

Wiltshire Council Elections
June 2009

A Liberal
Democrat Vision
For Wiltshire



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Wiltshire
Winning



Budget and Council Tax

A Liberal Democrat Vision for Wiltshire

Wiltshire Council will have a budget in excess of £800 million in the coming year, and a capital programme of £124 million. Our aim is to deliver quality services, while minimising the impact of this expenditure on the citizens of Wiltshire at a time of economic depression, and in particular by making savings on non-frontline costs.

Nationally, Liberal Democrats would abolish the Council Tax and replace it with a much fairer local income tax. In the meantime, we will have to continue to levy the Council Tax but keep it to a minimum.

The Tories claim to have saved £18 million (£6 million a year) in the move to unitary. Where are the savings? Why a 3.5 % Council Tax increase, given that they have also had a £12 million capital and £18 million revenue windfall from two of the four outgoing District Councils?

Liberal Democrats will:

- Keep Council tax rises at or below the rate of inflation in years from 2010 till 2012, subject to the levels of grant provided by central government
- Scrutinise the budget already set this year by the Conservatives, with its inflation-busting 3.5% Council tax increase, with the aim of making significant savings to be carried forward to 2010.
- Speed up the creation of an asset register for the whole Council and the disposal of property which is no longer required
- Reduce by a half the multi-million pound proposals for office improvement.
- Scrap the proposal to appoint an additional Director-level post
- Publish and review the salaries of the Chief Executive and Corporate Directors of the new Council
- Make savings over the four years by bringing together library, arts, leisure and communication services
- Scrap the Tory policy of providing expensive uniforms for library and other staff
- Return to cash-freeze budgeting, abandoned by the Conservatives
- Review the extensive capital borrowing commitments and the risks being taken in the light of the high levels of borrowing and debt inherited from over ten years of the Tory-run Wiltshire County Council



Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour

A Liberal Democrat Vision for Wiltshire

For people in Wiltshire, the level of crime and anti-social behaviour is the most important factor in having a good place to live. Liberal Democrats are close to local communities and share that concern. Wiltshire Council can make a stronger contribution to tackling crime and anti-social behaviour than has so far been made by existing Councils. 'Tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime' may be a well-used phrase but it still reflects the Liberal Democrat view.

Reduction of anti-social behaviour will be a priority for a Liberal Democrat Wiltshire, while we will also increase the co-operation with Wiltshire Police to tackle crime. At the same time, Liberal Democrats will invest in youth services and leisure activities for young people, and in the provision of services in deprived areas. We commit ourselves a programme of action over the next four years.

Liberal Democrats will:

- Encourage the police to strengthen Neighbourhood Police Teams, with a doubling of numbers as a target for the four years
- improve the partnership with the Police Authority, to improve both performance and accountability
- set up joint action teams between the police, pub watch, trading standards and social services to tackle alcohol-related crime in town centres
- set up similar joint action teams to improve communication between council services, the police and young people
- support the Wiltshire Air Ambulance and encourage closer co-operation between the Ambulance Service and the Police.
- work with bus and train companies to improve security on public transport, particularly in the evenings
- review and improve the leisure facilities available for young people in towns and local communities
- prioritise the provision of leisure facilities and services for the disadvantaged areas in the County
- encourage the police to improve telephone response to calls from members of the public
- provide accessible contact points for parents looking for advice and assistance
- encourage practical applications of the principle of restorative justice by promoting the ideas in schools and social services, and by signing up to the Restorative Justice Consortium
- set up a programme of local initiatives to reduce speeding in built up areas, including making 'Speedwatch' available via town and parish councils and task Area Boards with reporting each year on measures to improve security within local communities



Education and Training

Education opportunities are crucial for the continuing development of a healthy, open and prosperous society. Excellent educational services allow everyone to achieve to their maximum potential and create an educated population and workforce to ensure the vitality of Wiltshire's businesses, communities and public sector bodies. Schools should be able to make sure every child has the opportunity to do their very best and get the skills they need to get on in life.

In recent years educational provision has increasingly been centralised by both Conservative and Labour governments. Liberal Democrats recognise the need for local diversity and commit to increasing the ability of local schools to manage themselves. We also commit to equality of opportunity, and improving parental choice for all families, in all circumstances.

In tough economic times, learning opportunities for all ages and circumstances become even more important and Liberal Democrats will invest in further education and encourage job-related training.

Liberal Democrats will:

- work with FE colleges across Wiltshire and with local schools to ensure a strong post-16 provision is retained
- in collaboration with educational leaders and local employers, prepare a Wiltshire lifelong learning plan, with a focus on community education and educational entitlement for all adults in Wiltshire.
- champion better access to vocational education for all 14-19 year olds.
- lobby, through the Local Government Association, for the return of school funding decisions to local democratic decision-makers
- ensure that all our schools meet the Healthy Schools targets.
- support and encourage village schools, which have an active role to play in our communities, especially where there is local support for them and their educational achievement are good
- provide extra funds, aiming towards reduction of infant classes (5-7 year olds) to private school levels of only 15 children.
- wherever possible provide more one-to-one support and catch-up classes for children who are struggling.
- prioritise support for those children at risk of abuse
- prioritise proactive policies on bullying, inside and outside school.
- halt the sale of school playing fields to ensure outdoor sport is available for all young people
- work with schools to minimise the environmental impact of travel to school journeys, including an increase in links to park and ride schemes and rural bus routes
- promote 20 mph speed limits near schools
- vigorously oppose any attempt by the Government to abolish free school transport for pupils living more than two/three miles from school.
- **not** scrap grammar schools but we will **not** support the expansion of existing grammar schools or the opening of any new grammar schools.
- expand the Youth Service to help cut down anti-social behaviour in our communities.
- set up an Education Partnership Board, where councillors, officers and schools representatives can meet and make recommendations to the Council on key education policy decisions



Environment

A Liberal Democrat Vision for Wiltshire

Our vision is a Green Wiltshire, deriving maximum benefits from the beauty and opportunities of the natural Wiltshire environment but also committed to minimising the harmful effects of our energy demands and waste production.

Time is running out for our environment. Life in Wiltshire, like all of the UK, is threatened by the effects of climate change. Those who talk 'green' but take little or no effective action make no contribution to a better future. We commit to producing a Green Vision for Wiltshire within our first two years in office, based on a green audit of every service which the new Council will provide. We will use the considerable resources and influence of the Council to promote innovative environmentally-friendly practice across Wiltshire.

Liberal Democrats will:

- Commit Wiltshire to the "triple 20" targets:
 - greenhouse gas emissions down 20% by 2020
 - energy consumption by the council down 20% by 2020
 - 20% of Wiltshire's energy from renewable sources by 2020.
- Commit to the Nottingham Declaration
- Introduce much stronger green expectations into development frameworks and planning policies.
- Support Wiltshire towns and villages that want to become "transition communities", and move away from dependence on oil and fossil fuels.
- Over time, switch council homes and buildings to renewable energy tariffs, and switch council-run vehicles to electric or 'hybrid' fuel engines wherever possible, and encourage use of bikes and public transport.
- Support insulation and solar power in housing association properties.
- Introduce local grants for insulation and micro-generation installations, working with the Micropower Council, and doubling the government grants for householders who switch to energy-saving systems.
- Explore other renewable options such as mini hydropower.
- Reduce carbon emissions from private cars by encouraging alternatives to the 'school run' and by boosting public transport.
- Reject the use of incineration as a means of waste disposal – it causes more problems than it solves...
- Extend kerbside collection of recyclables to include, in all areas, glass bottles, plastic bottles, cardboard, paper and cans.
- Establish weekly collections of food waste, and emphasise sorting and separation. Landfill costs council taxpayers millions of pounds in fines.
- Seek to establish an anaerobic digestion (AD) facility in Wiltshire, and make positive use of the output for heating and vehicle fuel
- Encourage supermarkets to reduce packaging and support recycling.
- Encourage home composting of kitchen waste, by providing subsidized compost bins, and encourage the use of sink macerators in new buildings, especially in flats
- Ensure adequate provision of regularly emptied litter bins in all areas, while cracking down hard on fly-tipping, on littering and on pollution caused by industrial operations.
- Ensure that waste transfer stations and landfill sites are properly run and don't cause nuisance to nearby residents.
- Work with environmental groups
- Encourage Fairtrade status for all Wiltshire towns and cities.
- Encourage companies developing "green" products and technologies into Wiltshire, thus providing more sustainable local jobs
- Make proposals to Government under the Sustainable Communities Act, to secure finance for our objectives
- And institute a 'Green and Local' audit of all Wiltshire Council services and operations, followed by the production of a 'Green Wiltshire' Vision for the next ten years



Health and Social Services

A Liberal Democrat Vision for Wiltshire

Wiltshire Council will have the capacity to make significant contributions to healthy living in Wiltshire. A Liberal Democrat-led Council will work closely with NHS Wiltshire, but differing from the previous Conservative administration in taking the role of an active and critical friend on behalf of the citizens of Wiltshire. We live in an ageing society and the next four years in Wiltshire will see an increasing need to support independent living within the community.

Liberal Democrats will:

- adopt Personalised Social Care as the Council's headline theme for the next four years. The Conservatives talk about it but have made very little practical progress towards it.
- Strengthen the links with other agencies, departments and charities to provide a more co-ordinated 'joined up' approach
- Prioritise home care and support and seek to restore a meals on wheels service
- increase investment in Disabled Facilities Grant to allow adaptation of homes to promote independent living
- at the same time, guarantee not to use the commitment to personalised social care to reduce support for those who need accommodation away from home
- as part of that commitment, re-instate wardens in residential and sheltered accommodation
- improve services to those with mental health issues
- give local people a bigger say in the currently undemocratic health service, by challenging the Wiltshire PCT to become more democratic and accountable
- immediately review the case for any ongoing or planned hospital closures, in contrast with the Conservatives' acceptance of them
- provide a much more robust and publicly visible scrutiny of Wiltshire health services, so that our health services are run for patients and the public
- also strengthen the links between the Council's social services and the PCT
- work with partners to increase the role of nurses and health visitors in the community
- encourage the health service to give more priority to nurse and midwife training in Wiltshire
- support the development of professional standards in health and social care, while resisting reorganisation as an alternative solution
- question the need for establishment of polyclinics, and encourage the continuation of GP practices
- introduce a Wiltshire kickstart scheme to encourage more NHS dental practice across the county, beginning with areas of greatest need
- encourage employers to offer health advice and support



Housing

Liberal Democrats will respond to the need for a significant increase in affordable housing in Wiltshire and will seek to find improved ways of meeting those needs. At the same time, we resist centralised diktats about quantities and how these improvements should be delivered. We will seek to apply the highest possible environmental standards in planning and affordable housing policies.

Liberal Democrats will:

- shape the planning framework to encourage developers to build new housing in Wiltshire to a high environmental standard and at the very least, meet the BREEM very good standard.
- oppose the imposition of excessive housing targets in Wiltshire by the government and the Regional Development Agency quango
- respond positively to any government relaxation of restrictions on Council's building affordable housing
- oppose plans to build on flood plains and put a stop to Tory plans to sell Council-owned flood plain land for development
- encourage a significant increase in social housing provision across all of Wiltshire, to meet the rising demand in the economic recession, with an overall target of 30% affordable housing on sites of more than 15 dwellings.
- ensure affordable housing provided as part of Section 106 agreements is of a high standard of design with social housing distributed evenly throughout new developments, and appropriate community support.
- encourage and where possible support high standards of insulation and use of renewable energy in housing association homes, and require this in any homes the Council itself may be permitted to build
- work with Wiltshire Rural Housing Association to provide affordable housing in villages where appropriate.
- prioritise the repossession and re-use of empty properties
- support shared ownership schemes where there is a need.
- continue to support the principle that residents' preferences decide whether social housing should be in Council or Housing Association ownership, and
- thereby support tenants in South Wiltshire who want the council to remain their landlord
- support the West Wiltshire housing PFI project.
- support tenants in South Wiltshire who want the council to remain their landlord and not pursue any ballot to transfer housing in South Wiltshire to a housing association.



Leisure

Our aim is to revitalise the contribution Council services make to the healthy enjoyment of leisure time by all of Wiltshire's citizens, while at the same time ensuring that taxpayers money is spent efficiently and contributions for other sources are maximised.

We will follow national good practice by integrating the diverse leisure services which Councils currently support and provide - for example sports and gym facilities, libraries, parks, adult education and the arts – in a single leisure services department. This will lead to reduced costs and improved services. We will use leisure facilities to provide local and accessible information.

Liberal Democrats will:

- look for opportunities to open libraries within or alongside leisure centres, to reduce costs and improve opening hours
- support integration in other leisure areas – for example supporting a folk festival in a park with a folk music exhibition in the local library, and with ticket prices discounted in nearby leisure centres
- integrate leisure services within the new Council
- require all funded facilities to contribute to improved public information about Council services, and access to them. Where needed, we will open one-stop-shops to provide easy access to Council services
- honour leisure centre management contracts and seek to keep local centres viable
- develop a more supportive culture for Wiltshire arts and music, including a review of music teaching provision across the County
- actively seek partnerships with the private sector in all areas, and look for much increased sponsorship for our leisure activities
- encourage the participation of people of all ages and backgrounds, and pay particular attention to the interests and needs of young people
- create a new 'Wiltshire Rocks' web portal, with easily accessible information about leisure facilities and events, relevant public transport routes and times, places to go and groups to join
- work with public transport operators to improve connections to and between leisure facilities and locations
- continue the support of free swimming for over-60s and under-16s and work towards a target of access to free swimming for all by the time of the Olympics in 2012.
- promote healthy walking, work with parish and town councils to publicise and maintain public footpaths, and act to preserve paths against degradation by inappropriate use
- support the Kennet and Avon Trust and Wiltshire waterways restoration efforts
- promote allotment use, seek to protect allotments sites wherever possible and look for new sites where there is demand
- encourage town twinning, by facilitating a network of towns and communities connected to local Wiltshire places, to encourage the sharing of ideas and good practices.
- support heritage centres, increasing their local contributions
- promote more diverse enjoyment of Wiltshire's unique natural and historical heritage through new partnerships with English Heritage, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- everywhere promote the quiet enjoyment of leisure facilities and respect for the rights of local residents
- and achieve these goals over the next four years by making savings in unattractive services, by reduction in the costs of inefficient management arrangements in County Hall, and through increases in private partnerships and sponsorship



Community

A Liberal Democrat Vision for Wiltshire

Services and community benefits should be provided as closely as possible to local communities. Wiltshire is a large county with a rich diversity of communities, interests and needs. We differ from the other parties in starting with a commitment to that diversity. Our goal will be decisions being taken at the local level, and only centralised in Trowbridge when this is required for reasons of efficiency or equity.

A Liberal Democrat Wiltshire Council will belong to local citizens and local communities, not the other way round. We commit ourselves to a 'Local Wiltshire' with a promise of a root and branch 'Green and Local' review of the new Council's services, on the principle of 'do it locally if we can'.

Liberal Democrats will:

- keep planning local, with staff and meetings still based in local centres
- allow residents from ten or more households to call in planning applications for decisions in public (unlike the Tories who will leave it to the unitary councillor)
- Allow similar opportunities to town and parish councils
- delegate real decisions to Area Boards, with real budgets as well – including responsibilities (and money) for pavement and minor highway repairs, car parking, local traffic management, local waste collection points and litter collection,
- additionally provide each Wiltshire Councillor with a ward budget of £10,000 a year for quick, flexible action on local problems which have been identified by local people
- set up new 'one-stop-shops' in the centre of market towns, so that members of the public can get advice, pay their bills, book meetings with officers, meet their councillors and make their views known.
- make one-stop-shop managers responsible to Area Boards and part of the support for those Boards
- transform partnership working with the police, fire brigade, PCT and ambulance service from just talking in meetings to joint action teams, working together to solve problems in short timescales
- review Area Boards after a year to keep them on their toes, and check if they are delivering genuine local decision making or if new arrangements are needed for local decision making with clout
- involve local citizens and community groups in the scrutiny of Council (and Area Board) business. For Liberal Democrats scrutiny is not just a job for councillors
- honour any commitments already made for the delegation of resources and facilities to town and parish councils and looking new opportunities to delegate to those councils as part of our commitment 'Local Wiltshire'
- and look for new opportunities for local delegation as part of our root and branch 'Green and Local' review of the Council's services and activities.



Roads and Transport

A Liberal Democrat Vision for Wiltshire

Roads and public transport in Wiltshire have been allowed to degenerate into third world conditions. New thinking and new policies are needed to modernise the county and overcome a decade of neglect.

A Liberal Democrat Wiltshire Council will not only prioritise road repairs but also use its resources and influence to make radical improvements to public transport. The Conservative County Council has made a mess of the roads and failed to do anything about the decline of get train and bus services. They are not to be trusted to find the solutions which are so desperately needed.

Liberal Democrats will:

- initiate and provide funding for a regular and frequent cross-Wiltshire train service, linking Swindon, Chippenham, Melksham, Trowbridge and Salisbury
- set up a new train partnership with the train operators, and a similar bus partnership, to achieve improved services
- in particular, work with the police and transport operators to assure secure evening and late night public transport
- initiate joint funding arrangements for the improvement of bus and train station security and user friendliness
- encourage the development of rail /road/freight / passenger interchanges
- favour the use of rail for Wiltshire Council services, and by Council contractors for example in the transport of residual waste
- make road repairs one of the Council's top priorities for the next four years
- make informed representations to government about Wiltshire's road repair needs, based on a sample survey of current damage
- prioritise resurfacing of existing roads over the creation of new ones
- renegotiate the county council's highway maintenance and repair contracts, to provide a better service for council taxpayers
- scrap the spray and grit approach which is ineffective and damages vehicles
- introduce a new system for prioritising road repairs which genuinely takes account of local views
- investigate road repair and building cost overruns
- improve work and leisure cycle routes