

Manifesto for Somerset 2022

“Liberal Democrats will take the opportunity of a new council to build a fairer, greener, flourishing Somerset that cares for the most vulnerable and listens to you.”



- **Liberal Democrats will take the opportunity of a new council to build a fairer, greener, flourishing Somerset that cares for the most vulnerable and listens to you.**
- **Liberal Democrat Councillors are hard-working local champions who will listen and stand up for you.**
- **Only the Lib Dems or the Conservatives can win control of Somerset council. The LibDems have a proud track record of running three successful Somerset District Councils.**
- **The Conservatives have cut, cut, cut since they took over Somerset County Council in 2019. They have taken you for granted, ignored you and are imposing another wasteful reorganisation on Somerset.**
- **Nationally, we are seeing the costs of living soar and daily reports of Conservative corruption.**
- **Please send them a message they cannot ignore by voting for your Liberal Democrat candidates in May.**



**Councillor
Val
Keitch**

**Leader of South
Somerset District
Council**



**Councillor
Federica
Smith-Roberts**

**Leader of
Somerset West &
Taunton Council**



**Councillor
Ros
Wyke**

**Leader of Mendip
District Council**



**Councillor
Bill
Revans**

**Leader of the
Opposition on
Somerset County
Council**

**Leader of the
Liberal Democrats
on Sedgemoor
District Council**

Liberal Democrats

Somerset

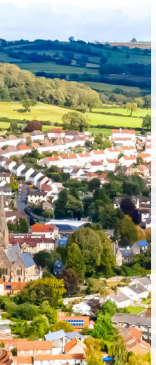
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1 Principles

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 We believe that each generation is responsible for the fate of our planet and, by safeguarding the balance of nature and the environment, for the long-term continuity of life in all its forms.
- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 We aim to disperse power, to foster diversity and to nurture creativity.
- 1.5 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.



2 Vision

- 2.1 A new council creates an opportunity to build a sustainable future, and build a more caring, fairer and flourishing Somerset.
- 2.2 We will be business-like and efficient in running the council, using resources wisely for the benefit of the whole county.
- 2.3 We will run a listening council that consults and communicates with all its residents.
- 2.4 We will be transparent, inclusive and demonstrate integrity at all levels.
- 2.5 We will champion our county's needs nationally, address its challenges and celebrate our many achievements.
- 2.6 We will be responsive, resilient and proactive in meeting and preventing future challenges.
- 2.7 We will build on our track record of running South Somerset District Council since 1987 and running Mendip District Council and Somerset West & Taunton Council since 2019, drawing on our experience of setting up and running Somerset West & Taunton Council since its inception.





3 Drivers of Change

3.1 Environmental

Man-made climate change is the greatest threat facing the planet. Somerset is on the front line of climate change with coastlines and low-lying areas susceptible to flooding and its ecology is particularly vulnerable. Responding to the climate and ecological emergencies will require fundamental changes in the ways that we live and work.

3.2 Social

People living longer is something to celebrate but it also creates challenges for our health and social care systems. More people are living longer with chronic and multiple health conditions. People are moving to Somerset from areas where property prices are even higher, increasing house prices for local people. Working-age people who have made Somerset their home are also leaving the UK after Brexit, leading to staff shortages in key economic sectors. Lifestyles and working practices will change after Covid altering the way people in Somerset live.

3.3 Inequality

Inequalities are growing throughout Somerset. The rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer. Too many young people are disconnected from society. These inequalities have a significant impact on our health and education outcomes. We are all worse off in the long run. Disabled people are side-lined and marginalised from society. Economic outcomes for women still lag behind outcomes for men. Like many parts of the UK, we have much more to do to tackle discrimination.

3.4 Technological

The speed of technological change will continue apace over the coming decades with changes in transport, communications, bio-technology, artificial intelligence, energy generation and health care. We need Somerset to be agile in the face of these developments and build the infrastructure to take advantage of these changes.

3.5 Financial

The Government has slashed funding to all our local councils and the Conservative-run Somerset County Council disastrously froze council tax for six years while demand for its services was growing. The Conservatives have shown themselves to be reckless with our local government, spending on vanity projects and ignoring people's needs. They have favoured working with big multi-national companies rather than spending Somerset's money with Somerset businesses.

3.6 Economic

The country faces many challenges to recover from the pandemic, respond to the challenges of Brexit, meet changes in international trade, tackle shortages of workers in key sectors, adapt to changing patterns of consumer spending, (including online shopping) and be agile in the face of new challenges for sectors like agriculture transport and hospitality. We will ensure that the Town Deals of Bridgwater and Glastonbury, and the Levelling-Up programmes in Somerset respond to local need and achieve best value.

3.7 Leadership

National political leadership under the Conservatives remains in crisis with a lack of integrity and a culture that expects autocratic leadership, accepts a lack of honesty and rejects consensus and collaboration. Leaders are expected to lack humility, creativity, vision or wisdom, and think in the short term. We believe this political culture is not good enough for Somerset.

3.8 Bureaucratic

Previously some councils have been bureaucratic, lethargic and unresponsive to local needs. Departments have operated in silos trying to avoid solving problems and shifting responsibility to others. Moving to a unitary council presents the opportunity to work collaboratively and proactively to reduce future need and consequently pressures on budgets.

4 Priorities

In the face of these challenges the Liberal Democrats have 10 ambitious priorities for the new administration of Somerset Council:

- 1** Establish a sustainable Somerset so that we tackle the climate and ecological crises
- 2** Make Somerset more caring so that we look after the most vulnerable residents
- 3** Build a flourishing Somerset so that we are more prosperous
- 4** Listen to Somerset residents so we can be open and transparent in making informed decisions
- 5** Be responsible with Somerset's assets and resources so we get value for money
- 6** Ensure no children are left behind so that all get the best start in life
- 7** Sensitively develop and protect our beautiful county so that all can afford a decent home
- 8** Connect Somerset better so that we can travel and communicate effectively and sustainably
- 9** Make Somerset fairer so that all can get on in life
- 10** Enhance and protect all our communities so we can live our lives to the full



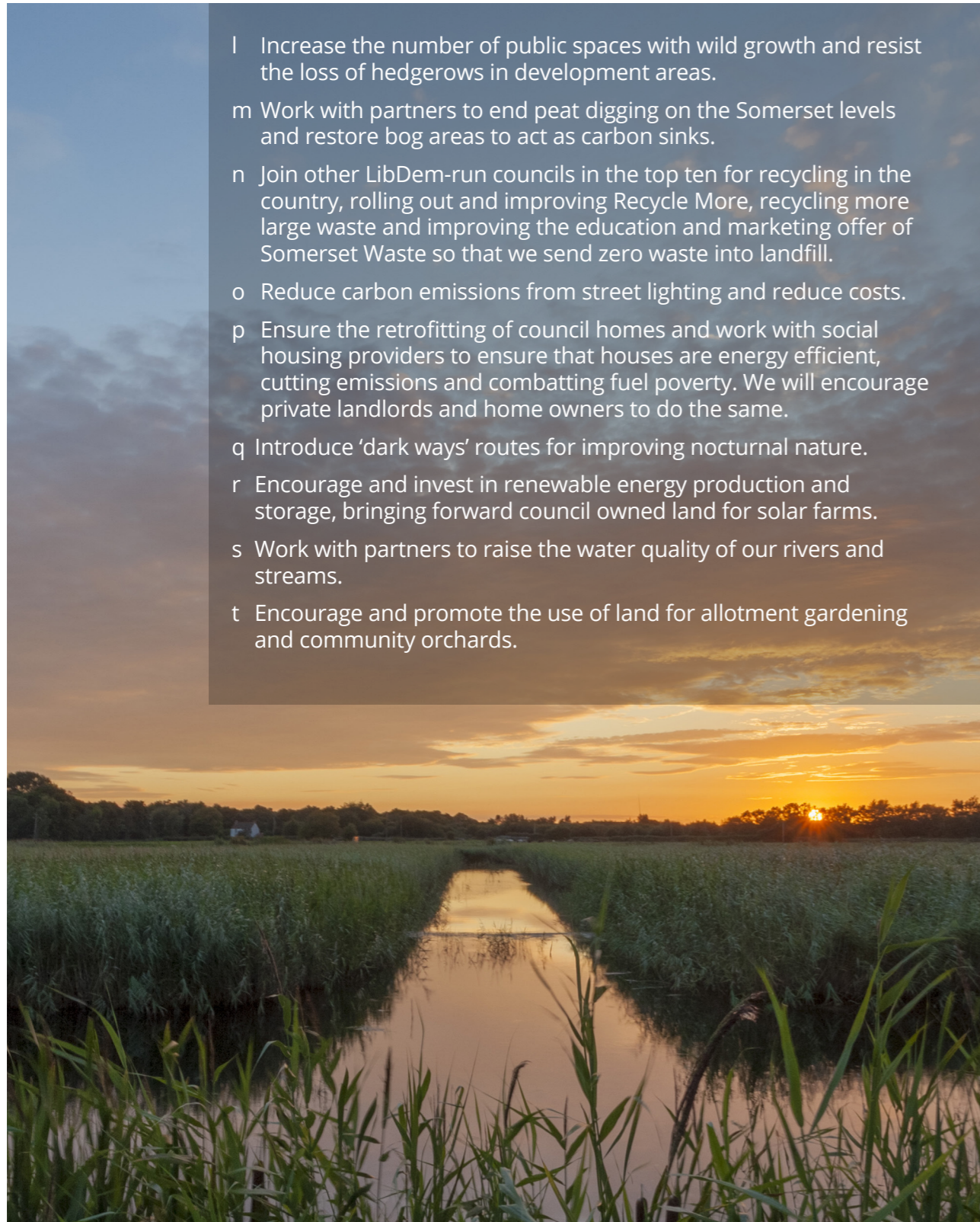
Priority 1

Liberal Democrats will establish a sustainable Somerset so that we tackle the climate and ecological crises

The climate and ecological emergency presents an existential threat to humanity. Somerset must reduce its carbon footprint, repair our natural environment and address the public health threat caused by air pollution.

Policies

- a Our goal is to be carbon neutral by 2030. We will produce an annual carbon budget statement and a medium term plan to achieve this goal.
- b Assess all council decisions for their impact on the environment, building on the "Doughnut Economics" work piloted by the LibDems in Cornwall.
- c Decarbonise our investments, as a matter of urgency, including working with partners in the pension scheme, to press businesses we invest in to meet our values and aspirations.
- d Develop and deliver public events to raise awareness and influence public behaviours to address the climate emergency.
- e Protect our local ecology and find ways to enhance biodiversity.
- f Work with other local authorities and housing developers to increase the standards of eco-construction so that all new housing will be carbon neutral.
- g Council car parks to have EV charging points by 2025 and encourage on street EV points, recognising the need for high charging speeds.
- h New council vehicles will be electric or hydrogen-powered wherever possible.
- i Work towards reducing carbon emissions from council buildings in line with our carbon neutral targets.
- j Building on the successful approach of our district councils, expand our cycle networks as multi-user paths and explore an affordable single journey bike hire service.
- k Plant 150,000 trees throughout the county every year during our administration, especially in locations that will support flood mitigation measures. We will ensure that the trees are monitored and nurtured where necessary, minimising the use of plastic.



- l Increase the number of public spaces with wild growth and resist the loss of hedgerows in development areas.
- m Work with partners to end peat digging on the Somerset levels and restore bog areas to act as carbon sinks.
- n Join other LibDem-run councils in the top ten for recycling in the country, rolling out and improving Recycle More, recycling more large waste and improving the education and marketing offer of Somerset Waste so that we send zero waste into landfill.
- o Reduce carbon emissions from street lighting and reduce costs.
- p Ensure the retrofitting of council homes and work with social housing providers to ensure that houses are energy efficient, cutting emissions and combatting fuel poverty. We will encourage private landlords and home owners to do the same.
- q Introduce 'dark ways' routes for improving nocturnal nature.
- r Encourage and invest in renewable energy production and storage, bringing forward council owned land for solar farms.
- s Work with partners to raise the water quality of our rivers and streams.
- t Encourage and promote the use of land for allotment gardening and community orchards.



Priority 2

Liberal Democrats will make Somerset more caring so that we look after the most vulnerable residents

The pandemic has demonstrated the vulnerability of our community members who need more support. More people will want to be cared for in their own homes. Our approach will be based on proactive prevention.

The major stakeholders in Health and Social Care are going through massive change as they set up an Integrated Care System; Local Government Reorganisation and the merger of Somerset Foundation Trust and the Yeovil District Hospital Trust.

Our approach will be early intervention to allow people to live thriving, independent lives and prevent reliance on longer-term expensive services. Council services, working together with our partners need to intervene early to prevent residents needing more support later on.

Adult Social care accounts for over 40% of Somerset County Council spending and demand is growing. Controlling these costs will be key to making the new council effective.

Policies

- a Ensure that access to services is founded on clear, anti-discriminatory values and practices.
- b Put effective social work at the heart of our approach, offering people in need and their carers timely assessments and regular reviews.
- c Caring for our carers is critical. We will undertake a review of short break options, including how we might support people in their own homes so that unpaid carers can take a break.
- d Expand Shared Lives, a scheme to support adults who struggle to live on their own and who are matched with carers who share their home, family and community life. This could, for example, offer a short-break option and a step-down resource for people waiting to be discharged from hospital.
- e Ensure that Changing Places toilets are provided in the major towns and visitor destinations and encourage accessibility by encouraging wheelchair availability for beaches, landscape and heritage destinations.
- f Collaborate with colleagues in the NHS to improve access to mental health services, delivering community-based support where possible.
- g Recognising that Somerset is the third highest area for suicide nationally and with men four times more likely to kill themselves than women, we will develop a strategy to target male mental health.
- h Work with our partners in the health service and voluntary sector to minimise the impact of addiction on families and vulnerable people.
- i Collaborate with our partners in the voluntary sector and the police to combat domestic violence and abuse.
- j Build on the excellent record of our district councils to work with individuals and families to avoid them becoming homeless with the ambition to end homelessness by 2027.
- k Acknowledging the changes in demand for gypsy and traveller sites across the county and in local government structures, we will work to find the most appropriate land for temporary, transit and permanent sites.



- l Play a significant role in responding to the consequences of international emergencies, providing support to refugees who need Somerset to be their new home.
- m Ensure that our quality control teams capture and propagate evidence of best practice examples, alongside reviews of things that are not working well.
- n Work in a joined-up way – internally (Social care and housing for example), and with external partners, to ensure the best possible outcomes for vulnerable people and their carers.
- o Work with developers and social housing providers to ensure that there is a sufficiency of housing suitable for carers and those with care needs.
- p Make sure that the care providers we contract with pay at least the National Living Wage and will work together with them to improve the status of care professionals in our communities.
- q Encourage collaboration and support coordination between domiciliary care providers to complement each other’s community support offers.
- r Support the continued growth of a mixed economy of providers, including expansion of the micro-provider market. We will facilitate collaboration between micro-providers to provide mutual support, for example with training and sickness cover, to make the system more sustainable.
- s Work with specialist providers to explore ways of using IT assisted technology to deliver home care.
- t Undertake an early review of block contract arrangements for day, residential and domiciliary services for adults with Learning Disabilities to ensure that all are kept safe and well and receive high quality care and support.
- u Work closely with the new NHS trust, primary health care, emergency services and the third sector to improve the well-being and health outcomes for all our residents.
- v Create and implement an annual, measurable action plan to address health and wellbeing inequalities in our more deprived communities.



Priority 3

Liberal Democrats will build a flourishing Somerset so that we are more prosperous

The prosperity of Somerset is challenged by the impacts of Covid-19, Brexit and climate change. The transition to a growing, low carbon economy that Somerset needs will only be achieved by driving up productivity through research and development across different sectors. We would seek to grow those parts of the economy in which Somerset has an actual or potential competitive advantage, such as medical sciences, artificial intelligence, education, hydrographic and environmental assessment, renewable energy, aeronautics, and sustainable agriculture and food production. These are key potential drivers locally, nationally and globally.

We relish these challenges, will tackle them with partners, including local businesses and organisations, colleges and universities, government at all levels, and the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership.

We regret that our vision for a University of Somerset has been side-lined for 13 years.

Policies

- a Proactively work with the business communities to support and champion new enterprises and improve investment and growth, including hospitality, sustainable agriculture and food production, creative and manufacturing sectors to create a fairer environment for industry.
- b Extend provision for low cost employment space for new local enterprises, for which our Somerset LibDem councils have won national recognition.
- c Work with providers to establish more higher education programmes in the county so local people can access a range of degree and postgraduate qualifications creating a balanced and well qualified workforce.
- d Collaborate with providers to continue to deliver and extend a range of training opportunities to improve workforce skills to support and develop local business.
- e Deliver major regeneration schemes in our towns and invest in reviving our high streets in our market towns and larger villages throughout Somerset. This will include direct investment in high street property.
- f Offer vital support to the people of Somerset facing redundancy and income reductions, helping them to retrain and find new jobs.
- g Establish a small business support team dedicated to helping our businesses recover, from the impact of Covid and respond to the challenges of Brexit.
- h Engage with developers to create a range of employment sites to meet local demand.
- i Support starter units and business hubs near our larger villages and market towns to promote local employment.
- j Allow Local Community Networks to set car parking rules to best serve the needs of their communities.
- k Work with our creative, heritage and hospitality sectors to enhance Somerset’s sustainable tourism offer, including support for small tourism and educational initiatives.
- l Nurture and support environmental businesses seeking to operate in a carbon neutral way.
- m Celebrate those businesses that work for their communities.



Priority 4

Liberal Democrats will listen to Somerset residents so that we can be open and transparent in our decision making

Somerset residents know that the Conservatives have not listened to them. The poll on local government reform showed that the Government will ignore a 65% mandate for a more devolved solution. Liberal Democrats will run a listening council that will be open and democratic.

Policies

- a Strengthen the trust and relationships with our city, town and parish councils to address local needs and relationships.
- b Maintain council community hubs throughout the county working with town and parish councils, decentralising service delivery and streamlining bureaucracy.
- c Deliver Local Community Networks (LCNs) that genuinely listen to the views of local people, building on the pioneering success of the South Somerset District Council area boards.
- d Devolve decision-making, assets and services to LCNs and Town and Parish Councils where desirable, viable, sustainable and effective, including planning.
- e Assist smaller parish councils to deliver services in collaboration with each other.
- f Ensure that a Town Council covering the unparished area of Taunton is established.
- g Make sure that Somerset Councillors better reflect the diversity of Somerset's population by ensuring that council meetings are held at accessible times and venues, using technology where possible to facilitate this.
- h Ensure that the increased workload of Somerset unitary councillors is supported by casework and policy teams.
- i Public council meetings will be webcast to allow full transparency of decision making.
- j Review council governance systems two years after vesting day, to ensure that council procedures are open and democratic and involve all councillors in decision making about their areas through LCNs and in council policy through the council committee structures. Scrutiny and Audit committees will be used formally to review the performance and policies of the council and informally through Scrutiny Workshops to inform and develop new policy.



Priority 5

Liberal Democrats will be responsible with Somerset's assets and resources so that we get value for money

The Liberal Democrats have always spent your money wisely, investing in our county's services and infrastructure where and when we have controlled our councils. We acknowledge that local authorities have to apply for Government capital monies as well as borrow to invest, reflecting the policies of the Government of the day.

We will continue to demonstrate financial pragmatism in our spending and borrowing to ensure that the county's priorities are met. Liberal Democrats take responsible financing seriously. Local Government reorganisation has only been necessary because the Conservatives nationally have underfunded our councils and locally have mismanaged SCC finances by pretending that a six-year council tax freeze was possible. LibDem-run District Councils have invested commercially to bring in new income to their councils.

Policies

- a Deliver a balanced budget and raise council tax only where necessary to maintain our front-line services.
- b Treasure and cherish our staff to ensure that we recruit, develop and retain a professional and talented workforce. We recognise that a reorganisation will impact on our valued staff and ensure that all are supported and treated fairly through the process of setting up the new council.
- c Be smart in how we manage the council's resources to achieve the best outcomes for our residents.
- d Manage the council's assets, property and land holdings to ensure the best value for our residents, exploring all avenues to maximise return on our assets.
- e Use any savings from local government change to properly fund our council services.
- f Invest in our infrastructure and the local economy by using local contractors where possible to deliver local jobs for local people.
- g Tackle waste, duplication and vanity projects, including the Our Somerset newspaper, to free up resources to spend and deploy where they are most needed.
- h Invest wisely to ensure that the council has secure income streams in the future, as we have done in the district councils we run.
- i Work with other councils to ensure that areas like ours are given a fairer funding settlement by central government.
- j Review all contracts and services to ensure that they deliver value for money for the council and our residents. We will in-source contracts that are not performing well and break them down into smaller more manageable contracts with local employers. Where possible we will source locally to make our economy more sustainable.
- k Source from organisations that operate ethically, recognising their responsibility to the environment and society, with robust policies against modern day slavery.
- l Establish a unit to proactively prepare quality bids for funding streams from central government using the experience of recent successful bids and work with the third sector to secure extra money for Somerset.



- m Work, alongside our suppliers, towards ensuring that all staff are paid the National Living Wage.
- n Pay all suppliers within 30 days and local suppliers within 14 days, to support business, employment and growth. Encourage and expect all businesses with council contracts to follow suit.
- o Maintain a county farms estate providing 5-20 hectare units for newcomers to start in agriculture to provide more equitable access to land to champion and lead on regenerative agricultural practices with tenants moving to net zero.
- p Ensure that the council can afford to pay back historic and current borrowing, including internal borrowing.



Priority 6

Liberal Democrats will make sure no children are left behind so that all get the best start in life

The best gift any child can receive is a decent education. Too many Somerset children are not achieving their potential. Educational, health and leisure outcomes are hugely unequal. Significant cuts to preventative services in Somerset have placed families at risk and widened inequality. We spend huge amounts of money supporting families in crisis instead of preventing them from getting into difficulties. Too many of the children that fall behind come from increasingly less prosperous backgrounds. Children and young people with additional needs, including Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Children Looked After, are falling further behind.

Policies

- a Recognise that Somerset Council should play the leading role in setting an education strategy for the county that will ensure that all can achieve their potential and the future needs of our communities are met.
- b Working with parents, governors and teachers, invest in our schools, ensuring sufficient supply of places to meet future need.
- c Work with heads and governors to close the performance gaps for the more vulnerable students and standards across all schools and colleges in Somerset.
- d We recognise that our approach to children's services needs to be trauma informed and ensure that all staff are trained to understand the impact of adverse child experiences.
- e SEND and Children's Service still require substantial improvement. We will ensure that the EHCP process is more efficient and effective by working more collaboratively with parents and schools. Outcomes must be reflective of need rather than constrained by resources.
- f Recognising that education is the ladder that takes people out of poverty we will be challenging and supportive of situations where children are not accessing education.
- g The best start in education is crucial to future outcomes. We will ensure that there are sufficient early years places in the county, work with providers to make sure that safeguarding standards are high and that all children can achieve.
- h Provide support to early years providers to ensure that children with SEND in early years settings are identified and are given the help they need.
- i Develop a range of preventative services to support families early, reducing the quantity and complexity of demand later.
- j Apply for Government funding at the earliest opportunity to set up Family Hubs to improve access to services, connections between families, professionals, services, and providers, and putting relationships at the heart of family help.
- k Work with partners in the NHS, charity sector and education to ensure that we reduce demand for mental health services amongst our young people and ensure that CAMHS and other mental health services promptly meet the increasing need we are seeing post-pandemic.



- l Bring our Somerset children home. Too many looked after children are in expensive care homes outside of the county because there is insufficient local provision. We will increase the numbers of foster carers and work with providers to offer a wider range of local specialised care.
- m Work with developers and social housing providers to ensure that there are houses available for those that want to become foster carers but lack the housing to fulfil their aspiration.
- n We will take seriously our duty as a Corporate Parent to the Children Looked After of Somerset and to Care Leavers, ensuring that they all get the start in life they are entitled to. We will ensure that all Children Looked After have the option of a trained advocate.
- o Increase the support to full time and respite foster carers to sustain and improve the service they receive. We will improve the wrap around care and support to families with complex children to ensure they can stay connected to their homes.
- p Work closely with educational settings to ensure that each Child Looked After has a comprehensive entitlement to a full-time inclusive education package.
- q Work with the police and other agencies in partnership to combat the rise of 'County Lines' networks in the county and its impact on our young people and communities.
- r Establish a Youth Club support service to work with LCNs and providers in the county to build a network of youth clubs serving all communities, including detached youth work.



Priority 7

Liberal Democrats will sensitively develop and protect our unique county so that all can afford decent homes.

Our planning system is under threat from government reform which means that developers will be able to build with minimum local control. The Phosphates issue, exacerbated by central government lack of action, is causing a backlog of development in significant parts of the county. Meanwhile high house prices are preventing local people from buying their own houses and the private rental market is inflationary because of increased demand and inadequate supply, made even more difficult by the impact of Hinkley Point C.

Policies

- a Cut housing waiting list by building 1000 low and zero carbon homes per year for social rent to meet local need, recognising that this need is in all communities.
- b Maintain the Somerset West and Taunton Housing Revenue Account and council housing stock in public ownership. If possible, we will also maintain the Homes in Sedgemoor stock so that we will use the diverse range of provision available to meet housing need throughout the county.
- c Bring forward a local plan for Somerset to ensure that there is an adequate supply of housing, balancing the need to meet demand with the needs of communities to be sustainable.
- d Use our influence in the housing market and as a social housing provider to address the needs of foster carers, key workers, carers and those that need care.
- e Recognising that connection to community is vital for social cohesion, we will ensure that policies to build social housing to meet local rural need is prioritised, especially in the Exmoor National Park and our Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and villages.
- f Ensure that council services, our Local Community Networks and the Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA) work collaboratively to support sustainable development in the park in accordance with the ENPA local plan.
- g Work with self-builders and Community Land Trusts to bring forwards proposals to meet specific local needs and develop areas for community and social benefit.
- h Develop projects for brown field sites, including modular building.
- i Unlock stalled developments in the planning system and develop a programme to bring empty and under used homes, offices and shops into use.
- j Protect open land surrounding our towns and villages so that we keep the identity of our communities.
- k Support communities to write their own Neighbourhood plans.



Priority 8

Liberal Democrats will connect Somerset better so that we can travel and communicate effectively and sustainably

Roads remain the lifeblood of our communities and our economy. Thousands of potholes, the crumbling road edges, deteriorating signage and blocked gulleys show a highway network that has been neglected in recent years. The climate change agenda demands that public transport links in Somerset are dramatically improved and the digital connectivity allows many to have new ways of living and working.

Policies

- a Build on the work of the LibDem run District councils in Somerset to encourage active travel, reducing our carbon footprint and congestion.
- b Fundamentally overhaul our Public Transport system to make it a viable and significant means of transport in the county, based primarily on our bus network. All Public Transport networks need to integrate with one another to make them effective.
- c Assess options for improving Community Transport and Car Clubs in collaboration with Local Community Networks, in tandem with clean energy projects.
- d Invest in our roads maintenance, making area Highways offices more responsive to local concern.
- e Co-ordinate highways works and diversions to ensure that traffic continues flowing while our highways are improved.
- f Repair our roads and maintain gulleys proactively to prevent more costly problems over time.
- g Encourage cycling by adding to and maintaining the network of dedicated on- and off- road cycleways across the county, connecting all communities of significant population. Somerset has the potential to be “the cycling county” with its low terrain areas, riverbanks, canal network and disused railways.
- h Ensure that road design prioritises pedestrian and cyclist safety.
- i Carry out a disability access review of our town centres to make them safe and welcoming places for all.
- j Ensure that new housing developments’ highways are adopted as soon as possible.
- k Invest in infrastructure to reduce congestion at pinch points around the county.
- l Make it easier for communities to reduce speed limits, eg 20’s plenty zones around schools and residential areas.
- m Review the county freight strategy to protect rural routes and reduce emissions.
- n Ensure that strategic planning works closely with settlement planning to deliver the infrastructure Somerset needs.

- l Work with developers to focus on eco-friendly, truly affordable housing options to both rent and buy. New builds should be carbon neutral, insulated and with water harvesting, heating and energy systems based on renewable technologies. Work with other authorities and national government to make new homes carbon neutral as standard.
- m Work with others to protect our National Park, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Nature Reserves.
- n Properly resource the planning service to ensure that they can attract good staff and stand up to speculative developers when we need to.
- o Ensure that development brings the infrastructure to support it, through robust Section 106 agreements and/ or Community Infrastructure Levy and resist the use of management fees to maintain public areas.
- p Make sure that developers include a sustainable transport plan in applications demonstrating that this connectivity will be in place for the first residents of a development.
- q Ensure the provision of more accessible and adapted housing for people who live with a disability to enable them to remain in their communities.
- r Work closely with central government and the water authorities to remove the phosphate blockage on development in Somerset.
- s Ensure planning applications continue to be decided by local area planning committees and pledge to review centralised planning functions with a view to ensuring that decisions are taken at as local a level as possible, including at Local Community Networks.





Priority 9

Liberal Democrats will make Somerset fairer so that all can get on in life

Inequality and deprivation are holding people and communities back throughout Somerset. Poor education and health outcomes are closely linked to poverty and discrimination. Low incomes are impacting on the productivity of our economy and the life outcomes of Somerset people.

- o Bring in a “Liberteen” bus pass to encourage and enable young people to use public transport to gain their independence and confidence in the public transport network.
- p Work to promote rail travel in the county, re-opening stations where possible, integrating with other transport networks and other service providers.
- q Ensure that all schools have a transport plan that enables children to attend safely by active travel or using public transport.
- r Encourage “no idling” zones around schools to ensure good quality air for our children to breathe.
- s Enable schools to set up “school streets” areas around the schools at pick up and drop off times to help keep our children safe.
- t Work with logistics companies to pilot “final mile delivery” schemes by bicycle (in urban areas) or electric vehicles.
- u Review the Connecting Somerset and Devon contracts which have not delivered value for money or high speed broadband for Somerset residents.
- v Use small local contractors for roads maintenance and small improvement schemes and investigate bringing roads maintenance back into council provision.

Policies

- a Work with education, employers and national and regional partners to raise aspirations so that Somerset becomes a higher wage economy, encouraging social mobility.
- b Assess all council decisions for their impact on social equalities building on the “Doughnut Economics” work piloted by the LibDems in Cornwall.
- c In line with our climate change agenda, work to reduce fuel poverty for our social housing residents.
- d Ensure that the Citizens Advice and the voluntary sector that supports people in the county are adequately resourced in the long term so that they can plan their response to increasing demand post-Covid.
- e Ensure that local residents in need have timely access to the full support and advice available when they are in times of hardship, need or crisis, recognising that those in rural areas and less advantaged communities find this support most difficult to access.
- f Work towards the National Living Wage for all council employees and contractors.
- g Support ethnic, LGBT+ and cultural groups to foster the range of diversity across the county.
- h Support events that promote awareness of diversity, for example Pride festivals.
- i Promote neurodiversity awareness to support individuals who have specific needs and support colleagues, customers, members and partners in making our services and working community more inclusive. To enable people with neurodiversity to achieve their potential in the workplace, we will support them with their career progression.
- j Work to support credit unions to lessen the impact of unscrupulous lenders.
- k Require developers to meet social and affordable homes objectives through good community design.
- l Use our influence, for example as a licensing authority, to tackle bias and discrimination.
- m Work with businesses and organisations to ensure that as many areas as possible are accessible to those with sensory and physical disabilities.

Priority 10

Liberal Democrats will enhance and protect all our communities so that we can live our lives to the full

Somerset's strength is in the resilience of our communities. We need our communities to offer a range of facilities and networks to enable people to live full and enriching lives locally, drawing on the support we all gain from being part of something bigger than ourselves.

Policies

- a Work in partnership with communities to maintain and enhance our valued local cultural, sporting and recreational amenities and facilities.
- b Recognise the challenges that rural communities face in accessing services, housing, transport and opportunities and work through the Local Community Networks to address the difficulties these communities face.
- c Take a stronger enforcement approach to support our communities combat litter, fly tipping vandalism and planning enforcement.
- d Recognise and promote the importance of sporting, cultural and creative events in improving quality of life, maintaining our investment in these services and thereby building our resilient communities.
- e Ensure that the confidence of the Arts Council of England in confirming South Somerset as one of the 54 priority places in the country is well placed, as we help Somerset to thrive through cultural and creative opportunity.
- f Our support for the creative industries will recognise the huge contribution they make to community cohesion across Somerset as well as the economy.
- g Promote innovation and quality in the design of our buildings, community facilities and public open spaces.
- h Work in partnership with police, fire and health care to promote community resilience through Local Community Networks.
- i Maintain a comprehensive Library and information network throughout the county, working with LCNs and town and parish councils to keep our Community Libraries open.
- j Through the Somerset Rivers Authority we will work to prevent the impact that flooding has had on our county through flood prevention and "slow the flow" initiatives and maintaining the water management infrastructure properly. And we will pressure Conservative ministers to honour their 2014 "money is no object" commitment to fund flood prevention.
- k Review the role of the drainage boards, Wessex Water, the Environment Agency and Somerset Rivers Authority to reduce duplication and promote effective management of water in Somerset and work with partners to eliminate the discharge of sewerage into our waterways and coasts.



Contact details

Social media etc