

Liberal Democrats



FOR A FAIR DEAL IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

MANIFESTO 2025

1. INTRODUCTION

Buckinghamshire Liberal Democrats are committed to delivering value for money for council taxpayers while prioritising local communities and resident priorities in everything we do.

This manifesto outlines our commitment to a fairer, greener, and more prosperous Buckinghamshire, where residents get the services they need and deserve.

Liberal Democrats will continue to champion local communities:

- **Campaigning for better health and social care services**
Making sure that investment in health and social care goes hand in hand with new housing developments to keep up with demand
- **Standing up for our green spaces**
Prioritising a new housing plan that identifies sites for development while protecting our green spaces
- **Ensuring the council delivers value for money**
Cutting waste, keeping charges and spending under control and investing wisely in projects that deliver genuine savings and improve services for residents.

Liberal Democrats will be the fresh start that people want.

In this document you will find out about our plan for Buckinghamshire, how we deliver the change that people deserve.

2. PLANNING AND HOUSING

The Liberal Democrats will seek a fair deal for planning and housing that meets the needs of all residents and fulfils their aspirations for well-designed, sustainable homes that they need and can genuinely afford.

The Labour government's changes to planning regulations, particularly weakening protections for the green belt, threaten irreversible damage to our countryside and limit opportunities for local people to have their say. These changes now leave Buckinghamshire more vulnerable than ever, as the Conservative-led council has failed to deliver an up-to-date Local Housing and Development Plan with sufficient identified housing sites, putting developers in the driving seat. This is not acceptable.

Our fair deal for Buckinghamshire:

We will:

- Work with town and parish councils to develop a community-led approach to building the homes we need, while protecting the environment from inappropriate and unchecked developer-led schemes.
- Ensure new developments are well-planned, connected, and integrated with essential infrastructure, including health and social care, education, roads, transport, water, sewage, and energy.
- Push for more environmentally sustainable construction and ensure developments integrate with and protect the natural environment.
- Take all practical steps to ensure families have access to permanent, secure homes and communities. This includes tripling the annual target for social housing construction in Buckinghamshire, increasing it from 500 to 1,500 homes. This will provide vulnerable families with secure housing and help reduce the waiting list, which currently stands at an unacceptably high 7,200.
- Continue investing in the Council's own temporary housing provision to reduce the costly need for placing vulnerable people in unsuitable accommodation, such as bed and breakfasts.

- Create a robust Local Plan for housing and development that directs growth to locations where it is most beneficial, curbs unchecked development in unsuitable areas, and protects our greenbelt and natural spaces.
 - Consider developing our own social/affordable/shared ownership properties. Across the country, there are examples of Liberal Democrat councils that have successfully achieved this and generated profit, which is reinvested into the council's services.
1. York City Council, when under Liberal Democrat leadership, set in place a programme to deliver hundreds of new zero carbon Council houses.
 2. Portsmouth Council is providing over 1,330 new Council properties – either built, bought from the private sector, or in the pipeline.
 3. South Lakeland funded the building of over 1,000 housing association homes.
 4. Kingston Council is building hundreds of new Council houses.
 5. Eastleigh Borough Council, run by us since 1995, has delivered thousands of new homes.
 6. Oadby & Wigston Borough Council, run by us since 1991, has delivered both homes and protected green spaces, with housing forming a major part of their successful 2023 re-election campaign.
 7. Between 2012-2021, the Vale of White Horse was third highest put of 270 Local Authorities for net increase in dwellings as a proportion of their starting stock.

3. HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Buckinghamshire residents care deeply about health and social care, particularly the challenges of accessing GP appointments and NHS dental services. While these services are the responsibility of the NHS rather than Buckinghamshire Council, the Liberal Democrats recognise the vital role that the Council and individual councillors play in consulting with healthcare providers and the NHS Integrated Care Board for Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and West Berkshire.

We are committed to advocating for the needs of our residents. We can scrutinise these services through the Health & Adult Social Care Committee and JHOSC Partnership Committee at Buckinghamshire Council.

Currently, adult social care accounts for 73% of residents' Council Tax, with a 500% increase in cases since 2021. This trend raises serious concerns about the Council's long-term financial sustainability and its ability to support individuals in maintaining their independence at home.

Unpaid carers play a crucial role in delivering care, but their well-being is often at risk. Many face physical and mental health challenges due to the stress of caregiving. The Council's ability to provide respite care is essential in ensuring unpaid carers can continue supporting their loved ones.

Charities also play a significant role in supplementing care services. However, many are struggling with funding challenges, and reductions in Council grant funding are putting the sustainability of these organisations—and the services they provide—at risk.

Our fair deal for Buckinghamshire:

We will:

- Support Liberal Democrat MPs in urging the government to develop a cross-party, long-term solution to the social care and NHS crisis.
- Set up mental health hubs across the county to provide early support and improve the lives of residents.
- Form a task force to evaluate the needs of unpaid carers in Buckinghamshire and improve council support. The Conservative Carer's strategy lacks tangible action for these community heroes.
- Work with health and care organisations to access additional grant funding.
- Develop an urgent plan to ensure ongoing day and respite care for vulnerable adults in Buckinghamshire. Evaluate long-term needs before deciding on the closure of care centres. Focus should be on both financial and residents' needs, not just monetary aspects.

4. SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES AND EDUCATION

Our children are our future, and the Liberal Democrats believe every child deserves access to the education that best meets their needs, regardless of their dependent's financial situation. We recognise the urgent need to improve Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provision in Buckinghamshire, as too many children face unacceptably long waits for assessments and the support they need.

Our fair deal for Buckinghamshire:

We will:

- Maintain a diverse system of schools that appropriately caters to all children in Buckinghamshire and consider expansions in line with need such as ARP's.
- Investing in early education from birth can provide children with a solid foundation, reducing the need for costly special educational support later.
- Advocate for a fairer system of SEND provision by lobbying the central government.
- Increase the number of specialist SEND school places in Buckinghamshire to minimize the necessity for distant placements.
- Conduct an urgent review of the school transport system to enhance its efficiency and safety.
- Establish mental health hubs to address the growing crisis in young people's mental health.
- We will work towards enhancing the quality of all schools and addressing the demand for educational services. It is unacceptable that many secondary schools in Buckinghamshire are currently under Special Measures by Ofsted. We will close the educational gap between diverse types of schools and are committed to expanding free tuition schemes provided by Fairhive Housing Association across Buckinghamshire to ensure equal educational opportunities for every child.

5. TRANSPORT AND ROADS

Buckinghamshire's roads and footpaths are a concern for residents. Although severe weather conditions contribute to damage, a significant cause of the current issues is underinvestment in road maintenance over several years. It is now estimated that £500 million is needed to bring the roads up to standard.

Public transport across the county is highly inconsistent. Rural areas often lack reliable bus and train services, and even essential routes—such as those connecting Aylesbury, Buckingham, and Milton Keynes—suffer from limited services, especially in the early mornings and evenings.

Our fair deal for Buckinghamshire:

We will:

- Prioritise better road maintenance using innovative technologies (already used in other countries) to reduce costs and speed up repairs.
- Explore ways to increase the frequency of road sweeping and better coordinate it with gully clearance to reduce flood risk and help maintain road surfaces.
- Set up a task force to ensure value for money from our highway maintenance contractors.
- Reduce delays in investigating and repairing collapsed drains to improve road conditions and prevent flooding.
- Increased investment in pavements to create safer environments, particularly for our elderly and disabled residents.
- Although the Bus Services are not a responsibility of Bucks Council, we can set up a task force to collaborate with them, making sure that they are providing the best possible service.
- Expand the use of the Village Connect Buses who currently only run in a few of the villages in Bucks. There is a huge demand for this type of service.

6. CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Buckinghamshire's Children's Services have consistently let down vulnerable children, as highlighted in numerous OFSTED inspections. The impending report will be released after May's elections. The council is finally reinvesting in local children's homes to ensure safe accommodation and reduce dependency on overpriced private providers outside the county. This belated move is inadequate given the urgent and complex needs of the service.

More needs to be done to make children's services effective and sustainable. Foster families are essential for children who cannot stay with their own families. The council's recent efforts to recruit more foster families and invest in local children's homes are positive but overdue steps.

Our fair deal for Buckinghamshire:

We will:

- Create a scrutiny committee for children's services to ensure vulnerable children receive the necessary support while monitoring financial sustainability. Education will have its own separate scrutiny committee.
- More ambitious investment in council-run children's homes to keep vulnerable children closer to their families and reduce costs.
- Develop new and innovative approaches to attracting and supporting foster families.
- Strengthen early intervention in children's well-being and education to reduce the number of children who need to be removed from their families.
- Residents' perceptions of Bucks Council need drastic improvement, as it is often viewed negatively. Parents must seek legal counsel immediately or brace for a gruelling and unpredictable battle to secure an EHCP (Educational Health and Care Plan). We need to provide guidance and support to parents.

7. ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE CHANGE

We live in a beautiful county with valuable green spaces and a strong agricultural base. We believe access to nature offers enormous physical and mental health benefits, and everyone has the right to enjoy green spaces near their home.

Our farmers play a vital role in ensuring food security and maintaining a healthy rural landscape and economy. They need more support, not the neglect we have seen from the current Labour government.

As the effects of climate change and the global loss of nature threaten human well-being both now and, in the future, we in Buckinghamshire must take action to combat climate change and protect a healthy natural environment.

Our fair deal for Buckinghamshire:

We will

- Provide stronger green space protections by speeding up the delivery of the Buckinghamshire Local Plan for housing and development.
- Measure and double tree canopy cover across the county by 2050.
- Establish an effective flood mitigation response team to coordinate with stakeholders, such as the Environment Agency, local landowners, town and parish councils and voluntary organisations, including resident groups, to improve flood prevention.
- Work to access and secure all available funding for improved flood prevention measures.
- Collaborate with private providers to improve the availability of electric vehicle charging points, including curbside charging.
- Support farmers and landowners in nature conservation efforts.

8. DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The future of council services that meet the needs of Buckinghamshire residents and provide value for money from their council tax relies on careful planning, the successful implementation of new digital strategies, and better use of technology.

Our fair deal for Buckinghamshire:

We will:

- Embrace digital transformation to create a more open, efficient, and people-focused local council. We will reduce bureaucracy, save money, and reinvest in frontline services by modernising outdated systems and processes, while making it easier for residents to access the services they need.
- Make your council more responsive and accountable by using digital tools to enhance engagement and strengthen local democracy. By offering better ways for people to interact with their council—both online and in person—we will ensure decisions are more transparent and informed by the needs of the community.
- Ensure no one is left behind—whether due to age, disability, or lack of access—so that services remain fair and accessible to all.

9. DEVOLUTION AND COMMUNITIES

For several years, grassroots sports teams have faced neglect from the Conservative administration at Bucks Council. The facilities provided across Buckinghamshire are in poor condition, despite being among the most expensive in the country to rent. Some facilities have been deemed unsafe, while others lack essential amenities such as changing rooms or hot water, yet they continue to be rented at full price. Aylesbury United Football Club currently does not have a dedicated home ground and shares a pitch with Chesham United.

Our fair deal for Buckinghamshire:

We will:

- Work more closely with town and parish councils, empowering them to contribute meaningfully to Buckinghamshire Council decisions, including taking ownership of public assets like parks and community buildings where they wish to do so as promised by the Conservatives during the 2020 roadshow. This will save taxpayer money that can be re-invested in healthcare, education, and public safety, and reduce costs for local clubs and teams while providing high-quality facilities.
- Establish a binding agreement with Town and Parish Councils for the management of these areas. For smaller parishes lacking the capacity to manage these assets independently, provide necessary support structures and frameworks to ensure seamless and efficient administration. Make it clear that any delay or failure to execute this transfer is unacceptable and detrimental to the community's interests.
- Organise public engagement meetings where residents can actively participate and ask questions.
- Increase transparency in council decision-making and budgeting, ensuring accountability for how we spend taxpayers' hard-earned money.

- Update the Town and Parish Council charter to be more robust and inclusive, meeting community needs. It should establish stricter accountability and enforcement to ensure responsible and transparent management of green spaces, upholding public trust and fulfilling promises made by officials.
- Collaborate with Town and Parish Councils to address community needs through sports teams that encourage good mental and physical health practices, potentially reducing demand on NHS services.
- Correct the democratic deficit in High Wycombe by enabling the establishment of a town council.