



LEEDS - A CITY TO ENJOY

**The
Leeds Liberal
Democrat
Manifesto
2010**

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-
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Liberal Democrat
Manifesto
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LEEDS

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A CITY TO ENJOY

L EEDS has always been a city of variety and of diversity. Whether born in Leeds or settled in the city, its people are proud of its history and its heritage. It is a strong city with the skills and the determination to succeed. It is a city of different communities that all have their individual identities but in which all contribute to the image and drive that makes Leeds a city to enjoy and to take pride in.

Liberalism has a proud record in Leeds. The history of the party and the development of the city are part of the same political and civic heritage. Look around: the Town Hall, the Art Gallery, the Corn Exchange, Woodhouse Moor, Roundhay Park and even Armley Prison are all the result of Liberal controlled councils, just as the water from your tap is a result of a far sighted Liberal decision to build reservoirs in the valleys north of Leeds.

The council could take decisions on such imaginative and significant projects because it not only had the confidence and imagination but was also able to raise the money to fund them. Today the council is hedged about by a myriad of government restrictions. The intervening years have been a story of the progressive decline of civic powers. Even sixty years ago Leeds City Council ran electricity, gas and water supplies, and was in charge of local transport, the local hospital, the police and fire services and much of social security. For years it has not even run housing or education, though, at last, the latter is coming back into the elected Council's hands.

Liberal Democrats believe that democracy is first and foremost local democracy and that without reversing the trend to centralisation it is very difficult to build a city in which each citizen feels secure, has decent housing and education, has access to social services, enjoys a wide variety of cultural facilities and is able to participate in local and citywide voluntary activity. Liberal Democrats nationally are committed to returning services to local people and to strengthening local government as the place where decisions are made and where accountability takes place.

For Liberal Democrats, the neighbourhood is the key focus for a sense of community and we are committed to working with local people to build on local initiatives and on local services in order to ensure that local leadership thrives and everyone can live without threat or anti-social pressure. As the planning authority we aim to work with police, transport, housing and other bodies to co-ordinate the services that affect our lives. We are also working to reduce unemployment and to provide initiatives for job creation and for voluntary involvement. In addition we are committed to practical steps to combat climate change and to reduce the city's carbon footprint.

The aims in this manifesto are all components of our programme for Leeds. They will not all be achieved immediately but the more support the Liberal Democrats receive the quicker our vision for the city will arrive. Please help us to make it possible.

Local government is not limited to the provision of services. It is concerned with the overall economic, cultural and physical well being of the community.

The Bains Report on Local Government Management Structures, 1972

1. Culture

A city is much more than the sum of its parts. For better or worse it has a personality and an image which imbue its citizens and which it communicates to outsiders. Leeds has always had a solidarity and a sense of security which give its residents a real pride in the city and in its activities. Whether it's rugby or cricket at Headingley, football at Elland Road, or the myriad of other sporting venues in the city, there is a passionate loyalty. Even in its current temporary sojourn in League One, Leeds United regularly attracts more fans than many Premier League clubs.

Leeds' personality shows itself also in its cultural vitality. There are choirs, jazz groups and amateur orchestras around almost every corner and recent years have seen a burgeoning of both performing and fine arts. The Carriageworks houses a wide variety of amateur dramatics and the Quarry Hill site has the West Yorkshire Playhouse, the College of Music, the superb Venue for chamber recitals and the International Lieder Festival – the latest addition to the city's array of arts excellence. Opera North maintains a remarkable reputation and has a new performance centre in the Howard Assembly Rooms. Leeds also maintains its reputation as a centre for dance, both classical and modern, housing both amateur and professional companies.

The one currently missing component in this catalogue of musical venues is an arena big enough to draw major rock groups and international concerts. The city has a number of clubs, including the Academy in the historic Coliseum building, but it has lacked a large scale performance space. The City Council is now rectifying this omission and is committed to building an arena near to the centre of the city, alongside the inner ring road, by the University.

With its superb country houses, Temple Newsam and Lotherton Hall, in City Council ownership, Leeds has perfect sites for art and furniture collections and for outdoor aviaries and animal centres. The reopening of the Tiled Hall at the Art Gallery has provided a marvellous facility to supplement the art and sculpture collections. The new City Museum, in its new premises in the historic Mechanics Institute, has deservedly won prizes and is a splendid complement to the Armouries.

The Leeds City Museum is a £20 million project. Its first year target was 120,000 visitors but it drew in 285,000. It is one of the top ten attractions in the region.

After London, Leeds has the largest proportion of public open space of any city in England, ranging from the broad acres of Roundhay Park, Temple Newsam and Middleton Park, down to the many local parks in Leeds' suburbs, all of which contribute to the well being of Leeds citizens.

All these activities and facilities make up a Liberal city that provides for the cultural needs of its citizens and which attracts visitors who want to share the atmosphere of such a lively city. It is this emphasis on human values that characterises Liberalism and differentiates it from the emphasis on economic values that makes both Conservatism and New Labour so defective in their view of society.

2. Communities

Two joint service centres are currently under construction in Chapeltown and Harehills at a cost of £11 million. These will provide various facilities, primarily face to face, including services provided by the City Council, the Primary Care Trust and other partners.

A city should be more than the sum total of its communities but it has to draw its spirit from the vitality of its communities. Historically Leeds' communities have been the proud focus of local activity and the perennial initiators of local projects. The integrity of the community has been the guarantor of its stability and its security. In recent years community values have been seriously eroded. Although there are thirty-one parish and town councils within the city boundary, they are all in the better off areas of the city and, with but one exception, none are in the communities of the former county borough. The sole exception is Alwoodley, itself one of the wealthier suburbs.

The “downtown” communities of Leeds were undermined by the slum clearance and dispersion of the population that began on the grand scale in the 1930s. Neighbourhoods such as Holbeck and Hunslet became a shadow of their former selves and, with increased social mobility, few of those who served these communities, such as doctors, teachers, solicitors and police, lived amongst their fellow citizens. Instead they commuted from leafier suburbs and not only did they thus deplete local leadership but they gave the impression to any young person with drive and ability that their ambitions were to be achieved by moving out. Today these local communities have been further undermined by the tyranny of educational league tables so that parents, instead of seeing the school as an integral part of the community, and its achievements

being much broader than examination results alone, send their children criss-crossing the city in pursuit of the elusive pieces of paper.

In addition Leeds has many large areas which, with the best of intentions, were built entirely as council estates. With the exception of those houses sold off under the “right to buy” – which itself created the problem of the better council houses no longer being available to those in grim accommodation – these are huge artificially created housing “reservations.” They are the very antithesis of the local neighbourhood which evolves over many decades, if not longer, into a natural community. From a purely physical point of view, these council houses were better appointed than their old terrace predecessors, but they have not been able to replicate the community spirit of the old neighbourhoods. Small wonder that the old council estates, the maisonettes and many of the tower blocks contain the most widespread antisocial behaviour.

It is time to pay attention to reviving community spirit and to strengthening Leeds’ neighbourhoods. Only by so doing can we hope to inhibit anti-social behaviour and to give individuals the ability to draw on the inherent strength of the community which alone can establish security and stability.

There are two examples on the west side of Leeds which are well worth noting. The Houghleys comprised the bottom part of the Wyther Park estate in Armley. They were rough and, having been built on the curious circular principle beloved of the 1930s planners, they were incapable of being made secure. Decent people moved out and it became the refuge for every conceivable type of antisocial tenant.

Local Liberal Councillors eventually persuaded the City Council to demolish the worst part of the estate and a housing association built houses for private letting in much of the space. Then, following more demolition, a developer built houses for sale. Today it is a mixed estate – council, private and owner-occupier – and it is transformed. This lesson needs to be learned for copying in every similar situation. We can then hope to persuade professionals to return to live in the communities they serve.

The second example is much simpler. The garden wall on to the pavement on the north side of Burley Road, between Cardigan Road and Woodsley Road, has beautiful glazed tiles set into the wall. There is no graffiti whatever on this wall, even though bits of wall without tiles and even the electricity switch box are covered in scrawl. Why is this? First, the beauty of its appearance itself inhibits despoliation, but, second, and probably more important, the tiles were designed by local schoolchildren who were thus responsible for this aesthetic improvement, a fact which somehow still protects it. Again this example needs to be copied elsewhere.

Two new leisure centres are being built, costing £27 million, under the Private Finance Initiative, in Armley and Morley.

Developing communities need not be hugely expensive and it needs to be done carefully and sensitively, with an awareness that it cannot be imposed but has to be coaxed out of existing networks and voluntary initiatives. What is important, however, is to have some sort of community building, without which it is impossible to have meetings of, say, a local history society, a keep fit class, further education, drama performances or a community council.

3. Planning

The Council's capacity to determine the planning of the city centre is not as influential as many citizens believe. Certainly the combination of public money with private development can create the kind of environment that makes people feel at home with their city whilst being inspired by developments. It depends on architects and entrepreneurs proposing attractive buildings and on the council making sure that they fit into its broad perception of how the city should advance. It requires a determination to conserve Leeds' heritage, to ensure that the city accommodates its residents' needs as individuals, rather

than just as consumers, and to maintain an overall plan of land use that includes leisure, mobility and conservation needs.

Planning has to be visionary – how else would the waterfront have been transformed – whilst avoiding falling prey to any passing fad, such as the long since abandoned “streets in the sky” across the city centre.

Leeds is blessed with a remarkable variety of imposing and historic buildings. Some key central buildings, such as Red Hall, were demolished, alas, before wider conservation powers were available, but far more have been retained than in, say, Bradford or Birmingham. Leeds’ pedestrianised streets, its arcades and its historic yards are considerable assets but other buildings, such as the White Cloth Hall in Kirkgate, still need substantial restoration investment, but are at least safeguarded.

The current economic downturn has hit Leeds hard. It has caused the postponement of the huge retail development on the east of the city centre and has put question marks against the construction of a number of iconic buildings. The knock-on effect is a significant reduction in capital receipts for the City Council.

The Liberal Democrats are committed to ensuring that more areas of the City Centre are safely accessible for pedestrians, that it will be possible to cycle into the centre from each main artery and that there will be an attractive new south side access to the railway station.

4. Mobility

The £32.5 million East Leeds Link road opened in February 2009, serving the Richmond Hill and Cross Green areas. The road connects the inner ring road and the city centre

The privatisation of bus services undermined the huge progress that was underway in Leeds to integrate road and rail and to develop new services and stations. Bit by bit, since privatisation, the initial variety of bus companies has been replaced by one dominant operator. A public monopoly has been replaced, detrimentally, by a private monopoly.

Leeds needs a tramway. Despite initial indications that finance would be forthcoming, and initial preparations being made on routes, land purchase and types of vehicles, the government turned down the Leeds plans, even though seven of Leeds' MPs were arrayed on the Government side of parliament. Only with a fixed track, dedicated route, tramway can the city deal fully with its serious congestion problems. The commitment to a new generation of trolley buses will help but they are not the ideal solution.

5. Employment

Historically, the wide variety of industry in Leeds always protected it from a recession in any one area. The decline in textiles, for instance, had a massive effect on employment in Bradford but Leeds could always expect to make up the deficit by moving to another sector, such as printing or engineering. In recent years financial services have burgeoned in Leeds and have brought thousands of new jobs. The current economic difficulties have, however, hit Leeds hard and there is a need to promote employment initiatives and employment alternatives.

The City Council has an apprenticeship programme and is keen to assist small businesses with, for instance, "advance" premises. It is also promoting a huge volunteering initiative which will both provide openings for worthwhile and fulfilling projects and also opportunities arising out of voluntary work.

With its own staff, the City Council foresees the workforce shrinking by 350 almost entirely through natural wastage. In the past year the Council has implemented the Labour government's Equal Pay Act – an important goal which previous Labour controlled councils completely failed to reach. Equal

pay for 25,000 Council staff was achieved in the teeth of blatant political opposition from Labour and the trade unions who went to the extreme lengths of provoking a strike of refuse workers in the hope that overflowing dustbins would be blamed on the Council administration.

The detailed facts on this are important, not least because they illustrate how individuals can be manipulated for political ends. Had the Labour party and the trade unions succeeded in overturning the evaluation outcome for one group - the refuse workers - it would have undermined the whole equal pay process or required an 18% rise in council tax.

To implement the equal pay legislation the City Council set up an evaluation process. The process was established and carried out with the active participation of the trade unions. 10,500 employees came out better off.

A Care Assistant, previously paid £12,629 is now paid £16,663 - a £4,034 *pay rise*. The Council currently employs 763 Care Assistants, 642 of them female.

A Cleaner, previously paid £11,995 is now paid £13,027 a £1,034 pay rise. The Council currently employs 1310 cleaners, 1000 of whom are female.

A Kitchen Assistant, previously paid £11,995 is now paid £13,040 a £1,052 pay rise. The Council currently employs 731 General Kitchen Assistants, 727 of whom are female.

10,000 staff were evaluated to receive the same pay, but 2,500 – amongst them the refuse workers - would have been worse off. The Council took exactly the fair and proper decision: it guaranteed this last group their existing pay for three years to enable management and unions to work out an equitable solution.

The Council offered the bin men increased bonuses for lifting efficiency levels to those of a number of neighbouring local authorities and sought a reduction in the number of days taken off sick, which at an average of twenty-eight days a year, was far higher than other groups of council workers. These proposals would have maintained the bin men's pay level. The Council also guaranteed that the service would not be privatised.

Halfway through the protected pay period, with eighteen months still to go, the unions inexplicably called its members out on strike. The strike went on for almost three months, with rubbish piling up in many areas, despite the Council instituting emergency measures. A Council offer put directly to each employee was rejected but, eventually, after eleven weeks on strike, virtually the same offer was accepted. By this time each bin man had lost around £4,000 in pay. The same deal could have been reached without the strike and without any loss of pay.

Why did the unions cause their members such hardship? They clearly believed that the Liberal Democrat led City Council administration could be made to take the blame for the rubbish in the streets, and thus to suffer politically. To some extent the scaremongering and their selective use of facts achieved this political trick, and significantly the unions were backed throughout by Labour Councillors and MPs. Never once have the unions explained why they called the strike when there were still eighteen months of negotiating time to go. Their members suffered unnecessarily.

The Liberal Democrats are proud to have achieved what all previous Labour controlled Councils have failed to implement: equal pay for the Council's staff and, in particular, significant pay rises for jobs which are largely done by women.

6. Education

Three new schools opened in 2008 – Allerton High, Pudsey Grangefield and Rodillian – with a further two that opened in 2009 – Allerton Grange and Swallow Hill.

The city's education service is in the course of being returned to the City Council. Education Leeds, which took over in 2001 under the direction of the Labour Government, will end its role next year. This, alas, does not mean that the Government's heavy hand will henceforth be absent. Far from it. There will still be pressure to create privately funded academies, thinly veiled instructions to close schools, an obsession with school league tables and a requirement to permit parents to choose any school for their children.

Liberal Democrats take a much broader view of education than either Labour or Conservative parties. In particular we chafe at the limitations of the National Curriculum, believing that the purpose of education is to liberate the potential that exists in every young life. We also believe that the good school is not measured solely by its ability to push its pupils through national examinations but by producing confident and increasingly mature young people capable of participating fully in the life of the local community. Consequently we believe in the importance of the community school and intend to encourage parents to share that vision.

Quite apart from the value of being at a good local school and being able to contribute to local activities outside school hours, the effect on traffic congestion, carbon emissions and pollution of transporting many thousands of children across the city each day is significant. During the morning rush hour one in five vehicles on Leeds roads is taking a child to school – and there is an annual cost to council tax of £5 million for school transport.

7. Social Services

Part of the Council's Children's services were criticised by the inspectors and the administration took immediate action. This year's budget includes an additional £6.2million of resources in Children's and Young People's Social Care to support improvements in safeguarding and in child protection. A further additional £2.million is included for fostering services and £1.4million for Children with Disabilities.

Independent Living Project:
£51 million of Public Finance Initiative credits were obtained in 2005 which have provided independent living opportunities for 341 vulnerable members of our society. The project has received two major national awards.

We have a keen commitment to the Independent Living Project for people with learning difficulties and mental health problems. This includes putting £19million into custom-built properties to provide tenants with a more independent lifestyle.

A further £2.1million is being put into fostering services, with a doubling of the recruitment and training budget from £60,000 to £120,000.

Liberal Democrats have ensured the development of adult social care in Leeds. With £4.3 million of extra funding this year, this has been a department that has seen an increase in its budget even in difficult times. Resources have been carefully focussed on improving provisions which enable individual men and women to become more independent, while being underpinned by a community care budget which includes necessary residential and nursing care.

8. Housing

The City Council is currently building sixty-three new council houses in Gipton. It may be a relatively small number but these are the first such houses to be built in the city for thirty years. It is the Liberal Democrats' intention that these will be the forerunners of many more.

We have no rigid dogmatic commitment to one or other type of housing. We believe that there is a need for more houses both to rent and to buy and, in particular, we are committed to ensuring a mixture of housing tenure in every part of the city.

Forty years ago Liberals were in the forefront of ending the wholesale demolition of back-to-back and other terraced housing in Leeds that had laid waste to vast acres of improvable and relatively cheap housing that was eminently suited to young people venturing out on living independently for the first time.

However, it is not enough simply to rescue such housing from the demolition crews; like all buildings old houses need to be periodically renovated to ensure that they are fit for new generations. Liberal Democrats will ensure that the City Council plays a vital role with owner occupiers and landlords in ensuring that the older areas of Leeds do not become dilapidated but rather provide a solid and enduring housing provision for generations to come.

Housing provision and housing conditions are the most regular causes of citizen concern, as many Councillors' surgeries or mail bags demonstrate, but the individual Councillor's ability to deal with these problems is constrained by the existence of the Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs), set up by the government in 2002, which at the time would only provide its national "Decent Homes" funding via ALMOs.

Consequently, for the first time in almost eighty years the City Council ceased to manage its own council houses and there was no longer a City Councillor with the responsibility of answering directly on the administration of its

housing stock. With a new government there needs to be a full debate on the provision of central funds and the accountability for public housing.

For a century after the establishment of its university, the links between students and the rest of Leeds were warm and friendly, but the massive burgeoning of student numbers from the 1990s gravely undermined that relationship. Whole swathes of inner Leeds were effectively commandeered for student accommodation and the multiple occupation of older houses became the norm to the great distress of families trying to live as neighbours. More recently the construction of purpose built student accommodation has begun to catch up and the pressure on Headingley and adjacent neighbourhoods is at last easing. Nevertheless there is still an acute need to regulate Houses in Multiple Occupation in order to minimise the insensitivity of student living styles when they impinge unacceptably on other residents.

9. Environment

In recent years the Liberal Democrat led City Council has taken a lead in practical measures to implement green policies for Leeds. The city has a comprehensive citywide climate change strategy, adopted in April 2009. The City Council aims to reduce its emissions by 41% by 2020 and the Council is in the vanguard of big cities by pledging to reduce the carbon emissions of Leeds as a whole by 40%. This year we are implementing a pilot scheme to distribute free insulation to one thousand households in some of the most deprived areas in Leeds.

In the current municipal year the kerbside collection of recyclable waste will reach all properties in the city. Investment in recycling will enable the recycling and composting target to reach 41% within the year. In addition, by reducing the amount of unrecyclable waste, the City Council has been able to reduce its landfill tax increase from £1.7 million to £0.6 million. Substantial work has been carried out on flood defences and alleviation measures for Leeds City Centre and new flood defence schemes are underway for Wykebeck in East Leeds and for the river Wharfe at Collingham.

10. Finance

For decades local government has been increasingly controlled by central government and the heavy hand of Whitehall is evident at every turn, even in the permission required to be able to borrow capital. If municipal government and local democracy is to have any meaning, central government needs to liberate local government and to confine its own activities to issues that can only be resolved nationally, such as grant aid to equalise widely differing financial bases.

Under the present administration Leeds has this year had the lowest council tax increase in fifteen years, believing that it was important at a time of economic downturn to minimise the burden falling on individual local taxpayers. This has been achieved despite receiving much lower grant aid from the government than most other cities. Nationally only five of the thirty-six metropolitan authorities have a lower council tax bill than Leeds. Effective financial management has significantly lowered the amount of interest the council pays on its debt and Leeds has the lowest interest rate in the country. This has saved some £40 million in the last three years.

11. Conclusion

Liberal Democrats believe that Leeds is a city with immense vitality whose citizens contribute their talents to create its great spirit and whose resourcefulness will ensure its future success. We believe that the City Council cannot by itself achieve all that we want for the city and that it has to work with the people of Leeds to enable them to put their time and energy into making it an even better place to live, work and play.

This manifesto aims to give an idea of the kind of city Liberal Democrats are working for. We are committed to these aims and ideals and we ask for your support in achieving them. Join us now to help make Leeds a fairer, livelier, safer and greener city.



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