

A Manifesto for Leeds

Draft version 4

6th October 2003



(A) DEFENDING OUR SERVICES

Privatisation

We oppose all forms of privatisation of public services.

Privatised services are more expensive but poorer quality. Private firms only run public services for one reason - to make money. That means raking off some of our money into their pockets. Whether it is outright sell-off, "PFI" or a so-called "Public Private Partnership" the outcome of privatisation is always cuts in our services to fund profits for private shareholders.

In Leeds, the "New Labour" council privatises with enthusiasm. Education, housing, leisure, refuse collection, and so on. That is what its "New Labour" masters in London tell it to do. We will stop this.

Education

We will bring local education back under democratic control within the council. "Education Leeds" will be closed down and its assets reclaimed. Capita and Ridsdale will be given the boot. There will be no more sucking profits out of the children of Leeds.

We will put an immediate stop to all school closures. There will be proper objective re-examination the balance between numbers and school places, based on the universally acknowledged need for smaller classes. There will also be re-balancing of the school budgets to ensure that schools in all areas get a fair deal and can maintain good teacher pupil ratios.

We will rebuild a proper education committee, bringing together not just councillors but also staff, parents and pupils, to take the strategic lead in Leeds education.

There will be practical help and encouragement for schools to play a larger role in their local communities.

We will spearhead a challenge to central government over their harmful tests, ratings and league tables. Our schools should concentrate on real education to develop all our children.

To ensure the proper staffing levels, we will pay our teachers and other

school staff the decent wages they deserve. We support the teachers' unions in their campaign to prevent discrimination by faith schools against non-faith teachers and gay teachers.

Social Services

We would stop loading extra taxes onto disabled and elderly people. The "New Labour" council has imposed a harsh charging regime that takes back from the most vulnerable people the little money central government has provided for them.

We will develop systems to help all disabled and elderly people to make the most of their lives. We will support them whether they wish to live at home, in sheltered accommodation or a residential home. We will use the best practice from European countries in organizing our social services.

We will keep open Roundhay Road Day Centre and further develop their excellent facilities making them accessible to all.

Housing

The "New Labour" council has played a cynical trick on its tenants. They were told that the only way they could get the improvements they desperately needed was to vote for privatisation in the form of "Arms Length Management Companies". Tenants were told they would then be able to access hundreds of millions of pounds of Government money.

Now the tenants find that the change is going to cost them many pounds a week in extra rent - but that they are not going to get the essential upgrading and repairs needed.

The "New Labour" Councillors in Leeds, along with those from the Liberal Democrats and Tories, failed to defend the interests of Leeds tenants. They ignored constructive alternative proposals.

For example, the Scotthall Tenants and Residents Association put forward its own well-researched alternative of a land trust for their area. Their Chapel Allerton "New Labour" councillors first promised not only support but to make the project their main priority. Instead they completely ignored the land trust scheme in favour of the Council's privatisation scheme.

We will hold a fresh, fair ballot in which both sides are given equal resources to present their case. This will include proper independent reports presented to tenants covering the pros and cons of any proposals. There will be no privatisation unless a fair and informed ballot supports it.

Council housing should rather remain with the Council but with estate management boards - with real power - on which tenants would have a majority and on which there would be representative of the trade unions. These estate boards will be directly involved through a joint housing committee for Leeds in overseeing letting policy, development priorities and budget setting. We will seek to expand both the numbers and variety of public housing through out the city and to ensure affordable housing, rented and for sale, in both in the public and private sector.

We will explore further the land trust scheme. For over 100 years Garden Cities have provided viable public social alternatives to council housing, funded by land assets.

Health

The National Health Service is one of Britain' s finest achievements. "New Labour" is privatising it piece by piece. As publicly owned hospitals are replaced by "PFI" hospitals the number of beds and the number of doctors and nurses is cut. Community Health Councils used to provide an element of local oversight of health services, "New Labour" has abolished them.

We will seek local control over local NHS services. If this is achieved, we will stop all privatisation of the NHS. Local health services will be accountable to a local board with representation from local people, including patients and staff.

Water

Our water system was established by municipal socialists - cities acting to supply their citizens. We will seek the return of water to public ownership by city or regional boards with proper local representation.

We oppose the compulsory fluoridation of water.

(B) FOR A GREEN, SUSTAINABLE CITY

An Integrated Green Approach

All the Council' s environmental work will be co-ordinated through a single environmental directorate.

We will commission an Ecological Footprint for Leeds. Such Footprints, which detail the amount of resources the city uses up, have been successfully developed for York and London. An Ecological Footprint will enable an accurate plan to be developed for Leeds to save and enrich our environment.

We would have a special focus on energy conservation and sustainable energy regeneration within the city. The council will set an example with its own policies and practices. We will use the purchasing power of the council to bring both energy conservation and devices such as solar panels and heat pumps within the reach of all Leeds residents.

Pollution & Waste

We will use to the full Council powers to stop pollution in Leeds and to make polluters pay. Our transport policy will cut pollution. We will pursue proactive approach on recycling material. "New Labour" sends waste to Indonesia for burial. We will reduce waste and recycle waste, developing products from recycling. We will develop city-wide composting schemes as well as encouraging and supporting home composting.

Unnecessary and excessive packing is one major source of waste. We will work with manufacturers and retailers to reduce and simplify the amount of packaging for all goods.

Good Affordable Food

We support Leeds market. We will organise more regular and accessible farmers' markets to provide cheap, wholesome, fresh food. We will support small local shops to reduce the unhealthy dominance of the huge supermarket chains that try to control both shoppers and suppliers. We will

declare Leeds a GM-free zone, with no genetically modified crops or animals grown in the Leeds area and no genetically modified food on sale.

Open Space

The City' s green spaces woods, parks, open spaces, and school playing fields will be brought into a single conservation plan. We will not give planning permission for any building on green field sites.

We will expand allotments, aiming to make them available for all who want them. This means developing new allotments in areas closer to where people live and ensuring that some plots are made suitable for those who are not so young or who have disabilities.

No more school playing fields will be sold off.

The current council plans to spend up to sixty million pounds on lighting.

We will ensure that such expenditure provides lighting which is both energy efficient and drastically reduces the light pollution which prevents us seeing our skies at night.

Transport

We support the development of the Leeds Tramway system and will expand it to cover the whole city. Extension will be funded by the issuing of public bonds backed by the council, not by the use of the expensive Private Finance Initiative.

We will seek powers for the council to run the whole of public transport - trams, buses and railways - in our area. We need an integrated public transport system of high quality, instead of the privatised chaos we now suffer.

Cycle paths and footpaths will be given the same level of support currently given to roads. Leeds needs a continuous network of footways and cycle ways, segregated from motor traffic. The dangerous patchwork of odd bits we now have is an invitation to accident and injury.

To enable public transport to move freely, and cyclists and pedestrians to

move safely, we will be prepared to restrict car traffic. However, any restrictions on car access to the city centre must follow the provision of good, regular, cheap public transport to make car use unnecessary.

(C) FOR A DEMOCRATIC, WELCOMING CITY

The Council

We will reform the council to make it more open and accessible. "New Labour" has made most councillors powerless. Only a tiny Executive has any say in decisions. We will give power back to councillors as the representatives of their local communities. Further, we will support direct community involvement in decisions, including giving them a real say in how council resources are spent.

Equality

Believing that all the people of Leeds should have equal rights and opportunities, we will pursue:

- positive support for disabled people
- stamping out racism
- opposing sexism
- tolerance for different life styles, sexualities and cultures.

We celebrate our diversity and appreciate the rich variety of cultures, races and beliefs in Leeds. We will welcome refugees and asylum seekers for their contribution to our city. Leeds like other English cities has been built on successive waves of migrants and refugees.

Both the women' s committee and the race equality committee will be made central to all the activities of the council. We will review how the city serves and supports women and racial minorities.

(D) FOR A SAFE CITY

Reducing Crime

Like most places, Leeds has problems with street crime and burglary. The keys to making our city a safe place to live lie in:

- making sure all our people have a stake in our society and our city
- making our environment lived-in and unfriendly to crime
- providing facilities for all young people other than simply wandering the streets
- a reassuring and community-friendly personal police presence

For example, the best way to reduce street crime is not fast-response police cars. It is not even just having more police foot patrols. It is having well-lit, clean, comfortable streets with plenty of ordinary, law-abiding people around.

Home Zones

We support the establishment of more Home Zones putting local residents before traffic and other outside use. Home Zones provide a more pleasant environment with less danger from traffic and more freedom for children and adults to use the streets.

Policing

We will develop municipal policing based on the Italian model. It will use the city centre patrols, the council' s security staff, the parks patrol, traffic wardens and the anti social behaviour teams as its core elements.

This set of forces will be directly accountable to the elected council. It will be able to pursue polices against crime which have informed public support. It would, of course, need to cooperate closely with West Yorkshire Police.

Currently the West Yorkshire Police are not sufficiently accountable to local people. We will support local committees and neighbourhood watches with a

much stronger role in overseeing the West Yorkshire Police and in advising on the best approaches to making our city a friendly place for its people and an unfriendly place for criminals.

Drugs and Criminals

It has been repeatedly proved that the fact that drugs are illegal causes the vast majority of crime. The supply of drugs is controlled by criminals, as is their price. Making drugs illegal has fuelled a whole criminal industry, from international drug-running cartels to individual users committing crimes to fund the drug use. In the USA in the twenties, it was the Prohibition Laws making alcohol illegal that led to Al Capone' s lawless Chicago, not alcohol use itself.

We will therefore campaign for the complete decriminalisation of cannabis and for a public enquiry into the status of other drugs - including alcohol and tobacco. It is our position that all drugs have significant dangers and that it is vital that people, most especially the young, are made fully aware of these. However this is primarily a matter of public health and education policy, not of the criminal law.

Rehabilitation

We will, in cooperation with other agencies, introduce strategies to help people get out of crime - especially youth caught up in gangster type activity. This would work directly with the young people themselves and with their communities on education and alternatives.

(E) FOR PEACE

We will reinstate the Peace and Emergency Planning unit, closed by "New Labour". We will give it the resources and political backing to make a difference throughout the council and the City.

We will ask the Council to condemn wars such as the illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq. This will be by specific resolution in Council and the publication of material showing how damaging such conflicts are to the citizens of Leeds. A good model for such information is the famous Leeds and the Bomb booklet produced by the Council in the 1980s.

We will work to bring all our different communities together to celebrate their diversities and to build understanding of the ways in which they differ. Specific measures would be taken to expose race and religious hatred including anti-Islamic and anti-Jewish prejudice. The thrust would be to generate a culture of mutual solidarity as opposed to a culture of fear and suspicion.

We will strengthen the city' s friendship links and twinning arrangements as a basis for building a truly internationally orientated city. This will specifically include taking forward the Leeds-Hebron Friendship Link.

We will use the power of the Council to expose the damaging and destructive dangers of the big oil companies for peace, as well as for our environment.

(F) DEVELOPING OUR LEEDS ECONOMY

Full Employment for Leeds

The basic aim of the council' s economic policies will be to provide the opportunity for worthwhile and rewarding employment, and access to a fair income, for all the people of Leeds.

Leeds must have broad based employment with a range of low, medium and high skilled jobs. The "New Labour" council has relied far too heavily on low paid jobs such as call centres. These jobs are now under threat from being moved to even lower paid areas overseas and from the growth of voice recognition technology.

Leeds needs to develop a workforce with a range of skills. To do this we need properly supported training, included improved grants for students from Leeds to study at college and university.

We will publish a catalogue of Leeds City assets, including those sold off, at what price, to whom.

We will actively oppose the continuing closure of local Post offices, vital for older and less mobile citizens.

Major Projects for a Major City

We will break out of the self-serving mediocrity of the current council by unlocking the imagination and power of all the citizens of our City. This vision is of a city lead by people who will put Leeds first. All our political rivals, especially "New Labour", kow-tow to their political masters in London.

Together with the citizens of Leeds we will work to enhance our City, including active consideration of major projects. We will actively promote the development of a Leeds Concert Hall.

We will ensure that trade names that are essential parts of the prestigious Leeds heritage, such as "Tetley" and "Elland Road" can only used by our city. We will campaign for the same sort of European rights that currently protect "Champagne" and "Port".

We will, subject to technical advice, change the council computer systems to

an open computer architecture such as Linux, to save money and stop Microsoft exploiting our City.

No two-tier Leeds

Leeds is currently a two-tier city. Those involved in finance and law prosper, along with much of the city centre. But Leeds also contains areas of great deprivation, with poverty and high unemployment.

We will work to reduce the glaring inequalities between rich and poor areas, and between rich and poor people. We will target council resources on the poorer areas of Leeds. We will also ensure that city centre developments, including housing, cater for ordinary people as well as the rich.

Our waterfront will be made accessible to all, not just those who live in expensive riverside developments.

Pensions

We will ensure that no employee of the council loses his/her right to a proper pension. We will campaign for inflation-proof pensions, and the continued right to company pensions based on final salary, for everyone in Leeds.

(G) SUPPORTING LEEDS CULTURE

We will continue to support the West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds International Film Festival, Leeds International Concert Season, Opera North, Leeds Youth Opera, and Phoenix Dance Company. We will support the Leeds Symphony Orchestra and the development of a professional Leeds Orchestra.

However, our view of culture goes beyond the narrow definitions pushed by "New Labour" to include science, poetry, history, literature, sport as well as visual and performing arts. We will encourage the involvement of local communities in all forms of culture and support local activities, events and cultural education. We will provide support for the many local festivals in the City, including such well established ones as the Leeds West Indian Carnival, the Irish Music festival, and the Mela.

We would ensure the preservation and extension of publicly owned sports facilities for the people of Leeds. In particular, we would retain and improve the Leeds International Pool in the city centre.

AFTERWORD

Globalisation, democracy and Leeds.

Global firms such as GE Capita, News International, McDonald' s, Nike, etc affect the life of every voter in Leeds. These huge unregulated monsters move their bases from city to city, from country to country. They generate massive untaxed profits, often using near slave labour, and are unaccountable to anyone. They exploit everyone, but especially women, the young and the underdeveloped world. Their impact on our daily lives and on our environment is a key issue locally as well as internationally. Without control of these global profiteers, all the gains of the last century in equality and social support will be destroyed.

Under "New Labour", local democracy has been cut back and back. Local councils have been made increasingly just the servants of central government. Leeds "New Labour" council has rushed to implement every right- wing idea put forward by Blair in London, from privatising education to becoming a "flagship" PFI authority.

Because it is in hock to big business, "New Labour" nationally has been unable to fulfil even its unbelievably meagre five first election pledges, even after seven years. In Leeds, "New Labour" has presided over cuts in schools, cuts in services, and the mortgaging of our children' s future by privatisation.

All three of our opponents, Labour, Tory and Liberal Democrats, are equally right-wing. They ignore these fundamental questions. But both globalisation and the London control freaks affect every decision made in Leeds, whether it is closing a school, charging for a day centre, or failing to provide a decent bus service.

Alliance for Green Socialism

The Alliance for Green Socialism

is a political organization devoted to the building of a peaceful, environmentally safe and socially responsible world. A world in which diversity is both respected and celebrated. A world in which relations are based on mutual understanding and not force, where rights and a decent life are available for all, not just the rich. The AGS believes this can come about by the development of a democratic, socialist and environmentally conscious society.

