

Liberal Democrats



Dacorum Liberal Democrats

Manifesto 2023

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1 Introduction

We are fortunate to live in one of the most attractive parts of Hertfordshire or for that matter in England.

The area of Borough of Dacorum includes around two thirds of land designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) or Green Belt. We consider this puts a natural limit on areas that can be built on without damaging the natural environment, our residents' Quality of Life and enjoyment of the landscapes.

The Climate Emergency and the nation's commitment to net Zero by 2050 means we do not have the luxury of putting off what will be difficult decisions if our grand children are to inherit a good place to live.

To achieve this we'll need to be open to new ways of living, eating, heating our homes and travelling.

Residents tell us that it is important to build more homes for local people that are truly affordable in areas close to work, schools and other services. We agree – so we will press government to allow us to build more social housing.

For those who live in our older properties we will invest in ways to cut heating costs yet make your homes warmer.

Your Liberal Democrat Councillors know that residents face unprecedented pressures. Finding ways to make savings in our heating bills will pay off many times over in the future, but more important is that we drastically reduce the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. We will prioritise investment in insulation measures especially as the Borough owns around 10,000 homes with many that need to be updated to modern insulation standards.

Our Vision is that with the right mix of policies, we will build communities that enjoy a green environment on their doorsteps, with more well paid local employment meaning a better Quality of Life with less need for lengthy commuting

I ask that you do not judge all politicians by the recent examples of bad behaviour and governance by members of the governing party at Westminster. We Liberal Democrats stand as Councillors to represent our communities. As we are part of those communities, believe in good governance and acting with integrity, and seek to serve you and not our paymasters. I am privileged to lead a great team and ask that you vote Liberal Democrat in May.

Ron Tindall, Liberal Democrat Group Leader.

Email - rongtindall@aol.com
March 2023

2 A New Approach to Housing and Infrastructure Planning

The Right houses, in the Right places, at the Right prices.

A Liberal Democrat council will create a long-term Plan for the Borough based on housing needs and the capacity of local infrastructure.

- Housing numbers should be based on the local needs of each town or community, and take account of local constraints of infrastructure and public services like schools and health care.
- We will prioritise the use of brownfield land for development, to reduce the impact on green spaces.
- We need homes at a price our residents including young people can afford.
- We will also build different types of homes based on local needs.

Liberal Democrats priorities for the next four years

Prioritising local Needs

- We will produce a local plan based on the needs of local residents.
- We will prioritise homes at a price local people can afford.
- We will also work with neighbouring councils to ensure that development brings local employment opportunities, infrastructure and transport links.
- We will ensure that developers contribute towards the infrastructure needed; roads, health centres, schools and open spaces.

Ensuring we build quality green homes

- We will establish design codes with strong bias on homes that meet the needs of residents.
- We will develop measures to improve the insulation of existing housing.
- We will require new homes to have passive provision for or actually use the latest green technology for heating and the proper climate change mitigation required for the future.
- We will introduce a programme to bring Borough owned properties up to an agreed housing standard.

Making homes affordable

- Developers will be required to meet their obligation to provide affordable housing.
- A Liberal Democrat Council will deliver significant numbers of social rent homes as well as shared ownership on all council-led developments.
- We will find new ways of prioritising the Council's resources and assets to provide homes for those that need them most.

Planning for the future

- We need to take make it easier to choose to walk, cycle or use a bus to reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality.
- We will introduce new, and improve existing, walking and cycle routes.
- New Housing developments must be laid out to accommodate bus routes either now or in the future.

3 Environment, Roads and Parking

3.1 Road safety & Parking Congestion

We shall be proactive in working with Residents, Local businesses and County Highways to improve our environment.

We will look to address speeding issues, and limit commercial vehicles driving through and parking in residential streets.

We will look again at locations where there is a need for Control Parking Zones (CPZ) in residential areas to limit parking to residents only.

Air Quality

The health and wellbeing of our residents is important, and air quality is something we can address.

We will introduce green screens along busy roads and round schools
Look to reduce idling near schools and support “walk the last bit” parking schemes.

We will work with Herts Highways to introduce schemes that encourage safe alternatives to car travel; more cycle paths and options for the safe use of Electric Scooters;

Encourage affordable bike hire schemes to address commuter generated congestion and parking issues.

Our Priorities

- More Green Flag Parks.
- Work with schools to help reduce air pollution in the playground.
- Work with the County Council and cycle groups to develop more cycle friendly routes.

3.2 Electric Vehicles (EVs)

Local Government at all levels has failed to support the development of EVs by lack of provision of EV charging points. Many areas of the Borough only have on street parking. Residents are unable to charge their cars from their domestic power supply. While in the long-term private companies may take over this service, we need to facilitate the transition to EVs, by ensuring there is a basic provision of charging points across the Borough.

Our aims are:

- To work with all stakeholders to ensure residential areas that have, on street parking, have access to public EV charging in their neighbourhoods.
- To accelerate the provision of high-capacity Electric Vehicle [EV] charging points available to the public across the Borough.
- To endeavour to provide charging points to all, at a reasonable price.
- To allow free or cheaper parking when electric vehicles are charging in Council car parks.

4 Clean Safe & Really Green in Our Borough – Services

Recycling

Following the decision of China and other nations around the world to stop importing plastic waste, we shall investigate our re-cycling options to ensure we adopt the best methods rather than dump our rubbish on other countries.

- We want to be among the best Districts for recycling, so we will increase practical help to individuals and businesses to re-cycle more.
- To capture more street-litter we shall review street-recycling bin capacity.
- We shall review the present Council operations to ensure that residents and businesses receive services of the highest quality.
- The Borough has gradually become more unkempt as austerity cuts have deepened. We will seek to reverse this trend and bring back a sense of pride among residents to our towns and countryside.
- Green bin collection will be extended to be all year round, At busy times this will be every 2 to 3 weeks. At less busy times every 3 to 4 weeks.

Warden/Ranger Services

We will review the present warden services to include environmental duties dealing with litter, dog mess and other anti-social behaviours on our streets.

- We will develop and support community groups to aid warden services.
- Look to introducing a Ranger Service across the Borough to deal with small issues in the most cost-effective and swift manner, like cutting back hedges, erasing graffiti and minor repairs.
- Fly tipping has become a scourge on our countryside: we will give enforcement more resources.
- We will work with the local police and Neighbourhood Watch to improve safety on our streets and in our homes.
- We will consider whether a system of lockable gates in alleys in urban areas would improve both safety and quality of life for local residents.

5 Health

Hospital policy

Over many years the political leadership in Dacorum has failed to constructively represent the Borough's interest in health provision. This has resulted in running down the local hospital service in Hemel Hempstead and the closure of other step-down facilities in other parts of the Borough leading to centralising all hospital facilities outside the Borough.

We will use the Council resources to campaign for:

- Better health care provision for all parts of the Borough.
- A new hospital provision where it would be easily accessible by all forms of transport from across the Borough.
- Sufficient GPs to meet demand, particularly as new houses are built.
- Fighting against any attempt by the Government to privatise the NHS.

6 Being real and involved with communities

Liberal Democrat Councillors are renowned for working for their communities with prompt replies to phone calls, emails and letters. We will introduce a Councillor-Resident charter as a guide to good practice for all Councillors.

It's important that the Council is seen to act for all our residents whether they live in the rural hamlets or towns and villages.

Our communities tell us that the Council is remote and doesn't respond to issues that matter to residents. As a result, there is a need to establish ways to work in a timely manner with residents wherever they live across the Borough.

In Hemel we need new forums (to be modelled on those established in Three Rivers): while in Berkhamsted, Tring, and other parishes, we will strengthen existing forums at Town and Parish Council.

Stronger Communities – local neighbourhoods

As within a village, a strong community has residents who enjoy a sense of identity with their locality; we will foster this more widely – especially in our urban areas.

The Voluntary Sector

We are fortunate to have such a wonderful voluntary and community sector, with so many residents willing to give up their community. The voluntary and community sector deserves the Council's support to empower their capacity to provide more and more services.

Our priorities for the next four years are:-

- Create and strengthen a climate of Partnership working with our voluntary sector.
- Introduce a 'Dacorum Deal' setting out what support our voluntary and community partners can expect from the Council.
- Help community groups by allowing access to working spaces, meeting rooms and facilities in Council properties and community centres.
- Create and promote a register of local community, residential, business and voluntary groups that will be consulted as a matter of right on local interest and service provision.
- Revise and simplify the project commissioning and grant process.
- We will commit to a zero-tolerance policy on fly-tipping

7 Arts, Culture, Sport and Leisure

If Lockdown taught us anything, it's the importance of space around us. Green space, uplifting space, social space, fun space and sport space.

We will ensure that the green spaces in our communities are enhanced and developed. Both for new developments and to revive old ones.

Post Lockdown antisocial behaviour is an increasing problem. We will consult on measures to tackle this and will support proposals to expand local youth facilities.

As the makeup of our town centres change, we will look to develop a commercially sustainable central arts, theatre and music venue, for the whole of Dacorum.

Dacorum has many good sports and leisure facilities. It also has a thriving voluntary sector. However, these services lack co-ordination and support. We will seek to coordinate them to serve the community more widely.

We will look at how we can make better use of all community buildings across the Borough, making them available to all residents for all community activities.

Improved governance and expertise

We will expand the Council's capability to manage outsourced contracts. Including setting up a Supervisory Board for the Leisure Management Contract.

- We will reach out to all sports and activity groups, whether they are Council run, voluntary or commercially run, to bring them into the decision-making process of the Council.
- Every local group will be invited to take part in a Dacorum Sports Council, which will adopt co-operation agreements between complementary groups, in order to maximise efficiency and capacity.
- We will produce a credible Sports & Leisure Strategy based on an audit of facilities, partners and a comprehensive consultation with all these stakeholders.
- We will ensure that our approach meets the needs of all ability groups.

As the Borough grows, our strategy will link development of leisure capacity in our communities to housing and population growth.

8 Getting the Finances Right

We live in challenging economic times. While some events have been beyond the Governments control many of these have been worsened by their actions or inactions.

We will prioritise looking after the individual and small businesses in the Borough over large corporations.

Current staff are under considerable pressure and vacancies have a negative effect on Council Staff, while the Covid pandemic has caused considerable problems for the council, where staff are off sick or need to isolate so cannot do their normal job.

Liberal Democrat priorities for the next four years;

- We shall survey the current staffing arrangements to ensure that we have the right number of staff in the right places to implement Liberal Democrat policies while ensuring that staff have a healthy life/work balance.
- We shall look to our ability to borrow money and spend reserves, where this can be invested in the Borough, to generate a reliable long term revenue stream that can be reinvested in services.
- We shall work with businesses across the Borough and in the new development areas to aid growth and mitigate the worse effects of an unfair business rate system.
- We shall review all vanity projects to ensure that money spent on them represents good value for money.
- Central Government likes to micro manage, which local projects are allowed to proceed. Only allowing them to go ahead when it suits them. We will set up a dedicated team of Officers to apply for Government grants and seek out new opportunities to raise money by other means.

Shovel ready projects, ready to seek funding.

- We will set up a Hardship Fund to help residents who have no other means of support. We will also seek partnerships with charities who offer support in the Borough.
- A large number of Council services are provided by contractors. We will enhance the Council's contract management capability to hold contractors to account for the delivery of services.
- Where we are able, we shall seek to reverse cuts and improve services. This will be tough in the present economic climate but needs to be done.

9 A Democratic and Listening Council

Liberal Democrats have always believed that local people should be involved in decisions affecting their communities and that services should be run for the benefit of residents.

- We believe that Councillors should be available to their communities and will arrange informal opportunities for residents and Councillors to meet and discuss local issues.
- We will look at the different ways residents interact with the Council and ensure that the processes are as simple, friendly and responsive as possible.
- We will introduce processes that ensure issues don't disappear into black holes but are addressed and responded to in a timely manner.
- For the difficult-to-solve issues, such as parking, we will introduce local forums to make recommendations to improve the quality of life for the whole community.
- We will aim to improve working with other stakeholders so that the Council always works for the good of the community.
- Where a resident contacts the Council about a matter which is the responsibility of another Council or authority. The Council will put the resident in direct contact with the officials in the authority responsible.

10 Working with others

No man is an island, no council works in isolation from other levels of Government, whether it be Hertfordshire County Council or Central Government.

Some of the things described here are the direct responsibility of Dacorum Council. Others are shared across different levels of Government, while some are outside the control of the Council, but they are interdependent on the responsibility of the Council.

To achieve the aims set out in our Manifesto and in the delivery of all Council services we will co-operate with other authorities and stakeholders.

- Where we have power, we will act.
- We will always co-operate to get the best services overall.
- Where we do not have power, we will seek to persuade and co-operate.
- Where co-operation is lacking, we will campaign to change their minds.