



A Fresh Start for West Berkshire



Liberal Democrats

West Berkshire Council Manifesto
May 2023



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Foreword

For too long the Conservatives have taken West Berkshire for granted. Some time ago they stopped listening to residents' concerns, believing that they always knew best. After almost 20 years in power, what do they have to show for it? Our services have been cut, our roads and pavements are in a terrible state, and we're struggling to keep up with our commitments to the climate.

This is a Council that can't even get the basics right, and yet they persist with wasting taxpayers' money on vanity projects and white elephants. These are not projects that will benefit the wider West Berkshire population, they are merely attempts to patch holes in a plan that has suffered from a lack of joined-up thinking. West Berkshire residents deserve better.

It's time for a fresh start. This manifesto puts forward a positive vision of what West Berkshire could be like under a Liberal Democrat administration.

West Berkshire is a fantastic place to live, but we know we can do better. In the past it has been Lib Dem Councils that have built our schools, libraries and leisure facilities, only for the Conservatives to allow them to fall in to disrepair. Our aim is to rebuild for the future.

We'll be competent with your money. We wouldn't spend £10m on the "Sports Hub" in Newbury, we'll focus on the things that matter, like fixing the potholes in our road first time, not using cheap fixes that fall apart almost as quickly as they were repaired.

We'll take action to protect the environment. We'll ensure we meet our target of a net-zero Council by 2030, and we'll phase out the 'Green Bin Tax' that discourages recycling across our district.

And **we'll deliver a fairer deal for residents** from the Council. A Liberal Democrat administration will be one that listens to you, and gives you a real say in the decisions that affect our area.

At this election only the Liberal Democrats can take control from the Conservatives. Labour and the Green Party just don't have enough support locally to win.

We are ready for a fresh start in West Berkshire, and in the following pages you will see the commitments that we will deliver in our first 100 days (underlined in orange). We're ready to make a difference, but we need your vote to make it happen.

Vote for your Liberal Democrat candidates on May 4th - and don't forget your photo ID if voting in person!

LEE DILLON

Leader of the Liberal Democrats
West Berkshire Council



A Fair Deal for Residents

Fairness is at the heart of the Liberal Democrats' vision for the future. Years of Conservative Government cuts and unfair tax rises have left many people feeling unrewarded for the hard work they put in to raise their families, care for one another and play by the rules. The Liberal Democrats will ensure a fair deal for residents though:

1. Supporting the most vulnerable in our community

1. Ensuring care packages are in place as early as possible through earlier initial care assessments.
2. Delivering a programme to tackle social isolation, especially in rural areas.
3. Re-establishing funding for the ReadiBus service to operate in West Berkshire.
4. Working to increase the number of local foster carers.
5. Preventing homelessness through more 'housing first' placements.
6. Seeking residents' views to ensure that grants are spent in consultation with those who use and deliver care services.

2. Supporting our young people

1. Prioritising funding to reduce wait times for children's mental health services.
2. Conducting a full review of Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) capacity and model in West Berkshire.
3. Working with families and stakeholders to keep children safe in their homes. If children do have to go into care, we will increase the number of successful Looked After Children placements.
4. Working with Town and Parish councils to fund youth workers in their areas.
5. Introducing local ticketing systems that also link to discounted bus / train travel. For example, you print a cinema ticket in Thatcham and it then acts as a bus / train ticket.
6. Piloting summer lunch clubs to target holiday hunger.

3. Delivering more affordable housing for ownership and rent

1. Committing to delivering over 1000 affordable new homes by 2030.
2. Working with housing providers to develop local home ownership models.
3. Delivering more social rent and affordable housing with housing associations through joint ventures with partners.
4. Bringing empty homes back into use.
5. Ensuring proper enforcement through existing mechanisms such as HMO inspections and environmental health inspections (when a tenant complains about disrepair).
6. Creating a forum for registered providers of housing within West Berkshire to give tenants a greater voice.
7. Campaigning for a long-term funding settlement for supported housing.

4. Fairly treating residents and stakeholders

1. Cancelling the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) demands made to homeowners who made a mistake in their planning application process, and carrying out a full review of West Berkshire's CIL process.
2. Not imposing Non-Disclosure Agreements / 'gagging orders' on our service level agreements with local charities - as the Conservatives unreasonably did with ReadiBus.
3. Reducing the amount of information being considered in secret (Part 2) by West Berkshire Council.
4. Providing detailed information when carrying out consultations so that residents can make informed decisions.
5. Listening carefully to questions from members of the public during our meetings, allowing reasonable follow-up questions and providing written answers within 5 working days.
6. Keeping residents informed of changes in their local area by re-introducing neighbour notification letters for planning applications.

Protecting the Environment

Climate change is the biggest single threat facing our planet. Across the country, Liberal Democrat led local Councils have led the way in combating this crisis. The Liberal Democrats in West Berkshire will champion reducing the harm done to our planet district-wide by:

1. Championing a carbon neutral West Berkshire

1. Making West Berkshire Council carbon neutral by 2030.
2. Using West Berkshire Council's purchasing power to encourage the reduction of carbon emissions in the wider community, updating all our procurement policies to reflect this.
3. Considering the social, environmental and ethical impact of West Berkshire Council investments.
4. Introducing idle-free zones and 20mph speed limits outside schools.
5. Investigating ways to stop HGVs using Newbury as a through-route, including a potential low emission zone, and improving traffic flows on the A4.
6. Dramatically reducing the carbon emissions of all Council-owned buildings through installation of solar panels, proper insulation and efficient lighting and heating systems.
7. Improving biodiversity on West Berkshire Council owned land, and changing the way we manage and care for our land. We will share our best practice with local communities and landowners to encourage them to do the same.
8. Promoting sustainable markets across the district.

2. Increasing recycling & reducing litter

1. Conducting a full review of kerbside recycling with the aim of increasing what can be collected. Providing grants and officer support to set up recycling clubs for items not recycled at the kerbside.
2. Re-establishing kerbside recycling of green waste without cost to residents, by phasing out the "Green Bin Tax", starting with those most in need of support.
3. Working with schools and communities to increase education around recycling and its benefits.
4. Using legal powers to prosecute fly-tippers and using the money to introduce more recycling points.
5. Provide more multi-use bins that can take litter and dog waste.
6. Working with Towns and Parishes to create a 'Clean up the Town / Village' anti-litter campaign.
7. Removing abandoned shopping trollies, and re-charging their owners for the cost of collection.

3. Promoting environmentally-friendly travel

1. Focusing on walking and cycling in transport plans.
2. Providing new / additional secure bike storage at key locations, e.g. bus stations.
3. Supporting a trial of an eScooter rental scheme in our towns.
4. Supporting the move to electric vehicles by expanding the number of Electric Vehicle charging points where needed, and allowing residents to use council carparks to charge their cars overnight.
5. Working with transport providers and local businesses to provide more evening bus services.
6. [Trialing an extension to pedestrianisation hours in Newbury town centre.](#)
7. Enabling 20 mph limits for residential streets where residents want it.

4. Fighting sewage discharges

1. Using the power of the Council to hold Thames Water to account over continued sewage discharges into our watercourses, blocked sewers and leaks in our district.
2. Taking seriously our legal responsibilities to the watercourses in the Council's ownership.
3. Continuing our strong record in investing in flood-protection.

Competence, Accountability & Transparency

Not only have Conservative council leaders mismanaged the running of West Berkshire Council, they have done so while reducing levels of accountability and transparency to their lowest possible levels. The Liberal Democrats know that a good Council is one that can be held accountable for its decisions, and is transparent about decision-making. We will increase competence, accountability and transparency across the Council by:

1. Ending waste

1. Cancelling the wasted £10m the Conservatives are planning to spend on the Monks Lane "Sports Hub", keeping the plan for a 3G pitch but ending the waste on the clubhouse, stands and ongoing payment to the rugby club.
2. Making developers pay for major infrastructure first, rather than relying on taxpayers' money.

2. Investing wisely

1. Always aiming for investments that save money / generate revenue *and* provide a benefit to our community. For example saving money and the environment by investing in solar panels.
2. Encouraging bids that bring other money into our district from outside, in order to keep council tax rises to the bare minimum.
3. Reviewing the disposal of all council assets (e.g. York House) and changing current plans to ensure they meet the long term interests of residents and West Berkshire Council.

3. Increasing accountability & transparency

1. Ensuring an opposition party councillor chairs the Council's scrutiny committee, unlike the last 18 years of Conservative rule.
2. Taking a grown up approach to politics, listening to alternative voices and welcoming inputs from all sides.
3. Opening advisory groups to public scrutiny rather than the secretive Conservative approach.
4. Making clear, measurable commitments and regularly reviewing and publishing our progress against them.
5. Re-establishing community forums to pro-actively invite residents input and feedback at in-person meetings. Committing to report back on our resulting action plan within 4 weeks of each meeting.

4. Working to make West Berkshire Council an employer of choice

Building for the Future

West Berkshire is a great place to live, but that doesn't mean we can't strive for it to be even better. The Liberal Democrats want to build a West Berkshire to be proud of. We'll invest in our area by:

1. Fixing the flawed Local Plan

1. Taking all available action to change the flawed local plan. It currently allows too much development on green spaces in North East Thatcham and Theale, without the necessary supporting infrastructure. Any new plan will have a comprehensive evidence base, and we will seek your feedback for a minimum 2 months.

2. Returning football to Faraday Road

1. Immediately returning the grass to bookable football space.
2. Agreeing outline plans with the Newbury Community Football Group for a new pitch with an enhanced stadium and facilities.

3. Introducing cheaper parking

1. Creating a fund to offer a package of targeted lower cost / free parking in consultation with town & parish councils.

4. Supporting schools, further education and skills development

1. Striving for all schools to be Ofsted rated good or outstanding.
2. Working hard to close the attainment gap across the district, as we believe that education is the key to future life-chances.
3. Supporting volunteer-run after school clubs like the ones in Hungerford and Thatcham.
4. Launching a mentoring programme for children with local businesses.
5. Leading by example on apprenticeships by offering more opportunities across Council services.
6. Working with local education providers to create work clubs and programmes to gain skills while in work.
7. Supporting our local libraries in line with our statutory duties.

5. Maintaining the road network and improving traffic flows

1. Maintaining the road network in good condition.
2. Fixing potholes first time and dangerous ones within 72 hours. Enabling the reporting of potholes via a West Berkshire mobile app.
3. Supporting building a bridge over the railway line in Thatcham.
4. Establishing an out-of-hours traffic management response service.

6. Enhancing our towns

1. Enhancing our main towns based on the recently produced masterplans and commissioning work for Theale and Lambourn in partnership with the respective parish councils.
2. Beginning a programme of renewal and re-provision of our leisure facilities, following in the footsteps of previous Lib Dem administrations.
3. Continuing our support for the new Lido development in Newbury, and looking to expand opening times even further.
4. Recognising the canal as an important part of West Berkshire life, and continuing to work with partners like the Canal & Rivers Trust to maintain and enhance this wonderful asset.
5. Expanding the number of temporary and permanent markets across West Berkshire.
6. Working with local businesses to lobby the Government on business rates to help keep more shops and businesses open.

7. Supporting the rural economy

1. Working with residents to determine what your village needs in order to keep schools, shops, pubs and local businesses open, making plans accordingly in collaboration with residents.
2. Supporting communities in developing their own Neighbourhood Development Plans.
3. Supporting local farmers to get produce into local markets.
4. Working more closely with farmers and landowners through a Rural Business Forum.
5. Lobby the Government to ensure that our farmers are not undercut by imported food that is not produced to the same high environmental and animal welfare standards.

Our BIG 6 to fix:

- Taking all available action to change the flawed local plan.
- Bringing back football to Faraday Road.
- Fixing the potholes first time, and dangerous ones within 72 hours.
- Re-establishing kerbside recycling of green waste without cost to residents, by phasing out the “Green Bin Tax”.
- Making West Berkshire Council carbon-neutral by 2030.
- Ensuring care packages are in place as early as possible through earlier initial care assessments.

A FRESH START FOR WEST BERKSHIRE