

Cherwell District Council 2016 Election Manifesto

The Green Party is a modern political party with nearly 140 councillors in principal authorities in the UK establishing how to get the best out of the environment through better ways of thinking about the economy, how society can work fairly and how to live in tune with the world around us.

Our local membership is growing fast and nationally exceeds that of UKIP and the LibDems. We know that continuous economic growth is not possible in a world of finite resources. We all have to adapt to this new awareness.

Our policies for a sustainable society have been developed and costed over many years. We know they work, but more than that, we know they are needed.

We stand for greater equality, sustainability and the right of all of us to a full and healthy life which includes decentralising government as much as possible and empowering people far more in making decisions at the local level.

The District Council elections give all of us the opportunity to start to make real changes in Cherwell for progress at the local level.

Please look at our specific policies for Cherwell.

Housing and Planning

Housing is at crisis point in Cherwell, with thousands living in temporary or poor-quality housing.

Cherwell's outdated Housing Needs Survey (2008) indicates 74% of our homeless cannot afford to buy properties in Cherwell.

There is a shortfall of affordable housing of 500 homes per annum – even before dealing with the backlog that includes families living in unsuitable accommodation.

Banburians have the lowest average wages in the county.

The number of households on the Cherwell District's housing list has doubled from 2000 in 1997 to 4000 in 2012.

To tackle these problems, the Green Party would:

- Work with building societies, credit unions, pension funds, etc. to enable local councils to borrow money to invest in housing.
- Increase the proportion of affordable housing in new developments to enable us to build the type of housing for which there is the greatest need.
- We seek to increase the proportion of affordable to 40% and to develop a realistic definition of affordable.
- Work with housing associations and developers to increase the proportion of one- and two-bedroom flats and houses being built.
- Encourage schemes for part ownership and self-build.
- Reduce the number of empty houses through empty property use orders.
- Focus on identifying brown field sites in town centres for affordable and social housing, where facilities are within walking distance for those without cars.
- We would release some land currently reserved for business use for the development of affordable green homes.

To keep the environmental impact of housing to a minimum, the Green Party would also:

- Accelerate programmes for insulating our older housing stock, and enhance the insulation requirement for all new housing. The resulting energy efficiency would greatly benefit occupants.
- Create a link in the planning process between new housing and local employment in Banbury and Bicester to create a sustainable economy.
- Use the planning process to rigorously analyse the traffic impact of new housing schemes, and to promote schemes to encourage walking, cycling and the use of public transport.
- Encourage village communities to produce their own neighbourhood plans in order to safeguard important community spaces from development.
- Offer council help to communities setting up community land trusts.
- Not allow the use of school playing fields for housing.
- Introduce the licensing of all private landlords' properties to ensure suitable housing is provided for their tenants.

The Green Party welcomes the holistic environmental planning (for allotments, workshops, amenity land, etc.) behind Bicester Eco Town, and would hope to extend a similarly imaginative use of land to further developments.

Protecting Public Services

Locally and nationally, public services have been under attack like never before. In Oxfordshire and Cherwell we have seen massive cuts and are facing even more by the Conservative-controlled County and District Councils plus deep cuts in the local Health Service and many other public bodies, such as the Police and Fire Services. Without the support of the opposition parties, Green Councillors have been putting forward alternative budgets including a 72p per week council tax rise to protect Adult and Children's Services, libraries and youth centres and to protect the elderly and vulnerable from savage social services cuts.

Most public services are the responsibility of the County Council and central government but Cherwell District Council has a role to play in dealing with community safety, health and safety, leisure centres, sports and arts activities and supporting the voluntary sector and most importantly the provision of social housing.

Green priorities include:

- Continuing to oppose the drift towards the privatisation of both Oxfordshire's health and education services.
- The government's policy of encouraging the creation of Academy schools must be stopped.
- Stopping further council house sell-offs and building more green, affordable homes.
- Resisting the "bedroom tax".
- Improving support for the most vulnerable individuals and families in the district.
- Supporting the development of the new Community Hospital in Bicester and protecting the Horton General Hospital's services.
- Improving sports facilities using the Olympic Legacy fund.
- Continuing with recycling to achieve the district, county, national and European targets.

Energy and Sustainability

Climate change through the use of fossil fuels and dwindling finite resources are global problems we all face.

There is an urgent need to be smarter consumers.

The uses of renewable and sustainable resources are ways to achieve this.

It is the Green Party policy to eliminate fuel poverty and ensure a continuity of supply by investing in energy efficiency and a diversity of renewable energy industries.

This will provide the basis for a sustainable economy. We will:

- Provide funding and a co-ordinated programme for a comprehensive energy survey of all local properties to identify measures to help improve energy efficiency across the region.
- Promote small-scale renewable energy generation and supply through micro generation such as solar panels or thermal pumps.
- To oppose all plans for fracking in the local area as it is destructive both to the environment and local communities for a small short-term gain.
- Extend recycling targets for household waste to 80% and develop policies to reduce domestic and commercial waste to eliminate the need for landfill sites.
- Promote local markets and community bulk buying in food and energy to help create a more sustainable and self-reliant local community that reduces the current inefficiencies in marketing, storage and distribution whilst supporting local business, farmers and community enterprises.
- Commit the District Council to establish best practice and adopt policies whereby all direct and contracted services maximise their use of renewable, sustainable and local resources.
- All Council approved suppliers should pay the living wage.

Public Transport

We believe in improving public transport by creating new jobs, cutting pollution and improving health and helping people to rely far less on using cars.

Our priorities for the Cherwell District are to:

- Expand bus services – including evening buses that currently finish at teatime, especially between Banbury and Oxford.
- Make easier transfers between bus, train, bike and car, including extending bus routes to the railway stations to make bus–train connections practical.
- Encourage the adoption of hybrid and more environmentally friendly vehicles.
- Create cycle lanes separate from powered vehicles.
- Create in Banbury a bridge exclusively for pedestrians and cyclists over the railway, canal and river.
- We fully support Cherwell District Council's opposition to the government's planned High Speed Rail 2.

Safer Streets

The most obvious way in which we want to make our streets safer is by regulating traffic to give better protection for all road users including pedestrians and cyclists. However, there are also other ways such as crime reduction.

To make road use safer, we would aim to:

- Build more cycle paths and footpaths.
- Introduce more 50 mph speed limits.
- Introduce more 20 mph speed limits in built-up areas, including villages.
- Use chicanes and other measures at the edges of villages to slow traffic down.
- Make sure wherever possible that busy village streets have pavements.
- Make safe routes for children to get to school by walking or cycling.
- Make sure that pavements are easily manageable for pushchairs and wheelchairs, e.g. by having enough access points where the kerb is dropped (especially outside doctors' surgeries, etc.).
- Make residential streets wherever possible into 'home zones', i.e. use chicanes, speed humps, red brick surfacing, etc., to slow traffic down so that children on foot or on bikes in the street are safe.
- Implement Oxfordshire County Council's policy of 'People before Cars' in the design of new residential developments, where the order of priority for 'people movement' in residential areas should be: 1) walking, 2) cycling, 3) public transport, 4) private car usage.

We would also work to reduce street crime. We would:

- Work with local communities on ways of reducing crime in specific areas.
- Work on initiatives to involve young people in positive projects and activity.
- Work with the police on neighbourhood policing.

Although these issues can be seen separately, they are all related to each other through the planning process:

With major developments, we would want plans to result in mixed use where shops, housing and businesses are closely located and connected by pavements and cycleways.

Climate Change

The Green Party will ensure that a local response to the international challenge of climate change is a priority in local decision making, by:

- Ensuring that air quality and other environmental factors are reliably and regularly measured and that the findings inform policy.
- Setting ambitious local targets to reduce the emissions which cause climate change.
- Setting targets for the whole region, not just the activities of the District Council, and robust strategies to meet them.
- Working to ensure that new and refurbished buildings are built or maintained to high environmental standards.
- Working with both households and businesses to find ways to reduce climate change emissions.
- Developing realistic and affordable alternatives to car use, including working to ensure good public transport and cycling and walking links for new developments in the area.
- Working with social organisations, schools and individuals to inspire people to take community and personal action to reduce their own climate-changing emissions.

Making the Council Work for You

Greens believe that decisions affecting citizens should be taken at the lowest level of government.

Also politicians need to be made more frequently accountable and not just at election times. The low election turnout in some wards suggests an unhealthy future for democracy.

A Green Council will:

- Arrange listening events in Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington where Councillors and senior officers can hear residents' and business concerns. These meetings should take place in July at the start of the budget making process in the lighter evenings. They should be broadcast live over the Internet. These would be in addition to the statutory consultation arrangements later in the financial year.

- Along with their County colleagues, review the possibility of devolving part of their budget to Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington Town Councils and the larger Parish Councils.
- This will make it easier to fine tune services to local needs whilst retaining the expertise, economies of scale and maintenance of standards assured by directly employed district staff. For example, Town and Parish Councils should decide the location and facilities to be offered in public conveniences.
- The District Council should encourage more Parish and Town Council local polls where difficult decisions have to be made.
- Establish a Cherwell Youth Parliament, chaired in rotation by the leaders of the political parties on the Council. Spokespersons from other organisations, e.g. the County, the NHS, state funded educational institutions outside County Council control, Housing Associations and privatised utilities, could be invited to answer, dependent upon the matters under discussion. The intention would be to give young people a real voice.
- Establish at Cabinet level a Councillor responsible for Rural Affairs to ensure that the voices of people living and working in the countryside and enjoying its amenities are clearly heard and the Council does everything to enhance their lives.
- Make available online the full content of planning and licensing applications. This is to avoid costly and inconvenient journeys to Bodicote House. Applicants for planning and licensing decisions could pay for this. Comments from those affected by these applications should be facilitated on the same page as the application.
- Ensure that the new process of individual registration of voters in 2015 will not result in citizens losing their vote. Furthermore the Council should ensure that EU citizens living in the district have every opportunity to vote in relevant elections.
- Re-jig the system of allowances and expenses to Councillors to ensure that those on low or average incomes and those with caring responsibilities are not prevented from standing for election because of cost. The allowances should never be a supplementary form of income to some relatively wealthy pensioners or those with substantial private means.
- Find an academic partner and seek sponsorship to conduct a survey to find out what prevents greater citizen engagement with the District Council and what changes need to be made to make local politics more relevant to people's lives.
- The Green Party would not apply a political whip to its elected members.

North Oxfordshire Greens say that it would be wrong to be too prescriptive by listing more than what we say above. We trust our citizens and we believe our approach will result in many good things being put forward, which are beyond the imagination of any party manifesto.