

A Manifesto for Suffolk 2017

An open, tolerant, happy place to live, learn and work



Liberal Democrat Values

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 believe that the role of the state is to enable all citizens to contribute fully to their communities and to take part in the decisions which affect their lives.

We aim to disperse power, to foster diversity and to nurture creativity.

We believe in an open, optimistic, caring, diverse and tolerant Britain.

We champion the rights of the individual to freedom and equality.

We seek solutions based on carefully analysed evidence not on prejudice, tradition or self-interest.

A decade of conservative cuts letting local people down

Since 2005 the Conservatives have run the County Council and reduced services, instead of looking after the real needs of local people.

Liberal Democrats believe there is a better way and we need urgent action in some important areas.

A better way – SUFFOLK Liberal Democrat SIX priorities for local people

- 1. Provide a £5m boost to adult social care**
- 2. Invest in the infrastructure to support new housing – roads, schools and doctor's surgeries**
- 3. Fund a county-wide mental health programme in schools**
- 4. Fix our roads and pavements**
- 5. Invest in local bus services and make park and ride buses more frequent**
- 6. Protect our libraries**

Jobs and the Economy

To improve the quality of life of people in Suffolk and ensure we have the resources we need to run better schools, fair social services and improved highways, we need a thriving economy supporting successful, innovative, efficient and profitable businesses. This is crucial to attract highly skilled workers earning good salaries.

Liberal Democrats will:

- Work together with our communities to give back power and resources to allow them to help solve their problems
- Encourage expansion of home based businesses through small capital grants to fund new initiatives
- Work with providers to roll out excellent fibre based broadband connections across Suffolk and help mobile phone companies install a countywide 4G superfast mobile data network
- Keep tax rises down by using money from government grants and reserves, investing in infrastructure that boosts business and services that help local people. We will not continue to stockpile reserves “for a rainy day”
- Set up a “Service Gaps Task Force” with the district councils, the police, the NHS and the voluntary sector to identify where services are falling short and spend taxpayers’ money efficiently to fill the gaps

Community Services and Social Care

In Suffolk, we have an ageing population and a growing number of people with complex needs who have survived trauma or inherited disabilities. They all deserve equality of opportunity and a good quality of life.

The many who are disadvantaged by the lack of education, skills and opportunities that lead to jobs, housing and a reasonable quality of life, deserve help to learn, to become an asset to society and to have a good life.

Obesity, through lack of activity and the cost of a healthy diet, is a massive and growing issue. Improved, targeted help for individuals and communities is vital to lead to better, longer lives, with fewer challenges at a lower cost to society.

Far too many people remain in hospital ready to return home but waiting for social services to provide for their needs. These occupied beds are needed for others impact on waiting times and are costly to the NHS.

Liberal Democrats will:

- Ensure actions to encourage lifestyles that promote physical and mental health are effective and are adequately funded
- Develop effective partnership teams, to deliver better multi-disciplinary services. Instead of paying lip service to co-operation, work with the NHS, schools, and providers of care for children and people with disabilities,

- Ensure proper investment in preventative mental health services, while working with the NHS and local charities to promote mental wellbeing
- Campaign for adequate funding, from government, for social care for the elderly and people with disabilities
- Ensure providers of residential and home-based care are able to provide a good quality of care to the people who use their services
- Invest money from reserves in Suffolk Libraries, helping them to provide a wider range of services for local people e.g. mobile children's centres.

Children and Young People

The people on whom our nation's future depends need social skills, education and training that will help them be emotionally secure and prosperous. School performance in Suffolk remains poor but is gradually improving. The move to academies and the removal of responsibilities from the County will create many challenges in the future.

Liberal Democrats will:

- Invest in early years' education, children's centres, schools and colleges to deliver opportunity for all and the quality of education that Suffolk people deserve
- Resist attempts by the current government to reintroduce selection at the age of 11
- Work in partnership with the NHS and voluntary sector and fund a county-wide programme of education in emotional health and mental wellbeing in all schools, including primary schools

Highways

The Conservative County Council has recently renewed the private contract that has handed over control of our highways to a private company that has reduced spending but failed to deliver. The contract has proved to be intensely bureaucratic.

Liberal Democrats will

- Take back control of the Highways contract unless it delivers an effective road maintenance programme
- Use £2million from the Tory reserves stockpile to improve our roads. We will fix potholes, maintain pavements and cut the grass verges more quickly
- Lobby the government for further improvements to the Copdock interchange to eliminate queuing delays and the drag on Suffolk's economy
- Support the building of the third crossing in Lowestoft and the new wet dock link in Ipswich

Transport

The Conservative County Council has cut bus services, including Park and Ride, with little regard to the effect that this has on people's lives. Older people now find that their leisure activities are curtailed; those visiting friends or relations in hospital find that this is much more difficult or impossible. Young people in work find their travel times extended or unreliable and those in education find their choices severely curtailed. Everyone suffers from congestion and the environment is damaged if roads are crammed with cars.

Community Transport and Concessionary Fares

Liberal Democrats will:

- Ensure community transport provides the journeys people need in areas with little if any scheduled public transport. We will make sure that concessionary bus passes can be used on these services
- Allow people with concessionary passes to get on a bus at any time, using all the concessionary fares grant from government
- Extend free transport for 16 to 19 years old to allow them to get to colleges, apprenticeships, and their first place of work

Park and Ride

Liberal Democrats will:

- Maintain an effective Ipswich Park and Ride system, reducing congestion and pollution, and benefiting town centre shops and businesses
- Protect the through ticket to the hospital and rail station
- Subsidise the existing service to make it more frequent during peak hours and re-examine the Bury Road Park and Ride closure

Housing

Years of under-investment and a complex planning system have led to a national housing shortage. The country has built very little social housing and too few private rented or owned houses. The shortage is made worse by a growing population and social change. People are living longer and often live in one-parent families. We must attract new people to staff our vital industries.

There is an urgent need for more homes for local people, and young people must be able to obtain their first home at a price they can afford.

There is a need for private and social rented housing for those who don't wish to purchase.

Liberal Democrats will:

- Use the planning system, working with district councils, to encourage development that meets local needs especially for those having difficulty finding a suitable place to live, but also recognising the need to keep Suffolk a special place to live and work
- Establish a *Suffolk Housing Task Force* to identify the critical infrastructure needs, like schools, roads and utilities, to unlock the housing potential of the county
- Set up an investment fund, from the Tory reserves stockpile, to ensure that housing developments include plans for school places, roads, parking, green spaces, cycle routes, employment and protect the environment

The Liberal Democrat Budget plans for Suffolk

Over the last four years the Conservatives on the Council have stockpiled £40million of taxpayers' money and squirrelled it away into reserves. While the Liberal Democrats accept that a certain level of reserves is necessary for us to save in case of an emergency or disaster, the Tories have taken this too far.

Liberal Democrats will invest from reserves, allowing us to both keep council tax rises to a minimum, and also make *the following spending commitments*:

- £5m to protect vital social care services from government cuts
- £1m to attract further funding to invest in infrastructure that encourages more housing to be built
- £1m allocated to a countywide mental health and wellbeing investment in schools
- £2m into a "Pot Hole Pot" to fix our crumbling highways and pavements
- £600,000 to subsidise bus services including park and ride services to make them more frequent
- £400,000 to protect our libraries and help them provide more for local people