



A South Gloucestershire that works with everyone for everyone

Liberal Democrat Manifesto 2023



CLlr Claire Young

Leader of South Gloucestershire Liberal Democrats



Dear Friends,

On May 4th you have the opportunity to put South Gloucestershire back on track.

The Conservatives have let us down nationally and locally. In Westminster, they have shown they are not to be trusted with the economy. Locally they are not listening to what matters to residents.

We will run South Gloucestershire Council in a completely different way. We will listen to and work with local people.

We face two huge challenges - the threat to our planet from Climate Change and the cost-of-living crisis. We know people are deeply concerned about both the soaring price of food and household bills and protecting our planet for future generations.

Our priorities are:

Tackling the Climate and Ecological Emergency. We will help more people insulate their homes, cutting their carbon footprint and their bills. Supporting innovation to build a greener economy. The Conservatives are falling behind on climate change targets; we will make it a top priority.

Getting our area moving. The Conservatives are bickering with the West of England Mayor rather than working together for local people. We will work with communities, transport operators and the West of England Combined Authority to deliver a joined-up transport system.

Helping residents with the cost-of-living crisis. We will offer support and advice to people and businesses, to help them cut their bills and grow the local economy.

Bringing back local decision making. We will ensure your voices are heard and that the issues that matter to you are tackled. People tell us they are fed up with out of touch Conservative councillors from miles away making decisions about their area - often to suit the whims of their MPs.

This manifesto offers a fundamentally different type of council. One that looks outwards and works in partnership with the whole community - with residents, voluntary sector groups, Town and Parish Councils and other public authorities. As true partners, listening and finding shared solutions. We cannot wave a magic wand to generate loads more cash. But by working together, as partners, to do all that is possible, however, we can create the better future we all want for our area.

We can create a South Gloucestershire that works with everyone, for everyone.

Claire Young

A South Gloucestershire *for everyone*

A Liberal Democrat administration would seek to be a champion for everyone in our communities. Whether in the urban centres, market towns, villages or an isolated farmhouse, whatever your age, background and life experiences, we will give you a voice.

Local people have been hit by the double whammy of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. Communities like Downend, Yate and Winterbourne have lost key services like banks while bus cuts have increased rural isolation.

Under the Conservatives in 2021 Ofsted reported that Children's services were failing the most vulnerable children in South Gloucestershire leaving a few at risk of "significant harm". We will focus on our children and young people, their personal development and wellbeing must be paramount.

We strongly believe that there should be an increased emphasis on wellness instead of only illness. We want the local NHS and the council's public health and social care teams to work more closely together to help residents remain healthier for longer. The council alone cannot solve all the problems with the Health Service but we can work constructively with health providers and communities to improve the lives of residents.



In our Communities, a Liberal Democrat administration will:

Promote Age-friendly Communities. Places where age is not a barrier to living well; where the environment, activities and services enable older people to enjoy life and feel well for longer.

Find innovative ways to provide banking and post offices services, to support our local economy and prevent isolation.

Work with Town and Parish Councils to bring services to their local areas.

Work closely with the local police and PCSOs to tackle anti-social behaviour.

Prioritise women's safety by developing a Safety Charter so women feel secure walking around South Gloucestershire.

Strive to ensure that South Gloucestershire is an inclusive and welcoming place for everyone. We are proud that our area has welcomed refugees from Ukraine and elsewhere. We will support those families, help them build their lives and become valued members of our community. We oppose the hostile environment the Conservative-run Home Office has created for immigrants. We will take steps to improve community cohesion and ensure that all our residents feel at home here, no matter their place of birth.





On Schools and Children's Services a Liberal Democrat administration will:

Implement the recommendations of the review of Children's services, working towards having Social Workers assigned to each school to offer immediate support to both pupils and staff when they need it.

Help schools with the cost of rapidly rising energy bills. They need investment to install energy saving measures such as good insulation, solar panels, etc. thereby reducing bills and tackling climate change.

Stand up for children receiving Free School meals. Under the Conservatives in 2022 children entitled to Free school meals saw their payments for school holidays slashed. We will continue to push for greater funding so struggling families know they can feed their children throughout the school holidays.

Invest in the mental health & wellbeing of local children. The effects of lockdowns and the pandemic have dramatically affected many children within our communities, not just in terms of lost learning opportunities, but also in social skills and building friendships. We will, by improving access to counselling and resilience resources, help teachers ensure every child can have a happy and healthy school life.

Recognise the challenges parents face to get the support they need if their child has additional needs. We led a review of the assessment and review process for Special Educational Needs. We will implement its recommendations thereby empowering schools and teachers to give children the standard of education they deserve. We will support families in navigating what is a complicated process.

Support young people regardless of their background. We will provide additional support to those who are carers, LGBTQ, refugees or from ethnic minorities groups. Each young person is an individual who needs to be supported to have the best possible start in life.

On Health a Liberal Democrat administration will:

Prioritise services for mental health. We will improve the transition of young people moving into adult services and invest in facilities to help combat loneliness among elderly residents. Liberal Democrats believe that mental health is as important as physical health and that the two are closely linked.

Work with partners to update our Dementia strategy. We will develop best practice in caring and supporting those living with Dementia. We will recognise and support South Gloucestershire's thousands of carers and the critical, unsung, role they play.

Work with the NHS over local provision and access to services, outlining urgent reforms which need to take place. Too often residents struggle to access face-to-face GP appointments or be seen by an NHS dentist. Communities see their health provision radically altered with little or no notice. We will press the NHS to provide clear information about what health services are available thereby reducing confusion and hassle for residents.



Demand specialist appointments in local health centres to save patients needing to travel to Southmead or Bristol. We will make the delivery of the long-promised Thornbury Health Centre a top priority, build on our campaign to improve the range of services available at Yate Minor Injuries Unit and demand additional health services be provided at Cossham Hospital.



On the Economy and the Cost-of-Living Crisis, a Liberal Democrat administration will:

Help residents experiencing the effects of the cost-of-living crisis on fuel and energy bills with advice on reducing bills and accessing financial support schemes.

Lobby the West of England Combined Authority to make more funding available for adapting local businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, to utilise emerging technologies.

Work with the West of England Growth Hub to provide training and support to residents wanting to start a new business within South Gloucestershire. We will provide Business Rates relief on premises for new start-ups and offer increased support to businesses wishing to re-locate here by helping with land or property searches. We will clarify the confusing rural rates relief scheme and expand support for our rural economy.

Expand the council's apprenticeships scheme to give young people and those who want to retrain for a new career a first step.

A South Gloucestershire *for the world around us*

Liberal Democrats are proud to have proposed the council declare a Climate Emergency in 2019, achieving cross party support on this vital issue. Unchecked climate change presents a huge threat to our economy, environment, and way of life. We already feel the effects with both flooding and extreme heat. Under the Conservatives, South Gloucestershire Council is working too slowly on its Climate Change Strategy.

Despite the election of a Metro Mayor for the West of England in 2017, transport in South Gloucestershire is stuck in the slow lane. As Liberal Democrats we believe a joined-up and more ambitious approach to transport is necessary to get South Gloucestershire moving. We will support people to make greener transport choices to tackle congestion and climate change.

In 2019 we worked with residents to fight off the Conservative's unsustainable plans for five mega-developments at Coalpit Heath, Charfield, Engine Common, Buckover and Thornbury. We recently opposed regional plans from Labour's Metro Mayor for South Gloucestershire to take a disproportionate share of Bristol's future housing. It risked ripping up swathes of the Green Belt, merging communities into one another, reducing access to the countryside and damaging biodiversity. We need a new Local Plan to protect our communities from speculative development and provide small-scale, genuinely affordable housing for local people – houses for need not greed. We aim to protect the countryside for the good of our wellbeing and the natural environment.

On Transport, a Liberal Democrat administration will:

Work with the West of England Combined Authority to improve our bus network. We will investigate bus franchising to give greater public control of the network. We want greener, lower carbon buses and the introduction of Fairer Fare zones for Thornbury and Yate. We will build on our successful campaign for demand responsive transport by working with our communities and Town and Parish Councils to develop innovative solutions for isolated areas that have been deprived of regular bus services.



Encourage healthy living with investment in cycling and walking infrastructure. We will work with the West of England Combined Authority to create a network of off-road cycle, walking and horse riding routes for residents to travel without using their cars. We will complete the Yate Spur and Alveston Hill cycle route whilst linking more communities to the Bristol/Bath cycle route. We will ensure cyclists have secure, covered locations to park their bikes thereby promoting multimodal journeys.



Lobby for improved rail services. Lib Dems have successfully campaigned for the re-opening of Charfield Station and more frequent trains at Yate. Building on these successes, we will investigate the re-opening of other stations (e.g. Coalpit Heath) and upgrading existing stations.

Support car sharing clubs. Many people will still need to use cars to travel especially in rural areas. We will support car sharing clubs, for families who would like to manage with one car or people who may not own a car at all.

Expand electric car charging facilities. We will ensure the council's entire vehicle fleet becomes electric as technology improves. We will encourage commercial operators into South Gloucestershire to improve charging facilities, in both urban and rural areas, including on-street provision and e-charging hubs.



Turn our Park and Rides into solar-powered Transport Hubs ensuring they are served by buses at times of day convenient to users. We will push forward with plans for the long-promised, but still undelivered, Park & Share at Tormarton.

Prioritise finishing the M49 junction after years of frustrating delays.

Maintain free parking in our town centres to support businesses, with easy access for blue badge holders.



On Climate and Environment, a Liberal Democrat administration will:

Create an Executive Member position within the Council with specific responsibility for Climate and Sustainability to ensure the Climate and Ecological crisis is at the heart of all our decision making.

Adjust the planning system to make it easier to establish solar PV and wind energy projects in appropriate locations. We will expand the types of Renewable Energy and explore innovative solutions including geothermal energy, hydrogen and battery storage. We will explore the possibility of using water in mine workings to heat homes and push the West of England Combined Authority to investigate the possible benefits of tidal energy to harness the power of the River Severn.

Work with local groups to develop Community energy projects. We will emphasise local engagement, leadership and control with the community collectively benefiting from the outcomes of generating local energy.

Investigate rate relief for businesses that invest in renewable energy technology with energy saving helping local businesses tackle climate change. We will extend support for local businesses to promote the take-up of new and existing renewable energy schemes, (e.g. Go Ultra Low grants for electric car charging points).

Reduce the councils use of pesticides, furthering the action plan to increase pollinators and promote biodiversity. To reverse the effects of climate change we need nature-based solutions to capture the carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Work with Town and Parish Councils to support their communities in promoting biodiversity and nature.

Reduce the amount of waste going to landfill. We will continue to improve our recycling rates, expanding the soft plastics recycling at the kerbside whilst working with residents and businesses to reduce single use plastics. This will save taxpayers' money spent on landfill charges and help the environment.



Crack down on fly tipping and littering across our area. We will provide enforcement officers with the resources they need to investigate and prosecute the worst offenders.

On Housing, a Liberal Democrat administration will:

Work with social housing providers to provide affordable homes. We will use council-owned land to create a number of 100% affordable housing developments at a scale that will complement existing communities, rather than overwhelming them. With all developments, we will seek to ensure that the homes built meet local need and protect biodiversity on site. We will push the providers to achieve the highest BREEAM or Passivhaus standards.



Insist on zero carbon homes in the new Local Plan. Too often we see poorly designed new housing with inadequate infrastructure. We will insist upon high quality designs for all homes and hold developers to account.

Protect South Gloucestershire from being overwhelmed by Bristol's unmet housing need, reducing pressure on the green belt, our highway network and our over stretched infrastructure.

Ensure community facilities on new developments are community owned not privately owned. We will ensure there are no new "fleecehold" arrangements, where private management companies can charge unregulated fees for maintaining open spaces. Where these arrangements are already in place we will assist residents in taking back control of management companies.

Put infrastructure first. Schools, community buildings and other facilities will be put in place quickly, not years after the houses are built. Roads and services will be completed quickly, to improve safety.

Extend the consultation on homes being converted into Houses of Multiple Occupancy Residents without needing to get planning permission into the Stoke Gifford area as well as Filton, Stoke Park and Cheswick areas. This would not mean that HMOs within these areas are unacceptable, rather that it would bring these into the planning system to allow consideration of the proposed development against the council's adopted Local Plan policies.

A South Gloucestershire *with* Everyone

Democracy and empowering local communities lies at the heart of the Liberal Democrat approach to local government. Under the Conservatives, more and more power has been concentrated in the hands of a small number of councillors; we want to give power back to local ward councillors and to the people they serve. Liberal Democrat councillors believe in being champions for our local communities. We want to create a South Gloucestershire where everybody is valued and feels valued.

A Liberal Democrat administration will:

Actively work with local residents to shape the plans for our area - not present it as a fait accompli. Under the Conservatives the council has been terrible at genuinely engaging with residents on all matters from planning and transport through to education and the environment.

Put in place transparent decision-making processes in which residents feel listened to.

Create Area Committees to take decisions locally on matters such as transport, planning, environment and highways. This will give local communities more power to focus on their priorities. Area committees will ensure that the handing out of community grants happens in an open and comprehensible way.

Restore the right of members of the public to speak at site inspection meetings.

Transparency and accountability are at the heart of the Liberal Democrat approach to planning. A Liberal Democrat administration would reverse the Conservatives' anti-democratic curtailment of residents' rights in the planning process.

Reform planning committees to ensure that residents in South Gloucestershire have better access to meetings that affect them. We would stop the Chair of Planning from having a veto on decisions going to planning committees, ensuring residents, parish councils and community groups are not cut out of the process.



Collaborate with our partners including the Town and Parish Councils, the NHS, the emergency services, businesses, voluntary and community organisations. Only by working together can we maximise our limited resources to make South Gloucestershire a better place for all.