains and buses could link up more smoothly.
- 2 Ensure greater enforcement of bus and cycle lane policies so that they provide the benefits for alternatives to car use they are intended for.
- 3 Improve the network of cycle lanes in the town and introduce more lanes to rural areas to provide safer routes for all cyclists.
- 4 Encourage more buses after 8pm so that people can make use of facilities in the borough into the evening
- 5 Improve the time it takes to construct and repair our bus shelters to put an end to the ineffective shells we see in many parts of the town.
- 6 Continue to support and lobby for an East/West rail link and improvements to the rail link west of Bedford, especially improvements to the rolling stock on the Bedford to Bletchley line.
- 7 Lobby to improve the deal for children and young people's bus fares. We established the best local fare for Pensioners in the borough and have campaigned to see this safeguarded in recent years. We believe children's fares also need to be lowered in order for them to get around and make use of all the borough without being prohibited by excessive fares.
- 8 Pedestrianise the High Street and St Paul's Square North to improve the environment of our historic town centre and revitalise the shopping mix in the town
- 9 Adopt a parking policy that reflects the needs of residents not just money making.
- 10 Provide quick and lasting repairs to our roads and footways



- 11 Ensure parking enforcement takes place outside the town centre
- 12 Tackle speed and parking issues outside our schools. Parking problems outside borough schools have become serious safety issues as well destroying road verges. We would ensure better enforcement of parking laws outside our schools and work with Schools and the County Council to provide safe routes to schools and encourage the use of walking school buses (crocodile) idea, so that children can be safely escorted to school, without the need to use cars.
- 13 Introduce weight restrictions to roads in the borough in order to control the flow of lorries through our towns and villages.
- 14 Strive to make sure that the Borough's bus services satisfy local needs, through a thorough public review of bus services with the major operators and the County Council.
- 15 Lobby for new bus routes to serve new and developing employment and residential areas.
- 16 Seek to work with operators to ensure that a good selection of bus services serve key areas - such as the hospital and crematorium, and run extended hours to widen the usage.
- 17 The free bus pass and 40p maximum fare were introduced from a Liberal Democrat proposal. We will continue to ensure that our pensioners have one of the best deals in the area when the new scheme is introduced.



Our Community – Living and Working In The Borough

We would:

- 1 Make sure all play areas in the borough are built to ROSPA Standards so that our children can play safely. Enforcement powers should be used where they are not safe enough.
- 2 Establish a “green belt” between the edge of Bedford and Milton Keynes
- 3 Develop a science park
- 4 Respect significant old buildings and incorporate them where appropriate into new developments taking into account best practice in urban design principles
- 5 Introduce planning conditions that require all new developments to make use of renewable energy and are energy efficient in order to make our communities more sustainable.
- 6 Ensure all new developments have a suitable infrastructure to meet the needs of those who will live there from the earliest possible moment, creating sustainable communities for the future.
- 7 Support the idea of the Bedford-Milton Keynes canal to bring tourism to the area.
- 8 Ensure there is better design of all building developments including the appropriate number of car spaces in new developments to prevent verge and nuisance parking.
- 9 Create more well located and well designed green spaces in new developments taking into account their proximity to planned housing.
- 10 Encourage more primary care facilities such as dentists and doctors surgeries across the borough.
- 11 New housing should help us meet our wider environmental targets, for instance by having sufficient space for recycling bins and water butts planned from day one.
- 12 Tackle housing waiting lists. The current housing list is continuing to grow with little evidence to show it is likely to reduce. We would seek to use **positive** initiatives used elsewhere in the country to look to reduce the numbers waiting to be housed and create more choices of the area in which they want to live.
- 13 Make new homes available to existing Housing Association tenants in the first instance. Allowing existing tenants to move to the location and type of home they require is not only good news for them it will also free up existing accommodation that may be under occupied for new tenants



- 14 Work with housing associations and other agencies to bring empty homes back into use.
- 15 Look for a better use for surplus sheltered accommodation. There is a surplus of sheltered accommodation in the borough whilst there remains a deficit in most other forms of affordable housing. We would look at opportunities for alternatives to sheltered accommodation that could be gained from existing stock that would benefit those looking for new homes.
- 16 Support more local action days. Building on the back of litterpick initiatives if we want to live and work in a clean and pleasant borough we need to start locally not just in the town centre. Involving everybody in the local community will only help to strengthen each community, fostering pride in their locality so that no area can feel that it has been abandoned by the borough.
- 17 Oppose government plans for excessive housing development in the Borough.

Sport and Leisure For The Borough

Key to enabling flourishing, stable communities are creating opportunities for the creative use of leisure time. Liberal Democrats believe in giving people the power to make the most out of their life whether through work or play and realise that there must be a good balance of the two. We believe good quality leisure and recreation are essential to making Bedford Borough a good place to live.



We would

- 1 Maximise the benefit to Bedford Borough from the 2012 Olympics. With the Olympics coming to London in 2012 we believe Bedford is ideally placed to become a host town for a national team. We will work alongside the local sports council to make sure Bedford benefits from this experience.
- 2 To increase the local economy we need to make more out of our events by encouraging people to stay overnight in the borough.
- 3 Encourage a greater number and mix of hotel accommodation in the borough. More accommodation is needed if we seriously want people to visit the borough. We would work with planners and developers to increase the number of beds available in the towns and villages so that overnight stays are possible. We will also look into the development of a campsite in the borough.
- 4 More use and promotion of facilities for all residents.
- 5 Establish a museum for airships to celebrate our world famous past.
- 6 Support plans for a rowing lake in the borough.
- 7 Our Parks and open spaces are an asset that needs to be shown. We would increase promotion of our parks and open spaces, including better signposting and a wider spread of locations for major events. We would push for our parks to be green flagged so that they are maintained to a recognised high standard.
- 8 Promote the use of conference facilities at Wyboston.



Managing the Borough's finances

Local Control of Expenditure

Successive Labour and Conservative governments have squeezed the funds available to local authorities meaning tax payers are left to pick up the pieces. We would seek to reverse the flow of funds upwards and away from local authorities and at the same time encourage more funds to be available for local decisions in every area of the borough.



Opening Up The Council Through the Use of New Technology

Council documents should be accessible on-line via the council's website and free to download. This should include advance agendas, minutes, lists of planning applications etc.

We would:

- 1 Encourage more investment in e-government systems that make the council more accessible to the public.
- 2 Councillors and officers should be encouraged wherever possible to opt out of hard document copies and use electronic versions to reduce paper usage and cost.

Planning For our Futures

This manifesto and all suggestions put forward by the Liberal Democrats ignore the buy now pay later philosophy adopted by the Mayor and other parties. We have consistently put forward fully costed alternatives where we believe better decisions could and should have been made. The ideas in this manifesto would be funded by a reprioritising of the work of the council. We are committed to providing first rate front line services but are concerned at the money that is wasted on pet projects or cosmetic improvements to town hall buildings.

We would:

- 1 Adopt a zero based policy option budget with a greater emphasis on breaking down so called statutory budgets so that the services the council provides are prioritised to those the public actually want without huge hikes in council tax.
- 2 Zero based budgeting means we would start from scratch when looking at the councils finances. From this approach we would look at every area of the councils finance to see what should and could be funded rather than just making minor changes to existing budgets. To ensure that every department maximises efficiency.
- 3 Maintain a 3 year rolling fixed term funding plan so that we are prepared for the future..
- 4 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.



- 5 Ensure green issues play a major role in all new procurement strategies.
- 6 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.
- 7 To ensure a better seamless service to residents we would introduce greater transparency over the operating of DSD and improve the integration of its services within the town hall.
- 8 Institute a “suggestion box” scheme for all council and DSD staff.
- 9 Provide incentives for good ideas that are put in place that enhance services or save the council money.
- 10 Lobby government to abolish the unfair council tax and replace it with a local income tax. The council tax unfairly penalises pensioners and less well off groups. We would like to see greater powers locally to raise funds for local government and greater control over how this money is spent. We believe this will prove a fairer system of taxation that will make local government more accountable for its spending practices

Working Together

Local government is important not for its own sake but for the service it provides to local residents. We believe it is essential then that your local council is open and accessible to you, and responds to the decisions you want. We want to see an end to the practice of secret meetings, an end to political infighting and an increase in local decision making powers.

We will:

- 1 Work with all groups – businesses, residents groups, Parish Councils, Urban Community Councils, unions and others who seek to improve Bedford Borough, strengthen communities and empower individuals, ensuring that we are easily accessible to such groups.
- 2 Stop the sidelining of ward councillors; enhance their community leadership role so that they can best serve the electorate they represent.
- 3 Continue our work on Policy Review and Scrutiny Committees. These committees provide the checks and balances for any council system but are particularly relevant under the Mayoral system as operates in Bedford. The Policy Review and Scrutiny Committees allow for greater research into decisions and issues than the Mayor and his/her colleagues have time for in order to make sure decisions are made in the best interests of local residents. Currently Liberal Democrats chair 3 out of the 4 Policy Review and Scrutiny and committees. Scrutiny in Bedford is currently involved in a number of external research projects looking at best practice.
- 4 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.
- 5 End the practice of secret meetings behind closed doors.
- 6 Introduce a “Can Do” culture so that where an enquiry can’t be dealt with it will be passed to someone who can.
- 7 Work towards a Unitary authority for your area, to reduce duplication, waste and the overall number of councillors.
- 8 Re-introduce the Lib Dem initiative of providing budgets allocated to local areas to be spent on local problems and needs. These are problems that would never get to the top of the cabinets agenda but which are significant in our local villages and neighbourhoods.
- 9 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 make the decision on local matters.
- 10 Ensure resources for running the elections process are adequate, so that elections are run as openly and efficiently as possible.
- 11 The consultation area for planning applications should be as large as possible to ensure that local residents have the right to have their say.



Opportunities For All

Bedford has received national recognition for its ethnic diversity and we believe this is something we should all be proud of. We believe any form of discrimination should not be tolerated. We will ensure any such incidents are taken seriously so that everybody is treated with dignity and respect. It should be a priority of the council to make Bedford a better place for all its residents.

We would:

- 1 Ensure all policies are socially inclusive, and give regard to minority groups within society, as well as the needs of the socially vulnerable.
- 2 Ensure better understanding and tolerance through our equalities work. Discrimination must be reduced, inequalities must be addressed and negative stereotyping removed.

Giving The Council Back to You

Liberal Democrats are not afraid of giving you more power. We believe in devolving power from Whitehall so that more local decisions are made locally not by unelected distant government quangos. Who is better to make local decisions than the local people they affect.

We would:

- 1 Establish a number of Local Area Management Panels to cover the entire Borough. They will make sure that the Borough councillors for that area can set local priorities in meetings held in the area at which the public may speak.
- 2 Local councillors for each area will have enhanced powers to make decisions that directly affect that area, openly and accountably.
- 3 Give the urban areas of the Borough the same rights as the rural areas by encouraging the creation of Urban Parish Councils throughout Bedford town. We welcome the example set by Brickhill Parish Council, and would see this as a model for future parish councils.

The Rural Borough

Currently over 30% of the adult population live in rural areas of the borough. Liberal Democrat councillors currently represent wards in the urban and rural areas, in the north and south of the town. Liberal Democrats can therefore listen to and represent all people across the Borough and in this respect we recognise the importance of making sure rural areas do not miss out.

We would:

- 1 Engage the Police in discussions about Policing in the rural areas.
- 2 Set up a Rural Outreach Service to fight poverty and ensure that rural people are getting the benefits they deserve.
- 3 Stem the flow of urban sprawl and protect greenfield sites by ensuring that previously developed sites are used first.
- 4 Ensure that policy decisions take account of the impact in rural areas.
- 5 Ensure that within the villages themselves the right mix of housing is provided so that young people wanting to stay within the village are given every opportunity to do so.



Our Historic Town Centre

Bedford was granted the second ever borough charter in 1166 and the borough's history and heritage has flourished ever since. We put forward plans to see the market relocated to St Paul's Square and Harpur Street. We also put forward plans to see more markets introduced to Bedford town centre. We have been heavily involved in work to see further development of areas like the bus station, Castle Lane and the improvements to Castle Mound. We believe the Town Centre and the River in particular should be allowed to flourish drawing in visitors from outside the town centre and benefiting residents across the borough. It is essential that developments plans continue to prosper but this must be managed carefully to minimise disruption in the town.



We Would:

- 1 Redevelop the bus station area as a priority and provide a modern bus station at this location that allows for improvement in the services that are offered and provides a similar level of customer facilities. The development should not be an excuse to cut existing services. The development of this area should include a new full size supermarket to replace the loss of Sainsbury's in the Town Centre.
- 2 Maintain a police presence in the town centre. Development plans suggest the use of the existing police station at Greyfriars as an area for the location of the new bus station. We believe a police presence should still be maintained in the town centre in order to provide a rapid response to all situations.
- 3 Seek to minimise disruption when the town centre is finally developed 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 would seek to ensure each stage of the development was carefully staged so as to minimise disruption to those who work or live in the borough. We believe the Town Centre development should be considered as a whole not each project viewed in isolation.
- 4 If Bedford is a good place to live and work, then it will also be a good place to visit and invest. We should not therefore pursue speculative tourism projects, but seek to build on existing strengths to make the Borough increasingly attractive to local people – and if we succeed, others will come. The riverside area is one such area – we should seek to retain and enhance the excellence of rowing on the river and the beautiful embankment area.



- 5 Back proposals that encourage access to the riverside and enhance enjoyment of the river – including coffee shops, restaurants and other leisure facilities that overlook the river – including in the riverside car park area.
- 6 Review existing car parking, to develop our car parks and make on-street parking a less necessary option.
- 7 Work to limit the number of pubs and clubs in the town centre and encourage alternatives that attract a cross section of the community.
- 8 We will work with all interested groups to progress these projects to improve the town for residents, businesses and visitors alike.