

Radical ideas - not the dead centre

The Liberal Party was relaunched as a national organisation by Liberals who rejected the merger with the SDP which led to the formation of the Liberal Democrats. Instead of worrying about our media image we have returned to our philosophical roots. This manifesto sets out our proposals on key issues based on that Liberal philosophy.

the Liberal alternative

The Liberal Party stands for the creation of an open society and against all forms of prejudice and vested interest. The hallmark of liberalism is the faith it places in people and communities. Liberals want everyone, not just the wealthy and the most able, to have the maximum opportunity.

By rejecting prejudice and vested interests Liberals have historically been generators of new ideas; ideas often adopted much later by others. We are proud to continue that tradition and in this manifesto are many radical ideas that contrast sharply with the bland consensus of the three main parties.

not the centre

Liberals do not seek merely to adopt a middle position between conservatives and socialists. Instead we try to apply Liberal principles and are not afraid when this leads us to unconventional conclusions.

what is freedom?

Both Conservatives and Liberals talk about "the freedom of the individual", but they mean different things by that phrase. Conservatives see freedom in narrow economic terms. Liberals have a much broader view of freedom.

Cooperative ventures, employee participation and community involvement are all on the Liberal agenda. Our aim is to spread power to give people real influence over the decisions that affect them. However, we also believe that the process of spreading power must not be paternalistic and that new structures must evolve in response to real needs rather than being imposed from above.

A consequence of our view of freedom is an attitude of tolerance towards minorities. The unemployed, travellers, gays, single mothers and many others have found to their cost that the Conservative view of freedom does not include them.

socialism and equality

Socialists aim to achieve equality through state planning and regulation. Because this involves action on behalf of the disadvantaged members of society it has always had the sympathy of Liberals. But Liberals believe that state planning is usually ineffective and that equality is not the prime objective.

We aim for a good minimum standard of living for all. Liberals do believe strongly in equal rights and thus have some aims in common with socialists.

the danger of tyranny

As our society becomes more aggressive and less stable, authoritarian solutions can seem attractive. This is an increasing problem, not just in Britain but around the world. Fear leads to demands for quick action and “strong government” rather than careful thought and consultation. Simplistic solutions, the scapegoating and oppression of minorities and stifling of criticism are the inevitable results.

Against this the Liberal quest for freedom leads us to a love for reason and debate. Our proposals for the reform of British democracy go beyond calls for a fairer voting system to ideas which seek to ensure that decisions are made after due debate and deliberation, on the basis of good information, and with better protection against abuses of power.

a practical approach

We are not armchair theorists. The ideas and proposals in this manifesto have been worked out and debated by members of the Liberal Party on the basis of their experience, drawn from many different walks of life and from active campaigning.

All we ask is that you read what we have to say, consider it with an open mind and, if you agree with the principles of our approach, join us!

Summary of Liberal Party policies

Democracy

Reforms designed to improve the standard of political debate and encourage longer term thinking.....

- no “three line whips”
- use of “juries” rather than referenda
- the Single Transferable Vote electoral system

Civil liberties

Advancing individual and minority rights.....

- stronger laws against discrimination and recognition of the rights of minorities
- a statutory Bill of Rights
- restore rights of peaceful protest

The environment

Policies which are realistic but reflect long term thinking.....

- longer lasting products
- research into sustainable sources of energy
- an EU “pollution police force”
- stronger laws on animal welfare (and full enforcement)

Transport

An integrated transport network.....

- planning policies which reduce the need for travel
- investment in public transport (buses, metro systems and railways) to entice people away from cars

The economy

Creating a stable economy.....

- Community Employment Schemes to create real new jobs
- more flexible working arrangements
- measures to increase employee power and encourage co-operatives
- employee, consumer and community involvement in state owned industries
- more effective measures against monopolies
- combine the tax and benefit systems to eliminate the “poverty trap”
- land value taxation

Education

Making schools answerable to the local communities they serve.....

- end the National Curriculum
- smaller schools sharing resources on a “collegiate” basis

Health

Bringing health back under democratic control.....

- co-operation between (elected) health authorities and hospitals instead of an artificial market
- more openness about health priorities and greater emphasis on prevention

Homelessness

A concerted effort could go a long way to solving this problem if the political will existed.....

- restoration of benefits to 16 and 17 year olds
- more low cost housing and use of empty properties
- cooperatives and self-build schemes

Crime

Tough penalties may be popular but prevention and detection are more effective.....

- more use of civilian staff to release police time for detection
- better anti-theft devices in cars and crime prevention to be considered when designing housing estates

Europe

A “Commonwealth of Europeb” mainly concerned with peace and the environment rather than with economics.....

- oppose a centralised economy with a single currency
- the European Parliament to be the main decision making body
- reform of the Common Agricultural and Fisheries Policies

Peace

Working to resolve conflicts at an early stage.....

- a stronger UN, less under the control of the major powers
- nuclear disarmament
- transfer resources to “non-military security”

Democracy and deliberation

Liberals believe that it is political failures that lie at the root of many other unsolved problems, especially the short-term thinking which so often leads to quick-fixes instead of lasting solutions.

Liberals Propose

- the Single Transferable Vote electoral system, which serves voters rather than parties
- regional and local government with real power
- use of “juries” of the public for consultation on major issues, instead of referenda
- replacement of the House of Lords by a senate, to be elected on a regional basis
- a written constitution
- fixed term parliaments

Liberals Oppose

- three line whips
- the constitutional power of the monarchy (but not its retention for ceremonial purposes)

overdue reforms

The British system of government has a backlog of overdue reforms: proportional representation, fixed term parliaments, an elected second chamber, devolution to the nations and regions of Britain, the restoration of power to local authorities and the need to curb abuses of power through a written constitution.

All these have been supported by Liberals for a long time and there is a growing consensus for most of them, but Liberals have a deeper concern about the health of our democracy.

genuine debate

A key issue for Liberals is the generally poor standard of political debate. One reason for this is the use of three line whips which make most of the important votes in Parliament a foregone conclusion. Although Liberal Party members elected to public office work together to achieve the aims of the Party and always strive to agree among themselves, they remain free at all times to serve their constituents as they think best.

more use of the jury concept

We are opposed to the use of referenda. It is dangerous to pretend that issues can be settled by a simple question with a yes or no answer. Our alternative is to use a form of jury system, where representative groups of several hundred people (selected by scientific sampling methods) consider issues in depth over a period of several days and are able to question experts before giving their views. This gives more meaningful but non-binding results.

the right voting system

The Liberal Party – 1997 General Election Manifesto

Although we believe that proportional representation is important we are strongly against systems which give more power to party machines. We advocate the Single Transferable Vote in multi-member constituencies, as proposed by the Electoral Reform Society, which enables voters to express preferences between different candidates of the same party and does not exclude independents.

The use of multi-member constituencies retains a link between MPs and their constituents and encourages parties to offer a balanced slate of candidates. In a five member constituency no party would offer five male candidates!

Civil liberties

Liberals are committed to advancing the rights and opportunities of the individual and we therefore support proposals for a Bill of Rights. It is a sad state of affairs when people have to appeal to Europe for redress not available in Britain.

Liberals Propose

- a bill of rights, incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights and enforceable in British courts
- stronger laws against discrimination on the basis of race, sex, disability and age
- the repeal of laws which discriminate against homosexuals
- a nationwide plan for properly controlled travellers' sites

Liberals Oppose

- any legislation which restricts the right to peaceful protest
 - the introduction of identity cards
-

freedom under threat

Every citizen should be alarmed at the erosion of civil liberties during the last seventeen years of Conservative rule. The recent Criminal Justice Act (which sadly the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties are not committed to repeal) removes the right to silence and restricts many kinds of peaceful protest. These measures have done almost nothing to combat crime but have removed long established individual rights. The right to protest, inconvenient though it often is for those with power, is a vital feature of democracy.

no to identity cards

Liberals are strongly against the proposed introduction of identity cards. We are not impressed by the argument that the innocent have nothing to fear; the history of this century shows that there is everything to fear from governments that want to monitor and control the lives of citizens.

People should not have to prove their innocence in order to go about their business and that is an important point of principle.

the rights of minorities

It is a widely accepted Liberal principle that everyone should be allowed to exercise their freedom up to the point where it conflicts with the freedom of others. This means that even though the majority may disapprove of the actions of a minority they are not entitled to ban those actions unless they do actual harm to others. The Liberal Party campaigns with minorities who we believe to be unfairly restricted.

British law discriminates against non-heterosexuals, for example in the unequal ages of consent and by preventing local authorities from giving grants to education or art which presents homosexuality in a positive light. Liberals are campaigning for the repeal of such legislation.

The gypsy and travelling community is another case in point. When proper planning for both local authority and private sites is made gypsies and travellers are able to contribute and their children are assured an education. It should be possible to accommodate a nomadic lifestyle, as has existed in these islands for many centuries. A sensible legal framework would also require attitudes of responsible citizenship from the travellers themselves.

Caring for the planet

The changes needed to safeguard the future of life on earth threaten many vested interests and call for longer term thinking than our present political system displays.

Liberals Propose

- statutory minimum guarantee periods so that goods are built to last
- a major programme of investment and research into non-polluting sources of energy
- an EU-wide “pollution police force”
- periodic environmental audits for companies, with the reports placed on public record
- tighter control over laboratory experiments on animals and full enforcement

Liberals Oppose

- nuclear power
 - the concept of taxing pollution instead of stopping it
 - fox hunting and other blood sports
-

longer lasting products

The market gives producers a vested interest in making goods that don't last. Mandatory minimum guarantee periods of several years could be used to force manufacturers to make goods more durable and repairable. We also propose a variety of incentives to encourage designers to take into account the reduction of pollution during manufacture and the use of materials which can be recycled.

sustainable sources of energy

Far too little money has been invested in researching alternative sources of energy, in contrast to the huge investment in nuclear power. Solar, wind and wave power, barrage and hydroelectric schemes, the incineration of waste and geothermal energy are all worthy of further exploration.

An often overlooked “source” of energy is to use less of it! Many products and buildings could be made much more energy efficient.

pollution

Liberals propose an EU “pollution police force” to investigate actual and potential causes of pollution and bring prosecutions. This would have a duty to respond to questions and complaints from the public. We also support company “environmental audits” with reports filed on the public record at Companies House.

animal welfare

Surplus capacity now provides an ideal opportunity to move away from intensive farming methods. We would like to see legislation to phase out battery farming and the institutionalised cruelty and poor hygiene that go hand in hand with such practices. We also support the campaign for a permanent ban on the export of live animals for slaughter.

Recent research indicates that toxicity tests, for example, can be as effectively taken using cultures of postmortem animal or human cells and skin tissue. We believe that it will soon be possible to end experiments on live animals altogether. In the meantime existing regulations should be strictly enforced. We strongly support moves towards a common European acceptance of national testing, which should mean that testing need only be done once.

A transport network

Britain needs a coordinated transport system with different forms of transport forming an integrated network. Environmental considerations alone make this an important issue, but there is also the question of the time lost in travelling which has an affect both on quality of life and on the economy.

A good transport network is an important part of the foundation on which a successful economy is built.

Liberals Propose

- Planning policies which seek to place employment opportunities and amenities near where people live
- tax concessions for small vehicles
- investment in bus and metro systems and fare-free local public transport
- the reopening of rail links to all major centres of population

Liberals Oppose

- rail privatisation
 - further major road building
-

getting away from the car

There is an increasing acceptance that problems of pollution and road congestion can only be solved by a major shift away from road traffic.

The Liberal strategy is to reduce dependence on the motor car by investing in other forms of transport.

We also advocate tax and access concessions for small vehicles which meet fuel consumption and pollution standards, increases in tax on larger vehicles, the design of car-free residential areas and priority schemes for pedestrians, cycles and buses.

buses and light rail systems

If dependence on the motor car and the congestion and pollution that follow from it is to be reduced, investment in bus and light rail (metro systems) is vital. We support the idea of fare-free local public transport.

We also advocate a halt to all new trunk road building, diverting funds saved to public transport. Work on the elimination of accident black spots and improvement of existing roads would not be affected.

reopening railways

We propose the reopening of rail links to all major centres of population. We calculate that three million people are living in centres of population without train services and that services could be restored to these communities by reopening just 700 miles of track.

reducing the need for travel

Planning policies could reduce the need for transport by placing housing, employment, shopping and leisure facilities together. This is possible to a much greater extent than happens at present. Home shopping and delivery systems should be encouraged. There should be tax incentives for people working from home.

An economy serving people

Living in the real world

Liberal objectives

- to create an economy with long-term stability and full employment
 - to support world development and tackle poverty
 - to convert to sustainable, non-polluting industrial processes
 - to foster the development of local economies and give employees and consumers a real voice
-

the threats to the UK economy

The Western world has long depended for its standard of living on having an educated workforce and technical know-how not available in the rest of the world. This position is fast being eroded as developing nations catch up.

The Western world is profligate in its use of natural resources and must urgently move towards sources of energy, industrial processes and lifestyles which are sustainable and non-polluting.

A series of short term measures and electoral bribery have given us an unstable economy while key issues have not been addressed.

local economies

The Liberal response to these facts of life is to foster the development of local economies, encouraging cooperative ventures and organisation on a human scale.

Tackling unemployment

Liberals Propose

- more investment in training
- Community Employment Schemes to create real new jobs
- wider use of job sharing
- a more flexible approach to retirement and working hours

Liberals Oppose

- schemes which reduce unemployment statistics without actually reducing unemployment!
-

real wages for real work

It is a paradox of our present economic system that although there is a shortage of jobs there is no shortage of work to be done.

Liberals do not believe that the solution lies in the creation of a low wage economy. Our proposal is the introduction of properly funded and planned Community Employment Schemes paying real wages for real work and concentrated on improving local environments through building and maintenance projects.

keeping pace with change

In a fast changing world, employment opportunities are greatly enhanced by the availability of training and by flexible patterns of work. Wider use of job sharing, a more flexible approach to retirement and workplace childcare facilities would all help to increase people's employment options.

Co-ownership

Liberals Propose

- tax and grant aid for employee co-operatives
- employee, consumer and community involvement in state owned enterprises
- large companies to have supervisory boards, 50% elected by employees
- enhanced powers for the Monopolies and Mergers Commission

Liberals Oppose

- further privatisations
-

state or private ownership

Liberals believe that certain industries cannot easily be made to serve the wider interests of society if they are run for profit, but we would like to move the debate on, to consider other forms of ownership and control. We advocate more employee, community and consumer involvement in the running of state owned enterprises.

democracy at work

Liberals would like to see positive help for employee co-operatives in the form of tax incentives, soft loans and grants. We are also aware of the need for changes in company law to permit alternative company structures.

In larger companies there should be supervisory boards, elected equally by employees and shareholders, with specific powers in relation to such matters as directors' pay, takeovers and major decisions of company strategy.

Fair taxes

Liberals Propose

- a "citizen's income" and minimum wage
- merger of National Insurance with income tax
- a more progressive income tax system, with a top rate of 50%
- land value taxation
- extension of the zero VAT rate but a higher rate on luxuries

Liberals Oppose

- any increase in the range of goods subject to VAT
-

a citizen's income

By merging the tax and benefit systems into a single tax credit system (already working in several other countries) it is possible to eliminate the "poverty trap", whereby those on low incomes can be worse off if they earn more due to the loss of benefits. With universal rather than means tested benefits we thus create a "citizen's income" which can be linked to a minimum wage.

land value taxation

When planning permission is given for housing or a supermarket on vacant land the owner often makes a huge instant profit. This illustrates the point that land values are publicly created. Land value taxation seeks to return to the community some of that value. It is an easy tax to assess, hard to avoid and gives an incentive to put derelict land to use.

Education for life

Liberals believe that education should be more than just a preparation for work (important though that is) but a means of enriching the lives of individuals and the community.

Liberals Propose

- smaller schools sharing resources on a “collegiate” basis
- expansion of nursery education
- more training and support for school governors
- content of the curriculum to be determined locally
- schools to be fully answerable to parents and the local community

Liberals Oppose

- the National Curriculum
 - “Opting Out” of schools from local authority control
 - the replacement of student grants by loans
-

end the National Curriculum

All three main parties agree in principle with the National Curriculum. Liberals, however, disagree. The National Curriculum gives power to the Secretary of State for Education to determine what will be taught in every school. We believe this sort of central direction to be unnecessary and dangerous. It has resulted in a massive increase in administration and reduced parental choice by forcing all schools to teach the same things in the same way.

Liberals would like to see schools developing their own approaches, subject only to the maintenance of acceptable standards.

genuine local management

The present system requires schools to compete for pupils, which favours those already best resourced. Governors have been saddled with the impossible task of allocating inadequate budgets while the content of the curriculum, teaching methods and testing are all tightly restricted by central government.

We do not believe that the workings of a market are appropriate to education and propose that competition between schools should be replaced by a stronger voice for parents, the local community and pupils themselves.

smaller schools

The differing advantages of small and large schools can be brought together by structuring the school system to provide schools organised on a collegiate basis with shared facilities.

Access to learning should not be restricted by age but continue throughout life. Secondary schools could have a larger role in adult education and be looked on as a resource for the whole community rather than just the young.

the question of resources

Even if the burden of the National Curriculum was removed we consider that education would still be underfunded. In particular there is now a serious backlog of building maintenance in most schools which will be expensive to rectify.

Liberals are strong supporters of nursery education, not only as an aid to working parents, but also because it lays a good foundation for all that follows. We also believe that education would be greatly improved by a significant reduction in class sizes and advocate a maximum of thirty.

Bringing the NHS back to health

Liberals pioneered the National Health Service and are appalled at its present condition. We believe that the NHS should be the primary provider of medical care, with private medicine available as a supplement rather than as a superior alternative for the better off.

Liberals Propose

- health to be under democratic control through local authorities
- co-operation between health authorities and hospitals, rather than artificial markets and competition
- more openness about health priorities
- more emphasis on prevention, with particular reference to diet
- a new approach to combating drug abuse
- adequate funding for “Care in the Community”

Liberals Oppose

- any moves away from the NHS as the main provider of health care
 - the use of “gagging clauses” in staff contracts
-

democratic control

The Conservatives have attempted to create an internal market within the NHS, with hospital trusts competing for contracts from health authorities. We are fundamentally opposed to this approach and believe that health authorities and hospital managements should work together to agree joint strategies for the development of local healthcare.

The elected assemblies we propose for the nations and regions of Britain should have the functions of Health Authorities, thus bringing health under democratic control.

priorities

Financial resources are never infinite, even for the health service, and difficult decisions must be made about priorities. Public health, prevention and basic care services that benefit the many must generally take priority over technological advances which can help only a few.

Although we support the aims of “Care in the Community” we believe that it has wrongly been treated as a cheap option. In particular not enough has been done to build public understanding.

prevention is better than cure

We recognise the division between the cure of sickness and the promotion of health. To ensure that the promotion of health receives proper priority we suggest that it be separated from the NHS and given to environmental and educational agencies. The promotion of good diet is a particular concern.

drug abuse

Drug abuse is a growing problem and a major factor in rising crime. Liberals believe that prohibition is ineffective and encourages law breaking (as with alcohol in the USA in the 1920s).

We propose a radical new approach to the problem with the state taking control of the supply of drugs and making them available to addicts under supervision but without threat of prosecution. It is vital to put traffickers out of business but also to prevent the epidemic growth which can arise if drugs are too freely available.

Ending homelessness

The sight of homeless young people begging on our streets is now commonplace and is a warning of the sort of society we are becoming. The massive increase in homelessness in recent years is a direct result of government policy and the trend can be reversed.

Liberals Propose

- restoration of benefits to 16 and 17 year olds
- measures to bring empty property into use
- replacement of mortgage tax relief with a housing credit for all
- support for co-operatives and self-build schemes

Liberals Oppose

- the restrictions on councils' use of capital receipts which prevent them from building more houses
-

taxes and benefits

The removal of housing benefits from those aged 16 and 17 has forced many young people onto the street. These benefits should be restored. Prompt payment of housing benefits and coverage of deposits would enable landlords to feel more secure in letting to people on state benefits.

more low cost housing

Mortgage interest tax relief was originally a help to home buyers but in the long run it has simply fed through into higher house prices. We therefore support its phasing out and replacement by a housing credit available to all.

Just about everyone except the Conservatives agrees that local councils should be free to spend the receipts from council house sales on building more houses. In many areas there is also scope for better incentive schemes to encourage tenants occupying larger houses than they need, to move to smaller properties.

making use of empty properties

Taxes could be used to penalise the owners of empty accommodation in areas of acute housing need. Grants could be offered to encourage the conversion of properties not currently in use and to assist with the upgrading of substandard accommodation.

Various public sector bodies, for example the Ministry of Defence, have empty houses which could be brought into use.

the role of co-operatives

The “foyer” system, which consists of small scale developments of flats and maisonettes run on a cooperative basis, provides the first rung on the housing ladder for young people. Self-build schemes and housing cooperatives could also be more used and deserve to be encouraged.

Liberals support a greater say for tenants in all aspects of the running of estates and, where appropriate, the transfer of power and responsibility for management to tenant co-operatives.

Answers to crime

The major parties seem more anxious to show that they are tough on crime than to find solutions to the problem. This tends to focus the debate on the issue of penalties with too little attention given to better prevention and detection or to research into the causes of crime.

Liberals Propose

- more use of civilian staff to release police officers' time for detection
- a review of priorities and the amount of paperwork
- effective crime prevention features in cars
- “designing out” crime from housing estates
- swifter trials
- more imaginative schemes where criminals are required to make reparation to their victims

Liberals Oppose

- inconsistent sentencing
 - the privatisation of prisons
 - the return of the death penalty
-

better detection

Neither deterrents nor rehabilitation will succeed unless criminals are actually caught and current detection rates are far too low. Investment in modern technology and more use of civilian staff would help to release police officers' time for detection. Liberals would also like to see a review of policing priorities and of the amount of paperwork.

community policing

Liberals believe that effective policing depends on the full support and co-operation of local communities.

We would like to see police authorities adopt a more devolved structure with local police stations being accountable to the communities they serve and having sufficient autonomy to enable them to respond to the needs of those communities and enlist their support.

crime prevention

Car manufacturers have been far too slow to incorporate crime prevention features, presumably because reminding buyers that cars may be stolen creates the wrong image. Cars should be required to have effective alarms, immobilisers and steering locks.

Urban estates can be better designed to make crime harder, for example, there need not be any unlit or enclosed alleyways.

dealing with criminals

Sentencing policy should give priority to reducing the rate of reoffending rather than just be concerned with punishment. There is clear evidence that harsh punishment leads to resentment and a desire to “get back” which makes reoffending more likely.

Swifter trials would make the use of progressively harsher sentences more effective and would minimise the time spent on bail or remanded in custody. There should also be a greater range of imaginative noncustodial schemes, especially those which require offenders to make reparation to their victims and bring them to understand the suffering they have caused.

A Commonwealth of Europe

Unlike the three main parties, the Liberal Party opposed the Maastricht Treaty. We believe that the European Union (EU) now being built will be a centralised and undemocratic super-state. The Liberals want a fully democratic and devolved EU concentrating on issues such as the environment and peacemaking rather than on economics: a “Commonwealth of Europe”, to include all of Europe and not just the present EU.

Liberals Propose

- a “Commonwealth of Europe” with an emphasis on environmental action and peacemaking
- a central role for the European Parliament
- replacement of the Common Agricultural Policy with a simpler scheme to encourage organic methods and help farmers in time of difficulty
- replacement of the Common Fisheries Policy with a system of fishing zones

Liberals Oppose

- the Maastricht Treaty
 - the idea of a single European currency
-

against a single economy

We reject the concept of a single economy as impractical and dangerous. European Monetary Union entails the “harmonisation” of indirect taxes such as VAT (almost certain to lead eventually to VAT on food, books and children’s clothes), the “convergence” of the economies of member states and the creation of a European Central Bank not subject to democratic control and with the primary objective of low inflation.

This means that the whole of the EU would be functioning as a single, centralised economy. Liberals warn of the dangers of this and the possible consequences in terms of unemployment.

The moves towards a single economy put up barriers to the new democracies of Eastern Europe and against developing countries. The Commonwealth we propose would be able to be more open.

a democratic Europe

The European Parliament should be the main decision making body with the Commission responsible to it. By clearly defining the powers to be exercised at European level a truly democratic structure is possible. It is the vagueness of the Maastricht Treaty which leads to decisions being negotiated between governments rather than being made by the European Parliament.

reform of the agriculture and fisheries policies

The disastrous effects of the Common Agriculture and Fisheries policies show the problems of centralised decision making. The cost is high, there is fraud on a huge scale, farmers are growing crops for subsidies rather than to meet real demand and there are mountains of surplus food.

We believe that the Common Agricultural Policy should be replaced by a simpler and cheaper scheme aiming to subsidise organic farming, encourage less intensive methods of animal husbandry and help farmers to cope with the short term problems caused by rapidly changing market conditions.

We also believe that there is an urgent need for replacement of the Common Fisheries Policy and advocate a system based on fishing zones.

Making peace

The best means of achieving collective security is by working to resolve conflicts through negotiation at an early stage (before any shooting starts).

Liberals Propose

- a transfer of resources and effort to non-military ways of resolving conflict
- changes in the UN to make it more clearly impartial and less atool of the major powers
- new UN agencies to promote democracy and development
- withdrawal from NATO

Liberals Oppose

- nuclear and other indiscriminate weapons
 - the international arms trade
-

non-military security

Liberals believe that we should be more flexible and open minded in our approach to security. We advocate a transfer of political commitment and money from military to non-military security.

By non-military security we mean the techniques of arbitration, reconciliation work in areas of potential conflict, rebuilding the social and economic structure of areas where a fragile peace has been established and study of the causes and resolution of conflict. The development and maintenance of democracy is also important: it is not by chance that there has rarely been a war between two democratic states.

Non-military techniques have tended to be ignored, leading to situations developing with no action being taken until the options have become very limited (as in Bosnia).

a stronger UN

We are committed to strengthening the UN, giving it new powers to act to resolve disputes, to enforce the Geneva Conventions, to promote democracy and to prevent substantial damage to the world's ecology. To do this however, it must be seen as impartial.

We are the only British political party to advocate the addition of a second Assembly, elected by people rather than by governments, removing the major powers right of veto in the Security Council and setting up new UN agencies to promote democracy and environmental protection.

There is now real hope for peace in the world if non-military, early stage intervention by the UN can be made acceptable.

nuclear weapons

The Liberal Party is committed to the abandonment of UK nuclear weapons (the Trident system) and other weaponry of indiscriminate destruction.

We wish to maintain conventional forces; professional, well equipped, well trained and sufficient to defend Britain's legitimate interests. We would always insist on every avenue of diplomacy, non-military action and negotiation being exhausted before embarking on military action.

How Liberal Party policy is made

Liberal Party policy is made by members. Here's how we operate.

membership

Individuals can join through a local association or as individuals, but all members have exactly the same rights. Our members come from all walks of life and all parts of the UK. About the only thing they have in common is a belief in the principles discussed in this manifesto.

the National Executive

The Party is run by a National Executive Committee (NEC), elected annually in a postal ballot of all members.

the annual Assembly

Each year a conference is held (in the Liberal Party it is called the Assembly) over a weekend, usually around the beginning of October. Members can propose motions to the Assembly. As many as there is time for are then debated and, if passed, become party policy. Booklets are published of the motions passed.

commissions

At each Assembly there is at least one "commission". This is a less formal session which reviews the party's policy on a specific subject area. These less formal sessions help less confident members to contribute.

working with other groups

The Liberal Party has built links with many campaigning organisations and pressure groups. They are regularly given the opportunity to comment on our policies and to suggest improvements.

councillors and candidates

The Liberal Party has over forty elected local councillors. Councillors and candidates, although not bound to support and promote every item of policy, have an obligation (written into the Party's Constitution) to distinguish to the outside world between Party policy and their own views whenever they differ.

“Liberal News”

Every member receives Liberal News, the Party's official journal, eight times a year and this contains articles on policy matters as well as news of campaigns and other events.

a campaigning Party

Although the Liberal Party devotes a great deal of time and effort to translating the philosophy of Liberalism into practical policies, it is first and foremost a campaigning party. Clearly, a minor party cannot win and hold over forty local council seats (many more than the Greens) without a strong record of local action.

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