



LIVERPOOL: A CITY OF VILLAGES

*Liverpool Liberal Democrat's proposals
for housing policy*

Our Key Housing Policies

These are the key features of our discussion document. We want to come and discuss these ideas with resident and tenant groups, public sector developers, private sector developers, and investors. The Liverpool Liberal Democrats will:

- Build Council Housing in Liverpool. We will re-establish a Housing Revenue Account using Section 106 money to provide initial capital in addition to using council owned land and other surplus facilities.
- Develop Liverpool as a series of resilient villages and communities with access to all the facilities both public and private needed for a self-sustaining community.
- Establish a council led task force to crack down on poor, dangerous and unhealthy housing in both the public and private sectors
- Establish a council led task force involving good private sector landlords to take on the bad private sector landlords.
- Use our planning powers to a greater extent to either deliver 20% of affordable housing from new developments or take more money to deliver Council and social housing.
- Develop new housing cooperatives as part of a new neighbourhood structure and link them to other community led initiatives within the Community Asset Transfer programme.
- Work with registered housing providers in areas where they are the dominant or major landlord to build up a total approach to neighbourhood management with them controlling a range of public sector facilities and programmes. This 'neighbourhood investor' model could take over the existing work of the council and other partners in places such as Speke and Alt Valley
- Make the Festival Gardens Project an exemplar of the new Village approach combining a range of tenures and house types and sizes.
- Review the provision for adults with learning difficulties, care leavers, and other groups to reduce the need for the use of private providers and save money and provide better homes.
- Create a stand-alone Housing Committee which look at all issues of housing planning and delivery.
- Initiate a stock condition survey to take a sample of pre-1919 terraces with a view to understanding what are suspected to be deep problems with this deteriorating housing stock



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The Liberal Democrat Vision for Housing

For too long the need to build more housing without a greater social purpose has been the name of the game for both councils and governments. The Liberal Democrats in Liverpool are asking, “what is the key reason that we want to build housing?” It is because we want to build communities, give people opportunities and provide the foundation in life that families deserve.

As a society we have not learned from the mistakes that were made throughout the last 70 years where housing was built without such a social purpose. The key lesson that we should have learned but do not appear to be learning from all those errors was that building houses is not enough. What we need to build are homes where communities can prosper, where friendships can be grown and where basic facilities can be provided.

People don't just want a space to sleep; they want to relate to the area that they live in and be proud of. At the back of most people's minds is the concept of a village. What would that village provide for us? A community that would have in it:

A mix of property sizes, types, and tenures so that all types of people can live together of all ages and needs. A village that would have ready access to basic services such as a corner shop, religious facilities, Post Office, primary schools, health care and community facilities such as a community centre and a local pub.

Different house types would mean that people could move to larger properties as they left home and developed a family of their own and then back down again as their children moved out. In the meantime, families could look after each other across the generations and would have people who could play an active part not only in an inter-generational family but also inside the wider community.

Think of the benefits of such a ‘village’ approach. Happier families create less calls on social care and health services. Children could grow up together in good schools which could absorb those in need within the community. Health, education and social services, and other vital services could be distributed across a city on a basis of equality with less fluctuations in need.

Can a village community exist in a city like Liverpool?

In many ways it already does in many areas. Think of Woolton Village, or Lark Lane, or Old Swan or Penny Lane or Alt Valley. In all these areas there is a clear sense of identity and a variety of discernible services which are used by most of the community. These communities are not identical, nor should they be. Look at Lark Lane which has more young people and a more transient population than Penny Lane just the other side of Sefton Park. But the core of identity, community and service delivery are common to both.

In Lark Lane you find the former Aigburth Town Hall, now Marantos. In Penny Lane there is a discrete area bounded by the main railway line, Smithdown & Allerton Road and Rose Lane. At the heart, a place which gives all residents pride, Penny Lane itself.

How do we create the village concept across the city?

It will not be easy because there are few places where there is the land availability to make decisive changes to the housing and demographic mix of an area. In the Penny Lane Village, much of the housing was built before the first world War and most of the rest before the second World War or quickly afterwards.

In Alt Valley, Fazakerley, Speke and Belle Vale the worst of the post War blocks were pulled down because of action from Liberal and then Liberal Democrat controlled councils. Some of the land released was infilled with replacement social housing but some was allocated for build for sale to widen the diversity and to keep a variety of housing types to meet wider family and generational needs.

When we could really make effective social change, the council has ducked out of the challenge. This can best be seen along the Mersey Water Front. Areas close to the water that were once identified as being parts of Vauxhall, or Dingle or Granby albeit with few homes in them have been allocated to apartments, mostly for sale. This has been recognised in ward boundary terms by the creation of new wards which separate the new communities from the old along the former south and north dock access roads.

The most obvious place to introduce the village concept is the Festival Gardens. It is probably the only part of Liverpool where we can build a new village and not just retrofit existing communities over a period. It can be the exemplar of a new inclusive style of development which will create not only good housing but resilient and self-supporting communities.

Liberal Democrats believe that this development should create a place for all ages, tenures, and ownerships where with associated community facilities such as schools, GP practices and community hubs such as cafés and a community centre.

The council has announced new development partners for this site, Urban Splash and Igloo, and we will be urging with the council and the private sector developers to introduce a new social housing partner to ensure that 20% of the site will be developed for social housing some of which would be for the provision of the first new housing cooperatives since the early 80s.

Significantly, the developers of Festival Gardens are pledging to build nothing higher than 6 stories to give a human scale feel for the area which is so different from the 'build them high' mentality of many prospective developers in the city.

Change needed for planning policy

Unless there is a change in planning policy, we will continue to allow inner city areas to be developed largely into one and two bedroomed apartments for sale. The Labour Party are building up the problems of the future without looking at the problems of the past by creating new high-rise accommodation without any understanding of how this new accommodation will meet the needs of the wider community now or what the needs of the community will be over the coming two or three decades.

An understand of timing is important in all this. We have about 500,000 people living in the city in about 246,360 units of accommodation (2025 figures). This figure is hard to absolutely verify given the amount of specialist accommodation such as student new build and other specialist housing contained within it. According to figures released by the Cabinet Member for housing we are creating about 2,000 new units each year. Simple mathematics tells us that anything built today will need to last for about 123 years at the current rate of building replacement.

The Cabinet Member for Housing eventually replied to an email asking what was contained in the oft repeated Labour Policy of creating 8,000 new homes in 4 years. What she reluctantly revealed was that over a roughly 5-year period 9,990 new units of residential accommodation will be provided in the City. Of these 8,832 will be apartments, 345 will be houses and 813 will be specialist accommodation. Of the apartments 90% will be one or two bedroomed of which there is an oversupply in the market already.

When looking at who the units will be provided for only approximately 1,100 will be available for any type of social housing with 245 being shared ownership, 560 for 'affordable' rented, and 321 for social housing. The figures are partly extrapolated because the Council could not give full details of these homes, so we have expanded existing known figures proportionately.

So, Labour's housing policy is to replicate the tower blocks disasters of the 50s and 60s although this time for new start home renters and owners and wealthier people, with more tower blocks. There is no evidence that this model will work or indeed is needed. We still await justification from the Council's Housing department for the building of small apartments rather than larger apartments and houses.

We need a planning strategy that will build homes for the people that need them and not build units that will in the short-term provide profit for developers. As part of this we need to examine how we can ensure that the abandoned sites left by scam developers in the last decade can be finished off or cleared.

For whom do we need to build houses for?

The history of Liverpool is clear. Children grow up, many of them become high earners and then they leave the city because there is a paucity of three+ bedroomed accommodation in the city when they want to have kids or just when they can afford bigger and better and what is available sells at a higher price. So, they move out to suburbs mostly in Knowsley, Sefton, and Wirral.

The fact that 90% of the housing units being built are flats and 90%+ of those are one and two bedroomed means that there is little move on for those that have achieved or will achieve a higher income. They go and take their cash with them.

Liverpool's aim should be to create successful people and retain them in our amazing city. That is the Liberal Democrat plan as opposed to Labour's brain drain. Adequate housing, jobs, and opportunities is key to this aim.

At the other end there is a growing number of people aged 65 and over who are trapped in inappropriate accommodation. This could be because their homes are or no longer suitable, because they are not providing for the mobility needs of the elderly, or because they have progressed to a point whereby, they need some element of health or social care.

For these residents, the need is for low level homes built in a community and preferably in the area where they have spent most of their lives and where their children and grandchildren and their friends live.

In between there are a growing number of people needing specialist care provision. They could be care leavers, people with physical needs, or people with mental health needs. The wonderful thing is that more people survive into adulthood than would have done in the past because of the NHS, but those people need looking after.

The Council has set out a programme to build a new town in the North Docks in partnership with Sefton Council. At present there is no clarity about the physical types of property or the tenures. Unless the buildings provide the types of accommodation which our city needs the Village may create more problems than it solves because it will simply shuffle people around as we have seen with the city centre high rise developments which have destabilised the existing pre-1919 terraced areas.

How many more housing units do we need?

Firstly, how will the population makeup of the city change? This is a chicken and egg question because, in part, it will depend on what we build as there is clearly a correlation between what gets built and who moves into the new accommodation. But there are some things that we need to consider which may lay outside our control. Will the proportion of the population that is 65+ continue to grow. Will our Universities continue to provide learning to 62,000 FTE students (the 2024-25 position). How will the rate of immigration to and emigration from our country and thereafter our city change. Will there be employment growth or a stagnant economy?

Secondly, it will also depend on what is currently built. Even if we improve the build rate from 2,000 to 3,000 a year most of the city's housing for the next 25 years, even if we allow for population growth, is already in existence.

In 25 years, many of the houses that were built in the 1860s and 1870s onwards will be approaching a 200-year life span. Most of these were properties that were built cheaply for workers and have been upgraded at least twice. Realistically, how long can they last and how much will need to be spent on them?

How many of the properties that we have in the city are currently fit for use and how many of them can be upgraded for modern purposes?

Until we have firm answers to questions like these, we cannot put forward a new planning and delivery framework for housing. Instead, we will continue to respond to the needs of developers and not the underlying short- and long-term needs of the city.

What can we do to put empty properties back into the rental or home ownership market?

Of the 10,646 homes currently empty (2025 figure) 2,472 are long-term voids. We need to understand if they are empty because there is already a surplus of certain types of property in specific areas or because they are stuck in probate or other legal problems? Reducing the long-term voids by two thirds would provide 10% of the accommodation needed to meet the growth in population the city predicted to 2035.

The Council and its partners need to establish an empty homes task force which will work with local councillors and local communities to identify long-term vacant and explore all legal and fiscal tools available to the council to bring them back into use. This should include the threat of compulsory purchase.

The Liberal Democrats would develop a programme of bringing empty properties by doing two things:

1. Identifying empty property owners and working with them to bring the property back into use. This would be done by providing grants to repair the property on the proviso that the landlord allows the Council a 10-year lease by which the Council can use the property to provide housing at social rent.
2. Get tough on owners of properties that have been empty for years by serving notices and working with the government to purchase the property and bring them into the Council's own housing stock. We would then repair the property and use them for a mixture of Council housing and housing at market rent.

What can we do to reduce under-consumption?

According to the 2021 census two thirds of Liverpool's homes are under occupied. Under occupation will never be eliminated as there are complex reasons for it. A typical one being elderly people who want to stay on in their home after their spouse or partner has died. No attempt has been made to understand the cause of this and whether measures could be put in place to reduce this figure. One of highest levels of under occupation can be found in Liverpool 18 (Mather neighbourhood) which can be put down to this factor. We need to explore the effective use of land in and around areas such as L18 to see if we can build smaller properties as part of the village concept which would enable people to move locally so that families can use their spacious properties.

What can we do to increase pressure on bad landlords?

Bad housing is a killer. Damp and mould lead to bronchitis, asthma, and a range of other debilitating illnesses. But it damages lives in so many other ways. How do children learn when they go back to cramped and squalid accommodation from which they move quickly as circumstances dictate. How do people get jobs when they have no permanent home address to put on their CV and in discussions with their employers.

Vulnerable people such as care leavers and people with mental health issues are too often put into poor accommodation which is transient and does not begin to address our basic needs for a home and not just a place to live. It is also very expensive. Some landlords see the needs of people who are vulnerable as an opportunity to make money. That is wrong and we will begin to end that exploitation.

There are many good landlords in the city, and we want to work with them to crack down on the bad landlords, many of whom live and work nowhere near our city but involve agents of varying qualities in the control of the properties and their tenants.

In the short-term we would establish a commission with the residential landlord's associations to look at how they and the public sector could guide potential tenants and the vulnerable into good quality homes thus cutting off the tap of money into the hands of the landlords.

We will work with all partners to try and produce an effective crack down on poor accommodation. The Fire Service experiences relatively high levels of emergency calls from poor condition homes. The NHS takes in people with health conditions such as bronchitis and muscle, and skeletal conditions cause by damp and drafts. A failure to deal with bad housing causes costs pressures to other parts of the system and shortens the lives of those who are trapped in this accommodation.

We would also develop a pot of funding and advice on taking your landlord to court in the most extreme cases.

What can we do with terraced housing?

Approximately 90,000 of the residential homes in Liverpool are traced and built before World War 1. Much of that stock is in good condition and may well last longer than some of the homes being built today. However, much of the stock is in poor condition. It is no coincidence that many of the properties with bad landlords and bad living conditions lie in these areas or deteriorating terraces.

Regrettably, the fact is that Liverpool has not looked seriously at this type of housing for 25+ years with the demise of the poorly run Labour HMRI programme. The Council say that there is no point as there is no money for dealing with this problem at scale. Instead, a handful of initiatives such as improving insulation providing short term amelioration but not long-term solutions.

We just do not know what the condition of these properties are so we would initiate a sample stock condition survey to go to the Government to show that "Build Baby Build" is not the answer to some of the worst housing problems in the City and throughout the North of England.

Take into council control specialist housing provision for asylum seekers, adults with learning difficulties and care leavers?

Liverpool should develop a consortium with the other councils within the Liverpool City Region to take over the existing contracts held by SERCO. These properties are poorly run and unquestionably are in the poorest accommodation. There is often little integration with other services needed by asylum seekers and refugees which makes integration difficult if not impossible.

Too often our care leavers are placed at the age of 16 in substandard private sector accommodation where they struggle to establish a 'home' and consequently churn through properties. Similar problems exist for people with neurodivergent issues where investment is attracted not by companies or organisations that care but by venture capitalists seeking to maximise profits.

Homes for vulnerable people should be provided by the public sector who can integrate the housing needs of the varying groups into the cost-effective provision of other complementary services.

Involving tenants and recreating council housing

Firstly, we express our belief that new council housing is needed in the city. In the last part of the 20th century and early parts of this one, Liverpool Council was forced to dispose of its housing stock by both Tory and Labour Governments. The properties were transferred to housing associations who then either improved them, for the most part, or demolished the squalid concrete structures of the 60's.

We believe that this has created new housing problems with many landlords being remote, big, north west wide if not nation-wide that behave more like property developers and big businesses rather than maintaining a social ethos as investors in neighbourhoods.

Involving tenants and recreating council housing

Liverpool has considerable powers as land owners, its statutory role as the strategic housing authority and access to diverse types of funding which means that it can and should be more forceful as to what is developed than the laissez faire attitude of the past 15+ years.

We would challenge social landlords to work much more strongly within our newly established neighbourhood structures to grow residents and tenants' associations who can comment not only housing but also about the other issues which affect their daily lives. We would encourage housing associations to become 'neighbourhood investors and work with the council and other agencies to ensure that all the facilities needed within a 'village' are provided.

We will build on the current Community Asset Transfer programme to ensure that housing can be provided by local community groups with a holistic view of the needs of a community. Given the right support these organisations could develop at scale which would mean that they could become housing cooperatives or development trusts. Between 1979 and 1983 Liverpool was the leading developer of housing cooperatives. These cooperatives have stood the test of time providing a high quality of well-maintained accommodation inside resilient and caring communities.

We would look at the possibility of creating a new Housing Company involving public and private sector partners, especially from high quality developers and investors who have a conscience. We would use this vehicle to reopen a housing Revenue Account to support council housing in the city – the first to be built for nearly 40 years..

This partnership would form the basis for mixed use and tenure villages in which we build Council Houses, houses for market rent and houses for sale. This would ensure that all housing is done to a good standard but also that aspiration and opportunity is built into our housing model. People can then realise the dream of home ownership in villages which they feel part of, and which provide local amenities.

In addition to private sector funding the council would move its S106 money gained from new private sector housing development into a capital fund to create new council housing. This will need proper enforcement by the planning department and planning committee of the council to tackle those developers who try everything to avoid their social obligations to the City.

How long will this take?

Housing is a long-term project. Some of the best housing in the City is more than 100 years old. The housing that our residents deserve to live in will take time to build or restore.

Some things can be done quickly such as crackdowns on bad housing and bad landlords. The development of the right housing stock will take much longer as the council needs to be opportunistic in the development of neighbourhoods and communities and the facilities that are needed to 'glue together' the needs of the area.

Every journey starts with the first step and a map of where you want to go. For the past fifteen years there has been no map for Liverpool housing and most of the developments that have taken place in the first two decades of this century were dodgy developments by dubious developers.

It does not have to be that way. Liverpool Lib Dems will not produce a top-down paternalistic programme for housing but a series of strategies that will be co-produced with residents of neighbourhoods to make areas places where people choose to live and not the place where someone else has decided they will live.

This discussion document is our Step One. We hope to discuss it with groups across the city. Step 2 will be the delivery of a realistic but ambitious programme when we take control of the City Council in 2027.