



Manifesto

District Council Election

May2023



South Norfolk
Liberal Democrats

Introduction

Liberal Democrats believe governments and councils exist to serve people. We stand against the concentration of power and will look at how to reorganise services to make it easier for every resident to find and access the services they need.

Fairness, efficiency, protecting the most vulnerable and protecting the environment will guide our decision making. Liberal Democrat councillors will work tirelessly to ensure the economic and sustainable use of resources on behalf of all residents of the District, to make South Norfolk a vibrant place to live and work. Liberal Democrats will put residents at the heart of what we do, in consultation with local communities, individuals and groups. And we will do this whilst respecting liberal and democratic values.

Our Values

We believe everyone deserves a good quality of life, and that public services should help to achieve this.

We believe councils should work with communities, through engagement and discussion.

We want communities to be empowered to take positive action so that where they live can develop for the better.

We therefore pledge to run South Norfolk Council in an open and transparent manner and believe our elected representatives should listen to and understand their local communities' needs.

Conservative control of the Council since 2007 has meant:

- Poor decisions made with little transparency and without effective scrutiny.
- Wasting taxpayers' money on schemes like the failed "high-tech" public toilets in Harleston and elsewhere.
- New boilers at the Long Stratton Council building, which is now redundant.
- Replacing waste trucks with new diesel trucks.
- Ongoing loss of experienced Council staff due to endless internal restructuring.
- Failure to move with the times on national standards for services e.g. modern day ideas for effective recycling.

A Liberal Democrat Council will ensure good governance by making sure decisions are taken in the best interest of our residents, whether recycling, green spaces, street lighting, public toilets, etc.

A Liberal Democrat Council will:

1. Reduce wasteful Council Tax expenditure on ill-thought-out schemes and vanity projects, and better use resources in the priority areas of housing, the environment and care for the vulnerable.
2. Review joint staffing arrangements with Broadland District Council to make sure we can deliver essential services in a prompt and decisive way.
3. Make the Council-owned Big Sky Developments Company more accountable by appointment of a non-executive director. There are numerous examples where other councils have lost YOUR money by overexposing themselves to a volatile property market.
4. Work with housing associations, developers, Big Sky and private landlords to improve the availability of affordable and social housing and reduce waiting lists.
5. Ensure the Council is more efficient, effective and both democratic and accountable to the public by strengthening the Scrutiny system. Major Committee decisions will be scrutinised before being reviewed by the Cabinet, major changes proposed by Cabinet to be reviewed by Scrutiny.
6. Press for the local retention of all business rates in the face of continuing cuts to financial support from central government.

The Liberal Democrats have a strong record of leading change in South Norfolk. We have led the Council in the past, including the period from 1995 to 2007, and we are currently the official opposition to the Conservative Council. We believe that can become the largest group on the Council in 2023.

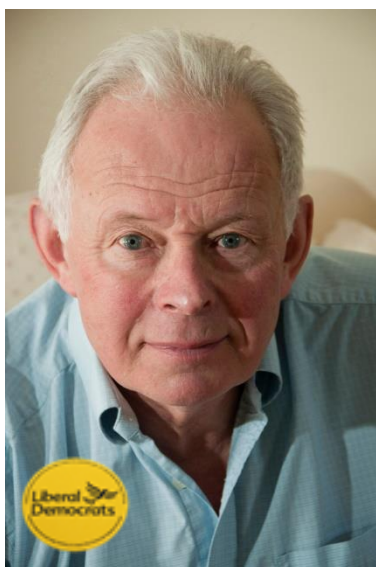
In this document, we have set out an ambitious and achievable programme for South Norfolk over the period 2023 to 2027 and beyond. We would welcome comments and questions on our manifesto. Please write to info@southnorfolklibdems.org.uk.

We hope that you share in our vision and values, and that you will cast your vote for our candidates in the elections on May 4th 2023. If you would like to help us with our campaign, please contact us at the email address above.



Chris Brown

Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group on South Norfolk District Council



Bob McClenning

Chair of South Norfolk Liberal Democrats

A Fair, Open & Accessible Council

Open Scrutiny and Accountability

All across Norfolk, the Conservative party are doing their best to avoid scrutiny of their administrations. At South Norfolk District Council they insist on appointing one of their own to chair the Scrutiny Committee, undermining one of the few checks and balances of the Cabinet system.

The Council owns Big Sky Developments, a company that builds houses for commercial sale in places like Cringleford, Poringland and Long Stratton. South Norfolk Council has a financial exposure of over £40million, indebted to South Norfolk Council, but the only councillors that get to see the company accounts are the Tory leader of the Council and two of his Cabinet members. We urgently need an independent, non-executive director.

In April 2022, the Elections Act brought in by the Conservative government means that millions of voters could be affected by the need to show photo identification when voting at an election. The May 2023 elections will require voters to show identification before they can vote at Polling Stations. Yet the cost to local councils will be significant in terms of direct costs and poor use of staff time to roll this out.

A Liberal Democrat council will lobby the Government to remove this draconian requirement which clearly discourages people from voting.

Liberal Democrats have always supported the concept of greater devolution of powers from central to regional and local government. However, we have opposed various recent schemes proposed and then abandoned by the Conservatives, like an elected Mayor to cover Norfolk and Suffolk. We are strongly opposed to their current proposals to impose a directly-elected Leader of Norfolk County Council.

A Liberal Democrat Council will:

1. Ensure the Scrutiny Committee will be chaired by a member of the largest opposition party.
2. Return to the custom of Council meeting two weeks after Cabinet (rather than the Conservative habit of holding Cabinet and Council meetings on the same day allowing little time for proper scrutiny before full Council votes on them).
3. Review the governance and reporting of Big Sky. to ensure that:
 - Available development opportunities are maximised to the benefit of the community,
 - The financial benefits and risks of this successful development company are properly reflected in the reports of the council.
 - There is appropriate governance and transparency for the operations of Big Sky, as a publicly owned enterprise.
 - All contracts deliver best value for money and limit the Council's risk.
 - One or more non-executive directors are appointed to the Board, to represent the interests of residents.
4. Ensure all eligible voters can vote and freely obtain the necessary documentation to enable voting, if this requirement cannot be easily rescinded.
5. Campaign against the proposed Norfolk devolution deal which will bring minimal benefit to the people of Norfolk, decrease local democracy and potentially lead to material increases in Council Tax.

LOCAL Government: Supporting Parishes

Liberal Democrats would promote opportunities for local Parishes and Town Councils to apply for grants for specifically proposed projects, approved and supervised by the South Norfolk environment/commercial department. This would include items such as:

- Insulating housing
- Solar panel installation on affordable housing
- Air source and ground source heat pump installations
- EV charging point installation
- Transport facilities

The Cost of Living Crisis is affecting everyone at present. We will work with food banks/community groups to gain feedback on how best to support our residents in South Norfolk.

The Horizon building.

The Conservative administrations at South Norfolk and Broadland Councils pressed ahead and bought the Horizon Building on Broadland Business Park, at a cost of £7.1million [plus cost of alterations]. As this is now a done deal, Liberal Democrats will look at ways to bring Council services closer to all the residents of South Norfolk, now that their District Council's office is located in Broadland. The current small satellite office in Diss is inadequate to meet this need.

A Liberal Democrat Council will:

Create community hubs to assist residents with access to Council services. Wherever possible these facilities will be combined with offices provided by the County Council and Town or Parish Councils.

Prioritising the Environment: Locally and Globally

Over the past four years, we have seen the negative effects of climate change on South Norfolk. Floods and wildfires have destroyed people's homes, with droughts affecting our agricultural industry and the natural environment. Conservatives have persistently failed to take climate change seriously despite constant Liberal Democrats' lobbying.

We pledge that we will declare a Climate Emergency as a priority. We will build on the limited work the Council has done so far to investigate how the Council may achieve Net Zero carbon emissions in the shortest reasonable timeframe. Our objective would be to make the Council itself carbon-neutral by 2030 and work with others to make the whole District carbon-neutral by 2040.

Our partners at Broadland Council have already taken steps to replace their diesel refuse collection vehicles with electrically powered alternatives. They also collect food waste separately, and have kerbside collection of small electrical items and batteries. If Broadland can do this, so can we.

There are also serious concerns about the use of pylons to be sited across South Norfolk, potentially blighting our countryside and properties through the district.

A Liberal Democrat Council will:

1. Declare a Climate Emergency, along with clear actions in response to it.
2. Work collaboratively with others towards being carbon neutral by 2040, or earlier.
3. Encourage and support the use of renewable energy sources.
4. Ensure, as far as possible under current legislation, that all new developments in the District include solar energy generation with battery storage, air or ground sourced heating and charging points for electric vehicles.
5. Look to improve home insulation and positively encourage ecologically sustainable house building.
6. Have a dedicated officer coordinating applications for grants and subsidies, from all national offers.
7. Oppose energy pylons which will blight our countryside and lobby for a better solution.
8. Support the use of solar farms on poor quality land to boost energy supply.
9. Support new onshore and offshore wind farms in appropriate locations, where there is direct benefit to local residents and support from local communities.
10. Change Council refuse trucks to electric wherever practical, or more sustainable alternatives.
11. Improve recycling rates, encourage less use of plastics in general.
12. Support sustainable waste management methods.
13. Robustly combat fly tipping and environmental crime by providing a proper level of staffing.
14. Work with County Council to bring in better and sustainable bus travel particularly for rural areas, with increased support for Community Transport schemes.
15. Lobby to improve disabled access to transport.
16. Work with partners at the County Council to highlight better travel routes that should be a priority for walking and cycling.
17. Work with Norfolk County Council to introduce appropriate speed limits on all roads in the District.
18. Properly enforce parking restrictions particularly near schools.
19. Preserve biodiversity wherever possible and protect the landscape nature of our District.
20. Encourage more community gardens and orchards with the participation of residents and volunteers. Actively consider offering financial support via parish councils to run these.

Delivering Equality, Providing Care and Improving Housing

Your Liberal Democrat councillors will work to support all residents and particularly those most affected by the cost of living crisis and the pandemic. We believe Conservative policies such as cuts to Universal Credit, and underfunding of Social Care, the NHS and social housing, are reducing the life chances of many people and making it hard for individuals to access the support services they need. Through carefully targeted expenditure, the Liberal Democrats will work to bring services closer to people helping to ensure everyone gets the services they need. Investing in services for the young can improve lives and increase the safety and wellbeing of our local communities.

Support services for the young, elderly and vulnerable

A Liberal Democrat Council will:

1. Work more closely with partners to support residents.
2. Develop play, sport and art facilities for all residents but particularly young people.
3. Support employment /training/business/education opportunities including local apprentice schemes.
4. Expand Help Hub and make sure this is accessible to all.
5. Create a Councillor Champion for mental health.
6. Introduce mobile dentistry.
7. Make Older People's Forum more localised.
8. Liaise with officers and outside bodies to ensure the wellbeing of council staff and councillors.
9. Develop and launch an anti-poverty strategy targeted on reducing the number of children and families living in poverty and improving opportunities for all.
10. Set up a Youth Council and work with this council to develop a Youth Strategy for South Norfolk.
11. Encourage and support local food banks, community fridges and community shops, working alongside supermarkets to reduce all food waste.
12. Encourage and promote energy saving policies - including subsidising insulation and energy conservation - for those least able to pay or on Universal Credit.

Sustainable housing growth and reducing homelessness.

A Liberal Democrat Council will:

1. Stop the poorly planned growth of towns and villages done currently under an agreement with other councils, where our voice is effectively shut out.
2. Provide affordable housing for local people and stop developers claiming they can reduce such provision because they are not making enough profit.
3. Work with developers, including Big Sky, to ensure a good supply of accessible housing for those who need it.
4. Work with developers and owners to encourage building of new Care Homes, and the upgrading and expansion of existing facilities. Offers of grants for specific projects.
5. Support the campaign to reduce the number of second homes by increasing Council Tax on these properties.
6. Set up a dedicated homeless shelter run by the Council which helps rehabilitate and train occupants to improve their prospects. Work with partners to increase support for homelessness and those at risk of homelessness.
7. Work to bring all current Social Housing in the District under the control of the Council and restore the right to build new Social Housing.
8. Hold developers fully accountable for any breaking of Sec 106 Agreements.
9. Expand the role of Big Sky to bring public land back into the hands of the Council including open spaces and playparks.

A Thriving Economy and Growing Prosperity

South Norfolk enjoys a strong economy with low levels of unemployment relative to the rest of the UK and to much of Norfolk. However, the pandemic and the energy crisis have led to major challenges for many businesses. The Liberal Democrat plan for business is designed to revitalise our town centres, to grow our green economy, to encourage world class research and development at the Hethel Innovation Centre and the Norwich Research Park, and encourage and support new businesses and working from home.

A Liberal Democrat Council will:

1. Encourage recycling industries.
2. Press for essential infrastructure to support the health service, education and transport.
3. Generate inward investment through support for the Hethel Innovation Centre.
4. Support small and start up business with mentoring and financial help, if needed.
5. Improve broadband provision throughout the district.
6. Increase free parking in our market towns and reduce the burden on towns that have funded free parking themselves.
7. Lobby for the local retention of business rates.
8. Support our local market towns and high streets.

Recognising the impact of increasing traffic through the District, we support the completion of essential road improvements including the Long Stratton By-pass, the Norwich Western Link and further improvements to the A47.

In addition, we will aim to help our local businesses to work with our closest export markets in Europe, helping ensure residents' jobs and futures.