

**LABOUR
EAST HERTS
MANIFESTO
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Contents

Introduction.....	3
The future of East Hertfordshire Council - Tory Austerity	3
Outsourcing of Services.....	3
Labour in East Herts will:.....	4
Exploring Alternative Economic Models	5
Labour in East Herts will:.....	5
Sustainable, Vibrant Communities.....	6
Labour in East Herts will:.....	6
Housing and Infrastructure	8
Development of “Locally Affordable” Housing.....	8
Labour in East Herts will:.....	9
Public Health.....	11
Labour in East Herts will:.....	11
A Safe, Clean and Green Environment	12
Labour in East Herts will:.....	12
APPENDICES	14
Appendix 1: Shared ownership	14
Appendix 2: Social housing	14
Appendix 3: Cooperative housing	14

Introduction

The future of East Hertfordshire Council - Tory Austerity

- 1.0 The Tory government's austerity drive has caused an unprecedented crisis in council funding. **By 2020, councils will have lost 77% of their core funding, which comes from central government**, and many will receive no money at all from the government. There is a huge risk that many more councils will find themselves tipping over the edge into what is effectively bankruptcy as has happened in Northamptonshire.
- 1.1 The result of these cuts is clear at all levels; there are food banks in virtually every town, libraries closing, a huge increase in homelessness. Many councils have been forced to sell off buildings and properties - between 2014 and July 2018, more than 12,000 publicly owned assets have been offloaded by local councils.
- 1.2 Increasingly, the only source of revenue income for East Hertfordshire Council will be council tax, business rates, and income from fees and charges. **This means the deep cuts we have already seen will continue and East Herts will be forced to make further reductions to their budget, and further reductions in services or increases in service charges.** Hard choices will have to be made on how to fund frontline services.

Saving Money by Bringing Services Back Inhouse

- 1.3 Against this background of falling income and increasing demand for services, the council's current policy is to outsource as many services as possible to private companies (privatisation) – a policy which leads them to take risks they do not fully understand to sustain services, and which currently receive no scrutiny given the lack of effective political opposition on the council.
- 1.4 It does not take much to realise that these private companies cannot deliver any better services on reduced funding than the council can itself, as they must make money for their shareholders out of the cost of delivering those services.
- 1.5 **Labour in East Herts will seek to bring as many outsourced services back in house as possible in order to achieve better value for money**, following the example of Labour-run Harlow Council which is saving millions of pounds in this way. We will focus on those services where the contract is coming to an end or can be broken without cost to the council taxpayer. **We can then focus on delivering real value for money without cutting services or wages.** Where outsourcing is adjudged best value for money, we will push for local companies to be prioritised in order to keep council tax locally spent. We will do this alongside a major role for residents through budget challenge where local people directly decide their priorities for funding.
- 1.6 Labour supports the principle of councillors allowances to enable fair representation from the less well-off in society who might not be able to commit their unpaid time to such a level otherwise; however we will seek to freeze these allowances for the full four year term in order to save money.

1.7 **Labour opposes the exploitation of anyone through modern slavery.** Today slavery is less about people literally owning other people – although that still exists – but more about being exploited and completely controlled by someone else, without being able to leave. Someone is in slavery if they are:

- forced to work – through coercion, or mental or physical threat
- owned or controlled by an 'employer', through mental or physical abuse or the threat of abuse
- dehumanized, treated as a commodity or bought and sold as 'property'
- physically constrained or have restrictions placed on their freedom of movement.

Labour in East Herts will:

- ✓ **Seek to bring service delivery back in-house where this achieves best value for money**
- ✓ Introduce participatory budgeting, allowing local people to decide their budget priorities
- ✓ Challenge and hold to account the council at all stages
- ✓ Improve transparency and accountability by involving the public in decisions
- ✓ Oppose the sale of council buildings and property
- ✓ Freeze councillors allowances for the full four years
- ✓ Adopt the Modern Slavery Charter committing East Herts council to proactively vet their supply chains to ensure no instances of modern slavery are taking place.

Exploring Alternative Economic Models

- 2.0 As business rates will become the council's main source of funding along with council tax, it is essential that East Herts does what it can to support local businesses and employment. Labour will seek to learn from the co-operative councils' movement (www.councils.coop) and from the model that Preston Council has set.
- 2.1 **Labour-run Preston has been hailed as one of the success stories in the last few years for turning itself and the local economy around.** We would emulate this model by working in partnership with public bodies such as the police and housing associations, to commit to spending locally wherever possible. Any contracts issued would be sub-divided so that local firms would have a level playing field on which to compete and their bids would be preferred wherever possible, on the principle that money spent locally is re-spent locally many times over within the local economy.
- 2.2 **Labour supports sustainable communities and a pro small business environment in our towns and to that end will ensure East Herts Council and its contractors pay the Living Wage and employ no one on Zero Hours contracts.**

Labour in East Herts will:

- ✓ Seek to learn from the co-operative councils' movement, join the Cooperative Councils Innovation Network, and boost the local economy
- ✓ Ensure all East Herts Council employees and contractors are paid the Living Wage, and no imposition of Zero Hours contracts

Sustainable, Vibrant Communities

- 3.0 Under Tory control the East Hertfordshire district has suffered from a lack of interest, pride and investment. Our town centres are languishing, traditional industries providing much needed employment are being pushed out to more rural areas, and towns like Hertford are almost ghost towns due to the lack of intervention to support a strong retail economy.
- 3.1 **A Labour East Herts would act to revitalise and reinvigorate the urban centres, ensuring a more balanced mix of retail, industry and small businesses.** We will zone more land for the provision of employment opportunities. A Labour East Herts would seek to tap into the expertise of the growing network of Co-operative Councils who are working to find fresh and innovative solutions to the problems of today.
- 3.2 **Labour priorities are different to those of the Tories.** We are positively in favour of vibrant town centres, but do not believe that the piecemeal town centre improvements in Hertford will deliver the transformation required. The council must be more proactive to bring the Bircheley Green regeneration forward before the town centre dies. Whilst Labour is strongly supportive of the arts and cultural sector there is little evidence that the multimillion-pound expansion of Hertford Theatre, or a new arts centre in Bishop's Stortford (replacing the Rhodes Centre) will provide benefit and value for money for their communities. **Labour is concerned that these high-profile schemes are not getting the amount of scrutiny they warrant due to the lack of opposition councillors on East Herts council.** Good decision-making springs from transparent governance.

Labour in East Herts will:

- ✓ **Work to increase community collective action and cooperation, empowerment and enterprise, joining the Cooperative Councils Innovation Network to develop new ways of working to support this**
- ✓ Support and encourage neighbourhood planning across the district and work with residents and community groups to ensure that neighbourhood regeneration is designed with the focus and involvement of those who will use the facilities
- ✓ Introduce opportunities for budget challenge so that residents have the opportunity to identify their priorities and the level of funding support they will receive
- ✓ Ensure town centres include access to health, library, council and voluntary services and leisure space
- ✓ Ensure buildings and services in town centres are accessible to everyone including those with a disability
- ✓ Revitalise markets in the district, working with town and parish councils and trade organisations
- ✓ Ensure town centres are always well lit and safe places for the whole community
- ✓ Support creative and inclusive projects to brighten the street scene and increase well-being
- ✓ Work with retail landlords to increase opportunities for meanwhile use and pop up shops, innovative use of hard to let retail space, and increase the range of goods and services available to the digitally excluded or disadvantaged
- ✓ **Ensure regeneration schemes such as Hertford Bircherley Green are carried out in a timely and transparent manner without phasing which decimates the available retail space in the town.**
- ✓ Provide financial and other support to Citizens Advice who support the relatively disadvantaged and vulnerable members of our community

- ✓ Work with the Local Economic Partnership to lobby for increased investment in road and rail links throughout the district to support continued economic development
- ✓ **Ensure the Council is a Living Wage employer and include a Living Wage as a condition for all contractors.**
- ✓ Ensure the Council provides apprenticeship opportunities.

Housing and Infrastructure

- 4.0 East Herts is a largely rural area with several pretty market towns but pockets of real deprivation. It is also undergoing a period of very rapid change due to the pressures of meeting housing need in the South East. It is an attractive place to live because of its closeness to London, with excellent transport links into the capital. Those who choose to move here (particularly from London, where they are pushed out by unaffordable housing) are increasingly from varied demographic groups adding to the cultural and ethnic diversity of the area.
- 4.1 **Housing of all kinds is in short supply and inadequate to meet the demands of modern lifestyles.** More young people live in single households, and the growing population of older people want to live healthier, independent lives. Some families want to live in multigenerational households but are unable to find suitable homes. Much of the older housing stock is energy inefficient. Councils at District and County level are failing to cope with the increasing pace of social, demographic and economic change affecting our local communities.
- 4.2 Despite greatly increased house building planned over coming years (over 18,000 homes over the next 15 years), **few plans have been made to properly upgrade infrastructure, schools or improve public transport to reflect the increased numbers coming into the area.**
- 4.3. Cuts to bus services and the loss of the rail link between Hertford and Stevenage for the next few years have had a seriously negative impact on those who are dependent on public transport to travel around the district. It impacts on the ability of many to take up job opportunities. It has also resulted in increased traffic on already crowded roads. This can only deteriorate further with the expected influx of new households following the building of thousands of new houses.
- 4.4 The Tory-run East Herts Council has chosen not to invest income received from housing development to improve public transport, health and social care services and educational provision. The significant delay in producing an approved District Plan had led to chaotic and uncoordinated development across East Herts. The approved District Plan outlines plans to build 18,458 new homes by 2033.
- 4.5 **Building strong communities and providing excellent housing services will be at the heart of our Housing Strategy.** Good quality housing provides an important foundation for people's lives and contributes to good health and, cohesive communities.
- 4.6 The government has stated that it will permit councils to borrow against their assets in order to develop their own council housing. East Herts has handed over all its council stock to housing associations so has fewer assets than many councils against which to borrow. **Labour would press for the council to begin building again and produce good quality homes for low rent to meet the needs of those on housing waiting lists.**

Development of "Locally Affordable" Housing

- 4.7 We are determined to meet the needs of all people who live in the area, and an essential part of this would be to ensure that **any new housing development includes at least 50% of**

affordable homes. In several areas, the council has permitted developments to go ahead with little or no affordable housing in the mix. Because of this, the number of affordable homes overall is below that needed, which is why we will push for a higher quota than the council currently proposes of 35-40% in each development of over 10 homes, to make up the deficit.

- 4.8 We will also develop a standard of “**locally affordable**” rent or purchase price, to produce homes which will be **truly affordable to those on average salaries to the area**, rather than the government’s definition of affordable (which is anything up to 80% of market rents).
- 4.9 These homes will be in the form of Shared Ownership (see appendix 1), Social Housing (see appendix 2) and Housing Cooperatives. The development of cooperative housing has proved particularly successful in other parts of the region and are distinctive forms of both ownership and tenancies (see appendix 3).

Labour in East Herts will:

- ✓ **Press for affordable housing quotas to be met in all housing developments and move to a higher standard of 50% affordable housing in each development. These homes to meet a “locally affordable” criteria.**
- ✓ Press for East Herts Council to build good quality housing again for low rent to meet the needs of people on housing need waiting lists
- ✓ Identify funding both from the government and within the council’s own resources, to help housing associations build social housing and build the council’s own homes
- ✓ Work with local housing associations, who provide social housing, both for the benefit of residents and to develop a local lettings policy for any new build to enable local people to remain in the area.
- ✓ Encourage developers to bring forward sites which already have planning permissions. This is in line with Labour’s Green Paper on Housing’s statement, that sites should be taken from developers who leave them abandoned for long periods.
- ✓ **Support local communities in the development of neighbourhood plans and implement their proposals once approved.**
- ✓ Require that all publicly subsidised housing is built to the 'Life time home standard' and that a proportion of these are built to allow full wheelchair access.
- ✓ Work with agencies to support people to live in their own homes with dignity, combating social isolation, loneliness and fuel poverty. Reducing hazards such as cold houses and falls in homes could save the NHS over £1 million in treatment costs.
- ✓ Introduce a tenants’ hotline where tenants can pass on information about inadequate housing conditions safely and anonymously. The council will then investigate and take action.
- ✓ License all privately rented properties, with the priority given to those areas with the largest proportions of privately-rented accommodation.
- ✓ Ensure all houses in multiple occupation (HMO's) are licensed, and that enforcement is resourced adequately.
- ✓ Require a planning application to turn any individual dwellings into HMOs. There will be a presumption of refusal where there is already a surfeit of these properties.

- ✓ Introduce an East Herts Housing Standard which will be higher than the minimum housing standards legally required of rented property. We will work with local landlords, encouraging them to raise the quality of their properties to the East Herts Housing Standard.
- ✓ Introduce a compulsory purchase programme of long-term empty properties. Bringing each of these back into occupation ensures another family has a home, council tax is paid on the property and the damaging effect of a blighted, decaying, empty building is lifted from the neighbourhood.
- ✓ **Ensure East Herts takes action against poor landlords, including placing the names of the worst performing on a 'rogue landlords register'.**
- ✓ Ensure that the council uses its full enforcement powers and keeps these fully resourced. This would ensure that closure notices would prevent properties from being let until they meet basic standards and challenging individual landlords who the council feels do not meet the 'fit and proper' person test and placing their names on the rogue landlords register.
- ✓ Oppose any further cuts to bus services
- ✓ Support the introduction of "hopper" buses in Sele
- ✓ Push to increase the accessibility of public transport

Public Health

- 5.0 The health of people in East Herts is generally better than the England average and life expectancy for both men and women is also higher than the England average. **However, there are significant challenges in health inequalities and public health concerns.** For example, life expectancy is 4.8 years lower for men and 4.9 years lower for women in the most deprived areas of East Herts than in the least deprived.
- 5.1 The rural nature of East Herts also presents healthcare access barriers for many people. Specific public health challenges in East Herts includes a high percentage of people over the age of 17 diagnosed with diabetes and also a high percentage of people aged 65+ with dementia.

Labour in East Herts will:

- ✓ Work with the NHS and other health bodies, including voluntary sector health groups and patient organisations, to provide excellent health facilities in town centres, accessible to all communities
- ✓ Support health promotion campaigns and link up with leisure facilities and the NHS to support social prescribing
- ✓ Support the provision, availability and use of allotments across the district
- ✓ Support older people to remain independent as long as possible in their own homes
- ✓ Support and promote leisure and health initiatives, facilities and the cycle network
- ✓ Provide, support and promote free and accessible health facilities such as outdoor gyms and skateparks
- ✓ Work with retail and community groups to support food waste reduction and reuse schemes
- ✓ Support initiatives to protect and improve mental health and wellbeing

A Safe, Clean and Green Environment

- 6.0 **Tory-imposed austerity is a political choice.** This austerity has placed unprecedented pressure on all public authorities, so it is even more vital that they work in partnership to ensure a safe, clean and green environment. **A pleasant and welcoming environment is also critical in promoting mental health and wellbeing.** Labour in East Herts commits to working with all public and voluntary agencies to increase environmental sustainability, wellbeing and reduce crime and the fear of crime.
- 6.1 East Herts is a predominantly rural area, however it is surrounded by major traffic routes and **intolerable levels of traffic across the district are now having a significant impact on air quality and therefore an impact on the health of residents and visitors.** Areas such as Gascoyne Way in Hertford and the Hockerill junction in Bishop's Stortford have been identified as places where air quality levels are critical. It is vitally important that the council maintains and expands air quality monitoring and acts on the Air Quality Management plans. The council also has a role to play in the way it manages parks, verges and the environment in general to reduce pesticide use, and promote biodiversity.
- 6.2 Whilst East Herts District Council and Hertfordshire County Council's strategy is to promote modal shift and thereby reduce reliance on cars, the reality for most people is more complex. **The inability for many families to get a place for their child at a local school means that they are now more likely to have to transport them to school further afield. Commuting patterns have changed and the reduction of light industry in the district and the economic pull of London means that many people are working at significant distances from where they live.**
- 6.3 Town centre parking is too low and too inflexible in East Herts towns forcing town centre workers to park in surrounding residential streets. Parking charges for shoppers and trips to essential services are too high and don't allow people to browse and are therefore impacting the local economy. Charging points for electric vehicles are still relatively scarce and need to be expanded to make these vehicles more attractive.
- 6.4 **Overall the waste management strategy needs a more balanced partnership approach.** Whilst the level of waste recycling in East Herts has risen, more needs to be done proactively with local retailers and manufacturers to minimise packaging and provide for its recycling. Cuts to the opening hours of household waste sites is having a knock-on effect with an increase in the amount of fly-tipping.

Labour in East Herts will:

- ✓ Promote and uphold schemes to reduce environmental impact on health and wellbeing in the district such as road bypass schemes, ensuring appropriate consultation with local residents.
- ✓ oppose the granting of planning permission for quarries proposed at Bengoe and Stanstead Abbots due to inappropriate proximity to residential buildings and schools.
- ✓ Support reduce, reuse and recycle initiatives across the community and support these principles in the operation of council services, with particular focus on reducing the use of plastics.
- ✓ Encourage and uphold household waste recycling and act against fly tipping across the district, using CCTV, enforcement officers and fixed penalty notices to tackle fly tipping. We will ensure that all levels of councils work together to support environmental principles and

prevent passing problems from one tier to another through short sighted cost saving measures

- ✓ Increase the opening hours and capacity of household waste disposal sites
- ✓ Promote and uphold biodiversity in the district and ban the use of neonicotinoids which have proved devastating to bees from use by any council related service.
- ✓ Continue to support and promote green energy, energy insulation and other sustainability initiatives within East Herts.
- ✓ Install green energy and energy saving measures wherever possible on council-owned property.
- ✓ Promote and support efforts by villages to go “plastic free”
- ✓ Promote the use of electric vehicles by providing more charging points in car parks across the district and using planning policies to promote electric car use. Insist on provision of electric charging points in all new developments across the district.
- ✓ Introduce car parking technology and tariffs that encourage town centre use such as pay on exit, ‘first hour free’ or ‘free after 3’ schemes
- ✓ Season ticket schemes for all day parking (supporting low paid workers and discouraging indiscriminate residential parking close to stations)
- ✓ Full consultation on car parking with parish and town councils and community groups in smaller towns such as Buntingford and Stanstead Abbots.
- ✓ Ensure parking regulations are enforced where indiscriminate parking causes significant problems close to schools and train stations.
- ✓ Fund Police Community Support Officers and Neighbourhood Wardens
- ✓ Support neighbourhood watch schemes and measures to address anti-social behaviour
- ✓ Work within the Crime and Disorder Partnership to facilitate safer and stronger communities

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Shared ownership

This is a scheme for those unable to buy a home on the open market. Through this scheme purchasers buy a share of between 25 per cent and 75 per cent of the home's value from a Housing Association. It is necessary to provide a deposit and to raise a mortgage for whatever percentage of the home's value is being purchased.

The housing association owns the remaining share of the value of house and rent is paid on this amount. The rent is up to three per cent of the value of that owned by the Housing Association. The larger the share bought by the homeowner, the less the rent that is payable. When able to, the homeowner can buy additional shares in the property until they own it outright.

Appendix 2: Social housing

Social housing is let at low rents, on a secure basis to those who are most in need or struggling with their housing costs. Normally councils and not-for-profit organisations (such as housing associations) are the ones to provide social housing.

A key function of social housing is to provide accommodation that is affordable to people on low incomes. Limits to rent increases set by law mean that rents are kept affordable.

It is allocated based on need. Unlike the private rented sector, where tenancies are offered by the landlord and letting agent to whomever they choose, social housing is distributed according to the local council's allocation scheme.

Housing stock is owned and managed by registered providers. Registered providers (often known as social landlords) are the bodies that own and manage social housing. They tend to be non-commercial organisations such as local authorities or housing associations. Housing associations are independent, not-for-profit organisations that can use any profit they make to maintain existing homes and help finance new ones.

Appendix 3: Cooperative housing

Housing cooperatives fall into two main categories:

Non-ownership. This is usually referred to as 'non-equity' or 'continuing tenancy'. In these types of cooperatives, occupancy rights are granted subject to an agreement which is similar to a lease. The advantage of this over other types of tenancy, is that each tenant has a vote in electing a management committee of the cooperative and therefore has a direct stake and voice in management issues.

Ownership. This is referred to as 'equity' or 'strata'. Here occupancy rights are granted by way of the purchase agreements and legal instruments registered on the title. The main advantage of ownership is the pooling of members' resources, so their buying power is combined. This lowers the cost per member in all the products and services associated with home ownership

For further information, examples of housing cooperatives can be found on the following sites:

Large scale. The Cooperative Development Society at (www.cds.coop)

Small scale. Argyle Street Housing Cooperative, Cambridge at (www.ash.coop)

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