



# Liberal Democrats



## 2022 Merton Manifesto

This manifesto sets out Merton Liberal Democrat policies and priorities for the borough of Merton for the 2022 local elections and can be found online at: [www.mertonlibdems.org.uk/our\\_plan](http://www.mertonlibdems.org.uk/our_plan)

Published and promoted by M.Gould on behalf of Merton Liberal Democrat candidates, all at 14 Mossville Gardens, Morden, SM4 4DG

# A Fresh Start for Merton

Open, competent and caring



The leadership of Merton's Council needs to show courage, energy and the willingness to do things differently. And if things don't work, it must be open about that, listen to what went wrong and then act.

We want a fresh start for Merton: an open, competent and caring Council.

The Liberal Democrats are the team you can trust to work hard to bring that fresh start.

We are fighting for you on the big issues – the **cost of living crisis**, the **climate emergency & pollution**, **standing up for our areas** and developing an **open local democracy** – to make a Merton of which we can be proud.

There's so much I want to tell you about what we've achieved, and so much more we want to do.

We hope you will back us to bring that change at the local elections on 5th May.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anthony Fairclough". The script is fluid and cursive.

Anthony Fairclough, Liberal Democrat Council group leader 2018-22





# ***THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS***

***OUR RESIDENTS, BUSINESSES & SERVICES ARE FACING THE  
WORST FINANCIAL CRISIS IN A GENERATION***

# Council Tax & Funding

An honest approach to funding the Council



## WHAT WE'VE DONE

- The Lib Dems were the only group who **proposed reducing Labour's increase in Council Tax** by up to 30% this year.
- We tried to ensure monies collected from additional parking charges were used exclusively to **fund air quality improvements** – but Labour & Conservative councillors refused to support our proposal.
- We suggested establishing a free breakfast club for school children – this would have been funded by charitable donations on a model used by other London councils to **finance projects that couldn't be paid for out of existing budgets** – but the other parties voted it down!
- Proposed plan to reverse Labour decision to cut the **grant to Deen City Farm**.

## WHAT WE'LL DO

- Fight nationally to reform local government finance to **ensure local councils are properly resourced**.
- Learn from how **Richmond & Kingston Councils get a better service from Veolia** – the waste contractor who is currently failing Merton.
- Our Council routinely underspends its annual budget and we'll ensure those monies are used to address real need - like **helping schools meet their soaring energy bills & reversing the cut in Deen City Farm's funding**.
- This year the **Government paid Merton less than half the £90m they gave Wandsworth** – who also make millions from developers building luxury skyscrapers along the Thames - **there's no comparison, so we won't make one**.

# Housing

Fighting to give everyone a decent & affordable home



## WHAT WE'VE DONE

- Persuaded Labour leadership to give more help to renters by **appointing a Tenants' Champion**.
- Convinced the Council to **sign up to *End Our Cladding Scandal's 10-Point Plan*** – despite the Conservative group's opposition.
- Attempted to change planning rules to turn Virgin Active site into a Community Land Trust to **access grant funding to provide affordable housing for key workers** - rather than private profit for developers.
- Forced a last-minute pre-decision scrutiny meeting with officers, on **uncovering a secret plan to dissolve Council's building company**, after it spent over £2m without laying a single brick.
- **Proposed a scheme to meet 40% affordable homes target** - voted down by Labour, despite Council repeatedly achieving only 13% affordable housing.

## WHAT WE'LL DO

- **Achieve 50% affordable homes target** by adopting robust affordability & viability criteria.
- Turn Virgin Active site & land owned by Council's former building company into **Community Land Trusts**.
- Provide **real support for renters**, through our new Tenants' Champion scheme, by learning lessons from Richmond Council's successful experience.
- Bring empty homes back into use to **cut our temporary housing waiting list** by up to 20%.
- Start **prosecuting rogue landlords**.
- Work nationally to **end cladding & leasehold abuses**.
- **End Council's practice** of offering residents temporary accommodation more than 90 mins from Merton.

# Schools & Young People

Ensuring our schools & young people's services are properly funded



## WHAT WE'VE DONE

- Proposed a schools' breakfast club to **address child food poverty**.
- Our attempt to **use some of this year's annual budget surplus**, in helping schools meet increased energy bills, was rejected by Labour.
- Suggested a scheme, voted down by Labour and the Conservatives, creating a **new "schools' bonus"** requiring developers to pay into a special schools' fund on receipt of planning permission.
- Sought to make Labour honour their pledge to **keep Little League free** - defeated by a coalition of Conservative & Labour councillors.
- Submitted plan, defeated by Labour, to **review Merton's struggling mental & sexual health services for young people**.

## WHAT WE'LL DO

- Trial a **free breakfast club in primary schools** across the borough.
- Make sure **Council budget surpluses are partly used to help schools** meet their increased energy bills.
- Fight for fairer funding by calling on Government to **ensure no school loses out under the new funding formula**.
- Support establishing **more Council-run schools for children with special educational needs** to reduce Council overspends on private providers.
- Reform Merton's mental & sexual health services for young people with particular emphasis on **improving Merton's eating disorder provision**.
- Work with Merton's professional & amateur clubs to **get more young people playing sport & exercising**.

# Health & Social Care

Campaigning for properly funded health & social care services



## WHAT WE'VE DONE

- Persuaded Council to adopt our proposal to **guarantee London Living Wage to all care workers** in Merton.
- Tried to get the administration to **address why Merton has one of the worst MMR vaccination rates in the UK** – but Labour & the Conservatives refused to support our plan.
- Correctly **predicted Merton's low Covid vaccination rates**, following Council's failure to learn lessons from the borough's MMR experience.
- Sought to persuade the Labour administration to engage constructively with the NHS in **managing change at St Helier hospital**.

## WHAT WE'LL DO

- Seek to **open 'walk-in' doctors' surgeries** in Merton to improve accessibility.
- Use the disused Wilson's Health Centre site to **improve health provision** in Mitcham.
- **Prioritise solving the issue of low vaccination rates** amongst children & adults across Merton.
- Fight nationally to **properly fund the NHS & Social Care provision** – but not via a regressive NI tax increase.
- Ensure the Council seeks to **mitigate issues arising from Conservative government decisions on NHS funding** – such as the removal of certain services from St Helier hospital.
- Work with Merton's professional & amateur sports clubs to **improve local sporting, outdoor gym & children's play facilities**.

# Promoting Diversity

Working to ensure equalities are improved despite the financial crisis



## WHAT WE'VE DONE

- Called for basic measures like 'name-blind' recruitment to help **address lack of diversity in senior Council appointments** - voted down by Labour.
- Our proposal to **update Merton's out of date Equality & Community Cohesion Strategy** was rejected by Labour, who regularly fail to provide the Annual Report on progress they are required to submit.
- Won review on **how to make councillor role more accessible** - despite Conservative opposition.
- Succeeded in campaign to **make Motspur Park station step-free** from next year.
- **Successfully challenged Council's parking policy** by demonstrating how they failed to follow their own equalities procedure.

## WHAT WE'LL DO

- Give **greater priority to the Equality & Community Cohesion Strategy**.
- **Introduce 'name-blind' recruitment** for Council jobs.
- Ensure former home of leading suffragette and Grade II listed building, Dorset Hall, is saved to **celebrate & promote women's rights & equality**.
- Create a **forum of local groups, charities & businesses** to help them develop joint projects to bring our community closer together.
- Make Merton **more accessible for mobility impaired residents** via improved planning rules & funding criteria.
- Reverse Labour decision, refusing to **commission plans to make all our stations step-free**, to ensure we are better prepared the next time bid funding opportunities arise.





# ***CLIMATE CHANGE & POLLUTION***

***OUR LOCAL ENVIRONMENT IS UNDER THREAT FROM  
CLIMATE CHANGE, AIR POLLUTION, FLY TIPPING & LITTER***

# The Climate Emergency

Only real action will save our planet



## WHAT WE'VE DONE

- Jointly sponsored the Council's **2019 Climate Emergency Declaration** – whilst it was the Lib Dems who ensured it contained measurable targets & included residents in the working group.
- Called for the **Climate Action Plan to include tree & biodiversity strategies** – voted down by Labour.
- Successfully **convinced the Council to include single use plastics** in the Climate Action Plan.
- Twice proposed **de-carbonising the Council's pension fund** – voted down both times.
- Ensured the money councillors can use for small projects in their area can be **spent on tree planting**.
- Opposed & successfully **delayed Labour's greenwashing tax on 'not voting Labour'** which unfairly increased parking charges in non-Labour wards.

## WHAT WE'LL DO

- Appoint a Council **Cabinet Member for the Climate Action Plan and Clean Air** – to ensure a genuine focus on making Merton zero carbon by 2030.
- **De-carbonise** the Council's pension fund.
- Put **robust tree & biodiversity strategies** in the Council's Climate Action Plan.
- Replace the Council transport fleet with electric vehicles. and **implement a strategy for electric vehicle charging points** across the borough.
- Prioritise helping residents to **reduce their carbon emissions**.
- Support the **Local Electricity Bill** to establish a *right to local supply* by promoting local renewable electricity.
- **Turn off the lights** in the Civic Centre!

# Air Quality

Clean air is a basic human right

## WHAT WE'VE DONE

- In 2019 we convinced Council bosses to agree that **anti-idling measures should be enforced** - specifically near schools – to date the Council has not issued a single penalty notice for idling.
- Petitioned for **more Electric Vehicle charging points**, and a charging point strategy for the whole borough.
- Pressed Council to investigate how other councils **help homeowners without drives safely charge electric vehicles** via their domestic supply.
- Attempted to **ring-fence additional monies raised by Labour parking charges** to improve air quality – the supposed purpose of the increases!
- Tried to introduce a **low mileage rebate on parking permits** – rejected by Labour.

## WHAT WE'LL DO

- Install **more Air Quality monitors** and give people real time access to the results and then actually use that data to inform further actions.
- Work with Transport for London to introduce **more low-emission buses**, and limits to heavy 'through traffic'.
- Focus on **supporting people move to more environmentally friendly vehicles** - if the Mayor of London extends the ULEZ to Merton, we will campaign for it to be done fairly with help for businesses & those who cannot afford to switch, including a generous scrappage scheme & lead-in times – **environmental measures should aim to influence new choices & not punish past decisions!**
- Introduce a **low mileage rebate on parking permits** as parked cars don't pollute.



# Sustainable Transport

Improving public transport & opportunities for walking and cycling



## WHAT WE'VE DONE

- Worked with residents and haulage companies to **challenge speeding & noisy HGVs** in residential areas.
- In 2012, Lib Dem councillors **proposed a 'default' 20mph speed limit** on residential roads (but not dual-carriageways!).
- Worked with rail companies and the Council to **make local stations step-free** - after a long campaign, Motspur Park will be made step free next year - whilst we have also made progress on Haydon's Road and Raynes Park Stations.
- Consistently campaigned to **oppose the expansion of Heathrow airport**.
- Secured a **'lessons learned' review of school streets** and pushed for more/better signage and genuine consultation & dialogue.

## WHAT WE'LL DO

- All active **travel measures should be approached strategically & collaboratively** using trials and evidence.
- Develop **strategic cycle routes**.
- **Limit heavy 'through traffic'** on residential roads.
- Continue **working constructively with local HGV companies** to further address noise & safety issues.
- **Commission plans to make local stations fully accessible** as rail companies tell us having 'shovel-ready' plans is critical when funding becomes available.
- If the Mayor of London extends the ULEZ to Merton, our focus will be on fairness, **giving people the time & support to switch to more environmentally friendly vehicles**.
- We'll **measure the effectiveness** of every initiative.

# Cleaner Streets

Time to discard the 'mucky' in *Mucky Merton*

## WHAT WE'VE DONE

- **Challenged Council over-paying the waste contractor Veolia an extra £1m per year** for just providing the service they'd originally agreed!
- **Demanded action on fly-tips**, after our research showed only 2% of fly-tippers were fined in 2021.
- Conducted **regular community litter picks, and volunteer planting sessions** – we also tried working with Conservative councillors to ensure Haydon's Road was cleaned up (until they refused!).
- Worked with Council officers to address chronic litter problems on streets with flats above shops, by persuading them to introduce a **simplified collection regime & tougher enforcement** from this year.
- **Pushed Council to address repeated failures to collect refuse & re-cycling** from certain blocks of flats with continuing waste collection issues.



## WHAT WE'LL DO

- Provide a waste service that works for residents by introducing our **5-Point Plan for a Clean Sweep**:
  - (1) prioritising street sweeping after collections;
  - (2) introducing 'pop-up' waste skips in neighbourhoods;
  - (3) working to manage existing waste contracts better;
  - (4) solving waste collection issues for flats; and
  - (5) getting tougher on fly-tippers.
- Learn from how councils like Kingston & Richmond get a better service from Veolia, who are also **electrifying Kingston's entire refuse truck fleet** from next year.
- Consider all options - including **bringing waste back in-house** - in the forthcoming waste contract review.
- Promote civic pride with **street planting competitions**.

# Green Spaces & Blue Streams

The natural environment is key to public health



## WHAT WE'VE DONE

- Challenged Council to use its powers to **block the AELTC's plans to build a 10-storey tennis stadium & over 9km of roads on Wimbledon Park** - a scheme which involves cutting down 300 mature trees on Metropolitan Open Land & destroying the habitat of birds, bats and endangered European Eels.
- Called for the Council's Climate Action Plan to include both **tree & biodiversity strategies** – voted down by Labour.
- Ensured the pot of money councillors are allocated for small projects in their area can be **spent on tree planting**.
- Lib Dems in Parliament tried to **ban water companies dumping sewage in the Wandle & other local rivers**.

## WHAT WE'LL DO

- Enforce the legal **guarantees given by the AELTC** to preserve Wimbledon Park.
- Work with the AELTC, Friends of Wimbledon Park, the Capability Brown Society & residents' groups to **reach a compromise on the All England Club's plans**.
- Put **robust tree & biodiversity strategies** in the Council's Climate Action Plan.
- Look at putting public open space into trust - to **give the community a real say over the use of land** and provide more protection.
- Encourage the Council's parks contractor, **idverde**, to **work more closely with Friends' groups**.
- Consider all options in any review of the parks' contract, including **bringing the service back in-house**.



# ***STANDING UP FOR OUR AREAS***

***OUR TOWNS AND NEIGHBOURHOODS SHOULD BE  
PLACES PEOPLE CAN BE PROUD TO CALL HOME***

# Planning

Using the planning system to realise Merton's potential



## WHAT WE'VE DONE

- Our proposal to **limit building heights in Wimbledon town centre & close the loophole** that allowed Council to give permission for the overbearing St George's House development was voted down by Labour.
- After leading the challenge to previous plans, **we supported the YMCA's current redevelopment** - which includes 121 low-rent flats for young people - after the developer listened to the Community's concerns.
- Lib Dems in Parliament have **fought Conservative scheme to allow developers to add 2 extra storeys to blocks of flats** across Wimbledon without planning permission or any affordable housing requirements.
- **Supported Plan Wimbledon, a residents' group established to influence local planning decisions** - now seeking to help it build links with local businesses.
- Proposed restoring the **online publication of residents' comments about planning applications**.

## WHAT WE'LL DO

- Adopt a **new approach to planning** by bringing the community, local businesses, social housing providers and commercial developers together to discuss competing priorities and necessary compromises.
- We **won't scrap local planning rules**, which would create a developers' free for all, but amend them to reflect the community's priorities on building heights, etc.
- Develop a new planning regime to **embrace new ways of living & working** such as encouraging communal working areas in new flat developments.
- **Ensure planning enforcement is properly resourced** to deal with 'cowboy' developers & ensure planning rules are followed.
- **Put more emphasis on waste storage & collection solutions** before planning permission granted.



# Crime & Policing

Ensuring Merton remains one of the safest boroughs in London

## WHAT WE'VE DONE

- Took the Labour Mayor of London to court, forcing him to **abandon his plans to close Wimbledon Police Station** in 2018.
- Lib Dems were the **only party to respond to the Mayor's current proposals threatening our police station** - whilst Labour & the Conservatives said nothing!
- Called a **special Council meeting on violence against women & girls** where our proposals to ensure the Council takes practical steps to improve women & girls' safety were unanimously supported.
- Pushed Council to **become a leader in Restorative Justice** - using Central Government funding to facilitate, where appropriate, victims of crime meeting the perpetrator in a controlled setting.

## WHAT WE'LL DO

- Continue **fighting to stop the Labour Mayor closing Wimbledon Police Station.**
- Prioritise Restorative Justice within Merton to **cut fear of crime and reoffending.**
- Support the Borough Commander's strategy to **prioritise community policing.**
- **Raise the profile of police ward panels & neighbourhood watch** by holding public meetings to further develop community engagement.
- Put greater emphasis on **changing male, rather than female, behaviour** in addressing violence against women & girls.
- **Address Anti-Social Behaviour** in social housing by working with Clarion and other agencies.



# Rejuvenating the Local Economy

Building the post-pandemic economy



## WHAT WE'VE DONE

- Attempted to get the Council to **help our struggling high streets** by pushing them to:
  - apply for grant funding;
  - adopt planning rules that encourage independent shops alongside established chains; and
  - work with developers to provide space for start-ups, pop-ups and communal work areas.
- **Supported local business groups** including *Love Wimbledon* & the *Chamber of Commerce*.
- **Backed the new owner's plans** to develop Centre Court shopping centre.
- **Called out Labour bosses who attended investors' conference in Cannes but secured no funding** to rejuvenate Morden.
- Fought to **help local language schools, events companies & others who didn't receive their fair share of financial assistance** during lockdown.

## WHAT WE'LL DO

- **Promote a vibrant creative sector**, from start-ups to established businesses - we need to listen to these industries about what the Council can do to help.
- **Support soundly financed cultural additions to Wimbledon's vibrant array of 3 theatres & 2 cinemas** and build on the success of the thriving Bookfest & Film Club.
- Aim to be named the **London Borough of Culture**.
- **Establish incubator sites for start-ups** and investigate barriers to opening new businesses via a review of planning policies.
- Work with local groups to **attract funding to promote our heritage** and encourage visitors.
- Ensure **take-away food delivery companies provide a service without dominating** the high street.



# ***OPEN LOCAL DEMOCRACY***

***MERTON NEEDS COUNCILLORS WHO WILL LISTEN AND  
BE HONEST ABOUT THE CHOICES TO BE MADE***

# Democracy & Transparency

Opening the doors to the town hall



## WHAT WE'VE DONE

- Worked with the Council and **achieved a significant number of improvements over the last 4 years** - both big and small, as evidenced in this manifesto.
- **Promoted the growing use of public questions in Council meetings** - an innovation we persuaded the administration to adopt in the previous Council term.
- **Pushed for a review of the Community Forums** to examine how they can be made more relevant.
- Sought to **convince the Council to return to publishing planning representations** on their website.
- Persuaded the Council to **live-stream, and archive, all public meetings on YouTube**.
- **Tried to stop Labour & the Conservatives changing the constitution** when they did a deal to block the Lib Dems from chairing scrutiny meetings!

## WHAT WE'LL DO

- In Merton, all major decisions by the administration are scrutinised by a number of committees - **the Lib Dems will end the current practice in which the governing party appoint the Chairs** of those panels.
- The Lib Dems will introduce reforms to **allow Community forums to operate more like peoples' assemblies**, directly contributing to local democracy.
- We'll **use consultation exercises to educate & inform in winning hearts & minds** before instituting changes such as school streets and other traffic & parking measures.
- We'll **review the workings of the Council cabinet system & consult on returning to a committee structure**.
- We **pledge to take bold decisions, admit where we get it wrong and learn from our mistakes**.