

New Forest Liberal Democrat Green Budget Speech 2020

Chairman,

Ten years of austerity, operating with about £6 million less from our General fund, limits choice about services we provide.

Our alternative budget provides a balanced budget whilst keeping minimal reserves.

The Liberal Democrats aren't **The** Green Party, but we are definitely a green leaning party. We think that care of the environment is the top priority.

This budget speech concentrates on green issues.

As a Hampshire County Councillor, I am very pleased to have promoted and supported a cross party motion to treat Climate Change as an emergency. £2 million was allocated to tackle climate change.

In declaring an emergency, New Forest National Park members and Hampshire County Councillors, were not “virtue signalling”. They were expressing a collective statement of intent.

This Council should declare a climate change emergency. Failure to do so leaves you in the position of fiddling while Australia burns and our towns and villages flood.

Individually, Councillors are making a difference.

Cllr Caroline Rackham with tree planting activities. Cllr Hilary Brand providing the means to plant carbon capturing shrubs at a local school.

Cllr Jack Davies campaigning to keep buses running.

Cllr Mark Clark tackling sea erosion in his patch. He and others have also been working on things like air quality monitoring and signage.

There are examples of Conservative Councillors who have acted positively.

The important thing is that we all act collectively, that our vision and policies are all aimed at ensuring we clean up our act and encourage others to do so.

We must no longer stand in the way of taking action on climate change.

So, it's against this context and the **loss of £6 million in funding**, that I present the Liberal Democrat budget proposals

We really need to up our game with recycling, reducing plastic use and collecting food waste.

I am proposing the Council drops the planned privatisation of the management of our leisure centres.

It's taken over two years and we are still spending resources and energy on the idea. We know that it is unpopular with the public and service users and has damaged staff morale. It's a distraction. It's not even guaranteed to save much money. Our own staff are capable of delivering efficiency savings, let's show confidence in them.

Focus on making council facilities more energy efficient, cutting down on wastage, better partnership working with other local authorities and organisations.

It would be a brave decision to scrap something that you have been pursuing for years, but you should do it.

We should be actively lobbying for the restoration of the passenger service along the Waterside railway line.

We should be doing very much more to protect rural bus services, promoting safe cycle routes and considering the needs of our town and village centres when it comes to traffic management and ease of movement for pedestrians and people with mobility challenges.

Housing. When the average – **the average**, house price in the new Forest is over £441,000, you know something has gone badly wrong. What chance for our young people of getting on the housing ladder?

We have had a twenty year period, where few new homes have been built. Half our Council housing stock sold off under the “right to buy” scheme. House prices are spiralling. They are out of reach of most young people.

We need more homes. They need to be good quality, energy efficient, homes. We still haven't successfully fixed the issue of too much reliance on private developers to deliver more housing.

Let's press our local MP's to deliver policies that work for local people. Let's also partner up with other organisations to improve things

Why not get the Managers of all our local supermarkets in to talk about reducing plastic, or recycling more generally?

We would benefit from better relations with groups such as the Zero Carbon Alliance, Friends of the Earth, New Forest Transition, when it comes to reducing the carbon footprint and addressing some of the serious air quality issues we have.

Work with the New Forest National Park, the local Waterside Town & Parish Council's, rail, bus, ferry, walking and cycling and environmental interests – with a view to having a common position on how the area should be allowed to develop. Prevent commercial interests running things and setting the agenda.

If Dibden bay is to be developed for port use, the price that needs to be paid is Associated British Ports giving up a very large part of the land so that we can have a country park located there.

I would like to again propose that the unspent money this Council has received from central government for “Brexit preparations” be used to distribute to food banks within the district.

Finally, young people would not forgive me if I didn't follow through on a pledge that the Liberal Democrats made during the election last May, the one that increased our number of members here from just two to thirteen.

For the very direct benefit of young people who find it hard to meet the cost of bus travel and also for green reasons, we propose the allocation of £40,000 towards a discount bus pass scheme for young people.

Chairman, that concludes my budget proposals which I commend to the Chamber and are seconded by Councillor Malcolm Wade.

Liberal Democrat Budget proposals for financial year 2020 -2021

Using the same figures prepared by officers for the administration, with the following exceptions :

1. A recognition that it is permissible to use reserves for the purposes of this Council taking all necessary actions to fight climate change. Allocating £100k from reserves to employ a climate change officer with a budget to implement changes.
2. Scrapping the privatisation of the management of leisure centres (cost neutral)
3. Enhanced engagement with other organisations, local MP's, other authorities : £10k
4. Brexit preparations funds allocated to local food banks (subject to government permission)
5. Young Person's discounted bus travel scheme : £40k

Additional potential cost of Liberal Democrat proposals = £150k

Funding of this to be achieved by limited use of reserves, enhanced green practice, such as reductions in mileage expense claims by members and staff through initiatives such as car sharing, cycling etc.