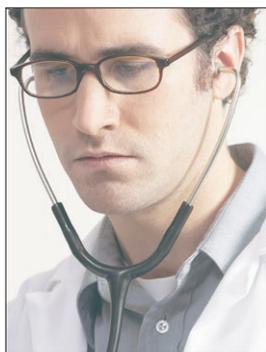


Health

Putting patients first

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Pensions

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Equipping children for life

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Liberal Democrat Pre-manifesto



FREEDOM FAIRNESS TRUST

**TEN REASONS
TO VOTE
LIBERAL DEMOCRAT**

- Put patients first** Free doctors and nurses from Whitehall meddling.
- Free personal care when you need it** No one forced to sell their home to pay for care.
- No tuition fees, no top-up fees** University affordable for every student.
- More investment in children's early years** Spend the £1 billion Child Trust Fund when it matters most.
- 10,000 more police on the streets** Cutting crime and the fear of crime.
- £25 more on the pension every week at 75** A million pensioners off means-testing.
- Free off-peak local transport** for all pensioners and disabled people.
- Axe the Council Tax** Local Income Tax is both fair and affordable.
- We should not have gone to war in Iraq** It's time to restore trust in the government.
- Take the environment seriously** Cut pollution, cut congestion, and boost renewable energy.



INSIDE: The Liberal Democrat priorities for government. Contact us: www.libdems.org.uk

OUR POLICIES ARE FULLY COSTED



Building on success

“ I am sometimes asked 'You Liberal Democrats are doing very well, but what do you really stand for?' With the publication of this pre-manifesto document - we have an easily understood top ten list of priorities. They underscore our broader vision.

We Liberal Democrats prize freedom of the individual, underpinned by a safety net for the vulnerable, in our society. We are defenders of the public services, free at the point of use. We are internationalist in outlook - pro UN, pro Commonwealth and pro Europe. Our Liberal background makes us wary of an over-mighty state and dedicated to civil liberties. We are enthusiasts for the green agenda.

As Labour and the Conservatives continue their phoney war over choice, we make it clear that our number one priority is quality local public services: a good school and hospital near you.

Our mantra is 'fairer, simpler taxes'. Our top rate of tax for the wealthiest 1% of taxpayers on income earned over £100,000 will get rid of student tuition fees, introduce free personal care for the elderly and help smooth the transition from the unfair council tax to a local income tax based on ability to pay.

By making tough choices over prioritising government spending and genuinely supporting localism, we can use taxes more efficiently for frontline care while cutting back on micromanagement from the centre and excessive bureaucracy.

Our new 'Tough Liberalism' agenda and plans for more police on the streets are raising awareness of our determination to deal with anti-social behaviour and widespread concerns about crime rates and fear of crime.

Our determination to take the environment seriously - cutting pollution, congestion and boosting renewable energy - sets us apart from both Labour and the Conservatives.

The next General Election isn't far away. We have a great opportunity. Using this pre-manifesto, we must build on our recent successes.”

Charles Kennedy

Applicability:

This document contains Federal Liberal Democrat policy priorities, except in areas where policy of the Scottish and Welsh Liberal Democrats and the Northern Ireland Local Party applies. This means that in many major areas, such as health and education, the policies only apply to England. Separate manifestos set out our agenda for Scotland and Wales. Figures included are presented on a UK-wide basis.

ISBN1851877274

Our policies are fully costed...

Liberal Democrats have always been open and honest about how we will pay for our policies. At the last three general elections, we set out full details of how much our policies would cost and how we would pay for them - none of the other parties did this. Since Labour have now put up taxes, we don't need to raise taxes for most of our proposals - we have detailed plans to fund most of them by savings in current budgets. That will involve switching around £5 billion from lower priority programmes and unnecessary bureaucracy to our priorities.

Key proposals include:

- **Cutting subsidies.** We will abolish the DTI; reduce spending by DEFRA; adopt competitive procurement in defence; and abolish many local area initiatives.
- **Scrapping the Chancellor's Child Trust Fund and using the money for children's early years education and support.**
The Child Trust Fund will cost £1.25 billion over a Parliament. A much better way to help the next generation is to invest in children's early years.
- **Not introducing ID cards.** Hundreds of millions can be saved by not introducing ID cards. That money would, we believe, be better spent on increasing the number of police on our streets and providing them with the latest technology to make them more efficient.

However, we also want to create a fairer distribution of the costs of paying for public services, because it cannot be right that - as at present - people on low incomes or in old age have to pay so much more of their income in taxes and Government charges than those who are much better off.

Three of our key policies are about creating a fairer distribution of the costs of public services:

- **Scrapping tuition and top-up fees for students.**
Cost: £1.2 billion.
- **Introducing free personal care for elderly and disabled people.**
Cost: up to £1.4 billion.
- **Keeping down the rate of local taxes.**
Cost: £1.7bn.

These three items add up to £4.3 billion and we will pay for them by one tax change, introducing a new 50% rate on very high individual income in so far as it exceeds £100,000 a year.

TEN REASONS TO VOTE LIBERAL DEMOCRAT

Our top ten campaigning issues are highlighted in this document for your easy reference.

Our pledge for Green Action:

Green Action

Take the environment seriously - cut pollution, cut congestion, and boost renewable energy.

Climate change is a major threat to our planet - and urgent action is needed. There are three simple steps that will make a huge difference. First, Liberal Democrats will press other nations to ratify the Kyoto Protocol - and lead by example by ensuring that Britain achieves its targets well before the deadline. Second, funded by congestion charging where appropriate, we will tackle traffic pollution by getting more people onto public transport. Third, we will ensure that much more of the UK's electricity comes from safe and renewable sources.

Putting patients first

Put patients first - free doctors and nurses from Whitehall meddling.

Doctors and nurses are highly trained and dedicated health professionals. Ministers and civil servants are not - yet they continually bully your local hospital, doctors, and nurses. Liberal Democrats would hack away the red tape, abolish absurd targets, and free our frustrated doctors and nurses from demoralising meddling - so they can put patients first. Millions would be saved and be re-directed to patients and those who care for them.

Tackle the root causes of ill health.

The Health Service should help people keep healthy as well as cure them when they fall ill. Liberal Democrats will recruit more doctors and nurses than there are now. We will cut the money wasted in government NHS bureaucracy and recruit more community nurses; develop more preventive medicine and screening; and promote education about issues like smoking, healthy eating, and the need for physical activity. We will also reduce the social causes of ill health such as poverty, pollution and poor housing.

Don't let Whitehall red tape run the local hospital.

Bureaucrats in Whitehall can never understand local needs as well as local people can. Local doctors and nurses should take clinical decisions - and local investment should be set by locally elected people who can be kicked out if they get it wrong. To make sure that funding gets to the front line and isn't held up in Whitehall, we will ring fence guaranteed funding for the NHS, by earmarking an NHS contribution out of the taxes people already pay.

Free personal care when you need it - no one forced to sell their home to pay for care.

Those towards the end of their lives deserve dignity. No one should be forced to sell the home they love to pay for their care. Funded from our new 50% rate on incomes over £100,000, Liberal Democrats will provide free personal care when people most need it - for as long as they live. This means implementing the recommendations of the independent Royal Commission on long term care for all of the UK, as we have done in Scotland.



Our vision: Prevention is better than cure

So you want to know how the Liberal Democrat approach is different? Imagine the Liberal Democrats have been in government for five years - one parliamentary term. Our approach would have been to tackle problems at their source, rather than the knee-jerk reactions of previous governments. Most people know that it's common sense to stop problems happening in the first place - rather than just trying to put things right all the time.

We believe this approach works better. After five years in government, money would be more focused on helping people stay healthy and fit, through better screening programmes and health education - rather than only waiting until doctors have to operate or prescribe medicines when they get ill.

We don't just adopt that approach to health. It also applies to many other issues. Because children would have a better start in life through high quality early years education, it would be less common to have to pick up the pieces later on when they've fallen behind in basic skills. As potential and past criminals are given the skills to get a decent job, we'd be cutting crime by cutting the numbers resorting to crime. Above all, we want our focus on creating strong communities to help more people to help themselves, by raising aspirations and giving people the skills, health and resources they need to succeed. This is the difference we want to make.

“**Abolish absurd targets and free our frustrated doctors and nurses from demoralising meddling**”

Clean air and water.

Pollution in the air, in water and in the food chain causes or aggravates many illnesses, as well as destroying the environment. We will make sure that dangerous chemicals are eliminated by ending production and use of unnecessary persistent bio-accumulative chemicals.

Promote walking and cycling.

Children walking to school get fit for life - but it must be safe. Fewer school-run car journeys also mean less pollution, less congestion and fewer road deaths. Liberal Democrats will encourage and promote Safe Routes to School with calmed traffic, safe pavements, good lighting and grown-ups on hand to conduct 'walking buses'. Adults need exercise too, so we will provide more cycle routes and reform planning rules to make sure key services are more easily accessible by foot or bicycle.



Equipping children for life

Our vision: Helping families

So you want to know how Liberal Democrats would help families? We'd use five years in government to give families the practical assistance they need, whether that's support from Early Years Centres, or help with finding a job.

Dileep and Nisha, have two children, aged 9 and 5, Reena and Sanjay. At the moment in many parts of the country there is virtually no co-ordinated support for parents until children start school. Under the Liberal Democrats Dileep and Nisha would be able to visit their local Early Years Centre for health check-ups, advice, to meet other parents or to use facilities like the toy library which allow their children to play with toys and equipment their parents would never be able to afford for them. Instead of 5 year-old Sanjay preparing for national tests, under the Liberal Democrats he'd go to full-time pre-school at the local Early Years Centre, giving him the skills for formal school at 7. Reena, their 9 year-old would be making more rapid progress because pre-school would have provided the skills she needs to get the most out of education.

And it's not just about the children. Under this government, struggling parents have few places to turn. Under the Liberal Democrats parents could get more help with the pressures and frustrations of parenting, if they want it. Every Early Years Centre across the country would offer professional parenting advice. And it wouldn't just be the current generation of parents who would learn new skills - children would be taught practical aspects of parenting too, including spending time with younger children.

No tuition fees, no top-up fees - university affordable for every student.

Labour broke their promise on top-up fees. The result: tens of thousands of able students saddled with mountainous debts, or frightened altogether from going to university. Funded from our new 50% rate on incomes over £100,000, Liberal Democrats will abolish all tuition fees - as we already have in Scotland. No one should be deterred from the chance of a university education because of the fear of debt.

Teaching not testing.

Our children are now the most tested in Europe, but overdoing tests doesn't improve their education - it just increases stress and wastes money on bureaucracy. Teachers and parents know how every child is doing day to day by spending time with them, not by bureaucratic tests every few years. We will give teachers time to teach, and children time to learn, by abolishing unnecessary tests and red tape in every school, and providing a record of pupil achievement instead.

Every child taught by a properly qualified teacher.

The teacher recruitment crisis has left thousands of teachers teaching subjects or age groups they are not trained to teach. Liberal Democrats would give all teachers and schools access to funded high quality training courses, so that all children will be taught by properly qualified teachers.

Give people the skills for work.

Employers up and down the country know that school-leavers often don't have the skills they need to succeed in the workplace. Liberal Democrats would reform education for children over 14 so that they can mix vocational and academic learning, as Liberal Democrats in government in Scotland have already done. This can include apprenticeships, combined with basic skills courses. This will ensure that more school-leavers have the range of skills they need for success.

More investment in children's early years - spend the £1 billion Child Trust Fund money when it matters most.

Expert opinion confirms what common sense suggests is obvious: children well taught and well cared-for in their early years have a far better chance of living fulfilled and rewarding lives. The government's Child Trust Fund, by contrast, is expensive, unnecessary and delivers few real benefits. Liberal Democrats will use this money to improve early years support. This means reducing class sizes for the youngest children and setting up Early Years Centres to provide better health, education, social services and family support for every child - when it counts.

“Ensure more school-leavers have the skills they need for success”

Green every school to teach children how it can be done.

All plans for new buildings under the Building Schools for the Future Programme must be good for the environment as well as good for education.

Children will learn far more about caring for the environment by seeing green projects in real action in their own school.

“Local income tax is based on the ability to pay”

Our vision: Better communities

So what would Liberal Democrats do to support our communities? We'd use five years of government to help communities be vibrant, successful and self-supporting, whether they are local, based around a workplace, a place of worship or ethnic background. Take housing. We want many more people to be able to afford a home. Instead of endlessly building on greenfields, we'd make sure that where possible empty buildings were converted into desirable and affordable properties by making changes to the tax system - renewing run-down communities, to make them thrive again.

On crime, our starting point would be to make crime hotspots less common by reducing crime in the first place. But where they do exist, there would be more police on hand as more would be recruited using the money Labour has planned to spend on optional ID cards. Older and disabled people would benefit from more local public transport, which would be free off-peak. This would help them to be more independent and to get involved in the local community. They would also feel safer doing this because of the extra police and falling crime rates.

We'd work to reduce traffic and pollution, with more people choosing to use the improved bus services, and more children walking the designated Safe Routes to School rather than clogging up the streets by being driven to school.

We would introduce a single Equality Act to make sure that all forms of discrimination are stamped out, with no excuses. Greater local accountability in the public services would help to build strong communities where people can make real decisions about the services they use.

In rural areas, we want to see more affordable housing available for local people, by bringing in new rules reducing the number of homes being converted into holiday homes. Just as in urban areas, there would be more police where they are most needed, and this would be particularly welcome in some of the most remote rural areas. There'd be more money coming in to rural communities as the development of farmers' markets and fair trading rules for supermarkets would give farmers a fairer return for their produce.



Axe the council tax

Axe the Council Tax - Local Income Tax is both fair and affordable.

The Council Tax penalises pensioners and people on low incomes. They pay a far higher proportion of their income in tax than the very rich. A Local Income Tax is based very simply on the ability to pay. It would be run through the existing Inland Revenue Income Tax mechanism - so saving hundreds of millions - while at the same time ensuring that the typical household and pensioner pay hundreds of pounds less.

Affordable homes.

We will tackle the affordable housing crisis by using the planning system to deliver more affordable homes to rent, and shared ownership properties, rather than endless "executive homes". We will reform VAT to encourage developers to repair and re-use empty buildings and brownfield land, rather than always building over the countryside. Where necessary, we will require people to get planning permission before turning a full-time home into a holiday home.

Set communities free from Whitehall.

We will free local councils from many of the stifling controls of central government so that they can innovate and deliver services that meet people's real needs. Councils will become genuinely accountable to their local communities rather than being agents of Whitehall.

Green Action

Tackle waste.

Liberal Democrats will set a long-term goal of zero municipal waste, through waste minimisation, reuse and recycling. As a first step, we will ensure that by 2010 60% of all household waste is recycled, with more doorstep recycling and composting. Producers will be held responsible for disposing of their products and materials that are difficult to reuse or recycle.

A fair deal for everyone

Our vision:

Improving pensioners' lives

Liberal Democrats would make a big difference to the lives of pensioners. In our first year in government we'd axe the Council Tax and introduce Local Income Tax instead. Council Tax is based on the size of someone's house, but Local Income Tax is based on income. Because pensioners mostly earn lower overall, over two-thirds would be lifted out of paying local taxes, the majority saving hundreds of pounds. The principle is simple to understand - everyone pays according to their income, so no one pays more than they can afford.

Secondly, Liberal Democrats would stop the scandal of elderly people having to pay for the personal care they need if they have to go into residential care. Older people would no longer be threatened with having to sell their homes or use up their children's inheritance, simply because they are unfortunate enough to need care in the last part of their life.

Thirdly, all pensioners over 75 would be entitled to a pension which lifts them above means-testing for normal living costs. Even better, everyone over 75 would get this pension, provided they have lived in the UK long enough. This would particularly help women who, if they gave up work to care for their children, sometimes get as little as a penny a week state pension. With the Liberal Democrats they wouldn't be penalised for bringing up their children, and could look forward to a decent pension when they need it most.

Our vision:

Supporting people with disabilities

Imagine a government that would really make a difference for people with disabilities. The Liberal Democrats would implement policies to deal with the pressing needs of the many disabled people living in our communities. For those people who need personal care, that would be provided free when they need it. No one would have to sell their home or be reduced to poverty because of their disability or old age.

We'd also make practical changes to help those who want to enter the workplace or who face discrimination in their day-to-day lives. For those who want to enter paid work but who are uncertain where to start, Individual Work Schemes would operate across the country to give them one-to-one advice, focused on their needs and interests, from highly skilled professionals - and training if they need it.

Liberal Democrat legislation would bring protection against all discrimination up to the same level. That would be enforced by a reformed Equalities and Human Rights Commission, defending the rights of anyone who suffers discrimination.

“Give elderly people the pension they have earned - and deserve”



£25 more on the pension at 75 - a million pensioners off means-testing.

Millions of elderly people are failing to get the pensions they have earned - and deserve and need - because of demeaning and unworkable means-tests. National Insurance rules are complicated and archaic - some women who gave up work to bring up their children get as little as a penny a week because they have not been able to pay national insurance. Liberal Democrats will simplify the system and, by guaranteeing a basic pension at 75 of at least £105.45 per week (linked to earnings), abolish the need for means-tests altogether for a million people. Every pensioner couple over 75 will receive at least £160.95 per week state pension - £33 more than at present.

Use New Deal money on a better employment scheme.

The New Deal puts too many people on unnecessary or ineffective schemes rather than into real jobs. Liberal Democrats will tailor assistance so that jobseekers get the package of support they need to get work. We will also scrap benefit sanctions which leave genuine claimants unable to feed and house themselves.

Put child maintenance payments in the hands of the Inland Revenue so that everyone gets a fair deal.

The Child Support Agency often requires parents to pay an unrealistic amount of maintenance, but has also failed to enforce those payments. We would scrap the CSA and hand over its enforcement functions to the Inland Revenue so that payment avoidance is tackled efficiently.

Save energy and cut fuel bills.

Thousands of people die each year from preventable cold-related illnesses - mostly pensioners - on average, around fifty in each constituency. Poor home insulation and poor quality housing are among the main causes. They lead to cold homes and high fuel bills. We will allow the Pensioners' Winter Fuel Payment to be taken in the form of energy saving materials, with the added benefit of installation carried out free. This will cut their fuel bills every year - and help save the planet!



More police on our streets

10,000 more police on the streets - cutting crime and the fear of crime.

By getting rid of Labour's optional ID card scheme, we can pay for 10,000 police on top of Labour's plans. In addition, the average police officer today spends twice as much time on pettifogging paperwork as they do on the street. We'll cut this unnecessary bureaucracy and red tape holding back our police. We would also make more effective use of police time by tackling drug dealers rather than criminalising people with cannabis only for their own personal use.

Make prison education the new way to tackle crime.

Liberal Democrats want some non-violent criminals to do tough community work as an alternative to jail. This would give them skills, reduce reoffending, and mean that they pay back to the community. Meanwhile, those that do go to jail would be subject to a tough working day with education and training a top priority.

Firm but fair on asylum.

For centuries Britain has had a proud record of granting safe refuge to those fleeing persecution, and in turn, refugees have enriched our culture and wealth immeasurably. However, a common European asylum policy would make sure that there are common standards and fair sharing of refugee settlement. UK asylum systems must be firm and efficient to ensure that those who need help get it, whilst those who don't can't abuse the system. We will also end asylum seekers' dependence on benefits, allowing them to work so they can pay their own way, and use their skills to benefit us all.

Improve animal welfare.

Liberal Democrats will establish an Animal Protection Commission, so that all animal welfare matters are brought under the responsibility of a dedicated, expert body, with the duty to ensure animal protection laws are properly enforced and kept up to date.

Our vision: Tackling the job culture

How will Liberal Democrats tackle the 'job culture' that blights many communities? We'd use innovative ways to tackle the root of the problem, rather than just the symptoms.

Simon and Carrie, both 16, are in the same year at school. If they'd lived in a country with a Liberal Democrat government they'd have had many more opportunities.

A lot of young people like Simon hate school and dislike authority, but Liberal Democrat changes to schools would mean that at 14, he'd be offered new, more relevant, opportunities. Rather than being forced through the strait-jacket of the present secondary curriculum, Simon could choose a part-time apprenticeship course, learning a real job. For example, Simon wants to be a car mechanic - so he'd be able to learn to do just that, part-time, in a real garage, doing real work, and spend the rest of his time in school taking courses in basic skills. By linking his learning to a job he would be happier to learn - and his boss at the garage would make sure he turns up on time anyway!

Carrie might face different problems. She is brighter than most, but she is bored by standard lessons, and so is getting cheeky and starting to truant. With our more flexible system, she'd be able to learn at a faster pace, and take exams when she's ready, so she could race ahead and enjoy learning more.

All children and young people could also benefit from new out of hours programmes which would be offered in local schools where they could talk to their friends without being on the streets, as well as picking up careers advice and having a trained counsellor at hand. Having things for young people to do in the evenings, at weekends and during the school holidays would help the whole neighbourhood.

If noisy neighbours are the problem, extended use of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts would provide councils with a better way to tackle nuisance from the start, rather than always relying on court and police action when things have gone wrong.

Of course, some people will still cause trouble - but by cutting police bureaucracy and investing in 10,000 more police, we'd make sure there were more local police available to crack down on any problems at the start.

“Tackling the root causes of the crime, not just the symptoms”

An Environmental Court to enforce high environmental standards.

We will improve enforcement of pollution controls through an expanded inspectorate for the Environment Agency, and a new specialist Environmental Court to deal with enforcing environmental rules. We will also ensure the level of penalties which polluters have to pay are appropriate to the offence - at present they are often trivial compared to the profits from environmental crime. We will promote greater access to justice in environmental matters.



Get Whitehall off the backs of businesses

Cut the red tape that stops businesses from growing.

Liberal Democrats will slash the red tape, bureaucracy and over-regulation that is holding British business back - especially small businesses. We will start with these three measures:

- No new regulation will be passed until there is a full published assessment of its costs and necessity.
- Every new regulation will automatically cease unless Parliament specifically approves its renewal after a period specified in a sunset clause.
- Endless visits by all sorts of factory inspectors will be replaced in most cases by one all-purpose inspection.

Get Whitehall off the backs of business.

We will scrap the Department of Trade and Industry. There is no need for a big government department interfering in the economy and subsidising companies that fail. Liberal Democrats will put the DTI's useful roles in more appropriate departments, such as support for scientific research in the Department for Education, and will axe the rest. This will save billions of pounds of taxpayers' money over the life of a Parliament which we will invest in higher priorities.

Protect consumers from rip-offs.

We will introduce a new legal duty on business to trade fairly. Enforced by the courts, this will require less form-filling than Labour's complex rules, yet provide more effective protection for consumers, and promote free competition. We will also tackle abuses in the market for consumer credit, including new rules to make lenders disclose all their charges clearly.

“Cut the red tape”

Green Action

Promote clean energy.

Liberal Democrats will ensure that 20% of the UK's electricity comes from renewable sources by the year 2020, through a more ambitious tradable renewables obligation on energy suppliers. Liberal Democrats will phase out existing nuclear power stations as they come to the end of their life since there is no safe option for dealing with their waste.

Transport

Making public transport work



Make the railways work again.

Conservative privatisation left the railways in a mess. Under Labour the railway bureaucracy has increased five fold, but still no one takes responsibility. Liberal Democrats will cut the bureaucracy and ensure clear responsibility for the whole network. This will save money for investment, and cut the excuses.

Reward owners of less polluting cars with lower taxes.

For many people, particularly in rural areas, cars are a necessity and cannot be replaced by public transport. But they can be far less damaging to the environment when they use less fuel or alternative fuels. We will reform the system for taxing cars to cut tax on those that pollute less, funded by increasing it on those that pollute more.

Free off-peak local travel - for all pensioners and disabled people.

Outside the rush hour, thousands of local buses and trains run virtually empty. Liberal Democrats will give pensioners and disabled people free off-peak local travel on local public transport. That will mean more freedom for them; better use made of our expensive transport system; and less congestion and pollution for everyone.

“Cut tax on cars that pollute less”

Cut the jams and reduce pollution.

Congestion charging in London (first proposed by the Liberal Democrats) has cut pollution, cut traffic jams and paid for new investment in buses. In cities and towns where traffic congestion is a problem, and where there can be good public transport alternatives, Liberal Democrats will extend congestion charging, in return for upfront investment in better public transport, so millions more have the chance to drive less.

Reform aviation taxes.

Car drivers pay more tax the more fuel they use - yet airlines don't. To encourage more fuel efficient aircraft we will press for multi-national agreement on aviation pollution, and meanwhile implement per aircraft rather than per passenger charges, to discourage half empty flights. Where there are essential "lifeline" routes, we would ensure that these keep running.

Green Action

A more democratic Britain

Better government by the nations and regions.

Local people know more about their area than civil servants in Whitehall. A lot of money is wasted trying to control things from London when they would be better decided by people locally. Therefore, Liberal Democrats will strengthen the powers of the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly. We will examine how to extend the role of the Scottish Parliament in consultation with the Scottish Executive. In England, both the Conservatives and Labour have built up a powerful but unelected tier of regional bureaucracy. Liberal Democrats will scrap unnecessary quangos throughout England, reform regional boundaries to make them more representative where people wish it, and give people through referenda the opportunity to have a regional assembly to make existing regional bureaucracy accountable. Underpinning these reforms will be a new system for dividing up government money within the UK so that there is fair funding for the nations and regions according to their real needs.

Slim down central government.

We will cut the excessive number of government departments, and reduce the unnecessary number of government ministers - cutting 40 from the current total of 112. We will also move government bureaucracy out of London, starting with moving the Treasury to Liverpool, saving £500m over the life of a parliament on office rents. There would be savings on office rents, whilst wealth and jobs are spread more equally through the UK by ending Britain's over-centralisation.

Strengthen the fight against discrimination with a single Equality Act.

This will outlaw all unfair discrimination, including on the grounds of race, sex, religion, sexual orientation, disability, age or gender identity, and ensure equal protection for all.

Make the BBC more independent from government.

It's time to stop the government manipulating the BBC. Liberal Democrats will introduce an independent system for ensuring that the BBC fulfils its public service obligations.

A more democratic Britain.

Liberal Democrats will improve and strengthen our democratic systems. Labour have botched reform of the House of Lords - we will replace the Lords with a properly elected Senate. We will also bring in fair votes for all national and local elections. Liberal Democrats in Scotland have already done this by introducing the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system for local and Scottish Parliament elections, and we want to see that system for all elections. We will review the electoral system with the aim of giving people a greater say over who their local MEPs are, and we will give the British people the chance to bring in electoral reform for Westminster through a referendum which Labour promised, but never delivered. We will support the AV+ system for Westminster as a first step to reform if that can achieve greater cross-party support. We will also pass comprehensive Freedom of Information legislation, to make government at all levels more open and accountable.



“Slim down central government”

Green Action

Make government greener.
It is vital that government and businesses are made to take their environmental obligations seriously. We would establish reporting obligations for government and business as part of an Environmental Responsibility Act, holding government as well as business to account. We would use the purchasing power of government to boost the market for green products and services.

Rural communities

Protecting rural communities

Give farmers a fair price for their food.

For every £1 we pay for our food, farmers get less than 8 pence, due to unfair practices by highly profitable supermarkets, and unfair processes. Liberal Democrats will introduce a legal duty to trade fairly, enforced by the Office of Fair Trading. This will protect farmers and consumers from exploitation by supermarkets and processing companies.

Speed up reform of the Common Agricultural Policy.

The CAP does not protect the interests of rural communities, family farms and the environment. We will press the EU to speed reform so that any public funding benefits the people who need it, and better protects the environment. We will encourage greater development of local markets and organic farming.

Save our fish.

We will seek rapid reform of the Common Fisheries Policy to give local fishermen a real say in the management of their own regional waters, and we will strengthen protection of dolphins, porpoises and other endangered marine wildlife.



“Give farmers a fair price”

Green Action

No commercial GM crops until we know they're safe for the environment.
We will continue to support the right of local communities to create GM-free zones. We will insist on rigorous schemes of labelling and traceability in food to guarantee consumer choice.

Fairer, simpler taxes

A stable, well managed economy.

We welcome the greater economic stability achieved since interest rates were set independently but there needs to be more independent scrutiny and discipline in fiscal policy. The current level of personal debt and the related property market 'bubble' are signs that the economy could be heading back to the days of boom and bust. This cannot carry on. The government has to accept responsibility for reining in irresponsible credit expansion in respect of mortgages and personal loans. We will tackle lack of transparency in the market for credit cards, hire purchase and loan insurance; curb misleading advertising by lenders; end the tidal wave of unsolicited credit promotion; and crack down on loan sharks.

Fairer taxes.

Under Labour ordinary hardworking families pay more as a share of their incomes in tax than the very rich; the elderly have to sell their homes to pay for their care; and rising Council Tax and university top-up fees are making the system even more unfair. Liberal Democrats want to make the tax system fairer and simpler. To this end we will axe the unfair Council Tax and replace it with a local income tax based on people's ability to pay. We will also ask the richest 1% of the population - the people who can most afford it - to pay 50% tax on that part of their income over £100,000 per year. This will allow us to deliver in England policies that people in Scotland already benefit from thanks to the Liberal Democrats in government there: no top-up and tuition fees, and no elderly and disabled people having to pay for their care.

Tough choices in public spending.

Liberal Democrats have different spending priorities from Labour. We believe that in order to concentrate resources in areas that are currently under-funded such as pensions, policing and early years education, funding should be switched from lower priority areas. Savings can be made by reducing unnecessary bureaucracy and government departments but, no less important, tough choices also have to be made. That means reducing unnecessary subsidies to industry, environmentally destructive production to agriculture, and cutting wasteful new initiatives like the voluntary ID card - so we can spend more on the things that really matter.

Call a referendum on the euro.

Joining the euro would strengthen British manufacturing, make our farmers more competitive and bring down the prices and interest rates that British consumers pay. Liberal Democrats believe that Britain should work to create the right economic conditions to join the euro, and will then call a referendum so the British people finally get the chance to make their decision.



“A stable, well managed economy”

Green Action

Shift the burden of tax away from people and jobs and on to pollution and environmental damage.

Tax cuts can play a role in encouraging people to act in an environmentally sustainable way. We will start environmental tax reform by changing the Climate Change Levy into a Carbon Tax so that energy users involved in the Emissions Trading Scheme pay less tax than those that aren't. Green taxes mean taxing differently - not taxing more.

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Working with others for a safer world



Foreign Affairs and Defence

We should not have gone to war in Iraq - it's time to restore trust in the government.

Weapons inspectors were recklessly denied the time they needed to finish their job in Iraq. National security is critical - but always best achieved through international co-operation. The same is true for preventing international terrorism. For maximum impact, Britain needs to work through the United Nations, and with Europe, as well as the USA. We will seek to reform the institutions and resources of the UN and the EU to make them more immediately responsive to international crises.

Make Europe more democratic, and define and limit its powers.

Membership of the EU has been hugely valuable for British jobs, environmental protection and Britain's place in the world. In order to include ten new member states, the EU needs reform to ensure that it is democratic, and that the limits to its role are clear. For the first time ever, the proposed Constitution does this. Crucially, the elected European Parliament will have more power over the unelected European Commission, and the role of the EU overall will be defined and limited. For that reason, we are clear in our support for the Constitution which we believe is in Britain's interest.

Our troops protect the nation - we must protect them.

Britain provides its military as a force for good in the world. But the more military commitments Britain makes around the world, the more our troops are overstretched. They are short of the equipment they need, and there are specialist areas which are severely under strength. We also need our armed forces to be ready to cope with emergencies at home, such as terrorism, natural disasters and other emergencies. Our foreign policy must be realistic about what we can, and should, take on - and we must then equip the military properly to do it.

Work for the elimination of nuclear weapons and tackle the arms trade.

We will press for a new round of multilateral arms reduction talks, but will retain the UK's minimum nuclear deterrent for the foreseeable future. We will establish a Parliamentary Arms Export Committee to monitor arms exports and scrutinise individual licence applications. We will require arms brokers to register under a Code of Conduct, and revoke the licences of those who break the code.

International Development

Meet Britain's promise on aid.

Britain has agreed, along with all the other members of the UN, to meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Meeting that commitment includes eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. Britain promised in 1970 to raise its level of overseas aid to 0.7% of UK annual income, along with every other developed country. Britain has never fulfilled this pledge to the poorest people in the world. People are literally starving because Britain has broken its promise to them. Liberal Democrats will meet that commitment within two parliaments, and guarantee more towards doing so over the next parliament.

Fair Trade.

Rich countries still operate subsidies and tariff barriers that hit the poorest countries in the world. Liberal Democrats will seek to break down these barriers, and will help fund developing countries to be properly represented in trade talks.

“Make Europe more democratic; define and limit its powers”

Green Action

Take strong global action to protect the environment.

We will promote a review of the World Bank, World Trade Organisation and the International Monetary Fund to ensure that they are sensitive to the needs of the poorest, and promote sustainable and effective development outcomes. We will work through the UN to encourage all countries to take responsibility for protecting the environment.

Promote environmentally sustainable development.

We will ensure that development aid is targeted on projects that are environmentally sustainable, such as renewable energy, clean water or sustainable agriculture; build markets in the richer countries for sustainable products from developing nations; and increase support for international environmental agreements of particular benefit for the developing world.

Put Britain at the forefront of climate change negotiations.

Liberal Democrats will ensure that Britain achieves its targets from the Kyoto Protocol well before the deadline. This will put us in a position to press other nations to ratify Kyoto.

The relationship between the major parties is very volatile. What are the opportunities for the Liberal Democrats now?

As this Labour government becomes unpopular, what's increasingly clear is that the challengers are not the Conservatives. The challengers are the Liberal Democrats: because we are now the other truly national party.

The by-elections in Brent, Leicester and Birmingham, as well as the local elections when we pushed Labour into third place, showed that it is the Liberal Democrats who are challenging Labour in its heartlands. When pundits speak lazily of the 'two main parties' - meaning Labour and Conservative - what does that mean if you live in Newcastle or Liverpool or Manchester or anywhere in Scotland? Nothing.

Yet we are also the party which is challenging the Conservatives in many southern and rural seats.

The message of the June 10th elections and of the recent by-elections is that this is an era of three party politics. We can - and we will - build on that.

What has really changed though?

People are fed up with this government which ignores them. They don't like the Conservatives who neither sound like them, nor understand them. They are comfortable with the Liberal Democrats who reach out to them. This pre-manifesto underlines our vision, the kind of Britain we want to see: and people are listening to us as never before.

Our opponents will say this is just 'fall out' from the Iraq war: because we were the only party to oppose the war.

Certainly Iraq has become a totemic issue: for Tony Blair, it's like sleaze was for John Major. Certainly for us Iraq has been a turning point. While the Conservatives were the principal cheerleaders, we stood up for the millions who were deeply worried about the war. They watched us perform as the effective opposition and they won't forget.

I agree that Iraq is totemic - but I don't believe it's the whole story. People don't trust Tony Blair; but they don't trust Michael Howard either.

People see the Labour and Conservative agendas are converging. Both are arguing about choice; they're outbidding each other over the number of civil servants they will fire; scrapping over who can sound toughest on law and order.

We opposed the war, but we also have a different vision of Britain. We must use this pre-manifesto as a foundation on which to go out and campaign over the coming months.

Is there something more fundamental about Liberal Democrat thinking which is striking a chord with voters today?

I believe there is. For much of the 20th Century, people in this country were characterised as being 'small c conservative'. But in this 21st century, it's the characteristics of the 'small l liberal' that are beginning to dominate.

Look around you. We are less deferential; more inclined to think for ourselves; more open about sexuality and equality. For example, how many people care these days whether their local MP is gay or straight? What they ask is whether this person is effective.

Our national institutions are changing too. We are no longer a nation of one church; we are a nation of many faiths. We are no longer a nation with one family structure. We are no longer a nation of one colour and, increasingly, we welcome diversity.

Tolerance, balance and an enthusiasm for choice and diversity are characteristics of liberal thinking. Increasingly, they are welcome as people recognise how strongly they are reflected in our Liberal Democrat ideas.

So where does this leave the Liberal Democrats in the left versus right political arguments?

I believe that is old-fashioned terminology which doesn't adequately reflect 21st century politics.

If you take, say, the council tax, the war on Iraq, the Euro - these are issues which people are passionate about. But they don't fit neatly into the rigid delineations of the old left-right spectrum.

But phrase the question differently - is a party 'liberal or illiberal'?

Immediately, the old issues take on a new aspect. You might then ask - does a party believe in a big or a small state? Does it truly believe in the benefits of diversity? Does it trust the people, or seek to dictate to them?

Through this prism of 'liberal' or 'illiberal', you can start to grasp the reality of the new politics. That, in turn, leads to a clearer understanding of the challenge for those of us seeking to reinvigorate the debate.

What is the challenge for the months ahead?

If I am right about our 21st century politics, then we Liberal Democrats have a great opportunity. Our task - using this pre-manifesto as a guide - is to go out there and spread the word. Our challenge is to persuade this 'small l liberal' society, to become 'large L Liberal Democrat' voters.



Freedom

Liberal Democrats believe that **freedom** is a basic human right. Everybody should be able to make independent choices about how they live their life, provided those choices don't harm anyone else. Everybody should have the opportunity to make the most of their life in a diverse society that values individuals and their differences.

Fairness

Freedom is underpinned by **fairness**. To give everyone a fair chance to make the most of their potential, we need a high quality National Health Service and excellent education, so they are not unnecessarily held back by ill health or a poor education, regardless of how much money they have.

Trust

At the same time, people need to be able to **trust** government. They need to trust that government will listen to them and be honest and open about what it is doing. People deserve a government that tells the truth and keeps its promises. Liberal Democrats want to make government more open, more democratic and closer to the people it is meant to serve.

But trust also works the other way - the government must trust the people of Britain. That means giving people as much freedom as possible, trusting local communities to make decisions about their own local services, and listening to the views of ordinary people about what their communities, jobs and families need most.

Green

So our policies are all about freedom, fairness and trust. And all our policies also have a **green** thread. We want to see a society in which individuals and communities enjoy the freedom to run their own lives. A degraded natural environment is a constraint on freedom - it damages personal health and quality of life, it impoverishes economies, and it weakens or destroys local communities. This is as true for future generation as it is for present ones. But achieving sustainability cannot be done by one government department acting alone because issues cross the boundaries of departments and agencies. So we will put the environment at the heart of every part of government.



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