

WILTSHIRE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS



Manifesto



A FRESH START FOR WILTSHIRE

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***A Liberal Democrat-led
Wiltshire Council will focus
on affordable homes, safer
roads, environmental
protection, better care,
improved health and closer
working with the community.***





SIX TO FIX

**MAKE LISTENING TO OUR
RESIDENTS A PRIORITY**

**FIX POTHoles AND
MAKE ROADS SAFER**

**IMPROVE HEALTH AND SOCIAL
CARE, WORKING WITH THE NHS**

**BUILD MORE SOCIAL AND
AFFORDABLE HOMES WITH
THE RIGHT FACILITIES**

**TACKLE THE CLIMATE
EMERGENCY AND
PROTECT WILDLIFE**

**WORK MORE CLOSELY
WITH COMMUNITY GROUPS
AND VOLUNTEERS**

PLANNING AND HOUSING

We will tackle the housing crisis that has left too many people unable to find a place to rent or buy. We will pursue a plan-led approach that reflects local needs and provides homes where they are needed.

- We will work with developers to ensure that sites allocated in the current draft local plan are built on and that Wiltshire keeps up its required supply of housing land.
- When new sites are needed, we will promote building on brownfield sites within towns, including redundant employment sites.
- As brownfield sites alone cannot solve the crisis, we will allocate areas for well-designed 'urban extension' neighbourhoods, close to existing towns, but with their own centres and facilities such as shops, surgeries, schools, community centres, offices, workshops, shops and pubs.
- Over the longer term, we will explore options for new settlements on open land in sustainable locations. We will protect beauty spots, but we are prepared to consider new settlements in areas where few people currently live and which do not have great agricultural or aesthetic value.
- We will raise the level of the 'Community Infrastructure Levy' (CIL) paid by developers of small projects with no affordable homes and review rates for other developments where these are below those charged by comparable councils.
- We will ensure that 40% social and affordable housing is applied in all sites other than those that will be unaffordable to develop without a lower share.
- We will plan for infrastructure such as surgeries, shops, community centres and sports facilities to keep pace with house-building.
- We will campaign with other councils for powers to charge house-builders who gain planning permission for developments but do not build them within three years.
- We will form stronger relationships with housing associations to co-ordinate activity and ensure they maintain high standards.
- We will seek to increase the council's own housing stock, including a full review of its Stone Circle Housing Company and Stone Circle Development Company.
- We will promote [Community Land Trusts](#) whereby local people create organisations that own and develop land for the benefit of the community, working with expert national bodies.
- We will appoint an officer to tackle the job of bringing Wiltshire's 6,000 empty homes back into occupation and impose a 50% Council Tax premium on homes left empty for one year (as opposed to the current two years).



PUBLIC HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

As care is Wiltshire's largest area of spending, providing it efficiently is a top priority, along with cooperating with the local NHS to use resources well.

- We will continue and develop healthy living programmes such as Wiltshire Healthy Schools and campaigns to help people stop smoking and tackle obesity.
- We will maintain the county's leisure and sports centres and seek to attract more users.
- We will create a sports and leisure partnership that brings together schools, colleges, towns and parishes, voluntary sport clubs and private sector providers to promote and increase leisure activity.
- We will review mental health services to ensure the council is able to identify and provide the best support to those experiencing mental health challenges. We will also work more closely with organisations that support people with mental health challenges, referring individuals where appropriate.
- We will create a cabinet post for liaison with the NHS and other health providers so that one councillor is responsible for leading on the complex interaction between the ICB and the Council.
- We will review and scrutinise all contracts with social care providers to ensure they are offering the best care outcomes and value for money.
- We will focus on expanding services of prevention in care and support of residents to ensure that everyone leads a long and healthy life.
- We will seek to enable everyone to have access to good quality care whether as a client of social care or those funding their own care.
- We will lobby government to invest to enhance methods of inspection and assessment of providers of care services.
- We will make 'home' the primary place for care and support delivery rather than hospital. With the right care and re-ablement, therapy and support promptly delivered, home is the very best place to be.
- As resources allow, we will extend the use of technology enabled care to enable security and safety in the home and real time information to your support network.
- We will scale up and rejuvenate the Shared Lives programme that helps people with care needs to live in a suitably qualified carer's home. This has the potential of saving the local authority hundreds of thousands of pounds annually in its social care budget.
- We will encourage the rationalisation and efficiency of contracts (not services) and the commissioning process to save money and resources so that they can be re-channelled in services to clients.
- We will make improvements to the relationships between children's and adult social care to improve the transitions in access to service from one to the other.
- We will encourage the flexibility and effectiveness of contracts so that they are able to monitor and adopt new ideas, methods and technologies.
- As resources allow, we will expand the Council's re-ablement service that helps people regain abilities or confidence, for example after a hospital stay.
- We will raise awareness among child care professionals, teachers, police and the public on how to alert the council to children potentially at risk. This aims to meet the need to recognise the impact of chronic neglect more quickly identified by OFSTED in a report that otherwise rated children's services outstanding. We will maintain the high quality of services provided to vulnerable and looked-after children, and pilot an 'acting early' programme to identify children at risk from before birth to the age of five.
- We will work more closely with community groups, volunteers and charities who support vulnerable people.
- We will rebuild youth services in our communities in partnership with voluntary groups, following the cuts of the past decade.



TRANSPORT STRATEGY & ROAD SAFETY

We aim to reduce car travel, enhance public transport, promote walking and cycling and improve road safety.

- We will work with town and parish Councils to complete and maintain new walking and cycling routes.
- We will work with bus and train operators to make services more frequent, timely, reliable and co-ordinated.
- We will examine the case for the council taking control of bus services to better serve local communities, as allowed under the Better Buses Bill.
- We will promote the use of electric bikes with the aim of reducing the number of short car journeys.
- We will press the Department of Transport to reopen railway stations such as those at Corsham, Devizes and Wilton.
- We will commit to a long-term goal of eliminating fatal and serious injuries on Wiltshire's roads,
- Wiltshire having had 21 fatal collisions in 2023, we will go ahead with the plan to join Devon, Cornwall and other counties across England in the 'Vision Zero' initiative to reduce road deaths and serious injuries by 50% by 2030 and to zero by 2040..
- We will give more weight to local experience when assessing speed limits and use predictive risk systems to prioritise decision-making. Area Boards will be asked to review collisions that result in serious injuries and recommend improvements, working with highways officers and the police.
- We will make the default speed limit on C and unclassified roads no more than 50mph, unless assessments conclude a 60mph limit will be safe.
- We will implement 20mph limits outside all schools.
- We will encourage the use of Speed Indicator Devices (SIDs) integrated with automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) cameras to capture details of speed offences.
- We will review road maintenance budgets, including for pothole repair, to give more priority to non-principal and rural roads as the sums being spent on C and unclassified roads are currently less than half of those spent on A and B roads.
- We will rebalance spending on non-principal road maintenance as it ranges from less than £1,000 per kilometre per year in Marlborough to over 4 times as much in Salisbury.
- We will democratise the process for identifying road repair priorities by publishing annual budgets and schedules for proposed works for each Area Board area.
- We will work with school staff and the police to encourage safe travel to schools, promoting active travel and acting to prevent inconsiderate parking.



AGRICULTURE

We will increase support for farming which is a £330m sector in Wiltshire, sustaining 6,000 jobs as well as over four-fifths of its land area.

- We will set up a farm support team staffed by agricultural professionals to work with the agencies that provide free advice to help farmers tackle the challenges they face, apply for government grants and expand their businesses.
- We will create a forum for Wiltshire farmers and food suppliers to develop ways to support farmers in maintaining jobs, promoting animal welfare, increasing productivity and providing food security.
- We will support farmers in restoring woodland, peatland and waterways, creating natural flood protection and managing land to encourage species recovery and carbon storage, while producing food for the table.



EDUCATION

We will seek a fair deal for all children and young people in education, including the children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) for whom we have particular responsibility.

- We will seek to deepen relationships between the council, schools and nurseries to ensure that the best practice on identifying and supporting children with SEND is understood and implemented county-wide.
- We will work with schools and assessors to bridge gaps in obtaining Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and ensure every child assessed as needing extra support receives an EHCP before secondary school.
- We will continue to support educating children with SEND in mainstream schools wherever appropriate, providing resource bases as finances allow.
- We will work closely with students with SEND reaching the end of their school education to ensure that they have the best opportunities to live and work independently.
- We will foster positive relationships with school trusts to ensure they are serving the community appropriately.
- We will campaign for fairer funding for education from central Government as Wiltshire is near the bottom of the funding league.
- We will work to narrow the gap in educational opportunity and attainment between the most socially advantaged and disadvantaged pupils.

ENVIRONMENT

We will accelerate efforts to reduce carbon emissions and protect nature in Wiltshire, building on the progress made since Liberal Democrats led Wiltshire Council's decision to acknowledge the climate emergency in 2019.

- We will simplify plans to cut the council's emissions by focusing on the two top priorities:
 - reducing gas used in council buildings – 80% of direct emissions – by switching to biomass boilers or heat pumps over the next five years;
 - reducing diesel used in refuse and other vehicles by switching to electricity or hydrogen.
- We will accelerate steps to make the whole county carbon neutral, seeking to increase retrofits of insulation and renewable energy on existing housing stock as well as maintaining the requirement for new homes to be zero carbon once built.
- We will communicate the climate and ecological emergency to the public and provide information for residents on reducing their carbon emissions. We will promote the building of solar and wind projects in suitable places.
- We will integrate planning for environmental protection and nature recovery with the local planning process, seeking to avoid developments that would increase flood risks or impact negatively on nature recovery.
- We will build climate-smart infrastructure – such as footpaths, cycling routes and public transport, as resources allow.
- As resources allow, we will roll out more electric vehicle charging points.
- We will run a campaign to attract innovative businesses developing green technology to Wiltshire.
- We will aim to increase Wiltshire's tree canopy coverage from 14% to 20% (the current goal being 17%), funded by grants from government and external bodies as well as local volunteers and eco-groups.
- We will work with water companies to create a strategy to clean up our rivers and waterways, pressing the government and Ofwat to make water companies cease sewage dumping by increasing investment and lowering dividends.
- We will create a 'Wiltshire Water Forum' bringing together water companies, Wiltshire Council, the Environment Agency, the National Farmers Union, Natural England, Wessex Rivers Trust, the Bristol Avon Rivers Trust, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and others to meet regularly to report and monitor progress.
- We will step up all forms of recycling, including food, with the aim of reaching zero landfill by 2030 and ending the burning of waste as soon as possible.



POLICING AND PUBLIC SAFETY

We will make strengthening relationships between police, Wiltshire Council, town and parish councils, businesses and voluntary groups a top priority.

- We will introduce community safety forums bringing together local schools, youth organisations, town and parish councils, churches, residents, business and community groups, to enable communities to exchange intelligence on crime hot spots and develop action plans.
- We will look afresh at the council's role in this area, including supporting organisations that help victims of crime and work to combat violence against women and girls.
- We will work with the police and schools to encourage good citizenship and investigate ways that the children's service can support children who have been convicted of crimes.
- We will work more closely with the

police in engaging with families with challenges, particularly domestic violence and risks to children, recognising that social services and the police both need to be involved as long as is needed as we have different roles.

- We will support the police's efforts to tackle rural crime by engaging with rural communities to gather information and encourage reporting.



BUSINESS & ENTERPRISE

We will lead a renewed effort to attract investment and support Wiltshire businesses.

- We will be proactive in supporting businesses and town centres, including encouraging pop up shops and other uses of empty premises.
- We will re-establish relationships with Visit England and set up a new Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) to promote tourism and build capacity in the sector.
- We will convene a Tourism Forum

so those in the tourism and hospitality sectors can exchange ideas and ensure all of Wiltshire's attractions are promoted nationally and internationally.

- We will establish a Business Economic Development Forum for businesses to share ideas, innovation, connections, and to benefit from joint fundraising opportunities;

ARMED FORCES

Liberal Democrats understand the new challenges faced by the armed forces and are committed to maintaining spending, attracting recruits and supporting them locally. Wiltshire has the largest military settlement in the UK with 13.4% of all households having a current or former member of the Armed Forces.

- We will reconfirm our commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant, a promise from the nation that those who serve or have served, and their families, are treated fairly and included in Wiltshire's community.
- We will support the Military Civilian Integration Partnership that brings together military and public services to maximise the economic and social benefits of Wiltshire's military presence.
- We will work with the forces' 'HIVES' that provide information and support for military families to ensure we are aware of their needs.

CULTURE

We will promote Wiltshire's distinctive culture to residents and visitors, including its history, performing arts and traditions.

- We will produce a resource pack for schools, including videos, images and assignments to provide all students with a basic understanding of their county's cultural heritage and activities.
- As resources allow, we will promote events in underprivileged areas, help spread best practice on events among town and village councils, promote Area Board and other grants and take steps to celebrate the diversity of cultures among Wiltshire's residents.
- We will work with schools, community groups and artists to promote cultural activities.



HOW THE COUNCIL WORKS

We will change the way Wiltshire Council works to bring decision-making closer to people and ensure that all council activities, are properly discussed and scrutinised. We will also work to strengthen and collaborate with the voluntary sector.

- On day one upon taking office, we will launch a review of how the council is run with the aim of bringing decision-making closer to residents and communities.
- We will look to devolve power to 'compass point' assemblies for the north, east, south and west of the county. Already there are planning committees for each of these areas but we see scope to devolve elements of highways, leisure, culture, business support and other duties to that level.
- We will also look to strengthen the 18 Area Boards that cover areas across Wiltshire including Salisbury, market towns with their nearby villages and groups of rural villages. We want to involve local residents more in these boards and give City, town and parish councils a greater say.
- We will listen systematically and deeply to people's hopes and concerns and frame policies and actions to respond to them. We will create closer links between the council and our communities, encouraging more residents to become involved in activities such as youth groups, social enterprises or environmental projects.
- We will create a crowdfunding hub on the model of #crowdfundcotswold through which local people can contribute to locally run charities, projects and community groups.
- We will set up a small team to support the voluntary sector, foster partnerships between volunteers and council staff and help community organisations to grow.
- We will hold a quarterly forum with large charities such as Community First and the Wiltshire Community Foundation to increase co-operation and find ways to deliver services effectively and efficiently.
- We will proactively engage with town and parish councils in areas such as tourism and event organisation where partnership can deliver benefits.
- We will support our staff teams to create deeper and lasting relationships with our communities, local government and business partners and the voluntary sector.
- We will carry our regular surveys among staff to understand their priorities, concerns and views.
- We will review processes to drive efficient working and make best use of digital technologies including artificial intelligence and automation to improve services and engagement with residents.

FINANCE

We will set out a detailed budget as soon as possible after the election. We expect to raise revenue in ways such as increasing some rates of the Community Infrastructure Levy and imposing a council tax surcharge on empty homes after one year instead of two.

Over the first year of the council's term we expect to make savings by expanding the Shared Lives programme and making other efficiencies in adult services. Over the four years of the term we expect to increase the number of homes in Wiltshire and this will provide a significant rise in council tax revenue.

We will channel additional revenues into increased budgets for spending lines such as Area Boards and highways maintenance, expansion of the re-ablement service, Neighbourhood Collaboratives that run local partnerships to reduce inequality in health and care and an enhanced 'acting early' programme to identify and support children at risk.

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