

Oxfordshire Green Party

County Council

Manifesto 2013

The Green New Deal for Oxfordshire would provide:

- **A strong sustainable local economy**
- **Better care for vulnerable people**
- **Protection for public services**
- **Clear air, greener transport**
- **Action on climate change**

Greens - Setting an Alternative Agenda

The Greens are the real opposition to the Conservative- controlled County Council, providing an alternative model to cuts and privatisation. Only the Greens are setting a sustainable agenda for Oxfordshire and actively protecting our environment.

Greens' Central Policy Objectives Include:

- **Creating a Strong Sustainable Local Economy**

Only the Greens are proposing local investment via a Green New Deal to combat the global financial crisis with a wide range of schemes, such as insulation programmes to cut energy bills and create employment. We will work with local employers, especially small independent concerns, trade unions and residents to revitalise our local economy. We will work towards securing an economy that encourages the growing, production and distribution of local food.

- **Keeping Our Services Public**

Only the Greens have put forward budgets that seek to minimise cuts and their impact on vulnerable groups. We have spoken out about the higher cost and lower quality of service privatisation. Green Councillors will keep fighting to protect vital public services such as the Fire Service, effective Policing and most importantly our NHS. Furthermore we will fight proposals to encourage private profit-making companies to manage our schools. Such arrangements in the NHS are threatening the existence of a number of hospitals.

- **Action on Climate Change, Flooding, Water Resources and the Protection of Natural Diversity**

The Greens are the one party to have a coherent programme that involves all the District Councils, business groups ,trade unions and community organisations in reducing carbon emissions in Oxfordshire. Only with our vision and political pressure will policies emerge that take into account the climatic and ecological challenges facing Oxfordshire in the coming years.

- **Greening Our Transport**

Your Green Councillors have been consistently campaigning to reduce pollution and improve public transport .We have proposed plans to stop the increased number of cycle deaths and injuries. We support provision of new local railway connections and oppose new airports in Oxfordshire.

- **Health and Protection for Children and Vulnerable People**

No party has fought harder against the malicious cuts to services for the elderly and those on a low income than the Greens. Only your Green Councillors have put forward alternative budget options to stop the attack on the most vulnerable.

Only the Greens can be trusted to expose the folly of recent Government legislation to privatise sections of the NHS.

- **Education**

The Greens believe in working with teachers' unions, governors and parents to provide a broad-based comprehensive education focused on individual development of knowledge and skills rather than simply training for work .

We want schools to cooperate, not to 'compete' against each other, and to gain from the services of the local authority networks.

Schools have faced too many changes in recent years. They should be allowed a period of quietness to get on with building achievement and opportunity.

- **Environmental Improvements**

The Greens have by far the best record of fighting for environmental improvements. We opposed the idea of wasting £millions on incinerating waste and have been the major force behind the highly successful moves to recycle and reuse waste products. Whilst other parties stood by we proposed motions to protect green spaces and spoke out against any weakening of planning regulations.

A GREEN VOTE WILL HELP MAKE OXFORDSHIRE A SAFER, ENVIRONMENTALLY STRONGER AND MORE PROSPEROUS COUNTY.

WITH YOUR VOTE WE CAN COMBAT THE MOST VICIOUS CUTS IN VITAL SERVICES.

Education

Our Vision

We are committed to life long learning, access to which should be free and open to all.

Education is a process of personal development rather than training for a specific job. In a rapidly changing hi-tech world, those with a wide breadth of knowledge, skills, creativity and understanding will be happier and far more able to contribute to society. Education is a dynamic process with new methods and practical applications emerging continually.

We believe that innovation and creativity in teaching and learning are to be encouraged, to give everyone opportunity to reach their full potential.

We consider encouragement of recognition of achievement in all things, not just through formal qualifications or key state examinations, to be essential.

Encouraging co-operation between all individuals and schools, rather than competition and self interest.

Raise Education Attainment

There are numerous socio and economic reasons why Oxfordshire state schools are said to 'under-perform'. The core solution will require national legislation related to the private and public sector in education and a new improved financial settlement for state schools.

Greens will:

- Place resources to strengthen literacy and numeracy programmes in primary education as a part of a concerted campaign to improve attainment levels.

Expand Nursery and After School Provision

Greens will:

- Seek funding for more nursery and after school provision to help working parents
- Encourage increased range of activities on offer to children

However the Green Party recognises that parents also need to be supported to care for their children at home should this be their preference.

Healthy Eating

Greens will:

- Introduce a free school lunch for all primary age children with a subsidy for meals in secondary schools.
- Re-establish of local school kitchens with locally sourced, healthy food to combat obesity in children and ensure that all have a healthy and nutritious meal.

Multiculturalism

Greens believe that education should be secular and children of all religious backgrounds or none should be welcome in all our schools. A social mix encourages tolerance and harmony. Segregation on religious grounds can lead to social division.

Greens will:

- Encourage all our schools to recognise the wealth of cultural diversity that we share in Oxfordshire and to find equal value in all.
- Welcome school encouragement of children to be aware of all religions and atheism as a part of their education, but worship and doctrine are issues external to the school and are for their family to determine.
- Ensure our schools have an ethos that is welcoming to all.

Working with Academies

We do not support the governance and funding structures of academies and ‘free’ schools.

Greens will:

- Want all schools to be locally accountable and financed rather than in the hands of private ‘sponsors’.
- Work with Academies where they have been established by Central Government seeking to draw them into co-operative local authority networks of practical support services and community engagement.

Reduce External Contracting

Contractors profiteering from public services reduces the money available for teaching and learning.

Greens will:

- Seek to maintain local authority services in-house and reduce external contracting with its higher cost and lower quality.

Expand Adult Education

Greens will:

- Retain the County’s Adult Education system with a focus on more free provision of both formal and non-formal educational systems within the community.
- More provision for English as a Second Language and Arts as Therapy, are typical areas for expansion.

Sustainability in All Areas of School Life

Greens will:

- Facilitate all schools to have solar power and renewable energy with extensive insulation to cut costs is a priority.
- Encourage Eco School programme to cover all institutional improvements on buildings and taken account of foreign travel plans.
- Plan for our children to be able to walk and cycle to school safely.

Special and individual needs

We wish to see as much integration as possible of children with special needs into mainstream provision and as much separation as may be necessary for a child's own advantage. Special schools for children with physical, mental or behavioral problems may still be needed.

Greens will:

- Face up to the costs that may be involved in adapting mainstream schools to facilitate effective integration.
- Ensure Travelers' children are able to gain full education provision of opportunities whilst maintaining compatibility with their own culture.

*** Expand the LEA Role**

The Greens see great advantage in school co-operation and recognise that the Local Authority can have a role to play in building networks for support of teachers, governors, parents and children. We want to reverse the obvious neglect of the possible dynamic role of the LEA we have seen for years in Oxfordshire.

Greens will:

- In collaboration with education professionals, will seek to expand the coordination, planning, and practical services of the local authority to all schools.

Working with Teachers, Unions, Governors and Parents

Greens will:

- Work more closely with parents, teachers, unions and governors to innovate.
- Welcome new teaching and learning techniques applicable in the 21st century as the way forward, rather than top down imposed reforms. Schools will be encouraged to embrace new technology and innovate with new systems of teaching and learning relevant to our age.

Greening Transport for All

Oxfordshire's Transport Issues

Oxfordshire is a beautiful county with international and global appeal, and the city of Oxford is known as 'the City of Dreaming Spires'. But on the ground the experience can be sadly different. Residents, students, workers, shoppers and visitors to Oxford breathe a cocktail of toxic gases on very many of Oxford's central streets. County towns suffer from heavily-trafficked through roads, and walking routes throughout the county are interrupted by hazardous traffic routes. This particularly affects wheelchair & pushchair users and people who are unable to move fast. Cycling in Oxfordshire is fraught with hazards, although cycling is the most energy-efficient form of transport. Moreover, the scattered nature of many settlements in rural areas and the poor provision of public transport has made many people totally dependent on the private car. This is becoming increasingly unsustainable, with rising fuel costs, and in the prolific carbon emissions involved playing an all too large part in dangerous climate change.

It doesn't have to be like this: Green Councillors will look to the future for all the people of Oxfordshire.

Our vision

The Green Party view the hierarchy of road users with the most vulnerable road users at the top, and the least vulnerable with the most choice at the bottom. If our built and rural environment was designed with wheelchair and pushchair users and people who can't move fast in mind, we would have true accessibility for all.

The Green Party also believes that people can have better lives if they can reduce the necessity for tedious and sometimes unpleasant travel commitments. Good planning of additions to settlements and more opportunities to work at home must also play a part in Oxfordshire's future. This will reduce commuting and the congestion, pollution and danger it causes in town centres and their approaches.

Wheelchair/pushchair users and Pedestrians

Greens will:

- Plan networks of walking routes in all towns using the most direct 'desire' lines
- Give walking routes priority wherever possible, i.e. at junctions
- Put pavement extensions across side roads, creating a level and continuous surface across main roads
- Prevent parking on pavements
- Put cycle lanes on the roads rather than on the pavements.
- Free pedestrian routes of clutter and ensure they are wide enough and with a good, even surface.
- Support the introduction of 20 mph zones in all residential areas and streets throughout Oxfordshire.

- Improve safety for pedestrians and wheel & push chair users especially in villages and on rural highways
- Prioritise pedestrian and wheel & push chair safety over car capacity when deciding on the need for pedestrian crossings.
- Ensure visually challenged pedestrians are considered and consulted when changes are made to the road network.
- Create a culture where on shared spaces (e.g.towpaths) cyclists give way to pedestrians and are courteous.

Cycling

Cycling is the most energy-efficient form of transport and is clean, efficient, healthy and enjoyable. However, cycling rates could be much higher than they are in Oxfordshire. In particular, children and elderly people feel unsafe cycling in towns and along rural routes between county towns. Even in Oxford city cycle routes are poorly thought out, they stop and start awkwardly, and are often closed off or blocked by markets, cars and vans, and/or buses with engines running. Cycle routes also force conflict between cyclist and pedestrians by going on and off pavements, confusing cyclists about the rules of the highways. Despite being highly vulnerable road users themselves, cyclists are frequently the target of the anger of other road users. Cycling on rural routes is extremely hazardous, with fast traffic, narrow winding roads, and poor visibility. Incidences of cyclists seriously injured and killed are unacceptably high and this needs to be tackled urgently.

Greens will:

- Place most cycle routes on the major roads in urban areas, and never on pavements. To improve cycle safety, traffic speeds will be reduced, and cyclists given priority over motorised traffic at junctions.
- Upgrade or allocate space to cycle paths along all major roads between towns, and work with Sustrans to extend safe and direct off-road routes between towns. The Green Party, however, does not normally support the Sustrans practice of putting cycle-ways on pavements.
- Increase on-street parking for cycles in around shopping areas, and in urban terraced streets, where parked cycles currently block the pavement
- Ensure cycle routes are not blocked by parked vehicles, or by buses standing for long periods with engines running.
- Make cycle routes as continuous as possible; they should not disappear at hazardous junctions and in narrow streets.
- Ensure cyclists can cycle conveniently and directly both north-south and east-west through Oxford and directly through Oxon towns.
- Look into how desperately needed cycle routes in rural areas can be provided, perhaps in some places by making bridleways into shared use paths.
- Ensure that commuter cycle routes are prioritised; at present rural cycling is seen by the County Council as a leisure activity.
- Develop policies for electric bikes in conjunction with vulnerable road users.
- Support a proposal for an Eynsham to Oxford cycleway via Farmoor

Public Transport

Since bus deregulation in 1985, services in Oxfordshire have been under private control. Competing companies run frequent services along the most popular routes but ignore the less popular routes. This makes for inadequate services throughout much of the County, and pushes people to feel they can only drive everywhere. In Oxford City, especially in the centre, even if the 'cleanest' engines possible were installed in buses, air pollution on bus routes would still breach air quality targets for the 'safe' minimum of particulates and other toxins in the surrounding air.

Greens will:

- Commission a feasibility study into a modern lightweight electric tram system for Oxford city, running north-south and east-west.
- Free up space for the smooth-running of public transport by closing off Longwall Street and Hythe Bridge Street to through private traffic (except disabled drivers), meaning private traffic could drive into and out of Oxford city but not through Oxford city, which would cut air pollution and congestion whilst still allowing accessibility. Separate access permits would be available for students at the beginnings and ends of each term, and for delivery vehicles before 10am/after 6pm.
- Encourage the use of cycle rickshaws and other pedal-assisted vehicles for deliveries and as short distance public transport.
- Continue to subsidise essential but uneconomic bus routes, and consult with parish and district councils on the level of provision
- Work with bus companies to put bike racks on buses.

Railways and Trains

Rail privatisation has reduced opportunities to co-ordinate and improve rail use in the County. Train services in the UK are amongst the poorest in Europe, being overcrowded, expensive, hard to access by wheelchair or with a pushchair or bicycle, and often with large numbers of empty 'first class' carriages whilst people stand in very crowded 'economy' carriages, sometimes for many hours.

Greens will:

- Work in partnership with train and rail operators
- Strongly resist any attempts by train companies or government policies to reduce train services or close rail routes or stations
- Work towards ensuring that all carriages are equally accessible and comfortable for everyone.
- Promote and support the opening of new stations or currently disused railway lines.
- Work with rail companies to improve rail services and timings of services to County towns such as Banbury, Didcot etc.
- Support the development of the Oxford/Stratford and Oxford/Cambridge rail links.
- Welcome any interim proposals to open disused railway lines for cycle use or walking
- Seek to co-ordinate integration of rail and local bus services

- Work with rail companies to address noise, vibration and air pollution issues arising when residents live near railways and their sidings, particularly those likely to involve intensified freight air pollution issues arising when residents live near railways and their sidings.
- Work with rail companies to ensure bicycles can be carried on trains

Canals and waterways

Despite waiting lists for residential moorings, residential moorings are under threat from profiteering landlords and unsympathetic County and District Councils. Canals are also an under-utilised means of transporting heavy goods to and between town centres.

Greens will:

- Promote and protect residential moorings as a form of affordable housing, and increase them wherever possible.
- Investigate the greater use of canals as a means of transport throughout the County.

Policies for private vehicles

For many people, car-dependency is part of daily life. People who can afford them and can drive are forced to depend on cars when they live in places with inadequate or absent public transport links and no safe cycling routes. The vicious circle of car use leading to an undermining of local public transport, leading to yet more car use, has led to many localised problems; traffic congestion, noise, pollution, a dirty hazardous environment and a shortage of public space for activities other than getting from A to B. Children are unable to play outside or walk to school. Health issues due to lack of exercise are on the rise across all age groups. These problems are spread across urban and rural communities alike. Traffic use is rising steadily throughout Oxfordshire and defeating attempts to tackle the urgent issue of toxic air pollution

Greens will:

- Commit to motorised-traffic reduction targets
- Support car-clubs and car sharing schemes
- Oppose planning applications which will generate extra car traffic
- Ensure that all sizeable new developments are well-served by public transport, and wherever possible, car free
- Not permit the building of major roads, such as by-passes, which invite further traffic growth
- Abandon all proposals to straighten or widen roads and junctions
- Introduce 20mph zones on all residential streets, and near schools and where people congregate. e.g. health centres. 20 mph may also be applied on certain rural roads.
- Campaign for extended powers of Local Authority Enforcement that allow money from fines to be kept locally and invested in improving safety
- Support the extension of Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs), but strongly oppose the painting of white lines on pavements for car parking. Where this has already happened steps will be taken to reverse this, focussing

first on streets where the space left for walkers and other pavement users is below County minimum standards of 1.2 metres in width.

- Build no further Park and Ride sites and not expand the current sites further (because more parking spaces means more room for more cars, and they encourage a rise in car-dependency)
- **Increase** Park and Ride parking charges and on-street parking charges – and use the income to boost public transport subsidies, especially for buses coming in from county towns
- Support other measures, such as tree-planting, to minimise traffic noise and pollution
- Reduce the width of the roadway on St Giles, Oxford to create a public pedestrian area
- Investigate using congestion charging as a means to raise revenue for public transport and to reduce car-dependency
- We will clamp down on the current practice of allowing builders vans to park on pavements and in cycle lanes. and seek provision of parking spaces for those undertaking essential work in the locality e.g. health visitors & builders

Transform Oxford

The Green Party has been particularly involved with proposals that affect Oxford as one of the most important centres of heritage in Britain, and in this context has been working for a more friendly and accessible city centre for nearly 30 years. Oxford Transport Strategy in its current form was generally supported by the Greens, but with several notable exceptions. The Greens correctly predicted that the railway station junction (Frideswide's Square) would be unwieldy and frustrating for all road users alike. As such we welcome the new proposals to narrow the space for motorised transport, although we have concerns that creating a free traffic flow will pull in more traffic and also create hazards for other road users. The Greens support the vision of a much more widely pedestrianised city centre, with cyclists also taken into account. However, the Greens would achieve this by reducing traffic overall, not pushing it onto the unofficial inner ring route that is Hythe Bridge Street, Worcester Place, Beaumont Street, St Giles, the University area, Longwall Street, Magdalen Bridge and the Plain.

Greens will:

- Stop through private traffic using Longwall Street and Hythe Bridge Street, meaning those vehicles could enter and leave the City centre, but not drive through it. Non-disabled drivers wanting to go from North to West or South would have to use the ring road, or some other means of transport.
- Support the introduction of Low Emission Zones, wherever pollution continually exceeds EU danger levels
- Introduce road closures or traffic calming in side streets to reduce 'rat running'.
- Seek to introduce more Home Zones throughout the County.
- Extend traffic management measures which reduce general traffic and give priority to wheel & push chair users, cyclists, and public transport users

- Encourage the use of cycle rickshaws
- Keep people informed of Oxford's air pollution figures so they can take them onto account in their transport choices and more fully understand the dangers to their health they are facing. Regularly survey all areas subject to traffic pollution.
- Oppose the siting of cycle lanes on pavements
- Ensure cyclists can cycle conveniently and directly both north-south and east-west across Oxford city centre, and throughout Oxfordshire.

Fire and Safety

The County Council runs the local Fire and Rescue Service whose mission is to make it safer to live and work in Oxfordshire by reducing the incidence of serious fires and related emergencies. It has an impressive track record and is staffed by dedicated men and women. Despite cuts the Service is just meeting its response times. This would not be possible if they are faced with further budget cuts.

Community safety is largely the responsibility of the Police, the City & District Councils – not the County Council. However, the Safety Advisory Group (SAG), which reviews the safety of community events is County led.

The Greens have previously fought against the decisions of the SAG which we believe are overly officious and conservative.

Our Vision

We are committed to Community Safety and welcome developments where residents can work with trade unions, professionals and local communities to ensure that this is maintained throughout the county. The Green Party applauds the work of Oxfordshire's Fire and Rescue Service and has always sought to protect its funding

Greens will:

- continue to protect Oxfordshire's Fire and Rescue Service funding.
- continue to oppose any further closures of fire stations
- reform the Safety Advisory Group to be more **supportive of local events** which could help reduce costs of putting on events (e.g. the unnecessary closure of Magdalen Bridge in Oxford City on May Morning) and contributing to the escalating costs of staging local Carnivals.

Libraries, Museums & Arts Centres

Our Vision

The development of truly creative successful strategies to develop links between different cultural services and agencies i.e. the County Council, and District Councils, to maximise the use of public money. This is at the heart of the Green vision for Oxfordshire.

Libraries

The County Council runs the Library Service and contributes to the running of a number of museums. Although it doesn't operate any leisure centres or swimming pools (these being either privately run or operated by the City and District Councils) it does impact on outdoor leisure pursuits in a variety of ways through its Countryside and Transport services.

In December 2011, the County reversed a previous decision, as a result of intense public pressure, to close some of the County's 43 libraries. The plan currently going forward is to fully fund 22 libraries and hope that the remainder can continue to operate with the help of volunteer labour and through increased use of self-service.

Greens will:

- Remain committed to keeping all of Oxfordshire's libraries open and believe that more work can be done to operate them in partnership with schools and other educational establishments
- Preserve the libraries and serve to retain them at the heart of our communities.
- Seek funding to allow libraries to evolve and continue to offer services that people want. They are a valuable community resource and if they are to remain popular they need investment to evolve with the times to continue offering the services that people want.

Museums

The County's museums are mostly free to enter and are generally well-respected. The County Council has handed some properties over to charitable trusts to manage and such initiatives have proven successful. Less successful has been the handing over of County assets to private companies – a prime example being the Oxford Castle. The heritage aspects of the Castle have been largely ignored in favour of commercial interests. For example, access to the Castle Mound – once free – has been restricted and charges introduced.

Greens will:

- Seek to protect free public access to all museums and heritage sites.

Arts Centres

The County's Arts Centres provide a rich mix of all kinds of entertainment and education for all ages, abilities and tastes, yet the Conservatives want to reduce their budgets by nearly 50% and push them out of County Council responsibility. They will be run by self appointed management committees, accountable to no-one and which **are likely** to provide a much reduced service.e.g. The Mill Arts Centre in Banbury

Greens will:

- Reinststate the full grants to Art Centres and return their management to elected members and representatives of the communities they serve.

Countryside

The County's Countryside Service deals with public rights of way and has a responsibility to look after woodlands and biodiversity. The Greens believe in further expanding public rights of way and improving the quality and biodiversity of our countryside. We are proud that Oxfordshire has several habitats recognized to be of national and international importance which include calcareous (chalk or limestone) and neutral grassland.

Our Vision

The Greens are committed to the economies of both rural and urban areas, which should be seen as a whole. Greens promote partnership working on conservation with other public bodies, campaign groups, businesses and the

general public to seek to protect and improve the lives of wild and captive animals and enhancing wildlife habitats.

Greens will:

- Pay more heed to the findings of the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study which identified several priority habitats which must be protected. The majority of these are designated as sites of special scientific interest or County wildlife sites.
- Maintain funding for Road Verge Nature Reserves which connect all areas of the county allowing wildlife to move through an inhospitable landscape in some areas.
- Oppose badger culling.
- Support organic and local farms and seeks to ease their sale of local food to local communities and schools.
- Add local farming to the list of options young people can consider after full-time education (it is not currently seen as a viable option)

Business Links

Since early 2011, Oxfordshire County Council has been delivering most of its business support activities in partnership with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), an unaccountable business-led forum.

Through its funding of the LEP, the County Council encourages “economic growth and diversification” based on four key programmes; skills, infrastructure, inward investment and broadband. However the Green Party disagrees with many of the LEP’s priorities.

Our Vision

Greens prefer an approach based on the findings of the widely acclaimed Green New Deal Group, which continues to promote economic development and job creation through investment in environmental and socially focused enterprises. Green’ industries’ have a huge role to play in ending the UK recession.

Greens also believe that the County Council should closely scrutinize the work of any partners such as the LEP to increase accountability to local taxpayers.

Our commitment to local, sustainable, environmentally efficient development benefits our community.

e.g. the Greens helped establish the Westmill Wind and Solar farms in Oxfordshire. The latter is the largest community-owned solar power station in the world. These energy businesses provide good returns to investors, most of whom live locally.

Greens will:

- Seek to prioritise those LEP and County Council programmes which support these aims and discontinue others, diverting investment from unsustainable infrastructure development, such as the building of new

airports, and focus instead on enhancing our local public transport systems.

- Seek local investment, in preference to inward investment, to ensure that any profits are more likely to remain within the region, and Oxfordshire is better protected from the uncertainty of global markets.
- Remain committed to increasing scrutiny throughout local government, encouraging more local accountability.
- Work to ensure that the County Council is more proactive in injecting money into the local economy. For example, the Greens have proposed a massive increase in independent advice services to help people access benefits; many millions of pounds of which remain unclaimed. Most of this money would then be spent locally.
- Commit to expanding Oxfordshire's only Credit Union, to provide low cost credit for people who might otherwise turn to unscrupulous 'loan sharks' or high interest bank loans.
- Encourage County Council support of worthy enterprises through its own procurement choices by buying from ethical, local businesses.
- Our business commitment will extend to encouraging enterprises including social enterprises that prioritise local food production and distribution and to the establishment of local Farmers' Markets.

Environmental Improvements

Our Vision

Flooding

There should be a wide ranging approach to water to include consideration of the need for other measures to ameliorate other aspects of climate change such as drought.

Greens will:

- Consider flooding as an increasingly serious problem brought about by climate change.
- Work with all agencies to implement plans that look at the river catchment as a whole and puts forward wide ranging solutions involving appropriate building solutions and sustainable drainage to ecological measures such as increased tree planting and wetland capacity.
- Continue to develop and refine the County's response with other agencies to flooding emergencies
- Encourage and support the formation of Flood action Groups & local street flood representative is to be encouraged & supported.
- Increase advice & support to residents and businesses on how to make their properties more flood resilient.

Climate Change

The impact of decisions made at the County-wide level should always be viewed in terms of impact on increasing oil burning and dependence on fossil fuels. The Green Party would hold these issues as having primary significance amongst other considerations.

Greens will:

- Consider the likely impact on climate change in all planning considerations, including both immediate and knock-on effects of decisions.
- Consider the likely impact on climate change in all decisions relating to transport, construction, quarrying, and major plans which the County is

consulted on in terms of national development proposals in Oxfordshire.

Health & Protection for Vulnerable People

COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICES FOR ELDERLY PEOPLE , ADULTS AND CHILDREN WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES

Our vision

Social Care is a Green Priority

For the Green Party there is no more important function of the County Council than making life easier and more fulfilling for vulnerable people and people with disabilities, and their families and friends.

This Manifesto will demonstrate a different model of care, based on communities and participation, which is aimed at making life easier for people with disabilities. How things are done is important, but more money is also needed.

One of the great accomplishments of the last twenty years is the steady increase in average life expectancy. However, long life often brings disability and loneliness to elderly people, and poverty and ill-health to the family and friends caring for them. In addition to the huge increase in the number of very old people, more infants with severe disabilities are surviving, and people with disabilities are living longer.

The present system is seriously flawed. Social Care has been underfunded by Labour and Conservative Governments for decades and has been hit by unprecedented cuts each year for the last 3 years, with the proposal for about £30 millions in cuts over the next four years. Oxfordshire County Council has, for many years, been a low spender on Adult Social care compared with other Councils. The Conservatives have wasted tens of millions of pounds over the last 7 years by subsidising free parking in Park & Ride car parks and on the streets of Oxford, whilst cutting services for people in desperate need. They have finally adopted Green Party policy for moderate parking charges, but much irreparable damage has been done in the meantime to Social and Community Care services.

Greens will:

- **Propose a 3.75% increase in Council Tax. This will raise £5.8 million per year more than the 1.99% being proposed by the Conservatives.**
- **Hold a referendum on the proposed increase**

This would cost an average Council Tax payer an extra £20 a year, about £1.65 a month. Most of this would be used to reduce the impact on Social Care of past and future cuts forced on Oxfordshire by the current central government. If Greens had more influence at the national level we would ensure that wealthy corporations and individuals pay the taxes they now evade to support Social and Health Care services. But that awaits a different kind of government. We need to be of practical help here and now, and believe that many people of Oxfordshire share our unhappiness that so many are suffering unnecessarily. An increase of 3.75% would require a referendum.

Prevention and Early Treatment

In addition to lack of funding there are major flaws in the current approach. Prevention and early treatment are inadequate. This makes life harder for the people involved. It is also a false economy because many people deteriorate and need more expensive care than they would have with earlier help.

Our vision

We acknowledge the importance of prevention and early treatment, and recognise that too little money has been allocated to properly ensure this.

Greens will:

- Make a major effort to prevent disability and provide assistance before people become incapacitated. A Green Party Social Care system would rest on villages and neighbourhoods. People would know where to get the advice and help they need when they need it.
- Build on and help improve the lunch clubs, befriending circles, healthy living advice, physical recreation, arts, drama and general recreation.
- Scrap the foolish rule that people who do not need help in getting dressed cannot have help with keeping their homes and gardens attractive and clean. Nothing depresses people who are largely housebound so much as the homes they have cared for becoming squalid.
- Provide in our budget extra money to help some of the people disqualified by the present unreasonable criteria.

Oxfordshire was one of the earliest Councils to limit services to people with 'Substantial' or 'Critical' needs. This requires very high threshold before any Community Care service is provided. The definition of 'Substantial' includes: 'abuse or neglect'; 'inability to carry out the majority of personal care'; 'the majority of social support systems and relationships cannot be sustained' and so on. You can be very disabled and isolated before falling within these criteria.

Services for a fulfilling life- not just survival

The current doctrine is for shorter and fewer hospital stays, and sharp reductions in residential care. There is some value in this because most people prefer to remain in their own homes as long as possible. But if that home life is simply about staying alive, spending long lonely days looking at four walls or facing unrelieved work by tired carers, it will be not be a great boon. Far too many people in Oxfordshire have faced increasing suffering year in and year out as a result of County Council service cuts.

Greens will:

- **provide substantial funding to help communities to make it possible for people with disabilities to lead healthier and more fulfilled lives and for individuals to get the help they need for to have a rewarding life.**

Community Workers for Supportive Communities

Like all of us, older people and people with disabilities want contact with other people, and varied, interesting things to do.

Such a life delays and prevents severe depression which is a major cause of disability. We propose that every village and neighbourhood in the County be helped to provide activities and befriending networks for all people, of whatever age, in the way that they desire.

Greens will:

- Encourage full use of public buildings, including schools.,
- Increase support for Village and Community Centres.
- Seek employment of Community Development Workers, whether directly by the County or by funding voluntary sector organisations, whose role is to help local people create and maintain the activities they choose.
- Support existing groups and helping create new ones where necessary and wanted.

There is a huge supply of good will and skills in all our communities. This can be built upon. They do not always happen without assistance. Skilled workers and money are often required. Public services and communities are not walled off. They strengthen and interact with each other.

Advice and Advocacy

There are £10s of millions of pounds of disability and pension benefits which are not being claimed by Oxfordshire residents who are eligible. Many people who are entitled to Health or Social Care services are not receiving them.

Greens will:

- Propose that every GP surgery in the County have at least one session a week providing first-class benefits and service advice.
- Substantially increase funding for Advice and Advocacy agencies which are efficient but lack finance to meet the need.

Many people are unable to make the complicated case needed to access benefits or services. They need vigorous and informed advocacy from these advisors. This is needed more urgently as drastic cuts in benefits are being introduced.

The County Council as advocate:

Many services are provided by the Government and other bodies.

Greens will:

- Use the Council's influence on behalf of the people of the County.

Support for Carers

There has been a significant improvement in the awareness of the importance of carers (family and friends) in supporting elderly and other people with disabilities, but their level of poverty and ill-health remains very high and pressures are increasing.

A very important recent development has been the creation of an emergency service which provides immediate cover when a carer is unable to care. This came from the unanimous proposal of an all-party Working Group on Carers. The idea of this Working Group originated with a Green Party Councillor.

Greens will:

- Propose a substantial increase in short breaks for carers, and a guarantee to all carers that there will be an agreed plan in place so that if they become unable to continue caring they will know that those they care for would be adequately looked after.

Transport in Social and Health Care

Our vision

People need to have satisfying lives, and to be able to get out to see and enjoy the world. This means transport for those who are unable to do so under their own steam, recognising in rural communities particularly there is a need for a full variety of transport for many purposes.

Greens will:

- Propose that more activities be created in every locality to reduce the need for long distance travel, which can be tiring and distressing.
- Community Development staff would support and help increase the coverage of volunteer driving schemes.

Care-workers

Our vision

Greens value people who do such difficult and responsible work in society. We recognise that care-workers have been badly treated, which is wrong in itself, and will not attract or keep the staff needed to do caring work well.

Last year Oxfordshire County Council sacked their remaining 400 Care-workers. They were well-regarded by service users, and better trained than most private agency staff. They could be deployed more flexibly around the County; private provision is weak in some areas. They were not well paid but they were eligible for pensions and were paid for the time they spent going from client to client. They were therefore more expensive than the private agency staff, many of whom have no pension provision and are not paid for travel within their working day. One such worker worked for 6 days a week, for over 60 hours to earn 35 hours of low pay. This is an unjust and unsustainable situation.

Greens will

- Use some of the extra money raised in a Green budget to create a highly trained Council-employed task force that could respond to crises, including the bankruptcy or fraud of a private agency.

Protecting the NHS

The Green Group introduced a motion, which was passed, criticising Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust's proposal to hand over their role as purchasers of health services to a private company. Under pressure they withdrew the proposal. Policies to fragment and privatise the NHS were introduced by the last Labour Government, and have been carried forward in an intensified form by the Con-Lib Coalition. The introduction of profit-making into the NHS is removing large sums of tax-payer money from health care and will inevitably reduce the quality and availability of important services. It is more than ever necessary that there be strengthened Green Party representation in the Council, informing the public of what is happening and seeking their support to maintain a public NHS with adequate resources. Green Councillors had a great success in getting the Oxford Community Hospital reopened after it had been closed for more than a year, although with the previous provision of 28 beds reduced to 20. Community Hospital provides expertise in rehabilitation. They keep people out of less pleasant and more expensive acute hospitals.

Our vision

To maintain a public NHS with adequate resources. Also to recognise the value of good Community Hospitals and support them in providing their services.

Greens will:

- **Continue to oppose the Labour and Conservative Parties' policies to cut, fragment and privatise the NHS.**
- **Continue to press for fair treatment, access to fully paid NHS care for those who may need it rather than means tested Social Services for Nursing Home or domiciliary care**

NHS Continuing Care

By law, the NHS is required to provide fully paid care to people with a great need for services because of their ill-health, even when they do not need acute medical care. Oxfordshire NHS has been reluctant to accept their responsibility. This means that many people have to use means tested Social Services for Nursing Home and domiciliary care; meaning hundreds have had to sell their homes.

Green Councillors passed a resolution calling on the County's Social Care team to press the PCT for increased provision of free services. This made a major difference and 3 years ago Oxfordshire provision had increased to the point that it matched the average for the whole country. However, since then there has been a determined campaign to reduce the numbers.

At the most recent count Oxfordshire had fallen to fifth from the bottom of the 157 authorities in the country. Oxfordshire NHS is now paying for 261 people, which is 4.3 for every 10,000 residents. The average for the country is 11.1 people out of every 10,000. If Oxfordshire was average, 412 more people would have their Social Care fully paid for by the NHS. There is no reason for this very large discrepancy. An increased number of Green Councillors would increase our ability to obtain fair treatment.

Conclusion

Support for people with disabilities, whatever their age, is a major responsibility of the County Council. It has been underfunded for years, and was said to be "in crisis" by Age UK and the Alzheimer's Society two years ago.

Since then there have been unprecedented cuts and the County Conservative budget calls for cuts of more than £20,000,000 in this area over the next two years. This would cause serious distress to many people for whom we have responsibility.

The Green Party continues to call for the very rich to be compelled to pay the national taxes they succeed in avoiding. But the need is so great we are asking our fellow residents of Oxfordshire to pay £20 a year in extra Council Tax. This will give the County £5.8 million a year, most of which would be spent on Social Care.

We would use some of that to bring many £millions more to people with disabilities through help in accessing benefits to which they are entitled and to provide free insulation in the poorest areas of the County to reduce the cruelty of fuel poverty.

We would help local people, including disabled people themselves, to help each other.

Our vision is:

A strong Council working with a strengthened society.