

# **SWINDON'S NEW DEAL**

**FOR A GREENER TOWN, HEALTHIER LIVES,  
AND A WEALTHIER ECONOMY**

**BECAUSE SWINDON DESERVES BETTER**



March 2021

# Swindon's New Deal

This document outlines what we are calling Swindon's New Deal. It is a supplementary document to our manifesto which aims to outline the principles of how a Labour administration would govern. These principles and ideas are at the heart of our manifesto and will guide our future decision making.

Although this New Deal takes inspiration on society, economics, and good governance from both academic theory and successful councils, its ideas and policies are focused on Swindon's needs and our Vision for Swindon.

To best explain the New Deal this document is broken down into two sections. First, we outline the priorities and principles of the New Deal and secondly, we discuss how each of our manifesto pledges aims to tackle a priority of the New Deal and how our principles led to these choices.

## **The Swindon New Deal aims to tackle the following priorities:**

- 1) Reduce deprivation as measured in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
- 2) Remove health inequalities as measured in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
- 3) Create a greener, cleaner, safer environment, including deep carbon reductions for Swindon by 2030
- 4) Start supporting local businesses and creating local jobs
- 5) Transform the physical and social landscape of Swindon into a more pleasant place to live

## **The principles of a Labour run Swindon Borough council:**

- We will always aim to keep council tax as low as possible. Council tax is by its nature a regressive tax.
- We will not be afraid to invest to spend on pre-emptive measures. We will adopt a planned and strategic approach, avoiding simply reacting to problems with the additional costs this creates. Our aim is to overcome the twin perils of ever-reducing budgets and increases in tax.
- We promise to regularly communicate with the public we are elected to serve. We will provide as much detail as possible on our spending to show accountability for how the council spends Swindon's taxes.
- We commit to maximise our local spend. Swindon Borough Council is a key economic force within Swindon. To help the local economy and residents, a Labour Swindon Borough Council will aim to prioritise tendering contracts to companies located within the borough, especially those who pay our residents the Real Living Wage.

**What we need to encourage Swindon residents to do, to help us govern by these principles:**

- Participate in communication with the council. Although elected to be the voice of residents in the day-to-day running of the borough, councillors need to establish a two-way dialogue. We recognise the need to draw on the expertise of the wider community and all levels of the Civic Offices staff.
- We need to work smarter with our residents, in minimising waste and making our refuse system more user-friendly in order to reduce costs and use the savings to support our zero carbon ambitions.
- Encourage good neighbourliness. Social care is the single biggest cost to our Council. Small acts by everyone help residents remain independent longer. If residents lend a hand when they are able, we can use funding more productively and help keep council taxes down.

**How Our Manifesto Delivers on the New Deal**

We promise to be communicative with residents. Step One of this should be explaining how our manifesto is attempting to bring our New Deal into reality. Below we have broken down our manifesto across the five priorities the New Deal is hoping to tackle, as well as offering an explanation of how our proposed New Deal's principles are at play in each.

**1) Reduce deprivation as measured in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment**

Manifesto pledges:

- Keep council tax low
- Establish a Poverty Commission for Swindon
- Increase the numbers of jobs paying the Real Living Wage
- Help break the "lowest income, highest cost" trap

Tax goes up, services get cut. This has been the reality for Swindon residents for the past decade of the Conservative administration. You pay more, the council does less. Council Tax is a regressive form of taxation which is detached from the financial realities of residents. Although we cannot change this method of taxation, we can promise to keep it as low as we can so as to not increase the financial burdens on Swindon residents. We will campaign within the Local Government Association for a fairer system of local taxation which addresses the current inequalities.

The roots of poverty and inequality differ in their origins from community to community. We believe there is a need to establish a Swindon-wide independent commission to examine in depth the root causes of poverty in Swindon and devise a strategy to combat the

inequalities it finds. We believe that the current patchwork of charitable bodies, individual initiatives and statutory bodies has too many holes for people to fall through.

In Section 4 below we stress the importance of moving the minimum wage level to the Real Living Wage if we are to really address inequality.

We know that many who find themselves on the lowest income are faced with the highest costs. For example, those who cannot get reasonably priced credit find themselves at the mercy of the loan shark or those outlets charging outrageous levels of interest. Similarly, those on lower incomes often find it difficult to shop around for the lowest energy tariffs. We aim to work with Consumer Protection to help prevent people on the lowest incomes falling foul to those who aim to rip them off.

Reducing deprivation in Swindon also involves increasing opportunities for everyone. Swindon is in danger of becoming a low-wage, low-productivity town. We want Swindon residents to be able to grow their skills and income.

## **2) Remove health inequalities as measured in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment**

Manifesto pledges:

- Reduce Mental Health waiting times for young people
- Maintain wardens in residential homes
- Create a loneliness reduction strategy
- Increase specialist housing for SEND
- Create a homelessness reduction strategy
- Introduce a Renters' Charter

These manifesto promises serve two purposes. Firstly, they are the right thing to do. Our core values involve helping those in need and this is something we believe is the council's duty. These manifesto pledges are part of our promise to Swindon to pre-emptively spend money to save money later. We believe levelling up is the best way of using our scarce resources and is both cost-effective and productive in reducing the inherent costs of inequality.

## **3) Create a greener, cleaner, safer environment, including deep carbon reductions for Swindon by 2030**

Manifesto pledges:

- Re-introduce Park & Ride
- Ring fence 4% of the highways budget for cycling
- Air pollution monitors outside all schools

- Set up a loan scheme to retrofit houses, creating new green jobs
- Target deep carbon reductions for Swindon by 2030
- Tackle air pollution by placing monitors on bin lorries and outside schools
- Increase the number of electric car charging points around Swindon
- As part of our procurement process reform, we will favour local companies with strong green credentials
- Support biodiversity and pollinators in our open spaces through re-wilding schemes

The climate crisis is real. Even the Conservatives are no longer climate change deniers. Compared with, for example, Wiltshire Council, Swindon has been slow to get started on moving to a zero-carbon future. We need to move far faster, and our manifesto's pledges aim to meet the real challenges at speed. A failure to act now will only increase mitigation costs in the future. We also recognise that although the threats to humankind are existential, early action to combat climate change creates the need for new skills and businesses, and we aim to build a Swindon economy which addresses those needs.

The time for talking has ended. Let's replace Conservative inertia with a brighter and greener future for our community and future generations.

#### **4) Start supporting local businesses and creating local jobs**

Manifesto pledges:

- Prioritise local companies for public sector procurement contracts
- Seek to meet the needs of small and medium-sized firms, not just larger ones
- Re-open the Oasis
- Transform the town centre
- Expand university level education in Swindon

Swindon's revenue and capital budget is increasingly provided by locally generated taxes. Year on year the government has reduced grants to Swindon in real terms. We believe that more of the money we raise locally should be spent locally, and that our procurement processes should aim to favour local businesses which meet our aim of tackling inequality - in short, those firms which pay the Real Living Wage, provide good conditions, retrain their employees and value employees' rights to be members of trade unions.

We also want to do more to help our local small and medium-sized businesses have greater access to Swindon Borough Council contracts. We want to engage with this sector to examine the barriers to access in the current tender process and how we can better help them grow their businesses.

Again, this process supports our aim to "keep it local" and grow our local economy as we recover post Covid.

The closure of the Oasis reveals the abject mismanagement of the Conservatives. The failure to include a requirement to keep the Oasis open in the original contract, or its transfer back to the borough council is blatant neglect by the Conservative administration. Labour is the only party to press for a contingency fund to enable the leaseholders to bring forward a new contract to keep the Oasis open. Labour is also pressing for a full enquiry to find out why the council got into the mess in the first place and learn lessons for the future.

Until Swindon has a town centre worthy of the people of Swindon, it will run the risk of being overlooked for inward investment and the boost to the local economy this would generate. We know that there are investors who are keen to invest in Swindon, but their ideas have not been seriously considered by the Conservative administration. We will set up a competitive process to invite new proposals to regenerate the town centre and build on its heritage, and put the proposals to the people of Swindon.

As part of our high-wage, high-productivity local economy we want Swindon residents to be able to grow their skills and income. We want to see more opportunity locally to access higher-level qualifications and skills. In the absence of a university, we will work with local colleges and skills providers to offer foundation level degrees in practical skills that match local needs and the emerging green economy.

A wider access to higher skills and qualifications will help break the cycle of deprivation and inequality, which holds back too many of our communities. It will also help rebuild a culture of “growing our own” and avoid the need to recruit a significant proportion of our higher-skilled workforce from outside Swindon.

## **5) Transform the physical and social landscape of Swindon into a more pleasant place to live**

Manifesto pledges:

- Fix all potholes for the long term
- Introduce 20mph speed limits where residents want them
- Convert all damaged grass verges to parking bays where residents want this
- Increase parking and parking enforcement
- Build 1000 affordable homes within 5 years
- Seek to find ways to restore all the historic buildings in Swindon
- Keep Lydiard under council control and invest in Coate Water
- Develop a cultural quarter with a new theatre and art gallery

Our invest-to-save approach can best be illustrated by the contrast with that of the Conservative approach to road maintenance. Each year too many of our residents see potholes re-appear that were patched the previous year. This is a waste of money. We need to replace patch and mend by a regular maintenance schedule. Not only is the current ad

hoc approach expensive, it is also dangerous to cyclists and motorcyclists, with the annual cost to motorists of damage to tyres and tracking being immense.

In the same vein the Conservative neglect of anti-social parking is creating unsightly and dangerous conditions for residents and pavement users alike. Active enforcement action will improve neighbourhoods and help provide funds to enable more sustainable parking spaces.

Swindon's growth in the period 1950 to 1980 was largely built on the back of an ambitious social house building programme. This programme was supported by Conservative and Labour alike. Over more recent times growth has been in the private sector with negligible new social housing. We need to tip the balance back towards more social housing and aim to build 1000 houses for rent over the next five years. This will help to reduce the cost of placing an increasing number of homeless families in private rented accommodation at double the cost to the public purse of the rent of a social housing tenancy. Again, an invest-to-save initiative.

But our future success in transforming Swindon also requires us to look to our past. We have much to learn from the past, and we will pay tribute to our forebears. We have grand and culturally significant buildings in Swindon that have been left abandoned. We will ensure that Swindon's culture is safeguarded, maintained and there for all to enjoy.

We trust this paper shows you our vision for a better Swindon. We see the manifesto as part of an ongoing process of active dialogue and we want residents to get involved and communicate with us. So, please feel free to contact your Swindon Labour councillors and talk to us about our New Deal and how best we can, together, transform our town. If you do not currently have a Labour councillor, with your support we're hoping to fix that for you this May, but for now feel free to contact your local candidate or any other Labour Group councillors to find out more.