

LEADING UTTLESFORD TO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



**LIBERAL
DEMOCRATS**

**Uttlesford Liberal Democrats
Manifesto 2007**

www.saffronwaldenlibdems.org.uk

What we believe

The Liberal Democrats exist to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society, in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community, and in which no-one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity.

We champion the freedom, dignity and well-being of individuals, we acknowledge and respect their right to freedom of conscience and their right to develop their talents to the full. We aim to disperse power, to foster diversity and to nurture creativity.

We believe that the role of the state is to enable all citizens to attain these ideals, to contribute fully to their communities and to take part in the decisions which affect their lives.

From the Preamble to the Liberal Democrat Constitution

Liberal Democrat principles

Freedom. Fairness. Trust. These are the qualities of the British people at their best, and they are the guiding principles of the Liberal Democrats.

This manifesto is built on these principles – principles that we believe must underpin Uttlesford's council, but which are too often lacking in public life today.

Freedom – because Liberal Democrats believe that individuals should govern their own lives, free from unnecessary interference by government or society. We want to build a society which gives individual men and women opportunities to pursue their aims, develop their talents and shape their successes. A country where people are free to shape their future is stronger, wealthier, happier, and more fulfilled.

Fairness – because ill-health, disability, poverty, environmental pollution and the fear of crime curtail freedom, just as much as discriminatory laws or arrest without trial. So we want government to provide the essential requirements that everyone needs to make real choices in their lives – a good education, a decent pension, a clean environment, effective policing and high quality healthcare. And we want to see fairness too in the way in which taxes are raised and minorities are treated.

Trust – because to deliver freedom and fairness, we need to give citizens the power to hold government to account. So we want to see government brought closer to the people it is meant to serve – which is why we are committed to curtailing the personal power and patronage of the Prime Minister, strengthening British democracy, and handing many powers back from central government to local neighbourhoods, with real democratic control over those who wield power.

This manifesto sets out our plans for a Liberal Democrat Council in Uttlesford District



*Sir Menzies Campbell MP,
leader of the Liberal Democrats*

Targets for Uttlesford 2007-11

- **Establish Uttlesford as one of the top ten councils for recycling.**
- **Continue to charge the lowest council tax in Essex.**
- **Oppose a second runway at Stansted Airport.**

Uttlesford made the ground-breaking decision in 2006 to reject Stansted's application for maximum use of the single runway on climate change grounds. We will defend this decision throughout the appeal starting in May 2007.

Introduction

In 2003, Uttlesford residents made the momentous decision to replace the Conservative and Independent coalition that had run Uttlesford since 1997 with a Liberal Democrat run council. The Liberal Democrats gained 13 seats, and the Labour party representation on the council was wiped out.

Before 2003, Uttlesford Council was one of the least ambitious district councils in the country, delivering mediocre services. It's been a long and difficult job for the Liberal Democrats to start turning the Council round after such a long period of missed opportunity. But the results are showing, with the Audit Commission commenting on the Council having the courage to deliver these improvements.

The recycling rate which had plateaued by 2003 has increased dramatically to over 50% with the introduction of the 3 bin collection, and is now in the top 10 in the country.

Uttlesford has enjoyed investment in leisure with the opening of a community cinema in Saffron Walden and two new leisure centres at Dunmow and Stansted.

Young people now have a youth forum to represent them. New or refurbished skate parks are on the way in Saffron Walden, Dunmow and Stansted, supported by council grants.

The council is providing better value for money and has been able this year to limit its Council Tax increase to only 2 per cent – one of the lowest increases in the country. We have introduced Area Panels with delegated powers to consult with people on their local problems. The public attendance at these panels is proof of their success and effectiveness.

The consistent factor in the Council's improvement since 2003 has been the Liberal Democrats' philosophy. We have worked hard with other partners for the improvements local people want, and for a better council. We are the only party that keeps in touch all year round with news of what we're doing and why.

In the coming years, we aim to ensure that combating climate change is at the heart of all the council does in energy use, recycling, new housing development and our opposition to the expansion of Stansted Airport. We will ensure that all Uttlesford residents enjoy the best Quality of Life, in flourishing communities, and that everyone enjoys equal opportunities to share in these successes.

To continue to work on your behalf and to continue the improvements we've made to our district, we need your support – and your vote – in the local elections on **May 3rd**

Thank you.



Mark Gayler

Cllr. Mark Gayler
Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group
Uttlesford District Council

Leisure & tourism

How things used to be

- ◆ There was a tired looking Leisure Centre in Saffron Walden, a decaying Sports Centre in Dunmow, and none in the west of the District.
- ◆ Bridge End Gardens were in total disrepair.



What we've done

- ◆ We have opened two new Leisure Centres in Great Dunmow and Stansted Mountfitchet, and have refurbished the Lord Butler Centre in Saffron Walden.
- ◆ We have introduced programmes in our Leisure Centre that have been nationally recognised as helping to achieve the best health standards in the United Kingdom.
- ◆ We have set up user panels to help respond to residents' concerns at the Leisure Centres.
- ◆ With Lottery funding, we have restored Bridge End Gardens for the benefit of everyone in Uttlesford, and they have become a national landmark.
- ◆ We have introduced, through partnership, a local cinema in Saffron Walden after listening to suggestions from the community.
- ◆ We have introduced signed tourist, cycling and foot trails around Uttlesford and finger signs in Saffron Walden.



What we want to do next

- ◆ We will encourage the participation of young people by extending discounted rates in all leisure centres.
- ◆ We will establish a Heritage Trail from Dunmow *via* Thaxted to Audley End
- ◆ We will seek Heritage Lottery funding to build a Resource Centre for Uttlesford's Museum Service.
- ◆ We will seek funds to complete the second phase of the restoration of Bridge End Gardens.
- ◆ We will create more recreational open spaces within the District, including establishing more playing fields.
- ◆ We will work in partnership to develop a footpaths partnership and develop cycling.

London Olympics 2012

We will develop a tourism policy that will benefit from the London 2012 Olympics.
We will investigate the feasibility of a competition-standard athletics track within the district.

A decent place to live



How things used to be

- ◆ Before 2003, under the Tories, housing the homeless, reducing the use of bed and breakfast accommodation and tackling the lack of affordable housing, were not a key council priority.

What we've done



- ◆ We completed the Decent Homes Standard for housing, three years earlier than required by the Government.
- ◆ We have completed an audit of sites for affordable homes on council-owned land, and have worked with housing associations to deliver many affordable homes.
- ◆ We have reduced the number of homeless people in bed and breakfast accommodation by working with local charities.
- ◆ We have rebuilt facilities in Vicarage Mead, Thaxted for local elderly residents.

What we want to do next

More and more young people can't afford a home, and the number of homeless families is at a record high. While the Conservatives sold off affordable homes, Labour cut the numbers being built. That's why we are so determined to help create new opportunities for people to afford their first home. We have supported affordable home schemes in Clavering, Newport, Ashdon, and Hatfield Heath.

- ◆ We will introduce inclusive housing accommodation for homeless people within communities.
- ◆ Responding to local housing need, we will work with housing associations and developers to provide appropriate and affordable housing, and increase the rate of building affordable homes, using identified sites within the district, *e.g.* London Road, Newport and Manor Road, Stansted.
- ◆ We will continue to work with the new Health Authority to promote local health initiatives
- ◆ We will rebuild the Thaxted Day Centre and Mead Court, Stansted and review all housing for elderly residents.
- ◆ We will quickly bring empty homes into occupation.
- ◆ We will investigate the purchase of land for the creation of affordable housing schemes in conjunction with Housing Associations.
- ◆ We will push for a minimum of 40% affordable houses on future developments.

Children & young people

How things used to be

- ◆ Before 2003, young people had an unstructured voice in local decision making.
- ◆ Young people were not listened to by the council.



What we've done

- ◆ We've re-established a very successful Youth Forum, as we promised in 2003, and supported a number of music festivals.
- ◆ We have provided grants to support new or refurbished skate parks in Saffron Walden, Dunmow and Stansted.
- ◆ We have worked constructively with the voluntary sector to support the re-opening of the new Youth Centre with the local councillors in Newport after the Tories closed it. We have also offered funds to assist the rebuilding of Thaxted Youth Centre.



What we want to do next

- ◆ We are developing a local transport network to help young people access the improved facilities in the local area.
- ◆ We will work in partnership to support the introduction of more teen shelters, as in Elsenham and Birchanger.
- ◆ We will continue to involve young people in decision making, by encouraging participation in Area Panels and Parish Councils.
- ◆ We will press Essex County Council's youth service to provide a better range of services to young people locally.
- ◆ We will work with partners to create an all-purpose Children and Young Persons Centre, possibly using the old police station in Great Dunmow.
- ◆ We will encourage local organisations to offer increased child care facilities to working families.





Scrapping Labour's expensive, illiberal and ineffective ID card plans would pay for extra police, with existing plans for extra community support officers continuing too.

The average police officer today spends more time in the police station than on the streets. Liberal Democrats in government would encourage the police to upgrade the technology and simplify the bureaucracy to allow them to spend more time on patrol and less time tied to the desk.

How things used to be

- ◆ Before 2003 there was little effective collaboration between the council and the police to address crime and anti-social behaviour.
- ◆ Many people were isolated by the fear of crime, particularly in rural areas, and at certain times of the day.

What we've done

- ◆ We have worked effectively with the Police to increase the visible uniformed presence in communities by funding Community Support Officers.
- ◆ We have helped establish alcohol-free zones in Elsenham to the relief of local residents, and will work in other areas with local anti-social behaviour problems.
- ◆ We have introduced strategic partnerships to better communicate local residents' concerns to the police.
- ◆ We have objected to Essex County Council's district wide plans to switch off street lights in the middle of the night where there are local concerns about dangers to public safety and a lack of sufficient consultation.

What we want to do next

- ◆ We will continue to work with the Police to ensure a highly visible and increased uniformed presence, and support the introduction of Neighbourhood Watch to all areas.
- ◆ We will continue to build on the excellent work of the Council's anti-social behaviour team, with community based assessment of situations.
- ◆ We will introduce a community response team to remove graffiti and improve the street scene.
- ◆ We will fight to ensure that all street lighting is sufficient to ensure personal and vehicle safety.
- ◆ We will use the Area Forums to hold the Police accountable for their performance, by scrutinising and influencing their performance locally.

Recycling & waste

How things used to be

- ◆ Before 2003, Uttlesford recycled less than 15% of its rubbish and generated a lot of waste in absolute terms. The Council lacked ambition to improve recycling rates.

What we've done

- ◆ We took the hard decision to change the old recycling system to the new extended one.
- ◆ We increased total recycling to over 50% by the end of 2006 with the simplified three bin collection.
- ◆ We have reduced the climate changing gases generated from our rubbish by collecting kitchen waste. We have reduced the amount of rubbish going to landfill thereby avoiding heavy government fines.
- ◆ We have maintained free collections for heavy household items.

What we want to do next

- ◆ Boost recycling even more by joint working with Essex County Council and our neighbouring councils to make collection more efficient.
- ◆ Keep up pressure on the County to provide a new Recycling Centre in Great Dunmow.
- ◆ Extend recycling to difficult to reach places such as flats and terraces, and give further help, especially to the elderly and less physically able, to recycle green waste.
- ◆ Extend recycling to include other materials such as those plastics that are not currently collected.
- ◆ Help schools, halls and small businesses to recycle their waste.
- ◆ Keep up a high profile publicity campaign on reduction, reuse and recycling.
- ◆ Pilot a scheme for the wider collection of green waste.



Liberal Democrats will set a long-term 'zero waste' goal, through waste reduction, re-use and recycling. Manufacturers must be held responsible for disposing of their products and materials that are difficult to re-use or recycle.

We will not allow new incinerators in our area, and have signed a commitment to this effect along with other councils in Essex.

Transport services



Conservative privatisation left the railways in a mess, but Labour hasn't solved the problems. Delays have doubled, bureaucracy has soared, while services are cut. Liberal Democrats in government will ensure that the Department for Transport work with train operators to improve the service for commuters. Pollution and congestion continue to have a major impact on health and quality of life, as well as on climate change. Many of the solutions involve improving and promoting public transport.



How things used to be

- ◆ Before 2003, Uttlesford Council had no strategy for parking in the town centres.
- ◆ Bus services operated under contract were very patchy, with irregular service provision in rural areas.

What we've done

- ◆ We began to identify local traffic and parking problems in consultation with local residents through Area Panels, supported town centre strategy groups, and appointed a dedicated officer to co-ordinate policy.
- ◆ We pressed Essex County Council to create small work teams to work regularly in parishes to complete minor works.
- ◆ We supported the community bus service formerly run by the post office.
- ◆ We have fought to protect the local rail service from domination by airport passengers.

What we want to do next

- ◆ We will continue to lobby Essex County Council hard for improvements to our roads, kerbs and pavements, and push them to keep to strict time scales for their implementation.
- ◆ We will establish new cycle routes, particularly between Saffron Walden and Audley End, and better shuttle bus service between the station and the town.
- ◆ We will promote the introduction of Quiet Lanes, 20 mph zones and traffic calming in residential areas and around schools.
- ◆ We will develop new ideas for better and more frequent rural transport through wider support for Uttlesford Community Transport, the use of Yellow buses, and real time dial-a-buses. This would involve support to the contracted services to serve local resident's needs rather than the airport's and link to local stations. We would look at introducing a Heritage Bus Route to improve tourism.
- ◆ We will seek an agreement with Essex County Council to pass down all decision making in relation to local roads to ensure local prioritisation.

Preserving the environment

How things used to be

- ◆ Before 2003, the Council had little interest in promoting energy efficiency.
- ◆ The airport continued to expand and gained permission to expand to 25 million passengers per year.
- ◆ Sustainability was not put at the heart of Uttlesford policies and the environment was not seen as a key priority.



What we've done

- ◆ We fought for, and obtained, a strong new Local Plan that will preserve the character of the district, and set in place a strategy to manage the development pressures on the area.
- ◆ We have introduced new policies to encourage reduced energy and water use, including a £75 Council Tax rebate for those investing in cavity wall and loft insulation.
- ◆ We have set planning policies that require energy use for new developments to come from renewable sources.
- ◆ We ensured a robust examination of the planning application from the Airport to increase their use of the existing runway, which led to refusal of the application.
- ◆ We developed a strategy for the sustainable economic development of the District.

Uttlesford District Council in 2006 signed the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change, which puts a duty on the council to reduce carbon dioxide emissions throughout the district.

What we want to do next

- ◆ We strongly oppose any further runway at Stansted.
- ◆ We will vigorously defend the council's decision to refuse increased use of the existing runway through the forthcoming planning appeal.
- ◆ We will help Uttlesford residents reduce their energy use through free audits and assistance in implementing the audit recommendations, support local schools and ensure that the Council leads by example.
- ◆ We will introduce policies that ensure greater energy and water efficiency and use of renewable technologies so that all new developments have a low carbon impact.
- ◆ We will work with Stansted Airport, where possible, to maximise the benefits from the largest local employer, while seeking to minimise the environmental damage.

Liberal Democrats will ensure that the required new homes are provided in the most suitable locations taking into account the views of local communities. Liberal Democrats will seek to ensure that no community is over-burdened. We will pay special regard to the environment and aim to minimize the carbon emissions from the new homes and transport.

More responsive and efficient services



The Government's council tax is very unfair! It hurts pensioners and people on low incomes the most. Only the Liberal Democrats are campaigning for a fair alternative - a Local Income Tax based on ability to pay.

How things used to be

- ◆ Before 2003, the Council had no focus on the needs of the people of Uttlesford. It lacked commitment and drive to improve performance. Services were mediocre and did not offer best value for money.

What we've done

- ◆ We have improved corporate planning, set clear priorities in consultation with residents, and made sure Council spending reflects those priorities.
- ◆ We now have a proper financial plan for the years ahead,
- ◆ We have reversed the trend to higher council tax increases year on year under the previous Conservative administration and limited increases in council tax as far as possible.
- ◆ **We have the lowest district council tax in Essex.**
- ◆ We have supported community ownership and use of council buildings. We have leased the former council offices in Dunmow to the voluntary sector.
- ◆ We've continued to restructure council management where it cuts costs and improves performance.
- ◆ It has taken time to turn the Council round, but we've made a good start, and our improvement has been recognised by external inspectors.
- ◆ We have introduced a new "single point of contact" customer services team to improve the service people receive when they contact the council, whether by telephone, e-mail or in person.

What we want to do next

- ◆ We will be open about the financial pressures the Council still faces. We will identify and cut out inefficiencies wherever they are identified. The Council's performance is improving rapidly but we will continue to keep a close eye on performance and spending.
- ◆ We will develop an excellent Customer Service system that meets the needs of residents with quicker answers to problems.
- ◆ We will continue to improve value for money and **listen** to our customers' concerns.

Engaging with the community

How things used to be

- ◆ Under the Conservatives the council rarely consulted local electors outside election times.

What we've done

- ◆ Despite Conservative opposition, we have introduced Area Panels where local people can have their say about local issues, influence decisions made and hold service providers to account. These are held at different local venues throughout the district.
- ◆ We have been working in partnership with parish councils to promote better services locally and in developing village appraisals
- ◆ We have extended public participation at Development Control meetings.
- ◆ We developed an award-winning web site and web casting for the Stansted Airport planning application to allow greater public involvement in the process.
- ◆ We have ensured the Council keeps local residents informed through a quarterly newsletter, Uttlesford Life.
- ◆ We have set up regular liaison meetings with Town and Parish Councils to ensure that they are informed and involved in what the District Council is doing.
- ◆ We organised a Diversity Festival in order to engage with hard-to-reach groups within our community.



What we want to do next

- ◆ We will continue to listen to residents' views about which services **you** value most through consultation.
- ◆ We will continue use of citizens' panels to seek local opinion.
- ◆ We will extend the Council's work with "hard to reach" groups, including migrant workers and the socially disadvantaged.
- ◆ We will consult and work widely with local groups in setting new planning policies that will form the Local Development Framework.
- ◆ We will continue to value, and support, the work of the numerous local voluntary organisations and charities.