



scottish
green party

Think Global, Act Local

A Green Charter for Local Government



www.scottishgreens.org.uk

Introduction

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The local council elections in 2007, under the more democratic Single Transferable Vote system, present a big opportunity to breathe new life into our town halls and communities. There are already almost 100 Green councillors in the UK, making real improvements to local services, and we expect to see Green councillors elected across Scotland on the 3rd May.

The Scottish Green Party's commitment to local democracy, transparency and accountability underpins our approach to local government. Most Scottish councils operate on the basis that the experts always know what's best. Greens believe that local people have the skills and knowledge to improve their own circumstances, if only their councils would support them. Our radical agenda will return real power and resources to communities.

Working together with Greens in the Scottish Parliament, prospective Green councillors have big plans for local government. This Green Charter sets out clear priorities as to how elected Greens will put councils across Scotland on the side of the people they represent.

Greens are already making positive changes in parliaments and town halls all over the world. Now it's Scotland's turn. First vote Green in May's council elections and you'll like what you get. A Green vote will deliver constructive, effective and hard working Green councillors who will stand up for their communities, ensure high quality public services, thriving local economies, and a cleaner environment.



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1. Responsible, Democratic Councils

Unfortunately, many councils still only pay lip service to community involvement, leaving people frustrated and with little say or control over how their local services are run. Greens want to change this, and will help people to reclaim their communities and to lead the changes they want to see. We believe that people have a right to information about decision-making processes, and to participate in those processes. Whilst the current Scottish Executive opposed giving communities their say in the planning system, Green MSPs will continue to campaign for equal rights and for decisions to be made as close as possible to those who are affected by them.

At their worst, some Scottish councils seem to have a limited grasp of what local democracy means, they have wasted public funds and ignored local opinion. There is a substantial opportunity now with the new electoral system to improve governance in local authorities across Scotland by electing Greens. Greens stand for integrity and the prudent management of resources, including financial ones. Our MSPs are alone in the Scottish Parliament in publishing annual reports on their work, including details of their expenditure.

Greens also believe that vital public services should be properly funded, not just given a token injection of cash at election time. As an interim measure we support efforts to make the council tax fairer, such as additional bands, while campaigning for an alternative to council

tax, based on land values that encourages and supports local sustainable development. Green councillors will also support initiatives to reduce waste in council activities without cutting front-line services.

Green councillors will:

- work hard to involve the community in planning the future of an area or service, way above and beyond the minimum 'consultation' required by law, and continue campaigning to make the planning system fairer for communities;
- make best use of public money by ensuring that environmental and social criteria are taken sufficiently into account in all decisions;
- strive to work with other councillors in our multi-member wards for the good of the area; and
- campaign to reform council tax and promote Land Value Tax.

GREENS IN ACTION ► A Green councillor in Lancaster blew the whistle on the fact that Lancaster City Council had allowed the local nuclear power station to get away with putting off paying its business rates at a cost to the local taxpayers of £18,000.

GREENS IN ACTION ► In Oxford, Green councillors successfully secured £2 million of new social and environmental budget bids – all without increases in council tax.

2. Strong, Self-reliant Local Economies

Supermarkets drain money from the local economy; small businesses know that when a new supermarket opens, trade falls and small shops close. Small businesses make up the vast majority of all Scottish businesses and over half of Scottish jobs, yet large amounts of money is spent on enticing multinational companies to locate here. This can leave communities vulnerable and over-dependent on the whims of the global market. When the multinationals move abroad for cheaper labour, more public money is then spent on regeneration initiatives to fix the damage to communities.

Greens believe that self-reliant economies based on local businesses and local investment provide better and more reliable jobs. With local government buying power alone worth £2.3 billion in Scotland, just think what could be achieved if that money was spent more wisely. From renewable electricity to local farm produce, from buying from small local businesses, to working in partnership with social enterprises and the voluntary sector, local government spending alone can boost 'green' jobs and help create strong, local economies that provide secure jobs for the future.

Elected Greens will:

- introduce a Sustainable Communities Bill to support local firms ahead of multinationals and out of town shopping, give councils more powers to regenerate run-down areas, and

give incentives for councils to purchase from local suppliers and social enterprises;

- reform the Scottish Enterprise Business Gateway to give better training and advice for small businesses and family firms;
- phase out the Private Finance Initiative and make it easier for smaller, local companies to tender for council contracts; and
- create more green jobs, for example, in recycling, renewables manufacture and energy efficiency.

GREENS IN ACTION ► In Glasgow's West End, the local Green council candidate has spearheaded a campaign to stop the development of a massive Tesco store in Partick. Local businesses and the wider community recognise the damage a 'Tesco-Town' would inflict on the vibrant local economy, as well as adding to traffic congestion and the area's pollution problems.

GREENS IN ACTION ► Six Green councillors elected in Lewisham have secured two measures to strengthen the local economy in this year's council budget. The first is a feasibility study to introduce an electronic "loyalty card" for local shops to help revitalize local shopping parades and enhance town centres. Secondly, thanks to Greens, Lewisham will be launching a "Buy Local" campaign with 4,000 branded cloth bags for local shoppers.

3. Better Transport, Safer Transport



Our towns and cities are suffocating with traffic congestion and pollution that damages peoples' health, and chokes the economy and the climate. In rural areas, and even in many parts of our cities, many people have no access to quality public transport. Pavements and roads are in a poor state of repair.

For many people without access to a car or with mobility issues, the provision of affordable and accessible public transport, as well as safe streets and pavements is key to social inclusion.

Scotland needs a transport system fit for purpose, not one planned by people that still believe building more roads is the only solution. Green MSPs have proposed the Green Transport Bill to commit the government to reductions in road traffic and more investment in public transport. Green councillors will work to make transport convenient, safe and pleasant as well as less damaging to the air we breathe.

Green councillors will:

- introduce low emission zones to keep polluting vehicles out of congested areas;
- give streets back to communities by introducing 20mph speed limits in residential areas, and through proper investment in and maintenance of footpaths and cycle ways;
- pilot free bus travel for under 16s so that public transport "habits" are developed early;
- recognise the importance of walking as a mode of transport and tackle issues like pavement parking that make walking difficult;
- ensure that a greater proportion of the local transport budget is spent on cycling; and
- ensure that users of all transport services (including bus, cycling and walking routes) are fully involved in the development of new infrastructure.

GREENS IN ACTION ► In Norwich, Green councillors campaigned hard against route changes imposed on passengers by First Bus. By holding the balance of power in the city council, Greens gained a commitment for a Quality Bus Contract for the Norwich area, ensuring an affordable service that meets peoples' needs. Things changed when they got Green councillors – they made it happen.

4. More Affordable, High Quality Housing

Poor investment in social housing, bad planning, and the largely unregulated 'right to buy' policy have left many parts of Scotland without enough affordable homes, and thousands of Scots live in temporary, undesirable accommodation. Housing and energy use make up about a quarter of Scotland's ecological footprint, yet much housing, both old and new, falls below even the current limited standards for energy efficiency. Greens believe that everyone has a right to an affordable, warm home, and support energy efficiency and household renewables like solar panels.

Green MSPs have proposed the Home Energy Efficiency Bill to take forward action on this at a national level.

Green councillors will:

- tackle fuel poverty by making sure all new housing meets the highest environmental and efficiency standards, and introduce more grants and loans for private owners and social landlords to bring existing housing up to these same standards;
- house more homeless people by switching money away from expensive accommodation such as hostels, bed and breakfasts and hotels, and leasing more from good quality private landlords;
- give councils more freedom to build new housing and the discretion to limit the right-to-buy where there is a shortage of affordable or rented homes; and
- support work by democratic small to medium sized local housing associations or co-operatives to build more affordable homes.

GREENS IN ACTION ► The Green Group on Kirklees council secured £100,000 for solar street lighting and £500,000 for energy-saving measures in schools and care homes. Wind turbines are being installed in schools, zero-energy developments are being built and a 100-home 'solar village' has been developed. Photovoltaics and solar water heating have been put on the roof of the local community centre. These measures only began when local people elected Green Party councillors.

Daniel Nilsson



5. Less Waste, More Recycling

The North Lanarkshire Footprint Project calculated that the authority area produced 15 million tonnes of rubbish in 2001; that's 1.5 refuse bags per person every day of the year. The project found that more composting and recycling could reduce the waste footprint by 40%. In the Netherlands 65% of waste is recycled, but in Scotland the average Council recycling rate is just 25%. Scottish councils have made a start, but a lot more could be done to boost recycling and reduce waste before new incinerators are forced upon us.

We need to reduce the amount of waste we create in the first place, and recycle the rest. Burning household waste in incinerators is not a safe or sustainable option. Ministers might try to call it a green initiative, but it is a corner-cutting move to avoid the real challenge of reducing our waste in the first place. Incineration relies on bad habits, because plants need certain volumes of waste in order to remain profitable. It is an inefficient use of resources and materials, it increases pollution, and means that the potential for creating jobs in recycling and waste minimisation is lost.

Greens support a national 'zero waste' strategy to reduce packaging and other waste-creating activities, and the reuse and repair of goods as well as recycling. Green methods of waste management can also create more jobs than incineration or landfill. Nine jobs come from recycling 15,000 tons of solid waste, compared to just one if the same material goes into landfill.

Green councillors will:

- aim to run zero waste councils and communities, with annual targets to reduce waste;
- extend doorstep recycling and promote composting and provide a 'Rapid Response Squad' service to deal with overflowing recycling containers;
- introduce a campaign to reduce waste and put more emphasis on buying recycled products, starting by making sure the council buys recycled; and
- vastly improve recycling of trade waste by giving more support for local businesses to reduce packaging, to find recyclable and biodegradable alternatives, and to create more 'green' jobs by developing recycling and reprocessing facilities as close to the source of waste as possible.

GREENS IN ACTION ► In 2002, the London Borough of Lewisham only managed to recycle 4.2% of household waste, trailing way behind many London boroughs. Within the first few months of being elected in Lewisham in 2006, Green councillor, Sue Luxton, won a motion to boost recycling rates. Fellow Green councillor, Darren Johnson, led an investigation responding to peoples' concerns about the recycling of their waste. The investigation resulted in actions to give much better information for local residents so everyone can recycle with confidence. Action by Green councillors means that more people in Lewisham are now recycling.

6. Cleaner, Greener Communities

In many local authority areas residents are dissatisfied with street cleaning and frustrated by littering. 40% of people in urban areas think the quality of their local green spaces has deteriorated in the last 5 years, and that figure rises to 49% in the 15% most deprived areas of Scotland.¹ Dirty neighbourhoods are part of a cycle that weakens community spirit and discourages local improvements.

A survey of 30 councils last year and 268 schools suggests that 320 acres of public green space across Scotland is currently earmarked for development, or is already being built on, as a result of schools' PPP projects. Equivalent to over 180 full-size football pitches, this loss of open space encompasses parkland, playing fields, recreation grounds, amenity space and informal green spaces.

Green MSPs have warned of the loss of green spaces and the knock on impact on quality of life. Finally, last year, the

1. Source: Greenspace Scotland



Scottish Executive placed a duty on local authorities to measure the green spaces they have left and prepare a strategy for their protection, but this is still proving inadequate as more vital parks and playing fields are lost. Greens will continue to stand up for green spaces and all the benefits they bring to local communities.

Greens will:

- ensure existing green space within our communities is protected and used for the benefit of the community;
- keep streets clear of litter by putting in more bins and increasing the number of environmental wardens with powers to levy fines;
- require new developments to have provision for decent green spaces as a condition of planning approval;
- use every opportunity to protect and enhance wildlife in urban and rural areas; and
- create more allotments to promote physical activity and cut down on food miles.

GREENS IN ACTION ► Working with the local community, Green activists successfully campaigned to stop Glasgow City Council building a car park over part of Victoria Park. The Park will remain a vital breathing space in the city.

7. Good Local Schools

School is not just 'training for work', and school closures and mergers should not be seen as a money saving opportunity. Greens want our children to emerge from school as well-rounded citizens who have had the benefit of a wide ranging and imaginative education. Schools should be at the heart of local communities, and that means the wider community should be involved in decisions about schools, and have access to school facilities outside teaching hours. With increasing energy prices and the need for serious action and education on climate change, Greens are pushing for new and refurbished schools to meet proper energy efficiency standards and incorporate micro-renewable energy systems. All too often PFI-procured schools are badly designed and built with only the short term in mind.

Green Councillors will

- keep schools under local control, not run by private companies;
- make sure that every child in Scotland's towns and cities can safely walk or cycle to primary school;
- remove junk food from schools, and ensure that healthy, organic and locally sourced food is provided, free to all pupils; and
- insist on improved energy efficiency and renewable energy in new, refurbished and existing schools.

Eleanor Scott MSP examining a new woodchip heating unit in Dingwall. Systems such as these could now be installed in PFI schools if Councils use the opportunity.

GREENS IN ACTION ► Up until late last year, there was no funding to help install wood fuel (biomass) heating systems in PFI-procured schools. Following three years of consistent campaigning to highlight the potential of biomass to save the public purse and help tackle climate change, Green MSP Mark Ruskell secured an Executive announcement of £7.5 million for biomass projects. Although too late for some schools, successful Green campaigning now means that some new schools and other public buildings will be powered by eco-friendly wood fuel, helping to slash climate change emissions, save cash and spur on the rural economy.



8. Safe Communities



The rise in prison numbers has not reduced crime or made people feel safer – it's time for something different. Greens do not support the current ASBO-led approach. All too often it just moves problems to other areas and fails to tackle the cause of offending. Greens believe that victims should be better supported, and more should be done to prevent and change criminal behaviour.

More support should be given to restorative justice, where offenders see the impact of their actions on their victims, and are required to undertake community sentencing to give something back to society. We will also increase funding for social work and young people's services, cutting re-offending, and preventing crime by resolving problems early on. It's time to help our communities tackle both anti-social behaviour and the causes of anti-social behaviour.

Green councillors will:

- increase funding to victim support programmes and restorative justice projects;
- work with housing associations and private landlords to improve street lighting, stair lighting and door entry systems, as well lit and well used streets both feel safer and are safer;
- bring the whole community together to prevent and tackle crime through Community Service Agreements (see below); and
- increase funding for social work and young people's services.

GREENS IN ACTION ►

Community Service Agreements:

Green councillors will give local residents a meaningful say in setting priorities for local services through Community Service Agreements. These Agreements can be used to help to tackle anti-social behaviour, for example where the police agree to devote time and resources to hot-spots identified by residents. In turn, and as a formal part of the agreement, community groups and activists can then commit to organise alternative activities for young people such as sports programmes and community centres. Such groups will be then be given reliable funding as part of a comprehensive Green vision, not just tolerated and given occasional short term funding.

9. Public Services For All

Sports, arts and cultural facilities are an easy target for cuts and closures. Sports Scotland estimate that 118 sports pitches have been lost since 1996. Although some pitches and facilities have been refurbished and created, community groups often find they are too expensive.

600 Post Offices in Scotland could close by 2008. Many local communities will be left without postal and banking services, and the vital social role played by Post Offices will be weakened.

Greens will explore innovative ways of delivering the services people need in partnership with the local community. We will help develop the community's skills, enthusiasm and resources to address the issues they identify.

Green councillors will:

- provide good quality, accessible and affordable public services, including libraries, museums, sports pitches and swimming pools;
- work with local communities who wish to keep their post offices;
- increase support for the arts, sports and sustainable tourism;
- protect local heritage and develop imaginative and sympathetic uses for historic buildings; and
- transfer power, resources and responsibilities in order to increase community ownership of local assets.

10. Low Carbon Communities

All the other parties talk about climate change, but we need urgent action at all levels of government, not just warm words. Although all Scottish Local Authorities signed up to the recent Climate Change Declaration, emissions from energy and transport are still on the rise, and local planning decisions all too often look like business as usual. The election of Green Councillors will ensure local authorities make real reductions in emissions, not just make paper pledges.

Green councillors will:

- require all council buildings to be powered and heated by renewable energy;
- commit local authorities to binding year on year targets to reduce their carbon emissions;
- ensure that new developments are energy efficient, using renewable energy or with Combined Heat and Power systems where possible; and
- set up a Climate Change Forum to drive forward action on climate change with the local authority, businesses, and communities

GREENS IN ACTION ► In Spain, the Green Party on Barcelona's municipal council initiated the increase of the city's use of renewable energy. By 2010, Barcelona aims to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent from 1999 levels. The policy has since been adopted by Madrid, Valencia, Seville, Burgos, and Pamplona.



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