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ESSEX GREEN

MANIFESTO

2017



THE 2017 GREEN PLEDGE TO ESSEX VOTERS: SUPPORTING LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND PROTECTING OUR SHARED ENVIRONMENT

With the Conservative Government set to continue austerity into the 2020s, funding for public services is likely to be squeezed even harder in the next 4 years.

Green councillors in Essex have been active in fighting against cuts to services over the last 4 years – including opposing cuts to Youth Services, Children’s Centres, Recycling Centres, school transport and highway safety

projects - which are delivered locally by the Highways Panels. Greens will continue to work with like-minded councillors to protect services from further Conservative cuts.

With the UK set to leave the EU, there are concerns that this will be used as an opportunity by the Conservatives to reduce environmental protection in the same way that they have cut support for renewable energy and have tilted

the planning system heavily in favour of volume developers and speculators at the expense of the Essex countryside. It is vital that laws and regulations drawn up to protect our shared environment are not scrapped - and so the Greens nationally have called for a new Environmental Protection Act to replace EU legislation. (1)

The Conservatives offered “Localism” and invited voters to “Vote Blue, Go

Green”. Both are now seen as another political trick by a major party, which might have won a few votes at the time, but has left many voters even more cynical about politicians.

The Greens offer a fresh and clear vision, one which they are committed to delivering on. Green councillors will fight for:



Pictured: Green campaigners in Witham

(1) <https://www.greenparty.org.uk/news/2017/04/07/vote-green-to-protect-local-services-and-the-environment,-co-leader-says/>

WE OFFER GENUINE LOCALISM

Independent of the old parties and genuinely rooted in their local areas, Green councillors place representing local communities as their top priority.

And the Greens stick to their pledges. In 2013, the Greens said that Essex County Council was an authority in need of reform; that it was seen as a remote organisation that did not listen to local communities – and an authority still mired in the legacy of the former Leader Lord Hanningfield.

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AIR FIT TO BREATHE

DECENT SOCIAL CARE

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The 2013 Green Manifesto for Essex set out a 5 point reform package for ECC – which the Greens have delivered on.

Prior to the 2013 elections, the Greens uncovered that ECC paid its senior councillors the highest allowances and expenses in East Anglia. In the council year 2011/12, 15 county councillors each received over £30,000 in expenses and allowances and of those, 5 accrued more than £50,000 a year (source; Essex County Council) - which was about double the average full time wage for Essex. The Greens also researched the “free meals” that county councillors enjoyed at taxpayer expense, finding that some were munching their way through nearly £1000 worth of food a year yet none of it was being properly accounted for.

The Greens also researched the extent to which the public could participate in ECC meetings. The answer was very little. At most meetings where major decisions were taken affecting local communities, the public were not even ‘permitted’ to speak!

So at the 2013 elections, the Greens set out a 5 point plan to reform Essex County Council:

- Cut the perks – corporate credit cards, chauffeur driven cars, no more ‘trips’ abroad.
- Reduce Councillor allowances – capped at average full time wage.
- Become more accountable – open up all meetings to more public participation.
- Work with local communities, not against them – no waste incinerator at Rivenhall Airfield.
- Get back to basics – fix potholes quickly, sort out parking problems. Listen to communities.

In May 2013, the first ever Essex Green County councillors took their seats and they immediately started to call for these changes. In response, the ruling Tories said that the free meals were “an entitlement” and that opening up meetings to the public would be “un-

workable”. But with public pressure for reform, change became inevitable.

Now in 2017, free meals have been abolished. Some allowances have been reduced. All main meetings are now open to public participation and ECC has improved its performance on potholes - though there is a long way to go.



ANOTHER BIG GREEN SLATE THIS MAY

As in 2013, the Greens in 2017 will be standing candidates in the majority of seats in Essex. There are Green Party candidates in all 12 local authority areas with full slates in Braintree District, Maldon District, Chelmsford City, Brentwood Borough, Uttlesford District, Colchester Borough and Tendring District council areas.

Nationally (England, Scotland and Wales) the Greens are standing a record 1,561 candidates and have easily overtaken UKIP's total.

In 2013 there were 4 Green principal authority councillors in Essex sitting on 2 authorities. The Greens now hold 8 seats on 4 authorities and are getting closer to breaking through on to more authorities.

The number of Green Party members is now over three times higher than in 2013.

As in 2013, at this election the Greens are setting out realistic targets – to hold the 2 current seats in Rochford and Braintree Districts and to make good progress in new target areas.

And as in 2013, Green councillors elected in 2017 will work across party lines for the benefit of local people and the environment. These are extremely challenging times in local government, which requires as much co-operation as possible when tough decisions have to be made on services - as a direct consequence of the ever tighter spending squeeze being handed down year after year by the Conservative Government.

Basildon 1 (9)
Braintree 8 (8)
Brentwood 4 (4)
Castle Point 1 (5)
Chelmsford 9 (9)
Colchester 9 (9)
Epping Forest 2 (7)
Harlow 2 (4)
Maldon 3 (3)
Rochford 3 (5)
Tendring 8 (8)
Uttlesford 4 (4)

Total 54 (75)
Essex in 2017



Pictured: Green campaigners in Buckhurst Hill

ESSEX TRENDS

The trends identified by the Green Party in 2013 largely continue in 2017.

Dominated by elite groups of Conservatives at district, county and national level, Essex is being lined up for high levels of growth but without a viable strategy for how that growth could in any way be sustainable. This is being compounded by continuing austerity, with local authority services needed to support growing communities being placed under ever greater strain.

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Development pressures have increased following the introduction of the developer-friendly National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and requirements on local authorities to allocate land based on market-led criteria.

Local authorities in Essex are having to set very high development targets in their Local Plans but many are exposed to developer pressure on greenfield sites before those Plans are complete, with Government Inspectors increasingly granting schemes on appeal.

Whilst it is clear that new housing and job opportunities are needed, the scale of what is being proposed and the "Growth at all Costs" agenda is leaving many communities bewildered and there is growing animosity that the promised "Localism" has evaporated, with decisions being imposed. Large scale housing extensions into the countryside around the main towns and even around villages continue. Yet at the same time, many traditional market town centres are declining and villages are losing their services. Village pubs, rural garages and local small shops continue to close.

The latest addition to the growth agenda is the "Garden Communities" project

aka New Towns. With no specific consultation whatsoever, small elite groups of councillors and ministers have been drawing up plans for around 60,000 houses to be built along the A120 corridor from Stansted to Harwich. There is already peak time congestion on many main road routes and overcrowded commuter trains are the norm.

Transport decisions are increasingly dominated by support for road building, aviation growth and bigger ports with little or no thought as to the consequences for worsening congestion and declining air quality. Yet at the same time public transport is in many areas inadequate, and rural bus services particularly so. Essex County Council under the Conservatives has reduced access to school transport, forcing more parents to drive their children to school.

Despite the withdrawal of the planning application for a second runway at Stansted (the development of which was supported by the previous Labour Government), the Government is once again turning to support for aviation growth with another runway at Heathrow and support for expansion at Stansted up to its capacity on one runway – which could mean flights broadly doubling compared to now.

Major aviation expansion in or near Essex remains a significant threat to people's quality of life. Essex will become a more polluted, more noisy and less pleasant place to live with further aviation growth.

One area of progress has been in communications. The roll out of broadband is to be welcomed, though the pace of delivery has not been as good as promised. Whilst access to fibre based broadband in the main towns is becoming well established, reaching more rural communities is more challenging and requires more investment and support.





Pictured: Green campaigners protest nuclear power

Essex already has a large ecological footprint – the county does not have enough fresh water within its boundaries and has to import water. It is the driest county in the UK. The high growth levels proposed for Essex will place further stresses on the water and sewerage systems of the county.

Since 2013 there has been welcome progress in developing renewable energy in Essex, but following changes in support mechanisms imposed by the Government, that progress is now faltering. Essex offers massive renewable energy capacity, particularly solar and offshore wind.

Essex stands to be hit hard by climate change in the longer term. Rising sea levels could flood low lying farmland and hotter drier summers will worsen the county water deficit, cause subsidence on clay soils and put more stress on native trees and wildlife. More intense rain events and increasing areas of hardstanding will threaten river flooding in historic villages and towns.

GREEN VISION

Over recent years the gap between the policies and actions of those in power and the genuine Green agenda has grown. The Green Party does not accept that any green priorities should be dropped as a consequence of austerity in this era of the "populist right".

So we set out our vision of how Essex can become a better place to live and work, not based on "Growth at all Costs", but on thriving communities, sustainable development and a high

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quality environment where wildlife can thrive just as much as people can. This is a vision that places high value on "Quality of Life" in 5 key areas:

- Local green spaces
- Air fit to breathe
- Decent social care
- Affordable homes
- Action on climate change

LOCAL GREEN SPACES

In our towns and villages it is vital that local green spaces are protected and not bulldozed for short term aims. We will support greater protection for green spaces through the planning system and encourage looking after green spaces such as through community litter picks and more tree planting.

In the countryside we will oppose unsustainable development and will support measures to protect ancient woodland, improve habitats and curb light pollution.

AIR FIT TO BREATHE

The UK is in breach of agreements to curb air pollution and Brexit raises concerns that EU regulations designed to allow people to breathe clean air will be scrapped. There is a clear need to invest in more sustainable forms of transport that both give people viable options

on how to travel and will help reduce air pollution.

DECENT SOCIAL CARE

The pressure on Social Care budgets is increasing as austerity bites ever deeper. While the Government has "allowed" authorities such as Essex County Council to apply a Social Care Levy on top of the council tax, it is not enough to keep pace with real demand. This divergence has led to the Conservative Leader of Essex County Council warning of a funding "crisis". Greens support the need to help vulnerable people lead a decent life; they should not pay the price for the failure of bankers and governments.

AFFORDABLE HOMES

Green councillors recognise that Essex needs more well designed affordable housing on appropriate sites. These need to be planned with local communities, not imposed on them.

ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

The noises-off from "climate sceptics" in recent years have gone hand-in-hand with the Conservative Government cutting support for renewables and weakening the planning system. Green councillors will strongly support measures to

take action on climate change, because the science is very clear and because developing a green economy will have many benefits in itself including cleaner air and more locally produced energy.



GREEN PRIORITIES FOR ESSEX

HOW GREEN COUNTY COUNCILLORS WILL CONTINUE TO SUPPORT LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND WORK TO PROTECT OUR SHARED ENVIRONMENT

✓ Fight back against the Government, big business and elite councillors dictating what they think is best for Essex. Essex people should have the major say in the future of their communities and their county. Greens believe in real Localism. Local Plans should be based on evidenced local needs, not targets imposed via Government prescription. Greens will support sustainable development that benefits the people of Essex with affordable housing for local people on town and small village sites and more local manufacturing, IT and other enterprises that help build sustainable local economies and reduce the need for commuting.

✓ Support genuine Localism. Green support strengthening ties with district, town or parish councils. Neighbourhood Plans developed by local communities should be supported and taken notice of by decision makers.

✓ The Devolution Deal for Essex has stalled. The Greens do not support a Mayor for Essex as recently proposed

- with centralised powers and a "Cabinet" made up of a small group of likely the same elite councillors that are currently making many key decisions.

✓ Strong protection for the countryside and the Metropolitan Green Belt. Development to be focused on brown-field sites, re-using empty offices and small scale village sites. No further major urban extensions into the countryside. Special protection for the jewels of Essex such as Hatfield Forest, the Essex coast and the river valleys.

✓ There is a need for specific protection for ancient woodlands which continue to suffer damage despite their importance. Work with partners to plant new woodlands both for habitat benefit and as working woods for economic benefit.

✓ Work with district councils to better protect Conservation Areas and complete local community heritage asset registers.

✓ Greens will work with the travelling community and resident community to avoid conflict and to help plan the required amount of sites.

✓ Switch investment away from more major new roads though the countryside of Essex towards giving people better travel choices. £ billions are needed to upgrade the railways and to make existing roads safer and to relieve villages of through traffic. Traffic reduction and road safety should be the priority, not expanding capacity for ever more cars, lorries and pollution. The Green Party will support upgrades to the railways and light rail or tram systems for the larger towns and commuter bus links on the main inter-urban routes and around main stations. The decline in rural bus services and school transport should be reversed.

✓ Specific public transport projects: Build a new rail link between Braintree and Stansted which will also improve north-south connections across the region. Provide a passing

loop on the Braintree branch line to increase capacity.

✓ The arrival of Crossrail will likely add to the need for rail improvements on lines that connect with Crossrail.

Greens will bring forward traffic calming proposals for more town centres to encourage walking and cycling. Greens will seek support for a programme of rural roadside footway extensions and off-road links with the aim of linking villages with safe routes for walkers. Funding for Highways Panels has been halved by the Conservatives – this funding should be restored to help deliver more local safety projects as well as devolution of minor highway work to parishes to speed up repairs.

✓ While the repair of potholes has improved in recent years, there is a long way to go, particularly on local roads. The ECC reporting system needs to be more user-friendly.

✓ Greens will continue to support disability access to make footways and paths and all buildings and services as accessible as possible and will support firm anti-discrimination policies.

No expansion of Stansted beyond 25 million passengers per annum. No second runway. Stansted Airport will still be a successful airport catering for the equivalent of half the population of England flying every year. That's large enough and avoids the further damage to the environment that further expansion would cause.

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✓ Recycling rates are stalling. Greens support further investment to help everyone recycle – and to get rates to at least 70% by 2020. Green County Councillors have strongly opposed, and will continue to oppose, reductions in recycling services such as the restrictions introduced at Recycling Centres by ECC in 2016. These cuts risk increasing fly-tipping which at cost to the district authorities and private landowners.

✓ The centralised waste plant model followed by ECC is flawed, as the Green Party said 2 decades ago. The alternative remains the development of a network of district-scale recycling plants to process materials and compost food waste, as well as support for re-use businesses. Markets for materials need to be encouraged. Green councillors will continue to oppose waste incineration. Incinerators pollute and waste precious resources. Incinerators hamper efforts to recycle because they have to be fed continually. The Greens have helped lead the battle to stop incinerators in Essex, despite Essex County Council's support for a plant at Rivenhall Airfield.

✓ Green Councillors will work with others to oppose further moves to pri-

vatised waste collections in Essex, which may be done in order to feed expensive waste factories and an incinerator at Rivenhall Airfield. Essex County Council must back local communities to recycle more, not bow to multinationals who see big profits in mashing up and burning waste – that could and should be recycled.

✓ Develop resource conservation and recycling strategies to minimise gravel extraction, resource loss and waste. The Essex Minerals Plan is unsustainable and concentrates around 60% of total extraction to post-2030 in one area in and near to the southern half of Braintree District.

✓ The Greens will continue to lead on the need to tackle climate change. Essex could lead the way in a green energy revolution including more offshore wind power and using existing areas of roofing (such as on industrial estates) for solar PV. All ECC new buildings, including schools, should incorporate renewables where it is physically possible to do so.

✓ Ideally, every new building in Essex should incorporate renewable on-site energy generation. This could include one or more of: solar PV, solar

hot water, air or ground source heat pumps, biomass boilers. Higher energy conservation standards should be encouraged in new and existing buildings - domestic, commercial and industrial. Other green design features should become routine – including grey water recycling, sustainable drainage and a full range of recycling storage facilities. However the ability of planning authorities (which here is mainly the B/C/D authorities) to deliver on this agenda is being undermined by changes that the Government is making to the planning system.

✓ Greens will continue to oppose fracking and new nuclear at Bradwell or anywhere else, will oppose nuclear dumps in Essex and will call for an end to FED discharges.



✓ Street lighting and other significant sources of light should be better controlled with a phased replacement to modern, low energy fully shielded designs. The Green Party supports the part-night lighting scheme operated by ECC, subject to local consultation as different areas may have different needs. There is a need to keep some key areas lit all night such as town centres and public transport facilities. Better quality lighting, on when it is needed and off or dimmed when not needed, could greatly reduce lighting energy demand, save money and reducing carbon emissions. It will also reduce light pollution. The people of Essex should be able to see the stars again (most currently can only see a fraction due to light pollution). The switch to white LED by ECC needs to be carefully monitored. White LED can be much more intrusive into people's bedrooms and is more harmful to nocturnal wildlife.

✓ Support moves towards less reliance on fixed curriculum teaching and testing – allow Headteachers more flexibility. Speed up improvements to school buildings to higher standards of comfort, space and energy conservation. Speed up phase-out of all remaining demountable classrooms. Greens will oppose moves to close village

schools, especially for property asset sales.

✓ 20 mph zones and Safer Journeys schemes will be supported for all schools in Essex. More needs to be done towards a major reduction in child traffic casualties. The cuts to School Transport should be reversed; Greens will support an integrated and fair school transport system to reduce the "school run" and give parents and pupils choice as to how they travel to school. School buses should have an adult supervisor as well as the driver.

✓ Greens will work for a GM free Essex and use land under the control of Essex County Council to grow more organic food, including for schools and other public organisations. There needs to be investment in more allotment land so that people can grow their own local food.

✓ Maintain and improve high quality adult education and apprentice learning in Essex as part of the "education for life" philosophy.

✓ Green Councillors will support improved Social Care. This is a complex and growing part of what county councils do with rising demand against



Pictured: Green campaigners in Westcliff

tighter budgets. Planning for an older population must be improved. There needs to be improved integration between health and social services to minimise avoidable health problems and accidents for elderly people.

✓ Greens will campaign to roll back the centralisation of health services. There needs to be more community non-acute units for local people, reducing the need to travel.

✓ Essex County Council reform has been successfully delivered by Green councillors working across party

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lines in areas such as abolishing "free meals" and opening up meetings to greater public participation. Next steps including webcasting all main meetings and making public consultations more meaningful and reflective of actual public responses. Green Councillors will work to strengthen links with communities, not alienate them. There needs to be an end to "tick box consultation". Consultation should mean just that.

✓ Green councillors will defend local services and work to maintain and improve facilities. Youth Services have been cut back hard under the Conservatives which is a false economy. Engaging young people, particularly in areas of deprivation will help support local communities more in the long term.

✓ Green Councillors will work to support Children's Centres and related services which have come under funding pressure in recent years.

✓ Library services have largely avoided cuts. Greens support continued investment and reform including more integration with other public information services ie "one stop shops".

✓ The Green Party will not operate a party whip over its councillors and

will work across party lines and with Independents where there is common ground.

✓ Greens will strongly oppose closure and sale for development of local fire stations.

✓ Green Councillors will continue to call for more local police and support officers working in communities to help prevent crime before it happens and to re-establish liaison between police, local communities and councils.

✓ Green Councillors will support a co-ordinated approach to improving animal welfare and rooting out animal cruelty.

✓ Greens will support an audit of ethical policies within Essex County Council, including pension investments and procurement. Greens support ethical spending and investments by councils.





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