

Cherwell District Council 2018 Election Manifesto

North Oxfordshire Green Party

Introduction

The Green Party is a modern political party with over 160 local councillors in England and Wales 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. 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 Cherwell District Council elections give all of us the opportunity to start to make changes in Cherwell for real progress on the above issues at the local level. By voting for a Green Party candidate you're voting for:

- Decent housing
 - A planning process that works in the interest of local people before profit.
 - Homes that local people can afford to live in.
 - A council that works to orientate housing policy around minimising the negative environmental impacts of housing.
- Better public services
 - The expansion of local bus services and improved links between buses and trains.
 - The defence of a public NHS in Cherwell which is free at the point of use.
 - The removal of private involvement in the local education system.
- A greener Cherwell
 - Reliable and regular monitoring of air quality and the development of appropriate policies from the data gathered.
 - The promotion and support of small scale renewable energy projects in Cherwell.
 - Ambitious local targets to reduce artificially generated emissions contributing to climate change and a council that supports local homes and businesses to help meet these targets.
- A council that works for you
 - More local referendums where difficult decisions need to be made.
 - Additional meetings for residents to share their thoughts/concerns with councillors.
 - A councillor free to vote in your interests. The North Oxfordshire Green Party will not apply a political whip to your councillor.
- Safer streets
 - The introduction of more 50 and 20 mph speed limits.
 - The creation of more cyclepaths and footpaths
 - A 'people movement' priority of 1) Walking 2) Cycling 3) Public Transport 4) Cars

Please read on for an overview of why we need the policies we're proposing and the policies themselves in greater detail.



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Our Policies

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 Cherwell District Council's housing list has doubled from 2000 in 1997 to 4000 in 2012.

Green Party councillors 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.
- Seek to increase the proportion of affordable housing made available in each new development 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 brownfield 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, Green Party councillors 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 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 as well as deep cuts targeted at the local NHS and many other public bodies, such as the police and fire services. Without the support of other opposition parties, Green Party councillors have been

consistently putting forward alternative budgets at the county council level including a 50p per week council tax rise to protect Adult and Children's Services, libraries, youth centres and the elderly and vulnerable from draconian 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, supporting the voluntary sector and most importantly the provision of social housing.

Green Party councillors would:

- Continue to oppose the drift towards the privatisation of both Oxfordshire's health and education services.
- Oppose the government's policy of encouraging the creation of academy schools.
- Stop further council house sell-offs and build more green, affordable homes.
- Resist the "bedroom tax".
- Work to improve support for the most vulnerable individuals and families in the district.
- Defend and protect NHS services provided by the districts hospitals and doctors surgeries from privatisation, cuts or closure.
- Improving sports facilities using the Olympic Legacy fund.
- Continue with recycling efforts to meet 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 coordinated 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

The Green Party believes in providing public transport for the good of the people. The Green Party intends to invest in and improve public transport in order to create new jobs, cut pollution, improve public health and reduce reliance on private cars.

Green councillors will:

- Work to reinstate and expand bus services.
- 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.
- Continue Cherwell District Council's opposition to High Speed Rail 2 (HS2).

Safer Streets

The Green Party will work to improve the safety of Cherwell's streets by improving protection for pedestrians and cyclists as well as drivers of cars and motorbikes. We will also work to improve the safety of our streets by introducing measures to reduce street crime.

To make our streets safer, Green Party councillors will:

- Build more cycle paths and footpaths.
- Introduce more 50 mph speed limits.
- Introduce more 20 mph speed limits in urban 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.
- Ensure children have safe routes to use to walk or cycle to school..
- 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
- 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.

Green councillors will:

- Ensure that air quality and other environmental factors are reliably and regularly measured and that the findings inform policy.
- Set ambitious local targets to reduce the emissions which cause climate change.
- Set targets for the whole region, not just the activities of the District Council, and robust strategies to meet them.
- Work 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.
- Develop realistic and affordable alternatives to car use, including working to ensure good public transport, cycling and walking links are introduced for new developments in the area.
- Work 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

The Green Party believes that decisions should be taken at the lowest level of government possible in order to give citizens the maximum control possible over their own lives. Also politicians need to be made more frequently accountable and not just at election times. The Green Party is also concerned that low turnout figures at previous local elections indicate an unhealthy future for democracy.

To make the council work in the interests of the people, Green Party councillors 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.
- Encourage Parish and Town Councils to hold more local referendums 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 possible 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.
- Reform 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.

Final Words

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.

If you have a question about the contents of this manifesto, please feel free to contact us:

- Website: nogp.org.uk/contact
- Facebook: fb.me/northoxfordshiregreenparty
- Twitter: @NorthOxonGreens