



# **Making Cambridgeshire a better place to live**

**Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrats  
Manifesto 2013**

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Published and promoted by K Wilkins on behalf of Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrats and printed by Glisson Printers Ltd, all of 16 Signet Court, Swann Road, Cambridge CB5 8LA

*Making Cambridgeshire a better place to live:  
Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrats manifesto 2013*

The Liberal Democrats want to make Cambridgeshire a better place for people to live, in its cities, towns and villages, because we believe that the success of Cambridgeshire's economy depends on quality of life more than in any other shire county.

To make this a better place to live we would improve basic Council services, we would make it easier for people to get around, and we would take care of our environment.

The Conservatives are wedded to the trappings of power and consistently back this up with taxpayers' money; most even voted to give themselves a 25% pay rise.

While the Conservatives talk of being 'Open for Business', they neglect the very services a Council is meant to provide to its citizens and residents.

### **Improving basic Council services**

Our roads, pavements and cycleways have got more money thanks to the Lib Dems, but our pavements still need more and we would ensure they get it. We would fix the mess the Conservatives have made of our streetlights. We would better maintain our primary school buildings, provide more nursery places, and reduce the cuts to Adult Mental Health. We would protect our library service.

### **Making it easier to get around**

The Liberal Democrats would stop the Tory cuts to our bus service, which older people rely on, and provide young people with free transport as they seek employment, education and training. We would contribute to the cost of a rail link to Wisbech, our most deprived town. In cycling, we would invest in the Chisholm Trail in Cambridge and strategic cycle links around the county.

### **Looking after our environment**

We would invest in solar and wind power, generating millions in revenue for basic services and creating apprenticeships for young people in this key industry of the future. The Lib Dems know that human behaviour is a fundamental cause of climate change and would ensure that the County Council played its part locally in minimising Cambridgeshire's contribution to global warming.

### **Paying for it**

The overrunning costs of the Guided Bus project, backed by Labour and the Conservatives locally, is harming the Council's ability to deliver basic services. To fund our priorities we would eliminate the corporate waste caused by long-term Tory misrule and increase the amount of revenue generated by the Council.

We think it is unreasonable in financially constrained times for the County Council to maintain such a costly headquarters; we would sell Shire Hall, which costs £1M a year to maintain, and dispose of an extra 4% of the Council's property portfolio. We would also invest in green energy to generate a regular income stream to fund improved basic services.

## 1. The economy, the environment and quality of life

This manifesto is based on our firm belief that the Cambridgeshire economy, more than any other shire county in England, depends on the quality of life of the people who live here.

An economy based on knowledge requires people with skills, education and training to choose, not just to live and work here, but to continue to do so. The people who work in our high-tech industries can go elsewhere if they choose.

Other, older economies are bound to one place: the coal industry tends to stay near where the coal is, regardless of living conditions. Cambridgeshire is different, and, by their own admission, the Conservatives here do not understand it: they do not see that quality of life is vital to this area.

Employees at whatever level in our high-tech firms and universities obviously do not need to suffer the pollution of conventional, industrial economies; nor, though, do they need to put up with poorly maintained schools, lack of nursery places, crumbling pavements, air pollution from traffic or lack of places for their families to enjoy outside work and school.

If their needs and desires are not being met, they can and will choose to live elsewhere.

The Lib Dems understand that maintaining and growing our vibrant economy is about maintaining and enhancing quality of life at least as much as it is about creating jobs. We recognise that this is the crucial economic role for local government, especially a County Council that builds and funds schools, provides transport links, and is responsible for delivering many basic services.

To these ends, the Lib Dems would seek to make it easier for people to get around, reversing the Tory cuts to our bus service and investing more in it, to ensure that the benefits of economic growth are shared across the county.

We would invest in a rail link to Wisbech and seek to expand the rail network using new light-rail technologies, to increase the frequency, attractiveness and environmental-friendliness of public transport as we head to 2020 and beyond.

And would invest in walking and cycling so that more people can choose a healthier, less stressful and more enjoyable way of getting about.

We would invest in green energy to reduce this county's contribution to global warming, creating apprenticeships in the process and bringing in an extra £2.5M a year.

And we would use these funds to provide basic public services well – something the Conservatives have comprehensively failed to do.

In these ways, as set out in greater detail over the following pages, the Liberal Democrats would make sure that local government played its proper role in building a stronger, greener, more socially just economy here in Cambridgeshire.

## 2. Making it easier to get around

*Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrats believe that sustainable transport is vital to improving quality of life in our cities, towns and villages. We would make it easier for people to get around by bus, by rail by bicycle and on foot, and seek to better integrate these different modes of public transport.*

*Cambridgeshire has the worst rural bus service in the country and the local Conservatives have made it worse still by cutting funding for ordinary bus services while spending £2M a year on interest payments for the Guided Bus.*

### **The Liberal Democrats would make it easier to get around by bus. We would:**

- Reverse the Conservative cuts to funding for our bus services and increase spending on buses and community transport to a level of £5M per year, to fund better arterial bus services supported by a more diffuse network of community transport feeder routes. We would also:
- Create a capital fund to support Community Transport providers.
- Provide free transport for young people out of employment, training or education, following the example of some bus and rail operators.
- Introduce London-style bus regulation so that the public transport authority controls the bus timetable, not private bus companies.

In terms of rail, the Lib Dems have long called for Chesterton Station to be built and welcome that this is finally happening. **To make it easier to get around by rail we would:**

- Link Wisbech, our most deprived town, to Cambridge and London via an hourly train service, boosting job creation and retention in the town both for businesses and for schools and other public services.
- Promote community rail partnerships.
- Investigate creating a railway station in Ely North, press for the electrification of the Ely-Peterborough line and support Julian Huppert and Andrew Duff's efforts to find a route for the reopening of the East-West rail line to Oxford.
- Seek to expand the rail network using new light-rail technologies to increase the frequency, attractiveness and environmental-friendliness of public transport as we head to 2020 and beyond.

### **The Lib Dems would make it easier to get around by bicycle. We would:**

- Build the Chisholm Trail, a strategic cycle route that would run from Addenbrooke's to the Cambridge Science Park, alongside the railway.
- Invest in enhancing cycle links around the county.
- Bring junctions that are dangerous for cyclists up to a safe standard.
- Provide more cycle parking in areas of greatest demand.
- Introduce 20mph zones in densely populated residential areas, not including A and B roads, in consultation with local communities, to make travelling safer for all road users.
- Grit more of our cycle routes, among the busiest in the country.



### **To make it easier to get around on foot the Liberal Democrats would:**

- Invest £2.5 million more in pavement improvements.
- Reverse the cuts the Conservatives have made to the “Rights of Way” budget.
- Grit some of the County’s busiest pavements, including those in town centres and near schools.
- Invest in providing more dropped kerbs and other accessibility improvements, for people with mobility problems.

### **The Liberal Democrats would seek to create one network of public transport, so that travelling sustainably around Cambridgeshire became a practical option for as many people as possible.**

#### **To better connect these different modes of transport we would:**

- Construct “transport interchanges” across Cambridgeshire, that would maximise opportunities for integrated transport.
- Use powers already available to local government to require bus services to connect better with nearby rail links.
- Push for better cross-company and inter-modal ticketing.

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In Ely, the Lib Dems would build a proper **underpass** under the railway line, closing the level crossing and improving the area between the station and the city. We do not support the proposed bypass, which would destroy important views of the internationally important cathedral and increase carbon emissions.

### **Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrats believe that improvements to the A14 are urgently needed.**

However, given that central government is cutting local government funding faster than any other area of public spending, we consider it unfair to expect local taxpayers to make a third contribution through their council tax (on top of general taxation and tolling) to the cost of what is essentially a national and indeed international scheme. Instead we would seek to negotiate a more modest solution that would cost the government and local taxpayers less, in place of the current over-engineered scheme. This would focus on **four priority areas: (1) the Huntingdon bypass; (2) the Girton interchange; (3) safety; and (4) improving throughput** instead of massively increasing capacity. We would also press for the truly **multi-modal solution** that Cambridgeshire needs for its very specific form of economic growth to be both sustained and sustainable.

The Lib Dems strongly support the need for the new town of **Northstowe** but regret that there is not yet a clear picture as to how necessary early infrastructure will be funded. The reduction in developer contributions that has been proposed appears insufficient for the challenge which is being faced. When the financial circumstances are right we will invest in Northstowe because it is necessary for delivering the housing needs of the County.

### 3. Providing better basic services

*Residents pay their Council tax and in return there are some basic things they should expect from a County Council, especially one that is increasing Council Tax by the maximum amount permitted without triggering a referendum.*

The Conservatives allowed our roads to deteriorate into an appalling state, until a review initiated and led by the Lib Dems won the case for major investment. **Our pavements need even more investment, however, and the Lib Dems would provide it.**

The countywide streetlight replacement PFI has been botched on a spectacular scale, with pairs of streetlights just a foot apart on some streets, and other streets having their lighting removed entirely. **The Lib Dems would provide extra funds to fix this “one size fits all” policy and light our streets properly.**

The County has a duty to dispose of the waste collected by the District Councils, yet its multi-million pound waste recycling plant, manufactured by the Guided Bus contractor, doesn't work. As a result hundreds of tons of household waste are going straight to landfill every week. **The Lib Dems would seek a stopgap solution to allow our waste to be recycled, until the plant is operational.**

The overrunning costs of the Guided Bus have required the Council to borrow £64M, which is costing a further £2M per annum in interest alone. This is resulting in cuts to our local bus services that go way beyond what is necessary. **The Lib Dems would reverse the cuts to our bus service and gradually increase funding to a level of £5M per annum.**

The County Council is failing in its duty to ensure a sufficient supply of childcare places, which is stopping many parents from getting a job; and many of our primary school buildings have not been kept in a proper state. **We would improve our primary schools and create more nursery places where they are needed most.**

The County Council is making severe cuts to Adult Mental Health which will surely cost this Council money in the future as preventative services are withdrawn and more costly remedies are required in years to come. **The Lib Dems believe cuts to Adult Mental Health are a false economy and would reverse the worst cuts being made in this area.**

Other modest improvements to basic services that the Liberal Democrats would make include: **reopening youth clubs** closed by the Conservatives; **restoring local transport committees**, that give people a say in the decisions that affect their area; **enhanced gritting provision** for our cycleways and busiest pavements and some roads, and investing in **community librarian** support for our libraries, to help increase their usage.



## 4. Caring for our children and young people

*The County Council has a vital role to play in nurturing and developing our children and young people from their earliest years, and protecting those who are vulnerable. This is a challenge in the current funding environment and increasingly fragmented schools system, but the Liberal Democrats believe that some modest changes could make a real difference.*

A child's early years are formative, and the Conservatives have comprehensively failed in their duty to ensure that there are **sufficient local nursery places** for our children, with many parents travelling miles to find a place. The Conservatives' plans in this area fall significantly short of what is required, and the Lib Dems would ensure more capacity is made available quickly.

Some of the County's **primary school buildings** have been allowed to fall into a sub-standard state, which is demoralizing for teachers and pupils. The Lib Dems would invest in making improvements to those primary schools that need it.

A crucial problem is the **poor financial allocation to Cambridgeshire's schools**—the lowest in England. This dates back to the 1980s, when the Cambs Conservative policy of 'low tax and low spend' meant that relatively little was spent on our schools. Now that we have a national education system there needs to be a fairer national funding formula. Successive Conservative and Labour governments have ducked this issue. Cambridge's Lib Dem MP Julian Huppert is leading the campaign to get a fairer settlement for our pupils, countywide.

This County also has **one of the largest gaps in achievement** between children from wealthy and poorer families. Targeted use of the Lib Dem **Pupil Premium**, which provides each school with £900 extra for every pupil who has qualified for Free School Meals in the last six years, is helping to narrow the gap.

However, we believe that the best way to raise standards for all, contrary to the general thrust of Michael Gove's reforms, is to have a **well-funded Local Authority school improvement service**, working with schools in collaboration, not competition. We would direct resources and expertise to help close the gap so that all children get a fair chance, whatever their family circumstances. This would include more investment in our **music service**, which has been shown to improve the academic attainment of children from all backgrounds.

Our young people also depend on other Council services to be able to unlock their full potential, and the Conservatives' planned cuts to bus funding are particularly harmful to this group. The Lib Dems would invest in **significantly enhanced bus provision** and **free transport for young people** who are out of education, training and employment. We would also reopen some of the **youth clubs** closed by the Conservatives.

**OFSTED recently found that protection of the County's vulnerable children was "inadequate".** The Lib Dems support the new "unit model" of service delivery, but have raised serious concerns about the excessive level of caseload these teams are sometimes required to undertake. We welcome that the administration has listened to our concerns and provided additional capacity in this area, and will monitor the level of caseload carefully.



## 5. Caring for our ageing population

*With an ageing population and inadequate government funding, Adult Social Care is a service that cannot be sustained in the medium term, never mind the long term. There is a possibility that the budget will balance in 2013/14, but unexplained savings of over £40 million need to be found in future years.*

Lib Dem Minister for Care Norman Lamb has recently driven through the Dilnot reforms, which will cap the cost of any individual's contribution to their care at £72,000. This is a welcome development, but does not solve the funding issue for local government. Major change is needed in funding and service delivery.

Although these funding difficulties are compounded by bad local decisions, we must recognize that this is primarily a national issue on a scale that necessitates national solutions. In recognizing the scale of the challenge and the importance of finding a lasting solution to this problem we intend to co-operate with other political groups to influence government policy for the better.

We are already actively lobbying our own ministers in government to get a better deal for local government, and also making the case for a comprehensive package of reforms that would look at delivery of care services across local government and the National Health Service. In response our ministers have indicated a willingness to develop this line of thinking.

We offer our broad support for the organisational changes that are being proposed in this service area. However, we believe that, given the financial pressures on the service, there should be an even stronger emphasis on the preventative agenda, which drives down demand in the long-run, helping to make the service more financially sustainable.

It follows from this that we have real concerns in the area of **Adult Mental Health**, where budget cuts will reduce the level of service. This is a false economy that will ultimately result in increased costs to the Council. The Lib Dems would therefore invest £500,000 annually in funding the voluntary sector to develop innovative ways of supporting those with mental health issues within the community.

We also believe that if it the Council is really serious about the preventative agenda it should take a wider view, instead of thinking in "siloes" departmental terms. The **cuts to funding for our bus services** that the Conservatives are making will have serious consequences for older people, many of whom will find it harder to get around and be independent, finding themselves instead confined to their own homes. This is the opposite of a preventative approach and is likely to increase demand on social care budgets in the long term.

## 6. Paying for it

*The difficult funding environment for local government is compounded here in Cambridgeshire by the extra financial burden of the Guided Bus, backed by Labour and the Conservatives locally, which is costing the Council £2M each year in interest alone.*

*To raise funds for basic services the Liberal Democrats would eliminate corporate waste, sell more of the Council's property portfolio, and make investments in green energy that would quickly generate extra revenue to protect basic services.*

We recognise that Shire Hall is an iconic, listed building and value its links to Cambridgeshire's heritage, but it costs £1M a year to maintain poorly. We would **sell Shire Hall** to a party better able to maintain it and relocate to existing Council office space with extra capacity. This would generate a capital receipt of around £7M and save the taxpayer a further £1M annually. We would also dispose of an extra 4% of the Council's property portfolio.

**We would invest £20M in green energy**, including one £10M solar farm and one £10M wind farm (consisting of four turbines) **which would generate an extra income stream of £2.5M a year to fund basic services.** By funding the capital cost directly the profits would accrue to the Council instead of private companies, helping to protect frontline services and keep council tax down.

**We would reduce the use of consultants and interim managers**, which have cost the Council £11M over the last 3 years. There remains a basic lack of clarity in the accounting of these roles, meaning the actual figures could be higher.

**We would aggressively cut spending on PR.** Spend across the Council on employees in communications roles stands at £1.5M annually. The administration has repeatedly failed to make promised reductions in spending on press and PR. We would cut press and PR to the lowest level possible while protecting the vital public consultation function.

**We would delete extra spending on social media, saving £590,000 over the next 5 years.** We fully support more engagement with the public, but the Council should not need to invest so heavily in social media to achieve this. We would make better use of existing sites on offer, rather than developing our own.

**The Lib Dems would make bigger reductions in business miles.** We recognise that there is a hard core of business miles in highways and social care that can be delivered more efficiently but not eliminated, but believe that much bigger savings can be made across the organisation as a whole.

**We would seek to get better value for the taxpayer from the Park and Ride.** The "departure charge" – the Council's modest commission on the Park and Ride Service – was £2 in 2000, and is still £2 today. Despite ticket prices, patronage and the Council's costs soaring, the Council has accepted a continually diminishing share of the takings. We would restore a more proportionate relationship between departure charge and ticket price.

**We would charge utility companies more and per day, for works on the public highway.**



**For more information, or a copy of the 2013/14 Liberal Democrat alternative budget, please contact:**

Cllr Kilian Bourke (Lib Dem County Group leader)  
kilian.bourke@gmail.com; 07737782295

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