

SLOUGH LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

2021 Local Elections: principles and priorities

Building a healthier, fairer, safer, sustainable Slough



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SLOUGH LIBERAL DEMOCRATS: 2021 Elections

Building a healthier, fairer, safer, sustainable Slough **Principles and priorities - Lib Dem councillors will:**

- ***Promote cooperation at all levels to tackle challenges such as pandemic recovery & knife crime, drawing on approaches that work elsewhere***
- ***Promote coordination between health & social services, call for greater priority for mental health, especially post-pandemic; resist privatisation***
- ***Highlight the unfairness of the Tories forcing zero or 1% pay rises when Slough's Council Tax is UP by 5% because of Tory Government underfunding (services like police, social care) & Labour Council waste***
- ***Help tackle staff shortages in Slough's NHS & social care by calling for pay rises & by encouraging EU citizens working in vital services to stay***
- ***Call for more collaboration & support for the volunteers who run sports clubs so they can engage more young people in healthy activities***
- ***Demand Labour reverse cuts to the network of youth clubs across Slough, including through getting money available from developers***
- ***Support cooperation between communities & the police in schemes like Neighbourhood Watch; back calls to scrap deadly 'SMART' motorways***
- ***Promote full implementation by Slough Council of its new target of going carbon neutral by 2030 which builds on the 2008 Lib Dem-set target of 2020; help build a consensus on action to improve air quality***
- ***Seek sustainable solutions to Slough's shortage of: affordable housing, building land & successful High Street shops – limit Airbnb, collaborate with neighbouring councils, promote replacement of business rates***
- ***Promote action with the NHS to tackle increased mental health issues by placing a counsellor in schools, as in Lib Dem-run Sutton***
- ***Oppose damaging mistakes by Slough Council's massive Labour majority and their refusal to listen to residents, eg on traffic schemes***

Summary of key points from the Slough Liberal Democrat manifesto for the Slough Borough Council elections in May 2021

- **Cooperation and accountability:** Lib Dems will promote cooperation between agencies, the community and other parties on the Council to bring positive change for the residents of Slough, which is vital during COVID recovery, but will also provide effective opposition where necessary to hold the Labour-run Council to account when mistakes are made and alternative policies needed.
- **Better Health and Social Care:** The COVID pandemic, and the magnificent response to it by health and social care staff, highlights the need for reforms that have been long-promoted by the Lib Dems. These include: better funding and joined-up NHS & Social Care policies; and a higher priority for mental health services. We are taking action to help reduce staff shortages by making EU citizens working here feel more welcome. We support coordination of services but Labour's privatisation of some services run by Slough's Council threatened this and must be resisted. To reverse the decline in activity rates, the Labour-run Council should acknowledge the damage of their hike in charges, and go further in working with and supporting the efforts of local sports clubs.
- **Building safer communities:** Lib Dems will help build safer communities by promoting Neighbourhood Watch and cooperation between police, local authorities and communities including to tackle knife crime through a proven collaborative multi-agency approach which worked in Glasgow. Reverse Labour's cuts to Slough's network of youth clubs across the town, and get developers to pay more through a scheme so far ignored by Slough. Scrap SMART motorways.
- **Action to tackle the Climate Emergency & poor air quality:** Slough Lib Dems led the call for the Council to declare a Climate Emergency in Slough. Action is necessary to implement the Council's new policies to build on the cross-party support for Lib Dem Cllr Plimmer's 2008 motion for the Council to go carbon-neutral by 2020. Consultation is vital in protecting the environment, and adoption of a public health approach that emphasises the importance of improving air quality.
- **Building Homes & Town Centre improvements:** Lib Dems encourage the Council to: seek sustainable long-term solutions to Slough's shortages of affordable housing and land; collaborate with neighbouring authorities; encourage developers to include social and key-worker housing; limit 'airbnb'; do more for tenants, leaseholders, and the homeless. Replace business rates.
- **Boosting education:** Many school staff and pupils rose wonderfully to the pandemic challenges, but support is needed during the recovery, including for adults' skills retraining. In the coalition Government, the Lib Dems introduced the Pupil Premium and free school meals for over 5,000 Slough pupils. Now we support expansion of free school meals and action with the NHS to tackle increased mental health issues by placing a counsellor in schools, as in Lib Dem-run Sutton.
- **Effective opposition & Scrutiny:** The Labour-run Council needs effective opposition to hold it to account for areas of mismanagement, e.g. Slough's declining High Street & activity levels; traffic problems; and failure in running the Children's Services which meant central government took over.
- **Listening first:** Liberal Democrats have a good record of listening to thousands of Slough residents ignored by the Labour Council e.g. on traffic schemes and anti-social behaviour. We are committed to listening to young people through the work of the Youth Parliament.
- **Fairness & spending sensibly:** Slough needs Lib Dem councillors who will fight against the waste of the Labour Council that, combined with Tory Government underfunding of police & social care etc, has resulted in a 5% rise in Council Tax at a time of zero or 1% pay rises for key workers.



Building a healthier, fairer, safer, sustainable Slough

Context: It is important to recognise the fantastic contribution made throughout the pandemic by staff in the local NHS, social care, education, transport and many other services. Nevertheless, Slough is facing some major long-standing challenges, many of which have been made worse during the COVID pandemic. Challenges for recovery include: funding and staff shortages in health and wellbeing services; knife crime and anti-social behaviour; environmental threats; poor traffic management; restoring education; shortage of affordable housing; and decline of the town centre.

Often the best way forward is through agencies working together and through working with the community. Lib Dems will continue to lead calls for cooperative action on issues such as the Climate Emergency. But, Lib Dem councillors will also provide rigorous scrutiny of the Labour-run Council when they make mistakes and their policy choices are damaging to Slough and its residents. Look at the evidence:

Slough ***“scored badly for crime, household overcrowding and road traffic volumes”***, and low for physical activity – Office for National Statistics, reported in Slough Observer, 2 March 2021

Slough: ***“the worst place to drive in the country”*** – AllCarLeasing report, Express, 27 Jan 21

After the local elections in May, the Labour Party will still have a majority to run Slough Council. **To ensure that key issues are addressed properly it is extremely important some Lib Dem councillors are elected who can provide effective opposition and scrutiny.** In recent years there have been examples of Slough’s Labour-run Council mismanaging some key issues and failing to consult residents before taking actions. The Council sometimes wastes money on things residents do not want, including unwanted traffic schemes across Slough. They perform badly in areas such as long-term planning, activity levels in the population, working with voluntary and sports groups, the Heart of Slough project and the High Street. The Labour Council ran the Children and Young Adult Safeguarding Services so badly that central Government had to step in and take over running the service. **The recently identified massive holes in the finances of the neighbouring Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council highlights the dangers of having one party in control (in this case the Tories) without adequate scrutiny of their actions.** The Conservative party are not well-placed to offer effective opposition in Slough - ***Tory policies contribute to recent above inflation rises in the Council tax bill for Slough residents.***

We have identified a list of key priorities, issues and principles on which Liberal Democrat Councillors and candidates will continue to campaign for the residents of Slough, and work with others to achieve. To highlight the importance of cooperation, where relevant, we also provide examples of previous work by Lib Dem councillors and candidates who worked effectively with the community and councillors from other parties to promote issues on behalf of their own ward, or on behalf of the whole town, depending on the issue.

PRIORITIES: Health, wellbeing and fairness, safer communities, protecting the environment and improving air quality, education, affordable housing and the town centre.

Health, wellbeing and fairness:

Following their magnificent work during the pandemic, Lib Dems believe NHS and other essential workers deserve a decent pay rise. We are actively campaigning for such a rise and believe the Tory Government should spend money on this instead of prioritising areas such as the purchase of extra nuclear bombs. It is unfair that NHS and other key workers are receiving zero or 1% pay rise. It is made worse by the decisions of both the Tory Government (who have underfunded vital services including the police and social care), and Slough's Labour Council that together have resulted in an increase in council tax of 5%.

The Lib Dems have been campaigning against recent Tory cuts to parts of the health budget, and for more funding and integrated or joined-up policies for the NHS and Social Care.

Slough Council needs to go further with a long-term, joined-up, strategy that should include working with partners, including in the voluntary sector, to ensure improved mental health services, better access to GP surgeries and increased use of leisure facilities by sections of Slough's population who might most benefit from enhanced levels of fitness. Transformation of our mental health services is now as urgent as improving services for physical health and tackling the backlog of cases that built up prior to, and during the pandemic. There needs to be greater recognition of the urgent need to improve the position of social care.

Lib Dems encourage Slough Council to work more effectively with local NHS providers of services.

Lib Dems oppose the privatisation by Slough's Labour-run Council of some services run from Upton Hospital. NHS nurses and health visitors based at Upton Hospital learnt in July 2017 that the Labour-run Council had given the contract to run the services they provided for young people to a private company. This took the services out of our NHS. Creeping privatisation increases the fragmentation of the services. Instead of participating in privatisation of the NHS, Slough Council should be watching out for the dangers and helping to prevent it, if possible. The dangers of privatisation by stealth were recently seen in West London when a US private healthcare company took over a consortium of 49 GP practices with 500,000 patients.

Reports in 2020 on activity levels among the Slough population show a very worrying decline between Nov 2015/6 and May 2019/20. Labour councillors took a short-sighted decision massively to increase charges for hiring Council sports pitches from April 2015. In a survey conducted by Cippenham Lib Dems most residents thought the Labour councillors were wrong to

massively increase the charges for hiring sports pitches, especially given the drastic drop-off in the number of pitches hired that happened as a consequence. While we recognise the Council is taking some positive actions, a more holistic approach to boosting activity levels and well-being is required, including to ensure that any gains in activity rates as the pandemic continued are not lost as lockdown comes to an end. In particular, the Council should work more effectively with, and provide greater support for, those existing sports clubs and organisations whose volunteers contribute so much to the community's health and well-being. Slough Council resources are reported too often to be used for their own one-off, high-profile events, rather than supporting the continuing efforts of the existing clubs and their volunteers.

The Lib Dems are working to reduce the problems of staff-shortages caused by Brexit for the NHS and social care homes in Slough, and across the country, as many citizens from the EU who have been working hard in care homes and hospitals have been leaving the UK. Where possible Lib Dems are working with citizens from EU countries to reassure them that their contributions are valued, and help those who wish to stay in the UK overcome any bureaucratic obstacles to them being allowed to do so. In particular, helping to spread the message of, where necessary, applying for Settled Status as soon as possible.

Safer communities:

We consider safety and security to be a top priority for Slough residents and therefore we will work to ensure that it gets the required attention and resources from the council, Thames Valley police and community groups within the borough. Figures from before the pandemic showed:

- The crime rate in parts of central Slough was very high, being 153 % of the national average.
- Slough was ranked third in incidents of knife crime outside of London with 15.3 incidents per 10,000 residents.
- There had been a 29% increase in drug-related offences and an 11% increase in weapon offences in the Slough area in the previous two years.

Clearly, there is a case to apply more resources and take further measures to make people safe, and also perceive themselves to be safe.

- The Conservative Government finally recognised that the Lib Dems and others were right to call for a reversal to the Tory cuts in police numbers; the Slough Lib Dems will work with other members of the council to ensure Slough receives a fair share of these additional resources. We will highlight the residents' concerns, identify vulnerable areas and groups of people and make sure resources are applied to the right areas.
- Specifically on tackling knife crime Lib Dems support a public health approach to youth violence based on the World Health Organisation's principle of treating violence like a disease and responding with a whole-systems approach. This approach was used

successfully in Glasgow to reduce the city's notorious level of knife crime. The public health approach means the police also working with those in the health, education and social work fields to tackle the problem, by stopping more people being infected by the disease of violent behaviour.

- The Liberal Democrats firmly believe that safer communities are built by partnership between residents, community leaders, police, and local government initiatives. The Safer Slough Partnership is an excellent initiative to address these issues faced by the residents. However, we believe more can be done at a local, grassroots level with more participation by the residents and community leaders:
 - The Liberal Democrats will examine the possibility of promoting the creation of a network of smaller local teams from the participants of the Safer Slough Partnership to tackle issues at the grassroots level.
 - The Slough Lib Dems champion Neighbourhood Watch schemes in as many areas as possible around the borough.
 - We will encourage more residents to be part of the community policing. More community policing is essential to reduce the illegal selling of drugs and anti-social behaviour in the streets around Slough. The party's aim will be to demonstrate the value that young people aged 18 and over can get by becoming special constables and promote the volunteer scheme, this will help in a big way to keep young people away from gangs.
- **Former Liberal Democrat Cllr Robert Plimmer led the way in working with local tenants and residents' associations to get gates introduced into back alleyways, and hence improve community safety: this also involved many evenings discussing options with local residents and building a coalition of community support for the introduction of the gates.**
- The Liberal Democrats have consistently opposed the Labour Council's cuts to the network of youth clubs that used to exist across Slough. The Labour councillors starting cutting the youth clubs, including for example the one in Foxborough Ward, back in 2011. The Lib Dems will press for youth clubs to be restored, where possible across local communities and not just centrally. Further exploration should be made of the potential use of Section 106 money from developers for this purpose under regulations that appear hitherto not to have been used by Slough Council.
- Liberal Democrats believe it is essential to work with community cohesion groups, schools and religious institutions to tackle racism and religious discrimination:
 - We believe it will be necessary to be extra vigilant to ensure the Brexit process does not lead to European or other racial minorities being targeted.

- The Liberal Democrats will actively support organisations that work towards developing further understanding between communities by organising multi-cultural forums or events
- Liberal Democrats believe safety and security extends far beyond crime and policing. Effective traffic management, reduction in potholes, safe buildings and good quality public works all contribute to keeping residents safe.
 - In Cippenham the Liberal Democrats led the campaign to tackle unsafe Virgin Media boxes which were a public hazard.
 - We will continue to inform residents of how to report any environmental hazards and attempt to ensure the organisation responsible resolves the dangerous conditions.
 - Liberal Democrats will support measures to reduce careless driving and work towards improving traffic management around school areas.
 - Lib Dems oppose the Tory Government's decision to continue spending millions of pounds building the new, so-called SMART Motorways, including on the M4 motorway through Slough. It is claimed that evidence suggests where they are already in operation they are responsible for an increasing number of deaths. These deaths occur, it is suggested, because the SMART motorways now provide such limited places of safety for the drivers and passengers of cars that break down, and for the rescue services that come to help them. The money would be much better spent improving traffic management in the town.

Tackling the Climate Emergency and pollution:

Climate change is the single greatest long-term threat to our future way of life, and the associated problems of deforestation and loss of biodiversity are now being seen as increasing the chances of pandemics occurring ([d41586-020-02341-1.pdf \(nature.com\)](#)). The Liberal Democrats have long emphasised the importance tackling climate change and pollution. Others are now increasingly realising that the Lib Dems were right to be so concerned.

In that context it is important that every community plays its part in tackling the Climate Emergency. In March 2019 the Lib Dems led the way in Slough by calling on all parties on Slough Borough Council to work together to declare a 'Climate Emergency' and start planning how to address the issues. We called for the Council to adopt an action plan including producing a report within 6 months setting out the immediate actions the Council would take. We are pleased that since then there has been some progress in Slough, including in July 2019 when Slough Borough Council (SBC) adopted a cross-party motion to take action on climate change, even though it did not go as far as the Lib Dems had called for. Slough Lib Dems propose some specific steps the Council should take included:

- **In 2008 Liberal Democrat Cllr Robert Plimmer successfully secured all-party support for a motion that Slough Council should go carbon-neutral by 2020. The Labour Council did not meet this target, but in April 2020 adopted a new SBC Carbon Management Plan 2020 to 2030.** While Slough Lib Dems welcome the proposals, we call for action to cover what appear to be some gaps. These include how to achieve carbon neutrality across the rented housing stock. Furthermore, greater public consultation on the plan would be beneficial to encourage the residents of Slough to buy-in and own the concept of carbon neutrality.
- **Liberal Democrats believe that for the sake of the public's health, as well as to tackle climate change, Slough Council should generate as wide a consensus as possible around retaining and building on the gains in air quality seen during the pandemic. Generating a consensus around positive steps to improve air quality, includes, or would have involved:**
 - **Consulting widely before introducing bus lanes on the A4 in the west of Slough and making adequate plans to have sufficient buses already available to use these extra bus lanes. The Labour-run Council were so keen to grab the money made available by the Tory Government, on an apparently short timescale, that they didn't seem to recognise the importance of building a consensus before going ahead with such a controversial scheme. Furthermore, thus far the new scheme seems likely to end up causing more congestion across the west of Slough, and probably worse levels of emissions than there would have been without the extra bus lanes. Slough Council also seemed to ignore the existing bus lanes running parallel to the A4 as it goes through the Trading Estate. This is despite the fact that the Council itself had introduced and heavily promoted these bus lanes only a few years previously in 2016.**
 - In 2018 Watford Lib Dem-run Council worked with developers to introduce a hi-tech city tree. This is a new way to improve air quality in urban areas as hi-tech city trees clean polluted air. Lib Dems support the calls by Tory councillors for their introduction into Slough to supplement real tree planting. Sadly Slough Labour councillors just rejected this out of hand.
 - Making stations more accessible through extending the foot/cycle path network to the stations and improving security for bikes at stations.
- Slough Lib Dems recognise that the Council has made some progress in installing electric vehicle car chargers, but this is not keeping pace with the rate at which residents are buying EVs. Slough needs a strategy for the eventual widespread charging of electric vehicles across housing estates, including the potential role for charging in private garages and off-road parking areas.

- Four of the top five local authorities with the highest recycling rates are Lib Dem-led. Recycling in Slough should be taken further, with the Labour Council learning from successful approaches in other local authorities. This could include recycling of a greater variety of plastics. Plans to encourage micro-generation of energy in Slough should continue to be developed.
- Slough Council should campaign for minimisation of the impact of aircraft emissions and noise on local communities in Colnbrook and Langley that might be caused by the planned new flight paths.

The heritage of iconic buildings in Slough should be preserved where possible. Lib Dems campaigned for preservation of the facade of the Horlicks factory.

In Cippenham the Lib Dem Focus team members Matthew Taylor and Robert Plimmer led a community litter-pick in Nov 2018. The Lib Dem Focus teams in Slough also demand better action from Slough Council on issues such as:

- keeping the local estates clean and well-maintained, including the communal bin areas and security doors;
- proper tree maintenance including in Hempson Avenue where local Lib Dem campaigner Sukh Dhillon asked the Labour-run Council to ensure in future the pavement was not again totally blocked for months by tree branches as it was in 2020/1.

Affordable Housing:

Slough faces a housing crisis in terms of numbers, affordability and availability of land. Lib Dems say sustainable, long-term solutions must be sought. Not all the current problems are the fault of the Labour-run Council. Tory Governments introduced ideological right-wing policies that spent billions of pounds of tax-payers money on schemes that increased the cost of new homes and greatly boosted house-builders profits (one greedy building company boss had a bonus of £100 million partly thanks to the Tories use of tax-payers money). Tory policies also worsened the housing crisis in areas such as Slough by undermining the provision of social housing. We acknowledge that some progress is now being made in Slough – with further steps under consideration - and welcome the recent additional housing schemes planned, especially where they include social housing. There is still a long way to go.

Lib Dems promote better, long-term strategic thinking to address Slough's housing crisis.

Slough's Labour-run Council needs to make a completely new start by apologising for the problems caused by their previous mistaken policies. Slough's Council's independent Planning Policy Lead Officer said in January 2019: *"The main problem we've got is a complete shortage of land for development."* Labour have a long history of trying to draw the boundaries of Slough tightly

round a small urban area and cut Slough off from the surrounding areas, but now the town needs their cooperation in finding additional land to build the affordable houses needed by our community. Additionally the Council needs to be more responsive to the ideas from others:

- ***Take notice of views expressed by Slough Lib Dems in response to the consultation on the Proposed Spatial Strategy. In particular, the need to take a more strategic overview of the implications of range of key issues that should be considered at the same time because considering each one in isolation could create a vicious circle.***

[The exact position becomes even more complicated because in the middle of the consultation the Tory Government itself announced further changes to changes it had proposed only a few months earlier for housing targets for local authorities. However, the changes in Autumn 2020 do not appear to have reduced the target figure for new homes in Slough produced using the “standard” methodology for calculating the number of new homes needed in each Council area. That methodology showed “*an overall need for 17,860 new houses in Slough from 2016 to 2036*”].

The key problem is that in the consultative document SBC referred to the shortage of land to meet the housing target set by using the Tory Government’s standard methodology, but in other parts of the document said the plan aimed to provide an additional 15,000 jobs, and also referred to migration between Greater London and Slough. What is lacking here is an analysis that brings these points together to question the appropriateness of the Tory Government promoting a standard methodology that set a target for housing for which there is clearly not the land, and questions why Slough Council set a target for an increase in jobs that is so great that it is likely to encourage yet more people to move to Slough to take up jobs. **The combined approach of the Tory Government and Slough’s Labour Council is creating a vicious circle that is likely to be damaging for Slough because there will be a constant shortage of housing and land, and also increasing congestion on the roads.** The Lib Dems suggested a better approach might be a) for Slough Council to challenge the target for housing and reconsider its target for jobs growth in the light of the “*complete shortage of land for development*”, and b) for the Government to agree to flexibility in how the standard methodology is applied so as to reduce the housing target where there is a “*complete shortage of land for development*”.

- ***Take more action to force developers to include some social housing, including for key-workers, and/or properties for local residents under shared-ownership schemes.***

The Labour and Tory councillors on Slough Borough Council’s Planning Committee approved plans in early 2019 for the conversion of the redundant office block at 163 Bath Road into 106 apartments which did not offer a single flat for social housing or to key-workers or to local residents under shared-ownership schemes. This was despite the fact that Lib Dem campaigner Robert Plimmer had spoken at the Planning Committee and asked the Council to use their existing powers under Section 106 to demand social housing

provision. This would have been in line with the current 5 year plan of Slough Borough Council from 2018 to 2023 that commits the Council to support new housing developments that will provide social housing for people on the Council's waiting list. They refused at the time, and, while there have been some subsequent changes to the plan, the Council did not appear to secure as large a contribution towards affordable housing as they probably would have done had they taken proper notice of Robert Plimmer's arguments at the initial stage.

- ***Take action to ensure a higher proportion of any new homes built in Slough contribute to local housing need rather than being liable to be rented out as 'Airbnb' online rentals and the temporary accommodation of tenants staying during weekday nights whilst visiting and working in the Slough area.*** This could be done by using Section 44 of the Deregulation Act of 2015 that allows local authorities such as Slough to reduce temporary sleeping accommodation rentals for studio and 1-bedroom apartments to 90 nights per year or to completely restrict short term rental. This legislation could reduce the viability of flats being rented out as 'Airbnb' online rentals and the 'weekday lodgings' of tenants staying during weekday nights whilst visiting and working in the Slough area. Robert Plimmer requested that the Planning Committee consider the use of these powers in the conversion of the redundant office block at 163 Bath Road into 106 apartments.
- ***Take additional action on empty houses and examine whether any vacant commercial premises could be turned into housing sites,*** following rigorous safety checks and application of the requirements for social housing and restrictions on temporary sleeping accommodation rentals.

The Lib Dems have developed alternative plans for new Garden Cities, innovative rent-to-own schemes, and an emphasis on affordable, energy-efficient housing etc that should help reduce the considerable pressure on housing in towns such as Slough.

A better deal for tenants, leaseholders and the homeless. At the national level, the Lib Dems promoted a better deal, including help for first-time renters, and before the pandemic secured legislation aimed at providing a fairer deal for renters in the private sector and protect them from unaffordable deposits and extortionate fees. The campaign led by Lib Dem Baroness Olly Greener eventually forced the Government to address the issue in a new Tenants Fee Bill, and then the Lib Dems won several important amendments to strengthen the Government's proposals.

As reported in local papers, the treatment of SHOC (Slough Homeless Our Concern) by Slough's Labour-run Council was not appropriate. SHOC has been doing good work for the homeless of Slough for many years but had to leave the town-centre property it leased from Slough Council. Alternative accommodation was eventually found for them to continue their successful work. Lib Dems believe that permanent night shelter provision led by the Council working with existing local

charities in the town centre would enable crisis care, recovery and skills training to be delivered more effectively.

Town centre

The High Street deserves better consideration by Slough Council than it has received over many years. It needs creative policies to halt the current decline. Across the country even before the pandemic many town centres were struggling to retain an attractive range of shops. But Slough's Labour Council made the situation worse because the long delays in completion of the redevelopment of the town centre made Slough a less attractive place to shop and contributed to the decline. Therefore, particularly following the pandemic, new proposals start from an even more challenging situation. The Lib Dems hope the Council's latest re-development plans are more successful than various previous plans, but the Council's record is not good. Slough Council's Proposed Spatial Strategy consultation document stated: "*Slough has a failing shopping centre.*"

Nationally, and prior to the pandemic, the Lib Dems promoted better policies for town centres as such ensuring online retailers pay their fair share of tax, expanding the "Future High Streets Funds", reforming commercial planning law to enable Councils to ensure commercial space is used flexibly and efficiently for a mix of purposes that will attract people back to the High Street. Lib Dems also proposed replacing the outdated business rates with a fairer Commercial Landowner Levy on commercial landowners rather than tenants, thus sparing over half a million small businesses the bureaucratic burden of property tax, and by being based solely on the value of the land rather than the buildings it would reduce the average bill in over 90% of local authorities.

Education:

Many school staff and pupils rose wonderfully to the pandemic challenges, but support is needed during the recovery, including for adults' skills retraining. The Lib Dems will continue our strong record of supporting Slough schools. Prior to the pandemic, Slough schools had benefitted from two initiatives the Lib Dems successfully promoted and turned into key policies during the coalition Government. ***The Pupil Premium scheme was a key Liberal Democrat policy implemented by the coalition Government.*** It is especially valuable in supporting education authorities such as Slough that received £16 million extra while the Lib Dems were in the Government. This money helps address a whole range of issues and contributes strongly to overall improvements in the performance of the full range of pupils and schools. The introduction of free school meals for all 5-7 year olds is another successful policy introduced by the Lib Dems in the coalition Government. ***Over 5,000 Slough pupils benefitted from the Lib Dems free school meals policy, which has been shown to boost pupil performance, as well as helping hard-pressed families.***

- Some of these approaches have been built on during the pandemic, including by Kirsty Williams the Lib Dem who is the Minister for Education in the Labour-led coalition Government in Wales, and provide useful lessons for ways to boost and help the recovery of education in Slough. Kirsty ensured that the Welsh Government acted faster on extending free school meals than happened in England under the Tories. This support will continue in Wales. Kirsty Williams is now also promoting the development of whole-school plans for mental health issues, which have become even more serious during the pandemic. Some local authorities such as in Lib Dem-run Sutton have taken action with the NHS to tackle increased mental health issues by placing a counsellor in nearly every school.

In the broadest sense continuing education and retraining are very important, especially in recovery from pandemic. Here, we not only welcome SBC's initiative, but also the Slough Hub a not for profit social enterprise founded by Vineet Vih, during the pandemic in May 2020. He established it to help our community find work but also work together as they achieve this. The Slough Hub helps people at every stage of their career, whether they are looking for a job, want to set up their own business or are an existing business needing support.

PRINCIPLES: Scrutiny and accountability, decentralisation, listening first, spending sensibly and co-operation.

Scrutiny, accountability and effective opposition: Liberal Democrats recognise that Labour will retain control of Slough Council following the elections in May 2021. But Lib Dems elected to Slough Council will work hard to hold the leaders of Slough Council to account and provide effective opposition and scrutiny where necessary. The Labour councillors need to be held accountable where they have mismanaged services. There have been long delays in completing the Heart of Slough/bus station project, which might also have had a knock-on effect and contributed to the High Street's decline.

Where problems in services are identified by inspection bodies, such as happened with the Children and Young Adult Safeguarding Services, it is vital that the Labour Council accepts responsibility and takes action rather than just resorting to "*a foul-mouth outburst*", as reported in local papers. The failure of Slough's Labour-run Council to respond properly to damaging reports from the official inspection body (OFSTED) meant central Government had to take over running the service. Also the Labour councillors need to be held accountable for their policies when they are damaging to the town, eg closing youth services covering various local communities in Slough, massively increasing charges for hiring sports pitches, and withdrawing funding from popular and effective local charities like DASH (Domestic Abuse Stops Here), Age Concern and the Citizens Advice Bureau which were run in a way that was accessible to all sections of the community.

Decentralisation: The Liberal Democrats believe local people know best about services in their area. Therefore, we support the decentralisation of politics so that local people will have a greater say over local services. We support the Localism Act that shifts more powers from central government and gives them to local councils and local communities. We also support implementation of the Sustainable Communities Act which gives people the right to propose actions in their local areas to improve sustainability.

Listening first: Liberal Democrats are committed to listening to residents and putting them at the heart of the decisions that the Council take. The issues where Labour councillors have not listened properly to local people include the traffic schemes around Station Road, the Chalvey one-way traffic scheme, and traffic schemes in Langley and the Town Centre. In Cippenham many residents tell the Lib Dem Focus Team they do not think the Labour councillors listen sufficiently to them. A hundred percent of local residents who took part in a Lib Dem survey said they wanted councillors who listened more to local residents. The area clearly needs Lib Dem councillors who will listen and who will demand that resources are spent sensibly on addressing the people's priorities rather than spending on things residents do not want, eg the unwanted traffic schemes.

Questions are also being asked about how far Slough's Labour-run Council has properly consulted Slough Town's football team about the requirements for the new stadium. It has brought the 'Rebels' back to Slough after they had to leave in 2003 at a time when again the Labour-run Council was not listening properly to local needs. But there are questions about whether the capacity of the new Arbour Park stadium, at about 2,300, will be sufficient should the Rebels be successful in gaining promotion. Lib Dems also believe it is important to listen to the views of young people and also support continued funding of the Youth Parliament.

Spending sensibly: Liberal Democrats will strongly press for: 1) more efficient spending; 2) a reduction in the amount spent on unwanted traffic schemes and overly generous payouts to senior staff when they leave; 3) increased spending on addressing fly-tipping, litter and anti-social behaviour; 4) restoring money cut from supporting local charities and youth services spread around the town.

Co-operation: Lib Dem Councillors and candidates will take the long-term view, work effectively with other groups to improve the services provided by Slough Council and improve communities, and work for the common good. Lib Dems believe the Labour-run council has not always worked as well as it could have done to develop collaborative relations with charities (particularly those dealing with debt), local sports clubs and parts of the NHS that provide

valuable services to the community. **Lib Dem councillors would work more effectively with local organisations and will suggest Slough's Council learns to work more constructively with local organisations having strong records of helping the community.**

This document will form the basis on which Slough Liberal Democrat Councillors would negotiate with other groups so as to work cooperatively to address the problems facing our town. Liberal Democrat Councillors in Slough have a good reputation for collaborating with councillors from other parties, and more widely with groups across the town. As an example, former Councillor Robert Plimmer served Slough in a voluntary capacity as the town's highly successful Fair Trade Champion.

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