

A fairer **Cambridge** **for you**



Cambridge Labour Party manifesto April 2006

Cambridge is a city with much to offer to its own citizens and to the wider world. That is why the Labour government is investing in its growth. A dynamic and prosperous economy brings jobs for all. Excellent hospitals make a significant contribution to people's health. A green and pleasant local environment, leisure facilities and open spaces all make people want to live here.

But these benefits are not shared equally by all.

- Jobs in the city outstrip the supply of housing,
- The pay packets of those who provide the services on which the city's economy depends do not match the prices they need to pay to live here. Average wages in Cambridge rose by less than 4% 2004-5 (£24m440-£25077) while city house prices increased by more than 10% 2004-5 (£220,163-£242,857)
- Between 2003 and 2005, annual sales of homes in Cambridge dropped by 409, and increasing numbers of working families who live in Cambridge now ask: 'But where will our children live?'; and severe stress becomes part of many people's lives.
- Many commute into Cambridge because they cannot afford to live here; and the rush hour traffic that results renders the transport system a nightmare.

So Cambridge is a comfortable city for the well-off. But it is a two-speed city. Its prosperity depends hugely on those on less than average earnings, who clean, feed, clothe, house, teach, nurse and police the city. Too many of these valuable and hard working people are excluded, by poverty or distance, from the benefits which the city might offer. **Lib Dem councillors appear content to ignore these individuals, and their families and communities, which most need support.**

Labour believes in a Cambridge which is more inclusive and united, to which all contribute, from which all can benefit, and of which all can be proud. To help achieve this, Labour councillors will challenge the most powerful, and seek to give the least powerful equal access to the benefits that the city has to offer.

Labour aims to make Cambridge:

- Fairer
- More affordable
- More accessible
- Safer

A Labour City Council would be:

- Less wasteful
- More accountable

Whether in control of the Council or in opposition, Labour will ensure that democratic debate continues, and that voices too often ignored by Lib Dem councillors are heard.

To make Cambridge fairer

Fairness will become a key objective of a Labour City Council

Cambridge City Council must provide equal employment opportunities for all:

- Although the Council was recently commended for lesbian and gay employment, its record in respect of other minorities is poor, as figures show

	Cambridge working population	City Council employ	City Council target (2009)	Employed at Higher grades (Grade 7+)	Target Higher grades (2009)
Black and Minority Ethnic	11.29	5.11%	5.3%	0%	4.3%
Disabled people	10.7	1.58%	2.6%	0.08%	2.0%

- Labour believes a Council which is an equal opportunities employer should at least meet statistical norms of its own community; and regards its failure to meet such unambitious targets as unacceptable
- Lib Dem councillors have made no provision for meeting these targets in the future. When Labour proposed a council budget amendment to retain a member of staff whose job it was to get the Council to meet improvement targets, Lib Dem councillors defeated it.

For children and families:

- The Labour government has undertaken to eliminate child poverty in Britain by 2020, and when it narrowly missed interim 2005 targets promised to increase efforts to achieve this.
- In Cambridge, recorded child poverty dropped between 2000-2004 by 15% (16.4% to 13.9%) thanks to rising prosperity and action by the Labour government.
- But poverty exists in Cambridge. It varies widely with extremes of 31% of the child population in Abbey living in poverty and only 1% in Newnham.
- To address these inequalities, the Labour government has funded Sure Start schemes at Abbey Meadows and in Kings Hedges to try help young families get a fair start in life.
- These are now expanding into Children's Centres, more of which will open shortly in East Chesterton, Romsey and Trumpington



Sure Start - addressing inequalities.

For older people:

- The Labour government has paid for all local authorities to introduce free bus passes for all pensioners and disabled people to use after 9.30am, from 1 April.
- Labour councillors believe all local authorities throughout Cambridgeshire should provide this facility, but because some neighbouring councils will not meet their obligations, some charges will continue for journeys outside Cambridge.
- Some Lib Dem councillors have sought to find fault with universal pensioner entitlement to this scheme.
- The Labour government has made age discrimination illegal from October 2005 and Labour councillors want the city council to change its own employment practices to conform to the new age discrimination laws.
- Labour proposed a budget amendment to grant £17,000 to Age Concern to help organize activities for older people in the Centre. This was defeated by Lib Dem councillors

Free bus passes for the over 60s.



For disabled people:

- The Labour government is implementing the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), which is transforming buildings and services to make them accessible to disabled people,
- The Disability Panel in Cambridge is challenging developers to adhere to the DDA
- Yet over 70% of the Council's own buildings, including the Guildhall, are still not fully accessible to disabled people.

For those least able to pay:

- A Labour 2006 council budget amendment proposed two free collections of bulk waste items per year for the elderly, for those on benefits, for the disabled and for those on low incomes. Lib Dem councillors defeated this proposal.
- Current Lib Dem-set charges penalise those who rely on the Council to collect their bulk waste because of age or infirmity, or who lack their own transport to take materials to waste disposal sites.
- But a Labour council would charge £35 for car dumping, an activity which the Council currently subsidizes by charging nothing for cars' removal.

For local communities in Cambridge

- The City Council currently invests disproportionately in environmental improvements in the wealthier areas of Cambridge
- Labour wants a fairer distribution system, with investment based on population figures.
- This would increase investment in the most deprived areas in the north and east of the city, and decrease it in the more prosperous south and west.

To make Cambridge more affordable

A Labour council will:

- support growth which is sustainable and which increases the availability of social houses for rent
- increase the proportion of social rented homes available
- use the planning system to secure community benefits
- build 100% affordable houses on council owned land
- bring pressure to bear on poor landlords
- insist on the Council's obligation to honour the tenants' vote to stay in council ownership, particularly in respect of sheltered accommodation

Labour councillors understand that the greatest contributor to unfairness in Cambridge is the lack of social housing for rent, and of homes for sale, at prices working people can afford. Cambridge has some of the highest average property prices, and the gap between house prices and average wages continues to grow.

Labour will support growth to increase the supply of social housing for rent and for sale at affordable prices and for which viable transport infrastructure can be provided.

- Labour believes the city is vulnerable to predatory developers who are able to hoard land until they choose to develop it, and then 'sell to let' at inflated prices. Their primary concern is profit, rather than council priorities or the well-being of the Cambridge community.. For example:
 - The Belvedere development on Hills Rd, includes a home marketed at £1.5 million. This was given planning permission despite making no contribution to meeting social housing need in the area.
 - Ashwell want to build around the station area presumably for rent to London commuters, at double the density proposed in guidelines drawn up by the council.
- Rates of home construction lag far behind what is needed; and sites currently identified for growth, for example at the Sewage Works and Marshall airport, will not soon, and may never, be developed.
- Labour supports the City Council's current policy to 'maximise the supply of social housing' but:
 - Lib Dem councillors have failed to require 100% social housing on its own land at Clay Farm, or to debate this issue in public.
 - Only 16.2% of homes built in the Cambridge sub-region since 1999 have been social housing.
 - Completion rates of social housing are still only half of what they need to be if Cambridge is to house those who want to both live and work here

Affordable housing matters



- Labour believes
 - additional social housing is greatly preferable to money contributions from developers.
 - the Council must secure greater social benefit from development, with improved transport, the highest possible percentage of social housing, and additional benefits of open space and community facilities;
 - the Council should spend money it secures in planning agreements promptly in the interests of those communities who suffer the consequences of development.

Labour believes the Lib Dem administration is putting too little effort into identifying and bringing forward sites for development

- Sites are being brought forward too slowly, with development figures for the city 1999-2005 nearly 30% below what was planned.
- At the time of the last Local Plan in the 1990s, Labour had already proposed that new homes which were easily accessed by public transport should be built at Clay Farm and on other sites south of Long Road and close to Addenbrookes hospital. Lib Dem councillors who blocked development of this and other sites in the southern fringe, have now accepted Labour's view
- But Labour believes proposals for housing development should consider the full impact of what is proposed. For example proposals to develop on the airport site appear to ignore transport constraints. At a more local level, the unpopular proposal to demolish 84 well-used garages in St Matthew's St. would make little contribution to meeting housing need, but would put more cars on crowded streets, and build a mere 7 homes on the site should take account of putting more cars on the streets.
- A Labour budget amendment proposed to appoint additional staff to bring forward sites for housing development. This was turned down by the Lib Dem majority.



St Matthews Street Garages – an unpopular site for more housing.

Labour wants the City Council to meet tenants' aspirations better

- Tenants 'satisfaction with the participation the City Council offers' stands at only 50%, (40% amongst black and ethnic minorities) and is amongst the lowest in the country.
- The Labour government recently asked all local authorities to introduce fairer schemes for letting homes, which give tenants more choice, and Labour councillors welcome the City Council's decision to adopt 'choice-based lettings' policy which gives potential tenants greater choice.
- The Labour government has also imposed a duty on all local authorities to license Houses in Multiple occupancy.
- 68% of houses in multiple occupancy in Cambridge in the most recent survey were not of an acceptable standard. Labour councillors proposed a budget amendment in 2005 to fund a Landlord Accreditation Scheme which would protect tenants by supporting good landlords and putting pressure on those offering sub-standard rented accommodation in the city. Lib Dem councillors turned this down, but have now agreed to set up a scheme which a number of major landlords are proposing to join

Labour believes the council must honour its 2004 pledge to respect the 79% vote of tenants to stay in council ownership and management of their homes

Lib Dem councillors now propose to sell off some sheltered housing schemes such as Tiverton House. Labour believes the sheltered housing provides homes for those who are most vulnerable and most need Council support, and the Council should retain ownership of sheltered schemes.

Labour believes the Lib Dem housing record in Cambridge has been poor. They have failed

- **To meet the major challenge to build 50% affordable housing – with only 16.2% achieved since 1999**
- **to secure community benefit from sites, or to spend what money has accrued – with spending levels at only 50% of income generated**
- **to reflect adequately the needs and aspirations of tenants in either public or private sector**
- **to live up to their promise to retain sheltered housing within its own stock**

To make Cambridge safer

A Labour council will

- Increase contact and collaboration between police, public and council
- Welcome and support police proposals to consult fully and meaningfully with local communities
- Support measures, including introduction of Designated Public Places powers and other suitable strategies, to reduce street drinking in Cambridge
- Fund CCTV camera coverage of public open spaces which experience high levels of violent or anti-social behaviour, and lighting of paths and stairwells on council estates
- Honour the Council's policy obligation to make a Temporary Traveller site available in Cambridge in line with government policy



Crime in Cambridge is low, and falling. Most Cambridge people consider themselves safer now than in the past, thanks to increased police effort and focus on community policing

Labour councillors support Labour government proposals for more collaboration between police and councils and local people, and pay particular tribute to local police for having made significant contributions, through:

- The E-cops project was set up by the Community Beat Manager in East Chesterton to share information with the local community there, and is now 'rolling out' across the city.
- The APEC (Abbey, Petersfield, East Chesterton) Project brought a tight police concentration on establishing priorities with local communities in those high crime areas. Both of these initiatives have been tremendously successful in securing community confidence and support.

But collaboration is a two-way process in which Lib Dem city councillors are reluctant to participate. This reluctance seems motivated by a wish to oppose the government

- Leading Lib Dem councillors are on record as saying they 'do not trust' the police, and have offended both police and local communities by refusing to engage with issues of public drinking which have given grounds for concern in some areas.
- Only under pressure from Labour members have Lib Dem councillors permitted use of Section 30 powers to disperse drinkers (allowing them to be 'moved on')
- Lib Dem councillors refused to give the police Designated Public Places powers to confiscate drink in troubled areas like Mill Road and on Christ's Pieces, thus setting themselves apart from more than a hundred other local authorities in the country, some with Lib Dem administrations, who have given police DPPO powers..

- When police have offered to attend Area Committee meetings, the role that the council has offered them is insultingly small, when for many local communities policing issues can be the most important agenda item.

Begging, and public drinking and associated anti-social behaviour have been, and in some parts of the city continue to be, a major cause of concern, to which the police have to respond. But under Lib Dem control the City Council has often hindered rather than helped.

- The police cannot continue indefinitely to rely on 6-monthly Council renewals of Section 30 dispersal powers which are not designed to deal with street drinking
- Lib Dem councillors should agree to give police powers to confiscate drink by Designated Public Places Orders, which work well in many other communities, including those with Lib Dem-controlled councils

The City Council's CCTV service can make a major contribution to community safety

- In the 90s under Labour control the City Council introduced CCTV into Cambridge. Under Labour pressure, the City Council has increased investment in CCTV cameras, and can now respond to all reasonable requests from local communities for mobile cameras. Labour councillors will track applications to ensure speedy camera provision.
- This year Labour proposed a budget amendment to introduce fixed cameras on two sites – Parker's Piece and Christ's Pieces – which have recently seen a number of violent incidents. Lib Dem councillors responded by finding money for these cameras, from the Community Safety budget which will meet the immediate need but will reduce the money available for other projects to which that money was previously allocated

Labour proposed a budget amendment to spend £30,000 to restore and upgrade lighting on the council's estates, on footpaths and in stairwells. But Lib Dem

councillors are keener to spend in the city centre than out in the estates where the council is landlord; so they failed to support Labour's proposal.

Labour persuaded the Council of its duty to create a Temporary Stopping Site (TSS) for Travellers, which would give police the powers of immediate transfer from illegal sites in the city to the TSS. But:

- Having accepted the principle of a TSS, Lib Dem councillors have 'blackballed' individual sites without testing them against alternatives – apparently for party political reasons.
- Such practice makes the Council's policy commitment to a TSS worthless
- Travellers whose legitimate needs are not met are likely to continue to invade public and private open space illegally

To make Cambridge more accessible

Accessibility is of fundamental importance to life in Cambridge. A Labour council will 'put transport first' in judging the merits of any proposals for development.

This means:

- Transport issues must be fully addressed before development can be approved, at Marshall airport and elsewhere
- Developments whose transport needs cannot be met should not be permitted
- Public transport must play the most significant part in the growth of Cambridge, and this should include rail as well as bus
- Some element of transport demand management must be introduced if Cambridge is to sustain its prosperity
- Cambridge must have a properly developed transport interchange system
- Cambridge people should be able to use open spaces for free

Growth and the accessibility problem

- The City Councils own research shows that traffic congestion is the issue of greatest concern to local people.

City Council policies and decisions impact on the transport network in many ways: most dramatically when sites are brought forward for development under the planning system.

- **Labour believes**
 - **Congestion in city streets must be halted and substantially reduced if Cambridge is to retain its dynamic economy**
 - **the Lib Dem City Council has lacked the courage to challenge developers**
 - **an even bigger challenge faces Cambridge in the immediate future, with proposals in the new Draft Local Plan to build 14,000 homes on Marshall's airport**



Labour say "Hands off Marshalls"!

Labour believes the proposals for the airport development are fundamentally flawed.

- Because Lib Dems represent few areas in the east of the city, development on the airport offered the least politically damaging option for them, and a deal with the Tory County Council proved mutually convenient. The transport implications of this deal are only now the subject of a detailed study, which Labour has sought for 5 years, but which will only be published in July (ie conveniently after the local elections in May).
- Some details have been made available already. The County Council has revealed that development of the East Cambridge airport site as proposed would generate 125,000 individual trips per day in and out of the site. Some demand will be met by cycling and

walking, but the majority will travel by bus. At rush hour this would be likely to require 120 additional full 75 seat-buses per hour travelling one way on each of three routes from the development into Cambridge city centre.

Labour believes such an outcome would be unacceptable.

- It would bring gridlock to the city
- This would put at risk its economic vitality, because businesses will not stay when mobility becomes impossible.
- It puts undue pressure on Marshall to move out of the city, which would thereby lose one of its few major employers of skilled labour.



Traffic on Newmarket Rd

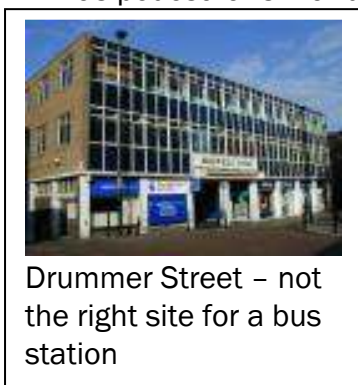


Traffic on Coldhams Lane

- More immediately it threatens the quality of people's lives around those key transport routes in the east of the city: Newmarket Rd, Mill Road and Cherry Hinton Road).
- Yet development of Cambridge East to this scale remains the only option on the table for meeting the bulk of Cambridge's housing shortage. And because neither Lib Dem nor Tory councillors are willing to consider alternative major development sites, it is likely that both councils will seek to skew the results of the detailed study now being carried out to test the viability of the proposals in transport terms.

Labour wants major expansion of public transport, which is essential to a sustainable and economically successful future for Cambridge. This should include:

- **Increased bus use**, preferably provided by other companies besides Stagecoach, whose current near-monopoly distorts whatever virtues free market competition can bring
- **Major improvements to mainline rail services, because rail remains an under-developed transport mode in our area, and improvements are essential to rail links with potential development sites** such as Waterbeach, which could address both transport and housing needs of the Cambridge sub-region
- **A proper transport Interchange at Cambridge station**
 - The site is accessible for trains, buses, cycles, coaches, private cars and taxis, as well as pedestrians – and even the guided bus if and when that happens.



Drummer Street – not the right site for a bus station

- Recent proposals by Ashwell for development of the Station Rd area appear to propose such a scheme; but fail to balance transport and housing development needs.
- Neither Drummer St nor Parkside is a sustainable site for a city bus station.
- **Any development of the station should also involve additional platforms on the east side of the tracks**

- **Demand management measures** (such as road pricing or workplace parking levies) could pay for increased public transport. Such measures are supported by the Labour government but currently opposed by the Tory County Council.

Labour will continue to oppose loss of commons and open spaces to new transport routes.

- Independent research by Cambridge Futures suggests that additional roads including orbital routes and roads across common land, would be necessary to accommodate current growth proposals.
- The government has agreed to support the guided bus proposals financially, Labour councillors know the technology is untested, and believe its impact on the city is unpredictable, but is likely to be particularly harmful to transport routes and local communities close the city centre.
- A proposal for the guided bus route across Coldham's Common, first made in the Cambridge and Huntingdon multi-modal study (CHUMMS) has recently re-surfaced. This might reduce impact on the city centre, Milton Rd and Histon Rd, but the loss of common open space involved would be unacceptable.

Labour wants the City Council to maximise access of Cambridge people to open spaces and recreational facilities

- Local people should not be charged for organizing activities for their local communities on open spaces, which the Council owns and manages on behalf of those communities, which cost the Council nothing. Labour councillors proposed a budget amendment which would have allowed those groups free access to commons and open spaces. Lib Dem councillors turned this down
- Labour will seek to keep the Howard Mallet building and site in Sturton St site in recreational use. Labour councillors proposed a budget amendment to buy the site which was not accepted by Lib Dem councillors.

The City Council Itself Is not sufficiently accessible.

- The Council's own research showed high levels of resident dissatisfaction with difficulties they faced in trying to contact the Council, not just because of transport difficulties, but because of opening hours, or being passed on to different departments, or not reaching the right officers on the phone.
- Labour welcomes a council decision to review access to its services in the coming year.
- **But Labour councillors will oppose cuts in face-to face contact available to local people, who must be able to make direct contact easily with both officers and elected councillors. Not everyone has e-mail or internet access.**

To make Cambridge City Council less wasteful

A Labour council will:

- reduce waste of council resources
- manage the council's own waste collection service better

Local people believe the City Council wastes resources.

- The council collects a lower percentage of Council Tax, and non-domestic (ie commercial) rates than other councils in Britain
- The council has a poor record in reclaiming overpaid benefits
- £52,000 per annum is wasted making planning decisions in Area Committees
- Area Committees currently cost over £150 per individual resident attending, which is



Money wasted on the disabled ramp that was too steep for wheelchair users to climb!

- poor value for money
- More than £10,000 was spent on building a ramp into council offices in 2005 which had to be entirely relaid
- Installation of pee-pods in central Cambridge at a cost of £14,000, without a proper cost-benefit assessment, indulges male incontinence and ignores accessibility of toilet facilities in late-night licensed premises.
- Waste management budgets are steadily inflated, resources are shifted as problems come to light, and costs rose by 15% in each of the last two years

Labour in Cambridge has always supported waste recycling.

- Labour councillors introduced green waste collection in Cambridge in the early 1990s.
- By 1998 under Labour Cambridge had achieved 13% recycling figures, which the Council only achieved again under Lib Dem control in 2003
- Green bins remain the biggest and most effective part of the council's recycling programme.

Lib Dem councillors changed waste management arrangements in October 2005,

supposedly in response to government recycling targets which the council has barely met.

- They decided to invest over £500,000 annually in door-to-door plastic recycling methods when other methods of recycling would increase tonnage more
- The change reduced collection services from weekly to fortnightly yet now costs 15% more than was previously the case



Lib Dem councillors circulated an excessively detailed 'consultation' document which:

- assumed that 'one size fits all' in waste collection;
- failed to recognize the different needs of different areas and types of housing;
- failed to offer or cost a weekly collection alternative.

The system which was then imposed had widespread harmful side-effects

- Many residents had difficulty in conforming to a fortnightly cycle.
- Residential areas show the consequences, with streets full of overflowing bins.
- The Council has refused to collect side waste, and rubbish from bins that are too full to close.
- The Council has failed to support or meet the needs of residents who lack side alleys and storage space for waste receptacles.
- Council Rangers have been removed from normal duties to become full time 'waste enforcement officers', delivering bins which the council has failed to provide, and threatening prosecution for bins left on streets.
- Relationships between local residents and Rangers and local residents have been damaged

The Lib Dems' Executive Member responsible for waste management has now resigned, leaving behind a poor value-for money waste collection service which has :

- been reduced to a fortnightly service;
- increased in cost to each Cambridge Council Tax payer 203-2005 from 38.35% to 49.94p - an increase in 30.2%.
- increased total costs by £1.5 million year-on-year over the last 5 years;
- barely kept pace with government recycling targets.

A Labour council would:

- recycle more material, more conveniently to residents, at less cost;
- introduce two free collections of bulk waste items per year for the elderly, for those on benefits, for the disabled and for those on low incomes.

To make Cambridge City Council more accountable

'Accessibility' has a wider meaning than when applied to the Council. It means ensuring that those with power can be held easily and publicly to account. A Labour council will:

- Increase accountability of Executive members by rigorously separating the Council's Executive and Scrutiny functions
- Enable opposition members to scrutinise the action of Executive councillors in the spirit of the Local Government Act.
- Get rid of superfluous and costly committee meetings
- Allow Area Committees to focus on the needs and interests of local people, and improve the quality of planning decisions, by returning planning decisions to a central committee
- Improve Council consultation with local communities, tenants police and other stakeholders and partners



Labour councillors believe the City Council is well served by conscientious and competent officers, but is being let down by second-rate political leadership. Lib Dem councillors have become a single-party elective oligarchy, increasingly inaccessible, and expert at evading public accountability, while consolidating power around themselves.

- Lib Dem councillors have guillotined debate in full council meetings on contentious issues: free bus passes, waste management

arrangements, and building social housing on council land. Since only votes in full council can overturn decisions made by Lib Dem Executive members, refusal to debate seals the tight control exercised by the ruling Lib Dem group and prevents other voices from influencing votes in the council chamber

- In 2000 the Labour government changed the way councils make decisions. Lib Dem councillors resisted this, and chose to keep as much of the previous system (which had Labour introduced and they opposed) as they could. So Cambridge City Council kept 5 'scrutiny' committees, which fail to exercise proper scrutiny, but keep members tied up in Guildhall meetings at great cost to council tax payers. These committees have no powers, but hold meaningless votes to put a democratic gloss on decisions already made in private Lib Dem group meetings.
- All Executive members (whose decisions are not governed by votes) and Chairs of Committees (who are supposed to be independent and to scrutinise Executive members) are drawn exclusively from the ruling (Lib Dem) group, so are subject to Lib Dem party whips. This conflicts with the spirit of the law on Scrutiny, which is supposed to be independent.
- The Council's scrutiny of decisions was recently described by independent inspectors as 'under-developed'. But no improvement has followed.

Labour believes that control of the Council by one party has led to poor consultation and poor decisions.

- 50% of tenants are dissatisfied with the opportunities the Council offers them for participation
- Lib Dem 'consultation' on waste management was flawed. It gave local people no choice of retaining a weekly collection service which many wanted, but offered five almost identical (and more expensive) recycling options.
- Lib Dem councillors have refused to publish results of consultation on tenants' aeries
- A Lib Dem promise to 'consult with local people' on planning proposals and the community benefit which might be sought from them, has not yet been honoured
- Lib Dem councillors overturned proposals by an independent panel on allowances paid to members, in favour of additional payment to their own senior executive members.
- politically inconvenient options for temporary sites for travellers have been arbitrarily dropped

Labour believes that Area Committee meetings should enable local people to influence council business (as did Labour's Neighbourhood Community Planning meetings before 2000). But current Lib Dem practice:

- gives too much control to councillors, and too little to the local communities they should represent;
- meetings are so poorly attended that every individual attendance costs the Council over £150 (much more expensive, and much less entertaining, than a seat at any of Cambridge's theatres or concert hall !);
- is an expensive (£52,000 annually) and exclusive tag-on to the planning system which is likely to produce poorer quality planning decisions;
- focusses too heavily on the special interests of a few local residents in minor planning applications, and on the public exercise of power by councillors.

A majority of councillors across all parties consulted recently agreed with Labour's view that all planning decisions should be taken by the central Planning Committee whose independence and competence are more assured, rather by Area Committees. But the Lib Dem Council Leader made an arbitrary executive decision to retain the present system.

Accountability and Scrutiny

- Proper accountability requires effective scrutiny of actions of Executive members.
- To be effective, scrutiny must be vigilant, well-informed and principled, but above all robustly independent of the Executive.
- Since Lib Dem councillors meet Executive members in private party meetings, they are by definition unable to exercise robustly independent scrutiny themselves. Scrutiny therefore becomes the responsibility of opposition members.

Labour councillors relish this challenge. But only if Labour has enough councillors to win votes in the Council chamber, can we scrutinize Executive decisions effectively. And only voters at the ballot box can make that happen.