

Ealing Liberal Democrats



2014 Election Manifesto
Stronger Economy - Fairer Society

Contents

Introduction

Top Ten Liberal Democrat Actions

Organisation and Finance

The Environment

Planning

Crime and Policing

Education

Transport

Housing and Estate Regeneration

Health and Social Services

Equal Opportunities and Human Rights

Arts and Leisure

Introduction

When Ealing Council has previously been run by the Conservative and Labour parties they have let down residents. The recent experience of politics at national level has demonstrated that coalitions, rather than reliance on a single party, better represent the majority of people. We are pledged to make the best use of the available resources and provide an administration geared to YOUR needs and aspirations. Here are our themes:

A Cleaner Ealing

Since the present cleaning contract was introduced on April 1st, 2012, the collection of our rubbish and recyclables has been deplorable. Every week there is a deluge of complaint, collections being incomplete or missed altogether in many areas. Weeds proliferate. Litter accumulates. Yet the present administration has failed to hold the contractors to account. Liberal Democrats would have enforced penalty clauses following severe breaches of contract performance.

A Fairer Ealing

The Council has been obliged to find economies in recent days but too often the brunt has fallen on the most vulnerable of our residents. Liberal Democrats have found ways to fund freezing Council Tax for the next four years – we have shown that it is possible and is crucial to cut costs and not services.

A Safer Ealing

We are aware of the public concern about crime in the Borough. Liberal Democrats would divert funding for centrally funded police initiatives to local ward policing.

A time for action

You will have a chance to do something about this. We hope you will find in the following pages some positive ideas to bring about a step change. A vote for the Liberal Democrats on 22nd May will ensure that your concerns are acted upon quickly, fairly and efficiently.

Top Ten Liberal Democrat Actions

The ten actions that a Liberal Democrat Council would implement on May 23rd, if we are chosen by the electors of Ealing to run Ealing, would be:

- Protect green spaces & prevent “garden grabbing”
- Protect the vulnerable - save day centres and local health services
- Freeze Council Tax for the next four years – cut costs not services
- Cleaner streets and fine contractors for poor performance
- Safer Ealing – more Bobbies on the Beat in high crime areas
- Restore free garden waste collection
- Freeze parking permits and vouchers
- More investment in roads and pavements
- Increase social & affordable housing supply
- Make the Council easier to contact

Ealing Liberal Democrat Group Leader, Councillor Gary Malcolm, says: “At the last local elections in 2010 the residents of Ealing agreed with Liberal Democrat policies and voted in the largest number of Liberal Democrat Councillors in Ealing, ever!”

Councillor Gary Malcolm added: “Our 2014 policies are ones that residents have clearly said they want across Ealing. The Liberal Democrats treat residents’ views as being crucial and we know that our actions running Ealing Council would improve our area for residents. We are the only party that is standing up for the vulnerable, whether they are the disabled or the elderly.”

Organisation and Finance

The two pillars of any political organisation are transparency and accountability. Liberal Democrats believe that decisions should be taken at the lowest practical level after full consultation with the people who are affected by them. For many, Perceval House looks distant and bureaucratic.

Consultation

Consultation procedures are seen by many as tick-box exercises rather than a meaningful process to identify the best solution. There is still a wide gap between residents' reasonable demands and official proposals. Consultation should be a genuine opportunity for residents to choose between fairly presented alternatives, not a sterile exercise in providing justification for a decision that has already been taken.

Budgetary procedure

The annual budget process, known as the "star chamber", is shrouded in secrecy and nothing is revealed until officers have come up with recommendations. Liberal Democrats would freeze the level of Council Tax for the next four years. We would also freeze the level of charges in respect of parking permits.

Communication

Telephone calls should be handled more efficiently on the council switchboard, Too often callers are left in the air or listening to music without a human voice. If a return call is promised, this must be carried out. Liberal Democrats will ensure that where people need to be they will be able to do so. Liberal Democrats will reduce the waiting time for face to face meetings in Perceval House.

Council meetings

Full council meetings spend too much time in party wrangling. More time should be available for petitions and questions from residents. Major changes in policy should be referred to scrutiny before, not after, consideration by the cabinet. Scrutiny meetings should be chaired by councillors from opposition parties.

Ward forums

These provide a valuable means of calling councillors to account and giving reasons for council decisions. They are particularly valuable when council officers are able to attend. Liberal Democrats will ensure that more responsibilities are devolved to a local level, including some planning applications. This should be entirely devolved to ward forums, e.g. road and pavement repairs.

Contracts

More care should be taken when outsourcing services or combining resources with other boroughs. The terms of such contracts, once agreed by the cabinet, should be publicly accessible. Contracts should include realistic penalty clauses to be invoked in the event of poor performance. When contracts come up for renewal these should be carefully scrutinised to save money.

The Environment

Poor service from Enterprise

The Liberal Democrat team, headed by Lib Dem leader Councillor Gary Malcolm, has been in the forefront in demanding improvement from the Borough's contractor, both in responding to complaints and seeing that the work gets done. The Council should now:

- Recover penalties owed by the current contractor and strongly impose penalties in the event of future defaults, and look to remove the contractor if failings go on
- Brief the response teams more accurately and arrange for complaints to be dealt with more efficiently
- Work closely with the contractors to ensure the refuse collections are properly supervised
- Introduce more litter bins and keep the surrounding area tidy
- Encourage residents to separate their recyclables, which would help to increase the recycling rate to 50 percent by 2018
- Introduce mixed recycling bins in major streets
- Ensure that council estates are kept free of rubbish and fly-tipping.

Garden waste

We opposed the current policy of charging residents for "garden waste" because we believe that charging people does not encourage them to become more environmentally aware. A Liberal Democrat administration would restore free collection of garden waste.

Air quality

Air quality in the Borough of Ealing is among the worst in London. When contracts are renewed, the opportunity should be taken to ensure that the vehicles used by the Council should be electrically operated.

Noise

Complaints relating to noise are becoming more frequent. The Council should work closely with the police to identify and deal with persistent offenders. Higher standards should be demanded as a condition of granting planning consent.

Parks and open spaces

The Borough has a rich inheritance of parks and open spaces which are well recognised as a significant part of our local heritage. Parks form an essential element in providing recreation for all ages. The Council should improve standards by

- Supervising events more closely, ensuring that hirers pay for any damage
- Ensuring that all parks and open spaces are retained and not sold off
- Improving the drainage of parks such as Ealing Common and Acton Green
- Improving the lighting facilities without undue recourse to ward funds.

Planning

Planning is an essential element of local government where theoretically everyone has a say. But not when it comes to local decisions, these are frequently taken with too much regard for commercial interests and too little attention being given to residents. Despite the guidelines set out in the Local Development Plan (and the Unitary Development Plan which preceded it), these are often swept aside by officers who are under pressure to meet unsustainable targets.

The Liberal Democrat approach

Residents are given a very short time to voice their objections to applications which may be harmful to their environment. The presumption is always in favour of the developer. If an application is refused – either by officers or the Planning Committee - a developer is allowed to appeal, but no such right is given to disaffected residents. Liberal Democrats have campaigned nationally for both parties to be on an equal footing, so far to no avail. To go some way to redress the balance, the Council should

- Involve the public more widely when preparing strategic guidelines
- Ensure that notices of planning applications are clearly posted in the street
- Be more open about pre-application discussions
- Send consultation letters to a wider circle of residents
- Inform interested residents of subsequent applications relating to sites with a planning history.

Reports to the Planning Committee

Some recent reports by planning officers have been heavily one-sided. Too often the writers of the reports betray their ignorance of the relevant areas. The Council should

- Exercise a more supervisory role, allowing a group of members to call in a report that is seriously biased
- Ensure that strategic requirements (for example, relating to density) are clearly set out
- Only permit “backland” developments in exceptional circumstances
- Ensure that two (or more) residents are given speaking rights at committee meetings when they are representing different interests
- Ensure that, when controversial applications are considered, sufficient time is given so that all relevant arguments can be heard with approximate parity.

Environmental opportunities

Planning applications often provide excellent opportunities to improve the environment. Solar panels should be insisted upon where appropriate. More attention should be given to good design, conservation issues and the general appearance of the street scene.

Town centres

The Borough should abandon its over-concentration on the Uxbridge Road corridor and instead build up all its town centres. The Council should encourage Neighbourhood Forums.

Crime and Policing

Since 2013 dedicated neighbourhood police teams have been halved by the London Mayor so residents don't see the police on our streets. There has been a reduction in the amount of crime reported, but fear of criminal activity remains a high priority for many residents, especially those living alone.

Priorities for the Police

The police teams regularly seek local guidance regarding priorities, which reflects current concerns, but a more comprehensive strategy is necessary. Police involvement with individual residents could be increased – as it has been in Hounslow for example. The safer neighbourhood teams currently being created should be fully representative of the communities they serve. The council needs to work more closely with the Borough Commander to ensure the right priorities. Such co-operation should

- Circulate regular newsletters explaining what the police have been doing and what they are proposing to do
- Establish their priorities and report the extent to which these have been achieved
- Improve communication so that telephone enquiries can be followed up systematically
- Identify isolated residents and work with social services to ensure that their safety needs are being met
- Endeavour to be more visible by patrolling every street in their ward at regular intervals. There should be more co-ordination between ward and "cluster" teams
- Re-allocate council funded police from central functions to the safer neighbourhood teams.

Antisocial behaviour

The fear of crime is accentuated by reports of antisocial behaviour which are frequently associated with excessive alcohol and/or drug-dealing. The council can help by establishing firmer guidelines. The objectives should be

- Holding local meetings as soon as reports of antisocial behaviour are received
- Taking firmer action to keep clubs and public houses free of crime and nuisance to nearby residents
- Considering more areas for special powers relating to alcohol licences.

Sexual and racial offences

The public are becoming increasingly conscious that insufficient action is being taken against those who commit rape and other sexual offences. The police should not hesitate to act to protect male as well as female victims. Racist language should be discouraged and offensive graffiti reported to the specialist council team for instant removal.

Education

Responsibility for education mainly falls on the schools themselves which are directly funded from central sources. There are however strategic decisions which are made by local councils. Previous administrations in Ealing have been slow to respond to challenges brought about by population increases and changes in government policy and have usually been left to react to increasing demand on a piecemeal basis.

The Liberal Democrat Strategy

The population of the Borough has increased dramatically over the last ten years and is expected to continue to increase over the next decade. But the council's strategy has not kept pace. The Council should

- Provide parents with genuine choices rather than Hobson's choices for the education of their children
- Encourage co-operation with parents at all stages, including career advice
- Strive for the highest academic standards but without excessive reliance on league tables
- Resist central government interference, relying on local initiatives rather than excessive paperwork.

Planning for the future

Ealing needs to build more primary and secondary needs to meet the demand for school places. To give our children the best chances the Council should

- Ensure that planning permission for large developments take account of the need to provide educational facilities in the neighbourhood
- Strive to reduce the size of classes, particularly in primary schools
- Develop contacts with neighbouring employers
- Give greater attention to weaker pupils.

Discipline

The Council should be more supportive of head teachers when they are faced with discipline problems. Proper standards of behaviour should be mandatory at all levels. Bullying, especially of a homophobic nature, should not be tolerated.

Sport and the arts

The Council should take full advantage of the Olympic legacy and encourage more pupils to take up sports seriously. They should also be encouraged to learn to play a musical instrument and develop dramatic and artistic talents.

Adult education

Recent administrations have given low priority to adult education. There should be more emphasis on vocational courses. The teaching of English to non-native speakers is of great importance and should be encouraged in tandem with the use of IT skills.

Transport

Responsibility for transport is divided between the Council itself and Transport for London. Initiatives also come from the Mayor of London and numerous pressure groups. It is necessary therefore to improve communication and promote discussion between the various authorities.

The needs of pedestrians

Pedestrians should be able to walk with safety in mind. Accidents can be caused by cars and bicycles as well as heavy traffic. The Council should

- Support the introduction of 20 mph limits except in major roads
- Introduce more pedestrian crossings at dangerous intersections
- Promote road safety in our schools.

The needs of cyclists

The Borough has a number of narrow streets but it remains important to improve facilities for cyclists. We supported the “Mini Holland” scheme bid for the Haven Green area, but the Conservatives did not. The Council should

- Support ward forums which have invested in cycle facilities such as racks and hoops to improve security for cyclists by appropriate match funding
- Increase, clearly identify and where possible physically separate cycle lanes
- Give greater attention to potholes on main routes, especially in winter.

The needs of motorists

The Borough does not need any new car parks. Yet an increasing number of people are having difficulty parking close to their houses, particularly at night. The Council should

- Monitor existing controlled parking zones more frequently and effectively
- Consult fully when new CPZ schemes are introduced, and giving full particulars of the results of such consultations
- Ensure that charges for parking permits are “frozen” for four years.

Trains and the tube

Ealing is well served by public transport but insufficient thought has been given to maintaining suitable infrastructure at a time of rapidly increasing population. The introduction of Crossrail is welcome – fullest advantage should be taken of this. Hanwell station should have a lift and there should be a more sympathetic design of stations.

It is essential that Piccadilly Line trains should stop at Turnham Green station at all times.

High Speed Rail

We support HS2 as an alternative to air travel. Tunnelling is welcomed to minimise disruption. There should be adequate compensation for residents affected by the route.

Air travel

Politicians and businessmen have been squabbling for years about the future of Heathrow. Liberal Democrats are the only party who have consistently campaigned against a third runway or any other changes that would increase noise pollution.

Housing and Estate Regeneration

Most of Ealing's housing stock is over fifty years old. The "Queen of the Suburbs" has been disfigured by much ugly development, both public and private. Large council estates like the South Acton Estate and Copley Close were left for years before improvement, and will take many years to complete. Ealing's housing stock has halved since the 1980's as both Labour and Conservative governments have sold off housing under "right to buy" and not replaced it. The Council has failed to achieve its target of 50% affordable housing in new commercial developments. We would enforce this target.

The Liberal Democrat Initiative

The Council should

- Grasp every opportunity to obtain additional funding
- Make it easier to obtain loans for those who cannot immediately raise money for a deposit
- Work more closely with housing associations to increase the housing stock
- Improve environmental standards and design quality.

Regeneration policies

The Council should

- Speed up the modernisation of Estate properties
- Establish effective forums enabling tenants and leaseholders a greater say in regeneration
- Ensure that the Southall Gas Works site is developed in a way that provides much-needed facilities and transport links for current and future residents of Southall
- Make greater use of compulsory purchase powers to tackle the blight of empty properties.
- Ensure that large housing schemes are supplemented by appropriate infrastructure, especially schools and medical facilities.

Repairs

Council tenants are often at a loss as to how to bring about repairs quickly and efficiently. Even straightforward repairs often take months to complete. The Council should

- Undertake a detailed assessment of the needs of council estates, to ensure that long-standing repairs are carried out
- Introduce a more effective supervisory system, so that the work done by contractors is more efficiently monitored
- Act more responsively in dealing with tenants' enquiries and complaints.

Health and Social Services

In recent years local authorities have taken over additional responsibility for public health matters. Health and social services departments are constantly being urged to work more closely together but because their traditional functions were differently organised there is a need for further collaboration, if not integration.

Hospital services

London's hospitals are under pressure from Whitehall mandarins to reduce services. We regret the downgrading of A&E at Ealing and Charing Cross hospitals and note that traffic congestion can add significantly to the time that ambulances reach their objective. However we welcome the fact that cross-party campaigning prevented total closure. The Council should

- Campaign to retain the full range of hospitals in the Borough, but at the same time encourage further specialisation
- Involve the public in making major decisions and exercise greater supervision of hospital services.

General Practitioners

As a result of government changes, GPs have been obliged to accept additional responsibilities. The Council should

- Encourage GPs to open at evenings and weekends and make it easier to get appointments
- Encourage GPs to give more responsibility in GPs to nurses, to deal with minor complaints
- Use surgeries to promote well-being and publicise local facilities such as diabetes and dementia clinics and provide care closer to home.

Social Services

Central government has called upon local councils to make many cuts to front-line services. Within the Borough of Ealing social services have been badly hit. The Liberal Democrats opposed the closure of the Stirling Road centre and the Learning Curve and the way the "efficiency savings" were effected. The process of personalisation, which is widely accepted, has nevertheless been very slow to introduce and will not satisfactorily cover all situations. More support should be given to the army of carers.

Ealing's older people

The older generation can often feel isolated. The Council did nothing to arrest the decline of old people's clubs and struggled to contact "hard-to-reach" people. The Council should work together with community groups to develop lines of support. Efforts should be made to identify people suffering from Alzheimer's disease or other dementias. It is vitally important that people should be looked after in their own home where possible and that health services should be locally accessible.

Equal Opportunities and Human Rights

Ealing has a good record in promoting social equality. Our community organisations reflect the interests of our diverse community groups. “Progress with Unity” is an appropriate motto. The Council’s existing policies are well recognised to encompass everyone, regardless of class, race, religion, gender or sexual orientation.

The Council should build on this reservoir of goodwill.

The Council as employer

The Council is itself the largest employer in the Borough. It should

- Ensure that fair policies are followed not only on recruitment of staff but also on promotion
- Facilitate the appointment of a greater proportion of women and ethnic minorities among the senior officer grades
- Give adequate notice before redeploying staff or implementing redundancies
- Ensure that a proportionate number of people with disabilities form part of the workforce.

Other responsibilities of the Council

More generally, the Council should

- Make its website more accessible
- Promote fuller discussion of new proposals, involving community groups and residents’ associations where appropriate
- Encourage on-line provision of council services
- Develop stronger links with hard-to-reach groups, especially those who are disabled or elderly
- Promote more facilities for studying the English language.

Advice services

Ealing remains the only borough in London without a Citizen’s Advice Bureau. Liberal Democrats will continue to press for an active CAB in Ealing. The closure of Law For All has been followed by severe cutbacks of legal aid, so that existing advice centres are under greater pressure. Those providing advice, including the Council itself, should encourage specialisation to cope with the complexity of government regulations which have been imposed by successive administrations.

Arts and Leisure

Involvement in the arts is an essential part of the human experience. Artistic events encourage civic participation, intergenerational activity and simple enjoyment of life. The Council has done little to promote the arts apart from a few prestige projects. Ealing has the Pitzhanger Gallery, and the Questors theatre has a history of innovation and a high level of performance, but central Ealing requires an artistic “hub” which will attract top class performers.

The need for local centres

There is a need for community centres in all parts of the Borough and research is being conducted to respond to local needs, be they commercial, educational or artistic: one area of activity should be combined with the others.

The Council should

- Conduct a Borough-wide audit to locate existing or potential performance spaces
- Encourage exhibitions of the visual arts in all parts of the Borough
- Give more encouragement to school and university students to develop their artistic and musical talents
- Work imaginatively with developers when central sites become available to use a sensible proportion of the area for performance space.

The cinema

It is a disgrace that it has taken five years to re-establish the cinema site opposite the Town Hall. The name of Ealing is associated by many with the famous comedies which originated in the Ealing Studios. We will press for a proper cinema complex rather than a token small cinema in a development dominated by retail and residential use. The opportunity should be taken to establish a film festival to run alongside the increasingly famous summer festivals in Walpole Park.

Libraries

It is recognised that everyone should have access to a library within a relatively short distance. All the Borough’s existing libraries are well supported and any further attempt to close even one of them should be resisted. They should continue to provide computer facilities and have people available to assist library users when required, despite the recent cuts in the number of librarians.

Sports facilities

Ealing contributed significantly to the successful running of the Olympics and Paralympics. Much of the local enthusiasm generated by these events can and should be encouraged to continue, particularly in our schools. We strongly oppose the council’s decision to give Queens Park Rangers a 200 year lease of Warren Farm for a peppercorn rent.

The Liberal Democrat alternative

The arts have been ignored by both the other parties, particularly Labour. Liberal Democrats would like to see a firm commitment to a proper arts centre to combine the aims listed above.