

THE LIBERAL DEMOCRAT MANIFESTO
OXFORD CITY COUNCIL ELECTIONS, MAY 2006
"People come first"

Oxford is a fortunate city with a wonderful natural setting, an unrivalled architectural heritage in its centre, two thriving universities, a growing reputation as a centre of innovatory and creative businesses, a renowned centre for medical research, a successful car-plant, a generally low unemployment rate, good road and rail communications with London and international airports. All in all, a great place to live, many would say.

And yet there are serious down sides not all of which are immediately obvious to those who visit the city. Oxford has a crisis: the numbers of homelessness and the poor condition of housing are unmatched in scale outside the worst parts of inner London. In some of the city's estates there is inequality of life chances stemming from deprivation - social, educational, environmental and even in terms of life expectancy - which is a rebuke to us all.

In brief, Oxford has a great past, a patchy present performance and a future the success of which cannot be taken for granted. Doing nothing, or not much but relying on the past reputation of the city to see us to a happy and prosperous future, is not a sensible option. The city has to look ahead, to plan and work for a better future for all its citizens, not just most of them. Vigorous and far-sighted leadership and a willingness to manage change for the common good are required.

What are the key challenges facing the city in 2006? Globally, climate change is the biggest challenge facing us all. Housing, transport, and reducing inequalities present big issues which call for collective action by many authorities and organisations. The city and county councils, the health service and the police service, need to work together and with the business and voluntary sectors who have a positive role to play, too. The most important factor of all, if there is to be the brightest possible future for us all, is the optimism, enthusiasm and commitment which comes from sensing that we, the people, are in charge - not them, but us, all of us, as individuals, as campaigning groups, as neighbourhoods and, collectively, as a city which cares about every one of its citizens.

It is this conviction that "people come first" which inspires us as Liberal Democrats. Unlike the other parties, which are tribal and exclusive in their instincts, we are, by passionate conviction, inclusive and tolerant. Our party's constitution reminds us that our values require us "to build and

safeguard a fair, free and open society...in which no-one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity”.

In the context of the City Council our values drive us to work for a more equal society, with better life chances for those in deprived areas; for a fair chance of a good home, a mind-opening education and a decent job; for neighbourhoods where everyone feels safe to lead their own lives; for tolerance for individuality and difference of life styles which respect others; for people to be in charge of their own lives and to have the capacity to shape them as they wish; where patronising and authoritarian attitudes, whether stemming from paternalism or any other fundamentalism do not smother personal initiative and responsibility.

We Liberal Democrats accept that the market is the least worst economic regulator but that where market failure exists it has to be moderated by regulation and civic action. We are active for social justice.

In the City Council elections of May 2006 there is the best chance for 25 years to free Oxford from the dreary authoritarianism of Labour. In 2005, after 25 years of Labour dominance, the City Council has been assessed by the independent Audit Commission as a “weak” council: not “excellent”, not “good”, but “weak” - Oxford, thanks to Labour, has a third rate council.

Oxford deserves better. It’s time for a change at the Town Hall. Liberal Democrats have the vision and the will to tackle the deep-seated problems facing the city. We shall work with the many partners outside the city council who also influence the city. We know that, most of all, the way to get the city moving to a better future is to recognise that “people come first”: to free them to shape their own lives, their own communities and the collective life of the city. In that way, Liberal Democrats will be proud to help to shape the prosperous, fair, free and open society our citizens deserve and can achieve.

The Liberal Democrat programme, *People come first*, set out in the following pages translates our values and aspirations into practical action. We ask the voters to put their trust in us to put our trust in them. **Let’s do it together!**

John Goddard
Leader, Liberal Democrats, Oxford City Council

SHIFTING POWER FROM THE CENTRE TO AREAS AND COMMUNITIES

The issues:

Oxford, like many other cities, is a collection of neighbourhoods with their own characters. Their distinctiveness and the sense of local loyalty this engenders should be fostered and not ironed out by Labour's approach of "one size fits all" and "we know what you need and here it is".

Labour, nationally and locally, do not trust local people to exercise power responsibly. Labour centralise and seek to control. Liberal Democrats devolve power and responsibility and seek to empower.

In stark contrast to Labour, Liberal Democrats know that communities function best and most constructively when they have real influence over their own destiny. We know that Whitehall does not know best; and that the Town Hall does not know best. It is local people who live in and care about their neighbourhood who know best about their problems and what will work best for the local good: Barton knows best for Barton and Wolvercote for Wolvercote.

Area Committees and their neighbourhoods

Area Committees were first established in the city by Liberal Democrats in 2001. Since then Labour have come grudgingly to accept that they have some part to play. But Labour has reduced Area Committees' powers over development control decisions, has kept Area Committee budgets to a minimal, tokenistic level and has failed to give adequate administrative support to the key officers, the Area Co-ordinators.

We believe that street cleaning, graffiti and park safety, for example, are issues which will be most sensibly handled by Area Committees as is the oversight of community centres. The local ward councillors will take decisions, in public, after local involvement and consultation. In this way "the council", now often seen as a remote, inaccessible body, will be brought out into the bright light of the concerned public gaze. Democracy requires frankness, openness and trust: deliberately to take decisions more remotely, out of the public gaze, is patronising and antidemocratic. Many people find it hard to know who to contact at the council to get the attention they need: at present there are some sixty phone numbers for public access to council services.

The Liberal Democrat approach

A Liberal Democrat City Council will:

- clean up all neighbourhoods by setting up Neighbourhood Environmental Action Teams (NEATs) which will deliver the local programme of street cleansing, graffiti control, kerbside collection for recycling and local environmental improvement.
- set up a one-stop public phone number for all city council services, implementing 24x7 service as soon as possible.
- establish enforcement teams, responsible to Area Committees, dealing with noise, planning, licensing and HMOs.
- bring Area Committees to be the focal point of City Council decision-making and activity in each neighbourhood by increasing their powers and giving them budgets to match their responsibilities.
- integrate the roles of park wardens with those of Street Wardens and other members of the NEATs. Area Committees will have oversight of all these activities.
- devolve responsibility for community centres to Area Committees. Working with the centres' management committees, users and residents, Area Committees will develop viable long-term business plans for all the civic facilities in their area.
- fully restore development control powers to Area Committees.

Community development

Oxford has some of the most deprived communities in the country. This situation is well-documented by national, impartial statistics. Some of the largest areas of deprivation are in the estates on the south east of the city; but there are also smaller pockets of deprivation in other parts of the city.

It is no coincidence that these deprived areas have the worst experience

of crime and anti-social behaviour. Crime is a symptom of a dysfunctional and fragmented society. Improving the physical environment and local shops and services will not solve the underlying problems unless communities are safe places to live. The safety of communities can only be assured by the community itself. A key issue is to build trust so that local people, the council, the police and voluntary bodies can work together.

Government programmes, under such banners as the Single Regeneration Budget, Social Exclusion and Neighbourhood Renewal have given some financial help to these areas but the fundamental problems in these deprived areas remain and are not in sight of solution.

When regeneration programmes are parachuted in from outside by those who think they know what is needed, they have some short-term effect but do not deal effectively with the root causes of the problem. Far more successful are programmes which are, bottom-up, developed from small beginnings by people who live in the area and are determined to tackle their local problems. Gradually, such locally-rooted programmes of community development, often based on a co-operative principle, can grow and become independent engines of social enterprise.

Partnerships between local voluntary organisations and key agencies, such as Learning and Skills Council, health, education, police and housing are essential: but the bottom-up approach has to be maintained: the important thing is to equip the community to tackle its own problems. It is this principle of locally directed self-help, which can be seen to have transformed previously deprived communities in England, which Liberal Democrats believe will be the way ahead for tackling the worst areas of deprivation within the city.

The Liberal Democrat approach

A Liberal Democrat City Council will:

- start the process of bottom-up regeneration and the building of community independence in deprived estates.
- prime the pump for core-funding of community resource organisation in these areas while working towards developing over a period a range of financial resources so that the organisation can become independent and self-sustaining.

Community safety and Crime

The issue:

For many people their first priority is to live in a safe place where they can enjoy their lives and bring up their children without fear of crime. For too many people in Oxford fear of crime is a real worry and for some the experience of crime and anti-social behaviour blights their lives.

The police are rightly seen as primarily responsible for preventing crime, for apprehending criminals and for bringing them to justice. It is the duty of the national Government to see that there is a police service capable of maintaining public law and order.

The Labour Government talk a lot about “neighbourhood policing” but their practice falls far short of this. It is commonplace to dial 999 and reach a remote call-centre ignorant of local conditions. And to report a serious incident requiring an urgent presence only to find that the police either do not turn up at all or turn up too late to be useful is so common that public trust in the police service is weakened.

To strengthen the police service the Government has resorted to employing less well-paid, less highly trained and less empowered Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). Some of these are paid for by local councils. PCSOs can be a useful addition to the community’s armoury of crime control, but they are not the answer to more serious drug-related or violent crime.

At another level, Street Wardens, who are not any sort of police officer, but are employed by and deployed by the city council, can have a useful role in improving liaison between the public and other council employees who can make small improvements in the local environment. Street Wardens can at times also usefully function as “eyes and ears” in liaison with the police.

Labour’s reaction to yobbish and anti-social behaviour is to be ever more repressive. Their instinctive authoritarianism, far from reducing the fear of crime, increases it to levels which do not reflect the real risks. Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) can properly be given to deal with non-criminal behaviour but to breach the conditions of an ASBO is a criminal offence, leading possibly to imprisonment. This creeping criminalisation of the young does not tackle the root causes of crime or anti-social

behaviour.

Liberal Democrats are not opposed to the proper use of ASBOs. We support ASBOs Plus - where the Plus is a programme of social training and rehabilitation tailored to the individual .

The reactions of some national politicians and sections of the press to the Iraq war and the threat of terrorist attacks have posed particular problems for the Muslim communities in this country. Oxford is fortunate in the general tenor of its race and community relations but we have to be vigilant to ensure that antiterrorist measures do not foster an atmosphere in which the Muslim communities are unfairly seen as potentially dangerous.

The Liberal Democrat approach

A Liberal Democrat City Council will:

- support the provision of PCSOs in suitable circumstances.
- reorganise Street Wardens to work with other council employees in Neighbourhood Environmental Action Teams (NEATs) to clean up and improve the local environment. Street Wardens will continue to liaise with the local community, PCSOs and police officers.
- continue to welcome the increasing involvement of all sectors of our diverse communities in civic and public life. In particular, we will be vigilant to challenge assumptions that criminalise young people, Muslims, or any other faith or ethnic group.
- encourage close working between our diverse communities at all levels and ages and the police.
- give whole-hearted support for the right of people to go about their lawful business without fear of harassment or intimidation; for the right to protest peacefully; and for the police to uphold both of these rights.

Oxford and the global environment

The issue:

Climate change is a threat to our way of life. Many would say it is the greatest and most urgent threat facing us now. Few informed people deny that climate change is taking place, that human activities are contributing to the rate of change and that urgently we need to make significant reductions in the carbon emissions to the atmosphere. As a city in an energy intensive economy Oxford has a responsibility to reduce its negative impact on the global environment. Much more can be done by the City Council to ensure that we promote, through our good example, the rigorous management of scarce environmental resources - carbon fuels, water, paper to name the most obvious - and the use of renewable sources, solar, wind, wherever practicable. Sustainability has to be the criterion by which all our actions have to be judged in future.

Liberal Democrats nationally have long had the most progressive programme for sustainable care for the environment of any of the major parties in this country. The problem is global but many of the solutions have to be implemented locally. There is a vital role to be played even by individuals - we can all reduce the carbon emissions of our cars and houses by avoiding unnecessary use of carbon fuels, by insulating our lofts and windows, by not leaving electrical equipment on standby unnecessarily and by turning the thermostat down a degree.

The Liberal Democrat approach:

A Liberal Democrat City Council will:

- provide leadership in tackling climate change and in reducing the use of scarce environmental resources, especially carbon fuels and water.
- reduce the use of energy and environmental resources in the council's premises, public buildings and vehicle fleet. This will be delivered by setting demanding targets, monitoring progress and acting promptly to ensure achievement.
- reduce fuel poverty by the vigorous promotion of alternative energy sources and maximising fuel efficiency.

- appoint a City Council energy manager to ensure the delivery of these commitments.
- give high profile support to the Oxford Solar City Initiative, promoting the use of natural sunlight as an energy source.
- use the council's data to focus and strengthen the advice and assistance given to households, businesses and voluntary groups in reducing their carbon emissions.
- use the city council's Planning Users' panel to promote best practice by developers and architects in the use of natural resources.
- adopt and rigorously implement as soon as possible the City Council's Supplementary Planning Document on Natural Resource Impact Analysis.

Oxford and its local environment

The issue:

Labour's Oxford City Council is a laggard in recycling, in keeping the streets clean and in caring for local small green areas. The City's domestic recycling rate is hovering around 16 % - the worst in the county and less than half of the rate achieved by some of our neighbouring District Councils. The City Council has been slow to collect green garden waste and has refused to collect plastics. Chewing gum and litter continue to spoil the appearance of our major streets and district centres.

In the city centre air quality is not as good as it could and should be. For too long the City and County Councils have squabbled and procrastinated about practical and immediate measures to cut air pollution. For too long the bus companies have talked about cashless buses which would lead to quicker boarding and less pollution. Action is slow to follow.

The Liberal Democrat approach:

A Liberal Democrat City Council will:

- devolve oversight of the Neighbourhood Environmental Action Teams (NEATs) operations in their areas to Area Committees. NEATs will deliver the local programme of street cleaning, graffiti removal, kerbside

collection for recycling and local environmental improvement.

- clean up the streets in neighbourhood district centres and the city centre, by more street washing and cleaning, including bus shelters.
- take and use powers to issue penalty charges for littering.
- raise the rate of domestic recycling to that of the best in the county.
- campaign for the earliest possible introduction by the County Council of a Low Emission Zone in the city centre to exclude the most polluting vehicles.
- improve facilities and maintain security at the city's Park & Ride sites
- adopt the power to require drivers of stationary vehicles, including buses, coaches and taxis to turn off their engines.
- empower Area Committees, working through NEATs, to enhance the appearance and enjoyment of small pocket parks and play areas.

Housing

The issue:

Oxford is in the grip of a chronic and severe housing crisis affecting both the market to buy and the opportunities to rent. Homelessness wrecks lives, especially those of children. In Oxford there are about 1,000 homeless families in temporary accommodation.

House prices have risen to such levels that most young people know that they have no chance of buying a house in the city - this forces them to move out and to commute in to work or to move away altogether.

There is a severe shortage of housing at prices which people can afford, whether to buy or to rent. To afford to buy on a mortgage, to part buy on a shared equity basis or to rent in the private sector are often beyond the reach of average wage earners. To rent from a housing association or the city council is more affordable but the houses just do not exist in sufficient numbers. A fundamental problem is the inadequate supply of affordable homes.

Many young people live in shared privately rented accommodation too much of which is substandard. There are about 5,000 of these Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs).

Within the City the pressure for more housing has led to the densification - an ugly word for an often ugly process - of established residential areas. For understandable reasons the planning system, imposed by Government guidance, requires the efficient use of land already in use for housing. But the system also acknowledges the need to maintain the character of the local area. This establishes a systemic tension which is difficult for councillors and officers to resolve to the satisfaction of the public.

The Liberal Democrat approach

A Liberal Democrat City Council will:

- promote socially balanced communities, working with housing associations.
- insist that developers, as required in the adopted Local Plan, provide 50% of affordable housing, on site, on all developments of 10 or more

housing units.

- gather evidence to support the lowering of the 10 unit threshold.
- encourage innovative initiatives to increase affordable housing, such as Community Land Trusts which retain the housing in community ownership in perpetuity.
- strengthen measures to prevent homelessness, working with charities and voluntary organisations.
- promote and extend supported lodgings and Nightstop schemes for young people at risk of homelessness.
- extend the inspection of Houses in Multiple Occupation, (HMOs), tackling the worst first, and enforce standards which meet the new health and safety housing standards.
- ensure that the programme of progressing to Decent Home standard for all council housing is efficiently managed; and that services to tenants in council housing, for example providing effective fencing, are adequately maintained. (See also the section on tenant participation.)
- adopt and rigorously implement as soon as possible the City Council's Supplementary Planning Document on Natural Resource Impact Analysis.
- continue to call for a strategic review of the Green Belt outside the city so that a new Green Belt can be sustained without erosion for another 30 years; and resist any development in the existing Green Belt until such a review, which should involve all the interested local and regional groups, has reached evidence-based conclusions.

Tenant participation and the management of council housing

The issue:

In 2005 Liberal Democrats gave full support to the City Council decision to retain ownership of its council housing. This decision was overwhelmingly supported by the tenants who had been consulted. The City Council now has to manage its housing capital and revenue resources so as to bring all council houses up to what is called Decent Home standard by 2010. This requires the development of the financial and managerial skills of council staff.

Tenants want to make sure that the council's concentration on achieving Decent Home standard does not reduce the capacity of the council to maintain other services to tenants. Although during the consultation period on the retention of ownership of council housing big efforts were made to involve tenants, in practice, active participation remains limited.

Tenant participation and that of local leaseholders and other residents needs to be seen as part of empowering the local community: it relates closely to the earlier section on community development.

The Liberal Democrat approach

A Liberal Democrat City Council will:

- produce, with tenants, a costed and timed plan for the maintenance of services to tenants throughout the Decent Homes programme.
- using a bottom-up, participative and very local approach, encourage widespread, active tenants' involvement with the housing services in the management of their estates.
- ensure a more visible and responsive presence on estates to deal with tenants' issues.
- activate a prompt and effective system for tenants' complaints.

Leisure and parks

The issue:

The leisure facilities owned and run by the Labour City Council are generally out of date, badly maintained and not well used by all sections of the population. The amount of money spent per head of the city population on leisure by the City Council is at the very high end of the spectrum of spend by English District Councils.

In brief, the Labour City Council is providing poor leisure facilities at high cost and low value for money. Liberal Democrat Vale of White Horse, by contrast, provides attractive facilities which are more widely used, at less cost to the council tax payer.

In the election campaign of 2002 Labour proclaimed that they would produce a strategy for the modernisation of the city's facilities. Nothing happened for nearly four years and then, in a rush, a swathe of documents was rushed out "for consultation" over the Christmas period December 2005 to early January 2006.

The indoor leisure facilities need a programme of capital investment, stronger management and better marketing for wider and more affordable use.

Parks are well-appreciated by local people and are generally attractive but not always seen as safe. Local people would like more influence and involvement over what happens in their parks and how they are managed.

The Liberal Democrat approach:

A Liberal Democrat City Council will:

- extend free access for swimming for under 16s and pensioners.
- attract new capital by setting up one or more social enterprises, such as not-for-profit trusts, to manage and develop the council's indoor leisure facilities and to provide better services.
- look to support more affordable and wider usage of these improved modern facilities.

- set up user groups for each of the major parks and indoor leisure facilities in the city to advise on their management and use.
- devolve responsibility for small parks and play areas to Area Committees which will manage NEATs and park wardens.

The Town Hall

The issue:

The Town Hall is a fine demonstration of late Victorian civic pride. It was fit for its purpose at the time. Now it is underused for city council purposes. Much of the basement area has stood unused for years and even the modern offices with access from Blue Boar Street are now almost empty of council staff. In its present state, the building is poorly adapted to wider community, cultural and artistic use. The Oxford Museum is hidden round a corner from St Aldates, hard to access and in a cramped space.

A major development scheme has been produced in outline to adapt the main building to provide exhibition, concert and gallery space, to improve access and to reduce the cost to the council tax payer by providing some lettable retail space and a cafe. There are also short term plans to make the Museum of Oxford, which is within the Town Hall building, more accessible and to develop its use so that it requires less subsidy from council tax.

The fundamental problem here is that to realise the major scheme some £9 million of capital is required. Even if a substantial sum was obtained from a lottery source the remaining costs falling to the city council cannot at present be financed out of the capital funds which can be foreseen to be available.

The difficulties over making the best use of the Town Hall are just part of a wider problem that is now assuming serious proportions. For many years under Labour's mismanagement, the city council has failed to maintain properly, to adapt or to find alternative productive uses for its large property portfolio of operational and investment buildings.

The Liberal Democrat approach

A Liberal Democrat City Council will:

- in the short term, enlarge the Museum of Oxford, provide access to it on the level from the main building and include a cafe for public use.
- make no charge for entry to the Museum

- continue to explore, with public and private sector partners, options for funding a scheme for transforming the Town Hall into a modern, attractive and accessible community, cultural and leisure facility at the heart of the city.

Local prosperity

The issue:

Prosperity depends on local, national and international factors. The city council, although a relatively small player, can facilitate local economic success mainly through making sure that the Local Plan strikes a good balance between economic, social and environmental developments - always looking for sustainability. The current Local Plan is newly adopted and was largely worked up under Liberal Democrat leadership: it is strong on environmental sustainability and tough on requiring affordable housing from developers. It provides necessary opportunities for future prosperity. It seeks neither to fossilise the city as a museum of past glories nor to turn it into a tourist theme park. It looks rather to welcome innovative and creative businesses and research developments.

Future economic success depends on the city's ability to adapt to changing circumstances and to maintain the city's reputation as a good place to live as well as a good place to make a living. This requires the city to be open to change and to manage it sustainably.

The West End, the district adjacent to the south west of the historic centre, is undistinguished architecturally and under-performing as an area in the centre of a modern city spatially confined by its geography and history. The development of the West End is a challenge to be accepted and welcomed as an opportunity to transform this part of the city into a lively, attractive place to live and work and to visit. Recent developments at the old castle and prison site, excluded from the common life of the city for centuries, show what can be done to adapt and conserve the past and to provide attractive city centre activities. There are plans, too, to adapt, enlarge and improve the Westgate and replace its multi-storey carpark both of which are outdated and in need of replacement. If the Westgate is successfully developed - success here will be judged by aesthetic, environmental and social as well as economic criteria - this will open the way to develop the larger West End, the last remaining quarter of the city centre not already intensively developed.

The city centre has to be kept in balance with the district centres and the small local shopping parades whose economic and social viability and vitality must be enhanced.

The Liberal Democrat approach

A Liberal Democrat City Council will:

- support the regeneration of the West End and the Westgate to provide a sustainable, high quality mix of housing, retail and recreation facilities and public open space, consistent with the City Council's Supplementary Planning Document on Natural Resource Impact Analysis.
- ensure the balanced development of the city so that the district centres and local shopping parades benefit from increasing prosperity
- continue to support the established economic strengths of Oxford as an international centre for education, medicine, publishing and as a regional centre for industry, retailing and tourism.
- maintain support for creative and innovative industries.
- encourage the growth of small and medium-size enterprises.
- campaign for the earliest possible introduction by the County Council of a Low Emission Zone in the city centre to exclude the most polluting vehicles.
- campaign with the County Council, the bus companies and others to make radical improvements in the public transport systems into and through the city, making use of low emission technology, reducing pollution and improving air quality.

Council tax, management of the council's finances and its staff

The issue:

After a comprehensive assessment of its performance by the independent Audit Commission Oxford City Council has been categorised as a "weak" council. Too often the services provided by the council are at high cost and of dubious value. The council is now struggling to demonstrate value for money in what it does - seemingly, a novel concept for it. Its buildings and its leisure facilities are poorly maintained and have a maintenance backlog of over £9 million which will have to be found from its annual revenue income stream.

Turning to the council's capital resources, even when it has the capital to spend on an agreed programme the council fails to deliver that programme: year after year the approved capital programme is underspent by millions of pounds. Why? The only convincing explanation is lack of forward planning and bad project management.

Poor performance extends to the most basic and essential functions of the council. One of these is to deal accurately and promptly with claims for housing benefit. Inefficiency in handling housing benefit harms people who are among the most vulnerable in the city.

The council tax is a grossly unfair tax: like the Tory poll tax, it is regressive, bearing most harshly on those with low fixed incomes. The system of claiming council tax relief is so bureaucratic that many eligible for relief do not receive it; some of them are too proud to wish to subject themselves to this means test. So long as the council tax is a major source of council income the council must collect it fairly and efficiently. It is unfair that the council's inefficiency here allows some who could pay to avoid doing so, in effect adding to the burden on those who pay what is due from them.

Liberal Democrats have been campaigning nationally for the abolition of the council tax and its replacement by a tax based on the ability to pay. Until the unfair council tax is abolished we Liberal Democrats see it as the duty of the council to avoid tax increases that cannot be guaranteed to give better value services.

The council staff deserve to have a clearer vision of where the council is going over the next few years and what is expected of staff. To that end

the Liberal Democrats have prepared a Vision for the council's corporate plan. It is brief and in plain English. It has a strong emphasis on working with other organisations outside the council and on the constructive culture which we want to foster among the staff - without their commitment political aspiration will not be delivered and our efforts to make the city a better place for all our citizens will run into the sand. The Vision is in Appendix 1 to this manifesto.

In the city council elections of May 2004 Labour lost their overall majority. The Liberal Democrat group decided that we should best promote our values and policies by remaining outside the Administration and acting as the constructive Opposition to Labour's minority Administration. Over the last two years we have successfully pressed a number of our policies to the point where Labour has found it useful to adopt them. Some examples of our success in getting our policies seen by other party groups as the best way ahead are set out in Appendix 2.

The Liberal Democrat approach:

A Liberal Democrat City Council will:

- give top priority to providing better services at better value for money.
- approve no increase in the rate of council tax unless we can be certain that better services of good value require it.
- improve the collection rate of council tax and the processing of housing benefit. We shall explore all options for providing the best value service.
- establish a ring-fenced fund dedicated to essential building maintenance.
- give staff the confidence and incentives to work innovatively and to accept constructive change.

The Liberal Democrat
Vision
for Oxford and the City Council

Oxford is a city of international renown but it is marred by unacceptable inequality.

“Our Vision for the future is:

a city where all its citizens feel at home, are treated with respect and have the opportunity to fulfill their aspirations;
and

a city which values its varied past and builds a better future for all its citizens.

To make a reality of the Vision the City Council will:

- be an open, efficient and responsive organisation
- devolve decision-making to the most local level which is viable
- work with and learn from other organisations
- encourage balanced development which respects environmental resources
- redress inequality through increasing opportunity”

The Liberal Democrat Group took the lead in campaigning for and including in our alternative budgets the following policies which were subsequently adopted by the full Council although not as fully or as soon as we wished. These policies were to provide:

- free swims at off peak times for under 16s and pensioners;
 - free concessionary bus travel for pensioners;
 - extended kerbside recycling to include garden waste, cardboard and plastic;
 - priority to finance PCSOs over Street Wardens;
 - stronger measures to reduce air pollution in the city;
 - for Oxford Building Solutions to be accountable to tenants;
- and to abolish:
- unfair charges on council tenants for repairs.