

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS 4 JUNE 2009

MAKE IT HAPPEN
in
HERTFORDSHIRE

**LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
OVERALL MANIFESTO**

Make it happen in Hertfordshire

Residents have been telling us how disappointed they are in the current state of the County Council.

The Conservative-run administration over the last 4 years has had many failings. They have lost a star in the Audit Commission ratings system. There have been major breakdowns in delivering services to elderly and vulnerable residents. Roads and pavements are in a significantly worse state than in neighbouring counties.

Our manifesto sets out the areas that we will focus on when elected to ensure residents get better services.

We have made it clear that Liberal Democrats are determined to cut waste – namely your money not being spent as efficiently as you would spend it yourself. It is time we all took a hard look at how we deliver services. Every household in Britain knows it has to use its limited resources as efficiently and effectively as possible. We need the County Council to be run in the same way.

Make it happen on our Roads and Pavements

Hertfordshire's roads and pavements are among some of the worst in the country. We will deliver a step change in how our roads and pavements are repaired, ensuring that they are maintained or resurfaced before they deteriorate to the point at which they have to be completely replaced. We will break up the Herts Highways partnership and create a public sector led, cost-effective and results-driven service, where local communities have a much greater say in how highways money is spent.

We will introduce Pothole Moles. Pothole Moles are a team of people who will concentrate on one area at a time, fixing **all** the potholes in that area. If you see a Pothole Mole team working you can stop them and report a pothole and they will fix it there and then, using high grade material to make the repair permanent.

We are fed up with roads and paths being repaired, only for the utility companies to come along and dig up the newly surfaced road. We will ensure strict enforcement of new legislation designed to stop this happening and hold the utility companies to account for their standard of work.

We will work to increase gulley and drain clearing to minimise the risk of flooding.

Make it happen for Children

We will introduce 20mph zones outside every school in the county, protecting our young people as they travel to and from school. We will introduce safe parking zones for parents, making the areas around schools safer and protecting residents' driveways.

We will do a full review of school primary places and build slack into the system: in many communities there are simply not enough places for our children. Too many parents year on year have to fight and attend appeal hearings to get into schools of their choice. We will bring forward plans to increase the number of school places where there are clear shortages and bring a halt to the Tories' school closure plans.

We will also create a partnership with schools to create a central admissions system for ALL schools. This will take away the trauma, especially in primary schools, of some parents and children not knowing until after the first day of term whether they have a place. This can leave siblings attending two different schools, which is highly disruptive to family life and damaging to the environment.

We will reintroduce the school uniform grant for parents on low incomes.

We will change the formula that is imposed on developers to ensure that if they are building houses they are properly financing our services. The Tories have lost Hertfordshire taxpayers tens of millions by allowing the developers not to contribute in full to the cost of public facilities.

Working within the current funding we will create community hubs. Why should a school not also be a library, doctor's surgery, post office and community centre? Schools stand empty for almost a third of a year: Liberal Democrats will ensure that these assets are used as effectively as possible.

We will also ensure that the Building Schools for the Future programme delivers buildings and facilities that are energy efficient.

We will carry out a review of all children at risk cases and increase the cost of living allowance for social workers.

Make it happen for our Elderly and Vulnerable Residents

We will reverse the recent increase in care charges.

We will review all current home care contracts: not only are these failing our elderly and vulnerable residents but also the dedicated staff

who deliver care services. We will introduce spot checks on service provision and take much closer account of residents' satisfaction ratings and complaints.

We will look at encouraging, through developers, housing that can be purchased by any adult over 55 which will provide on site any personal social and medical services that are needed, including physiotherapy, out-patient care and home-based nursing care.

Make it happen in Transport

We are concerned that as public transport becomes more profit-driven whole areas of our communities are not served. Post offices and local shops are closing, leaving people with no option but to own a car or use expensive taxis. We will look to find a solution using smaller vehicles to visit our towns and villages currently without public transport services.

We will seek to introduce a fleet of yellow school buses with safety specifications such as seat belts and CCTV cameras. By offering longer contracts to the bus companies we will be able to deliver this in partnership with them.

We will seek to follow London's lead and introduce free public transport for young people under 19 who are in education or training, allowing young people the freedom to travel.

We will work with the rail lines to try to build capacity into the current system. We will continue to campaign for east-west Rail links and keep the pressure on to ensure that schemes like the Croxley rail link are delivered to ease congestion on our roads.

We will introduce a bus zone system which will allow residents greater clarity over the fares they will have to pay when travelling. While designing this scheme we will review our current routes and work with bus companies to deliver fast east to west bus services.

Make it happen for Tourism and Culture

Tourism is big business in Hertfordshire. The county's tourist attractions and its pubs, clubs and restaurants, bring in important income to our towns and villages from both overnight visitors and from people who are here just for the day or the evening.

There are many simple things that can be done to improve Hertfordshire tourism, for example marketing, improved sign-posting, better web sites or more widely available multilingual literature.

We will expand the county's tourism service to make sure that local businesses benefit and that there are secure jobs for local people.

Make it happen in Libraries

A modern library needs to be welcoming and accessible. It also needs to have good access to modern sources of information. This means we need to move away from a service in which qualified librarians stand behind desks stamping books towards a self-service system in which librarians are freed up to give advice and guide people about choosing appropriate books and accessing the internet.

Libraries also need to be used to help enhance the lives of people who are otherwise at a disadvantage in society: those who don't have space at home to study or for whom English is not their first language. We will protect book stock and invest in modern technology to bring the service into the twenty-first century. We will give priority to providing accessible study areas and a wide range of materials in minority languages.

We will impose a moratorium on library closures and will enhance the library service in rural areas, either through an increase in the frequency of mobile library visits or through working in partnership with other organisations to share suitable accommodation in villages.

Make it happen for Young People

We will ensure there is a change in attitude towards young people. The media has denigrated young people to such an extent that residents are now scared of any young person talking innocently to a friend on a street corner. This does nothing for the resident or the young person. We will do this through changing in the first instance how council officials talk about young people. We will also start a campaign to project positive images about young people so that they will have greater self-esteem and Hertfordshire residents recognise the contribution they already make to the society we all share.

We will invest an extra £1 million pounds per annum in the youth service but delegate that money and the function to district councils who will be able to judge how to provide appropriate leisure and other activities.

We will provide free bus travel to anyone under 19 who is in training or education.

We will NEVER use a mosquito system (devices which emit a high frequency sound heard mainly by younger people) on any council property and will discourage their use anywhere in our county.

We will use London 2012 to inspire our young people to be involved not only in sport but in the community.

Make it happen for our Environment

We will continue with our Hands off Herts campaign to stop over-development in Hertfordshire. We do not want to see towns and villages joined up to become bigger towns.

Our green belt is there to give us green spaces and keep our towns and villages separate. We will fight to preserve it.

We will resist and campaign against the M25 widening.

We will continue to resist further runways and expansion of Luton and Stansted. Aircraft noise is a nuisance to many of us. Expansion of these airports alongside the expansion of Heathrow will make noise pollution much worse.

We will reduce the amount of rubbish we send to landfill; all this does is create waste mountains. Our solution would be to invest in a Mechanical and Biological Treatment Facility with a small Energy from Waste facility to deal with any rubbish that is not recyclable or reusable. This will also create a usable resource of electricity as a by-product. We will look carefully for the best site for this facility – one that is accessible but has the minimum impact on residents.

We will work with Districts, Towns and Parishes to protect and care for our roadsides. Residents are saying to us that they are fed up with seeing churned up muddy roadsides from people parking their vehicles on them. We will also work to ensure that our grass is cut on a regular basis.

We will review our road signs. In many places there are simply too many, causing confusion to drivers. There are also many that are not even readable as they are so old or damaged or obscured by vegetation.

Make it happen in County Hall

During a recession every household looks to their own homes and budgets to find ways of saving money. This should be no different at the County Council.

We will overhaul all policies in County Hall and reduce the headcount. We will move all county buildings over to renewable, sustainable sources of energy. We will introduce electric vehicles where possible.

The County Council is notorious as a self-publicity machine. It also produces dozens of largely useless glossy publication each week. We will slash the county's massive self publicity budget.

Make it happen in Health

Liberal Democrats believe in restoring local accountability to the NHS by the setting up of directly elected Health Boards to manage the PCTs. Until we are able to convince national government to make this crucial change we will be a stronger leading force in ensuring our county and district councils push for improved health care delivery. There is currently no strong political voice in the county ensuring that residents get the services and health care facilities they deserve. Too often the county is too remote from local problems, and districts have had their powers emasculated by this centrally obsessed Labour government. We will review and improve the structures currently in place to ensure that the county can deal better with local health inequalities.

We will fight to stop the ludicrous situation emerging in which women will only be able to have a hospital birth in Watford or Stevenage. These are inaccessible to many residents in Hertfordshire that will cause stress and distress to new families as they travel to what is one of the most precious moments in life. There are vague plans at present to introduce midwife led birthing units in Hemel Hempstead and in Welwyn Hatfield - we would push for these to be made firm proposals and included in the planning of the new Local General Hospitals on each site.

We will work with our health colleagues to improve mental health care and shorten waiting times. We will develop short term services to catch stress, depression and anxiety early before they become acute.

Make it happen in Policing

There is growing polarisation between police officers and the community they serve. The community has to maintain a police service that responds to its needs and delivers a service that prevents crime and anti-social behaviour. But the community also has a duty to its police officers. We will improve and increase the development of systems and technological aids which will enable our police officers to cope with the enormous mountain of paperwork, often duplicated,

which is generated by the unnecessary bureaucratic demands of central government.

We will review all sections of the police service and listen to the community to determine how our county can be best policed, a review which takes account of growing rural crime. There is a need to establish how best to provide, train and use the support services as back-up to the key element in any police service – the regular police officer. In addition to specialised units we have police officers supported by community support officers and the special constabulary. How these different law enforcement arms are utilised should not just be about economics but also how they can be best deployed to produce the best results. There is confusion about the needs of the community and how to service those needs.

We will introduce Community Justice Boards to start rebuilding communities. A Community Justice Board allows trained volunteers to listen to incidents of anti social behaviour, minor crimes and disputes. They bring the victim and the offender together to seek a fair and just solution. These have been introduced in Somerset and of the 400 offences heard by the board only 2.9% of offenders have reoffended.

Making it happen in fire and rescue

We are unconvinced that the County Council has thought through the significance of the Buncefield emergency. We pledge that there will be no more fire station closures. We will ensure that we have a proactive Fire Service which works to reduce the risks of fire and ensure that new public buildings, such as libraries and schools, are fitted with sprinkler systems.

Make it happen on the Economy

The Labour Government's adoption of banker friendly policies has meant a virtual financial meltdown. This impacts not only on council services but also on the people of Hertfordshire. The County Council should ensure all its policies are recession proof. But the best thing it can do is reduce its own burden on the council taxpayer.

We will therefore freeze the county council tax next year.