

SLOUGH LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

2019 Local Elections: principles and priorities

***Lib Dems Demand Change: Better Health, Housing
and Environmental Services for Slough***



LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

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Summary of key points from the Slough Liberal Democrat manifesto for the Slough Borough Council elections in May 2019

- **Better Health:** The longstanding Lib Dem demand for better funding and joined-up NHS & Social Care policies includes public health services. Lib Dems oppose Tory cuts and the privatisation by Slough's Labour Council of some services. To reverse the decline in activity rates, the Labour-run Council must reverse their big rise in charges for hiring sports pitches.
- **Better Homes and Town Centre:** Lib Dems demand better thinking to tackle Slough's housing crisis. The Council needs to: use every opportunity to force developers to include social and key-worker housing; restrict the loss of homes to 'airbnb'; do more for tenants, leaseholders, and the homeless. Replacing business rates would help save high streets.
- **Declaring a Climate Emergency & Protecting Slough's heritage:** Slough Council should join others in immediately declaring a Climate Emergency in Slough, and identifying measures necessary for Slough to be carbon neutral by 2030. A key element in protecting the environment is adoption of a public health approach that emphasises the importance of improving air quality. Lib Dems supported preservation of the Horlicks factory facade.
- **Building safer communities:** The Lib Dems demand better resourcing of local police. Tory cuts should be reversed. The Council should help build safer communities, e.g. by working with communities, and reversing the Labour Council's cuts to youth clubs.
- **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 improves pupil performance, as does the Lib Dems free school meals for over 5,000 Slough pupils.
- **Brexit:** Lib Dems oppose Brexit and recognise the contribution of the many EU citizens who work in Slough (eg 16% of Wexham staff). Lib Dems consistently supported a People's Vote, with an option to remain in the EU, and demand better protection for EU citizens in the UK.
- **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 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.



Lib Dems Demand Change: Better Health, Housing and Environmental Services for Slough

Context:

Slough is facing some major issues, including health and wellbeing, housing and the decline of the town centre, environmental threats and decreasing police numbers. 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 wastes money on things residents do not want, including unwanted traffic schemes across Slough. They perform very badly in areas such as health and activity levels in the population, 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, and work cooperatively where possible.** The Conservative party are not well-placed to offer effective opposition because the Tories have put ideological priorities, such as preparing for a no-deal Brexit, ahead of properly funding the police, NHS, social care etc. ***The Tory policies have contributed to the above inflation 4.7% rise in the Council tax bill for Slough residents in 2018/10 and 3.9% rise in 2019/20.***

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 and wellbeing, housing and town centre, safer communities, protecting the environment and Slough's heritage, education, and Brexit.

- **Health and Well being: *The Lib Dem's longstanding demands for better funding and joined-up policies for the NHS & Social Care include public health services covered by local councils. The Tory under-funding of the NHS & Social Care continues with further cuts to public health and training budgets. These cuts must be reversed.*** Slough Council needs a long-term, joined-up, 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.

The latest reports on activity levels among the Slough population show a very worrying decline between 2015/6 and 2017/8. 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. While we recognise the Council is taking some positive actions, a more holistic approach to boosting activity levels and well-being is required. ***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 and town centre:** 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. Tory Governments have introduced ideological right-wing policies that spend billions of pounds of tax-payers money on schemes that increase the cost of new homes and greatly boost house-builders profits (one building company boss had a bonus of £100 million partly thanks to the Tories use of tax-payers money). Tory policies also worsen the housing crisis in areas such as Slough by undermining the provision of social housing. ***Lib Dems demand better thinking 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. 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 cut Slough off from 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 adopt a series of policies:
 - ***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 January 2019 for the conversion of the redundant office block at 163 Bath Road into 106 apartments which do not offer a

single flat for social housing 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.

- ***Take action to ensure a higher proportion of any new homes built in Slough contribute to local housing need rather than all 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 & 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 are demanding a better deal, including help for first-time renters, and have already recently secured legislation that should in future provide 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 Oly 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. In Slough, the 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. 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 before appropriate, permanent alternative accommodation was found. Lib Dem councillors would work more effectively with local organisations and will demand Slough's Council learns to work more constructively with local organisations who have a strong record of helping the community.

The High Street deserves better consideration by Slough Council and creative policies to halt the current decline. Across the country many town centres are 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 Town a less attractive place to shop and contributed to the decline. Nationally, the Lib Dems demand 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; and 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.

- **Declaring a Climate Emergency and protecting Slough's heritage:** Climate change is the single greatest threat to our future way of life. It is even more of a threat for the residents of Slough because the town has the youngest population of any large urban area in the UK. The Liberal Democrats have long emphasised the importance of this issue. Others are now increasingly realising that the Lib Dems were right to be so concerned. Councils across the country are declaring a 'Climate Emergency' and setting out plans to go Carbon Neutral. Slough Lib Dems call on all parties on Slough Borough Council to work together to adopt an action plan including the following commitments:
 1. *Declare a 'Climate Emergency'.*
 2. *Commit to a target of making Slough carbon neutral by 2030, taking into account both production and consumption emissions (scope 1, 2 and 3 of the Greenhouse Gas Protocol).*
 3. *Request a report within six months setting out the immediate actions the Council will take to address this emergency and a plan to measure annual townwide progress towards meeting the 2030 target.*

4. *Work with partners across the town and across the region to deliver this new goal through all relevant strategies and plans and drawing on local and global best practice.*
5. *Actively lobby the Government to provide the additional powers and resources needed to meet the 2030 target.*

Slough Lib Dems also propose some specific steps that the Council should be taking:

- i) 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 urgent audit of progress towards achieving this important goal.
- ii) **Liberal Democrats believe that for the sake of the public's health, as well as to tackle climate change, urgent measure steps should be taken to improve air quality, including, where appropriate, making stations more accessible through extending the foot/cycle path network to the stations and improving security for bikes at stations.**
- iii) Recycling should be taken further and plans to encourage micro-generation of energy in Slough continue to be developed.
- iv) Slough needs a strategy for the eventual widespread charging of electric vehicles across housing estates, including the potential role for charging in private garages.
- v) We welcome the progress being made by Slough Council in reducing its own use of plastics, unnecessary packaging and difficult to recycle single-use coffee cups, but encourage them to go further.
- vi) 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. There will be considerable pollution from the increased road haulage and passenger traffic, on top of all of all the problems caused during construction of the runway.
- vii) While there is still any opportunity to do so, Slough Council should join the Lib Dems passionate campaign for the UK to remain in the EU as the most likely route to achieve policies at the national and international level to tackle climate change.

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 Focus team also demand better

action from Slough Council on keeping the local estates clean and well-maintained, for example communal bin areas, tree maintenance, and communal security doors.

- **Safer communities: *Lib Dems demand better funding for Thames Valley Police Force.*** Now the nation's public finances have been restored there could have been the money available to reverse the cuts and restore the number of police serving our communities. ***The Tories have had other priorities and carried on cutting the police and other services.*** 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). The Council should also invest more on schemes in the community, including youth clubs that they have previously cut. **Liberal Democrats also believe it is important to work with community cohesion groups, schools and religious institutions to tackle racism and religious discrimination**
- **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 Dems free school meals policy, which has been shown to boost pupil performance, as well as helping hard-pressed families.***
- **Brexit: *The Lib Dems policy has been that the British people should be allowed a vote on whether they approve of the terms of Brexit, or would prefer to remain in the EU.*** Matthew Taylor and other Lib Dems play a key role in the Slough4EU campaign for a People's Vote. Brexit is causing economic uncertainties for many local businesses. Furthermore, Brexit is creating enormous problems 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, the hospitals and other occupations have been leaving the UK. A Freedom of Information request from Matthew Taylor revealed that 16% of the workforce at Wexham Park Hospital are non-British EU nationals. Also further staff shortages are being caused by a large drop in the recruitment of new nurses etc from EU countries because the UK is no longer seen as a country where they would feel welcome. With Slough having a higher percentage of young people than any other urban centre in the UK, there are many people in Slough upset at the opportunities they might lose as a result of Brexit.

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 2019. 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 long 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 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, 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 2,300, 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. Young people will be particularly badly hit by Brexit, and many joined with the Lib Dems in demanding the chance to have their say on the final Brexit deal in a referendum with 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 and local charities; and 5) removing the massive increase in charges for hiring sports pitches which resulted a 50% drop in bookings.
- **Co-operation:** Liberal Democrat 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. 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.

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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