

GET GATESHEAD GOING

The Liberal Democrats'
plan to get Gateshead
growing and thriving

Get Gateshead Going: The Liberal Democrat Manifesto for Gateshead

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Regenerating Gateshead

1. We will, as a priority, host a conference on development in Gateshead, bringing together a range of stakeholders, developers, and Council leadership to identify and overcome barriers to the use of brownfield and infill sites for house building.
2. We will collaborate with development partners to create realistic and achievable house-building programmes, and we will push for progressively greater numbers of new builds completed. We will look for innovative solutions to kick start housebuilding including cooperative and self-build schemes.
3. We will review ways to increase the number of affordable homes and social rent properties, including encouraging housing associations to expand into Gateshead and seeking opportunities to convert under-utilised Council-owned buildings and spaces (such as garages) into housing.
4. We will consider applications to convert redundant farm buildings into housing and small commercial units.
5. We will review planning policies as they affect rural areas to make them more responsive to rural needs.
6. We will encourage proposals to convert surplus retail units into residential properties.
7. We will maintain planned capital investment in Gateshead Council's housing stock, and prioritise improving energy efficiency in order to reduce bills and improve sustainability.
8. We will encourage social and private landlords to take advantage of discount schemes and government grants to retrofit their properties with insulation and microgeneration (such as solar panels), improving the energy efficiency and warmth of rental properties.
9. We will press the new Mayoral Development Authority to reassess the stalled Quayside arena scheme and adopt a more realistic, mixed tenure development, with a credible timetable for completion.
10. We will urge the new Mayoral Development Authority to improve engagement with stakeholders in the High Street South and Town Centre redevelopment plans so that fair and equitable settlements can be reached more quickly, allowing the projects to finally move forward at pace.
11. We will set up a cross-portfolio bid team in the Council to make Gateshead more competitive in applying for grant funding, and to support local non-profit and charity organisations with their bids.
12. We will encourage the development of unique local centres across Gateshead by supporting cultural events, community spaces, and pop-up shops and other short-term uses for vacant buildings. We will introduce 30 minute free parking in Council-owned car parks to further support local centres.

13. We will work in partnership with local businesses and community organisations to create long-term plans that strengthen the character and economic resilience of high streets across Gateshead.
14. We will start a local business forum to improve communication between the leadership of the Council and businesses owned or headquartered in Gateshead.
15. We will work with the local community, businesses, and property owners to regenerate high streets, making them safer, more attractive, and vibrant.
16. We will increase the Council's engagement with employee-owned co-operative and mutual enterprises in Gateshead and seek to support growth in this sector.
17. We will work with developers and partners to regenerate empty Council-owned buildings, including temporary uses when feasible.
18. We will monitor plans for empty Council buildings, ensuring they are not declared 'surplus' without a plan to bring them back into use or to sell them.
19. We will use council powers whenever possible to prevent privately owned buildings standing empty for long periods.
20. We will evaluate the Council's use of Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs), with particular focus on their impact on civil liberties and efficacy in protecting community safety and wellbeing.

Ensuring a fair deal for Council taxpayers

21. We will ensure that Council systems and processes employ advanced tools to maximise efficiency, such as AI where suitable.
22. We will invest in employee development and education, ensuring that Council employees' progress is monitored using clear and agreed objectives.
23. We will target reductions in employee turnover and sickness absence, holding Service Directors accountable for results in these areas.
24. We will create a programme offering meaningful incentives to employees making suggestions that lead to cost reductions, efficiencies, or increased income.
25. We will invest in employee development and encourage training, including advanced qualifications and apprenticeships.
26. We will make the "Members Room", currently only open to Councillors, available to Council employees who wish to have a safe space within the building to use for breaks.
27. We will assess a range of Council functions, including Traffic Management, Housing Repairs, Design, Learning and Skills, and Health and Social Care Commissioning. This will re-focus the Council's activities on residents' priorities, help the Council learn from other local authorities, and provide better value for money.
28. We will work to ensure that appropriate fines, fees, and charges are levied and collected in a timely fashion. We will improve enforcement when necessary, for example, the dog warden service.
29. We will ensure that all potential avenues for income generation and cost reductions are given due consideration and implemented where possible.
30. We will eliminate allowances to Councillors for serving as 'Vice-Chairs' of Overview and Scrutiny Committees, and halve allowances for Councillors serving as Vice-Chair of decision-making committees.
31. We will reduce the cost of running the Council Leader's office.
32. We will replace the "Council News" magazine with a digital newsletter that includes news from all wards and directorates. A limited number of physical copies will be available at Council buildings (e.g. libraries and the Civic Centre). This will enable us to reduce spending on council communications.
33. Savings from reduced costs of Council functions will be transferred to the Local Community Fund to support Gateshead's voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations.
34. We will review the senior management structure and reduce duplication of effort across service directorates.

Enhancing Gateshead's Democracy

35. The role of Mayor of the Council will be reviewed, and will be offered to the Opposition in alternating years.
36. We will establish political balance in Overview and Scrutiny Committees by allocating chair positions proportional to the political makeup of the Council.
37. We will enhance accountability and transparency by making Cabinet members responsible for a single Group Directorate and introducing scheduled Cabinet Reports to the Full Council.
38. Scheduled decisions within Group Directorates will be made by responsible Cabinet members, after being considered by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
39. To enhance accountability we will align relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees with Group Directorates. Group Director and Cabinet members will report to them in person.
40. We will review the powers of the Audit and Standards Committee, increase the number of independent members, and appoint an independent member as Chair to reduce the chances of bias in the Committee's consideration of complaints against councillors.
41. We will establish Area Committees to bring decision-making closer to local communities. These committees will be made up of councillors in each of Gateshead's localities and will have oversight of neighbourhood priorities, allocate locally funded budgets, and work directly with residents.
42. Within the Area Committees we will introduce participatory budgeting to give residents a real say in how locally-raised money is spent. Communities will be able to propose projects, discuss priorities, and vote on which initiatives receive funding. We will implement this by allocating a dedicated local budget to each area committee and providing clear guidance and support so residents can actively shape their neighbourhoods.
43. We will consult on the creation of town councils where residents want them.
44. We will enable members of the public to put questions to the Council remotely.
45. We will introduce new pages on the Council website with regular updates on Council finances and major contracts and projects where appropriate.
46. We will improve the accessibility of Council services for all residents. This will include making it easier for residents to report issues to the Council (e.g. QR codes on bins).
47. We will ensure that Council consultation design is accessible for all residents. This will include using plain English where possible, and making alternative formats such as plain text and mobile device compatible versions available to download directly when the consultation opens.
48. All opinion surveys (residents, tenants, employees, and so on) will be published as soon as possible after the final day for returns.

Improving services for residents and tenants

49. We will increase the proportion of the revenue budget spent on Environmental Services, including maintaining green spaces, replacing damaged or diseased trees, and removing litter and dog fouling.
50. We will reintroduce prosecutions for fly-tipping as the standard action where evidence of culpability has been established.
51. We will ensure fortnightly rubbish collections are continuously maintained.
52. We will introduce an additional winter collection for Green Bin users on a self-financing basis to enable bin collection to extend into the winter.
53. We will review recycling and waste services, with the aim of improving access and increasing use of Council bulky waste collection services and recycling rates.
54. We will allow Gateshead residents to return their Green Bin if it is not needed.
55. We will improve recycling rates by adopting best practices from across the country such as re-introducing bring banks and promoting re-use schemes.
56. We will encourage businesses and social enterprises that promote upcycling, reuse, and recycling.
57. We will introduce a Graffiti Free Gateshead initiative, and create a dedicated team of staff to remove all graffiti as soon as it is reported.
58. We will re-introduce Resident-only parking zones where appropriate, with as minimal a charge to residents as possible.
59. We will improve residents' abilities to install dropped kerbs and driveways, and to repair or replace damaged grass verges.
60. We will review methods to improve parking provision in the borough, including options to bring Council-owned garages back into use such as refurbishment, asset transfer, or sale.
61. We will work with the North East Combined Authority to create a strategy for improving park and ride provision.
62. We will evaluate traffic planning strategy and policy with the aim of improving residents' ability to move around Gateshead more efficiently.
63. We will ensure the roll out of 20mph zones outside all Gateshead schools, and consider enhanced traffic calming and safety measures in other areas.
64. We will review the grace period on Council tax for empty properties (both furnished and unfurnished).
65. We will enhance the "Right to Repair", which would allow Council tenants to pay privately for certain minor repairs in order to reduce waiting times for housing repairs. Guidelines including approved contractors, eligible repairs, and Council inspection requirements will be created to ensure standards are met.

66. We will work to ensure that residents only need to report a repair once. We will expand existing systems to allow residents to receive regular updates in cases of delay, and a final update when an issue is resolved.
67. We will encourage and enable tenants to make use of their rights to report under-performance to the Regulator of Social Housing.
68. We will allow people to apply for Council-owned bungalows that are not suitable for those with accessibility needs, without age restrictions.
69. We will undertake a comprehensive assessment of the Council's selective landlord licensing scheme, examining its effects on rent levels and affordability as well as the implications of the recent Renter's Rights Act on the scheme.
70. We will ensure sufficient face-to-face availability in the Civic Centre to ensure drop-in services are available to the public during business hours.
71. We will ensure that retailers are regularly inspected by trading standards.

Creating a fairer Gateshead

72. We will review and improve the disabled adaptations policy to provide a more responsive service for the most vulnerable members of our community.
73. We will work with Gateshead Youth Council and local schools to develop an agreed strategy and materials to tackle the rise of extremism of all forms and to promote inclusivity.
74. We will expand the availability of Prevent duty training for community groups and interested persons to help tackle radicalisation of all forms.
75. We will enhance the role of the Women and Girls' Committee, re-name it the Women and Equalities Committee, and include in its remit multiple dimensions of intersectionality and ensure that the perspectives of disenfranchised groups are included. Relevant policies and practices will be reviewed to ensure they are up-to-date and promote inclusivity.
76. Vulnerable Gateshead children should be looked after locally when possible. We will significantly reduce the proportion of children sent outside of the borough for care and prioritise family support services.
77. We will continue to improve support for kinship carers and advocate for parity of support with foster carers.
78. We will work with both Gateshead's carers, and those they care for, to identify support requirements and increase satisfaction with Council caring services.
79. We will commission a review of the effectiveness and sustainability of Gateshead's Local Council Tax Support Scheme against examples from other Local Authorities. We will seek to ensure that residents are supported in the right way and will consider options including a tiered system of support.

Securing Gateshead's future

80. We will encourage the placement of a dedicated qualified mental health practitioner in every school, both primary and secondary, giving every child in school access to care and support from the moment they start needing it.
81. We will provide a process for residents and/or businesses to apply for pedestrian priority and school streets where children and the community have priority over vehicles during school hours.
82. We will improve the availability of cycle storage across the borough, and review cycle infrastructure to ensure safety for all road users.
83. We will Introduce a Community Toilet Scheme, encouraging local businesses to make toilets accessible to people who need them.
84. We will work with experts to create a Dark Sky strategy for Gateshead to boost tourism and improve public safety through ensuring that lighting is effective without being overwhelming.
85. We will continue to champion local food production, including home gardens, allotments, and orchards. We will improve collaboration with community groups to promote practical gardening and cooking skills, reduce waste, and expand access to nutritious, affordable food.
86. We will review under-used land across the borough and identify potential new allotment sites. We will also explore alternative funding arrangements, including user-led community asset transfers, to help unlock grant funding for improvements.
87. We will accelerate the creation of new woodland and other habitats, such as marshland and wildflower meadows, especially on sites that are not suitable for agricultural or other uses. This will improve biodiversity, improve our green spaces, and strengthen the resilience and well-being of our communities.
88. We will review the Council's flood risk approach and ensure that strategies for mitigating flood risks due to extreme weather meet current best practice and involve appropriate partner organisations.
89. We will collaborate with partners to install additional electric vehicle charging, directing officers to explore EV charging solutions for properties without dedicated parking spaces.
90. We will review the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan to ensure that progress is aligned with residents' priorities, and delivered at a pace that maximises results.
91. We will strive to make Gateshead a clean air borough, through encouraging the installation of renewable and sustainable energy sources as well as increasing tree planting and woodland creation, especially in urban areas.
92. We will facilitate crowdfunding and alternative methods for investing in Council priorities through platforms such as Abundance Investment and NECA's Carbon Marketplace.

93. We will back Men's groups for all ages and backgrounds, recognising the varied challenges that men face. We will encourage peer support, skills-sharing, and building social connections and resilience.
94. We will improve support for Women's groups for all ages and backgrounds, including child-friendly spaces where appropriate. We will encourage groups that recognise women's unique priorities while offering skills sharing, building resilience, and promoting well-being.
95. We will support inclusive LGBTQ+ groups and community spaces (such as the One Centre) that reflect the community's range of needs and which promote belonging, wellbeing, and access to specialist support where appropriate.
96. We will support groups focusing on promoting opportunities for young people to connect with trusted support as they transition to adulthood, build resilience, and improve life skills to help them thrive and feel confident in their future.
97. We will continue to support family hubs and groups that offer support to people of all ages, genders, and backgrounds who are caring for children.
98. We will partner with dedicated organisations to enhance and re-introduce Youth Services across Gateshead. This will provide dedicated space, healthy activities, skills development, and employment opportunities for Gateshead's young people, and include the reintroduction of grant support for talented young people.
99. We will introduce the Gateshead Youth Skills Guarantee. This will consist of a Council-backed programme connecting young people with local businesses, with an emphasis on renewable energy and digital industry jobs. It will include an apprenticeship guarantee ensuring every young person has access to training, work experience, or mentoring.
100. We will support and continue the Council's commitments to veterans.