

# **KINGSTON BOROUGH LIBERAL DEMOCRATS**

**MAKING KINGSTON  
BETTER, TOGETHER**

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## ***Dear resident,***

Kingston Borough is a wonderful place to live, with its great schools, green spaces and vibrant community. It's no wonder that so many families and young people choose to make the borough their home.

Kingston Liberal Democrats are committed to working together with residents, to maintain what is great in our community, improve and enhance our environment and look after our most vulnerable residents.

But the Conservatives are threatening that quality of life. Their commitment to relentless overdevelopment in Kingston, Tolworth and New Malden is ruining our towns and their poorly thought-through traffic schemes have led to record fines for the borough's motorists. Their financial incompetence is undermining council services for the vulnerable and is creating a crisis for our children's education, with yet more cuts to our school budgets. Their lack of action on the environment means nothing is being done to tackle our worsening air quality and their undermining of the voluntary sector makes their jobs harder than ever.

## ***Everywhere I go in the borough I hear the same thing - the ruling Conservatives just don't listen to people.***

We recognise there will be huge financial challenges and huge demand for more homes. But by working with you – the residents, community groups and businesses of Kingston, we believe we can together rise to the challenge.

This manifesto sets out some of our ideas – I'd welcome your feedback, and your ideas too. Please do get in touch at [manifesto@kingstonlibdems.org](mailto:manifesto@kingstonlibdems.org)

**In May's election, Kingston Liberal Democrats are proposing a more positive vision – where we can make Kingston better, together.**

Kind regards,

***Liz Green***

Leader of Kingston Borough Liberal Democrat Councillors

# 1. A new approach to planning and providing the new homes we need

## ***Community-led housing, not developer-led***

Kingston's historic appeal is being lost under the deluge of development encouraged by the Conservatives' "ambitious growth" agenda. We need to plan for the future and we need more new homes for local families. Endless luxury flats aren't the answer; ever taller skyscrapers with little or no affordable housing aren't the answer. We need homes for our families and the vital infrastructure to support our residents, new and old. We need the input of local people if we are to get it right.

## ***Liberal Democrat priorities for the next 4 years:***

- ✓ A Liberal Democrat Council will build 1,000 new homes.
- ✓ We will co-design, with local residents, masterplans for suitable development sites, based on agreed design codes that prioritise inclusive and sustainable communities.
- ✓ We will robustly challenge the new draft London Plan, where the Mayor of London wants to increase Kingston's housing target from 643 units to 1,364 units per year, working together with central government and other London boroughs, to get the level of housing we need, whilst keeping the quality of life our residents value.
- ✓ We will make developers contribute towards the infrastructure needed such as roads, health, schools and open spaces by reviewing the Council's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).
- ✓ There should be no large-scale developments on the Green Belt or Metropolitan Open Land; not in Chessington, not in Surbiton, not anywhere our vital green lungs are needed.
- ✓ We will write into our Local Plan a detailed policy for any back-garden development in Kingston, to minimise the impact of the Mayor of London's small site policy. RBK will draw up strict new design standards to ensure that neighbours are protected under planning law.
- ✓ There will be no compromise on the affordable homes policy, developers need to get real on what their contribution will be.
- ✓ Manipulating the planning financial viability process will not be allowed.
- ✓ We will work with residents on the Community Right to Build, Neighbourhood Plans and Neighbourhood Development Orders, where residents want to follow these options.

- ✓ A Liberal Democrat council will deliver 50% affordable housing, including a significant number of social rent homes, as well as shared ownership, on all council-led developments.
- ✓ A Liberal Democrat council will not attend international property fairs outside the UK, such as MIPIM in Cannes.
- ✓ We will review the Assessment of the Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land, currently being carried out by the Conservative Administration. We will share its findings with the communities we represent and agree next steps.
- ✓ We will work with others, such as Create Streets, learning from them, to make sure Kingston gets high quality, low rise, suitable density developments that create homes, rather than the current developments of tall luxury tower blocks.
- ✓ Regarding the regeneration of our housing estates, we will
  - ✓ Ballot all resident those whose homes are part of the regeneration project prior to the Council entering contractual agreements for regenerate.
  - ✓ Guarantee a right of return for all tenants on the same terms as their pre-regeneration tenancy.
  - ✓ Guarantee an affordable right of return for all resident leaseholders and freeholders.
  - ✓ Ensure no reduction in public access recreational open space.
  - ✓ Appoint independent legal and financial advisers to advise the tenants and residents on the estate
- ✓ A ban on all 'poor doors'. Enforced segregation on the grounds of housing tenure, wealth and income has no part to play in our communities.
- ✓ Invest in the Council's own property company to ensure high levels of social rented housing on some sites, and reinvest any profits into council services or more affordable housing.
- ✓ Explore opportunities for the Council to be an investment partner to providing funding to housing associations' building projects.
- ✓ Find new ways of prioritising the Council's resources and assets to provide homes for those that need them most and make it easier for local people to apply for affordable homes.
- ✓ Investigate introducing a Kingston Living Rent for some of our own schemes, to enable private renters on lower salaries to have longer-term tenancies for greater stability.

- ✓ Work with organisations, like Rentplus, to help residents caught in Generation Rent, who cannot afford to save for a deposit due to high private rent costs.
- ✓ Enforce minimum housing standards for residents living in the private rented sector, including ensuring Homes of Multi-Occupation (HMO) are licensed appropriately.
- ✓ Tackle the growing homelessness problem, including rough sleepers, with robust promotion of policies designed to help vulnerable people and end this scourge.
- ✓ We will work with community groups to help people at risk of eviction, before they are actually evicted.
- ✓ Help residents to downsize if they wish to, through schemes like the Seaside and Country Home Project and work with local voluntary organisations to release larger homes for families.
- ✓ Unlock development sites for suitable new homes, using Compulsory Purchase Powers if necessary.
- ✓ Stop the discredited 'Kingston Futures' branding and events aimed at 'selling' the borough to developers.
- ✓ Work with our Conservation Area Advisory Committees, to get the best outcomes to preserve our historic buildings.

## 2. Looking after our elderly, young and disabled people

Kingston Council spends about three-quarters of its budget on adult and children's social care yet these vital services for our most vulnerable residents are little seen by most people. Over the last four years, under the Conservative Administration, rather than integrating health with social care, these interlocked services have moved further apart. The service offered has reduced whilst costs have rocketed.

### ***Liberal Democrat priorities for the next 4 years:***

- ✓ Open three new schools, including a new special school, to meet our borough's growing need and save money on expensive out-of-borough provision.
- ✓ Open a new dementia care home, to provide the best possible care for our elderly residents needing this specialist service.
- ✓ Work with health partners towards an integrated health and social care system, empowering communities to live healthier lives and promoting prevention strategies.
- ✓ Develop a 'whole system solution' that can meet the changing needs of our local population, identifying shared local integration priorities and delivering a clear action plan.
- ✓ Carry out regular reviews and monitoring for all social care service users and their carers, to ensure the right individualised tailored service, in accordance with the Care Act
- ✓ Place greater emphasis on preventative measures such as great community-based schemes, like "In Good Company," a campaign to help combat loneliness in our communities and "Kid's Play Out", closing roads regularly to allow communities to get together with 'old-fashioned' playing in the street.
- ✓ Foster cooperation between the arts and health services to enhance quality of life, tackle stress and loneliness, and improve health outcomes.
- ✓ Weave a mental health friendly ethos into all policies and services and appoint a Mental Health Champion Councillor.
- ✓ Provide a focus on mental health for children and young people to raise awareness of the issues and prioritise delivery of services in the ways requested by young people themselves, including anti-bullying strategies.

- ✓ Support, provide training for and fully equip the health, social care, social work professionals and voluntary organisations who are the front line of the caring community. We will foster a culture of mutual respect when carrying out assessments and support social workers to carry out their responsibilities.
- ✓ Ensure all parts of the health and adult social care system are meaningfully involved in developing care plans, particularly clinicians, frontline staff and representatives of those who use the services.
- ✓ Take practical steps to improve health, such as increasing access to blood pressure testing in the workplace and providing public defibrillators across the borough.
- ✓ Investigate using technology as an aid to care and independence and to keep residents safe and informed about the care options available to them.
- ✓ Undertake a detailed study on predicted future demand for additional primary and secondary school places in Kingston.
- ✓ Prioritise safeguarding of children to protect children and young people from harm, online abuse and child sexual exploitation.
- ✓ Review the Youth Service and its funding by consulting extensively with young people and listening to their views; particularly focusing on participation groups and vulnerable communities such as SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and LGBT (Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender) where anti-social behaviour poses more of a threat.
- ✓ Support Express CIC to open an autistic centre in Tolworth.
- ✓ Work with partners in health services to speed up the diagnosis of children who may have autism, ADHD and ADD.
- ✓ Speed up the process of applying for an EHCP (Education and Health Care Plan) for children with special needs, by reviewing the issues with service users.
- ✓ Ensure that children with SEND and their carers are supported through transition phases of their education, such as entering secondary school. Focus during this difficult phase can prevent more complex problems later.
- ✓ Set up further provisions in mainstream schools for ASD, ADHD and ADD.



- ✓ Work with all our schools, academies and maintained, to ensure all children receive the best education and start in life.
- ✓ Support Early Years partners, in school and private/voluntary settings, to get sufficient funding for their vital role in making sure every child has the best start.
- ✓ Have a new focus on the needs of disabled people, starting with a new programme for introducing “Changing Places” toilets.
- ✓ Establish a policy to consider methods of reducing hardship for Adult Social Care users, to help prevent them going into debt.

### 3. Creating a caring community

We are fortunate to have such a wonderful voluntary and community sector, with so many residents willing to give up their time to help others. This is to be celebrated and the council should give every organisation the help it needs to deliver the best services. Over the past four years funding and support to the voluntary sector has been cut by the Conservatives, and yet they have asked them to jump through hoops on a commissioning process. The voluntary and community sector deserves the council's support, not funding cuts, if it is being asked to provide more and more services.

#### ***Liberal Democrat priorities for the next 4 years:***

- ✓ Review the voluntary/community sector commissioning process, to test if it is value for money (including council officer time and difficulty for organisations applying) when compared with the previous, simpler grants system.
- ✓ Introduce the 'Kingston Community Partnership Contract' detailing what support our voluntary and community partners can expect from Kingston Council.
- ✓ Support our community and voluntary sector with access to working spaces, meeting rooms and facilities.
- ✓ Giving our community halls to the community to manage, where appropriate, with support.
- ✓ Empower and facilitate the borough's four Neighbourhoods to build community partnerships.
- ✓ Create a register of local community, residential, business and voluntary groups that will be consulted as of right on matters of local interest and service provision.
- ✓ Encourage specialist performance spaces supporting grassroots acts across a range of genres.
- ✓ Support live music, which is always in demand. We are keen to promote live music with festivals and events across the borough in suitable venues with robust anti-social behaviour policies. We will continue to campaign for Kingston to keep a large live music venue.
- ✓ Fully support all community-run activities, such as 'fun days', farmers markets and Kingston Carnival, by actively promoting them. Provide help and advice to reduce the bureaucratic red tape and costs for community groups.
- ✓ Look for community-based initiatives to address access to housing, prevent homelessness and assist people with mental health problems who are homeless.

- ✓ Ensure no one is left behind in the digital age. Work with community groups to provide training to those who want to get online, but always offer an offline alternative.
- ✓ Introduce a borough lottery, with all proceeds going to local charities and good causes.
- ✓ Encourage local businesses to give staff time off to volunteer.
- ✓ Celebrate and thank our volunteers and all the work they do. Create a way of using this celebration to encourage even more volunteering across our borough.
- ✓ Promote the Kingston Pound to businesses and residents, as a way of supporting independents and keeping spend local.
- ✓ Work with a community interest company to operate our hubs, recruit creative tenants with local links and manage uses of underused spaces, similar to Pop Brixton.
- ✓ Support our local employers by promoting a start-up culture and nurturing the creative sector and securing more flexible, affordable workspaces that new and growing firms need.

## 4. Air safe to breathe

The air quality across Kingston Borough is not good enough. This worsening situation poses a serious risk to the health of our borough's residents – particularly children and the vulnerable. Kingston Council needs to take practical and measurable steps to reduce levels of CO<sub>2</sub>, NO<sub>2</sub>, PM<sub>10</sub> and fine particles, not just point the finger at others or brush the problem aside, as the Conservatives have been doing for the past 4 years.

### ***Liberal Democrat priorities for the next 4 years:***

- ✓ Plant more than 2,000 extra trees in our parks and streets, to return Kingston to its 'leafy suburbs' reputation.
- ✓ Introduce more than 100 new more electric charging points across the borough, from the lowly 26 currently available.
- ✓ Discourage people from idling their vehicles at the kerbside, especially around schools, through education campaigns.
- ✓ Provide free residents parking permits to all electric and hybrid cars and look at differential parking charges in Council car parks.
- ✓ Provide additional cycling facilities to maximise cycling opportunities, encouraging cycle-to-work schemes and new hire schemes, installing more secure cycle parking in town centres and residential streets.
- ✓ Continue with Mini-holland cycle infrastructure, but ensure that implementation is more considered, reducing shared space and impacts on other forms of transport, especially buses.
- ✓ Consult on 20 mph on all residential roads across the borough, to make our streets safe for everyone.
- ✓ Demand the highest energy efficiencies in all new buildings, with carbon offsetting during construction.
- ✓ Employ a new dedicated traffic council officer to reduce congestion by managing and minimising roadworks, charging utility companies if they overrun and ensuring they 'make good' the first time, working with neighbourhoods managers and rangers.
- ✓ Look to issue hourly charges to utility companies carrying out road works following successful trials in other London boroughs.
- ✓ Convince the Mayor of London to make Eden Street a 'Clean Bus zone' with only green buses on the routes using this busy road. This will have a positive knock-on effect across the borough, as most of our buses go through Eden Street.
- ✓ We will set out our environmental objectives clearly with measurable indicators, then monitor and publish our performance against our

targets, so everyone can see what we are doing well and what needs further work.

- ✓ Ensure our council contractors upgrade their fleet of vehicles to low pollution vehicles as quickly as possible and that our council buildings use as far as possible energy from renewable sources. We will review the insulation and energy efficiency of our council buildings and investigate funding for energy-saving improvements
- ✓ Trial installing green screens (vegetation that can remove some harmful air pollutants) at our worst-affected schools to help reduce air pollution in the playground.
- ✓ Work with our environmental community groups, supporting their work in educating people and promoting them to reach a wider audience.
- ✓ Promote more car sharing, such as through readily available smartphone apps and car clubs across the borough.
- ✓ Ensure that new developments are supported by infrastructure that encourages cycling and use of public transport, including provision of future-proof electric car charging points.
- ✓ Providing the support community and environmental groups need to do their good work in educating our children and ourselves on keeping and growing a Green Kingston.

## 5. Clean, green and safe in our borough

Kingston residents pay the highest council tax in London and have the right to expect clean, green and safe streets. Too often the 'basics' have been ignored and we feel that is not right.

### ***Liberal Democrat priorities for the next 4 years:***

- ✓ Give a greater emphasis to reducing and reusing waste, both in households and businesses, building on successful campaigns from elsewhere.
- ✓ Give practical help to people and businesses to start recycling or recycle more.
- ✓ Support Keep Britain Tidy, the Marine Conservation Society, Campaign to Protect Rural England and ReLoop and lobby with them for a change in policy from the Conservative Government.
- ✓ Provide public drinking fountains across Kingston Borough and encourage a culture of refillable bottles, to promote health, reduce litter and cut the use of plastic.
- ✓ Support and work with policy makers to make London the world's first National Park City.
- ✓ Maximise our natural resources and improve local environments by cleaning and greening areas. Pop-up community gardens and community groups and not for profit enterprises will be encouraged and supported.
- ✓ Seek local investment from the private sector for our natural spaces to provide activities and events including nature conservation, leisure facilities, walking, cycling, fairs and festivals and cultural activities.
- ✓ Support gardening groups to set up and look after street planning schemes and provide support so residents can bid and attract funding to help with environmental projects.
- ✓ We had cleaner streets and we can again, so we will better monitor and scrutinise our contractors and put in place a named person to deal with complaints to provide the services we deserve.
- ✓ Re-provide on-street recycling bins, which were removed by the Conservatives, so everyone can recycle when out and about.
- ✓ Increase the number of Neighbourhood Ranger posts to two per neighbourhood, to deal with small issues in the most cost-effective and swift manner, like cutting back hedges, litter picking wayside gardens and painting out graffiti.
- ✓ Take action on dog fouling, which is a major concern in some areas, and needs tackling, not 'kicked into the long grass'. We will hold local

meetings to discuss hotspots and consult with residents on introducing various schemes used elsewhere, such as a Kingston Community Dog Watch Scheme.

- ✓ Develop a new energy strategy aimed at helping residents and businesses to cut their energy bills and reduce their carbon emissions.
- ✓ Work with the local police to increase the number of neighbourhood watch schemes to reduce burglary rates across the borough.
- ✓ We will fight for Kingston Borough to increase the number of police officers provided by the Met Police and reverse the reductions of the last few years.
- ✓ Ensure residents know about Safer Neighbourhood Panels and the work that these vital committees do in setting local area priorities.
- ✓ Investigate installing lockable gates in back alleys to reduce opportunities for potential burglary.

## 6. A democratic, transparent and listening council

The Liberal Democrats have always believed that local people should be involved in decisions affecting their communities and services should be managed as close to their users as possible. That's why we started the Neighbourhood system in 1994. By contrast, the most common complaints we hear about the current Conservative council are their refusal to listen to residents' views and their outrageous fines. Astonishingly the Conservative-controlled council has not carried out a comprehensive survey of residents' views since 2014!

### ***Liberal Democrat priorities for the next 4 years:***

- ✓ Open up Council finances in a fully accessible manner, for residents to see what is spent, in different areas, with contractors and consultants.
- ✓ We want everyone to help shape services and no one to be excluded, so we will set up forums to enable residents to take part, such as an Elderly People's Forum and an Access Panel for those with disabilities.
- ✓ Carry out an annual residents' survey and publish the results to facilitate an honest conversation with our residents and listen to what you tell us. We will respect your views, explain ourselves and the reasons why we have made the decision, especially if we haven't made the decision you would prefer.
- ✓ Hold Councillors to account for the way they interact with members of the public. We will demand a high level of professional conduct, and sanction councillors who fail to treat residents with respect and courtesy.
- ✓ Introduce a common-sense approach to driving offences. Issuing penalty charges must be done fairly. We will produce information for all Kingston residents to ensure drivers are aware of enforcements in our borough and will ensure that all signage and road markings are clear.
- ✓ Putting in place our REACH programme (Residents' Engagement and Consultation Hub.) This will see the council consulting with more interest groups who often have deeper insight into council issues
- ✓ Making better use of community e-newsletters and community platforms and produce a Royal Borough of Kingston's eMagazine/Newsletter.
- ✓ Review the Contact Centre and improve complaint handling and customer relations particularly for email and website complaints; our customer service staff will follow through on issues and complaints to ensure the council responds to residents



- ✓ For the intrinsically difficult-to-solve issues, introduce policy-setting sub-committees that will include service users, residents and community groups as expert witnesses. These groups will make recommendations to improve council policies.
- ✓ Consultations will stop being tick-box exercises, and become a way of influencing decisions, with results published and participants informed of meetings.
- ✓ Return the right to residents to properly challenge council decisions by bringing back a dedicated Scrutiny Panel. Scrutiny guarantees that the trust put in elected councillors is not misplaced.
- ✓ Strengthen the role of our neighbourhood committees to ensure there is local debate and that decisions that affect local people can be made locally, with a dedicated manager for each of the four neighbourhoods.
- ✓ Encourage fault reporting in ways that work for residents not just the contractors, such as through social media.
- ✓ Make sure we have a genuine dialogue with local residents, partners and businesses about what is fair and unfair. Our aim is to create a sense of place and foster a feeling of community as we make the necessary big changes to the way the council will operate.
- ✓ Ensure governance is clear and transparent, with solid due diligence and independent external expert advice before purchasing commercial properties as investments.
- ✓ Introduce a change of culture with our council staff, so everyone knows their roles and responsibilities and feels respected when undertaking their job.
- ✓ Bring down the cost of senior managers and directors at the council; all appointments to assistant director and above will be made by councillors.

## 7. Getting a fair deal for Kingston

Despite its huge business rate contribution, Kingston has always had a bad deal from central government. This is now affecting our schools. Conservative councillors are too timid to take the government to task over it. Liberal Democrats are made of stronger stuff.

### ***Liberal Democrat priorities for the next 4 years:***

- ✓ Work with our schools and both MPs to lobby for a fairer deal for our children's education and the needs of their schools.
- ✓ Ensure that school funding is used for its intended purpose and is not used to pay for shortfalls in other areas.
- ✓ Work with health partners to access additional funding for NHS and social care services.
- ✓ Lobby the Mayor of London for better transport infrastructure, including more buses on routes people want.
- ✓ Make the most of business opportunities to reduce the burden of first class services on Council tax payers.
- ✓ Campaign for more investment in housing, including lifting the housing revenue account cap which could allow us to build even more homes.
- ✓ Campaign for a one-time stamp duty exemption to encourage anyone wanting to downsize and free up family 3+bed homes.
- ✓ Lobby hard to see new schools are established, that we have a say on the type of school and that it will meet the needs of our local communities.
- ✓ Lobbying to secure the best deal for Kingston on everything from funding for local police, schools and colleges to CrossRail2.
- ✓ Private renters have no security of tenure, we will campaign to introduce new rights for private tenants for longer term tenancies.
- ✓ Continue to campaign for better access for disabled people at our railway stations.

## 8. Getting the finances right

Kingston Council's spending power has been decreasing every year for the last eight years. Whilst residents pay the highest council tax in London, Kingston Council has always received less from central government than other London Authorities. It is easy to say “reduce managers, bureaucracy, red tape”, and much of that has already been done. There will always be more to do, but to fund the high quality services we think our residents deserve, Kingston Council must find new ways of working and innovative income streams.

During the last year, Council budgets have gone from bad to worse, and Conservatives are sleep walking into bankruptcy. For more analysis see [http://www.kingstonlibdems.org/tories\\_are\\_sleep\\_walking\\_kingston\\_into\\_bankruptcy](http://www.kingstonlibdems.org/tories_are_sleep_walking_kingston_into_bankruptcy)

### ***Liberal Democrat priorities for the next 4 years:***

- ✓ Hold an emergency budget to consider how the necessary savings can be made without adversely affecting services.
- ✓ Put value for money at the heart of the Council's budget. We will take every opportunity to modernise and transform working practices to make Kingston Council more efficient. We will continue to find alternative ways of providing services more efficiently and effectively by working jointly with partner organisations such as the health sector, the voluntary sector, local businesses and other local authorities.
- ✓ Being open, honest and accountable in our finances and the pressures on it.
- ✓ Putting a pause on any new outsourcing contracts whilst we carry out a review of all existing deals and looking at lessons that Kingston Council can learn and determine the best model for the future rather than trusting old-style outsourcing contracts.
- ✓ Government austerity means Kingston Council is being forced into commercialisation in order to provide essential services for those who need them most. Whilst it may not be what many would prefer, it is needed to pay for our changing population and ensure our parks and pavements, planning and potholes, leisure and lighting, waste and recycling are sufficiently resourced.
- ✓ Using our ability to borrow money at very low interest rates, we will look to purchase property sites which could also provide a vital revenue stream for the council that can be reinvested in services.

- ✓ Work with our staff and use their ability to work innovatively and creatively with the wider local public, with business and our community partners.
- ✓ Make sure we have a genuine dialogue with local residents, partners and businesses about what is fair and unfair. Our aim is to create a sense of place and foster a feeling of community as we make the necessary big changes to the way the council will operate.
- ✓ Support our local employers by promoting a start-up culture and nurturing the creative sector and securing more flexible, affordable workspaces that new and growing firms need.
- ✓ Ensure governance is clear and transparent, with solid due diligence and independent external expert advice before purchasing commercial properties as investments.
- ✓ Use LGA peer challenges to objectively assess issues and utilise best practice from local authorities across the country.