

Essex County Council Elections Thursday June 4th 2009

Green Party

Manifesto



www.greenparty.org.uk

For **Essex**

Introduction

Essex is a great county. An historic county. Home to nearly 1½ million people it stretches from the edge of London in the west, to the Essex marshes in the east, from the rolling landscape of the Suffolk border in the north to the Thames estuary in the south. Essex is a county of contrasts. Southend and Finchingfield. Harwich and Harlow. All so different from each other and yet the identity of Essex is one of the strongest and best known in Britain. Essex is a county that says what it thinks and lives life to the full.

Situated near to London and the sea, change has always been embraced by Essex, but it is a county that has largely maintained its characteristic mix of town and country, where the town centre is never far from the truly rural.

But that character is under threat as never before in peace time.

The Government and the European Union view Essex as a front line county for their ambition to drive ever higher levels of growth in the south east of England. If the Government gets its way, within less than a generation, Essex will be significantly transformed into a more crowded, more polluted, more noisy and less pleasant place to live - its countryside damaged by urban sprawl and major new roads cutting across thousands of acres of farms and woodlands, its roads clogged with ever rising levels of traffic and its skies never free of the noise of jets.

The Government, via the East Of England Regional Assembly, wants Essex to take well over one hundred thousand more houses over the next decade. Huge growth areas along the Thames and M11 corridor are planned, with ever more houses in flood risk areas, despite the warnings. And no sooner is the ink dry on one plan, than a new one, this time to the year 2026, plans major growth in central Essex, with several “new towns” in open countryside and massive growth for Chelmsford and Colchester.

The Labour Government continues to push for a second runway at Stansted, despite falling passenger numbers and overwhelming opposition from local councils and communities . With a second runway, Stansted could become the largest airport on the planet. A second runway alone could mean hundreds of thousands of extra jets above our heads each year and tens of millions more car journeys each year - hugely increasing CO2 emissions from Essex. So much for Gordon Brown's claims about wanting to curb climate change. 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. Energy demand from Essex is rising year on year, mostly from burning fossil fuels in power stations outside the county. Yet Essex stands to be hit hard by climate change. Rising sea level will flood low lying coastal settlements and farmland. 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 will threaten river flooding in historic villages and towns.

The Government wants the Essex and east Coast ports to become ever larger, importing ever more manufactured goods from abroad, especially the far east. Even more HGVs will thunder through the county every day and the ports will spread further along the coasts, turning night into day for local residents and consuming the wildlife-rich Essex mudflats.

Some growth is good. Essex needs more affordable housing on appropriate sites, investment in renewable energy, recycling infrastructure and local manufacturing. But what the Government intends has nothing to do with local priorities. It is all about the imposition of the growth-at-all-costs policies on what they regard as a soft target. Essex County Council has, to its credit, opposed the most excessive of the growth proposals. But it did not oppose growth of Stansted beyond 25 million passengers per year. It is actively promoting major road building and widening, such as the A12 and the A120 and has made a major U-turn in deciding to support waste incineration, despite Lord Hanningfield's personal pledges not to do so.

There is a huge opportunity over the next few years to invest in Green jobs – building a sustainable future for Essex. The Green New Deal offers a way out of recession and towards a low carbon economy. On councils across the UK, Green Councillors are already promoting this vision – more recycling, local manufacturing, better public transport, free insulation for all homes that need it and a big expansion in energy efficiency and renewables.

The Green Party believes its time to fight back against both the failure of the establishment parties to deliver on the green agenda and their failure to uphold high standards in office. It is time to stand up for Essex and not be dictated to. If this is a democracy then Essex should be largely deciding its future, not the Government, not the EU and not distant regional bodies. And Essex County Council needs radical reform to make it more open to public scrutiny and more focussed on local needs, not its own self-publicity. Groups such as Stop Stansted Expansion have already shown how effective campaigning can be. But there also needs to be a more powerful political voice for Essex. The “main” parties have largely failed to slow the tide of unsustainable development heading for Essex and sometimes they have shown themselves all too ready to accept it. There is an urgent need for independently minded grass roots politicians who will truly represent the people of Essex.

On June 4th 2009, there will be Greens standing in 56 wards in Essex – that is 80% of the total, repeating the big slate of Greens that stood in 2005. There are full slates in Tendring, Colchester, Braintree, Maldon, Uttlesford, Chelmsford and Epping. The Greens are also standing almost as many female candidates as male across the county.

In 1999, the first Green Councillors were elected in Essex at District level. There are also many Greens sitting on Parish and Town councils. The Green vote is rising election by election in many places and nationally, over a million people voted Green at the European elections in June 2004. Greens are now elected to more councils than ever before and to the Greater London Assembly, the Scottish Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the European Parliament.

Because of the large size of county council divisions, winning seats for the Greens at this level has in the past been hard. But that is changing. The Greens vote is building and the Greens are now in a position to mount strong challenges in Essex, such as in Braintree District and Colchester Borough.

Green Priorities for Essex

- **Fight back against this Government, or any Government, dictating what they think is best for Essex. Essex people should have the major say in the future of their county.**
- **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 massive damage to the environment that further expansion would cause. At the national and EU level, aviation fuel should be taxed like all other fuels to create a level playing field in transportation.**
- **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.**
- **Strong protection for the countryside. Development to be focused on brownfield sites 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.**
- **Total opposition to 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 so far successful battle to stop incinerators in Essex, despite Essex County Council's behind-the-scenes efforts to get one built. Recycling rates are rising strongly thanks to the support of residents for new collection schemes. Greens support further investment to help everyone recycle – to get rates to at least 70% within the next decade. Local scale, not industrial factory scale, recycling plants are needed to help process materials. Markets for materials need to be encouraged.**
- **Green Councillors will work with others to strongly oppose moves to privatise waste collections in Essex, which may be done in order to feed expensive waste factories and an incinerator at Rivenhall Airfield under a PFI scheme. Tory 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.**
- **Switch investment away from ever more major 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 should be the priority, not expanding capacity for ever more cars, lorries and pollution. The Green Party will support light rail or tram systems for the larger towns and modern rapid commuter bus links on the main inter-urban routes.**

- **Greens will bring forward traffic calming proposals for more town centres to encourage walking and cycling. Greens will start a programme of rural roadside footway extensions with the aim of linking villages with safe routes for walkers. Greens will work with parishes to improve winter gritting of main pedestrian routes and areas, not just roads.**
- **Headline Green transport priorities (to be taken forward with other authorities and bodies where appropriate):**
 - ◆ **Scrap the plans to widen the A12, M11 and M25.**
 - ◆ **Redevelop the A120 east of Braintree on-line but with bypassed section to relieve villages. Greens will strongly oppose the Highways Agency “southern route” and any other off-line route through the countryside**
 - ◆ **Prioritise safety over speed on the roads – rural road speed limits need to be reduced from the current 60mph**
 - ◆ **Upgrade the main railway lines into London**
 - ◆ **Invest more in rural bus services**
 - ◆ **Provide a passing loop on the Braintree branch line to increase capacity**
 - ◆ **Build a new rail link between Braintree and Stansted which will also improve north-south connections across the region**
 - ◆ **Investigate light rail or tram system for the larger towns**
 - ◆ **Develop commuter coach links on urban connecting routes and light bus links for villages near mainline stations**
- **A Green energy revolution for Essex. Support for windpower on appropriate sites, especially offshore (subject to wildlife audits and safety). Following decommissioning, Greens will support Bradwell Nuclear power station becoming a renewable power plant. Total opposition to any new nuclear build at Bradwell or anywhere else. No nuclear dumps in Essex.**
- **Every new building in Essex expected to 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 to 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.**
- **All street lighting and other significant sources of light to have a phased replacement to modern, fully shielded designs with controlled systems. The Green party supports the midnight switch-off of streetlights, subject to local consultation and the need to keep some key areas lit all night such as town centres and major public transport facilities. These policies will provide better quality lighting, when it is needed and greatly reduce lighting energy demand and hence carbon emissions. It will also reduce the “orange fog” that hangs over Essex every night - 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).**
- **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. 20 MPH zones and Safer Journeys schemes for ALL schools in Essex. Work towards major reduction in child traffic casualties. Develop 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. Improve school dinners with more organic food and fresh food and fruit.**

- **Maintain high quality adult education in Essex as part of the “education for life” philosophy.**
- **The Greens will oppose moves to close and merge schools, especially for property asset sales.**
- **The Greens will work with other parties to oppose Lord Hanningfield's mass privatisation plans for services. Vital public services and jobs need to stay public.**
- **Essex County Council can seem remote from ordinary people. It has cut school transport and is pressing on with plans for huge waste factories and an incinerator in the county despite massive public opposition (over 20,000 people responded to the Essex Waste Plan opposing waste burning). The Council granted consent for a waste incineration plant at Rivenhall Airfield in April 2009 despite receiving over 800 objections, but just 1 letter of support. Tory Councillors voted the plan through and the Tory Chair voted twice. Members of the public who wanted to attend the meeting were prevented from getting in. Objectors were not written to to tell them when the meeting was taken place. Only 3 people were allowed to speak against the plan (and normally its just 1 or 2). These sort of outdated practices must cease and the Council must open up to more public involvement. Thankfully, due to a concerted community campaign, there is to be a planning inquiry into the incinerator plans.**
- **Green Councillors will work to strengthen links with communities, not alienate them.**
- **Council tax levels should meet the priorities of Essex people. If investment is needed and Essex people support it, local priorities should come first. Ever more cuts in public services hit the poor and vulnerable hardest. In the longer term the Green Party would replace Council Tax with a fairer system based on the ability to pay.**
- **The Green Party will not operate a party whip over its councillors.**
- **The Greens work with others to raise standards in Social Services and Children’s Services. There needs to be better integration with NHS services, particularly for continuing care for the elderly.**
- **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.**
- **Green Councillors will work to improve provision for elderly care, both residential and at home. This is a vital area given the aging population. Planning for an older population must be improved. Greens will support state funded care for elderly in residential homes. There needs to be improved integration with health and social services to minimise avoidable health problems and accidents for elderly people. Greens support a big improvement in pensions and encouraging choice for active elderly participation in society, including employment.**

- Greens oppose further privatisation in public services, especially expensive PFI schemes that cost the taxpayer far more than equivalent public funded projects and unfairly benefit shareholders of private companies at public expense.
- Greens support disability access to make all buildings and services as accessible as possible.
- Greens support firm anti-discrimination policies.
- 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 healthy local food.
- Green Councillors will work to improve library services. There needs to be improved integration with other public information services ie “one stop shops”.
- Greens will strongly oppose closure of local fire stations.
- Greens will oppose more development on sports fields.
- Greens will support better youth activities to help cut anti-social behaviour.
- Greens will support further development of Childrens Centres on suitable sites.
- Greens will support sustainable tourism.
- Green Councillors will build on the ongoing work to get more local police and support officers on the beat to help prevent crime before it happens and further improve liaison between police and local communities and councils.
- Greens will work with the travelling community and resident community to avoid conflict and provide more, maintained and legal sites.
- Green Councillors will help to develop co-ordinated approach to improving animal welfare and rooting out animal cruelty.
- Greens will call for 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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Printed by: Essex Green Party Waterfall Cottages, Park Road, Rivenhall. Witham. Essex. CM8 3PR

Published by: County Agent P. Hughes 163 Honysuckle Road. Witham. CM8 2YD on behalf of all Green Party candidates for Essex