

Kirklees Green Party Manifesto 2008

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Kirklees Green Party Manifesto 2008

This Green Party Manifesto for the 2008 local elections is focussed on eight main policy areas. In the year ahead we will promote these within the Council Chamber with our growing number of Councillors, and outside, through the work of the Kirklees Green Party. The Manifesto includes key points from our recent successes and pledges of our approach on each of the key issues.

Economy

The economy of Huddersfield and the Heavy Woollen towns is a mix of the older industries which have shaped the culture and buildings of the area and the newer industries making use of our transport links, the skills of the local workforce and increasingly, new technology applications. To meet the challenge of the future, we need to adapt to a sustainable low carbon economy.

We want investment in the industries and enterprises for future needs providing development in existing sectors, such as engineering, construction, textiles and transport and logistics, and in newer sectors like energy conservation and manufacturing using raw materials from recycling. We need investment in the necessary skills and training for environmental industries and activities that will form the basis of a low carbon economy.

We are opposed to the loss of important public sector organisations to private ownership. We want to see increased support for community-based business and co-operatives. We also want to transform Kirklees' economy to one with more emphasis on people's quality of life, environmental sustainability and social justice.

An important factor in maintaining our economic base is transport. We want to see large-scale improvements to public transport links within the "Leeds City Region", to allow more people to travel to work by bus, train and tram not by car.

Our tourism industry can also benefit from improved ability to travel to and within the South Pennines by public transport, cycling and walking.

What the Green Party is doing

- Getting the Council to help community enterprise as part of our response to decline in community services particularly in our rural infrastructure.
- Pressing for employment, skills and training policies that meet the needs of a new era – moving to a low carbon economy.
- Promoting the employment and training benefits from energy conservation. Our Warmzone Plus insulation initiative has led to the contractor setting up a national training centre in Cleckheaton. The potential benefits could lead to up to 200 jobs.

- Pushing for regeneration money to be invested in sustainable local development.
- Pressing the Council and other local institutions to buy local goods and services, such as school meals ingredients and printing.

In the coming year we will also:

- Support plans for an innovative training centre in Colne Valley for building skills for “zero carbon homes”.
- Support local shops, post offices, and community facilities.
- Oppose the Tesco development in Huddersfield town centre that is not in the interest of small local businesses and has not been subject to rigorous environmental and transport impact assessment.
- Promoting more support for waste recycling and composting by businesses and other employers.

Energy

It is now accepted that our use of fossil fuels is driving climate change. Our economy and way of life relies on oil, gas and coal. The impact of this is now becoming clear; competition for them is creating international conflict and rising prices. In future we need to be less dependent on carbon-based fuel and to conserve energy. We also need to move towards renewable sources such as wind, hydro, biomass and solar power with considerably more incentives for decentralised and community energy schemes feeding surplus into the grid. Nuclear power is not a cost-effective alternative and will never resolve its disposal and decommissioning costs. Tax-payers subsidise the nuclear industry to deal with this problem.

We are committed to the production of sustainable energy plans for each community in the borough. These will need to be led by local people and engage the widest audience and can be facilitated by Kirklees Council, enabling everyone to see how we meet carbon reduction targets for the next decade.

Kirklees Council has pioneered a number of renewable energy and energy conservation initiatives which have been initiated by the Green Party group in the council. These include one of the UK's largest installations of photovoltaic solar panels, resulting in 5% of the country's solar electricity generation now taking place in Kirklees.

The provision of a borough-wide free insulation programme through Warmzone is a major step in helping reduce energy bills for all residents and the first scheme of its kind in the country. Sadly, when building new private housing there is still limited commitment to energy conservation and none to energy production, despite government plans that new housing should meet zero energy standards by 2016.

We need to continue to develop our programme of information, grants and loans to help people improve the energy efficiency of their homes and where feasible to encourage decentralised renewable energy production.

We will ensure all new buildings in Kirklees are as energy-efficient as possible in preparation for escalating oil prices. We are disappointed that the University of Huddersfield's latest building expansion was allowed to be built without significant energy efficiency measures and believe this is another example where short term cost savings will result in higher running costs and avoidable carbon use.

What the Green Party is doing

- Made Kirklees Council a leading exponent of energy conservation and renewable energy production using latest available technologies.
- Initiated the revolutionary 'RE-Charge' scheme which helps finance the initial costs of installation of renewable energy in the home and allows for this cost to be paid off when the property is sold, permitting residents to get the benefit of solar panels and other clean energy technology with no upfront costs.
- Initiated Warmzone Plus that is now being rolled out in the borough, area by area. It was developed by Green councillors in 2006 and has brought in over £10 million of additional investment from energy utilities as part of their obligations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Pressed Kirklees Council to investigate the feasibility of using solar street lights. Several trial units are currently in place.
- Promoted a number of energy efficiency initiatives within the Council using the budget process (see *The Council at Work* below).

In the coming year we will also:

- Press for major developments in Kirklees to be subject to rigorous sustainability assessments.
- Press for the renewable energy requirement in new developments to be continually raised, and to move towards carbon-neutral development.
- Continue to support proposals for renewable energy installations in the borough, including wind farms, where appropriate.

Education

Kirklees Council wants to allow private organisations to run some of our schools as trust schools or academies. These would not be accountable to elected local government and would allow business, religious and other bodies to take positions on school governing bodies. The government continues to use league tables which teachers say are unhelpful and put pressure on young students.

Quality and access to education depend on where you live in the district and what you can afford. We will work towards greater community involvement in the management of our schools, better communication and a positive culture for real progress and success.

The Council has closed popular and successful nurseries in the name of rationalisation of Early Years provision, which is a critical element in the development of young children's social and learning skills. This should not be done at the expense of a high quality Early Years service. We believe proper consultation is essential when closing or merging services.

Charges for school meals are set to rise again in Kirklees due to rising food costs. Greens have made the case for more use of local food and where possible utilising council land for growing crops, raising cattle and poultry. A full investigation with proposals is to be produced by Kirklees Council later this year.

What the Green Party is doing

- Opposing new privately owned trusts and academies and pushing for schools to be kept within local control.
- Campaigning for the abolition of SATs, league tables and the compulsory National Curriculum.
- Opposing privatisation of education through PFI (Private Finance Initiative).
- Promoting local sourcing and growing on school and council land to improve the quality of ingredients for school meals.

In the coming year we will also:

- Promote the need for strong Early Years service that is not subsumed into primary education.
- Campaign for better consultation prior to any nursery closures.
- Oppose the transfer of funds for Adult Education to skills for employment resulting in the run-down of local adult learning development. We should do both.

Health

Health inequalities are an important indicator of well-being. Life expectancy for residents of the poorest areas in Kirklees indicates the priorities that should be central to the public health agenda. We believe that spending on the prevention of illness and "healthy living" will deliver real financial benefits over the next decade. We want to make it easier for people to walk and cycle and to grow vegetables and fruit, leading to a healthier community.

The Green Party has several priorities to boost public health. We want to help more people to give up smoking, improve the health of children and young people, and promote healthy living. We also must strive for better access to services and advice for people living in areas where health is poorest.

We expect the NHS through local trusts to develop credible plans to meet their targets under the new Carbon Reduction Commitment. We expect to see more progress on this in the coming year from all our NHS Trusts.

What the Green Party is doing

- Opposing the take-over of health care services by companies such as Virgin and other multinational corporations.
- Supporting good, local services and continuity of care.
- Calling for more support at grass-roots level for carers in the community, both professional teams and personal individuals.
- Opposing insurance-based care and the contracting-out of the commissioning of services for NHS.

In the coming year we will also;

- Monitor the impact of the relocating of key services from Huddersfield to Halifax, particularly as they affect accessibility and travel time.
- Campaign for a more focused approach to tackling drug, alcohol and cigarette addiction.

Housing

We continue to be disappointed at the way in which most new house building fails to meet higher eco-standards particularly in some local Housing Associations. We believe that local planning authorities should be permitted to set standards higher than the national minimum for both renewable energy and energy conservation.

To help householders adjust to spiralling energy costs we believe it is vital to assist in the retro-fitting of energy efficiency measures to all Kirklees housing and we are encouraged by the response to Warmzone Plus (see *Energy* section), the latest of the conservation schemes we have championed. This comes on top of the successful implementation of a major programme of improvement to the 27,000 council houses with improved heating and double glazing. We will continue to monitor the impact of these schemes to inform future energy proposals.

Regionally, the creation of new eco-towns makes little sense. We think the ideas behind it should be applied to the regeneration and raising of environmental

standards in our *existing* urban areas, such as Huddersfield, Dewsbury and Batley.

Since the year 2000 house prices have risen four times faster than wages. This means an increasing number of Kirklees households are priced out of the market. We will need to have effective response to the anticipated increase in homelessness that will arise from this and other social policies.

What is the Green Party doing?

- Promoting the case for raising standards on energy efficiency and parking ratios in new housing developments
- Ensured that an insulation programme, free to householders, is rolled out to all parts of Kirklees.
- Developed a financing programme for householders to install energy generating (see RE-charge, *Energy* section).

In the coming year we will also:

- Support the use of planning guidance to ensure that there is at least 50% affordable housing included in all large developments, with an emphasis on rented housing to provide people with a real alternative to home ownership.
- Make the case for more sheltered accommodation for vulnerable people.

Local Food

Local food production will become more important as increasing transport costs and food scarcity affect more residents of our towns and villages. A low carbon economy will accelerate the need to build stronger links between local farmers and growers, and consumers.

We believe the Council has a role to provide support in the form of promotion and trading facilities to a range of local food suppliers, such as those providing local milk deliveries to the doorstep, village stores providing a vital service, organic vegetable and fruit “box” suppliers, farm shops and farmers’ markets.

We will work to help restore neglected allotments and identify additional local sites for members of our community to grow vegetables and fruit. This has been made possible by Green Party councillors’ success in obtaining £1.8 million investment in allotments. We also believe that home gardens are an underused resource for local food production and we support local projects to enable people to start growing fruit and vegetables at home.

We have established the potential for more of the food for school meals to be sourced locally (e.g. locally raised free range chickens and eggs) through the

2008 budget agreement and will look for more opportunities to promote local food production.

What the Green Party is doing

- Challenged the lack of resources for allotments and successfully funded new investment of £1.8million.
- Surveyed local allotments to establish the level of demand and the state of neglect.
- Encouraged the development of demonstration plots where people can learn to get started growing food at home and on redeveloped allotments.
- Promoted budget support for an investigation into the potential for local sourcing for school meals and for making use of school and council land for growing food and rearing animals for school meals ingredients.

In the coming year we will also:

- Promote a package of support to promote specialist and organic local food and drink producers and suppliers.
- Support plans for a regional organic food distribution network.

Transport

There are too many cars on Kirklees roads, causing congestion, pollution and stress and discouraging people from walking and cycling. Traffic growth in Yorkshire & the Humber is running at a higher level than other English regions and we support the need for more effective constraints, and affordable and attractive alternatives.

Building more roads, car parks and airports is expensive for the taxpayer, damages the environment and actually produces more traffic. Encouraging people to drive less helps to tackle our carbon use and reduces local air pollution. We need safe, cheap and convenient alternatives to the car, provided alongside parking constraints. We therefore commend Kirklees Council in its recent decision, backed by the four main parties, to look urgently at introducing new measures such as park and ride, congestion charging, and high occupancy vehicle lanes.

Investment in road safety in Kirklees is not based on the prevention of accidents. Funding is prioritised on the basis of how many injuries and accidents occur. As a result many dangerous roads where there are accidents 'waiting to happen' go to the bottom of the queue. Green Party budget negotiations have ensured that from 2008 this will change.

Public transport currently is still perceived as unreliable and at times is expensive. Recently bus routes operated by two major operators have been axed

without adequate notice or consultation, sending people back to car use or to rural isolation. This underlines the need for a more effective bus partnership between operators, the council and Metro as part of an integrated system.

Kirklees Council has only just started giving adequate priority in staffing or budgets to encourage behaviour change such as personalised travel planning, promoting teleworking or car clubs. We would support the introduction of low cost *Smarter Choices* initiatives to promote wider awareness and adoption of sustainable transport.

What is the Green Party doing?

- Campaigning for better integrated public transport system as an essential part of tackling congestion and pollution.
- Promoting measures to improve community safety and reduce “rat-running” through the enforcement of speed limits, better traffic management, the introduction of 20 mph “village” speed limits on appropriate roads, and the use of more Home Zones to allow children to play safely in urban areas.
- Pushing Railtrack and Metro for improvements to ensure more stations in Kirklees are accessible.
- Promoting cycling and supporting the expansion of the innovative Greenways programme.
- Pressing the Council for better pedestrian facilities, particularly in town centres by improving pedestrian links to and between bus and rail stations.
- Secured £2.25million of additional funding in the 2008 budget for accident prevention measures for Kirklees roads over the next 3 years.
- Supported the planning of a new car-share club, accessible to residents and other employers, through the development of a car pooling scheme for council employees without which it would lack basic viability.
- Promoted funding for voluntary bus services at Christmas and New Year holidays and operated Green Party schemes from the Newsome and Kirkburton areas.

In the coming year we will also:

- Campaign for a travel planning partnership for larger employers in Huddersfield to encourage more joint working on practical sustainable transport initiatives and to take over Kirklees Car Share.
- Lobby for the introduction of low floor buses on all routes to promote accessibility.
- Campaign for regulated bus services with more of a role for Metro in the setting of fares, routes and frequencies.

Waste

Our 'throwaway' culture of disposable goods is a huge waste of resources and energy. We want waste to be reduced, reused and recycled as much as possible. We believe the public will support waste separation if it sees that only things that cannot be recycled are sent for incineration.

The council has a financial interest in diverting waste from landfill and we believe this may provide the resources for more imaginative waste diversion projects including community composting, anaerobic digestion and promoting more furniture salvage and re-use away from the council's "recycling centres".

Government changes to the way domestic waste is taxed has meant over half the councils in the country have opted to move to two-weekly collections of non-recyclable waste. We believe that residents will need better help with the timing of collections and to keep up with sorting arrangements regarding what they can and cannot recycle.

We believe that opportunities missed in the past to develop district heating from our incinerator will require future evaluation as energy costs increase. We also want to see an evaluation of community composting projects for residents who lack a home composting facility, working with parks and allotments.

We believe that a far greater effort is required to promote the use of products made from recycled materials. By "closing the loop", using council procurement and publicity to other product buyers, we can effectively show the value of recycling and where possible help establish new industrial activity in the region.

What is the Green Party doing?

- Campaigning for a commercial waste strategy that includes reduction and recycling targets and for high profile procurement initiatives for business and public organisations to "buy recycled" products.
- Successfully proposed ways to improve awareness and communication of collection arrangements. These will include an SMS text messaging service to automatically remind people of bin collections - day and type.
- Encouraged the Council to work with Kirklees Primary Care Trust on our proposal to offer all new mothers washable nappies to help cut down on non-recyclable waste going into bins.
- Campaigned for a waste reduction initiative in the council to save money.
- Secured commitment from Kirklees Council to investigate the feasibility of anaerobic digestion as a means of generating energy from organic waste.

In the year ahead we will also:

- Promote national and European legislation for greater re-use and recycling and use imaginative budget arrangements to promote selected waste diversion from landfill.
- Support moves to charge consumers for plastic carrier bags.
- Encourage community composting in conjunction with parks and allotments.
- Press for planning applications to include recycling facilities where appropriate, especially in flats and apartment blocks.

Kirklees Council at Work

Our Councillors have led the challenge this decade to make Kirklees Council a leader on sustainability and have championed budget measures that help to reduce its carbon footprint. We believe that by leading from the front, Kirklees Council saves money and is better placed to encourage other employers to join the carbon reduction planning needed over the coming decade.

By establishing a Renewable Energy Fund in Kirklees the council has been able to reduce the carbon footprint in its own buildings. Greens have ensured that money from the energy saving is used for new energy reduction schemes. We have prioritised the installation of solar panels on buildings with flat roofs such as schools and council offices to help reduce installation costs and help young people learn about renewable energy technology.

Green Party budget proposals have successfully promoted the benefits of insulating public and office buildings as well as trying to promote work practices to reduce electricity use and reduce waste disposal costs. We will continue to strive to make the council a beacon and will link senior management rewards to the council's success in reaching carbon reduction targets.

Promoting intelligent procurement that favours local producers (e.g. for school meals) and meets other policy objectives including reducing carbon footprint, without adding to the real costs of the authority.

What the Greens are doing

- Proposed that a carbon budgeting process is established to work alongside the financial budget process.
- Championed a revolving fund to finance energy saving investment.
- Promoted through the budget process reductions in unnecessary energy use by the Council.
- Campaigned for the removal of the hospitality budget for political parties.
- Proposed cuts in the budgets for purchasing bottled water except in council buildings with lead pipes.
- Secured support for the establishment of a council car pooling scheme for use by staff instead of paying mileage allowances, thus reducing

administration costs and ensuring vehicles with lower emissions are used for council business. This is due to piloted later this year and is likely to provide the building blocks for a car club, accessible to local residents and businesses.

- Initiated a move to alter the fuel used in the Council's refuse vehicles to bio diesel, a fuel made from waste vegetable oils that is less polluting than normal diesel.
- Proposed to end free parking passes for MPs and remove parking passes from Councillors who do not have a car. Greens have argued that the value of the pass should be paid from Councillor's allowances.

In the coming year we will also

- Promote more local sourcing of selected products, through careful use of the procurement process.
- Continue to promote a conservationist and recycling approach to Kirklees Council's own waste production.