



THE LIBERAL PARTY

A Manifesto for Interim & Post Pandemic Recovery & Renewal



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“The Liberal Party exists to create a liberal society, in which every citizen shall possess liberty, property and security, and none shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity. Its chief care is for the rights and opportunities of the individual, and in all spheres, it sets freedom first.”

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INTRODUCTION

There has never been a situation that has changed the political discourse of a country and the economic journey as the Covid-19 pandemic has.

Economically the right-wing agenda of cutting public expenditure and services and a pure focus on individual profit has been replaced by debate over public investment assisting businesses, workers, and services. The unthinkable has become the norm.

We have a Conservative government forced to see that Government investment is needed to ensure the economy and society does not plunge into recession. Who would ever have thought of Boris Johnson as being a resurrected Lord Keynes?

The task for us as Liberals is not to sit back but to seize the change in the political agenda. We must ensure that those in casual work and the low paid are not forced to suffer excessive tax rises to fund the public deficit when the Covid-19 crisis is over.

We must ensure that 'clapping for health workers' is a platform to ensure that investment in public health is restored and maintained.

Whilst private businesses have been given meaningful funding, local councils hit by increasing costs and reduced income are still left in limbo. As we go to print, there is every possibility several major cities in the country are on track to be declared bankrupt.

We Liberals have long argued we need more public health investment for preventive health care. It should not shock anyone, that heavy smokers and those overweight have disproportionately been subject to fatalities during this crisis. We need community health education more than ever, yet in some cities like Liverpool our long-established community health workers are being made redundant.

This manifesto is a development on some of our policies as a response to the Covid-19 Pandemic. A true Liberal agenda is needed now in Britain more than ever. We hope our vision resonates with yours and that you will join us in the fight for more progressive and pragmatic approaches to the way we run government, enable individuals and support communities in the UK.

Cllr STEVE RADFORD
President of the Liberal Party

Policy Development Key Points

- There is clearly a need to note all perceived weaknesses and failings during the Covid-19 crises. However, focus should not be to find blame but to establish the facts.
- The party believes the NHS needs to adopt a more decentralised and communitybased management structure whilst restoring the number of wards and beds to reflect regional needs.
- We believe that, although private care homes have a part to play in the care of the retired, all such institutions should be integrated with the NHS and local authorities to promote regional planning and funding with oversight from the Care Quality Commission.
- Planned actions need to be developed to recover lost time in school, this could include a mix of longer terms, longer school days and/or additional extra-curricular options, which may include pupils repeating the current academic year.
- We note the tremendous efforts being made by UK companies to supply the NHS with vital equipment such as PPE and ventilators during the current pandemic and this should be harnessed to the long-term benefit of the economy.
- The UK must find ways to recover from the unprecedented economic consequences with the introduction of innovative and progressive economic strategies. We must continue to seek out new trade deals as part of the country's post-BREXIT economic policy and to provide a welcome global diversity in sourcing goods and services and remove regional dependencies.
- The post economic recovery gives the nation a golden opportunity to develop effective green policies, and now is the ideal time to invest in such technologies to the long-term benefit of both the nation and the wider world.
- Arts and Culture make an important contribution to community, health and wellbeing and promoting creativity and freedom of expression; but has been existentially threatened by the Covid-19 lockdown. A new vision for funding and promoting arts and culture in a post-pandemic Britain is now needed.

Future Actions & Current Needs

There is clearly a need to note all perceived weaknesses and failings during the Covid-19 crises. However, focus should not be to find blame but to establish the facts to ensure lessons are learned for further phases of this crisis and for future pandemics. Details must be gathered and preserved for any future enquiry.

In the meantime, it is vital that we continue to mobilise all human efforts to find vaccines and/or treatments for the virus and best manage circumstances which enables saving lives by protecting the vulnerable, while also allowing as many people as possible to return to becoming economically active once again.

An NHS revitalised & Renewed

One of the most immediate areas of concern in the post pandemic era is the National Health Service (NHS). The service has weathered unprecedented demand. Only through the dedication and sacrifice of its staff; from doctors and nurses, to hospital porters and ancillary staff; has it been possible for the NHS to be able to continue to provide the essential care, as it has to Covid-19 sufferers and other patients.

Three decades of cuts in beds and wards had left the NHS on the verge of a major collapse with 144,000 beds, half the total of 30 years ago (The Kings Report 2019). This total included less than 4,500 Intensive Care Beds for a UK population which has increased to over 67 million people in that same time frame.

The Liberal Party believes the policy of closing local hospitals to concentrate resources has led to a loss of capacity which will take considerable effort to restore. Almost a third of England's 340 community hospitals have seen beds closed in the past 10 years, according to research undertaken by the University of Birmingham.

We believe that the NHS needs to adopt a more decentralised and community-based management structure with a lower emphasis on targets. We support and call upon the recent Nuffield Trust recommendations to be adopted for increasing smaller hospital provision and improving acute care in smaller hospitals.

We believe that the time is now also ripe to close PFI contracts and to look at alternative and sustainable ways to finance the NHS. We also advocate initial investment in more preventative healthcare provision, with a view to identifying life threatening conditions earlier, bringing better health and longevity and make savings in chronic care provision in the long term.

There is a real danger that, once the pandemic has subsided, many NHS workers may question their worth within the organisation and may look to a permanent career away elsewhere. We need action to retain these valued people. An organisation already struggling with recruitment and staff retention, and with 22,500 vacancies, will need to maintain its staffing numbers both through a fulfilling career route and fair position/role remuneration.

Care Homes

The care home industry has seen heart-breaking levels of fatalities. The Liberal Party believes the first principle of care should be to help the elderly stay and function independently in their own home.

Although private care homes have a part to play in the care of the retired, all such institutions should be integrated between the NHS and local authorities to promote regional planning and funding and critical governance. In such an environment the Care Quality Commission has a pivotal part to play in ensuring the resilience and financial security of the sector.

The care industry does not have the same levels of prestige as the wider health care industry and this has resulted in difficulties in attracting and retaining staff. Efforts need to be made to recruit the 120,000 shortfalls in staff needed to maintain the service to over 400,000 care home residents and half a million home-based patients, with an increased number suffering from Dementia.

There is a great need to foster partnerships between care homes and GP practices, to provide dedicated and professional care in the community.

The wider issues of an aging population and its demand on care services has been known for many years but it has taken the tragic circumstances of the pandemic for it to be fully acknowledged.

Education

Children of school age have been disadvantaged by the disruption to their education. The Liberal Party believes that planned actions need to be developed to recover lost time in school, this could include a mix of longer terms, longer school days and/or additional optional extra-curricular opportunities made available, including if necessary repeating the academic year.

Further and higher education provision also needs to be extended to those hospitality and service sector employees whose jobs will very likely never return and who will need to look at alternative avenues of employment.

Youth and Community Service Provision including the Voluntary Sector should be strengthened and supported in line with the party's policy on Youth Services. This will ensure that young people have the additional social education support and safe places in which to retreat in their leisure time so as to strengthen their resilience for the future.

The Economy

The UK economy has seen an unprecedented contraction in the immediate aftermath of the lockdown and gradual lifting of restrictions.

The Government was quick to aid businesses and to adapt its support to include many communities and sections of the economy. However, the consequences of this are that the UK's debt has risen from 85.2% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at the end of March 2020 to an estimated 100% of GDP by the end of July 2020. This would mean that the UK's debt is the same value as the UK's yearly productive output: the highest level of national debt the UK has seen since 1961, during the post-war recovery.

The Liberal Party acknowledges that there will be significant economic challenges ahead, including a recession and hyperinflation. The UK's strangled NHS and other under-resourced national and local services have for far too long been as a consequence of successive Labour, Conservative and Conservative/LibDem coalition governments which have been unwilling to raise public funds through increased taxation.

The Liberal Party believes there are fair ways of increasing public revenue. These include Land Value Taxation (LVT) (to partially replace income tax), progressive Inheritance Tax (to also partially fund Universal Inheritance endowments) and motorway tolls. Reformist and behaviour-change focused fiscal policies such as these will reduce the burden of tax for the ordinary working person of modest asset wealth who has a relatively low footprint, and increase it for non-productive (i.e.: non-farming) land and high net real-estate owners and resource consumers. New, fair ways of generating public revenues must be raised to face-up the consequences of the Covid-19, but also to put the UK on track for a better funded NHS, Education and local services.

The Liberal Party notes with pride the tremendous efforts being made by UK companies to supply the NHS with vital equipment such as PPE and ventilators during the current pandemic.

The current economic disruption has already highlighted the inherent dangers in relying on global supply chains and production concentrated in a single region or country of the world. The UK has a long history of innovation and this should be harnessed to the long-term benefit of the economy.

Financial savings would be sought by immediately scrapping HS2 and directing some of the funds targeted for that to upgrade and reinstate regional rail connections. We would also cancel any funding not already committed to our Trident nuclear deterrent.

The Liberal Party notes that whilst employees return to work clear guidelines must be set, and validated, on ways employers can protect their staff. The Liberal Party therefore asks that the Government and Employer's guarantee their staff's rights to work in a safe environment by providing washing and sanitising stations, along with PPE to protect staff.

Business & the SME Sector

The Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SME) sector has a vital part to play in the health of the national economy and its long-term recovery.

One of the first issues to be laid bare by the pandemic was that many businesses were running on unsustainable margins and with no cash reserves to cover them even in the short term.

As part of the long-term recovery process, priority should be given to those who have lost businesses and livelihoods through no fault of their own.

The party believes that in the short-term there will need to be a revision of bankruptcy laws to ensure that no viable business is forced to close, or business owners are forced into bankruptcy as a result of these unprecedented events.

We must commit as a nation to never again allow our ability to respond to a crisis to be dependent on international innovation and supply. We must enable the development and maintenance of strong manufacturing, engineering, laboratory, and testing capabilities in the UK.

Post Covid-19 recovery will need to be partly driven through supporting hard-hit small business and SME sectors, whilst restricting the ability of large firms to establish dominating or monopoly positions

The Cashless Society and access to Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs)

The increasing trend towards a cashless society has been further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic where contactless transactions have been promoted as way of further enhancing social distancing.

The decline of cash payments in society has been compounded by a decrease in the availability of ATMs.

We believe Internet banking and electronic payments should be an alternative payment method and not a direct replacement. Services such as pre-paid meters are largely cash driven and many charities rely on spontaneous donations of small change.

The party also notes the vulnerability of electronic payment service with a series of digital banking failures In such circumstances cash is the only payment method to purchase goods and services.

The Which? Magazine report of December 2018 highlighted that more than 1.3 million people in this country still have no bank account and 2.2 million rely almost exclusively on cash transactions on a day-to-day basis.

We believe that once the pandemic is over, a managed rolling back from card-only transactions should be initiated.

We believe that bricks and mortar premises remain relevant to providing services to those in need of banking services such as the elderly and those in rural and urban locations as well as opportunities to act as local hubs for postal services and other community needs; which should be developed as part of the community infrastructure.

Arts, Culture & Entertainment Industries

The Liberal Party is concerned at the long-term damage to arts centres, entertainment venues, theatres, and museums by the restrictions brought in to contain the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Such venues are especially vulnerable due to the nature of their enclosed and intimate environments and the extended time people are in contact even with social distancing.

With the loss of the valuable Christmas period many venues have lost their largest infusion of funds which would have cushioned their finances for the next 12 months.

The Cultural Recovery Fund (phases one and two) have given arts, culture and entertainment organisations support for loss of revenues between October 2020 and March 2021 (now extended to June 2021). However, we believe that support should be extended up to at least the end of August 2021.

We also call for radical reforms to arts funding in the UK. Arts Council funding is skewed in its regional distribution and centralised policy-making. Local Authorities are increasingly withdrawing funding to arts and culture. The Liberal Party calls for regionalised independent Arts & Culture Funding Commissions with more input from grass-roots influencers to replace the Arts Council; the introduction of rates and tax incentives to businesses for partnership and investment in arts and culture; and the introduction of arts and culture participation packages for educational establishments to enable more capacity for partnership working and the positive opportunities it will bring for young people.

Wages & Employment Rights

The Covid-19 pandemic has clearly exposed the precarious state of many family's finances, even over 10 years after the financial crisis.

An employment market overshadowed by zero hours contracts and a gig economy left many working families ill-prepared financially and struggling to access benefits in a timely fashion, notwithstanding the abrupt halt to economic activity.

The pandemic has also highlighted deficiencies in employment contracts and entitlement to statutory sick pay for those on short term contracts or irregular employment.

The Liberal Party calls for an independently set living wage for key workers to ensure that no family is again faced with the prospects of destitution or homelessness and to curtail the rise in wage inequality.

Many of those who had taken up self-employment had done so out of necessity, not desire and their entitlement to benefits needs to be clarified.

The Department for Employment should be congratulated on its handling of the mass registration by people seeking benefits, but issues remain with the Universal Credit system and its speed at processing claims.

In the immediate aftermath of this crisis nobody should face Bankruptcy or homelessness or see their credit rating suffer because of these unprecedented events.

Post Pandemic International Trade

In light of the British people's decision to leave the European Union, the UK must continue to seek out new trade deals as part of the country's post-BREXIT economic policy for the benefit of future generations.

With this in mind the Liberal Party has already committed to support the campaign by 'CANZUK International' to forge closer links between Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK as well as the wider Commonwealth of nations. Such international trading links provide a welcome global diversity in sourcing goods and services and remove regional dependencies.

The Liberal Party is concerned that, during Covid-19 pandemic, the government is not ruling out Chlorinated Chicken as part of its trade negotiations with the USA; and calls for the British Government to not compromise on food standards, as part of any trade negotiations.

Civil Liberties

The Liberal Party believes that, at every opportunity, Civil Liberties and Freedoms must be protected whilst planning for emergencies. Covid-19 and post-pandemic contingency planning should not be used as a cover for curtailing people's liberty; recognising that security does not always bring liberty. In our society, security needs to ensure and support liberty.

Contingency Planning

Liberals believe that planning is not a luxury, it is a prudent and sensible activity to ensure the nation can respond to any emergency which may arise.

Stockpiling equipment with a proper turnover to ensure stock is not a wasted expenditure, but a prudent investment to allow government agencies to be properly equipped to respond.

Planning exercises should not be simply seen as tick box exercises for the results to be dutifully filed away for later reference. Action points need to be understood and acted upon.

The Liberal Party sees a role for Civil Defence planning as a multi-agency approach to managing risk and threats to the nations, its health and prosperity.

In all emergency planning, elected members and community representatives should have an equal role at the planning and support stages –working together with those seen as professionals to ensure realism, challenge and buy-in to make planning work.

Green Policies & the Environment

Throughout the post-Covid-19 economic recovery period, environment and sustainability should remain at the heart of Government policy, as should enabling and promoting behaviour change.

As the economy recovers, now is the ideal time to invest in such technologies to the longterm benefit of both the nation and the wider world.

One of the results of the enforced lockdown has been the reduction of carbon dioxide and other pollutants in the atmosphere. Air travel has been massively reduced and may take years to recover whilst many people have indicated they will rely less on motor transport as they realise the advantages of home working.

Many people have reconnected with the natural world in the absence of noise pollution and this helps with the nation's emotional wellbeing, as well as allowing a greater number of people to connect with the landscape.

We must not let the Covid-19 experience become an excuse for abandoning environmental targets such as the reduction of plastic waste, food wastage reduction, humane livestock treatment or the control of genetic modification.

Financial savings would be sought by immediately scrapping HS2 and directing some of the funds targeted for that to upgrade and reinstate regional rail connections. We would also cancel any funding not already committed to our Trident nuclear deterrent.

Arts & Culture

The Arts and Culture sector has experienced an unprecedented impact while social distancing measures have been observed; with the livelihood and future of many theatres, festivals, cinemas, museums, galleries, artists, and studios directly threatened. In spite of this, in the spirit of community and charity, artists and venues have continued to bring entertainment to people's homes and promote engagement from people of all ages and backgrounds free of charge.

The Liberal Party acknowledges the important contribution this sector makes to fostering community, promoting health, and pushing the boundaries on important societal questions of liberty and freedom of expression.

Current out-dated models of Government funding and traditional patronage exert too much influence on the nature and form of creative expression and accessibility to the arts and culture. The renewed urgency for ensuring the sustainability of Arts and Culture, brought about by Covid-19, provides an opportunity for a complete review and radical new vision in promoting and enabling bias-free, grass-roots creativity and cultural awareness, in a way that is accessible to all.

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Further details of our policies can be seen at: www.liberal.org.uk

Liberal Party policy is decided by its members at our annual Assembly and at various Special Assemblies which are held throughout the year.

We are not funded by big business or the Trade Unions, so we have no vested interests and our only loyalty is to YOU - THE VOTERS!

We do not impose a system of whipping on our members and councillors, nor do we require them to 'toe the party line', so they are free to represent YOU and act in YOUR best interests.

Thank you for taking the time to read this Manifesto -we hope that, having read it, we can rely on your support.

JOIN OUR JOURNEY

For more information, to join the Liberal Party, or to donate, please visit: www.liberal.org.uk
Or you can write to us at: The Liberal Party, 5 Dunster Road, Southport, Merseyside PR8 3AG

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