

# Green backbone

Paul Burall looks forward to a radical Lib Dem Manifesto

## The 2015 Lib Dem General Election manifesto should contain no environment section and no separate green policies within each section

Instead, the group that produced last year's Green Book wants next year's manifesto to be built around a 'green backbone' in recognition of the fact that sustainability is fundamental to increasing living standards, to improving the quality of life and to future-proofing the economy – a successful economy and a healthy society must be green or they will be neither successful nor healthy. This is the basis of The Green Manifesto published by the group at the Party's Spring conference in March.

### Three Key Objectives

The Green Manifesto contains more than 150 detailed proposals in support of three key objectives:

## A Better Economy

Generating sustainable growth

- A strategic infrastructure plan to provide the physical backbone for a new industrial revolution;
- An expansion of investment in green innovation and services such as community energy and domestic energy efficiency;
- Building 1.5 million new homes to 'nearly zero energy' standards;
- Improving energy security by increasing the role of low-carbon energy sources.

## War on Waste

End wasted energy and wasted natural resources. This would save consumers money, improve the quality of life, and enhance the ability of businesses to compete in world markets.

- Retrofitting 1 million homes every year to dramatically raise energy efficiency standards;
- Legally binding waste reduction and resource efficiency targets for businesses
- Better protection for consumers from sub-standard goods with new standards for energy efficiency and durability.
- Recognising that quality of life is just as important as the standard of living.



### Better Places to Live

Protect and enhance the natural environment in both the countryside and urban areas.

- Statutory targets for clean air, freshwater and biodiversity;
- Better protection from extreme weather and flooding;
- An independent report on the likely impacts on the UK of a 3-4°C global average temperature rise;
- The creation of new planned sustainable settlements to protect existing communities and ensure much higher standards of house design and performance.

To achieve these manifesto ambitions requires three sets of enabling policies: decentralising power and responsibility; embedding long-term thinking; and cooperating globally.

A second important Green step forward was made at the York conference when the Party passed a planning motion which included measures to strengthen Neighbourhood Plans by providing greater resources and giving a Community Right of Appeal if an application is passed that is not in conformity with the approved Neighbourhood Plan. It also called for greater cooperation on strategic planning issues by encouraging local authorities to form partnerships to produce plans to meet housing need and address economic and infrastructure requirements.

The motion set out measures to increase competition in the housebuilding market by reserving land for small builders and self-builders, and to require Local Plans and building regulations to take action to mitigate increasing summer temperatures caused by climate change.

An amendment that would have given local communities complete control over the setting of housing and development targets rather than having to meet nationally imposed requirements was resoundingly defeated.

The proposer of the motion, Annette Brooke, MP for Mid Dorset and North Poole, has also produced a draft policy paper expanding on the motion and would welcome comments. The paper can be downloaded from: [www.libdemvoice.org/reform-of-the-planning-system-38422.html](http://www.libdemvoice.org/reform-of-the-planning-system-38422.html) and comments can be submitted by email to: [planningconsultation13@gmail.com](mailto:planningconsultation13@gmail.com)

There is a tension between the natural Lib Dem desire for decisions to be taken locally and the Party's commitment to key national targets that are essential if issues about which Lib Dems care

deeply are to be resolved.

Housing is an obvious example. The Party is committed to building 300,000 new homes per year to meet pent-up demand and it is clear that this target would be fatally undermined if local communities were given a veto on housebuilding plans in their areas. NIMBY local authorities (mostly Conservative) would almost certainly refuse to allow almost any building in the countryside.

The same tension is perhaps even more apparent over policies to tackle climate change, not least because many influential Conservatives – from the Cabinets downwards – are climate change deniers. This has led to an almost complete ban on wind and solar farms in certain areas, undermining crucial renewable energy targets.

So ideas on how to tackle the tension between localism and necessary national targets and policy will be especially welcome.

One approach that could help (and is included in The Green Manifesto) is the use of citizens' juries to advise local authorities on controversial issues. Another is to enable central government to set essential targets – such as housing and renewable energy generation or carbon reduction – for individual local authorities or sub-regional areas. It would then be up to the local authorities to decide how best to meet these targets, combining the requirement to meet national priorities with local control over how these are implemented.

All ideas welcome!

Paul Burall

The Green Manifesto is available for download at [www.green-book.org.uk](http://www.green-book.org.uk)

Comments and suggestions are welcome – what do you think is wrong or could be better or is missing? Send your comments to [greenmanifesto@dbrack.org.uk](mailto:greenmanifesto@dbrack.org.uk)