

Your town, our town

Liberal Democrat ideas
for a better Cheltenham



Spring 2008

This document is in three parts. We begin with our principles and how they differ from those of Labour and the Conservatives. Then we translate these principles into a vision for the town. This means looking at the challenges that the town faces and the policies we think are needed to address them.

In compiling these ideas we acknowledge that it is not only the Borough Council that is responsible for what happens to the town and its citizens. There are various institutions that we need to influence to achieve things or to stop undesirable things happening.

The elected bodies range from Parish Councils up to the European Parliament. We will work at all levels - at the Parish level, with the County, with the South West Region and Parliament as well as Europe to realise the vision that we have for the town. Liberal Democrats are active at all levels in these elected bodies.

However, policies are shaped by more than just these formal elected bodies. The Liberal Democrats are active as ordinary citizens all the year round in a wide range of pressure groups, community organisations and voluntary sector bodies as well as more formal partnerships. Activity in these organisations informs us and helps turn our principles into clearer policies. It is at the level of principle that our politics begins. It is this that makes us different from the others and is the basis for the relationship of trust that we wish to build with the electorate of Cheltenham.

Foreword

Part one

What do liberal democrats believe in?

- ✓ **Personal liberalism.** We believe in the rights of the individual and in freedom of choice. As long as their choices do not actively hurt others, individuals should be able to choose their own lifestyles, politics, sexuality, religion etc. without discrimination or government intrusion into their private lives.
- ✓ **Political liberalism.** We believe that power should be devolved to the lowest level at which it can be exercised effectively. It should be held in bodies which are, wherever possible, accountable to the electorate.
- ✓ **Social liberalism.** We believe that liberty can only be enjoyed when people have basic needs met, and therefore it is the duty of the state to ensure that all citizens have freedom from poverty and crime and access to education and healthcare.
- ✓ **Economic liberalism.** Subject to the above conditions being met, we believe in free and fair trade with the market regulated by laws that are fair to everyone. We believe that over-regulated state planning is counter productive and bureaucratic.
- ✓ **Sustainable liberalism.** We believe that meeting the needs of the present generation should not come at the expense of future generations. This applies especially to the protection of the environment and the use of natural resources.

What differentiates the Liberal Democrats from the Conservatives?

Philosophy

The Conservatives typically put economic efficiency, economic growth and tax cuts ahead of social justice, investment in the public service and community cohesion. In addition, Conservatives are still mainly social conservatives: suspicious of immigrants, asylum seekers, benefit claimants, and people living non-traditional lifestyles such as single parents and people in same-sex relationships.

Policy

The Conservatives opposed devolution to Scotland and Wales and still oppose fair votes for Westminster, meaningful environmental taxes and constructive engagement in the European Union. By contrast, they supported the war in Iraq, support ID cards in principle, and

The balance on the council

There are 20 wards in Cheltenham with 2 Councillors a ward. Of the 40 Councillors:

17 are Conservatives

17 are Liberal Democrats

5 are People Against Bureaucracy (who supported the Tories in forming their current 'minority' administration)

1 Labour

Cheltenham's MP, Martin Horwood, is a Liberal Democrat. One of the South West Region Members of the European Parliament that represents Cheltenham, Graham Watson, is Leader of the 150 strong Liberal Group in the European Parliament.

have flip-flopped to support university tuition fees after fighting the last general election opposed to them.

What differentiates the Liberal Democrats from Labour?

Philosophy

The Labour Government is authoritarian, paternalistic and has continued the Conservative policy of centralising power. This is manifested in their plethora of central targets in the public services, the continuing emaciation of local government, and even in the way that the present government completely ignores the views of its own party members and party conference.

Policy

Labour have introduced or proposed a number of fundamentally illiberal policies, including the increase in the period someone can be detained without trial, the repatriation of genuine asylum seekers back to regimes like that of Mugabe in Zimbabwe and juryless trials in serious fraud cases. Labour's lack of commitment to international law and international collaboration has been graphically illustrated by the war in Iraq, and more subtly manifests itself in their lack of enthusiasm for proper engagement in the European Community. This Labour Government has created huge cynicism in the way it has distorted and misled people with the result that politics as a whole has become discredited.

Considering these things and applying them to some of the pressing issues of the moment, there are 7 themes that we believe are priorities for Cheltenham:

1. Environment sustainability

We are serious about environmental sustainability which, at its heart, is concerned with living within the capacity of the earth and tackling the production of polluting greenhouse gases and which is embodied in our policy of 'localism'. We look at the recent flooding as a wake-up call for the need to be serious about what's happening to the environment and believe that we need to be better prepared for such events in future, and that to do this we need to strengthen communities and make them more resilient and self reliant. We are concerned that much of what is currently claimed to be 'green' is nothing of the kind. We will work towards ensuring that national plans to produce carbon neutral development are realised and intensify our efforts to improve recycling so less rubbish is dumped in landfill sites. We will reduce reliance on carbon based sources of energy such as oil and gas and promote sustainable non-polluting

sources of energy. We will use the planning system in a way that encourages real sustainability and seek to decrease overall carbon dioxide production in the town. We are genuinely very pleased that there is now a developing political consensus around these issues, but we need to go further, faster.

2. Equal opportunities

We will be serious about equal opportunities and social justice for all of Cheltenham's Citizens. We will consider the impact of our policies on specific groups as well as areas. We want communities to be strong and cohesive: prejudice is divisive.

3. Regeneration

We will continue to regenerate the most deprived communities and groups and increase our support to the community regeneration areas in the town which we initiated - both as part of our commitment to social justice, and because the long term effects of failing to do this will be disastrous for the town and be the basis for social conflict. We will oppose the ongoing attempts to undermine this work.

4. Efficiency

We will constantly try and improve our efficiency and reduce our costs by using new technology and also take into account what the impact of such technology is on our citizens and our workforce.

5. Partnership

We will work in partnership with community and voluntary sector organisations who we acknowledge have a vast experience over a wide range of issues, and with colleagues from other statutory bodies such as the police and health services. We will continue to support the Cheltenham Strategic Partnership which coordinates the statutory and voluntary sectors in the town and its Local Area Agreements. We will support genuine voluntary bodies - and not seek to play them off against one another by making them compete with each other for Council funding. Partnership working depends on trust and co-operation, not conflict.

6. Young people

We will do more for young people. We have pioneered Community Resource Centres in those parts of town where deprivation is most concentrated and where opportunities for people, especially young people, are most limited. As part of our policy of localism we will take this model and develop it in cooperation with local people in other areas in a phased way paying particular attention to the needs of

young people and in ways that promote voluntary sector activity.

7. Help for pensioners

We will help pensioners more. We know the Council tax is the biggest item of expenditure for many pensioners and nationally are committed to introducing a local tax system which takes into account the ability of people to pay. Until this is introduced we will urge and enable people to claim Council Tax relief which is paid for out of national funding - not by other Cheltenham Council Tax payers. There should be no shame attached to claiming Council Tax relief - it is an unfair tax.

What kind of council do we want?

We want a council that exercises leadership but which has a light touch and a low profile - that is seen as an ally rather than one that tries to tell everyone what to do. Politicians who blow their own trumpets don't inspire confidence. To do this we outline below what we believe are the main challenges facing the town and what we think needs to be done to address them.

Council tax facts

To raise a million pounds a year through Council tax for Cheltenham Borough Council would cost local Council tax payers about 45p a week each and would mean a Council Tax increase of about 14%.

A 1% Council tax increase for Cheltenham raises about £73,000 for the Borough Council.

The Council tax bill sent out by the Borough Council includes the bill for County and Police Services. The vast majority of the amount charged (over 86%) goes to the County and the Police.

What are the challenges that the town faces?

Cheltenham is a very successful town - but it faces challenges of both a global and local nature. More than ever before these challenges are interconnected.

Modern life is dependent on energy. The use of relatively cheap fossil fuels has hugely increased the productive capacity and population of the planet. It is now clear that not only is this inheritance running out, but that the Carbon Dioxide produced is making the decisive contribution to the change in the world's climate. As a result it is likely that traditional carbon-based sources of energy - particularly gas and oil - are going to become scarcer and increase in price. There is a consensus now that we must reduce our use and reliance on such sources of energy and this will have far wider repercussions than have yet been appreciated. It will affect every aspect of our lives.

The increasingly integrated nature of the world economy has meant that many industries have relocated to countries where labour is cheap in order to survive and be more profitable. While the British economy has been very successful as a specialised part of a world economy, many of those traditionally involved in unskilled blue-collar work have become almost surplus to requirements and live an existence away from mainstream economic activity because they lack the skills needed for employment in today's world. The unemployed, sick, disabled and old are increasingly concentrated in the poorest parts of town, with elevated levels of relative deprivation. This is happening throughout the developed world. In an affluent town like Cheltenham the polarisation is, in some ways, even more pronounced than it is elsewhere.

How do we reconcile the global and local problems that we face so that we tackle them in a coherent and consistent way? We believe that in order to do this we need to pursue a policy of 'localism'. This means that we put the emphasis on nurturing stronger self-reliant communities; that we develop local non-polluting sources of energy and reduce our reliance on private transport and on the distances we travel in our day to day lives; that we waste less and recycle more; that we use local produce whenever we can.

The policy of localism therefore has environmental and social benefits. It will seek to identify community service centres where shops and other service providers are located within half a miles walking distance of every urban household. We will do this through the planning system and we will look to long term public investment to provide supporting infrastructure - with the provision of buildings such as Community Resource Centres at their heart that

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address the needs of local communities and that are run by local people.

The role of local government

It is fashionable to dismiss Local Government as irrelevant. It is not. The responses to the global and local challenges we face lie at all levels of Government - from international to local. In the end, it is what individuals do, how they behave, that is the critical factor. Local Government has a role in influencing this.

In Gloucestershire we currently have a 'two-tier' local government system. The County Council is responsible for roads and parking, education, and social services, and the Borough is responsible for housing, leisure and entertainment, rubbish collection, parks and planning.

We're tight against our boundaries, but the government says we need more housing

The town is filling up, with an escalation in the cost of property that means that buying a home is beyond the reach of increasing numbers of people. Average House Prices in the town are way above the national average. In the last election the protection of the Green Belt was an important issue that was taken up by the Liberal Democrats who gave a pledge to oppose development on it. This pledge will be kept, but it does create a problem.

How do we provide sufficient housing at affordable costs for the skilled workforce that the Government says the town needs when land is so precious and expensive?

This issue is rightly a sensitive one, and while there are areas that can be built on and should be identified as such, the real issue is about Cheltenham's identity and how best to retain and enhance its historically acquired economic, social, cultural and environmental quality. This is precisely what makes it a desirable place to live in and is the basis of its success.

An urban sprawl will ruin it. The proposals contained in the Regional Spatial Strategy of 12,500 more houses in the next 20 years - almost twice the rate of growth we have witnessed in the last 20 years - could result in this. The so-called 'urban extension' to the North West of the town must be opposed. Cheltenham, Bishops Cleeve and Gloucester mustn't be

Cheltenham facts

CHELTENHAM POPULATION - **111,656** (mid 2006)

Ages:

Under 5 : 5,666

Under 18: 23,296

over 65: 19,141

There are 62,858 people in employment in the town in full and part time jobs. (2007 figures)

Average House Price (Oct - Dec) 1998 - **£90,669**

Average House Price (April - June) 2003 - **£180,043.**

Average House Price (Jan - March) 2007 - **£243,378.**

National Average House Price May 2007 - **£178,423**

(source Land Registry)

Average individual earnings in Cheltenham at 2005 were £23,970 against an England and Wales average of £23,854 (source Maiden).

There are 51,287 households in the town (Jan 2007). The Regional Spatial Strategy proposes a further 12,500 houses in the Cheltenham Area up to 2026. This represents an increase in size of nearly a quarter and is twice the rate of expansion that the town has experienced in the last 20 years

allowed to merge into one long urban sprawl. Some well-managed open space must be kept between them.

Survey after survey shows that Cheltenham's people value its urban environment and its easy proximity to one of the most pleasant variations of scenery in Britain. Once urban areas grow not much bigger than Cheltenham is now, peripheral centres develop which can initiate the process of fragmentation. Towns can then begin to pull themselves apart and transform themselves into urban conglomerates and lose their identity and sense of place.

The future of Cheltenham has therefore to be seen in the context of the plan for the county as a whole.

We will oppose Cheltenham and Gloucester joining together as one continuous built-up area whilst acknowledging that the main focus for development in the county over the next two decades will have to be in the Severn Vale.

If this is to happen, then the key challenge is how to maintain the identity of existing settlements by well planned buffers of open space and by being careful about what development is allowed.

Crucial to this is an effective system of transport links in the Severn Vale to connect settlements together. This will not be achieved by putting another lane in the dual carriageway between Gloucester and Cheltenham (unless it is an interim measure reserved for buses and taxis at peak periods), but by installing a proper passenger transport system from Quedgely in the south of Gloucester to Bishops Cleeve in the north that feeds into the existing main line stations.

This will also reduce vehicle trips and therefore emissions. It has to be done coherently. The plan to build a new railway station at Parkway without a light rail connection feeding into it will merely disrupt what exists, clog up the roads and be actually counter-productive.

We will oppose an increase in development until the plans for a proper transport system are developed and financed.

We will also review local planning guidelines so that wholesale "backland" development in gardens is subject to controls that make sure the character and amenity of the existing town is protected. We do not accept that we either have to build on the green belt or on every piece of urban green space. We believe every piece of development has to be carefully considered in order to protect what we have.

We won't ruin the quality of the town in satisfying the demands of the Regional Spatial Strategy.

We will therefore:

- Oppose development on the Green Belt
- Insist that the case for growth is proven before development sites are identified
- Demand that public transport infrastructure is given consideration before houses are built and not afterwards
- Fight to maintain the environmental quality of the town by implementing proper policies towards sustainable development.

Preserving the quality of the town with more careful development and the better use of space and better transport are all interconnected. Our approach will protect the quality of life and cut greenhouse gas emissions.

A tale of two Cheltenham

A significant group of people lack the skills to enable them to find work in today's economy. They lack purchasing power as a result of this and are increasingly excluded from mainstream society and concentrated in social housing and the cheap private rented sector. They become more dependent on the government and the council to support their needs. People in this situation become subject to a cycle of interconnected deprivation that condemns them and their children to impoverishment - economic, cultural, educational and social. Poor skills lead to unemployment or low wages, which in turn is connected to poor housing and diet, low expectations, poor health and so on.

At the same time, the nature of the new economy and communications has meant that people are much more mobile than they have ever been. Communities are becoming more and more fragmented and less cohesive as a result of this. Many people no longer know their neighbours, and feel little in common with their locality. High property prices in the town are increasingly forcing people to look for accommodation elsewhere or to live with friends and relatives. At one time it was the affluent that commuted into the town. Increasingly, it is those who work in the town but cannot afford to live in it that are obliged to live elsewhere - particularly in Gloucester, the Forest of Dean and Tewkesbury, where prices are cheaper.

Many of those buying property in Cheltenham are relatively wealthy strangers to the town. At the same time, those who are poor or disadvantaged are housed in council or housing association property. The effect of this is to concentrate deprivation in particular areas of the town.

It is this that leads to despair and is the breeding ground for crime and disorder. A Lib Dem council will work to tackle the problems that people face in acquiring the skills they need so that they can earn a reasonable living, and not be dependent on state benefits.

It was a Liberal Democrat council that established the highly successful community regeneration areas. We will continue to support them.

How can we do these things?

Most people overestimate the power and capacity of individual organisations to change things on their own. There are some things such as collecting rubbish that the Borough Council has the direct power and responsibility to do and is good at. There are other things - such as crime and disorder - that it must work with other agencies to tackle. Partnership working around key priorities with a range of bodies is crucial, and one of the responsibilities of the Borough Council is to coordinate this co-operation.

It is these bodies, together, that distribute scarce resources according to decided priorities, but without the support and agreement of the council their efforts will not be as effective as they could be. Agreement on a vision for the town is therefore paramount - and this is why we have outlined ours.

Policy areas

Housing and homelessness

Pressure on housing has made Cheltenham one of the most expensive parts of the country to live in. The town is fast running out of space and the result is that even relatively well paid young people cannot afford to buy. People growing up in Cheltenham frequently have to stay with parents or relocate out of town. If Cheltenham cannot house those with the skills its economy needs to ensure its ongoing success then businesses may move. In the short term traffic congestion will get worse as people are forced to live elsewhere and commute into work.

In the 1991 District Plan it was estimated that between 1991 and 2011 some 7350 additional dwellings would be needed in the town. This figure has almost been achieved and it is estimated that 345 dwellings will need to be permitted and completed between April 2006 and mid 2011 to reach this target. This requirement will be replaced by targets imposed through the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy which, in its current draft, envisages some 12,500 additional dwellings be built between 2006 and 2026. There are moves to even increase this figure!! Indeed the latest revision suggests that the Cheltenham area will have a housing target of 13,800 imposed on it. This represents a rate of growth more than double that we have seen in the last 20 years.

We are concerned at these figures - they represent an increase in the size of the town of 25% in less than 20 years! We believe the impact on the town could be disastrous. We are not convinced by the projections. We believe that the provision of such a reserve of housing will merely seek to attract more people to the town rather than satisfying the needs of local people.

This is what the government wants to happen. It has identified Cheltenham as a growth area, and is suggesting building on the Green Belt. The new labour needed for this growth will be provided by in-migration from within the UK - and they will need housing. We are concerned about the impact of this on the quality of the environment and those who already live here. If it happens, it must be carefully planned and managed.

The Conservatives say they also oppose such Green Belt Development - but they refused to support Liberal Democrats in opposing development on the Green Belt at Grovefield Way adjacent to the Reddings. Only the then Conservative mayor, whose constituency it was in, supported the Liberal Democrats. This was in closed Council

Part three

session. Now the Inspector has allowed the appeal these facts can be made public.

Worse. The Conservative administration, along with Gloucester, Tewkesbury and the County, agreed to submit an 'expression of interest' for Government funding for 'infrastructure' to build a new settlement the size of Tewkesbury town between Swindon Village and Uckington. This implies to Government that the Council accepts this so called 'Urban extension'. We do not.

We believe that we need more social housing and that local people should take priority in accessing this.

We cannot leave appropriate housing provision entirely to the market. There is a huge amount of property on sale in Cheltenham - but it is out of the reach of those who most need a home. We need to provide low cost starter homes and apartments which are affordable for first-time buyers. We will therefore take steps to promote the greatest possible amount of affordable and social housing and strive to make it properly integrated into general development. We will support moves to increase the amount of social housing. The current standard is a quota of 40% social housing of all development on residential new build planning applications of more than 15 units.

We will introduce a new quota below this so that one third of all developments up to 15 in any residential development should be social housing, with 40% for 16 and beyond. Where a development will only consist of one or two houses, developers will have to pay a commuted sum of money to enable a proportionate building of social housing elsewhere. The reason for these changes is that too many developers are currently submitting applications for 14 units or less to avoid providing social housing. A stricter standard will resolve this.

We need more housing for rent, and the Council has a role to play in the provision of this both by building more council houses and as a planning authority using planning gain legislation. We will not favour the further development of expansive tracts of social housing, and will seek to have a mix of different housing types in the future.

Now that Cheltenham Borough Homes has almost successfully completed the Decent Homes programme, we will support moves for it to build social housing on Council land with Housing Corporation Grant, which it can now do having achieved top Government status for an Arms Length Management Company. We will also encourage the Housing Corporation to pursue a policy that allows CBH to manage the property of the other 25 Housing Association landlords

in the town in order to maximise efficiency and tackle the social issues that CBH has a track record in pioneering.

We will increase the private sector housing budget to provide grant-aid for conversions of properties to rent at reasonable levels, and where properties are very sub-standard encourage demolition and re-building even in the Conservation Area, so long as they retain the character of the area, and so long as there are no features of significant architectural or historic interest that need to be preserved.

At the moment there are parts of the town that are blighted by anti-social behaviour. We will establish intensively managed hostels subject to curfew to house those who are persistent offenders, or cause persistent nuisances. Support will be offered to help these people modify their behaviour. If they refuse to reform, they will be evicted. If they continue to cause a nuisance they will become the target of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders and be banned from the whole of the town.

We will continue to support the community regeneration areas and Partnerships, Parish Council's and the Neighbourhood Projects and see these initiatives at the heart of the long-term improvement of these parts of town. As the built fabric of the town improves the emphasis is shifting towards tackling social issues. Many of the problems that we have are not 'bricks and mortar issues' - but 'people' issues. These issues need to be tackled by all the responsible agencies - the police, social services, housing and health and so on, working together.

Access to advice so that people know their rights and responsibilities is an important part of 'empowering' people. The law is a complete mystery to most of us. We will work with those organisations, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, that have supported the people of Cheltenham for over 50 years with information and independent and confidential advice about their legal rights and we oppose any plans that will decimate them. We opposed from the start the Conservative administrations plans to cut the number of advice giving agencies in the town. As a result Cheltenham Housing Aid - the local arm of Shelter - will probably close, and Cheltenham Community Support Centre, previously Cheltenham Centre for Unemployed People, will close. This is a disaster for Cheltenham's most vulnerable people.

Affordable housing

There are **4773 council properties** in Cheltenham (Jan 2007) and 1700 or so Housing Association Properties which together house over one fifth of the town's population.

The Council created an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) called Cheltenham Borough Homes in 2003, which is a limited company with tenant representation on the Board of Directors. It has recently been inspected by the Government and judged to be a top flight ALMO, and vested with additional powers including the right to borrow money to build new homes.

The Council still owns the homes and has representation on the board - but the company is responsible for managing the portfolio - collecting rents, doing repairs etc. The government has encouraged this and allocated substantial extra funding with which to improve council housing. The Council still maintains the waiting list, and nominates people to become tenants of Cheltenham Borough Homes Ltd.

There are some **3481 people** on the waiting list in Cheltenham (June 2007) - but only about 500 a year are housed.

Transport and roads

The County Council is responsible for the maintenance and improvement of roads and pavements. At one time CBC had its own Highways division that looked after the roads in Cheltenham as the agent of the County, but the County Council took the responsibility back 'in house' in 2006. There has subsequently been a substantial transfer of resources away from urban areas to maintain rural roads. Traffic jams caused by last-minute road repairs in the town have become longer as the roads have deteriorated to the point that some of them are dangerous for cars, motorcyclists and cyclists.

There are 227 miles of road in the town - 180,000 vehicles travel in and out of it every day. (source CBC)

The last Liberal Democrat administration opposed the ending of the agency agreement with the Council. The Conservatives supported it. The decline in the service is their fault - but it is too late to do anything about it apart from fighting for more resources to come to Cheltenham. We will do this.

For years the Council had one of the best Concessionary Travel Systems for the elderly in the country. Now free local travel has been introduced by the Government for the over 60s and is to be extended nationwide. This is very good for older people and for Cheltenham, because it means that fewer older people will use their cars and therefore there will be less traffic congestion and pollution, and less demand for parking. We will support this initiative to make it as effective as it can be and will argue for the necessary funding from central Government to do it.

Given that the price of energy is certain to increase it will be more expensive to travel by car and there will be more demand for good quality bus and light rail services. The policy of localism will mean that people will travel less and use public transport more. We need to encourage investment in the public transport infrastructure to promote this.

But we will oppose plans for Parkway station!! We genuinely cannot understand the logic behind Parkway and why the County Council supports it. Neither is the Government persuaded and has indicated that a much better case must be made for it if funding is to be made available. We need a light rail system as mentioned earlier as part of a comprehensive approach to development in Severn Vale. Building a brand new station at Parkway is putting the cart before the horse!

We will continue a policy of reducing traffic through the town centre and of promoting clean, safe and efficient public transport. Buses, taxis and the disabled will be the only ones

excluded from restrictions. Deliveries will be encouraged outside of normal working hours. To reduce the amount of traffic entering the town on the A40 from the Golden Valley we will support the construction of southerly access/northerly exit from the M5 at junction 10 (Piffs Elm), and associated works to ensure safety on Tewkesbury Road. We will support acceptable extensions to the Park and Ride system - particularly to the west of the town at Uckington.

Crime and disorder

Crime affects the lives of far too many people in our town and it is one of the top priorities of the Liberal Democrats to ensure that the police, the Council and local communities work effectively together to tackle it.

The best defence against anti-social behaviour and crime is a healthy and vibrant community, in which people know each other and watch out for each other. We therefore believe that strengthening and developing communities is crucial in lowering crime and disorder. We welcome the decision by the Police to focus on neighbourhood policing. It strengthens our policy of 'localism'.

Those who commit crime and anti-social behaviour must be properly punished, and made to face up to the damage they have caused. We would advocate a broader use of Anti Social Behaviour Orders, controlled and co-ordinated by the Community Safety Unit. In exceptional circumstances, repeat offenders should be targeted and their exclusion from the whole of the town considered.

Much of the crime and anti-social behaviour in the town is committed by young people. We will support crime diversion schemes which stop young offenders becoming criminals in the first instance. We will encourage further co-operation between young people's organisations, particularly the County Council Youth and Community Service, the Council and Cheltenham's Youth Council to address the needs and aspirations of young people.

We will ensure a high priority is given to securing a safe town centre, especially at night, through high profile policing and intensive use of CCTV.

We will support anti-littering and anti-vandalism initiatives, establish a firmly policed town centre anti-litter zone and encourage the police to crack down on speeding vehicles and joy-riding

Policing in Cheltenham

There are 5 Police Stations in the town and 444 employees in the Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Police Division made up of 291 Police Officers; 50 Police Staff; 47 Police Community Support Officers; 44 Special Constables and 12 Custody Detention Officers. (Police: April 2007).

Theft & Handling was the single largest crime type, accounting for 40% of all recorded crime. The second largest was Criminal Damage, which accounted for 20.6% and Violence against the Person was the third largest band, with 14.5% of offences.

In all 14,143 crimes were committed in the year 2003/2004. (Source: Crime and Disorder Audit 2004 - Cheltenham Crime and Disorder Partnership).

We will encourage the town's park rangers, town centre wardens, taxi marshals and traffic wardens to work closely together with police community support officers to tackle low-level anti-social behaviour and vandalism so that the police can concentrate on serious crime and public disorder.

Health

Cheltenham town motto is “Salubritas et Eruditio” - Health and Education. Under the law, the Borough Council has a role in the scrutiny of the provision of health services in Cheltenham and works closely with the County Council to pursue this. Liberal Democrats and our MP played an important role in organising the opposition to the closure of the Battledown children's ward and are committed to fighting to maintain maternity services at Cheltenham. The protection of health facilities that serve the people of Cheltenham is of prime importance, and plans for change must include proper consultation with the public and their political representatives.

The health of the community should be looked at in a wider context than just the provision of health facilities - such as doctors, hospitals, dentists, opticians and so on, which are the responsibility of the National Health Service. It is necessary to make sure that health care is complemented with a strategy for healthy living that puts emphasis on public health issues such as clean water, fit housing and wholesome food, and the provision of facilities for exercise and leisure, such as swimming pools, leisure facilities and parks.

We will work with the Health Authority and the Primary Care Trust to coordinate the delivery of those services that have an impact on health. The Borough Council is the enforcing authority for environmental health and housing functions, which includes health and safety in certain premises, pollution and food and water. It also includes leisure facilities which have a health, (including a mental health), dimension. The parks, the leisure centre and the museum and art gallery are part of this function. We will promote athletics and swimming and review current facilities to assess whether the facilities provided by the borough in the playing fields it owns can be improved and enhanced, and we will seek to protect overall playing field provision. We will make sure that repairs to the leisure centre following the substantial damage done to it during the recent floods is completed as soon as possible and incorporate flood defence works.

Health facts

CHELTENHAM has:

- ✓ 14 Medical Practices with 91 Doctors;
- ✓ 18 Dental surgeries with 52 Dentists (with 2 more on the way)
- ✓ 23 Ophthalmic Surgeries with 54 Opticians;
- ✓ 25 Pharmacies with 97 Pharmacists.

A total of 270,620 outpatients were also dealt with by other Health facilities, including the 493 bed General Hospital and Delancey Hospitals; Linton House; St Paul's Medical Centre and Hesters Way Healthy Living Centre.

One of the initiatives that has proved popular in the town is the creation of Healthy Living Centres in Whaddon and at Hesters Way Community Resource Centre and there will be similar facilities in the Springbank Community Resource Centre currently being built. These co-ordinate a range of health care facilities and include ante-natal classes, exercise initiatives, anti-smoking courses and so on as well as other more orthodox medical facilities. We will work with the Primary Care Trust which is responsible for purchasing local health services to promote more of these.

We will continue to enforce housing fitness standards particularly in houses in multiple occupation and try to bring empty property back into use. We will continue to promote the insulation of property in order to tackle fuel poverty and reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

We will continue to promote cycling and walking particularly on health grounds as well as a way of reducing dependence on motor transport and reducing carbon dioxide emissions. We will make sure that there are dog free areas and play areas for young children. We will reinforce our dog and park warden services to protect our open spaces from litter and dog mess, and take appropriate steps to reduce other nuisances, such as concentrations of seagulls.

We will promote the use of allotments for growing food and for recreation, and support and extend the Farmers Market. We will oppose any development on allotment land unless it is clearly in the public interest to do so and only if alternative allotments are provided.

The festival culture and quality environment

The festival culture is central to the quality of life offered by the town. It is important to its economy as a tourist attraction. It is a cultural attraction for its citizens. Cheltenham's festivals are a showcase for the town and we will continue to support them and the newly created Cheltenham Festival Company. They are vital to the success of the town and are profitable financially for the town only because they are good culturally. Many people choose to live in the town because of its festival culture, and there is a strong relationship between its festival culture and educational establishments.

We will work to create the area around St Mary's Church and the existing library/museum as the cultural 'quarter' of the town.

Cheltenham festivals

Cheltenham Festival Company organises 6 festivals a year:

Folk Festival - February

Jazz Festival - April

Science Festival - June

Music and Fringe Festival - July

Literature Festival - October

In addition there is the annual Cricket festival. Along with the Race meetings, including the National Hunt Festival, these events attract about half a million people to Cheltenham a year, and directly generate an estimated £34million in income for the town.

We will advocate 'twinning partnerships' with rural towns in Gloucestershire and with Gloucester City as part of an increased tourist attraction.

Environment

The environment, particularly the town centre environment, is under constant pressure and is crucial in maintaining Cheltenham's quality image which is the basis of its prosperity. We will protect and enhance this heritage, particularly the Conservation Areas. We will preserve the appearance of the 1500 acres of Central Conservation Area and all the other conservation areas. We will encourage owners of high profile terraces of properties to co-operate in improving their appearance and work to secure funding to help in this.

We will promote and protect greens spaces as outlined in the Council's Green Spaces strategy and develop policies that help mitigate the effects of climate change such as allowing open land wherever possible so that water can naturally drain away and cultivating trees and plants that can live in the changing conditions.

Cheltenham is known as the Garden Town of England and has won more awards in the annual Britain in Bloom competition than any other town in the country. We will promote the town's parks and gardens, and ensure that the ornamental gardens, such as the Long Gardens, are protected as an admired attraction. Vandalism of these gardens and associated property will be vigorously combated.

We will clean the town centre area more regularly, and make sure that cleansing plant and equipment is improved and brought up to date. We will increase the number of dustbins in the town centre. It's hard to prosecute people for dropping litter when there are so few litter bins around.

Preventing and reducing waste before it occurs is the most efficient way to minimise it - and any waste that remains should be reused if possible. Only then should recycling and similar techniques be used, and so we will strive for a 'waste minimisation' strategy. This will include promoting composting and encouraging people to reduce waste as much as possible - and then recycle as much of the remainder as can be done.

We will keep the Recycling Centre at the depot open and intensify our efforts to promote recycling in the Borough as a whole. During the last Liberal Democrat administration we

The town covers 11,500 acres of which 1,661 acres are in Conservation Areas. Some 2,540 buildings are nationally listed and 450 more are on a local list of architectural interest. These have specific protection in the local plan.

There are 10 major parks and 16 playing fields in the town, and a further 475 pieces of green space owned or controlled by Public Bodies.

increased re-cycling threefold from 9% to almost 27% of household waste. This had only improved to 30% in March 2007. We will explore how we can extend recycling facilities to include plastics and cardboard and welcome the introduction of these facilities that we budgeted for when we previously ran the Council.

We have supported and will continue to support the Civic Pride initiative. The impressive improvement works at Montpellier Gardens are the first stage of this, but later stages will involve redevelopment of some major town centre sites owned by the Council. We will ensure that whatever building is done is appropriate for the needs of the town, well designed and has the minimum carbon footprint possible.

Education

Most schools in Cheltenham are good schools. We believe that good schools should be nurtured and weaker schools given the resources so that they can develop and improve. We do not believe that closing Pates Grammar School will improve the results at Pittville. We do believe that more resources should be targeted at weaker schools and for that reason support the amalgamation of St. Benedicts and Kingsmead into an academy. We believe that no child from the local area who wishes to go there should be denied access simply on the grounds of faith or the religious practices of their parents. The academy must serve the interests of the local community. Religious belief shouldn't be a pre-condition for a child's education.

In September 2006 there were 13,139 pupils in 39 local authority schools including 6 Secondary Schools and 3 Special Schools in Cheltenham as well as 4 private secondary schools and associated pre-schools. (source LEA 2007)

In addition there are 8304 students (5,952 f/t & 2,352 p/t) + 1,360 staff (671 f/t & 689 p/t) at Gloucestershire University in Cheltenham (source Glos. University 2007), and approaching 19,000 students at GlosCat (3,024 f/t and 18,753 p/t)(Source GlosCat website 2007 - figures include students at Gloucester and Cheltenham))

There have been many debates about secondary education because it is the gateway to future life chances, but to reduce education to just an issue of social mobility, as some have done, is a mistake. It is important to the individual in terms of their own development, to the country in terms of developing our economy, society and culture, and in producing the excellence that our top Universities lead the world in.

For this reason we start where we are at, rather than attempting to recreate the educational system. In addition to the six state funded secondary schools, we have four private secondary schools in Cheltenham. They are part of the town. We support the partnership work that goes on between schools and will encourage more of it - particularly between the independent and the state schools. Cheltenham Ladies' College is a very fine school with superb academic results and we believe the relationship they have with the wider community is good for everyone and ought to be applauded.

The days when money alone could buy a future are gone. Today's young people have to be academically committed to get to the best universities. We want a system that gives as much opportunity as possible - and it starts with very young children, and families and developing motivation and commitment in children.

We welcome Sure Start and the children's centres in the most deprived parts of the town and we want to see children nurtured to take advantage of all the options that exist and that can develop them. This is why we opposed the closure of Monkscroft Community school. On the one hand we are told that Cheltenham has to expand and build more houses. On the other hand we are closing excellent junior schools because the numbers of pupils are falling. This doesn't make sense.

Economic development

We will not artificially separate economic issues from social issues, because wealth creation is at the heart of addressing social issues and must be done in a co-ordinated and planned way. Economic Development and Education are also connected. We need to educate and train people, not only for the sake of their own self development, but so that they can also improve business and increase productivity. We are fortunate to have excellent facilities at GlosCat and at Gloucestershire University, which is improving all the time.

We will continue to promote and protect a diversified and balanced economy, and work with employers to identify the skills they need in their workforce in order to increase productivity and training opportunities.

We will continue the close working relationship we have developed with Gloucestershire County Council, the Regional Development Agency, Gloucestershire First, Business Link (now Chargrove Business Services) and the Learning Skills Council to try and continually improve the economic attraction of the town. We will endeavour to improve Cheltenham as a retail destination by focussing, in particular, on the town centre improvements detailed earlier but will encourage people to use Public Transport as visitors.

We will continue to protect land for employment purposes and use powers available to us to assemble plots of land to achieve this end. We will continue to support business and employment opportunities around Gloucestershire Airport at Staverton which the Council jointly owns with Gloucester City, and promote it primarily as a high-tech employment

Some 62,858 people are employed full and part time in the town. Growth has outstripped the national average over the last 10 years.

There are an estimated 6 million day visitors a year, mainly shoppers, who visit the town from beyond its borders.

There are 486 retail premises, 519 restaurants, cafes and bars and 1819 commercial premises in the town, and in all some 3,742 business premises.

opportunity for the whole of Gloucestershire rather than as a housing opportunity. However, we will not agree to the expansion of Staverton.

We will promote Cheltenham as a Quality Town located in a Quality County and we will publish an updated economic model on an annual basis in order to monitor the health of the local economy and hold an annual 'state of the economy' seminar to which businesses will be invited to give their views. We need to understand the nature of the local economy, and the threats and opportunities that face it.

Governance

We believe the decision making process should be made more open and transparent. We believe this will strengthen it. We argued successfully that no chair of Overview and Scrutiny should come from the same party that forms the Cabinet, where there was a single party cabinet, and that the process for 'calling in' Cabinet decisions should be made easier by Overview and Scrutiny Committees, but we feel more needs to be done.

We will therefore promote the following constitutional changes:

- At the moment the Cabinet can implement policies even if the majority of the Council are opposed to them. We will reassert the supremacy of full Council with a condition being that any issue can be referred to full Council by majority vote from one of the Council's three Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- We feel that to deny the supremacy of full Council is an abuse of democracy - and that this is a big flaw in the Cabinet system that has encouraged bad governance and poor decision making. We will seek cross party support for the principal that the Cabinet will not override decisions taken at full Council despite Cabinet having the legal right to do so, unless there are powerful reasons for doing so.
- The Constitution should be a respected and primary source of Governance. At the moment it is a political yo-yo because it can be changed by a simple majority vote. The Conservatives have indicated they will reverse the changes indicated above should they ever achieve a majority capable of doing so. We pledge that we will review the Constitution and change it so that it can only be amended by a two thirds majority in future to safeguard these important democratic rights.

Council decisions

At the moment there are 40 Councillors. They elect a Leader who then appoints a Cabinet which has executive authority to take most decisions on behalf of the Council within an agreed annual budget.

There are three Overview and Scrutiny Committees responsible for examining the work of the Council and the Cabinet. If the process of decision making has been defective then an Overview and Scrutiny Committee can 'call a decision in' and examine it further.

The executive should then reconsider it in light of the observations of Overview and Scrutiny. Although the membership of these committees are proportionately based on political parties, they are supposed to examine things from a non-party view point, and be detached from the Cabinet.

Conclusion

These are our ideas and views. They unfold from our basic beliefs and our experience of living and working in the town, and governing it, for many years. If you have ideas to contribute and they fit in with our views then we will pursue them if they can be practically implemented. We acknowledge that we haven't got a monopoly on good ideas.

But compare our manifesto with those of the other groups, and decide, having considered it, which party you most believe in to run the town.

Part four