

A Green New Deal for Cambridge 2022

As a society we have been through a lot in recent times, with the ongoing Covid pandemic being just one of the challenges we face. The Green Party of England and Wales has a vision for a Green Recoveryⁱ which will tackle the climate and ecological emergency while building a society that works for everyone. To achieve this we need more green voices in Parliament, fighting for policies such as a Universal Basic Income and renationalisation of the energy companies so that no one is left to make a choice between eating and heating. In the meantime, there is much to be done at the local authority level. This manifesto focuses on what Greens can achieve here in Cambridge.

In May 2021, two Green Councillors were elected to the City Council, both representing Abbey ward. They have spent the year working hard on behalf of Abbey residents and businesses, helping them access financial advice and support; reporting ongoing issues of anti-social behaviour; getting broken streetlights and play equipment fixed; escalating residents' concerns about local development and much more. They are also active in pushing for wider change. Cambridge City Council became the first UK local authority to endorse a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty after unanimously agreeing a motion proposed by Councillor Hannah Copley. Councillor Naomi Bennett brought a successful motion to council to urge the Treasury to provide cash to help insulate and retrofit Cambridge homes. Hannah and Naomi share their thoughts about the first year, and their ambitions for the year to come, in a report which you can read on our websiteⁱⁱ. In May 2022, we hope that they will be joined by more Greens on the City Council so that we can become an even more powerful voice for social and environmental justice.

A Green New Deal for Cambridge

There are many things to celebrate about Cambridge as a place to live, but also many injustices. The rapid economic growth experienced in some areas has left many people behind, with more and more struggling to heat their homes and feed their families. The Greater Cambridge Planning Authority is currently committed to building thousands of new homes, yet past development has failed to address the housing affordability crisis or to lessen the huge inequality in the city. Too many housing developments (although not all) are soulless, lack community facilities, add to Cambridge's traffic problem and chip away at our remaining green space. We need to learn from past mistakes and successes so we can work towards a better future.

Here is our plan to help everyone in Cambridge thrive.

Homes fit for the future

Greens are the only local party to oppose the policy of growth at all costs. Cambridgeshire's authorities are currently operating under massive uncertainties created by COVID, Brexit and shifting central Government priorities. We are also awaiting firm plans from the water companies on how demand is to be met in the future. Greater Cambridge is already committed to thousands of new jobs and houses in the adopted 2018 Local Plans – more than enough to meet demand according to latest projections. It makes no sense to expand and accelerate the house building programme, as is currently proposed in the draft Local Plan. Rather than scrabbling to keep up with outdated projections of growth in our region, we must plan for the future we actually want.

Priority should be given to investing in existing communities rather than new development. Any new developments should be based on local need and ideally involve future residents in their design. New settlements must be more than 'low carbon': they must provide local services and low-carbon transport options to enable emission reductions across the region. 'Net zero' buildings must mean more than minimising day-to-day emissions: the carbon costs of construction, the embodied carbon in building materials, and the loss of carbon stocks from destroying soils, vegetation or existing structures, must be taken into account. Wherever possible, existing buildings should be renovated rather than demolished and rebuilt. Buildings must be habitable in the face of a climate that has increasingly extreme weather events, including insulation to the highest building standards.

Green Councillors will:

- Continue to campaign for a "pause and rethink" on the policy of accelerated growth proposed in the draft Local Plan

- Continue to lobby for a fair and effective use of the Council's limited retrofit funding to benefit as many citizens as possible
- Provide information to help home owners put in insulation, solar panels, and heat pumps in place of gas boilers.
- Lobby for policy to require that all *new Council-funded* buildings, including council housing, be built to the Passivhaus standardⁱⁱⁱ (or equivalents for non-domestic buildings) and that any full retrofits of buildings meet the retrofit Passivhaus standard EnerPHit^{iv}.
- Consider the feasibility of a council "kitemark" to be awarded to developments that comply with the council's highest standards to encourage voluntary compliance with higher standards than those imposed by law, including but not limited to Passivhaus
- Lobby for recruitment of an additional building controls inspector to ensure the city's required standards are adhered to
- Work to find constructive uses for empty buildings, for example as social housing

Focus on community to reduce inequality

The Green Party believes that wellbeing and Quality of Life (rather than economic growth) should be the focus of policy at all levels. A large amount of wealth is generated in Cambridge but it does not benefit everyone, driving inequality both nationally and at the local scale^v. Even within Cambridge there is a wide gap between the most and least well-off wards in terms of factors like life expectancy and rates of childhood obesity.

Further economic growth is not the answer. Contemporary Cambridge has experienced very fast growth in housing supply but this hasn't made homes any more affordable, with the average house price now exceeding half a million pounds^{vi}. Too many people are living under the stress of insecure housing. Rough sleeping is the most visible but not the only form of homelessness. Young people in particular may be trapped in expensive and unsuitable rented accommodation or slip into 'hidden homelessness' such as sofa surfing. As a result of national policy, the provision of 'affordable housing' is woefully inadequate, both in terms of what proportion of housing is allocated as 'affordable' and whether it is actually affordable for the majority of people. We need a large increase in council-owned and managed secure rented property backed up by community ownership cooperatives, housing associations and co-housing projects.

The COVID-19 pandemic has widened pre-existing gaps in our society, but has also shone a light on the incredible resilience of local groups and organisations to support one another in a time of need.

Green Councillors will:

- Explore alternative housing delivery options to provide safe, affordable, sociable and sustainable living space for young people and other economically vulnerable groups
- Take every opportunity to support the work of Cambridge's Food Hubs, Cambridge Community Kitchen and other organisations helping people who are experiencing food and fuel poverty
- Review the community hubs and other organisations that developed during the Covid pandemic and ensure that those who still need it have adequate support
- Lobby for increased investment in youth groups and centres, outdoor sports infrastructure and recreation for older people to help them stay healthy for longer
- Work to rekindle Cambridge's Neighbourhood Watch and Speed Watch schemes so that residents need no longer feel powerless to act against anti-social behaviour.
- Ensure there is adequate space for children in all wards of Cambridge to study in safe, supervised buildings (such as a library, community hub or out-of-hours access to school rooms) close to their own home. Going to one of Cambridge's many good schools is no guarantee of a child's ability to improve their life chances if the complications of accessing help at home are considered.

Revolutionise transport in Cambridge

Cambridge needs a rapid shift to greener travel, with a more joined-up approach to transport planning and a focus on ending fossil fuel dependence.

Although Cambridge has the highest level of cycling in the UK, we have the potential to do even better by improving the cycle network. Increasing the proportion of journeys made by active transport would benefit everyone, including those less able to cycle or walk, by reducing traffic jams and improving air quality. Currently in many parts of the city pollution exceeds acceptable levels for health.

Current bus services are too expensive to use, do not serve Cambridge residents well and are not integrated with regional travel: there are areas, for example in Abbey, where buses are rare and slow, and other areas which lack any sort of service. Lack of good public transport provision widens inequalities by further disadvantaging people who can't afford to either live close to employment centres or to run a car. We need public transport that is convenient, cheap and reliable.

At the same time as improving people's travel options, we need to start introducing disincentives for people driving all the way into Cambridge from outside. We believe it is necessary to introduce charging in some form (e.g. congestion, pollution or parking charges). Any such scheme must be carefully designed to avoid placing additional burdens on any disadvantaged section of society.

Green Councillors will:

- Campaign for major investment in active transport with the goal of creating a fully interconnected, properly segregated cycle network
- Hold the Greater Cambridge Partnership to account in delivering a network of bus services that are well-connected, safe, fast, cheap and convenient to use. This should include the creation of Travel Hubs (bus stations with additional facilities, primarily accessed through walking and cycling – as distinct from the current Park and Ride model)
- Campaign for these improvements to be funded through the introduction of new charges which are designed to discourage car travel while being fair to all users (in particular, taking into account the needs of potentially more vulnerable sections of society such as women, older people or those with disabilities). We support the immediate introduction of a Workplace Parking Levy and call for an evidence-based assessment of options for a congestion or emissions charge to be introduced in the future
- Campaign to improve air quality in the City including by working towards introducing an emissions-free zone in the centre of Cambridge and campaigning for strict rules against engine idling as long as diesel and petrol vehicles are still used in the city centre
- Campaign for 20mph speed limits in all residential areas and work with residents to create low traffic neighbourhoods^{vii}
- Accelerate and manage the shift to electric vehicles by ensuring the installation of many more free or low-cost charging points, accessible to existing residents and standard in all new builds, and introducing appropriate safety regulations including clear guidelines on which vehicles can use which routes
- Support the development and roll-out of innovative solutions to reduce private car use, including car-sharing schemes, on-demand minibus services and electric scooter/ bicycle hire.

Face up to the Climate Emergency with real action

The City Council declared climate and ecological emergencies in 2019. Now we need effective action appropriate to the scale of the threat. With the COP26 international agreement on climate change falling far short of what is needed, work at a local level is more important than ever.

Climate justice and social justice are inextricably linked. We support the City Council's adoption of the Doughnut Economics model (the idea that society must meet everyone's needs without exceeding the capacity of the earth to support us) and will continue to push for the concept to be translated into real action.

Green Councillors will:

- Consider the linked issues of social justice and the climate and ecological emergencies in every decision they make
- Aim to make Cambridge a UK and world leader in its reductions in carbon emissions
- Encourage and support businesses and institutions in Cambridge to adopt more ambitious net-zero commitments and implement actions to reach net-zero carbon by 2030 at the latest, in line with the Cambridge Climate Change Charter^{viii}
- Continue to campaign for the County Council to divest the millions currently invested in the fossil fuel industry from their pension fund, and start future proofing council employees' pensions
- Help to make Cambridge more resilient to the effects of climate change including by increasing tree cover, ensuring buildings are designed to function in extremes of weather, and encouraging businesses to include weather extremes in their business continuity strategies.

Protect nature and green spaces for everyone

Nature is often treated as a 'nice to have' in mainstream politics, but Cambridge Green Party recognises that a healthy environment is core to everything we are trying to achieve. Globally, nature is what allows human society to exist and thrive. Locally, green spaces in urban areas can be havens for nature and are vital to our health, with a measurable impact on life expectancy. An estimated 68% of Cambridge residents do not have access to green space as recommended by the World Health Organisation^{ix}. Development is driving further destruction of green space within Cambridge and in the Green Belt. The policy of 'Biodiversity Net Gain' must not be an accounting trick within the planning system, where nature's devastation is weighed against promised improvements elsewhere. We must protect what we have, greatly expand the area of land set aside for nature, connect up our habitats and safeguard them in perpetuity.

Green Councillors will:

- Oppose further losses of urban green space and Green Belt land and, where development is essential, ensure that high-quality green space for nature and people comprises a high proportion of the land.
- Work to expand, safeguard and improve the network of City Wildlife Sites, Country Parks and Local Nature Reserves so that people in all City wards can access nature on their doorstep (while ensuring sensitive habitats are protected from unsuitable leisure use)
- Continue to ensure recreational green spaces and play areas are safe, clean and accessible to all
- Support tree planting initiatives and help to ensure that planting is carried out according to best practice; oppose any unnecessary removal of trees
- Push for an increase in Council officer time dedicated to biodiversity and green spaces and the appointment of dedicated wardens for specific areas; improve the support available for volunteer and community involvement in managing green spaces.
- Build on Cambridge's achievements as a Sustainable Food City by promoting local sustainable food growing initiatives including local growers' markets and community initiatives such as CoFarm and Cambridge Food Hub, and pushing for sufficient allotment provision in existing and planned neighbourhoods.

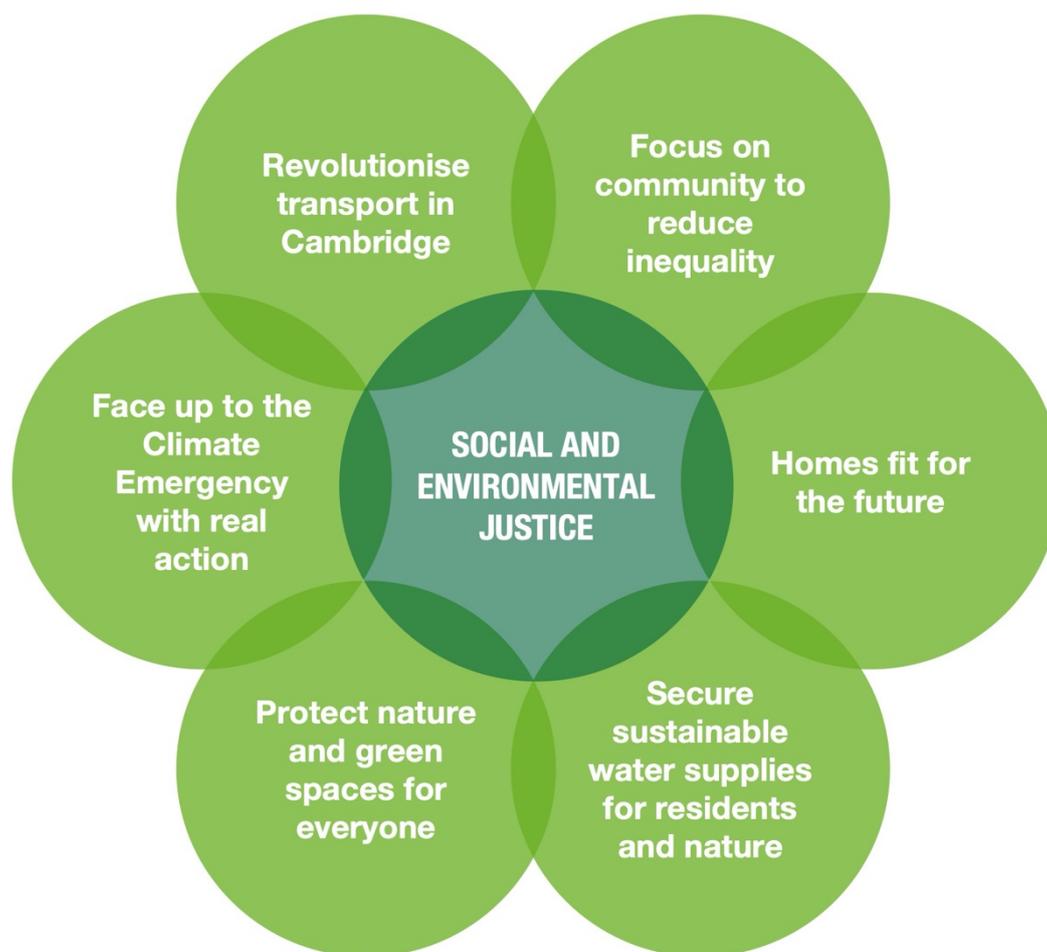
Secure sustainable water supplies for residents and nature

Our region is experiencing severe and worsening water shortages^x. This is bad news for nature: our special chalk stream wildlife is threatened, and the health of trees across the area is at risk as the water table falls. Water companies already pipe water in from elsewhere to meet demand in Cambridgeshire – an example of where we are living beyond our environmental means. Plans for large scale housebuilding in the region will increase the burden on our already overstretched supply, with impacts on quality of life for residents in the long term.

Green Councillors will:

- Oppose development that will increase the ongoing removal of water from the chalk aquifer, while supporting solutions to the over-abstraction problems
- Support nature-based solutions to water management including restoration of flood plain habitats and appropriate vegetation and tree planting to slow down surface run-off and reduce the risk of flash flooding
- Lobby for the highest water efficiency credentials for all new developments, including mandatory greywater collection
- Encourage our water companies to put more resources into supporting residents and businesses to reduce their water use
- Scrutinise Cambridge Water's plans for drought management and water abstraction to ensure they are evidence-based, climate-resilient and sustainable
- Hold Anglian Water to account for their repeated breaches of regulations governing discharge of wastewater into the Cam.

A graphical summary of our Green New Deal for Cambridge



References

ⁱ <https://vote.greenparty.org.uk>

ⁱⁱ <https://cambridge.greenparty.org.uk/our-policies/2022-councillor-report.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://passivhaustrust.org.uk/>

^{iv} <https://www.homebuilding.co.uk/advice/enerphit>

^v <https://www.thecambridgecommons.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Cambridge-Commons-SIP-Final-Report-1.pdf>

^{vi} <https://landregistry.data.gov.uk/app/ukhpi/browse?from=2021-01-01&location=http%3A%2F%2Flandregistry.data.gov.uk%2Fid%2Fregion%2Fcambridge&to=2021-12-01&lang=en>

^{vii} <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-blog/get-active/2020/in-your-community/what-is-a-low-traffic-neighbourhood>

^{viii} <https://cambridgecarbonfootprint.org/charter/>

^{ix} [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196\(21\)00229-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(21)00229-1)

^x <https://camvalleyforum.uk/publication-let-it-flow/>