

A Vision for the 21st Century

The Liberal Party's Manifesto for the 2001 General Election

An Introduction

This is the Manifesto of the Liberal Party, not to be confused with the Liberal Democrats.

We seek to build a Liberal society in which every citizen possesses liberty, property and security, with none enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity. Our chief care is for the rights and opportunities of the individual and in all spheres we set freedom first.

The policies detailed here reflect the fundamental Liberal belief in the equality of personal worth of every individual and a society which maximises the life chances of all, regardless of colour, creed, race, gender, sexual orientation, or where they live on the planet. Liberals proclaim that everyone should enjoy freedom of thought, of speech and of action, provided they do not impinge on the freedom of others, and that everyone should be equal before the law.

We hope that, having read the manifesto, you will support us by voting Liberal, by becoming a member or by contributing to our campaign funds.

Some Recent History

In 1981, the Liberal Party saw an opportunity to break the mould of British politics by forming an alliance with those who had left the troubled Labour Party to form the Social Democrats. Even so, it proved difficult to reconcile differences in philosophy and the "Alliance" failed to dislodge Margaret Thatcher or replace the rejuvenating Labour Party as the main opposition.

After the 1987 election, the Liberal and Social Democratic leaderships argued that the difficulty of two separate parties campaigning together could be solved if the two parties became one, and a "democratic fusion" was proposed to create a brand new party now known as the Liberal Democrats.

The proposal was controversial and many Liberals resolved to have nothing to do with the new hybrid. They decided to re-establish the Liberal Party to continue the genuine Liberal political tradition to champion causes which New Labour and the Conservatives oppose and which have long been forsaken by the Liberal Democrats in their frantic quest to join the political establishment.

What the Liberal Party stands for

By **Michael Meadowcroft**, President of the Liberal Party

Our society needs Liberalism, and Liberalism requires a Liberal party. In the face of global challenges to civilisation, we are being managed not governed, and all the parties in Parliament are floundering. As the problems we face become more complex, our politics are becoming ever more superficial; increasingly, politicians tackle the symptoms of the disease not the cause of it. Small wonder that public participation in our political process is getting lower and lower.

Liberalism goes to the heart of the problem. It believes that freedom is the most precious value of human society, and it is this belief which draws together its response to all the key issues facing us. Liberalism welcomes diversity and pluralism which recognise and value the differences between individuals and between communities. It does not believe that the end justifies the means and, consequently, it asks the questions no one else dare ask.

What kind of a society is it which relies on spy cameras in public places? Liberals oppose their dangerous intrusion. Is it a mature society which hands over all decisions on what its children will be taught in every classroom in the land to one person? Liberals oppose the dangerous concept of an imposed national curriculum. Is it a wise society which focuses on health innovations for the few rather than preventive health care for the many? Liberals expose the failure to tell the truth about health care. And how safe is a world which preaches ecology whilst practising growth? Liberalism accepts the truth of impending global disaster and plans accordingly.

All these radical ideas are unique to Liberalism and to the Liberal Party. They are developed in this manifesto. Please read on!

How we get things done

Liberals do not believe that it is necessary to stalk the corridors of power in Whitehall to achieve results. We apply our beliefs to create policy, with which to address issues of the day. We issue newsletters and press statements to increase awareness of problems and our ideas. We also make common cause with like-minded individuals to influence policy makers.

We field candidates at all levels of government and currently have Liberals elected to principal and parish authorities nationwide in places as diverse as Liverpool and Cornwall. Many of these are leading practitioners of community politics, in which residents are regularly informed and consulted about local issues. Groups of our councillors play a key role on 7 councils; on Wyre Forest, we are part of a rainbow alliance running the council with our Cllr Mike Oborski as Council Leader. In East Anglia, Cllr Ray Pobje is the Mayor of Peterborough City Council.

As for national elections, we punch well above our weight, having polled 93,000 votes in the 1999 Euro Election. In the last General Election, our Councillor Steve Radford took second place in the Liverpool West Derby seat.

Our Membership & Organisation

The Liberal Party is run as a “one-member one-vote” organisation, with all members having equal rights under the Party’s Constitution, whether they join a local association or the Party centrally.

All Members receive free copies of Liberal News, which is issued several times a year and they are entitled to attend and vote at the party’s annual general meeting - known as the “Assembly”- which is held every Autumn to consider the work of the Party and debate policy. The Party has a President and a National Executive Committee, which is elected by postal ballot of the entire membership to run the administration and the Party’s office.

We have spokespersons on a wide range of issues and have played a crucial role in the gay rights movement, the electoral reform campaign and the campaign against the Euro. Additionally, we have contributed to government consultation exercises on funding of political parties, transport and freedom of information.

There is local Liberal activity in Edinburgh, Sunderland, Gateshead, Cumbria, Southport, Liverpool, Manchester, Salford, Leeds, Sheffield, Peterborough, Wolverhampton, Kidderminster, Oxford, Brentwood, Southend, London, Eastbourne, Brighton, Isle of Wight, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall.

An A-Z of Liberal Party Policy

Animal Welfare

The level of a nation's civilisation can be determined by how its animals are treated. The UK may be better than some but animal welfare legislation has been piecemeal. Liberals want to see a new and independent Standing Committee on Creature Protection, with powers to act as an enforcement agency. Such an agency would oversee the end of battery farming, implementation of the Brambell Report and a complete ban on the export of live animals for slaughter. Liberals would also outlaw all laboratory experiments on live animals and the hunting of any creature for sport. We support well-resourced rare and endangered species recovery schemes, incorporating protection and expansion of wildlife habitats.

Arts, Leisure & Sport

The Millennium Dome represents everything a Liberal Arts and Leisure policy is designed to avoid; public money thrown at prestige, London-based projects could be better spent on a multitude of smaller community schemes to foster maximum participation in artistic, cultural and sporting activities locally. There should be greater public access to existing stadia, school facilities and open spaces. We oppose library closures, calling instead for their transformation into on-line information centres and exhibition venues to supplement their traditional function. Despite growth of cable & satellite broadcasting, we believe that community and public service broadcasting remain vital. The power of the media should be curbed with a statutory right of reply and redress.

Economy & Taxation

Liberals advocate a free enterprise economy with government intervention to re-distribute wealth and protect the weak from the powerful. We want sustainable growth and strict controls over monopolies. We seek to devolve economic activity to local communities on a human scale. Liberal taxation would be levied more on income according to the ability to pay, rather than flat-rate consumer taxes. To lessen the impact of VAT on the poor, we would extend zero-rating on necessities and levy a higher rate for luxuries. A minimum income for all would be achieved by combination of benefits and taxes to create a single tax credit system. NI should be combined with Income Tax and we want land taxation to recoup for the community those values it creates.

Education

Education is the rock upon which Liberal societies are founded. We believe that education should not just be a preparation for work but should be a lifelong process, enriching the lives of individuals and the community. We champion a free and comprehensive education service from nursery to nineteen. Small, community schools would be liberated from Ofsted, League Tables, SATS, and the National Curriculum, all of which we would abolish. Instead we favour local curricula agreed by teachers, parents and governors. In particular, we are concerned that "cramming" of literacy and numeracy may be damaging young children. Better paid and resourced teachers would spend less time on testing and administration and more time teaching in smaller classes.

Environment

Environmental pollution must not be taxed; it must be stopped. Ecological disaster awaits unless radical measures are implemented to reduce profligate and mindless consumption, thereby reducing pollution, countering life-threatening climatic changes and conserving resources. While a global approach backed by International Law is vital, Britain can show the way out of the consumer society to a future where manufactured goods are built to last longer, pollute less and are capable of recycling, where sustainable sources of energy replace fossil fuels and nuclear power, and where life in urban areas is as pleasant as life in the countryside. Such a future must be planned so as to be attainable for everyone on the planet.

Europe

The Liberal Party is opposed to the European Union as currently constituted, believing the EU to be a bureaucratic monolith which can never be democratically accountable and will always be prone to cronyism and corruption. In particular, we oppose the principle of the Single European Currency, harmonisation of taxes and the creation of a single European army. We wish to leave the EU and advocate instead a Commonwealth of all Europe in which nations would be free to operate their own economies, use their own currencies and levy their own taxes, while importing best practice as desired and making common cause on matters of regional concern, such as peace and the environment.

Farming & Fishing

The foot and mouth epidemic and the cod shortage are symptomatic of a serious crisis afflicting our farms and fishing fleets, for which intensive animal husbandry and over-production of cheap food are responsible. We propose a return to traditional and sustainable farming, free from pesticides and genetically modified crops, supported by local abattoirs and markets. We want to retain good agricultural land and to encourage small farms and co-operatives. Public services in rural areas would be enhanced and grants paid to farmers in recognition of their stewardship of the countryside. A separate Ministry for Fishing would introduce fishing zones, police pollution, scrap catch quotas, and run fish stock conservation and sea-bed farming projects.

Government

Democracies must be kept in constant repair. Britain's is falling apart and recent changes such as directly elected Mayors, secretive council cabinets, party list voting systems and party registration have made matters worse. Liberals would reform government by establishing small community councils nationwide, by introducing regional government for England, by strengthening the existing devolved institutions, by consultation using citizens' juries, and by rejuvenating elections with Single Transferable Voting, voters' information packs, a penalty-free nomination system and a Polling "Democracy Day" Holiday to encourage voter participation. We oppose referenda and any moves to mechanise voting or introduce state funding of political parties.

Health

Liberals pioneered, and are resolved to maintain, the National Health Service as the primary provider of free healthcare for all. Even so, rapid advances in medicine require difficult decisions about NHS priorities and limitations. We say that public health and services that benefit the

many must take priority over hi-tech advances that benefit the few. Allergy and Well Women Clinics, and better publicity on health, diet and accident prevention, would feature in our core care NHS, staffed by better paid nurses, doctors and ancillaries in well-resourced facilities. We would abolish NHS Trusts and bring the health service under local democratic control, ensuring liaison with housing and social services to create a seamless service.

Housing

Liberals call for a properly funded housing programme run by local councils who would be given primary responsibility for providing a variety of rented accommodation, for tackling homelessness, for providing follow-on and sheltered housing for vulnerable groups, for regulating mobile home parks and for acting as agents for private rented accommodation. Councils would also act as consultants for self-build schemes and for tenant management/consultation, and would be empowered to acquire long standing vacant properties. We would restore to councils the unfettered power to decide how to manage, dispose of, or increase their housing stock and we oppose wholesale privatisation and demolition of council houses.

Industry & Employment

Before wealth can be distributed, it must first be created!

To this end, environmentally-friendly infrastructure should be staffed by a well-educated, adaptable and motivated workforce who enjoy a national minimum wage, a share in the profit generated and a say in the decision-making. We want a workers' charter, cheap long-term credit for R & D, plant renewal and small business development, rebates to defray training costs, and more phased retirement and job sharing. Certain industries should be under public ownership to serve the wider interests of society. Properly funded community employment schemes would offer work to the jobless, whose earnings from part time work should not jeopardise benefit.

International Issues

Globalisation of manufacturing, telecommunications and commerce and international crises such as global warming, poverty, terrorism, and dictatorships, all cry out for World Government. In the meantime, the existing United Nations must be supported, reformed and strengthened. Trade must be fair, rather than just free, and multinationals must be tamed and taxed. We should cease trade in arms, unilaterally dismantle our nuclear weapons, refrain from indiscriminate bombing and sanctions, put our armed forces at the disposal of the UN to assist in joint security operations and disaster relief, and invest in non-military alternatives to conflict resolution. We should increase aid to poor countries and write off Third World Debt.

Law & Liberty

Liberals believe that the rights of the individual are paramount, subject only to the rights of others. We propose a written constitution, freedom of information and a Bill of Rights which would include rights to freedom of association, lawful demonstration, privacy and abortion. We would look into euthanasia and would license, rather than prohibit, drugs. We would reform PACE and tightly control CCTV. We oppose curfews, zero tolerance and any moves to introduce identity cards. We call for a specific offence to cover "hate" crimes and independent bodies to investigate complaints against the police and judges. We would extend trial by jury and

Legal Aid. We believe that rehabilitation and restitution are preferable to prison for all but the most serious crimes.

Pensioners

Liberals introduced the first old age pension and we maintain that a person who works and pays taxes for 40 years should receive a state pension sufficient to provide a basic standard of living, which the Family Budget Unit calculates to be £90 a week for single pensioners and £135 a week for a couple. Additional benefits will need to be paid to take account of housing costs, disability, and the needs of older pensioners. Care in the Community is always preferable to an old people's home but this has to be properly funded by the State. Improving home help and meals on wheels services are key components of Liberal policy, together with a government-funded, community-based, council-run, sheltered housing construction programme.

Transport

As last September's fuel crisis demonstrated, transport affects everybody's everyday lives. We have long advocated an integrated transport network, key components of which would be a renationalised, electrified and enlarged rail network providing fast regular trains between population centres; fare-free local public transport; more use of waterways; better facilities for cycling and walking and more teleworking, internet shopping and home delivery networks. High road transport costs impact on rich and poor alike, so must be reduced, but we envisage a long term strategy to ration road transport and we propose tax breaks for small environmentally friendly vehicles, funded by tax penalties on those that are not.

Young People

Co-ordinated policy on the nation's young is vital if alienation from society is to be avoided. Our support of state education and welfare is informed by the fact that many children - rich and poor - rely on schools, welfare and community services to make up for deficiencies at home. Disaffection of young people should be addressed by including them in decision-making processes; elected student councils should be set up in all secondary schools; the voting age should be reduced to 16; the need for independence should be recognised by restoring the rights of 16 and 17 year olds to claim housing and other benefits and by replacing student loans and tuition fees with a student grant fixed at the level of a basic "living wage".