

Lewisham Liberal Democrats
99 Bradgate Road
London
SE6 4TR

April 2006

Dear Friend

The local elections, on 4th May, will give you an opportunity to have a real say about your area and the future of Lewisham.

Labour have run the council for the past 35 years but have failed to meet the needs of local people. The Liberal Democrats are the main challengers to Labour in Lewisham. Our growing support has been demonstrated in a string of by-election wins over the past four years.

Liberal Democrat councillors have a proven record of serving their communities and making a real difference. This manifesto shows how much more we could do if given the opportunity by Lewisham's voters.

The choice on 4th May is simple. A vote for Labour that has long grown complacent and arrogant. Or a vote for the Liberal Democrats to enable power to be handed back to local residents and communities, and where the environment and community safety are at the centre of all decision making.

It's time for change in Lewisham. On 4th May we hope you will help us make that change.

Chris Maines

Liberal Democrat candidate for
Mayor of Lewisham

The Liberal Democrat Manifesto for Lewisham 2006

(full text version)

Our six priorities for Lewisham are:

- 1. Environment**
- 2. Community safety**
- 3. Housing**
- 4. Education**
- 5. Community services for all**
- 6. Open, accountable and efficient local government**

1. ENVIRONMENT

The Liberal Democrats are the only main political party with a proven commitment to environmental change. Together we can make a greener and healthier Lewisham for all. We promise to put the environment at the heart of all policy making with practical and workable solutions. Our councillors will continue to work hard to ensure your local environment is protected.

Green spaces:

- We will improve local parks and park facilities including play equipment.
- Promise to plant at least 1,000 trees and provide adequate protection and maintenance to ensure growth.
- Develop and promote walking routes and pedestrian friendly environments across the whole borough.

Transport:

- We will tackle the very poor condition of Lewisham's roads and pavements, which have been allowed to slide into severe disrepair thanks to years of Labour neglect. We will prioritise pavement repairs and continue the recently started capital spending on roads.
- Work with other agencies to improve station facilities and services; also to ensure stations are safe and friendly environments.
- We celebrate the extension of the East London tube line and believe further improvements could be made to the DLR, including its extension to Catford.
- Promote sustainable transport solutions e.g. promote car pooling, LPG vehicles, cycling and walking.
- Work with Sustrans to develop and complete the network of cycle routes across the borough and provide secure cycle parking places.
- Improve pedestrian sign posting.
- Establish a parking users committee made up of local residents to advise the Council on what needs to be done to make parking services fairer and more reasonable
- Ensure that genuine and representative consultations are conducted with local residents before resident parking schemes are introduced.

Recycling:

- Dramatically raise the levels of composting in Lewisham through the increased provision of compost containers and better education.
- Establish communal estate composting systems.
- Provide a doorstep collection and recycling service for garden waste.
- Provide a full doorstep kitchen waste biomass collection service to provide power and to reduce waste quantities.
- Set up differential rates for the lumber collection charges so that pensioners and disabled people receiving the mobility component of the DLA will be exempt.
- Provide cleaning blitzes in partnership with local residents in each local area once a year. Over a few days the council will focus the concentrated effort of a number of departments and staff in one area to bring sustained improvements. We will provide skips for rubbish removal, check for and remove dumped cars, clear graffiti, check pavements and paths for repairs check which trees need pruning and plant trees.
- Establish and support a scheme for furniture recycling. Working with the community sector the aim is to provide local training and jobs and free or low cost furniture to those in need.

- Work to ensure that a much higher proportion of waste from local businesses is recycled e.g. bottles/cans from pubs and restaurants.
- Work with other authorities to reduce the packaging materials produced by businesses and to make provision for their recycling.
- Develop the council's web site so that it provides a forum for the buying and selling of a large number of surplus materials which otherwise would be thrown away.
- Provide extra cleaning for heavy use hot spots.
- We will seek to acquire an agreement with Bromley Council to allow Lewisham residents, especially those in the south of the borough to use there rubbish dump.

Protection:

- We will review and reform the planning system to ensure that system is used to promote and where necessary defend the interests of local communities. The planning system must be used to ensure the protection of the local environment first and foremost.
- Make the planning system more open and transparent and accessible to local residents.
- Stronger enforcement action against commercial fly tipping.
- Ensure that all new developments must meet the highest environmental and visual standards.

Building:

- We will ensure that all new-build schemes have a third of their energy coming from renewables.
- Promote micro-energy, e.g. solar power and use of solar panels in council buildings and aim to provide grants to local residents.
- Promote water recycling.

2. COMMUNITY SAFETY

The Liberal Democrats recognise that the experience and fear of crime and anti-social behaviour are of great concern for all Lewisham residents. We are committed to an ambitious programme of imaginative and effective policies to make the borough safer for all sections of the community. We will work with and support local communities to achieve change. The Liberal Democrats listen to your concerns. Our councillors will continue to work hard locally to resolve local problems.

Tackling crime and anti social behaviour:

- We will improve and develop the existing street wardens schemes and provide renewed funding for the longer term. Although this program has involved local communities in addressing community safety issues more needs to be done to ensure the Council listens to and acts in response to local concerns.
- Capitalise on the energy and commitment of local people, by listening to their concerns and including them in decisions.
- Through local community councils, provide a small budget for all wards, which will be under the direct control of local residents to spend as they see fit for the purpose of addressing community safety and anti-social behaviour problems.
- Provide more funding for the noise patrol service to put in place a dedicated 24-hour anti-social behaviour/noise nuisance telephone and patrol service.
- Promote the use of acceptable behaviour contracts as a first step in dealing with anti-social behaviour problems. Include the use of restorative justice solutions where possible.
- Lewisham has high rates of domestic violence. Women in particular are at risk. We will work with the Council's partners to both raise awareness and to encourage and support the victims who come forward and report this crime, with services and support to help them.

Preventing crime

- We will work with the police to run regular knife amnesties.
- Work with and support local communities to prevent gun crime and tackle gun culture.
- Work with other agencies to tackle drugs problems.
- Prioritise youth activities for any money saved by improved efficiency of services. For example, support the Ilderton Motor Project in its attempts to extend its activities to the south of the borough.

Creating a safer environment

- We will improve street lighting and the condition of public footpaths and public spaces.
- Campaign against litter, graffiti, and fly tipping and increase enforcement action.
- Promote local involvement in community safety issues, e.g. by advertising local police community meetings and wardens' steering group meetings.
- Tackle the misuse of mini-motors, which are a danger to children using them as well as others.
- Improve and promote the use of community mediation services.
- Implement cumulative impact policies in licensing, where appropriate, to prevent over-saturation of licensed premises in certain areas.
- Advertise licensing applications effectively so that people get a fair chance to input their views.
- Provide more resources to strengthen the enforcement of trading standards.

3. HOUSING

The Liberal Democrats view decent and affordable housing as every citizen's right. Some 60 percent of Lewisham council housing is below the national decent homes standard. We will do all we can to urgently improve housing conditions for all citizens. We will take immediate action to tackle the serious homelessness situation in Lewisham. Homelessness has been growing at a faster rate here than in most other London boroughs.

Improving Social housing

- We will do all we can to improve the condition of the Council's housing stock.
- Work to ensure void properties are turned around much more quickly.
- Do all we can to encourage more social housing in new large-scale developments.
- Allow tenants and leaseholders to have works done by a contractor of their choice if this can be done more cheaply than by the Council contractor or if there has been an unacceptable delay and quoted prices are reasonable.

Tackling homelessness

- We will tackle the homelessness problem in Lewisham. Far more can be done to learn from best practice elsewhere.
- A rent deposit scheme should be introduced to allow some homeless applicants to make use of the private sector.
- Ensure homeless women and children are not housed in hostels with male alcoholics and drug addicts.
- Work in partnership with other London boroughs to set up a house and support for teenage runaways. This could be set up as an independent trust so that it could attract charitable donations.

Private tenants and owner-occupiers

- Genuine and committed Council support is needed for tenants' management organisations and other residents' associations. We will ensure a greater role and involvement of these groups in policy decisions and provide more in the way of training and support to them.

Help for all

- There should be more spot checks on the environmental and health and safety standards set by social and private landlords.
- We will provide a fully functional 24-hour noise nuisance phone line and noise patrol service.

4. EDUCATION

The Liberal Democrats will do all in our powers to ensure that all children and adults in Lewisham have access to a good education system and are encouraged to reach their full potential. We will ensure that all sections of the community are given equal educational opportunities. We aim to bring about radical improvements in Lewisham's schools. We will work hard to ensure that all Lewisham schools offer a good standard of education for every pupil.

Resources

- We undertake not to build a secondary school on the site of the existing Ladywell leisure centre but would investigate alternative sites further north.
- Rebuild or update schools in a planned and carefully co-ordinated way.
- Reading as a priority. Libraries and books made exciting for children from an early age. Author visits to be encouraged.
- Vocational courses and apprenticeships to be encouraged as part of a rich curriculum mix.
- All new school buildings should be as energy efficient and environmentally friendly as possible.
- Encourage closer links between local businesses and schools with the aim of stimulating them to provide greater support and resources to local schools and education projects.

Standards

- We undertake, if possible, to publish separate tables for academic and vocational qualifications to give a more accurate representation of all educational achievements. As the tables are calculated now one full intermediate GNVQ pass counts as the equivalent of four A-C grade GCSE's. It is widely acknowledged that this does not represent a true equivalence. The substantial increase in GNVQ entries over the last two years makes any comparison over this period of time virtually meaningless.

A good education and better learning environment

- Education should enrich all children's lives. We will do all we can to promote education in its broadest sense to include cultural and leisure opportunities as well as music, drama, art and sport.
- We will work hard to ensure that no sections of the community are disadvantaged or failed by the education system.
- Restorative justice to be encouraged in all schools as a way for pupils to learn to be accountable for their actions.
- Encourage mentoring schemes within all Lewisham schools.
- Promote healthy eating by providing better school dinners.
- Children to be encouraged to discuss other life skills e.g. money management, what working life involves, relationships, basic parenting before they leave school.
- We would learn from national best practice to encourage walk to school policies.
- Develop a scheme to promote apprenticeships and vocational training within Council departments targeted to benefit young Lewisham residents
- We will work with Film Education to support film screenings for schools.

Inclusion

- We will work to ensure equality of opportunity for all. No sections of the community should be left to underachieve or under perform in Lewisham's schools.

- In partnership with parents and schools we will address concerns around any group not achieving their full potential in school. Identify practical steps to be taken to overcome this.
- Increase the looked-after children education support team so that they can give more individual support to children who need it.
- Integrate children with special educational needs where possible but do not force this.
- Work with the health service to try to address children's and adolescents' mental health needs.
- Combat truancy, with truancy patrols allied to partnership work to address the problems of families whose children truant.
- Extended schools to be encouraged. Schools should be helped to open up for out of hours use by the local community e.g. sports facilities, IT facilities, evening classes for adults.

5. COMMUNITY SERVICES FOR ALL

The Liberal Democrats know and understand that functional and contented local communities are dependent on access to a wide range of services and support. Lewisham has been poorly served by both leisure and community services for too long. We are committed to improving this situation and empowering all local communities in Lewisham. We need a flourishing and vibrant local economy to provide more job opportunities. Strong communities support all their members. We are committed to improving the quality of services to people who need extra support and those who care for others.

Leisure facilities

- Swimming is the most popular sporting activity in urban areas. We will cancel plans to demolish Ladywell Leisure Centre to build a secondary school.
- We will encourage the increased use of all sports facilities across the borough and work to improve their condition and number.
- We will do all we can to ensure that Lewisham residents benefit from and are enriched by the 2012 Olympics.
- We are committed to ensuring that Lewisham has a cinema.

Culture

- We will do all we can to support and celebrate the diversity of Lewisham's population.
- We will do more to promote all the existing festivals and encourage greater school involvement.
- We are committed to supporting moves to open a local history museum in Lewisham.
- Promote links with Lewisham College and Goldsmith's College to develop cultural opportunities for the wider population of the borough.
- We will work hard to ensure that Lewisham benefits more than it has from Heritage Lottery funding

Services for all

- Work towards greater equality in council services and against discrimination.
- We will develop opportunities around the borough for elderly people to meet together and socialise or engage in cultural or learning activities.
- Do everything we can to promote better access for disabled people in all spheres of life.
- Encourage more businesses to settle in the borough and support local businesses.
- Promote and provide resources for the development of more local markets and farmers markets across the borough.
- We are committed to creating a fairer and more equal borough. Lewisham is a borough with significant need. There is a high proportion of general deprivation in wards in both the south and north of the borough. Unemployment remains at very high levels in some wards.
- Do more to promote Lewisham's role as part of a developing and vibrant London. Working closely with regional and national agencies to ensure Lewisham gets the resources it deserves.
- We aim to provide a very high standard of service to those who need support in their home and to provide as much help as possible to carers.

6. OPEN, ACCOUNTABLE, AND EFFICIENT LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Liberal Democrats are committed to open transparent and efficient local governance. Democratic reform and accountability are at the heart of achieving real change in Lewisham. Lewisham needs and deserves a Council that is run both more efficiently and more democratically. There is a pressing need for greater accountability to and involvement of local residents in the running of their local communities.

We promise to provide opportunities for greater local involvement in decision-making processes. We are committed to listen to and act on your views. Good governance is about attention to detail not spin.

Openness and Accountability

- We will provide the electorate with the opportunity to have a referendum on whether we should continue with the centralised all-powerful Executive Mayoral system.
- Reform the scrutiny system to ensure that the Mayor is properly held accountable for his/her decisions.
- Require councillors to produce annual reports of their activity to justify the allowances they receive. This is needed in Lewisham, where the Labour party considered it acceptable for one of their councillors to represent Lee Green ward from Scotland for two years.
- Establish an Advice Charter so that Lewisham residents know what services the local advice centres have been paid to provide.
- More actively publicise the freedom of information policy and the right of residents to request files or specific information and undertake to respond to requests within the required 22 working days.

Value for money

- We will promote good financial accounting practices throughout the Council.
- We will make greater use of advertising in Lewisham Life and follow the examples of many other councils which generate income streams through limited sponsorship and advertising on council property.
- Minimise further Council tax rises. Council tax is a regressive tax, hitting those on low and fixed incomes hardest. Although Council tax bills are largely dependent on grants from central government and cost pressures that cannot be controlled, we will seek to do everything within our control to minimise council tax rises above the rate of inflation.
- We will work to ensure that outside consultants are used only when necessary and that the tax payer receives value for money.

Involving local communities

- We will encourage a wider number of people to speak and participate at Full Council and other council meetings.
- Where there are Lib Dem councillors we promise to keep in touch all year round by producing regular newsletters and asking for feedback from local people.
- The system of Area Forums will be scrapped and replaced by Local Community Councils, with increased budgets.

Supporting local communities

- We will improve Lewisham's engagement with the voluntary sector and increase civic participation.
- Work closely with community organisations of all kinds - tenants, residents, green groups, and local charities. Encourage and support the development of such organisations where they do not already exist.
- Make all planning and licensing applications easier to obtain via local libraries and the Internet.