

Housing

Liberal Democrat Policy Briefing 16

January 2005



Affordable Homes in Safer, Greener Communities

The Liberal Democrats believe housing is a basic human right. Thousands of people however are homeless or living in temporary accommodation. Millions more are living in inappropriate or inadequate housing. The aim of Liberal Democrat policy is to create much more affordable housing in all parts of the country, to build homes that are environmentally sustainable in construction and use and to strengthen communities which are cleaner, safer and better managed, with ready access to green spaces.

Cleaner, greener homes

We will raise the environmental standards of all new homes and change planning rules to allow for appropriate, domestic based small-scale generation of green power which will offset household fuel bills. VAT on home insulation and renovation material will be cut to make them more affordable. This will also make it cheaper to renovate old buildings and convert them to now homes.

New forms of affordable home ownership

Liberal Democrats will develop new forms of affordable homeownership, between full renting and full owner-occupation. Measures will include mutual home ownership in which a household will own shares in the mutual housing association which in turn owns the home in which they live. A stake can be built up over time.

We will develop 'golden share' schemes in which the ownership of particular homes are restricted to specified groups such as key workers and the price of the house is capped.

We will also encourage greater use of shared equity schemes. We will establish for all housing association and council house tenants to a "right to invest" in their home under which they can gradually build up a stake in their home without buying outright.

New rights for council tenants

Liberal Democrats will end the current government policy of effectively forcing councils to transfer their stock to a registered social landlord. We will retain this as an option but will enable councils to consider other options for their housing, depending on the wishes of tenants.

New options will include the right for tenants to stay with the council without penalties imposed by the government on investment. We will, however, give tenants the "right to manage" – under which estates, through their own boards, will manage their own housing within the overall framework set by the council.

We will retain the option for councils to set up arms length companies to run housing or enter agreements with the private sector.

We will retain the right to buy but allow councils to decide the level of discount.

Greater protection for private leaseholders

We will give leaseholders new protections and rights, including making leasehold enfranchisement and transfer to commonhold easier and cheaper and by abolishing forfeiture, to be replaced by sanctions similar to those available to mortgage providers.

Housing associations tenants

We will increase tenants' opportunities to take part in their associations decision making. We will also cut the regulatory costs on associations through the abolition of the Housing Corporation and by removing all unnecessary regulations.

Private sector

We will work with private landlords and their associations to raise standards, improve training and increase professionalism to help create a vibrant private sector for rent.

Second homes

Where second homes are causing serious problems for the future of communities, we will allow councils to introduce planning controls to limit the numbers of holiday homes in the most heavily affected areas.

More new homes

More new homes are desperately needed to solve the crisis in affordable housing. By freeing up much more land for housing, more demand will be satisfied and prices of new houses will lower. Liberal Democrats will pilot Community Land Auctions to release land not currently scheduled for housing whilst allowing the community to gain from the increase in the land values caused by the council's decision to grant planning permission.

We will use the community land auctions to donate land to mutual housing associations to build affordable homes.

All land held by the government will be reviewed with a view to donating it in appropriate areas to registered social landlords or mutual associations for affordable housing.

This briefing contains Federal Liberal Democrat policies. The policies of the Scottish and Welsh Liberal Democrats and the Northern Ireland Local party apply on issues which are their responsibility within our Federal policy-making structure.

Printed by Liberal Democrats, 4 Cowley Street, London, SW1P 3NB Published and promoted by Chris Rennard, 4 Cowley Street, London, SW1P 3NB