

Manifesto for Leicester -2011

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Introduction

The Green Party is the party of hope and radical change. Years and years of politics as usual have given us broken communities and remote services, financial chaos, as well as skyrocketing unemployment and environmental breakdown.

But there is an alternative: a transforming green alternative.

- In a world of finite resources, uncontrolled economic growth cannot continue indefinitely.
- Great inequality within and between nations makes it more difficult to support the whole population sustainably
- Some of our aims depend on resources from national government. These are long-term
- But there are short-term measures that can be taken even in current circumstances and can be achieved in one four-year term.

The Local Economy

More economic self-reliance will help to protect communities from the fluctuating fortunes of the global markets. The Green Party seeks to empower all sections of society to meet their needs from their own resources.

At national level, the Green Party would seek to abolish the “poverty trap” by introducing a Citizen’s Income scheme to ensure a basic income for all, regardless of employment status.

Long-Term

- Build a local economy that can support itself and meet the needs of its people.
- Stimulate the local employment by investing in insulating housing and renewable energy industries in the city as well as expanding recycling.
- Provide grants for locally-based enterprises.

Short-Term

- Resist the imposition of PFI, which is not the best way of financing public services.
- Keep Leicester’s open market in its traditional place.
- Encourage retail outlets to merchandise locally produced goods and services.
- Promote farmers’ markets and other retail solutions that enable consumers to buy locally produced goods.
- Emphasise open-access decision-making so that business decisions will be accountable to and influenced by local people.
- Further develop local financial and investment resources such as democratically accountable Community Banks and Credit Unions, and local currency schemes.
- Actively support measures for production to be redesigned with recycling in mind.

Democracy & Services

The involvement of people in all aspects of decisions that affect their community will mean a major shift in power from central government to local communities and councils, together with devolution of services, duties, resources and tax-raising power.

Although opposed to an elected mayor for Leicester, the Green Party would participate in a mayoral election if one were called. Nationally, we would wish to see elected regional assemblies. Decisions should be governed by the principle of subsidiarity: accountability at the lowest practical level.

Long-Term

- Encourage communities to become urban Parish Councils, controlling some of their own services.
- Hold referendums to allow people to make decisions about their own community and about the city as a whole.
- Establish greater openness and accountability in local government. Whenever possible, council documents should go on the website.
- Extend the machinery for investigating complaints in local government.
- Establish a regular cabinet 'question-time' for the general public.
- Campaign for a fair system of proportional representation (PR) for all types of elections, with voting at 16 years of age, and for a Bill of Rights within a written constitution.
- Allocate executive power and portfolios (including places in cabinet) to reflect a party's share of elected representatives.

Short-Term

- Create a Community Development Department to take control of youth and community work and be responsible for all consultations with local communities.
- Support Residents' and/or Tenants' Associations and help new ones to get started.
- Decentralise services so that they become more accessible to people.
- Support the valuable work of voluntary organisations by offering them service agreements with a three to five year life span, to assist long-term planning.
- Put greater emphasis on meeting the needs of young people through a well-funded youth service, and involve young people themselves in the planning and running of it.
- Support area committees as a first step towards urban parish councils.

Planning

Our principles are based on sustainability and improving the quality of life of all people living in Leicester. Every effort must be made to stop urban encroachment on greenfield sites.

We will support planning policies that give economic, social and environmental benefits and oppose any that do not. (See the sections on Housing and also on Biodiversity and Open Spaces, for providing sustainable homes and protecting the environment)

Long-Term

- Make it easier for local people to appeal against major planning decisions, including regional developments, that affect their lives and damage the environment.
- Aim to ensure that planning approval for larger schemes, and all developments on greenfield sites, will be dependent on a full independent environmental impact assessment.
- Make housing, work, schools and leisure accessible without a car.

Short-Term

- Ensure that the local plan review is based on sustainability and reflects the needs of local people.
- Oppose all car-based planning applications.
- Work towards revitalising the city centre and in particular local shopping centres.
- Oppose large-scale, low-density housing, especially on greenfield sites.
- Preserve natural areas with tree preservation orders.
- Conserve buildings of historical and architectural interest, and enhance them by such measures as brick cleaning.
- Campaign for tax advantages for building on brownfield rather than greenfield sites.

Access & Transport

Traffic causes death, injury, illness and distress through noise and smell and is a significant waste of the world's finite resources. We will work towards a city where the need to travel is reduced and more journeys are taken by walking, cycling and public transport.

Long-Term

- Aim to return public transport in Leicester to public ownership and control.
- Bring in charges on parking spaces at workplaces and out-of-town shopping centres. Ring-fence this revenue for public transport.
- Reduce the need to travel by creating neighbourhoods where people live close to shops, workplaces, schools and other facilities (see also Planning).
- Close the city centre to cars (except vehicles for the disabled and essential users). This will be phased in as public transport improves.
- Build a light rapid transport and/or guided bus system.
- Increase the number of railway stations.
- Build a bus station near London Road Railway Station, forming a major public transport interchange.
- Increase subsidies for public transport.
- Improve the regulation of bus services.
- Introduce integrated bus/rail tickets
- Build no more major roads.

Short-Term

- Aim to have all all buses accessible to the disabled.
- Link the bus and the rail stations.
- Create more and better cycleways and other facilities for cyclists.
- Develop facilities for pedestrians, including a pedestrian officer.
- Add more bus lanes and give buses priority at junctions.
- Introduce further traffic calming measures in residential areas where requested by local communities, and "home zones" where these are requested.
- Introduce residents' car parking schemes in all inner city areas where residents want them.
- Produce an annual public transport timetable.
- Improve facilities at railway stations and bus stops, with timetables and "real time" information where feasible.
- Have bus passes and season tickets valid on all buses.
- Aim to have secure cycle storage at stations and workplaces.
- Encourage car sharing in both small companies and local neighbourhoods, and encourage larger employers to introduce green commuter plans.
- Take measures to reduce parking near schools, while ensuring that all schools have safe cycling routes to school and/or "walking buses".
- Aim to make cycling proficiency a part of every school's curriculum.
- Treat taxis as a valuable part of an integrated public transport system, and encourage operators to make them disabled-friendly.

Housing

Homelessness and fuel poverty are unacceptable in a civilised society. All the people of Leicester must be properly housed according to their needs. Housing should promote community life and not damage the environment. It is important to develop environments in which people can live, whatever their needs. These may include people with disabilities or people for whom a reduction of the fear of violence is of paramount importance. Besides that, deliver sustainable developments, which meet the housing targets for Leicester

Long-Term

- Build all homes and schools to achieve “zero carbon” to statutory standards from 2016.
- As well as buildings meeting zero carbon standards, ensure environmental standards include such things as renewable materials, water recycling and energy supplied from 100% renewable sources. (See Energy Section for more)
- Make imaginative use of empty space within the city limits, including car parks or unused office and factory buildings. Play areas, parks, dwellings and light industrial workshops can be created in these places.
- Create mixed developments, including homes and workplaces, different sizes of dwelling and both low-cost and private ownership within the same community.
- Create nature reserves for wildlife on brown field sites, which are managed, accessible to residents who pay a small contribution for their upkeep. (See the Biodiversity and Open Spaces section.)
- Encourage self-build wherever feasible, and create facilities that can be shared, in order both to promote community spirit and to reduce resource consumption.
- On sites of 15 dwelling or more, provide at least 30% of new housing as good-quality, low-cost properties for both temporary and long-term tenancies.
- Design 20% of new housing to cater for people with disabilities, so that facilities like an electric bath hoist and through-floor lift can be installed if required.
- Adopt a flexible approach to housing needs when considering tenants’ personal, cultural and health-related circumstances.
- Consider the situation of students from both universities, with a view to supplying more campus accommodation.
- Change the planning system to stop the spread of shared student housing and protect established neighbourhoods. A concentration of shared housing has caused an imbalance in some communities.
- Ensure that private houses used as student dwellings are maintained to high standards and that reasonable rents are charged.

Short-Term

- Plan the layout of streets to encourage co-operative living and to increase community safety. This should be coupled with easy access to employment, health care, school and shopping from all areas of the city.
- Oppose the sale of council housing, and the transfer of stock to housing associations or the private sector.
- Provide small houses and flats in response to changing social needs.
- Campaign for higher levels of council tax on long-term empty homes, and provide more resources to bring them back into use.
- Use financial incentives to encourage re-use of old buildings and previously used sites, rather than building on greenfield sites.
- Take steps to provide secure short and longer term provision for travellers, after consultation.
- Ensure rapid completion and refurbishment to a high standard of all housing schemes in progress, taking into account their environmental impact.
- Plan mixed developments of housing, shops and offices, ensuring that separate and secure entrances are provided.
- Make appropriate adaptations to low-cost and private dwellings to enable people with disabilities to remain in their own homes.
- Ensure every household is offered free loft insulation and cavity wall insulation.
- Identify the households (council and private) that will benefit from solid wall insulation and renewable energy, e.g., solar thermal and solar PV and develop a 10 year plan to improve properties. Provide zero interest loans through a pay as you pay scheme.

Energy

Energy is fundamental to our life, but the generation of electricity and the combustion of fossil fuels can damage health and the environment. Reducing the impact of our energy use requires a strategy to improve efficiency and reduce demand and also to reduce, and ultimately eliminate, the use of fossil fuels and nuclear power.

Long-Term

- The Council should set up an energy saving company and invest in low carbon energy generation, such as solar energy and renewable combined heat and power (CHP) to reduce energy use in Council-owned properties by 90% by 2025 (from 1990 levels). Similarly, encourage others to follow suit to supply non-residential and residential and commit to a programmable timetable.
- Campaign for the amendment of national planning and building regulations to ensure that solar energy systems and/or micro wind turbines are included on all new buildings, and retrofitted to existing buildings where feasible.
- Campaign at national level for a taxation system that puts the environment first and use the proceeds from emissions taxation schemes to fund improvements in public services, particularly public transport, and energy efficiency grants for the less well-off.
- Introduce a district heating programme, particularly to areas of the city with poorer and/or more elderly residents.

Short-term

- Ensure that all Council buildings, and where possible all other public buildings, are changed over to green energy suppliers.
- Accelerate the installation of solar energy systems for hot water and (where practical) solar photovoltaic panels in all council-owned buildings, and use this policy to jump-start a solar industry in Leicester. (See Housing section for more information)
- Further promote energy conservation and renewable energy through council information centres.
- Ensure that all new buildings and developments are constructed to the highest (carbon-neutral) energy efficiency standards. Support all appropriate schemes to improve the energy efficiency of existing buildings.
- Fit energy-efficient street lighting, designed to reduce light pollution, with dimmer switches that alter light according to traffic flow.
- Ensure that all new bus stops are free of illuminated advertisements, unless their illumination is solar powered.

Waste & Recycling

The waste created by over-consumption and over-packaging is a scandalously inefficient use of resources. Our first priority will be to use less, followed by re-use where appropriate, with recycling or composting as third in order of priority. Landfill will be used only as a last resort, and incineration will be opposed.

Long-Term

- Work towards a zero-waste strategy to reduce the amount of waste produced in the City.
- Meanwhile the aim should be to recycle and compost over 70% of household waste by 2020. The Council's target of 50% by 2020 (2007 strategy) should be more ambitious.

Short-term

- Encourage supermarkets and shops to reduce packaging on food and retail goods. Also encourage them to take back non-recycle materials.
- Campaign for a national tax on packaging, with the aim of reducing the amount of waste created.
- Campaign for legislation to make industries responsible for the full product life cycle (e.g. by accepting used

- products for recycling).
- Campaign for a change towards using less and repairing and recycling more.
- Campaign for the removal of single-use plastic bags
- Employ a Zero Waste adviser.
- Extend door-to-door recycling collections to include separate collection of all plastics, electrical and electronic waste, and biowaste (food waste) for composting.
- Extend recycling collection to shops, small businesses, schools and community centres.
- Set recycling targets for local businesses and consult with them on how these may best be achieved.
- Introduce a glass recycling system to pubs, restaurants and clubs.
- Put more litter bins and recycling bins on streets and parks, including dog mess bins.
- Take action against obstruction of the pavement by wheelie bins.

Health & Social Care

Strong communities promote good health and positive social welfare. The picture in Leicester is one of inadequate care for people in their own homes, low availability of residential homes, and one of the UK's highest prescribing levels of psychiatric medication. More money than ever before is being pumped into social care and health statutory services, yet we still have a failing system.

Long-Term

- Reduce social inequality. The poorest members of society are often most at risk, and societies where wealth is most equally distributed tend to enjoy the best overall health. Illness is often related to insecurity and stress: a less competitive and stressful environment will bring greater happiness and general well-being.
- Tackle social exclusion and poverty by reforming the benefits system and introducing Citizen's Income (see The Local Economy).
- Improve energy conservation. This will not only save money and resources but also bring health benefits, especially to the elderly who are at risk from hypothermia.
- Reduce traffic pollution (see Transport) and encourage cycling and walking.
- Invest in smaller community health and social care centres, providing holistic care, rather than unresponsive and bureaucratic health and social service departments
- Develop locally-based provision that is relevant and integral to the needs of local communities.

Short-Term

- Increase funding for community and voluntary organisations that are responsive to local needs.
- Allow small organisations to plan and provide beyond 1-3 years, by securing long term statutory funding rather than frequently having to tender for contracts (see Democracy & Services).
- In partnership with local health bodies, invest in health education that promotes better informed lifestyle choices.
- Encourage and (where appropriate) subsidise the provision of fresh fruit and vegetables where not otherwise available.
- Make more fresh (especially organic and excluding genetically modified) fruit and vegetables available in schools.
- Rigorously monitor and inspect nursing homes to ensure that they preserve the dignity and quality of life of residents.
- Ensure that environmental health officers strictly enforce measures prohibiting air pollution and excessive noise.
- Improve sex education, to reduce abortions and unwanted pregnancies and control the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.

Safety & Crime

Policies on safety and crime go hand in hand with those on education, social care, health, economics and housing. Dealing with crime should be concerned with minimising harm and disruption to people's lives and their local environment.

Long-Term

- Ensure the safety of the most vulnerable members of society, including older people, children, and those subject to racist and homophobic attacks.
- Where appropriate, bring offenders together with victims, for the former to be made aware of the impact they have had on the other person's life, and for reparation to be carried out where possible.
- Ensure that the police force is accountable to the public and is resourced to carry out its duties effectively.

Short-Term

- Increase the use of voluntary and community organisations, to voice the needs of the vulnerable and suggest practical solutions, within local Crime and Disorder partnerships.
- In order to assist these aims, police and the local authority and other relevant agencies should be encouraged to put as much emphasis on prevention as detection, thus providing security to individuals and the community in the most effective way.
- Make the city a safer place by encouraging better use of space in a creative, socially and environmentally friendly way.

Education

The emphasis of education should be shifted from training for jobs to education for life. A variety of educational opportunities should be available to provide lifelong learning and meet different educational needs.

Long-Term

- Aim for the designing, funding, implementation and evaluation of public educational provision to be the responsibility of the most appropriate local elected body.

Short-Term

- Fight for the continuation of local authority responsibility for education.
- Explore ways of retaining more local community-based schools.
- Fight against the privatisation of local authority services, opposing PFI schemes, city academies and the setting up of Free Schools.
- Encourage large schools to work in smaller, human-sized groupings.
- Support parents who wish to provide home education or home/school flexi-schooling.
- Develop effective student councils and parent councils in each school.
- Increase the availability of adult education in local schools and community centres.
- Continue to fight against cuts being made to adult education and community centres by the current administration. Aim to expand provisions for life-long learning in the city.
- Ensure provision of high-quality, nutritious food for school meals, suitable for all dietary and religious requirements, while continuing to exclude GM foods.
- Ban from publicly-funded schools all direct and indirect commercial sponsorship of teaching materials or teacher training.

Arts & Leisure

Life should be rewarding. Work should be creative. Leisure should be fun. It is therefore important that facilities to enrich our lives should be both accessible and affordable.

Long-Term

- Ensure that all neighbourhoods have community centres, libraries and sports facilities within easy reach.
- Situate specialist leisure facilities in the city centre if possible, otherwise where there is good public transport.

Short-Term

- Give financial support to community organisations that provide art, educational and leisure services.
- Tackle the excessive bureaucracy that may be imposed on such voluntary activities.
- Encourage “public art” such as good quality busking in designated areas in shopping centres.
- Enable local artists and craft workers to display their works both in the city centre and in local neighbourhood facilities.

Animal Rights & Welfare

Animals have rights. The Green Party will endeavour to ensure that these are upheld and animal welfare taken seriously. We will work closely with animal groups and charities to develop coherent strategies on these issues.

Long-term

- Introduce stricter licensing of pet shops, including a ban on the sale of wild caught birds.

Short-Term

- Ensure that no products (such as cleaning material) bought by the council are tested on animals.
- Support the banning of circuses with performing animals in Leicester.
- Support vegetarian and vegan options for meals in schools and other Council-run institutions.
- Employ an animal rights officer.
- Promote awareness of animal rights issues including vivisection, factory farming, hunting and the transport of live animals.

Biodiversity and Open Spaces

We have been abusing Nature on a grand scale for too long. Open space, particularly green open space, is vital to our physical and mental health, as well as biodiversity. Economic growth has taken precedence over all other values, in all our towns and cities. Therefore, it is important to adopt measures to help protect the environment, enhance habitat and help wildlife adapt to climate change in all developments projects from 2011

Long-term

- Maintain and expand all existing green spaces and create buffer zones for wildlife
- Create wildlife habitats, for example by including green roofs and network of wetlands such as ponds
- Plant native trees and those that grown naturally in climates similar to those predicted for the Midlands in the next 30 to 50years
- In areas of high demand provide land for allotments and community orchards
- Give remaining parks, allotments and playing-fields proper legal protection from all forms of development except those strictly relevant to them (e.g. cafes and sports pavilions).
- Aim for small parks, allotments and other green spaces to be controlled by “parish” councils (see “Democracy”). Large parks falling within the area of several parish councils will still be controlled by the City Council, which must involve the parish councils in their management.

Short-term

- Provide for green space in all major new developments.
- Ensure that parks and playing fields are properly maintained and supervised. Introduce park managers for large parks, supported where necessary by other staff. These would have the role of rangers rather than upholders of petty restrictions.
- Change maintenance schemes in selected areas to allow grass to grow longer and encourage more small wildlife, for example insects, butterflies and moths
- Allow the setting up of woodland burial sites.
- Increase the number of dog wardens and lead a vigorous campaign to prevent dog owners from allowing their pets to foul pavements and parks.
- Improve and extend the local network of footpaths and cycle routes, including canal towpaths.

Paying For It

The Green Party opposes the majority of cuts to solve the national financial crisis. Revenue raising measures would include a reduction in defence spending and the ending of further road building.

The Green Party believes in a more equitable tax system, and would use resource and pollution taxes to replace some other taxes, including income tax for the lower paid. Those on benefits will be fully compensated for any increase in the cost of living.

We would ensure that the tax burden is shared fairly by dealing rigorously with tax evasion, tax avoidance and the proper payment of corporation tax, while imposing windfall taxes on banks and bankers' bonuses. We acknowledge, however, that some improvements might have to be paid for by the people of Leicester.

Long-Term

- Sell surplus renewable energy to the National Grid from a City Council owned renewable energy company, (see Energy section). This will achieve carbon-reduction, whilst providing new income stream for the City Council and provide an alternative to cuts.
- Oppose the private finance initiative (PFI), which is more expensive in the long run than other ways of financing public works.

Short-Term

- Campaign to scrap the Council Tax and replace it by a local income tax together with a land tax.
- Explore what funds may be available from government, the European Union and other possible funders.
- Don't waste public money on large "image" projects.
- Save money by replacing Leicester Link with an easily readable annual statement of Council activity, including simple accounts of expenditure.
- Make available, on the web and in libraries and council offices, more transparent information on Council income and expenditure, including elected representatives' salaries, expenses and gifts.