

## LABOUR GROUP ANNUAL STATEMENT 2013

### ‘CREATING A UNITED CAMBRIDGE’

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#### 1. Introduction

Cambridge City Council needs new direction - based on principles **of social justice and co-operation, recognising the rights of all residents and all parts of the city and economic ambition** - Labour principles. Currently, the Liberal Democrat-run council fails to give the bold and robust partnership-building leadership that a dynamic and world-leading city like Cambridge requires to prosper, and focuses more on the needs of parts of the city.

The Lib Dems have stopped listening to all the people of Cambridge; they have become complacent and tired. Labour is developing the **ideas and energy** to get on with the hard work of solving Cambridge's problems and spreading the city's prosperity, opportunity and safety more equally.

Despite the financial crisis, Cambridge continues to be a city with economic opportunities and growth. However, this prosperity is both fragile and not equally shared around the city.

As a recent study shows, Cambridge is a place **divided by inequality**, as reflected by life-expectancy which varies greatly between Abbey and Newnham, King's Hedges and Castle. Although jobs are relatively abundant, increasingly few people can afford housing here.

Many residents are struggling with the impact of government cuts and attacks on the welfare state, such as the Bedroom Tax. For those doing crucial jobs in our community, especially in retail, public services and education, wages are often too low and rents too high. Young professionals and students suffer from a poorly-regulated and expensive private-housing sector. Without action to address long-term problems of affordable housing provision for rent and purchase, and serious transport and planning measures, everyone's prosperity is at risk.

There are also no grounds for complacency in terms of Cambridge's environment and quality of life. Cambridge is the country's leading cycling city; yet huge improvements need to be made to infrastructure and cycling provision, coupled with action to address the problems posed by the tiny minority of inconsiderate cyclists. Although generally a safe city, many in

Cambridge **suffer from the blight of public nuisance**. Some areas suffer particularly from problem-drinking and associated anti-social behaviour. Cambridge has excellent quality green public spaces and parks, but those who litter and show little consideration for their community face no consequences for their action.

We need to make everyone feel that the city council is working for them and tackle the impression that there is one Cambridge for some and another for others, **‘a two-tier city’**. Instead of the Lib Dem approach of blocking ideas and initiatives from others and treading water in face of these challenges, Labour will get to work on the side of the Cambridge people, and build in their ideas for their city into a plan for the city’s future.

Where the Lib Dem administration currently offers excuses, Labour has solutions.

Where the Lib Dems have reasons why we can’t, Labour will give reasons why we can.

Here is an outline of our current top priorities for a **United Cambridge**. We plan further work ahead of preparing, and consulting on, our detailed 2014 manifesto for Cambridge.

## **2. Equality, Jobs and Social Justice**

- We need to provide bold action to minimise the effects of **the cruel and uneconomic Bedroom Tax**. Local Lib Dems are not united against the Bedroom Tax, and have refused to condemn it. We will loudly lobby against it and work with others to oppose it. Instead of just hoping that the discretionary housing payments will be enough to help people hit by it, Labour will look to take innovative action to lessen the impact. We will remove the unnecessary bedroom classification from rooms that are really too small to be bedrooms, and avoid unnecessary financial penalties. We will refuse to evict tenants who fall into arrears solely because of the Bedroom Tax.
- We want to minimise the impact of the whole range of wider damaging cuts and welfare ‘reforms’ that the Lib Dem-Tory government are forcing onto the poorest, including housing benefit cuts and the currently chaotic introduction of Universal Credit. We will fund **extra benefits advice training** for council staff and ensure that those in need get the personal touch to help them in every way possible, not mail-merged letters informing them that their benefits have been slashed. We will also ensure that the Citizens’ Advice Bureau, and other local community organisations, have the assistance to respond to increased demand for their services.
- Cambridge families worry for their children’s prospects in the context of high youth unemployment and the national Lib Dem double-whammy of tripling tuition fees and abolishing EMA. We will conduct a review with a view to expanding the number of apprenticeship places provided by the council and other organisations to **provide extra jobs for local young people**. We will also look into setting up a Cambridge Jobs and Business Partnership with the support of local leading business people,

educational institutions and social enterprise to support local firms and assist education and skills development.

- We are glad that after years of pressure, the Lib Dems caved into Labour's repeated demand for a **Living Wage** for all council employees. We now need to work to ensure that the council aggressively promotes the Living Wage for contractors and to develop a campaign to persuade other employers in the city that it helps them as well as staff.
- We are committed to assisting the **expansion of city credit unions**. The initiative was our idea, and we will build on it extensively. For example, we will look at working with Cambridge student volunteer groups to provide help with the expansion of local credit union branches. We will also look at using the innovative system of jam-jar accounting to help residents with rent accounts and adjusting to the Universal Credit system.
- Some of the most vulnerable members of our community, such as the elderly and disabled, need help with looking after their gardens, to ensure they can retain pride in their surroundings. The current **Green Fingers scheme** has been slashed to the bone and does not accept new customers. We will conduct a review to examine the possibility of expanding and targeting the service, and accepting new customers in need.
- Some of the poorest residents of Cambridge struggle with **bulky waste collections** due to high charges. We will review the existing disposal policy of bulky waste to see if we can raise income from items disposed. This could then be ploughed back into the service to cut charges. We will also see if we can expand the system where City Homes conduct 'clear out days', using skips, to assist council tenants with disposal of bulky items.

### **3. Community Safety**

- On street consumption of alcohol, to tackle antisocial street drinking in Cambridge, we need to address the supply of high-strength alcohol, which is highly addictive and peddled by big drinks companies to profiteer off the back of the most vulnerable. Labour will set up a voluntary code of conduct, called '**Reduce the Strength**', with a view to persuading local off-licences to stop stocking super-strength beers, lagers and ciders. In Ipswich, this approach has resulted in a 49% decrease in street-drinker incidents; we will look to replicate it.

- We will look to make a more **pro-active use of Licence Reviews** to address the problem of licensed premises that break the licensing objectives.
- We will investigate the practicality of opening a centre to give street drinkers an off-street environment where they can get support and access to treatment while still drinking.
- We will work with police to introduce targeted alcohol-free zones via **Designated Public Places Orders** where there is evidence of a problem and where local communities want it.
- Work with police around the whole city **to tackle dangerous driving, dangerous parking, and dangerous cycling**, such as cycling on the pavement and not wearing lights, and to tackle bike theft.

#### **4. Quality of Life and Environment**

- We will set up a **Cambridge Energy Purchasing Co-operative**. This will allow local residents to pool their buying power so they can get access to cheaper energy on wholesale markets. We will examine several options, including a co-operative along the lines of the Co-operative Party's 'Collective Power', assisting all, not just businesses and central city users, in contrast to the council's proposed District Heating Scheme which will benefit large organisations but not residents. This would also target increasing the percentage of electricity derived from renewable sources, eventually achieving a fully sustainable-only supply. This would help also to tackle Climate Change.
- Review **Climate Change policy**. The Lib Dems have a lack of ambition on tackling Climate Change. Their calculations on carbon emissions have been shown to be useless. We will set up a review, involving interested local residents and groups including Transition Cambridge, to establish radical action that can be taken to address the climate change footprint not only of the city council itself, but of all Cambridge residents.
- At the moment, on issues such as fly-tipping and littering there is effectively **zero enforcement** in Cambridge. Zero fixed penalty notices have been issued in recent years. Although we need to educate people, there needs to be some sense of deterrence. As such, we will look to refocus the enforcement team on pro-active issuing of fixed penalty notices where necessary. We will scrap the ineffective Lib Dem 'Street Champion' scheme and use the funds to create a new enforcement officer.

- Shops, pubs and other private landowners/occupiers also need to be aware of their responsibilities in making provision for the disposal of waste, especially cigarette ends. As such, we will consider making great use of **litter clearing notices** in enforcement action to incentivise businesses to ensure that they provide disposal facilities, if informal approaches fail.
- Parts of Cambridge are blighted by the problem of **dog mess**. For years, the Lib Dems did not even bother to adopt the necessary legal provisions to enforce against this problem at all. Now, on Labour's initiative, the council has adopted Dog Control Orders. We will seek to make sure that these are enforced by setting up a '**Clear it Up**' Campaign. We will do this by making the Dog Warden full-time and ensuring that they work flexible hours. We will also conduct a media campaign to warn irresponsible dog-owners that they can be fined for not clearing up after their dog. We will also seek to use the funds in the capital bin replacement scheme to place new bins in dog-mess hotspots, and ensure that the fact that ordinary litter bins can be used for dog mess is advertised.
- We will seek to expand the council's use of **Community payback schemes**, so that offenders give something back to the community by helping clear up mess and grotspots.
- We will set up a **Community Snow and Ice Clearing Partnership**. The elderly and children often struggle to get about when there is snow and ice, and current gritting efforts are inconsistent and insufficient. We will set up grit containers in strategic locations to improve the speed of snow and ice clearance in residential areas.
- **Rangers** are an excellent resource, but co-ordination between them and local councillors are currently poor. We will ensure that meetings between local councillors and rangers are prioritised over the centralised 'Rangers Steering Group' so that councillors can report issues more effectively to rangers.
- We will continue the emphasis that Labour councillors pushed for, and achieved, in recycling policy to ensure that **temporary residents and residents of HMOs** are targeted with information and encouragement to recycle. We will work to expand recycling and ensure that more innovative technology is used to communicate with people to remind them to recycle and put their rubbish out, for example using smartphone apps and social networking. Overall, we will look to tackle the inertia on recycling rates, which have been stagnating for years.
- We will **improve access and the quality of experience for all in the city centre**. Currently, the city centre can be an intimidating place for residents, particularly the elderly and vulnerable. There is a lack of seating. A-boards and over-extended

pavement cafes can make it difficult for the disabled. We will work with CBID to improve seating. We will work with the county council to ensure that A-boards are not obstructive. We will also deliver a full review and consultation on the Market Square including to ask if it is properly used at night, by reviewing the possibility of opening it up for a wider range of uses, as well as using Section 106 public art funds to make a feature of the neglected fountain.

## **5. Housing, Planning and Transport**

- Cambridge faces a **housing crisis**. There are over 8000 people on our needs register. Lack of provision means that people in high need, due to housing benefit cuts, are being put up in unsatisfactory B & Bs as far away as Peterborough, which is terrible for families and children's schooling. In conjunction with South Cambs, in the context of the Local Plan process, Labour will get down to the business of identifying new and replacement sites that can be used for **significant house-building**.

This will involve committing to clear joint housing targets for the Cambridge area with South Cambridgeshire – targeting 33,000 new homes overall, with targets of 14,000 in Cambridge City and 19,000 in the wider South Cambridgeshire area by 2031. In this context, we will use the opportunities provided by housing self-financing to build as many new council homes as is possible, using new rules to ensure that a percentage are allocated to local families.

- We will not accept commuted sums in lieu of affordable house-building in major new developments, and set the Council an overall target of **at least 40% affordable housing** in new development in the city.
- We will continue to press for **improvements to the emerging Cambridge Local Plan** to 2031, and ensure that it shapes the city to meet the needs of all its residents including:
  - additional new housing and delivering the 40% affordable housing target, primarily for social rent
  - new employment opportunities, ensuring a full range of future jobs locally
  - improved transport infrastructure, which also switches more journeys to public transport, cycling and walking
  - wider improvements to our environment, recreation spaces, community facilities and infrastructure.

Cambridge needs strong and well balanced planning policies, agreed through a genuine dialogue with residents and business, which will shape high quality development. Our city has little remaining undeveloped space, but opportunities must be taken to identify and improve land uses whilst protecting the interests of local

communities.

In addition, we will work to ensure 'Greater Cambridge' develops an effective and consultative three way partnership between the City, South Cambridgeshire and the County Council able to deliver a robust, integrated and sustainable joint planning and transport plan for the sub-region. The closer the integration and the better it involves local residents and businesses, the more we will achieve and deliver together.

- Some of the schemes in the Affordable Housing Development Programme are popular and sensible. We support those. Some, such as those in Water Lane, Campkin Road and Lichfield Road are unnecessary. They are causing real distress to vulnerable and elderly tenants. They involve selling off prime bits of land to profiteering private development. **A Labour council would stop those unimplemented schemes that our consultation deems to be unacceptable.**
- We will investigate the possibility of launching a **Cambridge Community Land Trust** together with small, community based housing co-operatives, with the objective of building co-operatively owned, low cost housing to allow people to get onto the housing ladder.
- Private rented housing in Cambridge is expensive, poorly regulated, and precarious. We will look closely into the evidence and options provided by the upcoming review of **regulation of the private rented sector** and implement robust policies to ensure that tenants are not exploited. We will also look to tackle the outrageous rip-offs perpetrated by letting agents in terms of hidden fees.
- Cycling is crucial to Cambridge. It cuts congestion, is environmentally sustainable, and helps address public health challenges. We will **reinstate a full-time Cycling Officer** with a remit of promoting safer cycling through planning and infrastructural projects, working jointly with the County Council. We will also look to work through area committees, with the County Council, to develop a plan to **implement a major strategic North-South cycle route** (including the option of the Chisholm Trail route) to connect the new Chesterton Station, the Science Park and Addenbrookes. This will require a concerted effort to get on with securing funding for the initial stages, taking into account land ownership difficulties and delivering sensitive local design.
- We support the Council proposals, subject to the outcome of the staged public consultation, for **20mph speed limit zones** covering most residential and shopping streets areas, in each part of Cambridge, but want to ensure any scheme then implemented is accompanied by appropriate additional measures including the

3Es – effective education, enforcement including by Cambridgeshire police, and engineering where extra road safety works are needed.

- We support the urgent need for a **major upgrade to the A14** to ensure it is safe and reliable for our residents and businesses, and for all other users. We also foresee major risks both to the quality and quantity and location of new housing, and to the prosperity of Cambridge and ‘Greater Cambridge’, if it is significantly delayed.

We want to see the City Council at the table, fully involved in decisions on its design and delivery. This will be essential to ensure the design, including that directly affecting Cambridge, switches more journeys and more journeys within Cambridge to public transport, cycling and walking. These essential, additional Cambridge measures, including a new North West Park and Ride and new cycle routes, need to be funded from, and integral to, the overall scheme.

- We will examine funding and partnership options to **restore the City Centre Shuttle Bus**, rather than blaming the County Council as an excuse for inaction, as the Lib Dems have done. This will be a key component in developing transport policy for the City Centre.

## **6. Creating a ‘United Greater Cambridge’ – and paying for our programme**

- We need to give the Cambridge area real power over its own fate by working towards a single **unitary council** covering the ‘Cambridge City Region’, preferably a single council with South Cambridgeshire, incorporating county responsibilities. We can’t do this without resident and South Cambridgeshire support, and government policy changes, but we will explain why and seek resident and South Cambridgeshire backing to lobby Government for this change. In the meantime we will pioneer constructive close partnership working with the county and South Cambridgeshire with the aim of working towards a ‘Virtual Unitary Authority’. This should create savings from co-operation, ceasing service duplication and combining delivery teams.
- At the moment, the council’s policy towards commercial property management is shambolic, which was epitomised by the damaging delay in appointing a permanent head of property services. There is clear potential in **maximising our income from our commercial property** by being more entrepreneurial and ensuring that we have a consistent approach to property management and marketing. Each portfolio should have to have a plan for maximising income from their services by being innovative.
- We will **undertake a review of unnecessary spending and opportunities for efficiency savings**, and propose changes as part of our 2014 budget amendment, with wider proposals for 2014 and beyond to ensure responsible budgeting.



- The hotch-potch of **council specialist funds** is confusing. We have a Climate Change Fund, a Policy Priority Fund, an Efficiency Fund, a Repair and Renewal Fund, a Property Strategy fund, a Technology Investment fund, a Project Facilitation fund etc. Some of the earmarked funds may be worthwhile – but they contain a lot of resources which in reality are underused and could be earning us interest or being better invested in services. We need to examine how these resources can be used far more efficiently for Cambridge residents.
- The recent embarrassing £2.3m budget shortfall error exposed shortcomings in budget scrutiny processes and resources management. This comes on the back of the Lib Dem Icelandic Bank saga and their earlier Folk Festival ticket loss fiasco. We will make sure that the implementation of new financial accountability processes is robust and that **financial management is sound**.
- We will **reform Area Committees**. We will remove planning from them and refocus them towards genuine engagement of communities including ward based plans and neighbourhood planning. We will make the public forum central to area committees, where residents can air their views and problems, and councillors can report back. We would invite executive councillors to attend each area committee at least once a year. We would devolve more ward budgets via area committees, and make them genuinely responsive to the priorities of residents.
- We need greater **transparency and consultation** on the council. The Lib Dems consult as an afterthought, such as with the recent Affordable Housing Development Programme fiasco. We will not consult after decisions are taken, and will ensure that consultations are available to those with or without the internet. We will also seek to maximise transparency on the council, for example by looking into webcasting key council and committee meetings.
- Ward councillors need more opportunities to stand up for their residents. We would introduce a city-wide system of **‘ward walks’**, which work well in other authorities and already in some wards in Cambridge. This involves all ward councillors, and interested local residents, having regular opportunities to walk around their ward with a range of officers, such as the ranger, public realm enforcement, the dog warden, and potentially highways officers from the County Council, pointing out issues which can then be followed up.

### **Concluding Points**

The previous pages list a wide range of our policies. We would not publish these

policies unless we were happy for the current administration also to implement them. As happened with a list of our recent policies that we were glad to see implemented, we will challenge their false claims to have thought them up.

The sooner these policies are above implemented, the sooner that people in Cambridge will benefit, and the sooner we can move on to our next set of service and policy improvements, working with our quality staff, a real sense of partnership and the ambition we share with partners and with the wider community of our great city.