

# The **REAL** alternative for London



**Liberal Democrats**

# Foreword by Charles Kennedy

London is one of the great capitals of the world. It is not only the history of London, the arts, music, sport and wonderful diversity of culture and language that makes London such a fantastic city; it is not only that as a centre for business - from family shops to international banks - London is an economic powerhouse; above all, Londoners themselves make this city one of the most interesting and exciting places on earth.

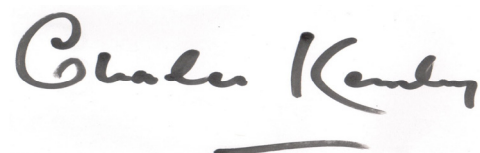
**But we can do better.**

London should be a place where crime or the fear of crime is not a routine experience. London should be a place where journeys around the capital cease to be stressful and unpredictable and become easier and more reliable.

And if Greater London is to be a place where everyone can fulfil their potential, we must celebrate and support all the different towns and villages of Greater London as places with their own character but united together to maximise prosperity and success. Liberal Democrats believe that bring the 2012 Olympics to London should benefit all Londoners.

That is why we are 100% behind the bid and our London MPs have been working hard to help make that bid successful.

Research by the Evening Standard has found that Liberal Democrat MPs in London work the hardest of any in the capital. Three of the top five were Lib Dems. As in the rest of urban Britain, the Real Alternative at this election is the Liberal Democrats.



## We propose: a safer London

Crime in London, especially violent crime, is far too high. London has the highest rate of recorded crime in England. Not surprisingly Londoners are more concerned about crime than anything else.

### A Permanent Community Police Service.

Liberal Democrats will ensure that every neighbourhood (communities of 5-10,000) in London is provided with its own dedicated community police team by 2006. We will fund 2,000 extra officers in London by scrapping Identity Cards, and recruit the extra 1,095 Police Community Support Officers needed to complete the roll out of the Safer Neighbourhoods programme across every part of London.

### Effective policing.

We will invest more than £30million in new technology to reduce paperwork and get our officers back on the streets, and focus police resources on improving performance in key areas like response times, victim support and solving crime.

Reduce alcohol-related violent crime. We will delay the introduction of 24 hour licensing to ensure more effective controls are put in place and ensure drinking establishments contribute to the extra costs of policing.

### Crime Prevention.

We will invest in initiatives that will help deter and prevent crime in the first place, such as better street lighting and security locks for pensioners. We will boost investment in youth services and parenting work to combat anti-social behaviour, encouraging the use of LibDem-pioneered Acceptable Behaviour Contracts where appropriate.

### Making Offenders Serve the Community.

Liberal Democrats believe those responsible for damaging their communities should pay them back. We will work with the London boroughs, the Courts, the Youth Service and the Probation Service to develop local input in the setting of community service work, so that victims and communities can influence the way that offenders pay back their debt to society.

### Police Recruitment.

Liberal Democrats will work with the Met to improve the diversity of the police, to ensure it reflects the community it serves. We will encourage the recruitment of Londoners to the Met as we believe it is important officers understand the community they police.

### Local Accountability.

We would devolve more resources to local borough commanders and allow them to set their own priorities in consultation with the local community. We plan an annual public meeting, at which all those responsible for crime prevention and reduction would be held to account by the local community.

## We propose: a healthier London

Too often for the NHS, hitting the government targets means missing the point. It is time to remember the founding principles of the NHS: care, of the highest possible quality, available fairly to all who need it, with doctors free to focus on the patient, not the red tape.

### Free personal care.

Those towards the end of their lives deserve dignity. Under the Liberal Democrats, elderly people and people with disabilities in London will benefit from free personal care, funded out of our new 50 per cent rate on that part of people's incomes over £100,000.

### Quicker diagnosis for serious conditions – so your NHS treatment is not delayed.

London health commissioners will benefit from extra funding to tackle local bottlenecks which hold up quicker diagnosis. We will tackle the scandal of expensive scanners being under-used and provide more scans at weekends and in the evenings. We will ensure people know how long you will have to wait in London for tests and scans by publishing these hidden waiting lists, figures which the Labour Government has refused to make public.

### Cut unfair charges.

Londoners will benefit from free eye and dental checks. We will extend the range of long-term conditions which qualify for exemption from prescription charges, based on an independent review.

### Put patients first – more doctors and nurses, free from Whitehall meddling.

Liberal Democrats will hack away the red tape and abolish the absurd targets set by government, and free frustrated health professionals from demoralising government meddling. London is a unique city. Its hospitals and local health organisations are facing radically different problems from smaller towns and rural areas. For example, infectious diseases are more of a concern than in other areas. That is why the Liberal Democrats want to give London health organisations more freedom to develop local solutions. It is also why we want Londoners to have more say in how their local health services are run.

### High-quality dental care.

Many people in London can't find an NHS dentist to take them on. We will reform NHS dental contracts so that more dentists are encouraged to do more NHS work. This will rebuild the relationship between the dental profession and government which has been badly damaged under Conservatives and Labour.

### Give people more control over their healthcare.

We will encourage regular health 'MoTs' tailored to individual patients' needs, with wider access to screening and blood pressure and cholesterol tests. Tens of thousands of patients die in the NHS every year without access to specialised care and pain management. We will prioritise extending choice and access to these services, including more support for hospices.

### Prevention is as important as cure.

We will concentrate on helping people stay healthy, as well as caring for them when they fall ill. Because second-hand smoke kills, we will ban smoking in all enclosed public places in London. Our policies as a whole will help tackle other causes of ill-health, such as poverty, pollution and poor housing. For example, fewer school-run car journeys means less pollution, less congestion and fewer road deaths. Children walking or cycling to school also get fitter - but the journey must be safe. Liberal Democrats will encourage

and promote nationally what many Liberal Democrat councils already do locally, such as 'Safe Routes to School' with calmed traffic, safe pavements, good lighting and adults on hand to conduct 'walking buses'. We will also provide more cycle routes and reform planning rules to make sure that key services are more easily accessible by foot or bicycle. This will benefit adults as well as children.

## **We propose:** better & fairer learning for London

Ensuring a top class education system for our children is one of Government's most important tasks - for the sake of our society, for the sake of our economy and for the sake of each individual's personal fulfilment.

We are ambitious for every child. Our focus is on providing every parent and child with a quality local school in London.

As a whole our education system is failing many of our children. Our children are tested too much and taught too little. London's schools lack qualified teachers. And teachers are having to spend too much time on paper work imposed by Whitehall and spend too little time in the classroom.

No tuition fees, no top-up fees, fair grants - university affordable for every student. Labour broke their promise on tuition fees. The result: tens of thousands of London students are saddled with mortgage-sized debts or deterred altogether from going to university. Funded from part of our new 50 per cent rate on incomes over £100,000, Liberal Democrats will abolish all tuition fees and grants will be made available to help poorer students with maintenance costs. No one will be denied the opportunity of a university education because of the fear of debt, while universities in London will receive the increased funds they need.

Cut class sizes - using the £1.5 billion Child Trust Fund. Children well taught and well-cared-for in their early years have a better opportunity to lead successful and rewarding lives. The Government has the wrong priorities, handing out a one-off cash windfall to 18 year-olds at taxpayers' expense through the Child Trust Fund. Liberal Democrats will use this money better by recruiting more teachers for London schools to cut infant class sizes from the present maximum of 30 to an average of 20 and junior class sizes to an average

of 25. We will extend before and after school provision from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. for all London school children and complete hundreds more Children's Centres by 2010. Building on our Maternity Income Guarantee, which will raise maternity pay for the first six months to £170 a week instead of £102.80 at present, these policies will give every child in London the best possible start.

Every child taught English, Maths, Science, Modern Languages, plus Information and Communication Technology, by suitably qualified teachers. The teacher recruitment crisis means that thousands of London children are being taught key subjects by staff who are not trained specialists in that subject. Liberal Democrats will guarantee that all London's school pupils will be taught the core subjects of English, Maths, Science, Modern Languages and ICT by suitably qualified teachers through funding secondary schools to provide the necessary high-quality teacher-training courses in these subjects.

### School discipline.

London's school children need to learn in a safe and orderly environment, where high standards of behaviour are upheld, where bullying is challenged effectively and where teachers are able to teach without disruption. Our smaller class sizes across London's primary schools will help reduce discipline problems. To deal with more persistent disruption schools will agree externally-monitored 'positive behaviour plans' with parents and pupils. If necessary, local education authorities' Behavioural Support Units will tackle exceptional problems in particular schools. When all else fails we will guarantee that head teachers will have local education authority support for 'managed transfer' to other schools or special units for pupils whose behaviour remains unacceptable.

### Time to teach.

Children in England are now the most tested in Europe yet there is little evidence that the Government's obsession with testing and targets has improved standards. Liberal Democrats believe that teachers should be given more time to teach and that testing should have a clear purpose: to improve learning for individual children. We will reduce the level of external testing, replacing compulsory tests at 7 and 11 with a system of sampling against national standards. Teachers will regularly assess pupils' performance, using the results to inform teaching and give parents accurate information on their child's progress.

### Special educational needs.

Children with Special Educational Needs in London should be schooled in an environment appropriate to their needs - usually in local schools with appropriate support, or in specialist schools for those who need them. Parents' wishes must be considered when making decisions about type of schooling. A designated teacher in each school will have responsibility to identify and plan for children with special needs, and act as a contact point for parents and other teachers. We will ensure that all teachers and teaching assistants working with children with special educational needs are appropriately trained. London's special schools will act as resource centres to support local schools with their specialist provision. In turn special schools will be linked to research departments in universities so that they can benefit directly from, and be involved with, the latest research in special education.

### Skills for work.

School-leavers should be equipped with the skills they need to succeed in the workplace. We will combine GCSE, A-Level and vocational programmes of study within a new diploma system, stretching the most gifted and engaging those previously turned off by schooling. We will give all students in London over the age of 14 the opportunity to combine vocational and academic learning.

### World-class skills for a world-class economy.

We are committed to closing the funding gap between London's schools and colleges, starting by providing equal funding for equivalent courses, wherever they are taught. To deliver world-class skills world-class facilities are needed. We will implement plans to invest in the modern, high-quality college facilities needed to deliver high-quality skills training in London.

### School transport.

We will maintain the right of children to free school transport when they live more than two miles from their designated primary school and three miles from their secondary school. This right is being taken away by the Labour Government. For those who live nearer school, there still need to be safe alternatives to the car; we will promote 'Safe Routes to School', with calmed traffic, safe pavements, good lighting and adults on hand to conduct 'walking buses'.



## We propose: tackling London's housing crisis

The shortage of housing, and of affordable homes in particular, has become a huge constraint on London's economic growth. This has exacerbated the recruitment and retention difficulties being faced by both the public and private sectors in London. The Liberal Democrats will not allow this crisis to continue.

London's housing crisis is the product of severe shortage in the supply of housing stock, coupled with high demand fuelling rising prices. We will pursue a series of policies aimed at increasing the supply of housing in London:

### Fast Track Home Building programmes above and alongside retail and transport sites.

Liberal Democrats will work with retailers and transport companies to identify unused urban space above and around supermarkets and train stations for affordable housing. An extra 40,000 homes could be created in the space above London shops alone.

### The Scandal of Empty Homes.

Action must be taken to bring the 90,000 empty homes in London back into use as affordable housing. We will enable and encourage boroughs to establish clear strategies for tackling empty properties. We will also reduce VAT on refurbishment and repair work, making it affordable for owners to bring unfit homes back into use, and cheaper for all Londoners to upgrade or repair their homes.

### New affordable homes.

We will divert more funding to Shared Equity schemes, where homebuyers part-buy and part-rent a property. We will use the 130 acres or more of surplus public sector land in London to build new Mutual Homes, where tenants buy shares in a trust that owns their home over time, rather than having to buy a home outright.

### Protecting Private Tenants.

We want to support and protect those renting properties in London and guard against the activities of unscrupulous landlords. We will quickly introduce the Tenants' Deposit

Protection Scheme introduced in the Housing Act 2004 after Liberal Democrat lobbying, so that landlords cannot unfairly keep tenants' deposits when they move out.

### Council and Housing Association Tenants will be granted the Right to Invest in their home.

More flexible than the Right to Buy, tenants will be able to buy a share of their home, and over time move to full ownership as they can afford it. Councils will be allowed to invest in improving their housing stock to meet the Decent Homes standard, rather than being forced to transfer homes to housing associations to access funding.

Leaseholders of flats will be given new powers to buy their freehold and protections from unscrupulous freeholders who impose high maintenance or insurance charges.

### Promote clean energy.

Liberal Democrats will promote a greener, cleaner London by making sure that at least 20 per cent of the UK's electricity comes from a full range of renewable sources by the year 2020, by increasing and reforming the obligation on energy suppliers to use renewable energy.

### Save energy and cut fuel bills.

Hundreds of people - mostly pensioners - die each year in London from preventable cold-related illnesses. On average, around fifty people die unnecessarily in each constituency every year. Poor home insulation and poor-quality housing lead to cold homes and high fuel bills, the main causes of this 'fuel poverty', while the average pensioner household spends £500 a year on energy. We will help pensioners and severely disabled people cut this bill by allowing them to take a year's Winter Fuel Payment as a voucher redeemable against insulation and energy saving materials. These would be made available at about half price through a partnership with fuel suppliers. A pensioner could save more than £100 from their energy bill every year by investing just one year's Winter Fuel Payment, and help the environment as well. In this way we will invest in cutting energy use and at the same time help pensioners and severely disabled people stay warm and save money.

### Less waste in London.

Liberal Democrats will set a long-term goal of zero municipal waste, through waste minimisation, reuse and recycling. As a first step, we will make sure that within seven

years 60 per cent of all household waste is recycled and we will aim to offer every household regular kerbside recycling to every household in London.

## Thames Gateway

The project to develop the Thames Gateway offers an unprecedented opportunity to boost economic growth and urban renewal to the area. The Liberal Democrats fully support the attempts to take advantage of the huge quantities of brown-field sites.

But we have some serious reservations about the way in which the project is currently being managed. A multiplicity of agencies and organisations has developed in the Gateway, with overlapping responsibilities and uncertain remits, creating layers of unnecessary and potentially conflicting bureaucracy, while central government tries to micromanage the whole project from Whitehall. We believe that the London Development Agency should retain strategic control for the Thames Gateway area so that planning and progress can continue unhindered - particularly on those projects related to London's Olympic bid. Local people should also have more of a say on development projects, and we should place a priority on bringing existing homes and empty commercial buildings back into use, rather than assuming new build is necessary.

Liberal Democrats have a clear and comprehensive vision for the Thames Gateway. We want to see the development of green and sustainable communities, with adequate community infrastructure, affordable accommodation, sufficient public transport links and the provision of training and job opportunities that are relevant and required by local people. We want to see communities rather than just construction. Clear, accountable, leadership is crucial, as is the full engagement and participation of local communities.

## We propose: scrapping the unfair Council Tax

The UK is the most centralised country in the western world, and our local government is weaker than in almost any other developed country. Successive Conservative and Labour governments have promised to free up local government, but have ended up making things worse.

Now local government in England is in central government's strait jacket. A vast array of Whitehall regulations, targets, inspections, controls and restrictions have effectively turned local authorities, of whatever political colour, into agents of central government, following a centrally imposed agenda. This works primarily through a financial system that means the average council is dependent on central government for three quarters of their budget. Much of the rest of their income comes from council tax, a system that is inherently unfair and inflexible. Scrapping council tax, stopping revaluation and freeing finance. Liberal Democrats want councils to be genuinely free to get on with the job of running services their residents want. That means they need more freedoms over finance, and a fairer system of finance.

Council tax is an unfair system of taxation which hits those on low and middle incomes the hardest. We will replace it with a local income tax (LIT) based on ability to pay.

Scrapping council tax also means we will stop Labour's proposed revaluation. Unless council tax revaluation is stopped, there will be many households in London facing large rises in council tax within two years, and those rises will not be linked to people's ability to pay. Revaluation will hit London hard as house price inflation has rapidly accelerated. Half of Londoners would be better off, with a quarter paying about the same and a quarter paying more. Half a million pensioners in the capital would pay no local tax at all.

Average household income in London is £27,000 a year and the average Council Tax bill is £1,078.

This would mean that the average London family would be £420 a year better off.

## We propose: getting London moving

Any improvements in London's transport have been by fault rather than by design, with the Mayor's incompetence and the Labour government's obstruction. Transport for London's financial planning is chaotic. The Mayor said congestion charging would raise £120 million a year; the reality has been £68 million. Customer service was so bad the Mayor had to hand another £31 million to Capita. Bus subsidies are rocketing.

Labour's insistence on their ruinous plan to hand Tube maintenance to private companies cost £900 million in legal costs alone. Labour Ministers dither on Crossrail and plans for Thameslink 2000.

## Tube

Bring Tube maintenance back in house. Liberal Democrats in Westminster will introduce legislation which will allow Transport for London the ability to terminate the PPP contracts and take maintenance and upgrades back "in house", whilst raising additional revenues from bonds. This would be based on the model of recent changes at Network Rail - originally proposed, unlike Labour, by the Liberal Democrats in our General Election Manifesto in 2001. This must be done only if a way can be found which did not have an adverse impact on London's taxpayers.

## Railways

Make our railways work again. Conservative privatisation left the railways in a mess, but Labour hasn't solved the problems. Delays to our train services in London have doubled, resulting in 1000s of years of commuters' lives wasted on delayed trains. This is also a massive drain on the businesses and economy of London. Liberal Democrats will streamline the system, with fewer, larger franchises, given longer contracts in return for more investment and better services. We will use savings from the roads budget to prioritise improving safety at our stations. Those without a Tube network need better rail services, integrated with bus and tram and our rail investment fund will also be available to make such improvements across London.

Keep South Eastern Trains as a Public Sector Comparator. We believe that the South Eastern franchise should remain as a public sector comparator for the immediate future to allow a proper assessment of costs and performance within the railways, so long as it is proven to deliver the best value for money for the taxpayer.

Strengthen the role of Transport for London's within the franchising process. We will strengthen legislation which was weakened during the recent Railways Bill regarding the operation of commuter services running in London. This would also explore where powers could be given over to Transport for London to take over the running of train services and create a 'London Commuter Authority'.

## Crossrail

The Liberal Democrats will continue to support the Crossrail Bill, and wish to see those outstanding questions regarding funding answered as soon as possible.

## Roads and Congestion Charging

This is a devolved matter to the Mayor and Transport for London, but the Liberal Democrats were first to press for congestion charging in London and supported its introduction. We don't believe that it should be extended at this time, as the environmental and economic cost benefit has not been proven. We do not support the current plans for the Thames Gateway bridge, as it is little more than a new motorway which will generate more traffic, more pollution and will be of little benefit to local residents.

## Airports

We will oppose the construction of international airports on new sites, and also the expansion of airports in the South East. In addition, to encourage more fuel-efficient aircraft and discourage half-empty planes we will press for international agreement on extending emissions trading to aviation, while at the same time implementing per-aircraft rather than per-passenger charges. We will end the regulation on busy national airports which results in retail rents subsidising landing charges and encouraging congestion and pollution. We will protect essential 'lifeline' routes to remote UK communities from London. London Liberal Democrats have also made clear their opposition the proposed end to the runway alternation policy.

## Using the River

Liberal Democrats want to encourage greater use of the river for transport. The Liberal Democrats believe that every effort should be made to use the river as a means for servicing the construction of these new developments, taking the pressure off our overstretched roads, and minimising their environmental impact.

# We propose: a greener London

The quality of our environment is an issue that impacts directly on all Londoners. It is worrying, therefore, that London fares badly compared to other European cities in terms

of its environmental track record. London recycles only 13% of its waste and our air pollution is worsening. London's streets remain dirty and its major roads are devoid of greenery.

The green actions outlined throughout this Manifesto show how the Liberal Democrats will continue to be the champions of environmental issues, not shying away from such major challenges as global warming, energy efficiency and waste management, and clearly addressing these in our strategies. We will insist on the highest standard of green design in planning and development across the capital ensuring that London's beauty is enhanced, promoted and preserved.

## We propose: more effective London government

The GLA has been unable to fully live up to expectations because its potential for innovation and strategic policy creation has been constrained by a Government afraid to let London make its own decisions. Making London government more open and accessible to everyone is a priority for Liberal Democrats. We believe in decentralised, inclusive decision-making and value the contribution of and co-operation with London's Boroughs.

### Abolishing the Government Office for London.

The Greater London Authority is an accountable and elected body with executive power. Its creation has meant that the Government Office for London has become a totally unnecessary layer of bureaucracy, at an annual cost to taxpayers of over £15million. Liberal Democrats will abolish the GOL to secure better value for taxpayers and ensure that London is governed democratically by representatives that Londoners themselves have elected.

### Powers of the London Assembly

We would strengthen the powers of the London Assembly by scrapping the need for a two-thirds majority to veto a Mayor's budget and instead require a simple majority of the 25 members to vote against it.