

FOREST OF DEAN GREEN PARTY

LOCAL MANIFESTO 2015-19

A POSITIVE CHOICE (The only real choice?)

This constitutes a statement of Green priorities in the Forest of Dean. Full details on Green Party policies and principles can be seen at:

<http://policy.greenparty.org.uk>

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INTRODUCTION

REVIVING AND SECURING PARTICIPATIVE LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE FOREST OF DEAN

Successive governments have, for the last 30 years unintentionally, compromised and corrupted our public services. Instead of being of service to local people, our public services are carved up as business opportunities and providers of commodities in which our only real role is as passive, paying consumers, or suppliers of services and commodities. Great services result when local government complements the enthusiasms and efforts of citizens, as individuals and in association with each other. Real Local Authorities make it easier for people to address those things they really care about and are not preoccupied with coercing them to comply with their agendas.

Greens are not surprised that central government has made local government, and the most vulnerable amongst us who depend on local services most, by far the biggest casualties of its cuts programme. All recent governments have shared the same passion for seducing British citizens to the dependence of those who can only consume. However, there is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about (as opposed to what others tell us we care about!) There is so much anger, distrust, greed, and pettiness that we are losing our capacity to work well together – always blaming others and finding scapegoats like Europe or immigrants for our own shortcomings.

Greens believe that healthy communities are maintained where public services supplement and complement what citizens initiate for themselves with their families and neighbours, acknowledging that life would go on if Local Government ceased to function (as in so many ways it has!) An education system that sees its role as superseding that of parents and families is misconceived, as is a social services bureaucracy that, in the name of care, ‘divorces’ our elders from community and familial roots. Community resilience is destroyed when leaders choose power over delivery. In the UK it appears that the bosses rate power and control above having public organisations that work well. Green Councillors will challenge and work reflectively with their constituents to find out what you really care about and to change this; evolving sustainable, relevant and integrated public services. Radical alternatives, not more of the same old cant (or should that be “can’t”).

A GREEN FOREST OF DEAN DISTRICT COUNCIL WILL:

- Prioritise the needs and wishes of Foresters above the often arbitrary and destructive imperatives imposed by central government – be prepared to fight the centralisers and anti-democrats
- Actively demonstrate that ‘local’ out-performs the fallacy of ‘economies of scale’ – using evidence honestly
- Evolve and demonstrate real localism
- Reverse the commodification and outsourcing of public services – focusing instead on developing sustainable and affordable high quality arrangements in collaboration with citizens
- Support the local economy through a strong policy of local sourcing and procurement, backed up with development support for Forest businesses
- Build a local economy based upon the Forest of Dean’s unique assets
- Develop the case for a Forest of Dean Unitary Authority
- Work for a Carbon Neutral Forest of Dean
- Work to strengthen and empower the citizens, families, and communities of the Forest.

JOBS AND ECONOMIC RESILIENCE ***THE FOREST OF DEAN – A WORKING FOREST***

The Forest of Dean has suffered successive administrations that have done little to improve the economic vitality of the region since the demise of the coal industry in the 1960's.

The Forest of Dean has a problem in that it is one of the best places in the UK to raise a family, but there are few local jobs. 14,000 leave the Forest of a daily basis to work in London, Swindon, Cardiff, Bristol, Cheltenham and Gloucester etc.

The Forest of Dean Green Party has ideas to reverse this trend.

With many indicators that put it on a par with other parts of the country benefitting from considerable EU investment, the Forest of Dean continues to be neglected. With an estimated 14,000 people being forced to work outside the Forest, there is a risk of replacing internal economic resilience with a dormitory region, entirely reliant on outside earnings.

The Forest of Dean Green Party, however, believes that the Forest offers a myriad of opportunities to create a dynamic, Forest-centred economy that will provide jobs and financial security as well as benefitting the wider economy and populace of the UK.

The Green Party's ***Green New Deal*** (rather than the current Government's poor rip-off, also called a Green Deal) is a radical programme of investment to improve the housing stock and particularly the energy-efficiency of the housing stock. Local jobs would be created on the back of a programme that would save both money and energy, as well as significantly reducing the outflow of hard-earned wages to major power companies.

Furthermore, the Forest of Dean Green Party would look towards achieving energy security, allowing a guaranteed base supply to protect against rising energy prices and unstable supply. There is an abundance of opportunities in renewables, including lagoons in the Severn, turbines benefitting from the unimpeded winds up the Severn Estuary, PV roof- and field-mounted arrays and biomass through Long Rotational Coppicing of the Forest itself. The latter would be achieved through an active engagement with local Forestry Commission partners.

The **Forest Green Economy** is the Forest of Dean Green Party's vision of a working Forest. The Forest itself would be an integral part of the provision of new jobs, in apprenticeships, local crafts, a green construction sector, and, of course, Green Tourism.

The Green Party's **Green New Deal** would be implemented across the Forest, again creating many jobs, as improvement and investment is focused on one of our most important assets, our housing stock. Energy-efficiency improvements would be undertaken on the majority of properties in the Forest to proof us against rising energy prices.

A much closer working relationship with the Forestry Commission and the Forest itself would help in the development of relevant apprenticeships, the promotion of woodworking and timber-based industries and jobs. Also supported would be a sound local green construction industry.

The local Green Party has been active in support of the 'Hands Off Our Forest' (HOOF) campaign. Now our Forest must become a vital part and component of our local economy in a mutual relationship based on guardianship of our natural resources and development of skills and industries that work with our Forest.

The Forest is a great place to run a business, and SME's (Small and Medium Enterprises) should be encouraged to relocate. Although there is designated commercial land that has been given planning permission for new units, there is already spare capacity on the industrial estates that populate not just many of the towns of the Forest, but also the villages.

Crucial to the growth of SME's must be fast broadband. The current leader of the Forest of Dean District Council promised good speeds across the Forest and has failed spectacularly over the course of his administration. Good broadband speeds are essential.

The Forest is a beautiful place and sustainable Green tourism would be encouraged, offering a place for rest and relaxation and recreation.

But, building upon this, **The Forest Green Economy** would also place an emphasis on **Health**. Our privileged environment has

obvious health-giving properties and the Forest of Dean Green Party would promote the growth of new Health-based industries. We have hospitals IN the Forest and they need to be encouraged to use the Forest on their doorstep to enhance their patients' healing and convalescence. The attractive working environment would be used to draw Health companies into the Forest, to create a world-class centre of excellence for research and training in traditional and alternative health practices.

The financial instruments and investment levers of the Forest Green Economy must be locally controlled to curb an outflow of wages and profits to corporation and shareholders with little or no interest in the long-term viability and sustainability of the Forest. Many studies have shown that economies and communities with a strong element of local circulation of economic resources are those that thrive. To that end, the Forest of Dean Green Party would support establishment of sustainable local Credit Union movement, community investment in all aspects of the Forest Green Economy and work to enhance the established 'Local Exchange Trading System' (LETS) which keeps value within the locality.

Much of the administration of the Forest is in Gloucester, and could be relocated to Coleford if the Forest was to take on Unitary Status. Local purchasing of public services and local sourcing could further keep the taxpayer's pound circulating within the local economy.

With many expecting Carbon to become a currency in its own right, the medium-term aim would be for a **Carbon Neutral Forest**.

For too long, the leaders of the Forest have allowed a downbeat and depressed atmosphere to pervade our local economy. Either this or the deluded belief that 1980's-style regeneration (i.e. buildings and roads) will inevitably produce jobs. The Forest of Dean Green Party sees opportunities to revitalise and generate old and new industries. With good **Green leadership** and clear vision, the children of the Forest can be given a clear future towards long-term that don't disappear when the infrastructure has been built; jobs that are rewarding, sustainable and of worth and value.

The Forest of Dean: a working Forest.

PLANNING & TRANSPORT – Using what we have much more effectively

Get the Local Development Framework Plan right

Greens will actively engage in the review and development of local plans and policies to further the green cause – in particular will work to develop an energy planning policy that supports renewable energy installations in the Forest.

Area Committees – develop real Localism

In line with some progressive local authorities, Greens would introduce several decentralised planning committees – local area committees – across the district. Parish councils would have direct representation on these.

The right development in the right place

The Cinderford Northern Quarter proposal is a vanity project that seriously threatens wildlife, will lead to no increased college facilities, gives us another hotel with no clear market, and gives dubious claims to job creation. Coupled with the numerous historical pit workings in the area increasing risk of subsidence / collapse – the Greens oppose this proposal.

For a fraction of the cost, the 5 Acres site could be a state-of-the-art centre for a college and combined sports centre with playing fields (that the CNQ would not provide)

No housing without jobs

The regional housing allocation should not be implemented unless there are associated *real* jobs (not simply more industrial units). Foresters commuting to Gloucester / Cheltenham or Bristol is not desirable or sustainable for the environment or communities. A survey of empty properties should be carried out before wholesale housing development takes place.

Public transport

Greens will resist calls for expensive infrastructure changes (e.g. new bridge over the Severn or A48 widening) as they only provide short-term solutions. We will resist cuts to public bus services and lobby for improvements. We will lobby for the public ownership of our railways and support any proposals for increased services especially into the heart of the Forest to Parkend.

Better walking and cycling facilities

Greens welcome the recent introduction of cycling facilities in Cinderford and will push for better integration with designated routes (e.g. NCR 42), and more facilities at new developments.

Local independent retailing

We will resist new out-of-town retail parks and car-based superstores, and only support supermarkets in town centres. The proposed ASDA store at Steam Mills will do nothing to enhance the town centre (or local independent traders' businesses).

Building Regulations & Climate Change

The Forest of Dean Green Party takes our contribution to mitigating climate change seriously and will lobby for tightening building regulations on all new developments so that they are in line with the Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3 with immediate effect, progressing to levels 4,5 and 6 on an annual basis, aiming for zero-carbon dwellings.

ENERGY – SECURING OUR FUTURES BY LOCAL ACTION

Background

Energy is fundamental to life and to the economy. Our planet receives enough solar energy from the sun each day to meet our raw energy needs for a whole year. It also provided finite stocks of fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas), in which ancient solar energy was locked away. Our economic development has taken us away from using sun, wind and water power to a technology dependent on dwindling supplies of fossil fuels which we burn, producing emissions that result in climate change.

Fossil fuels represent natural capital that the earth's systems have laid down as part of its self-regulating evolution to becoming a more habitable planet. Industrialism has been committing the fundamental economic error of using this capital as income and depleting this natural regulating storage of CO₂ upon which the stability of our planets climate depends.

Our use of these fossil fuels increases atmospheric pollutants and greenhouse gases, leading to forest damage from acid rain, poor health due to respiratory disease, environmental contamination from rapid release of concentrated natural toxins such as mercury and radium.

An important step in addressing this problem is for us to reduce our consumption of energy and, in the long run, to reorganise our society to be more in tune with natural renewable energy supplies.

The Green Party is fundamentally opposed to nuclear energy, which we consider to be expensive, dangerous and wholly undemocratic. The technology is not carbon neutral, and being reliant on uranium (a finite resource), it is not renewable. At best the true life cost in terms of energy balance for Nuclear or what is known as Energy Returned on Energy Invested (EROEI) is an average of ~8:1. This compares with EROEI for renewables of 8:1 for Solar PV and 20:1 for wind, all without the nuclear waste issues and risks of accidents to deal with. If we are going to be frugal with the use of depleting natural capital resources we need to ask ourselves this one simple question: why are we considering

Nuclear with its inherent additional safety and waste concerns as well as cooling requirements, when the overall net benefits are no better than renewables. There is so far no safe way of disposing of nuclear waste. To a degree unequalled by even the worst of other dangerous industries, the costs and dangers of nuclear energy and its waste will be passed on to future generations long after any benefits have been exhausted.

It is also a fundamental requirement to look to distribute wealth more fairly here in the UK, and especially in the Forest of Dean with an aging population and many retirees moving to the area purchasing local assets e.g. houses and land. One fundamental key to this is developing systems that allow individuals to be able to invest modest sums of money in actual assets linked to their future resilience. Community owned / invested renewable energy is a clear way to distribute wealth in a fair and equitable way whilst giving people opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to their future resilience.

"Peak Mineral Resources"

[1] Fossil fuels are finite resources and their global rate of production will inevitably reach a peak and then decline in the next few decades.

[2] In the case of oil and natural gas, the UK rate of production has peaked and the global rate of production will peak soon.

[3] The consequences of the declining rate of production of fossil fuels, or 'Peak Oil' and 'Peak Gas' as it is also known, will fundamentally affect the nation's economy and society:

a. International competition for increasingly scarce resources will lead to increased conflict and deteriorating cooperation between nations.

b. Increasing prices in the domestic market will lead to increasing levels of transport fuel poverty, heating fuel poverty, and food poverty in our society.

c. Declining availability of petrol and diesel fuel will have a serious effect on large swathes of domestic economic activity.

d. Declining natural gas supplies will lead to electricity shortages unless a vigorous programme of diverse alternative sources of electricity generation is implemented.

[4] To minimise the worst effects of Peak Oil on our economy and society, it is crucial that immediate steps are taken to reduce our dependence on oil and natural gas, through reducing our energy consumption, improved energy efficiency and development of renewable sources of energy.

Long-term Objectives for The Forest

Target 1. A Forest Green economy would reduce its demand for energy to a sustainable minimum, and obtain that energy from renewable sources. This is calculated to be approximately a 40% reduction in energy demand here in the Forest of Dean over the next 30 years.

Target 2. Energy would be generated, stored and distributed as close to the point of use as practicable, with maximum local control. This would ideally mean that all of the Forest of Dean's 558MW of required energy generation capacity is achieved locally, with as much as possible under local control and ownership. We estimate that the Forest of Dean has as much as 1035MW or 186% of its needs.

Target 3. Actively oppose any future reopening and / or expansion of the Forest of Dean's coalfields, including coal bed methane and fracking.

Target 4. Lobby FODDC to ensure that a target of 100% of energy from local renewables by 2050 is adopted, first as a working document, and then as a firm target by 2017.

Local Short-term Objectives

Target 1. To reduce demand for fossil fuels as rapidly as possible by inducing industry, householders and the public sector to invest in energy conservation and achieve a 10% reduction in energy demand by 2020.

Target 2. To reduce drastically and, if possible, eliminate the pollution caused by burning coal and oil locally, and not support reopening of Forest of Dean Coal Mines under any circumstances.

Target 3. To promote full use of currently available renewable energy sources for heat, electricity and transport, and provide the necessary support for the relevant markets and industries to grow with an emphasis on local ownership and businesses.

Target 4. Actively support establishment of local electric vehicle (EV) re-charging networks across the Dean, and work with local EV car suppliers to promote the benefits of EVs.

Target 5. Actively support the work of Dean Community Energy Group in its objectives for all renewable energy schemes above a £1M capital threshold to have clear community benefit, in line with the Governments Community Energy Strategy.

Target 6. Lobby FODDC to develop a positive Renewable Energy Strategy that incorporates the objectives within the Governments Community Energy Strategy.

Target 7. Support for work and pilot studies in allowing local people and businesses to buy renewable energy directly from generation sites under personal Power Purchase Agreements, which cut out the large profits made by the multi-national power companies and energy spot markets, and instantly go a long way to overcome issues of fuel poverty.

Target 8. Lobbying of FODDC to expand the use of renewable energy on public buildings beyond the minimum stipulated in local government guidance, and to move to EVs for its fleet.

Target 9. Active support and development of an EV community transport scheme funded from community energy projects, as an exemplar of what can be achieved.

Target 10. Set up a feasibility study into whether FODDC should set up an Energy Supply Company (ESCO) or partnership, by installing renewables installations on publically-owned land.

BRINGING FOOD AND PROSPERITY BACK HOME

Today, food is associated with obesity, dubious provenance, food miles, horsemeat, mislabeling, rising costs, food banks, and food security / insecurity. And the industry is heavily subsidised by us, to the profit of others. (About 80p in the £1 spent at a supermarket leaves the Forest forever. At local shops and markets, about 80p in the £1 is recirculated within the Forest economy.)

- By bringing food back home, the Green Party promotes local solutions.
- Localisation implies local production and consumption, as well as local decision-making and preservation of local culture. In the context of food supply, the benefits of localisation can include:
 - a reduction in ‘food miles’;
 - provision of fresher, healthier and more seasonal food;
 - promotion of a sense of community and local food culture;
 - resilience to changes in global food supply;
 - contribution to future food security;
 - support for small-scale, more environmentally-friendly farming and growing;
 - support for the rural economy.

The **Forest of Dean Green Party** encourages greater community ownership of food with simple solutions appropriate to our Forest way of life and Dean bioregion.

Having a ‘home farm’ in every parish owned and managed co-operatively by the community for the community encourages and re-educates that culture of resilience; so much a part of our forest heritage.

The local resurgence in agro-forestry, forest gardening, permaculture and small-holdings, together with a growing foraging culture, regular village food markets and food sovereignty all contribute to a vibrant Forest food culture which we urgently need to nurture and grow.

Join us in bringing our food back home again!

HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

Greens are committed to changing the fundamental relationship between citizens and their public services.

We don't believe that it is possible to *consume* a worthwhile life, nor that all that matters can be bought. We want to take a lead in restoring autonomy and responsibility to citizens, families and communities, and to making our public institutions what they should be: supplementary and complementary to our lives, **at the same time ensuring that the safety net that prevents poverty is not removed.**

As John McKnight and Peter Block reported just a short time ago...

"Human services have the unintentional effect of pulling suffering away from the family and neighbourhood and into the domain of the marketplace. This strikes at the heart of community competence, and it occurs because we have given care over to the professionals.

Professionalisation is the market replacement for a community that has lost or outsourced its capacity to care. The loss of community competence is the price we pay for the growth of the service economy."

...and we are committed to reversing this drift into de-skilled and disconnected dependency.

Hence our approach to public services is one of firstly helping people help themselves, and supporting the development of strong citizens, strong families, and resourceful communities, with the object of securing relationship-rich, fulfilling, inclusive, safe and contributing lives for us all.

In respect of **Housing**, we will:

- Introduce community grants schemes to support local householders and tenants to come together to improve their local environment
- Strengthen the council's strategic management and procurement functions, to ensure that the District's Social Housing stock is creatively and effectively developed and utilised
- Promote and develop local 'Land Share' schemes with the goal of ensuring that gardens that cannot be maintained by householders become local assets rather than eyesores
- Take our Empty Homes powers much more seriously
- Use all means possible to secure an increase in the building of affordable new homes and, where needed, social housing

- Promote Co-Housing and Self-Build initiatives
- Incentivise Green Housing Developments and the use of local timber in all developments
- Actively encourage the use of local tradesmen and materials in all public developments
- Ensure that Forest of Dean tenants are not penalised by the 'bedroom tax'
- Campaign for the abolition of VAT on property renovations and/or maintenance

In respect of **Community**, we will:

- Set about reversing the usual public services culture that assumes that people and communities are in some way problematic and in need of 'fixing' by 'experts' or 'systems'
- Focus upon working with the abundance of strengths and talents in Forest neighbourhoods to bring about bottom-up and locally owned solutions to those things that really matter to citizens
- Facilitate local and sustainable innovation to the things that really matter – such as growing old where we are known and loved with respect and dignity; growing up in communities that assist us to mature into kind, competent and contributing citizens; securing local economic sustainability; achieving locally mediated health and well-being services; and so forth
- Make **local** our default position, and work with other arms of the public services machinery to secure their assistance.

LOCAL – THE DEFAULT POSITION – DEVELOPING THE CASE FOR A UNITARY FOREST OF DEAN

As the business of government becomes ever more centralised, scaled and standardised, both democracy and the notion that all of us play our part as active citizens and tax payers in securing the best interests of everyone, flies out of the window.

Government in the 21st century in the UK is governed by big business. It sees big and relatively risk-free profits to be garnered from lucrative public service contracts.

The business ethos has, over the last three or four decades, burrowed its selfish way into the UK body politic and public

imagination like a voracious tapeworm. It may be the case, although frequently it is not, that securing *economies of scale, specialised production roles, and standardised products and services* enhance shareholders' dividends but, as has been empirically proven (but totally disregarded by governments in awe of capital who cynically call for evidence) time and again *SCALE and STANDARDISATION* are seen to **BE THE PROBLEM AND NOT THE SOLUTION.**

In accord with the evidence we propose that our public services should be **LOCAL BY DEFAULT:**

- Helping citizens to help themselves
- Focusing on underlying purpose and principles rather than predetermined outcomes
- Managing value rather than costs

Empirical research suggests that if locality working was generalised in England alone we would immediately stop wasting £16 billion per annum. Demand, much of it described as 'failure demand' (people whose needs are left unmet repeatedly seek assistance), would reduce accordingly.

In short the evidence says that if we do things locally we are all happier and there is no need for an austerity programme, just a lot less bureaucracy and "nanny-state knows best".

And we might see a renaissance in civic engagement! In France *local* local government, with the commune at the core, is at the hub of society. As Francois Mitterand observed:

"There are 36,000 communes? It is very useful. It means 500,000 municipal councilors plus, don't forget, 500,000 who have liked to be. That is one million citizens who are interested in local affairs." Ed.Note: this is still only about 2%

Our opponents stand for less councillors and larger, more centralised authorities utilising the discredited economies of scale argument. Frankly, their goal is a nation of passive and easily manipulated consumers for whom (t)wittering suffices as engagement.

Greens believe that leaving government to a largely professional elite is simply daft, putting any meaningful interpretation of democracy in jeopardy, ensuring that our public services will

eventually disappear completely into the market place, and most importantly, failing to make the most of what we have: our people, their resilience, ingenuity and resourcefulness.

When all is said and done our Green vision of a prosperous, interdependent and resourceful Forest of Dean needs as much authority and responsibility as is possible within our democracy to be vested locally.

We all need a Unitary Forest of Dean!

The Green Party – Local by Default!

A NICER PLACE TO LIVE

We believe that where we live is vital to our health and happiness. With a strong community, unpolluted natural surroundings and opportunities to share public resources, we can rebuild a good place to live.

At the heart of the matter are relationships with family, friends, and neighbours. The Forest of Dean Green Party will use appropriate resources at local levels, to bring people together, to discuss issues of common importance, build neighbourliness and enjoy helping each other.

Consumerism and the pursuit of excessive financial profits disintegrates communities. We must help them back together, so that they can develop strength and resilience in the face of a depleted social capital and a deteriorating climate.