



YOUR ENVIRONMENT
YOUR WELLBEING
YOUR ECONOMY
YOUR CITY

SOUTHEND LIBERAL DEMOCRAT MANIFESTO 2024/5

INTRODUCTION

Times are tough – you do not need us to tell you that or preach at you about what we are all going through. The mismanagement of the Conservative government is plain to see – except by them of course. As if the pandemic was not enough, the financial mismanagement of Trussonomics and the dire treatment of local public services, has led to a country that has lost its way and a feeling of utter despair for many people. We have, of course, to consider the war in Ukraine but look how ordinary people rose to that challenge, opening their homes and our country to people in a worse position than us.

So as we ride this storm and are battered from all sides, now more than ever, we need to rise up as a community, a home town, a city, to face these challenges – forget the hype from the Tories, judge us on our achievements – we won't always get it right in every resident's opinion, right across the town – no party or government does, but we have our hearts in the right place, not in our wallets.

The Liberal Democrats have played a key role in the opposition at Southend, against an ever hostile Tory minority Administration – their executive leadership is weak and they follow their conductor's baton like nodding donkeys, with no individual thought or values.

The Lib Dems are proud to have been working with others within the Council. We do not always agree but when people are willing to talk, compromise and form a consensus view – how much better is that. It is something to be pleased about, it is not a weakness, it is a strength which we have built on and with the Lib Dems at the forefront – calm, sensible, collaborative and the peacemakers.

Times are incredibly tough monetarily, and will be for any Council, so do not let the Tories fool you they can do better – they still raise your taxes but what will they cut? –libraries, museums, the roads and pavement programme? They have already shown disdain about climate change and wasted time on the biodiversity agenda. How ashamed the Tory's should be, as they let Southend down so badly.

These are our Liberal Democrat priorities:

- People and communities
- Environment
- Local economy

People and Communities

At the heart of the City is its people. They are why the Council exists and we need to respond to their needs, especially in these times of trial.

Some may have been disappointed that we will not bid to be City of Culture in 2029 – despite pressure from our MPs; well, they are not at the coalface. We knew how much it would cost and we knew that money could be better spent and how right we were given the dire straits the country is in.

So, our policies may not please all but that is a by-product of local government that all Councils must deal with. What we want and need to do is help the 180,000 plus residents of Southend in any way we can and for as long as we can. It is a high aspiration, but we should always be striving to reach it.

Our Policies

- ✓ Truly affordable, accessible housing, including council housing for all who need it , by continuing our programme of social housing provision and maintenance
- ✓ Effective regulation of the private rental market to protect renters
- ✓ Using our new Local Plan to ensure balanced development across the City which caters for residents’ needs not just in housing, but in infrastructure and local amenities
- ✓ Housing for all, whatever their circumstances, is our mantra and we will continue to ensure that the homeless are not disadvantaged or refugees made unwelcome in our City
- ✓ With the huge pressure for major developments we will be vigilant to ensure they are of a calibre and quality that addresses the City’s needs and the climate emergency
- ✓ We will continue to support the importance of Southend hospital, social wellbeing and mental health and the staff who work in these fields, especially the caring community
- ✓ Young people are the future of this City – we will be inclusive of their needs and their opinions and we will prioritise the provision of facilities which support them wherever we can
- ✓ Community safety is extremely important and we will continue to lobby the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for the resources a City as diverse as Southend needs, across the whole City and will continue to support our Community Safety Unit and maintain our CCTV coverage where it helps to protect residents and businesses.
- ✓ We will place particular importance on protecting all vulnerable groups from intrusive, detrimental, and dangerous activity.
- ✓ Getting about our City is important and the comfort of doing so will continue to receive our attention in our roads and pavement works and our provision of cycleways through better connectivity and safer routes. We will work with the bus companies to ensure a properly cohesive and effective service through the Bus Service Improvement Plan, especially north-south connectivity.

- ✓ Parking is a huge part of our consideration and the needs of residents are being taken very seriously in this – we are still reviewing parking permit systems and residents parking and are moving forwards with schemes in Leigh and Milton. All areas are different and peoples’ needs vary, but working with the local communities we want to ensure that parking is not the pain it has been in the past.
- ✓ We are embarking on a major £1M programme of improving our major play parks which are so popular with residents and visitors coupled with a programme of enhancing our outlying smaller parks which serve neighbourhoods. These are so important for the wellbeing of our residents, especially the children, and although a long job with over 40 parks and gardens we will, year on year, make improvements.

Environment

Our green agenda is paramount, and we have wisely spent time studying the issues that affect Southend and how they can be tackled – they are many and varied. We are now embarking on the action which these studies have revealed as necessary to get Southend to net zero.

There is an urgency to this of course, but diving in as some would want us to do smacks of ‘marry in haste – repent at leisure’ we want to get it right first time not keep reinventing the wheel and paying court to every idea that comes along – therein lies the way to time and money wasting.

We only must look at the advancement in cars to know that ‘splashing the cash’ without a true understanding is the wrong thing to do. With major car manufacturers improving on methods and fuels all the time – we will make provision of the right equipment at the right time.

Our Policies

- ✓ We will continue to ensure that our climate change agenda is across the whole range of Council services and at the forefront of all projects coming forward and all services we provide. This means working with local residents, businesses and organisations to ensure that our Climate Change agenda becomes a reality.
- ✓ We have 2 Air Quality Management Areas and we will shortly be producing a new Air Quality Management Plan to ensure we take effective measures in those areas and across the City where air quality is or could be an issue, such as schools. This also means the airport which has its own air quality concerns.
- ✓ Speaking of the airport – it has been going through the mill and in March 2024 was still in financial straits. Economically it is a source of employment locally, but it comes with issues and noise, particularly at night, is one such. While supporting the effective and efficient running of the airport, the Liberal Democrats will always be against night flights, which we voted against in the past and will do in the future. We will also always press the airport to improve its green credentials and its cohesion within the community.

- ✓ Greening our environment is important, and we will be operating a Grass Management Strategy which enhances biodiversity for our all-important pollinators and at the same time allows the continued enjoyment of our parks and gardens and the safety of motorists. We will be strong on this against a Tory resilience to accepting that this is the way forward for the world, not just the City.
- ✓ Many environmentally-related groups work in a variety of areas to enhance the environment across the City. We will continue to work with groups like these and with the established budget of £1.5M capital for climate change our programme can be enhanced and strengthened with their support.
- ✓ Energy is a major concern for everyone. While energy prices may reduce over time, will they ever revert to pre-crisis levels? If not, there will still be people who find themselves in fuel poverty and we will continue with advising on Government and local schemes to help them through this scourge on society.
- ✓ We have achieved zero landfilling with our new “black sack” disposal contract. This is a major achievement and will benefit the environment significantly, but the waste still must go somewhere for disposal – in this instance, to “waste to energy” plants outside Southend. There is of course a trade off in vehicle movements and the process but at the end of the day there is a product which is marketable and not just a filled in hole in the ground which may come back to haunt you years later. Our next step in the waste area is to secure an efficient and effective new contract, which is under way. The Tory Administration has agreed in October 2023 to procure a new Waste Contract with fortnightly collections and wheely bins for most households. This change will be challenging, and our role is to make sure all vulnerable residents are not ignored by the Council.
- ✓ We will promote recycling through legislation from Government and work in co-operation through residents and local groups to ensure the benefits are achieved.
- ✓ We have planted many thousands more trees in the last 4 years up to 2023 and we were shocked the Tory’s Budget had no funds put aside for new trees in Southend. We will commit to plant more to improve our vital canopy cover. We support cutting back severely on the use of herbicides in our parks and gardens and are continuing to test other methods to try to eradicate their use altogether. However, we know that weeds are a major assistance to our biodiversity programme – so we will create rewilded areas to encourage our pollinators.
- ✓ We still have the perennial problems of dog fouling, fly-tipping, and littering and we will be looking at new initiatives to counteract these acts which spoil our parks and residential areas. The Liberal Democrats are keen to see penalties be imposed on perpetrators but the evidential requirements are high, so we need to have some Government backing through legislation to be able to take effective action quickly.
- ✓ We have ensured that the green agenda is uppermost when bringing forward projects and that our contractors and suppliers are firmly rooted in green principles.

- ✓ We have introduced a 20-mph zone to protect some residential roads in Leigh and will be monitoring its effect with a view to expanding this to other residential areas as well as expanding our schools streets programme.
- ✓ We will actively promote measures to prevent air pollution caused by car idling, especially at schools and junctions.
- ✓ Our shoreline is incredibly important and we are investing more into its protection through the use of nature-based solutions – less intrusive than grey infrastructure (concrete) and we will be assessing the effect and the possibility of extending this as well as calling the water authorities to account and pushing them for improvements to avoid polluting our water environment.

Local Economy

The legacy of the pandemic has left an indelible mark on our economic areas, particularly our retail areas. The trend for online shopping and the sheer force of the diminishing of town centre trading is a difficult pattern to reverse. Southend is not alone in experiencing this change.

With the purchase of the Victoria Centre, we have seen it rejuvenated with new and varied uses and a good return on our investment. This will continue.

The new ownership of the Royals will hopefully lift that end of the High Street opening up to the seafront which it so sorely needs.

Southend City, Leigh to Shoebury, is a destination. With our planned improvements at Leigh Port, the changes for new cafes at East Beach and our greening of the town centre, the proposed Seaway development – there is a massive push to ensure that we become the destination we deserve to be.

We see 7 million visitors a year and this last year has been the best on record for the Pier. With the restoration of the restaurant space at the pier head and enhancements as we can afford them – the Pier will steadily improve.

We know there are varied views on car parking charging, and we can never please all parties, but our system will protect the High Street and its viability and mitigate the inevitable after effects in terms of litter etc, of 7 million visitors a year.

Our Policies

- ✓ Our new Local Plan policies will reflect the changes in economic activity and how we will tackle them, working with business and developers.
- ✓ We have to be more diverse in our City Centre, the community use of the Ironworks in the High Street has shown just how a community can work together and further

leisure interests will be encouraged as part of the day and nighttime economies. This will give security to the area and open it up for all to use throughout the day and aid our economy.

- ✓ We will continue with our programme of events throughout the year – ensuring that Southend maintains its reputation as a fun and exciting place to visit for special events and that we diversify over time to expand our repertoire.
- ✓ We will raise the profile of our history and heritage – with which the City abounds, from Leigh to Shoebury – each area is different in its heritage offer. We will enhance our Museums service with new exhibitions and the promotion of major displays around our two premier heritage assets – the Saxon Prince and the London Wreck. We will work with outside agencies and sponsors to ensure we can improve the service and add yet more to the destination attraction of Southend as well as supporting the heritage of all the areas in Southend and working with local groups.
- ✓ We will do everything we can give resources and legal implications to bring the Kursaal back into beneficial use.
- ✓ Jobs are an issue. We want to ensure that all who work in Southend City have a good work environment, the maximum benefits they can achieve through their employment and know that Southend is a good place to work – it is not the down-trodden seaside that some would like to denigrate – we are a positive force to make Southend a great City to live in, across its whole 7 miles and we want to make Southenders love it, as much as we do.

In the recent last few years, the Southend Liberal Democrat Councillors have held together the Administration of our Council, working with others across Party to help deliver our aims and objectives, as well as giving the City a coherent voice. We want to build on this success and make Southend an even better place to live, work and visit.

We hope you will share our vision for Southend City and ask you to vote for your Liberal Democrat candidate so we can strengthen our voice and influence on the Council.

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS WANT YOU TO LOVE SOUTHEND CITY AS MUCH AS WE DO!



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