

SLOUGH LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

2018 Local Elections: principles and priorities

Better Health, Better Housing and Exit from Brexit



One page summary of key points from the Slough Liberal Democrat manifesto for the Slough Borough Council elections in May 2018

- ***Better Health:*** The Lib Dem commitment to increase funding for the NHS (including mental health) & Social Care includes services covered by local councils. Lib Dems oppose the privatisation by Slough's Labour Council of some services run from Upton Hospital. To boost fitness, the Labour-run Council must reverse their big rise in charges for hiring sports pitches.
- ***Better Housing:*** Lib Dems believe new thinking is needed to tackle the housing crisis. Slough's Labour-run Council needs to start by apologising for the problems caused by their previous policies. They also need to do more for leaseholder, tenants and the homeless.
- ***Exit from Brexit:*** Brexit will cause problems for many companies based in Slough, and for the many EU citizens who work in Slough's care homes etc. Lib Dems believe there should be a second referendum on the Brexit terms, with the chance to say no to leaving the EU.
- ***Boosting education:*** Lib Dems helped Slough schools by introducing the Pupil Premium policy while in Government. This is giving millions of extra pounds to schools and with the Lib Dem's free school meals for over 5,000 Slough pupils improves pupil performance.
- ***Building safer communities:*** The Lib Dems believe the Council should help build safer communities, e.g. former Lib Dem Councillor Robert Plimmer led the way in working with residents to boost security by getting gates for back alleyways, but more action is needed.
- ***Protecting the environment & Slough's heritage:*** Slough Council must increase recycling and implement the idea introduced to the Council by Robert Plimmer in 2009 for the Council to go carbon-neutral by 2020. Slough Council should be critical of the damage Heathrow expansion will cause. The facade of the Horlicks factory should be preserved.
- ***Effective opposition & Scrutiny:*** The Labour-run Council needs effective opposition and scrutiny to hold it to account for its appalling mismanagement, e.g. the many delays with the Heart of Slough/bus station project; the declining High Street; the Children's Services which Labour ran so badly that central Government had to step in and take them 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 in Cippenham, Chalvey and the original Station Road changes; and over planning in Langley and anti-social behaviour. We are committed to listening to young people through the work of the Youth Parliament.
- ***Spending sensibly:*** Slough needs Lib Dem councillors who will fight against waste (eg on unwanted traffic schemes) and fight to boost funding in areas cut by Labour or that need more funding e.g. youth services and measures to fight fly-tipping and anti-social behaviour.
- ***Working together on the Council:*** Based on this mini-manifesto, Lib Dem Councillors will provide effective opposition where necessary, but where possible cooperate with others on key issues, including to campaign for a referendum with the chance to say no to Brexit.



Better Health, Better Housing and Exit from Brexit

Context:

Slough is facing some major issues, including health, housing and Brexit. In recent years there have been chaotic changes of leadership of Slough's Labour-run Council, mismanagement on key issues and the failure to consult residents before taking actions. The Council therefore wastes money on things residents do not want, including unwanted traffic schemes across Slough. They perform very badly in areas such as the Heart of Slough project/the bus station, the High Street and Children and Young Adult Safeguarding Services.

After the local elections in May, the Labour Party will still have a majority to run Slough Council. To make sure that key issues are addressed properly it is extremely important some Lib Dem councillors are elected who can provide effective opposition and scrutiny where necessary, and work cooperatively where possible.

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.

PRIORITIES: Health, housing, exit from Brexit, education, safer communities, and protecting the environment and Slough's heritage.

- **Health and Well being:** The Lib Dem commitment to increase funding for the NHS (including mental health) & Social Care includes services covered by local councils. Slough Council needs a long-term strategy that should include working with partners 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. Labour councillors took an appalling decision massively to increase charges for hiring 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. ***The Labour policy of higher charges for hiring sports pitches must be reversed.*** Slough Council also needs to work more effectively with local NHS providers of services. ***Lib Dems oppose the privatisation by Slough's Labour 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 takes the services out of our NHS.

- **Housing:** Slough faces a mounting housing crisis. Not all of this is the fault of the Labour-run Council, and some additional housing schemes are planned. ***But new thinking is needed to tackle 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 policies. Labour have a long history of trying to cut Slough off from surrounding areas, but now the town needs their cooperation in finding additional land to build the houses needed by our community. This is in addition to action on empty houses and examining whether any vacant commercial premises could be turned into housing sites, following rigorous safety checks. The Tory Government introduced ideological right-wing policies that will worsen the housing crisis in areas such as Slough by undermining the provision of social housing. The Lib Dems have developed alternative plans for new Garden Cities, innovative rent-to-own schemes, and an emphasis on affordable housing etc that should help reduce the considerable pressure on housing in towns such as Slough.

Slough Council should treat its tenants, leaseholders and the homeless better.

Slough Council should do like other councils and make it much easier for leaseholder service charges and housing (and garage) rental invoices to be paid, including by electronic methods following electronic invoicing. The treatment of SHOC (Slough Homeless Our Concern) by Slough's Labour-run Council has been shocking, according to a report in local papers. 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 before appropriate, permanent alternative accommodation was found. Slough's Council needs to learn to work more constructively with local organisations who have a strong record of helping the community.

- **Exit from Brexit:** It is thought that the economy of towns such as Slough with high-tech and research-based industries are likely to be hit worse than most by Brexit. There are many such companies in Slough, especially on the Trading Estate. And as elsewhere many young people in Slough are upset at the opportunities they might lose as a result of Brexit. Furthermore, Brexit is creating enormous problems for many citizens from the EU who have been working hard in Slough in care homes, the hospitals and other occupations. ***The Lib Dems believe the British people should be allowed a vote in a second referendum to say whether they approve of the terms of Brexit or would prefer to remain in the EU.***

- **Education:** The Lib Dems will continue their strong record of supporting Slough schools. ***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 Dem's free school meals policy, which has been shown to boost pupil performance, as well as helping hard-pressed families.***
- **Safer communities:** Lib Dems believe it is important that Slough Council, Safer Slough Partnership and the police work together to address the concerns of local residents. Lib Dems elected as councillors would continue to support the work currently being carried out by our Community Wardens in Slough to attempt to tackle anti-social behaviour and make residents feel safer. ***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,*** and also backed local Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs). Liberal Democrats also believe it is important to work with community cohesion groups, schools and religious institutions to tackle racism and religious discrimination
- **Protecting the environment and Slough's heritage:** Climate change is the single greatest threat to our way of life. The Liberal Democrats have long emphasised the importance of this issue. Others are now increasingly realising that the Lib Dem were right to be so concerned. Councils, working with communities, need to be at the forefront of reducing carbon emissions, and cutting waste, if we are to protect the planet. ***In 2009 Liberal Democrat Cllr Robert Plimmer successfully secured all-party support for a motion that Slough Council should go carbon-neutral by 2020.*** Liberal Democrats are calling for an audit of progress towards achieving this important goal.

Liberal Democrats believe recycling should be taken further and plans to encourage micro-generation of energy in Slough continue to be developed. Slough needs a strategy for the eventual widespread charging of electric vehicles. Slough Council should also provide a better lead by reducing its own use of plastics, unnecessary packaging and the thousands of difficult to recycle single-use coffee-cups used in the Council offices each

year. Slough Council should be critical of the damage that Heathrow expansion will cause, especially the impact of aircraft emissions and noise on local communities in Colnbrook and Langley. ***The heritage of iconic buildings in Slough should be preserved where possible.*** This includes the facade of the Horlicks factory.

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 2018. 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 have let Slough down with the recent repeated and chaotic changes of leadership. They need to be held accountable for their mismanagement. There have been massive delays in completing the Heart of Slough/bus station project, which might also have had a knock-on effect and be one cause of 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. (The service is still recovering from the Council's mismanagement). 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 we 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. 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 such issues rather than spending on things residents do not want, such as 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 2,000, will be sufficient should the Rebels be successful in gaining promotion. Liberal Democrats also believe it is important to listen to the views of young people and also support continued funding of the Youth Parliament. Young people will be particularly badly hit by Brexit, and many want the chance to have their say on the final Brexit deal in a referendum in which they will have the opportunity to vote to remain in the EU.

- **Spending sensibly:** Lib Dems 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 youth services, local charities, and concessionary fares; and 5) removing the massive increase in charges for hiring sports pitches which has resulted a 50% drop in bookings.
- **Co-operation:** Liberal Democrat Councillors and candidates will take the long-term view and work effectively with other groups to improve the services provided by Slough Council and improve communities. The Lib Dems believe the Labour-run council has not always worked as well as it could have done to develop collaborative relations with charities and parts of the NHS that provide valuable services to the community. Liberal Democrat Councillors will also work positively with others to campaign for a second referendum on leaving the EU to allow the people to have their say on whether they approve of the terms of Brexit or would prefer to remain in the EU.

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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