

# **Cambridge Liberal Democrats**

## **Election Platform May 2023**

### **Our vision for the city we share:**

- **A global power for good...**

*Projecting its ideas, innovation and humanity round the world, renewing our connections with Europe and beyond and breaking down barriers in the local community to share out its opportunities*

- **An evolving city...**

*Providing homes for people in all walks of life, embedding sustainability with growth, respecting nature and the limitation of its resources, while blending the best of old and new*

- **Prizing the wellbeing of its citizens...**

*With green and social space, a clean and healthy environment, equal access to arts and recreation, quality public services, neighbourhood amenities and 'voice' in the community*

- **Living lightly on the planet...**

*With less traffic and more public and active transport, an easy to adopt low waste, low carbon lifestyle and a leader in the fight against climate change and for biodiversity*

- **A liberal city...**

*Where people are free and safe to be who they are and live their lives their own way; they can come together as a community and there is support for those those suffering disadvantage*

*Liberal Democrats are proud of much that Cambridge City Council does. We have helped to lead and shape its response to climate change and the biodiversity crisis; the assistance it provides to residents with the cost of living; creating the opportunity to sort out our transport system; and the welcome to refugees.*

*The City Council is currently led by the Labour party, which holds the majority of the seats. This level of one-party dominance means that scrutiny and challenge is essential to ensure the council is as good as it can be. Labour continue to get some things wrong. Our vision for Cambridge is clear and vital to the city's future. Liberal Democrat councillors elected on May 4<sup>th</sup> will strengthen our impact on the council in the following ways:*

- **SHAPING CAMBRIDGE'S FUTURE WITH CARE**

The council is currently working on a new Local Plan which will shape development in Cambridge for the next 20 years. As the city's economy booms, the evidence shows that we need more new homes in order to stop the city becoming even more expensive and socially exclusive. Failing this we would be faced by more people commuting long distances, unfilled vacancies, and businesses moving out if they can't grow here.

Though this ongoing evolution of the city can sometimes seem uncomfortable, trying to reject it entirely potentially brings worse problems. We believe it is preferable to help channel and shape development to make sure that the next pages in Cambridge's story are worthy ones and that any opportunities to improve the amenities of the city are grasped.

A condition which must first be satisfied is a major improvement in water supplies to support increased demand and to stop the depletion of our chalk streams and the destruction of their important ecosystems.

Beyond that, development must be to the highest possible standards and honour the city's character and heritage. New homes should enable zero carbon living, be part of well-designed communities

equipped with necessary amenities, and as many homes as possible must be affordable for key workers and young people.

We support the plans for new city quarters at North-East Cambridge (land between the North Station, Milton Road and the A14) and in East Cambridge (at Marshalls airfield). Both current users plan to move out. These are highly sustainable sites and their redevelopment offers regeneration and access to better services for neighbouring areas. We will fight these services being siphoned off elsewhere, as currently looks likely in North-East Cambridge.

- **ENSURING FAIR PLAY FOR COUNCIL TENANTS**

The re-start of council housebuilding is welcome news for Cambridge – and especially if the homes are at the highest energy efficiency levels, so they reduce carbon emissions and save tenants' money.

However, it's important that in the process, the council doesn't get distracted from the welfare of the tenants of its existing homes. We are concerned that despite a big backlog, the council is underspending on maintenance and repairs to subsidise the building of new homes. This is especially alarming because the council is simply unaware of the condition of 20% of its housing stock. Cases of damp, mould and condensation, recently shown elsewhere to be potentially fatal, are notoriously under-reported. We are campaigning to have more focused attention on this. We also want to speed up the repairs and maintenance by making the service more flexible for tenants and for the council to be better prepared to win government funding for investment programmes in home insulation.

In order to fund some of the new council housing, the council sells off some homes privately. While we have no quarrel with this in principle, we oppose the practice of marketing these private homes to offshore investors, as happened with the Ironworks and Timberworks developments. This is a deliberately inflationary tactic which works against buyers in the local market, who already struggle with Cambridge's astronomical prices. Labour have had two chances to stop this, but still refuse. Overseas buyers wanting to move to

Cambridge can already access domestic marketing materials and will always be welcome here, living in our proudly diverse city.

- **AVOIDING KNEE-JERK CUTBACKS**

Like other councils, Cambridge City Council is feeling the pinch but it has been obvious for some years that it needs to save money. Liberal Democrats have been supporters of the project called “transformation” to re-invent the council to achieve its objectives in new ways: but after 8 years and the commitment of £8m, the project has come up with little. So now the crunch arrives, Labour have instead started knee-jerk cutbacks in services – exactly what we should be avoiding!

This year we successfully fought off the proposed closure of the Quayside public toilets, used by 35,000 people a year and the cutting of subsidised bus services for shift workers.

Sadly however, Labour did not listen to us on the need to avert the closure or part-closure of 7 other public toilets across the city or about the scrapping of the popular Big Weekend event which brings the whole city together every year. In both cases the cutbacks were driven through without options or a wider strategy, but simply took away exactly those things people expect from their council.

We argue that the council should speed up its “transformation” exercise. It has some of the highest financial reserves of any council of its type: instead of leaving them idle, it should invest them in Cambridge to earn a return that would help to avoid the squeeze on services. And it needs to make some long-term plans to re-purpose more of its car parks to other income-generating uses, as they are under-utilised and are likely to be more so as transport policy changes.

- **DETECTING ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

We think more should be done to combat anti-social behaviour in Cambridge. If public authorities look the other way, standards disappear. A dent in pride in the city affects us all, but for the most vulnerable it can seriously impact their quality of life.

A case in point is fly-tipping, which plagues far too many spots in the city, especially the estates and suburbs. So we were naturally baffled by another of the council's knee-jerk plans to reduce the number of patrolling enforcement officers who investigate and penalise culprits. This comes despite expecting the patrols to tackle an increasing number of problems across our growing city. This sadly shows how out of touch Labour have become from people's everyday concerns – and what a council is for.

Midnight road racers are another menace that we have been campaigning against. Waking young children, alarming the elderly and disturbing the peace for all of us; this is an epidemic in some parts of the city. We proposed the installation of new noise-activated cameras which are in use in parts of London and elsewhere in Europe. Labour said they'd look into it, but after two years nothing at all has been done!

We also want to see more attention given to drug dealing on the street. This sinister activity goes on in plain sight, both in residential areas and shopping streets, often resulting in dangerous needles being left in our public places. It also increases the levels of street begging and prevents rough sleepers from holding down accommodation. We'd like the council, police and health service to work together more closely to address this in a comprehensive way.

- **MAKING TRANSPORT WORK**

The recent Making Connections proposals to introduce road charging and improve local bus services generated a huge and sometimes divisive response. 24,000 people gave feedback from all perspectives.

It is our job to listen and try to bring the city together around a plan which is effective in reducing traffic volumes and in improving the alternatives to the car. Cambridge needs to make transport work, or it will seize up with congestion and we will all be just left to watch while our local environment and economy degrade.

It was once a be-all and end-all for everyone to drive everywhere all the time. But in a tight urban area like ours, in a world faced by

climate change, time has moved on and the city collectively needs to adjust to new ways wherever we can.

The status quo is not working. Congestion hurts us all: wasting time, lengthening working days, deterring customers, making recruitment hard. It makes public transport unreliable and cycling and walking uncomfortable. This is doubly true in the current cost of living crisis when the search is on for less expensive alternatives to running a car and for many the cost of wasted time amounts to hard cash.

Nevertheless many have voiced practical concerns with the proposals, both to us and to the formal consultation process. We will see to it that these are properly addressed by the Greater Cambridge Partnership.

The scheme as proposed must be changed and we will want to see the following before we could support it.

1. A credible plan to improve the bus network before any other measures come forward, recognising its decline and unreliability over many years.
2. More flexibility to allow for residents' unavoidable car trips free from the road charge.
3. An effective scheme to reduce the impact of the road charge on those with low incomes who would otherwise have less choice than others about the use of their car.

We are committed to continue working with other political parties and surrounding councils so that the original plan changes to address as many as possible of the issues people raised about their travel needs - while still providing effectively for the city's future.

*The Cambridge Liberal Democrat Group on the City Council will work for a better, fairer city both now and in the future. We invite support in that endeavour.*