

# **Christine McHugh's Manifesto for Bedford Borough 2007**

***Putting People First***

# **CONTENTS**

## **My Vision for Bedford Borough**

### **Delivering Improved Frontline Services**

- **A cleaner Borough**
- **Sport and leisure for all**
- **Our Community – living and working in the Borough**
- **Better transport through the Borough**

### **Delivering a Green Borough**

- **Reduce, Re-use, Recycle**
- **Energy efficiency and climate change**

### **Regenerating the Borough**

### **Delivering a Safer Borough**

### **Serving ALL Borough residents**

- **Opportunities for all**
- **The rural Borough**
- **Working with others**

### **Running the Council**

## MY VISION FOR BEDFORD BOROUGH

*“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*

The principles described above are my principles and they are the principles on which this manifesto is based. The ideas included in this document set out the vision of how I would improve the Borough if elected Mayor to make it a good place to live and work. A good place for the Borough’s residents to live and work will be a good place for others to visit and come to invest and do business. That’s what the Borough should be working towards.

Bedford town centre is embarking on a period of transformation. I want to see sustainable development of the town centre, plans that are economically viable without threatening the viability of existing retail and leisure venues inside and outside the town centre. The plans should be part of a consistent whole rather than piecemeal developments of individual sites and must be carefully carried out to minimise disruption to the economy of the town centre and to town centre residents.

I am committed to the Borough providing first rate front line services and have been concerned at the money spent over the last 4 and half years on cosmetic improvements to town hall buildings.

Bedford has a long record of Liberal Democrat councillors and FOCUS Teams campaigning all year round for, and keeping in touch with, the communities, rural and urban, in the north and south of the Borough, which they represent.

Liberal Democrats are successfully running nearby, thriving authorities: Luton, Milton Keynes, Cambridge and many others. In these areas the Liberal Democrat-run councils are having a major impact improving their local area and giving the council back to local residents.

As Mayor I would be a strong voice for the interests of Borough residents, representing our Borough in the region and to national government on council issues and other important issues such as the future of health care at Bedford Hospital on which I have been campaigning since last summer.

On May 3 you can vote for a forward thinking, confident, "Can do" leadership for Bedford Borough too.

## **Delivering Improved Frontline Services**

### **A cleaner Borough**

Creating a clean and green environment for all is essential in providing a good quality of life of Borough residents. Graffiti, litter and disrepair breed a culture of neglect and a feeling that things are going downhill. Challenging that spiral is key to making the Borough a good place to live, work, visit and do business. Graffiti removal, work to see repairs effected quickly and removal of dumping, including dumped cars, will be a priority.

#### **As Mayor I will:**

1. Promote the council's hotline service for reporting graffiti, vandalism, fly tipping etc. People should expect their report to be dealt with confidentially but efficiently.
2. Increase and improve street cleaning in the suburbs. It shouldn't just be the town centre and rural areas that are provided with extra clean ups. It is just as important that the rest of the Borough is well maintained by the council.
3. Support more local action days. Building on the back of litter pick initiatives, inviting everybody in the local community to participate can 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.
4. Work to improve communication between agencies, and putting a value on people representing the council acting in the area's best interests, rewarding those who identify problems and report, or resolve them outside their normal line of duty.
5. Make maximum use of new technology to deliver information and services.
6. Expand the 'Poopscoop' programme to make it easier for dog owners to clean up to continue in our efforts to put an end to the mess, inconvenience and health risks posed by inconsiderate dog owners.
7. Safeguard the continued work of our enforcement officers to help ensure that existing laws on littering and dog fouling are being kept.
8. 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
9. Introduce a fully operational database system to track arboricultural issues across the Borough.

### **Sport and leisure for all**

Key to enabling flourishing, stable communities is the provision of opportunities for the creative use of leisure time. I want to give people the power to make the most out of their life whether through work or play, with a good balance of the two. Good quality leisure and recreation are essential to making Bedford Borough a good place to live.

#### **As Mayor I will**

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. I will work as part of BOOST 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. I would work with planners and developers to increase the number of beds available in the towns and villages so that overnight stays are possible. I will also look into the development of a campsite in the Borough.
4. More use and promotion of leisure 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. Support the creation of the Bedford River Valley Park in the Borough.
8. Our Parks and open spaces are a great asset. I would increase promotion of our parks and open spaces, including better signposting and a wider spread of locations for major events. I would push for our parks to be green flagged so that they are maintained to a recognised high standard.
9. Work with local organisations and groups such as the Wildlife Trusts and the RSPB to increase the conservation value of parks and open spaces.
10. Promote the use of conference facilities at Wyboston.

### **Our Community – Living and working in the Borough**

#### **As Mayor I will:**

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. 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 for people as to the area in which they want to live.
3. Work with housing associations and other agencies to bring empty homes back into use.
  4. 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.
  5. Oppose any government plans for further housing development in the Borough.

### **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. I believe it is essential to meet our environmental commitments that viable alternatives to car journeys are available. I want to encourage 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, 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 run county council.**

#### **As Mayor I would:**

1. Work with transport providers to improve public transport links so that it is easier to get around the borough and further afield. I want to see a revitalised bus network and 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 for which they are intended.
3. Want to see an improved network of cycle lanes in the town and the introduction of 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 better rail links including an improved service to Kings Cross 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 scheme 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 facilities without being prohibited by excessive fares.
  8. Pressure the Tory run County Council to provide funding for quick and lasting repairs to our roads and footways
  9. Ensure Parking Enforcement takes place outside the town centre
  10. 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, so that children can be safely escorted to school, without the need to use cars.
  11. Introduce weight restrictions to roads in the borough in order to control the flow of lorries through our towns and villages.
  12. 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.
  13. Lobby for new bus routes to serve new and developing employment and residential areas.
  14. 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.
  15. See through strategic improvements such as the dualling of the A421 and the construction of the western bypass.

## **Delivering a Green Borough**

### **Energy Efficiency and Climate Change**

#### **As Mayor I will:**

1. Introduce a Zero Carbon Growth policy for new developments whereby the development seeks to minimize energy use, maximize energy efficiency, generate energy on-site and offset net emissions.
- 2.
3. Investigate the use of Solar Power technology including Photo-voltaic cells on Council roofs, to generate substantial amounts of our own electricity.
4. Encourage more home grown energy from within the Borough. Through the use of wind turbines, CHP boilers and solar power make it possible to 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.

### **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 I will seek to see much higher rates achieved in the Borough, working with the public to create the schemes best suited to helping them recycle.

#### **As Mayor I will:**

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. Mechanical and biological treatment of materials is preferable to on-site incineration.
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 tonnes of flat glass waste from windows all this can and should be recycled. We would do everything possible to promote the means for recycling.

## Regenerating the Borough

3. Ensure green issues play a major role in all new procurement strategies.
4. Ensure new housing helps us meet our wider environmental targets, for instance in making provision for recycling and water butts, using grey water schemes.

### **I will also:**

1. 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 kitchen waste, a wide range of plastics, foil and tetra packs (drinks containers) as part of the doorstep collection.
2. Improve facilities for the easy recycling of glass, starting glass collection in area where bottle banks are not available.
3. Increase promotion of the reasons why we should recycle and the schemes the Borough runs.
4. Improve the distribution of recycling bags and look at giving people the option of using bins as an alternative.
5. 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.
6. Introduce incentive schemes to encourage more recycling such as in Lib Dem run Liverpool and Cumbria.
7. Encourage the use of non disposable nappies by making it easier to clean them locally and providing incentives for their use.
8. Lobby government and producers to eliminate unnecessary packaging the first place.
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. Maintain a green audit to the town hall to ensure we are doing everything we can.
12. Support local charity shops to promote their work and to recognise the contribution they make in reducing waste.

## **Regenerating the Borough**

Bedford was granted the second ever Borough charter in 1166 and the Borough's history and heritage has flourished ever since. The Borough now faces a challenge to revitalise the town centre that has suffered from the Tory government's promotion of out-of-town retail and to attract a greater range of jobs to the Borough.

Liberal Democrats have consistently worked to revitalise the town centre and I will continue this. It was Liberal Democrats who put forward plans to see the market relocated to St Paul's Square and Harpur Street and plans to see more markets introduced to Bedford town centre.

The town centre and the river in particular should be allowed to flourish to benefit residents across the Borough and draw in visitors from outside the Borough. I want to see sustainable development of the town centre; plans that are economically viable without threatening the viability of existing retail and leisure venues inside and outside the town centre. The plans should be part of a consistent whole rather than piecemeal developments of individual sites and must be carefully carried out to minimise disruption to the economy of the town centre and to town centre residents.

The Liberal Democrats have successfully fought for an increase in the target number for new jobs in order to better match the planned growth in homes, successfully worked for the retention of the "green belt" area of special restraint around Bedford and we have sought to protect areas of outstanding landscape value in the north west and south of the Borough and the riverscape from the government's attacks.

### **As Mayor I will:**

1. Ensure that increases in employment match any increase in housing.
2. Make more of our strategic location close to London, Oxford and Cambridge. Scientific, technological and City-overspill opportunities should be targeted to increase the range of employment opportunities in the Borough.
3. Value local communities. Our villages and neighbourhoods must retain their separate, distinct and varied characters with their own range of shops and other facilities.
4. 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 planned so as to minimise disruption to those who work or live in the Borough.
5. Work to maintain a Police presence in the town centre in order to provide a rapid response to all situations.

## Regenerating the Borough

6. If Bedford is a good place to live and work, then it will also be a good place to visit and invest. The Council 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, visitors will be attracted to our Borough. 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.
7. Develop a science park to bring more high tech jobs to the Borough.
8. Support the plan for a Bedford-Milton Keynes canal to bring tourism to the area, within the existing planned Borough housing numbers.
9. 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.
10. Review existing car parking, to develop our car parks and make on-street parking a less necessary option.
11. Work to limit the number of pubs and clubs in the town centre and encourage alternatives that attract a greater cross section of the community.
12. Work with all interested groups to progress projects to improve the town for residents, businesses and visitors alike.
13. Respect significant old buildings and incorporate them where appropriate into new developments taking into account best practice in urban design principles
14. Work to 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.
15. 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.
16. Create more well-located and well-designed green spaces in new developments taking into account their proximity to planned housing.
17. Encourage more primary care facilities such as dentists and doctors surgeries across the Borough.

## **Delivering a Safer Borough**

**Crime and the fear of crime are two of the biggest issues facing society today. Crime must be tackled in partnership with the Police and Neighbourhood Watch 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.**

### **As Mayor I will:**

1. Put a stronger Council presence on our streets and in our parks by safeguarding and extending the Street Ranger and Park Ranger initiative, first introduced in Bedford by Liberal Democrats in 2000.
2. Support Neighbourhood Watch in its valuable work and help to encourage more streets to become Neighbourhood Watch areas.
3. Design out crime by ensuring new developments are built to crime prevention standards informed by the Police.
4. Nip anti-social behaviour hot spots in the bud. Target hot spots with mobile CCTV and working with the Police.
5. Provide more facilities, away from residential areas where young people can let off steam safely without disturbing local residents.
6. Support youth clubs and others working with young people, to give positive alternatives and a constructive environment for children and young people.
7. Make sure that people on ASBOs and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts have support to change their behaviour not just push the problem elsewhere. Far too many ASBOs are broken.
8. Stamp down on distraction burglary and rogue traders through the promotion of no cold calling zones.
9. Zero tolerance of vandalism. Graffiti must be cleaned and repairs made without delay to avoid a spiral of decline.
10. Work closely with the Police - funding Community Support Officers and co-ordinating the work of Council Rangers and Police on the ground.

### **Working with others**

#### **I will:**

1. Work with the Police to provide more facilities in more villages and neighbourhoods that are available to be used by the Police
2. 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
3. Put pressure on the Conservative led County Council to increase funding for youth services. They have a very poor record having been rated the

## Delivering a Safer Borough

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.

4. Lobby the Government to review the practice of extending licensing hours and seek to reduce the binge drinking culture in the Borough.
5. Create Street Leader awards to recognise outstanding efforts within our community

## **Serving ALL Borough Residents**

**Local government is important not for its own sake but for the service it provides to local residents. I believe it is essential then that your local council is open and accessible to you. I will make tackling poverty one of the Borough's key aims.**

### **Opportunities for all**

Bedford has received national recognition for its ethnic diversity and this is something of which we should all be proud. I believe any form of discrimination should not be tolerated. I 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.

#### **As Mayor I will:**

1. Ensure that decisions are assessed for their impact in tackling poverty.
2. Ensure all policies are socially inclusive, and give particular regard to minority groups within society, as well as the needs of the socially vulnerable.
3. Ensure better understanding and tolerance through our equalities work. Discrimination must be reduced, inequalities must be addressed and negative stereotyping removed.

### **The rural Borough**

Over 30% of the Borough's population live in rural areas of the Borough. I have represented both urban and rural wards and last summer undertook a tour of every rural parish, making myself available for residents' queries and seeking their views. Each year I would visit every rural parish – taking the Council into the heart of each of our communities.

#### **As Mayor I will:**

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 green field 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.

6. Make sure that parishes do not have to pay twice for council services, such as the council run playschemes.

### **Working with others**

#### **As Mayor I will:**

1. Work with all groups – businesses, residents groups, Parish Councils, Urban Community Councils, unions, voluntary organisations, faith groups and others who seek to improve Bedford Borough, strengthen communities and empower individuals, ensuring that we are easily accessible to such groups.
2. Work to make more rapid progress towards Bedford Borough becoming a Fairtrade Borough, which has been neglected by the current Mayor since it was agreed as an aim in 2004.
3. Stop the sidelining of ward councillors; enhance their community leadership role so that they can best serve the electorate they represent. Use the government's new guidance to allow local councillors to control some of the money spent in their wards.
4. Support the work of the 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.
5. 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.
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. 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 cabinet's agenda but which are significant in our local villages and neighbourhoods.
8. 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.

## **Running the Council**

### **Opening Up the Council Through the Use of New Technology**

Residents are increasing familiar with getting information and services on-line. Council services should also be accessible on-line via the council's website.

#### **As Mayor I will:**

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.

### **Local Control of Expenditure**

The Liberal Democrat group has consistently put forward budget amendments that are fully costed. I will continue this prudent approach to the Councils' finances – your money.

#### **As Mayor I will:**

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. Zero based budgeting means we would start from scratch when looking at the council's finances. From this approach we would look at every area of the council's 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.
2. Maintain a 3 year rolling fixed term funding plan so that we are prepared for the future.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. Institute a "suggestion box" scheme for all council and DSD staff.

## Running the Council

7. Provide incentives for good ideas that are put in place that enhance services or save the council money.
8. 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. I believe this will prove a fairer system of taxation that will make local government more accountable for its spending practices