

BEXLEYLABOUR

**BUILDING A
BETTER BEXLEY,
FOR THE MANY
NOT THE FEW**

Bexley Labour Manifesto

London Borough of Bexley Elections

Thursday 3 May 2018

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An opportunity to grasp

Elections are a choice, but on Thursday 3 May, Bexley does not just have a choice to make but an opportunity to grasp; the opportunity to change the direction of our borough.

On 3 May, we all have the opportunity to invest in Bexley and stop the decay of recent years.

We all have the opportunity to create a council that puts compassion at its core and makes aspiration its mission, calling time on the thoughtlessness and cruelty that have marked the last decade.

This year's election is the opportunity to look to our future, build a borough where our children and future generations can afford to stay, and all of us can be proud of today not obsessed with out-of-date and tired ideas that have not worked for years and cannot work tomorrow.

Thursday 3 May is an opportunity to build a better Bexley that works and will continue to work for the many, not the few.

**A new Labour council
for a modern Bexley.**

The challenges we face

Bexley Labour has a plan to tackle the real challenges this borough faces.

We are clear on the path we need to take in the next four years. It is plain to see the problems we have to overcome, and they are our priority; using the council's powers to address the housing crisis, protecting parks and open spaces, supporting the police and being tough on crime, safeguarding education and children and young people, and keeping the borough tidy all year round.

We have identified the problems. We stand ready to implement the solutions.

From Crayford to Welling, young people are left abandoned by a housing market that denies them a foot on the ladder.

The Conservative council refuses to accept there is a housing crisis let alone offer the solutions to solve it. From Foots Cray to Belvedere parents cannot fully enjoy

their retirement with grown-up children forced to stay at home long after they hoped to fly the nest.

Bexley's Conservatives have allowed hundred of properties built without a single affordable home provided. Thousands of properties to be built but none are genuinely affordable to hard-working local families and couples. A new Labour council will address the borough's housing crisis.

In Blackfen, Erith and Crayford local communities have seen their parks and open spaces sold off for development with the threat recently felt in Barnehurst and Belvedere and the prospect of even more being built on across the entire borough.

As one Conservative councillor said, 'Everyone's house was a field, to begin with'. A new Labour council will stop, cancel and reverse the Tories programme to build on parks and open spaces, within days of the election.

By using brownfield land and former industrial spaces, we can build the homes and create the jobs we need without destroying Bexley's much loved green and open spaces.

There are two-hundred and twenty-five CCTV cameras in Bexley. No one watches them.

The council has put money into their purchase and maintenance, but inexcusably axed the staff monitoring them live.

Whether in Bexley Village, Northumberland Heath or Sidcup CCTV cameras are not preventing crime and not helping our local police but instead stare into oblivion, catching the odd incident in retrospect by chance.

A new Labour council will spend the cash needed to reinstate live monitoring to support our overstretched police, be tough on crime and take a stand for law and order in the borough.

Every child deserves the best start in life. However, Bexley's Conservative council have worked hand in hand with their Government to deliver real terms cuts to local schools.

This has led to headteachers and governing bodies making the most difficult of decisions regarding support for our children ranging from redundancies to support staff, rationing classroom resources and writing begging letters to parents asking them to instead provide these funds for their child's education.

When challenged Bexley's Conservatives state these cuts aren't happening, but local headteachers, staff and parents tell a different story. The problems have been exacerbated by the Conservative's desire to deliver their ideological mission to academise every school in the borough.

This has left our council and communities with less and less say over the management of our local schools. While Chief Executives of academies take home six-figure sums, they are at the same time writing to parents begging for money for essential resources.

These cuts are felt hardest by those children with special educational needs and disabilities, with a need for more joined up working with health services and more urgency to provide the services they need.

A new Labour council will work to make academy schools more accountable to parents and the community, work with parents and teachers to fight the Government for an increase in school funding and fight to ensure adequate funding for every Bexley child.

Overgrown grass verges
next to inch deep potholes
and litter lying for months in
streets where weeds grow

knee high is all too frequent
a sight in our borough.

We pride ourselves on being
a green and clean borough
but after years of cuts that
pride is turning to shame.

Instead of spending
consistently, year-on-year, the
Conservative council made
huge cuts and then threw
some cash around when they
need your vote in an election
year. Their policy stores up
problems, is short-sighted and
cost more in the long run.

A new Labour council will
budget consistently and
maintain highways and
pavements year-in and year-
out. It is common sense and
saves taxpayer cash in the
long-run. We will keep the
borough neat and tidy all the
time, not just at election time.

THE SOLUTIONS WE OFFER

Taking action to tackle the housing crisis

There is a housing crisis in Bexley.

It does not just affect younger people who cannot afford to get on the housing ladder or find affordable rents; the housing crisis affects that generation's parents who cannot enjoy the fruits of their hard work with grown-up children living at home.

The housing crisis breaks up families with local people forced out of the communities where they grew up. Our communities are being transformed by unscrupulous landlords and developers who rent and sell below par accommodation changing the character of our neighbourhoods.

Bexley Labour is clear: things have to change quickly and drastically but Bexley's Tories, unable and unwilling to help, turn a deaf ear to calls to tackle the crisis.

Bexley's ambitious and forward-looking growth strategy came about after years of Labour pressure for joined-up thinking and an aspirational vision for the future. We believe that the growth agenda is the best means to address the housing crisis in our borough.



A Labour council in Bexley will:

- *Introduce a Private Renters Charter to protect renters in Bexley by ensuring they are fully informed of their legal rights and take stronger enforcement against rogue landlords to protect tenants.*
- *Support genuinely affordable housing because what is termed as 'affordable' too often is unaffordable for hardworking local people.*
- *Strengthen planning policies to address the housing crisis, ensuring a tougher approach is taken on viability assessments to deliver higher proportions of genuinely affordable in developments and to ensure developers no longer fail to offer what we need.*
- *Use our nomination rights to prioritise local residents when allocating properties and through Bexley Co., the council's housing development company, put Bexley residents at the top of the housing list.*
- *Improve temporary accommodation provision by introducing new purpose-built sites in the borough for accommodation for those who are waiting to be rehoused.*
- *Work with the Mayor of London to develop new housing schemes that make rent and home ownership more achievable for everyone.*
- *Ensure that the council-controlled housing development company, Bexley Co. delivers 50% affordable housing on all of its development sites.*
- *Develop more densely and efficiently in town centres and around transport hubs such as train stations to boost the numbers of homes available.*
- *Invest the council's staff pension fund into affordable housing, addressing housing demand and securing a return for the council's much-valued workforce.*

Protecting our parks & open spaces for a greener Bexley

Bexley has a proud industrial heritage. For generations, it has been a place where people work and make things, but just as important are the green spaces and parks that characterise our borough.

The Conservative plans to build on these open spaces are indefensible and risk ruining the nature of Bexley forever.

Places like Danson Park, East Wickham Open Space and Franks Park are community assets, not bankable assets.

Bexley's attractiveness lies in it being the gateway to

London and Kent: we must get that balance right, or we risk becoming a place where developers can cut corners off our greenery and build sub-standard developments. Bexley will be less attractive and less able to attract the growth we need.

Bexley should transform, but in a way that works for existing communities.

We must build a future but not on the wreckage of our heritage. We must protect and secure our parks and open spaces for a greener Bexley where we and future generations can live, learn and play.



A Labour council in Bexley will:

- *Support parks, green and open spaces by stopping, cancelling and reversing the programme to build on the borough's park and open spaces immediately on the election of a Labour council.*
- *Review cuts already made to the maintenance of green spaces in recent years to find new ways of protecting them now and in the future.*
- *Back measures by the Mayor of London to protect the green-belt.*
- *Commit the London Borough of Bexley to reducing the impact of climate change, locally, nationally and globally by assessing and reducing the council's CO2 emissions.*
- *Incentivise carbon neutral development and business in Bexley and microgeneration and renewable energy schemes.*
- *Introduce car clubs, including through the planning process, to reduce car usage by offering an alternative to private car ownership.*

Make the services we all use better

The pavements we walk on, and the roads we drive on we use without much thought. We expect them, rightly, to be in a good and safe condition.

We depend on the refuse collection to keep our homes clean and tidy just as we depend on street sweepers to keep Bexley clean and tidy. We only notice those services when they go wrong, and recently residents in Bexley have started to notice them.

It is crucial that we look after these services and make them work better for residents. It is essential that those services are delivered and give value for money at the same time.

A Labour council in Bexley will:

- *Work within the statutory framework to pass balanced budgets and keep council tax as low as possible.*
- *Focus on improving street cleaning, weed spraying and grass cutting in Bexley, including residential areas, not just town centres.*
- *Budget in a consistent way, not hold-back cash and store-up problems that mean our highways and footways are left damaged and unattended for years before being considered for repair.*
- *Instruct operators that waste collection must be carried tidily and not add to litter on our streets.*
- *Practise zero-tolerance on fly-tipping and those who litter with the support of newly invested in CCTV and by bringing prosecutions against those who spoil our borough.*

- *Investigate the potential of establishing a council run trading company to make better commercial use of our waste depots, collect bulky items from residents which will help fight fly-tipping and explore bringing waste collection back into council control so that it is managed in a way that works for residents, not shareholders.*



Ensuring every child receives the best education

Every child deserves the opportunity to make the best start in life. Parents rightly expect schools to be provide adequate funds to educate their child and for their school to be accountable for the decisions made.

For parents with children with disabilities, they find a system that fights against them and that ensures they must constantly battle for the resources that the law says their child is entitled to.

The push to pursue a mass academisation programme, has led to a fractured relationship with all schools, which has resulted in the council not being able to plan adequately for the education of every child.

We will not cower as the current council does to the Government's demand that these cuts are essential and acceptable, and we will ensure the future of every child is our priority, not the risk of upsetting our ministerial friends in Whitehall.

A Labour council in Bexley will:

- *Challenge the government cuts to local school budget and fight to ensure adequate funding for every child in Bexley.*
- *Better plan for the increase in children with additional needs and work with schools to ensure children with special needs are fully admitted to all schools in Bexley to achieve their full potential.*
- *We would seek excellence for all pupils in the borough and build a closer relationship with all schools, stakeholders, governors and parents to achieve a cohesive partnership for excellence in all schools across the borough.*
- *We would work to ensure that attainment and results are improved for children across the borough and ensure that progress is made with those schools performing well below average expectations in the secondary sector.*

- *We would seek to build more good quality schools across the Borough to meet the growing demand and aspirations of parents and pupils.*
- *Challenge the government to adequately resource Special Educational Needs in Bexley, as budgets have been severely constrained in recent years which has led to reducing numbers of teaching assistants.*
- *Improve and increase the provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs.*
- *Ensure a school place for every child of statutory school age and increase the number of school places.*
- *Campaign to encourage take up of free school meals by increasing awareness.*



Creating a healthier borough

Having a healthy borough is vital to the work of the council, and easing the pressures placed upon it. Sadly, a range of austerity measures has placed more pressures on our most vulnerable residents leading to an increase in residents experiencing mental health issues.

Our health services are seeing these increased pressures, and while measures are being taken to join-up local services, more needs to be done. Councillors of all parties are not able to adequately scrutinise or take part in decisions affecting local health services, due to the current governance arrangements within the council.

The council and its partners are working to address the reasons why Bexley residents are above the national average for obesity statistics. A Labour council will work to ensure that the council uses its role to ensure obesity is prevented at an early stage.

A Labour council in Bexley will:

- *Work with local health providers to continue to develop and improve services at Queen Mary's Hospital.*
- *Review our governance structures to ensure councillors are better able to influence local health decisions.*
- *Ensure Bexley is a borough where improving mental health and wellbeing is at the heart of everything we do.*
- *Continue to ensure that health and social care are joined up to deliver the locally accountable and integrated services our residents expect.*
- *Develop an obesity strategy with an absolute focus on preventing obesity and ensuring adequate investment and promotion is given to leisure facilities and opportunities to assist in the delivery of this aim.*

Protecting our most vulnerable children

One of the council's most important roles is not only to ensure our children get the best start in life, but to support those children who find they need vital support.

The council has a vital role to support those children placed into care and supporting foster carers and the adoption process.

It also has a vital role to support families of children with disabilities to ensure not only the child but the parents or carers get the support they need.



A Labour council in Bexley will:

- *We will continue to support our children's centres and other early years provision to help parents and their children, and campaign against cuts to children's centres and early years provision.*
- *We will ensure adequate support is given to our staff and partners to support children in care, foster carers and the adoption process.*
- *We will continue to monitor social workers caseloads ensuring that there is not an excessive workload and ensure challenge is embedded to continue to improve service delivery.*
- *We will exempt foster carers who live in the borough from council tax.*
- *We will work with voluntary partners and families to ensure there are adequate weekend and holiday services for children with disabilities and respite support and support within the home for their families.*

Supporting our older and disabled residents

Caring for our older and disabled and vulnerable residents is one of the most important jobs we have as a society.

Older people contribute a huge amount to the life of the borough and are often at the heart of our communities, creating and sustaining many of our community organisations.

However, some of our older residents find they require our support for various health conditions, and that austerity is impacting on the services they rely on.

The same position occurs for many families with adult family members with disabilities, with a battle to ensure that adequate service levels are maintained.

A Labour council in Bexley will:

- *Implement initiatives to reduce loneliness for older people in the borough.*
- *Increase support to the 20,000 carers in the borough and to review the increasing cost of respite care in the borough*
- *Make sure ageing well events are held across the borough to make all residents aware of services available to older residents.*
- *Work with housing partners to develop new housing schemes for older people for those who wish to downsize.*
- *Look at sustainable solutions to deliver better home care standards, looking at different solutions to offer better quality of care.*
- *Commence the process of implementing an ethical care charter through more sustainable pay, conditions and training levels of our care staff.*

- *Work with the Alzheimer's society to become a dementia-friendly borough.*
- *Ensure adults with disabilities are supported particularly in the transition period into adulthood.*
- *Ensure those voluntary groups supporting older and disabled adults receive the support they deserve.*



A safer and more secure borough

Bexley is one of the safest borough's in London. That has little to do with whether the council is Labour or Conservative and everything to do with our local police service.

To keep Bexley safe and secure we need to invest in our police force and put officers back on the beat.

We need to give them the resources to catch burglars and violent criminals and the tools they need to secure prosecutions to prevent anti-social behaviour and violent crime.

Since 2010 that has not happened. Conservative austerity policies directed

from Whitehall are making Bexley a less safe place to live and work.

In the last eight years, the Conservatives have cut £700 million from the Metropolitan Police budget and axed 2,495 police officers and 3,261 Police Community Support Officers while Bexley's Conservative council has stopped monitoring our CCTV network.

Working with the Labour Mayor of London, a Labour Council will make keeping Bexley residents safe a priority. We cannot have security on the cheap, so we will invest in measures that will support our police, not cut their resources and make their job that much more difficult.



A Labour council in Bexley will:

- *Help cut crime and increase prosecution rates by reinstating the live monitoring of CCTV in the borough by employing enough staff to watch the live feed 24/7.*
- *Take a zero-tolerance approach to anti-social behaviour and use our powers to assist our local police in area-wide problems when they arise.*
- *Ensure our community safety work supports ward policing teams to implement the local priorities of police teams, residents and traders.*
- *Ensure adequate support is given to those impacted by domestic violence not just in the aftermath, but in the longer term.*

Opportunities for all in a growing Bexley

Bexley's industrial heritage provides the stepping stones for a vibrant future. Our future is our history. The industrial land of our past will be the land we use to develop homes to tackle the housing crisis.

Although we will not return to heavy industry, new technology and innovation provide the opportunities to create new industries in the digital sector and renewable energy to bring industry back to Bexley and train and employ local residents.

In the 1860s William Morris led the arts and crafts movement from Red House in Bexleyheath, taking the train to Abbey Wood to get to our borough; we need to grasp that heritage of creative and dynamic enterprise to grow our future.

Being a riverside borough gives us an advantage that we must take. Our communities are already changing, and a Labour council will lead and direct that change, not sit back and watch developers

exploit our borough. We do not seek to stop change or even slow it down but to accelerate the transformation of Bexley so we can achieve our potential more quickly.

A Labour council may not directly dig the foundations of the transformation but will set out the fundamentals of change and ensure it works for local communities, not trample on them. We have a plan to change our borough that works for the many, not the few.

In partnership with private enterprise, we will quite literally build a better Bexley. A Labour council will champion infrastructure investment and lobby London and national government and seek joint working with business to deliver it.

Our plan for growth and regeneration works hand-in-glove with our mission to tackle the housing crisis. It is because we are proud of our past that we can be so confident of our future.

A Labour council in Bexley will:

- *Oversee the building of truly affordable homes. We will take a tough line with developers and strengthen our planning policies: securing more affordable homes, affordable workspace, jobs and apprenticeships for low paid and key workers across the borough.*
- *Seek to sympathetically increase the density of our town centres and key transport hubs, providing new affordable homes that Bexley residents need and deserve.*
- *Oversee the regeneration of inactive industrial land for housing, creating new mixed communities along with social and transport infrastructure.*
- *Promote public transport infrastructure in Bexley including closing the deal to bring the Docklands Light Railway to Belvedere within a decade.*
- *Pressure the Treasury and Department of Transport and work with London government to deliver Crossrail to Gravesend (CR2G), including new and less disruptive options than laying new lines, to enable the required construction of new homes and development of new businesses.*
- *Develop 'segregated transport links' including trolley buses and express buses to improve transport connectivity within the borough, especially between town centres and transport hubs and integrate them with neighbouring boroughs to other rapid transits links including the Dart in north-west Kent and a riverfront route to the North Greenwich Peninsula.*
- *Work with Transport for London to develop a longer-term strategy to extend the London Overground into the borough from Barking Riverside and through linkages to existing routes in South London.*
- *Lobby the Government, to bring national rail routes operating in the borough into the Transport for London family, to ensure metro services all week round and to bring about improved levels of staffing on transport services.*

- *Review our parking charges and policies to ensure they achieve the balance between protecting residential parking and supporting our town centres.*
- *Lobby the Mayor of London to develop new road river crossings integrated with options to extend public transport at the same time.*
- *Invest in our boroughs Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, by helping them to become more resilient, win new contracts and employ more staff.*
- *Work towards becoming an accredited Living Wage employer and commence the process to require organisations that receive council grants and have contracts with the council, to pay the London Living Wage.*

Supporting culture and diversity across Bexley

Bexley is rightly proud of its cultural history with unique attractions including the Crossness Engines, Lesnes Abbey, Red House, Danson House, Hall Place and Five Arch Bridge.

The borough also hosts a number of cultural venues and groups including Erith Playhouse, Rose Bruford College and Bird College which we believe should continue to be fully supported.

We also have a wide range of community groups run by volunteers supporting cultural activity across the borough. However, the Conservative council continues to support cultural activities and events without recognising many of the groups that exist or residents that support these groups.

More needs to be done to put our cultural offer on the map and to support a much wider range of events and cultural activities across the borough.

A Labour council in Bexley will:

- *Continue to support our cultural provision and work to ensure it is better promoted to increase tourism in the borough.*
- *Ensure that support is given to cultural groups and work with them to promote cultural opportunities.*
- *Ensure that the borough's diversity and groups representing all parts of the borough are reflected in our events and cultural activities.*
- *Ensure that the council actively supports activities which support Black History Month, LGBT History Month and International Women's Day.*
- *Work with the voluntary sector to develop innovative models to support these cultural events and a range of community-based groups including religious groups.*

Supporting our voluntary sector

Residents across Bexley do a fantastic job giving their time to support voluntary groups in supporting a range of community activities.

Bexley's Conservative council has however placed more and more pressure on voluntary groups, cutting their grants, expecting them to provide the same levels of service through contracts with the council for less money and calling for far more to be done by volunteers.

Voluntary sector groups feel they have suffered enough pain and that many of the concerns they raise aren't being adequately acknowledged. Our plan will be to work with Bexley's Voluntary Sector to build on their existing good work to ensure that all parts of the voluntary sector are able to flourish and continue to provide the support to our residents that they deserve.

A Labour council in Bexley will:

- *Work with Bexley Voluntary Service Council to ensure that hard to reach community groups are better supported.*
- *Work with our main strategic voluntary partners to ensure they can maintain their existing service provision and develop ways of introducing new services where possible.*
- *Acknowledge that the council continues to have a role to play in both commissioning and developing such services, and that volunteers alone cannot deliver vital services.*
- *Work with council staff and local businesses to more actively support the voluntary sector.*
- *Ensure our voluntary sector groups are more involved in the democratic process.*

Assisting our residents to be financially sustainable

Many families have faced the impact of huge Tory cuts to benefits, the bedroom tax, the threat of the tenant tax and the arrival of a flawed Universal Credit system. Sadly, while Labour Councils have invested to protect residents from the impact of those cruel policies, Bexley's Conservative Council have stood by and allowed our residents to suffer the consequences of these cuts.

We know that these changes have impacted the most on the disabled and single parents. We would plan to redress this balance to ensure that the council works to support those suffering the most from these changes, to remove them from the risk of a debt cycle and to put spending power back into the local economy.



A Labour council in Bexley will:

- *Explore whether council tax exemptions can be introduced for care leavers and other residents in need of support.*
- *Work to ensure the roll out of universal credit does not lead to increased housing pressures with increased rent arrears.*
- *Work to ensure support is given to voluntary sector groups supporting those impacted by the roll out of universal credit.*
- *Review how bailiff orders are used and whether they should be banned for cases involving vulnerable residents.*
- *Provide a debt and benefits advice service involving council officers, housing associations, credit unions, the Citizens Advice Service, businesses and local voluntary sector agencies.*
- *Work to ensure the groups involved in debt and benefits advice service have the resources they need to adequately support our most vulnerable residents.*

Building a modern council

While Bexley council may be located in a new headquarters, many of its working practices are stuck in the previous century. Conservative councillors continue to insist on committee agendas and correspondence being delivered to their homes. At the same time, the same councillors support a governance structure which is not fit for purpose.

While improvements have been made, our staff and councillors do not adequately reflect the diversity of the communities we serve. Our plan will bring our council into the 21st century in terms of our governance, ways of working and to ensure the staff that serve us reflect the communities they serve.

A Labour council in Bexley will:

- *Ensure that action is taken to reduce the gender pay gap and to ensure appointment into all posts including senior posts make us a more diverse organisation.*
- *Review our governance arrangements to ensure that both our committee structures and scrutiny processes are fit to serve our residents and their expectations of decision making.*
- *Review the role that councillors play in the democratic process and the support that is provided to enable them to be true champions of work within their wards.*



Building a better Bexley together



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