



A COLCHESTER FOR EVERYONE



Colchester Borough Council Liberal Democrats Manifesto 2011

When we took over Leadership of Colchester Borough Council in 2008 we wanted a Council that was value for money, supported businesses and tourism across the Borough, and took environmental issues seriously.

In the last three years, we have overseen the lowest ever rise in Council Tax in Colchester, increased recycling rates to record levels, and overseen the completion of the long awaited new A12 junction which will reduce congestion in Colchester.

We want to build on this success. Our plans for next year include bringing 'street services' such as graffiti or litter removal closer to residents by having one team per area for all of these services. We want to improve cycle routes and recycling rates to become the greenest Borough in the country, and invest in our town's heritage to attract more tourists to our area.

Inside this manifesto there are detailed plans for what we would do if the Liberal Democrats group won a majority on Colchester Borough Council this May. We think this is an ambitious document that will guarantee a better Colchester for everyone.

Councillor Martin Hunt,
Liberal Democrat Group Leader

Councillor Anne Turrell,
Liberal Democrat Deputy Group Leader

I. Helping Colchester's Businesses

Colchester has a large number of small businesses – the Borough economy isn't dependent just on large employers. We want to encourage more entrepreneurship within the Borough, and the Council has a vital role to play in providing the infrastructure for business. Every year, Colchester businesses pay almost £60 million in business rates, which we have to give directly to central Government and get less than £10 million back. We will:

Seek to get local control of business rates to deliver local priorities.

Work with businesses and the Colchester Business Group to attract regional, national and European funding to the Borough

Support the establishment and development of new businesses through Business Incubation Centres to ensure we have a diverse local economy with well-paid local jobs.

Increase broadband access throughout the Borough, including getting faster speeds, better access and more bandwidth for rural areas.

Work with businesses to spread the 10% Forces Discount scheme throughout the Borough

Promote apprenticeships and bid for funding so local businesses can recruit and train people

2. Protecting the Borough's Environment

The Council has a major impact on the local environment. Under our leadership, the amount of carbon dioxide produced by Council operations has gone down dramatically, and we're making the whole borough greener. We will:

Continue to increase the amount of household waste that is recycled, and introduce a separate collection of food waste

Oppose the incineration of waste

Keep funding replacement trees and tree maintenance and continue the Trees for Years scheme, which sees over 2,000 new trees planted every year

Create or find open space that can be given over to local residents for community gardens or community trees that everyone can take part in looking after

Use Planning rules to raise the environmental standards for all new buildings in the Borough and ensure that new developments are sustainable

Continue investing in energy saving schemes for Council properties – including fitting solar panels to Council houses - that save both money and CO2 emissions

Deliver on our pledge to reduce the Borough Council's carbon footprint by 25% by 2012

Promote micro-generation, energy conservation and water saving throughout the Borough, including requiring new developments to commit to using energy from renewable sources

Protect Colchester's green spaces and stop them being buried under concrete

Create more allotments in the Borough and encourage more people to use them

Encourage local markets and farmers markets

Provide support for 'Colchester in bloom'

3. Getting Colchester Moving

We're committed to making Colchester easier to get around for everyone. Under our lead, Colchester has done all it can to get a Park and Ride scheme. We will:

Keep the pressure on Essex County Council to deliver the Park and Ride scheme it has repeatedly promised and that we desperately need

Free up Colchester Town Centre by cutting down the number of non-essential journeys that go through there

Work with train and bus companies to improve and integrate our public transport and expand the range and frequency of services

Extend the foot and cycle path network in Colchester and bid for money from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund to continue the Cycling Town work

Demand that the County Council does its job properly in maintaining our roads and fixing potholes – there can be no more snow closures of the Town, as they allowed last year

Campaign for better public transport links for Colchester, including new rail lines such as a direct link to Cambridge, and high quality express bus and coach services

4. Improving the Town Centre

Colchester Town Centre continues to thrive, and is a major reason why the local economy is surviving in the recession. We will:

Build on the success of the year's new Christmas events and lights, and work to bring events to the Town Centre throughout the year, like the Carnival

Ensure that residents and businesses are fully consulted and involved in new developments like the St Botolph's regeneration area

Promote events, venues and late-night shopping to create a night-time economy that's safe and welcoming to all

Work with landlords to reduce the number of empty shops, and promote organisations like Slack Space to make empty shops look good

Ask the Government for local control of business rates so we can encourage local independent shops throughout the Borough

5. Supporting Rural Communities

A large part of Colchester Borough is rural, and we'll ensure that every part of the Borough is listened to. We will:

Promote tourism in rural areas and encourage visitors to see the whole of the Borough, not just the town.

Work to increase broadband access and bandwidth for rural areas, which will encourage jobs and investment

Protect rural land from over-development

Protect woodlands within the Borough and work with organisations like the Woodland Trust, The Campaign to Protect Rural England, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds etc. to protect our landscape.

Work to keep rural post offices, shops and pubs in business

Work to protect rural communities from cuts in bus services by Essex County Council

Allow affordable housing where it's really needed to keep rural families together and villages thriving

6. Housing fit for the 21st Century

Not only is the Council responsible for most planning and development within the Borough, it owns over 6,000 Council homes. We want to be sure that everyone, throughout the entire Borough, has a decent and affordable place to live. We will:

Review the Council's Local Development Framework in the light of new Government rules to ensure that we don't continue to be bound by discredited centralised housing targets

Ensure that a high level of social and affordable housing is developed, so everyone in Colchester has a chance of having their own home

Ensure we have the range of houses we need, including housing suitable for people of all ages, and not swamping the town with too many flats

Review and scrutinise the work of Colchester Borough Homes to ensure it is fit for purpose, especially in maintaining the Council's housing stock and getting vacated properties ready for occupation again

Preserve amenity space when new developments are built, and encourage the creation of more open space in all areas of the town

Ensure that there is proper infrastructure (transport, schools, medical services, shops and jobs) when new developments are built

Get empty homes back into use as soon as possible, so they're not standing empty while we're short of houses

7. Cleaner and Safer Streets

Everyone wants to live somewhere that's clean and safe. We're working hard to collect more rubbish from the streets and reduce the level of crime throughout the Borough. We will:

Introduce a 'zonal' system for street services, where each part of the Borough has a dedicated team working within it to solve problems, with a single point of contact for residents.

Continue our Days of Action, where different agencies come together in one particular area to tackle fly-tipping, graffiti, anti-social behaviour, and provide debt and health advice, amongst other services

Demand that Essex County Council allows the creation of 20mph zones in residential areas when people want them.

Get takeaway businesses and other major sources of litter to clean up their own mess, or contribute to the cost of cleaning it up

Campaign for Essex County Council to provide better street lighting and work to keep footpaths and cycleways clean and secure

Work with local groups to help residents make their communities safer

8. Delivering Value For Money

We'll ensure that taxpayer's money is spent wisely and effectively in Colchester.

Continue to find efficiencies within the Council's operations. These have already delivered more than £3 million of savings under our leadership.

Seek to share services and staff with other Councils and other organisations where this can save money while still delivering quality services in the Borough

Continue to keep Council Tax down and protect frontline services

9. A Better Quality of Life

There are great things happening in Colchester all the time – our sport, art and leisure facilities are some of the best in the country. We want to encourage the development of Creative Colchester as a source of both entertainment and employment. We will:

Maintain our support of the arts and the Creative Colchester strategy by using arts groups as partners in delivering the Council's strategic and cultural objectives

Extend facilities for young people, to provide them with activities and opportunities that will keep them active, healthy and safe

Encourage residents to keep healthy by promoting and developing high quality sporting facilities

Ensure that access for people with disabilities is a priority throughout the Borough

Promote a wide variety of services for older people throughout the Borough, and assist them in claiming the benefits to which they are entitled

Promote the use of Credit Unions within Colchester, and aim to make them accessible to people throughout the Borough

Work with the Garrison to ensure that events and activities in Colchester are open to Army families, and encourage even better relations between the Army and the Borough.

10. Promoting Colchester

Colchester's got a lot to shout about, and we want to make sure that people come here to see and experience it. We will:

Promote Colchester nationally and internationally as an important historical centre

Preserve our unique heritage, including the Roman Circus, Colchester Castle and Roman Walls

Seek external funding to preserve and improve our heritage assets – this year, we've had £79,000 from English Heritage for the Roman Walls and St Botolph's Priory, and we're submitting a bid for £5m of Lottery money for the Castle.

Look for innovative ways to promote the Borough, its history, and current attraction such as encouraging film and TV companies to film on location here

Working with hotels and other tourist-related businesses – a vital part of our local economy - to help them promote themselves throughout the UK and Europe

Encourage the growth and creation of local organisations that will promote Colchester Borough

Bid for 'City Status' for Colchester Borough to attract investment

11. Being Democratic and Accountable

The Council is the voice of the people of the Borough. We will:

Push for the Borough Council to take power back from Central Government and the County Council.

Seek to make Colchester a Unitary Authority, free from Essex County Council, should the opportunity arise.

Consult as widely as possible on Council policies and decisions, listening and responding to what the people of the Borough say.

Ensure that all consultations we hold are open and accessible, and that the Council listens and responds to the results of them

Seek to introduce a fair voting system for the election of councillors and keep annual Council elections in Colchester

Give individual councillors more powers to make a difference within the Council.

Use powers in the Localism Bill to review the way the Council works and seek to make it more open and democratic.