



Manifesto

**2005 Elections for
Norfolk County
Council**

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Foreword

The last four years have seen many Liberal Democrat initiatives come to fruition. Building projects like the Forum and the Park and Ride scheme around Norwich were started under our joint administration and have now been completed.

Looking forward, we support the introduction of a Children's Service to replace the old Education and Social Services departments; this move will ensure that the services we provide are centred on the child. We are strongly behind placing more emphasis on prevention and early intervention, more help for families and more support for the elderly.

There is certainly more to do in raising the standard of education in Norfolk, encouraging life long learning and widening participation. Our manifesto sets out proposals including wider community use of schools, extra provision for gifted and talented children and more help for children in the care of the Council.


We will continue to campaign for a fairer taxation system. Liberal Democrats are pledged to reform Council Tax, which forces the poorest families in society to pay proportionately more of their household income than the richest families. Furthermore, Norfolk loses out under the current system by which central government controls and funds local authorities. This is compounded by the inefficiency of the Conservative administration in Norfolk which has presided over massive overspends in Social Services and e-government whilst at the same time introducing huge rises in Council Tax and putting money in the bank rather than spending it on services.

The Liberal Democrat Group has shown that even with the current system, it is possible to improve services in Norfolk without the tax rises brought in by the Conservatives. Each year we have proposed an alternative budget, with lower Council Tax and improved services. If we had been running the Council, through the budgeting process we can demonstrate that a mere 1% efficiency saving across the Authority would have meant each household paying £50 less Council Tax.

The Liberal Democrat Group has serious concerns about the way that the County Council is being run. Far from improving on the old Committee system, the way that the County Council Cabinet system is working has alienated members from all political parties and does not serve our residents well. We will make it more accountable, open and transparent by giving everyone far more opportunity to participate in the work of the Council.

In this manifesto we have ideas for fairness and equality of access, raising aspirations, preserving and maintaining our environment, providing effective services that offer value for money, fighting crime and anti-social behaviour and improving the way the Council is run.

Liberal Democrats have made a difference in Norfolk. We will continue to work towards keeping Norfolk a safe and welcoming place to visit, study, work and enjoy.



Cllr. Barbara Hacker, Leader, Norfolk County Council Liberal Democrat Group

Fair and equitable support for all

In a large rural County like Norfolk, with a high proportion of vulnerable elderly people and comparatively poor transport infrastructure, extra care must be taken to ensure that everyone, no matter where they live or who they are, has equal access to sustainable County services. We believe that is essential that older people have a choice as to how they spend their later lives. To that end:

- We will work with adults and children within their communities to ensure that no-one is excluded by offering easily accessible local services which take account of local needs and conditions
- We will support small rural schools where they have the support of parents and are educationally and economically viable. We will encourage them to work together to enhance what they each offer individually
- We will continue to provide support for people with learning difficulties, so that they can develop their full potential, by supported housing, the provision of care, training and employment opportunities
- We will encourage the uptake of Social Services Direct Payments which enables clients to 'tailor' their care to suit both their physical and social needs
- We will invest in the services that support the needs of Norfolk's older citizens such as domiciliary care (help at home), day care, respite care (to give family carers a break), housing with twenty-four hour care, as well as residential and nursing home care
- We will continue to expand services such as meals on wheels, re-ablement services and the prompt delivery of equipment to keep people mobile
- We will support both family and paid carers and lobby central government to recognise the role they play in caring for some of the most vulnerable people in society
- We will recruit more 'in house' foster carers and provide adequate payment, training and support. We will investigate the provision of more 'in county' placements for the most challenging children in our care so that they are not placed in expensive 'out of county homes' far from their friends and families
- We will continue to provide early intervention and use support services as a means of preventing family breakdown
- We will spread the expertise, training and good practice already available in the palliative care for the terminally ill to ensure that patients are able maintain their dignity and end their days at home should they so wish
- We will work with other agencies, such as the Primary Care Trusts, District Councils and the voluntary sector, to improve preventative health initiatives

and address health inequalities

- We will work with GPs to encourage greater use of alternative treatments such as exercise referral schemes, leisure and cultural activities
- We will introduce free book reservations in all County libraries for those over seventy five
- We will continue to provide free Internet access in all our libraries (including new builds), with free training courses, and commit to providing Internet access and IT facilities on all mobile libraries as soon as the technology becomes available
- We will continue to improve the public transport network, by subsidy if necessary, to ensure that all communities have access to public transport for work, shopping and leisure etc. This will include:
 - More dial-a-ride schemes
 - More community transport schemes
 - Insisting on the provision of low floor vehicles
 - Improving the suitability of pavements at bus stops for those with physical disabilities
 - Exploring ways of making signage and information accessible to those with sensory impairment on all public transport, including bus stops
 - Maintaining an orbital bus route around Norwich
- We will support disability forums and aim to ensure that no-one is excluded from either built or natural environments because of poor access
- We will ensure that all County Council owned property is fully compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and therefore accessible to those members of staff and the public who have disabilities

Raising aspirations

Norfolk needs to be seen as an exciting and forward-looking place to live. We want to attract investment and people whilst retaining our existing skills. Therefore, our transport infrastructure must be improved and brought up to date.

Everyone should be given the opportunity to fulfil his or her potential in life. The County Council has a role to play in giving people the confidence to move forward by providing a safe environment in which to learn and experiment. To achieve this:

- We will ensure that all Norfolk children have access to the best possible pre-school and nursery provision by offering parents the choice of a free place for

all children from their third birthday

■ We will, as the corporate parents of all children looked after by the County Council, ensure that they have the opportunity to develop their full potential and achieve the same educational standards as their peers in Norfolk

■ We will provide a full-time co-ordinator for gifted and talented children thus raising standards for all

■ We will continue to play an active part in promoting and encouraging Lifelong Learning opportunities, particularly where all ages can learn together

■ We will vehemently oppose all aspects of the government's School Transport Bill that could lead to 11,000 children in Norfolk having to pay for school transport which they currently receive free of charge

■ We will work with partners to actively encourage more community use of schools and libraries, for example, as one-stop shops, breakfast and homework clubs and advice centres for health, education and employment

■ We will provide improved and appropriate library services, specific to the needs of children, teenagers, adults and the elderly

■ We will maintain the move towards offering smaller, independent living units with opportunities for those with mental health problems and learning difficulties

■ We will strive to become the first 'Fair Trade County' in Great Britain by using fair trade products in all our schools, care homes, office depots and other activities and encourage district authorities and major employers in Norfolk to do the same

■ We will continue to seek additional funding for sports and leisure facilities in Norfolk

■ We will reduce the number of road traffic accidents outside schools by installing variable speed limits and delegating the control of the speed limits to the schools themselves

■ We will use all means necessary to improve public transport, in particular to:

- Secure completion of the East-West rail link from Great Yarmouth to Oxford
- Complete and monitor the Liberal Democrat initiative of seven Park and Ride sites around Norwich but review the need for an additional facility at Drayton
- Investigate the conversion of Marriot's Way bridle pathway into a tram or light rail service with walking and cycling facilities to encourage the use of cleaner, greener modes of transport

- We will maintain constant pressure on central government to provide a dual carriageway trunk road network, particularly the A11 and A47, linking Norfolk to a motorway system
- We will continue to bid for government support for major road schemes including the Long Stratton and A10 West Winch bypasses and the dualling of the A140 so that locally raised revenue is not spent on road building
- We will also continue to bid for minor road improvements for example the Swaffham by-pass
- We will continue to support the provision of a Northern Distributor Route (NDR) for Norwich whilst recognising environmental and community concerns
- We will lobby both central government and the European Union to ensure Norfolk gets its fair share of funding for all services provided by the County Council and campaign for regional status
- We will work with our partners to support and promote the creation of East Port (Great Yarmouth)
- We will work towards ensuring that the County's economic strategy - *Shaping the Future* - is influential at regional level, attracting inward investment and retaining existing and new business
- We will recognise the importance of sustainable tourism to the County's economy and particularly to rural areas. We will work with partners to engage communities and businesses in developing sustainable tourism and will seek to ensure that the County's signage policy is appropriate

Safeguarding our environment

In Norfolk, we have much to celebrate in the diversity and economic value of our varied landscapes and wildlife. We have a way of life that is often envied. In order to make the best of what we have been naturally given and to build for the future:

- We will promote and utilise alternative forms of energy in all County Council owned property (including schools) and encourage developers to use alternative energy sources
- We will encourage the use of all forms of alternative energy throughout the County
- We will ensure that each school that wants a Safer Routes to School scheme has one
- We will continue to support integrated transport packages which will improve accessibility to town/city centres by walking, cycling and public transport

- We will continue to develop the quiet lanes initiative throughout Norfolk
- We will encourage alternative transport and research into cleaner fuel and engines
- We will aim to convert all County Council owned vehicles to cleaner fuel
- We will work with DEFRA, the Environment Agency and the Broads Authority to protect our estuaries and rivers, especially the Broads, against the risk of flooding and discourage building on Norfolk's flood plains
- We will work locally with planners, developers and water companies and nationally with the Environment Agency, to develop a robust policy framework to ensure water resources are available in Norfolk for the future
- We will continue to enhance and protect the fragile wetlands designated as sites of specific scientific interest and seek greatly increased efficiency in the use of water in agriculture, industry and homes throughout the County
- We will work to restore drained marshlands, wetlands and heathlands and improve the ecology of farmlands
- We will enhance and protect Norfolk's historic landscapes and areas, buildings, monuments and archaeological remains
- We will use brownfield sites wherever possible and protect the long-term plans for regulating development and building
- We will minimise visual clutter in urban and rural areas by undertaking a review of the signs and other paraphernalia to ensure that these are only sited where they serve an essential purpose
- We will continue to fully support the work of the carbon reduction partnership CRed
- We will ensure that, before every council decision is taken, full thought is given to how that decision will impact on the environment and take appropriate action to mitigate against damage to the natural environment
- We will continue to recycle materials wherever possible and use recycled and local materials as a matter of course
- We will work with partners across Norfolk to meet Government and European Union targets for waste reduction by continuing to seek ways of increasing the amount of recycling; and with manufacturers, retailers and distributors to reduce the amount of waste, for example packaging, that is produced
- We will provide appropriate protection against unscrupulous manufacturers and traders
- We will develop the principle of a timetable for taking enforcement action against breaches of planning conditions to ensure that they are dealt with in a more efficient and robust way and to the satisfaction of the public

Ensuring cost-effective quality services

The County Council has a leading role in ensuring the success and well being of Norfolk. The services we offer play a vital part in the planning, regeneration and sustainability of communities. New technology has offered local government the chance to revolutionise the way it works and offer the public a quicker, smarter and more efficient service. To fulfil this leading role:

- We will radically reform council working practices in order to make the best use of new technology
- We will link investment in information technology to clear performance improvements to the benefit of our service users
- We will improve financial monitoring processes to cut out waste and inefficiency and avoid damaging frontline services
- We will actively pursue all opportunities for increased capital funding and make use of new prudential borrowing powers available to local government to ensure that money is spent on providing services
- We will improve the information about services that are available so that it is clear, reliable and easily accessible
- We will, through the re-introduction of Area Committees and the use of independently verified consultation methods, maintain a regular dialogue with the communities we serve to ensure that we are offering the best services within the available budget
- We will work to reduce the backlog in school building maintenance and accelerate the reduction of the number of teaching spaces in mobile classrooms to below 10% by 2006
- We will complete the standardisation of the age of transfer to secondary school at 11 in the final review area (Norwich)
- We will ensure that all our future school buildings are adequately protected against the risk of fire, specifically through the use of sprinkler systems
- We will provide more local places for children with special educational needs to cut down on the need for expensive cross-County travel
- We will fully support the combination of education and children's social services to form a joint, child focused service for all children in Norfolk

We will increase the use of technology to make Library, Record Office and Museum material more widely available and encourage joint working and education projects

- We will maintain flexible library and museum opening hours, tailored to local needs
- We will, in recognition of the special problems of social exclusion and lack of services for those in very isolated rural areas, ensure that all services we provide acknowledge local situations and find the most appropriate solutions
- We will promote speed management schemes in conjunction with Community Safety Plans
- We will continue to improve the management and advertising of all areas of passenger transport, including school transport, to provide a more efficient, equitable and consistent service
- We will lobby central government to create a national regulator for buses to improve the accountability, and therefore quality, of the public transport network

Fighting crime and anti-social behaviour

Whilst crime levels in Norfolk are comparatively low, there is no doubt that fear of crime changes the way people live their lives. In addition, urban and rural anti-social behaviour is on the increase. This causes real distress and takes up a lot of police time.

Liberal Democrats believe in preventative deterrents as well as effective punishments. To keep Norfolk a safe and welcoming place:

- We will ensure that, before every council decision is taken, full thought is given to how that decision will reduce opportunities to commit crime
- We will use our planning powers and responsibilities to ‘plan out crime’ in new building developments
- We will support district councils to speed up the removal of abandoned cars and those advertised for sale on the streets
- We will work with other agencies to reduce levels of fly tipping that blight our rural and urban communities
- We will support the provision of cheap, accessible transport for our young people in the evenings so that they can enjoy leisure opportunities and get home in safety
- We will ensure that all departments of the County Council work together to prevent exclusions from school occurring. Where exclusion is absolutely necessary, ensure that support for the child and the family is delivered collectively
- We will, in partnership with others, provide support for victims of crime and

domestic violence

- We will ensure the active involvement of the Council in the seven Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships in Norfolk
- We will support and enhance the work of arts projects which tackle social exclusion, health and drugs awareness and community safety issues
- We will work with other agencies to ensure that community action is focused on keeping young people away from crime
- We will work with the police, media and other agencies to reduce the fear of crime, in particular by ensuring that policies to tackle crime do not create unnecessary alarm amongst people who are at little risk

Open and accessible local government

The Liberal Democrats consider it very important to give members of the public every opportunity to address elected members of the County Council whether at Cabinet, scrutiny, panel meetings or at full council. Too many Council meetings are now being held behind closed doors and decisions are made by a select few. For example, all but two of the County's Area Committees, which we introduced to improve local decision making, have been abolished. To make the County Council more open and responsive over the next four years:

- We will introduce public question time at full County Council meetings, as this is the only opportunity a member of the public gets to address all 84 members of the Council
- We will encourage advice and ideas from those who use Council services at an earlier stage - when plans are being formulated
- We will involve communities in strategic planning and transportation issues and extend the principle of joint working (for example the work of the Norwich Joint Highways Committee) to all districts
- We will aim to encourage and increase public participation in all County Council decisions by holding meetings locally when matters of specific interest are being discussed; and we want committee meetings to be webcast
- We will re-instate Area Committees and delegate real responsibilities and budgets to their control whilst ensuring that they do not duplicate the work of other local forums
- We will use Area Committees to provide much more detailed and specific information about local issues - for example planning, and road maintenance -

and seek input from the public prior to making decisions

- We will continue to improve our consultation processes; telling people the results of those consultations and explaining how and why decisions have been made
- We will, as a general principle, ensure that all Council meetings and working groups are held in public
- We will improve the Council's website so that it is an effective and accessible means of communication that is freely available
- We will develop new and innovative ways of communicating our strategies and ideas
- We will support the district focused Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) but review the need for a County strategic partnership. We have grave doubts as to whether this extra layer is necessary
- We will review the workings of the Cabinet system and enhance the role of Review Panels in policy development and scrutiny
- We will uphold and strengthen the scrutiny role in the County Council so that those responsible for major decisions and advice are properly held to account. We will continue to develop the role of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a voice for the people of Norfolk
- We will continue our commitment to proportional representation and regional government as long as power is devolved from central government and that any elected regional body has the authority to make strategic decisions.