

A Fair Deal for Cheltenham

- ✓ Delivering a prosperous town
- ✓ Tackling climate change and protecting our environment
- ✓ Investing in services, culture and people
- ✓ Delivering affordable, quality housing
- ✓ Taking good care of your money



The Liberal Democrat Manifesto for
Cheltenham Borough Council 2024

Our vision for Cheltenham

Cheltenham is a beautiful, prosperous and safe town. We want to keep it that way. But this town cannot stand still. Success will mean embracing heritage while being open to change in the future. Our town must build on its key strengths. That means supporting the creation of new jobs, ensuring people have good quality homes, prioritising regeneration and protecting our precious environment. We recognise the central role played by culture and the arts in our town, as well as our unique heritage. And we know that in a changing world, nothing can be achieved without sound finances or being outward facing and ambitious. That is how we will get a fair deal for Cheltenham.

Our record so far

Under the leadership of the Liberal Democrats, Cheltenham has a well-run and award-winning local Council despite a challenging environment that has seen many other local authorities fail. While chaotic governance and political uncertainty have had a depressing impact on the country and the wider world for many years, our area has weathered the storm thanks to consistent local leadership. Cheltenham Liberal Democrats have worked hard to insulate our town from the impact of more than a decade of cuts from Westminster, challenging the prevailing narrative that we must settle for less. We are the 19th worst funded council in the country and we have endured a real terms funding cut of approximately £13million. Despite this, our achievements include:

- Taking measures to address the threat from climate change.
- The redevelopment of The Wilson, Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum.
- Preserving the verdant glory of our parks and open spaces, including the landmark Pittville Park Play area, with 7 now recognised nationally with Green Flag awards.
- A new crematorium with more space and greatly improved, family-friendly facilities.
- The protection of key heritage assets including the Town Hall, Pittville Pump Room and Sandford Parks Lido.
- The county's first net zero housing developments.
- Doing the right thing by those who need the safety net of a council house.
- Forming strong partnerships with the private and public sector to support the town's ambitions to become the UK's cyber capital.
- Developing a thriving town centre and night-time economy, recognised last year as a safe and welcoming destination with our 'Purple Flag' award.

Our goals for the future

✓ Delivering a prosperous town

Our town has weathered the economic storm. Our local economy thrives, when compared to our neighbours and other towns. To achieve this:

- We put in place the Cheltenham Economic Recovery Task Force to guide the town out of the economic shock of the pandemic and then supported its evolution into the Cheltenham Economic Advisory Board to carry on that work, winning the Federation of Small Business local authority award for the best Covid-19 support and recovery for the South West region.
- We have adopted an action plan to tackle empty shops.
- We are investing more than £100 million in West Cheltenham, which will help to support thousands of new jobs at the Golden Valley development.
- We invested in the success of our High Street, enabling regeneration around the Minster attracting retailers including John Lewis.
- We are delivering the Minster Exchange to support new jobs in the town centre and reduce antisocial behaviour around one of our heritage assets.

Now our plans for the future include:

- Secure our Town's economic future as the nation's centre for cyber innovation by continuing to drive the Golden Valley Development forward, building on our success in launching the first phase – the Innovation Centre and associated transport infrastructure.
- Continuing the regeneration of the area around the Minster, first via the Minster Exchange development and later with a project including recently purchased High Street retail premises.
- Working with owners Canada Life on an appropriate redevelopment of Cavendish House, focusing on a mixed-use scheme led by much-needed new flats and apartments above ground floor level.
- Enabling the long-awaited redevelopment of North Place with homes in the town centre, replacing an eyesore.
- Putting in place a new car parking strategy that gives town centre businesses and shoppers the facilities they need, while maximising the efficient use of scarce land.
- Using formal planning powers and informal engagement to encourage property owners to convert empty and under-used retail and commercial premises into new town centre homes.
- Reviewing by-laws to tackle antisocial behaviour and low-level disturbances including graffiti, littering and parking on green verges.

- Working with public sector, private sector and third sector partners, we will ensure the Festival Town has a year-round program of events for everyone to enjoy, boosting tourism and the local economy.
- Continuing to work in partnership with the County Council to ensure public realm improvements in our town centre, while recognising that funding for expensive paving is no longer available at Borough level due to government cuts.

✓ Tackling climate change and protecting our environment

Climate change is having a major impact on our planet. That is why the Liberal Democrats on Cheltenham Borough Council have led the way locally by declaring a 'Climate Emergency' and set the ambitious goal of becoming a net zero carbon council and Borough.

To help reach this target:

- We have adopted a detailed Climate Emergency Action Plan.
- Started to spend the £10million Cheltenham Green Deal investment fund, including investment in new solar panels at Cheltenham Town FC.
- Adopted tough new pro-environment planning rules, resulting in the county's first net zero housing developments being built here in Cheltenham.
- Brought together large numbers of local organisations from the public, private and third sector under the Cheltenham Zero Partnership .
- We have awarded grants under the Cheltenham Zero Community Grants scheme and Cheltenham Zero Business Fund.
- We have introduced more wildflower meadows.
- We have planted hundreds of trees, including a special project in memory of Covid heroes and victims.
- We are fighting for an end to sewage dumping in local rivers.
- Cut the carbon footprint of the Christmas ice rink to a fraction of its former impact by working on an innovative battery and vegetable oil energy system.
- We have introduced a town-wide air quality plan, exceeding the action required by government.

Now our plans for the future include:

- Delivering more projects to move towards net zero using the Cheltenham Green Deal funding.
- Building more low-carbon council homes and requiring developers to do the same in private sector schemes.
- Developing pilot EV charging schemes in Borough Council car parks.
- Building the Cheltenham Zero partnership to spread best practice across the town.
- Ensuring that green principles are at the heart of the Golden Valley development.
- Supporting Planet Cheltenham's public engagement programmes.

- Lobbying and working with the County Council for more sustainable transport schemes, including new cycle paths and a solution to issues with bus services.
- Pursuing extensions of the Honeybourne Line.

✓ Investing in services, culture and people

As Liberal Democrats, we want to improve and enrich the lives of everyone in Cheltenham, with no one forgotten and no one excluded. While some councils slashed spending and sold off leisure and cultural assets, Cheltenham worked innovatively to protect non-statutory services. That is why we are continuing to invest in our local public services and in people's wellbeing.

- Launched an innovative partnership with the NHS, Cheltenham Trust and Feed Cheltenham to offer free leisure activities for food bank users.
- We have granted a new 35-year lease to Sandford Parks Lido Trust.
- We are committed to building another fully accessible Changing Places toilet in the town.
- We have worked with the Cheltenham Trust and the Friends of The Wilson on the continuing refurbishment of our Art Gallery and Museum, where visitor numbers are reaching record highs.
- We are continuing with No Child Left Behind, the scheme we introduced in 2019 to improve the life chances of vulnerable children. This has inspired and supported many successful projects locally.
- Supported dozens of cultural organisations in the development of a Culture Strategy alongside annual support of approximately £1.9million.

Now our plans for the future include:

- Adopting a new sports and physical activity strategy to ensure we can deliver the facilities our town needs for a healthy and active future.
- We are pursuing an improvement to public loos, including a new facility in Montpellier Gardens.
- Working with partners in health services to explore opportunities for improved GP options to serve our town as it grows.
- Supporting the Lido in its ambitions for long-term sustainability via renewable energy projects.
- We will work with partners to lobby for a new "Museum of Intelligence" in Cheltenham.
- Continuing to support the economic benefits brought by the Cheltenham Festival, while recognising and working with partners to deal with the challenges it presents for local residents.
- Recognising the contribution made by heritage, we will review policy to ensure we protect the town's past and preserve it for the future, including working to ease the conflict between heritage, economy and environment.
- Supporting the Culture Board as it seeks to deliver Cheltenham's Culture Strategy.

✓ Delivering affordable, quality housing

More good quality, affordable, low-carbon homes are desperately needed here in Cheltenham if we are to be a truly thriving town that meets the needs of all its people. Unaffordable housing represents a threat to businesses and public services, which rely on a supply of homes affordable for people on a range of salaries. Under Liberal Democrat leadership, the Borough Council has committed itself to delivering an expansion of affordable housing. This work will continue at pace now the work of Cheltenham Borough Homes has been brought back under direct management of the Council.

So far we have:

- Put in place plans for a huge investment in affordable housing delivered by this council.
- Started to deliver new homes, including in Pennine Road, Radford Court, St George's Place and other areas.
- Worked with the private sector to secure low carbon, affordable homes on new sites in Leckhampton.
- Secured an increase in standards of new homes being delivered, with private developers upping their game on energy efficiency and environmental matters.

We will continue to work to:

- Bring forward an increasing number of sites for new affordable homes, including council houses.
- We have a pipeline of circa 350 affordable homes to be provided up to March 2026.
- Deliver more much-needed affordable housing on sites across the borough, in appropriate areas, focusing on improving affordability, environmental performance and energy efficiency.
- Ensure we manage the planning challenges presented to local people by government as best we can, by working with our neighbours.

✓ Taking good care of your money

Over the past 14 years, the pressures on council finances from Government cutbacks have been enormous. In real terms, Cheltenham Borough Council's budget is £13million worse off than it was before the squeeze on local government began, and rampant inflation has pushed up the cost of providing local services and causing hardship to many of our residents. That squeeze has left Cheltenham as the 19th worst funded council in the country, out of hundreds of local authorities. We plan to spend £1,395 per household investing in our town and providing services to residents – of this only £104 (7.5%) comes from central Government, with £1,291 coming from commercial activity and local taxes.

Throughout this time, far-sighted Liberal Democrat leadership on the Borough Council has put Cheltenham first, protecting local services and improving efficiency while avoiding large increases in council tax. In particular:

- The council has won awards for helping the local business community via grants and its prudent approach to investing to support local services.
- We have worked to maximise the use of the Municipal Offices, despite cuts from above reducing the Council's staffing numbers.
- We introduced the Cheltenham Lottery which provides extra income for many local charities and community groups.
- We were the first council to invest in peer-to-peer lending to support new local businesses.
- We have used technology to provide more ways to access council services.

Now we are determined to continue our investment in Cheltenham's future. In particular:

- Working with our developer partner, we will deliver on our ambition to be the Cyber Capital of the UK, via the Golden Valley development, producing a return for taxpayers.
- We will work with partners across the public, private and third sector to pursue the long-term security of heritage assets including the Municipal Offices, Town Hall, Pittville Pump Room, and our leisure facilities too.
- We remain committed to revitalising our town centre and supporting sustainable and inclusive growth and recovery for **all** of our residents and communities.
- We remain committed to our £180 million housing investment plan.

A fair deal for Cheltenham

Cheltenham Liberal Democrats have provided steady and competent leadership of the Borough Council during a time of economic turmoil. Cuts from Westminster have left our area severely under-funded and much of the work traditionally done by local government now rests on the ability of local areas to bid for funding from government departments. We also recognise that there is much work to be done and that our ability to preserve and provide the local environment and additional services that make Cheltenham the best place to live and work now rests on finding new ways of working and cooperating with partners. Despite these multiple challenges, the Borough Council continues to be a high performing authority. It delivers services not offered by other district authorities in the country. It pursues projects that boost the local economy, protect the environment, enrich the cultural life of our town and look after our most vulnerable people. **Only one party can secure a fair deal for Cheltenham: the Liberal Democrats.**