

Chinese New Year: Year of the Ox

For all of us, 2020 was a difficult year; some of us touched by death and many by loss of income, wellbeing and self-worth. **So much has changed, and yet not changed.**

Those of us with memories of SARS watched in concern at the British Government late and botched efforts to tackle COVID. We saw COVID-related hate crime spike as Chinese people were shunned, and verbally and physically assaulted. Internet memes depicting Chinese people as sources of COVID were widely shared.

The ox symbolises strength, determination and hard work. Certainly, qualities needed to rebuild our communities, our economies, our families and ourselves.

Many people appear numbed to news that would have horrified us 12 months back – over 100,000 deaths, job losses, business closures and billions of pounds spent on PPE half of which were awarded dubiously. We cannot carry on as before and we must change the trajectory that has shaped growth and prosperity over the last 200 years since the Industrial Revolution.

Fundamental changes are needed from the way we govern to the way our economy works, the way we consume and the impact of technology on our lives, our jobs and our societies.

We have also watched with concern the situation in Hong Kong but continue to call for a more balanced response and an evidenced-based Chinese foreign policy within the Liberal Democrats. We are sad that Paddy Ashdown was not able to witness the first Hong Kong citizens use rights he called for decades ago to allow BNO passport holders the right to live in Britain.

So, will things get better in 2021? The ox symbolises strength, determination and hard work. Certainly, qualities needed to rebuild our communities, our economies, our families and ourselves.

Many Liberal Democrats have been actively helping others through the difficulties of the pandemic. We can bring a message of hope, that by working together we can reshape our society, economic and governance systems. **We can create prosperity, fairness and justice.**

Wishing everybody a fulfilling, prosperous and safe Year of the Ox.

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Chinese New Year

This year we welcome The Year of the Ox – an animal known for its strength, diligence and hardworking nature. These are positive values to which we should all aspire to live our lives by.

The New Year is usually a time of large family get-togethers. This year however, intimate, virtual celebrations will be the norm. I know the adjustment won't be easy but let us keep doing our part to suppress this virus.

This year we welcome The Year of the Ox – an animal known for its strength, diligence and hardworking nature. These are positive values to which we should all aspire to live our lives by.

As we welcome the New Year, we must also honour the immeasurable contributions of British Chinese communities to our country. **Thank you to the generations who have helped build our country and made it the success it is today.**

Let us also recognise the hard work and sacrifice of those working on the frontline, the dedication of those looking after their families and the commitment of those supporting their local communities.

Celebrations like this remind us of what makes Britain unique; the diversity of our nation, the rich mosaic of people, cultures and backgrounds who all come together to carry forward the work of making this a country we can be proud of.

So, to everyone celebrating, I wish you happiness and good health in 2021. Xin Nian Kuai Le!

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Author:

The best way to meet the big challenges of our time

Our values work best

Tackling the coronavirus epidemic, and minimising the tragic loss of life, is primarily a public health issue. But there's also a consistent political lesson from it too.

The approaches that work best use international cooperation. Viruses don't stop at borders, and scientific cooperation and vaccine supply chains work best when they don't either.

The approaches that work best involve giving power and responsibility to those on the front line. That's why localised public health services in Germany have done so much better than our centralised track and trace fiasco. It would have worked far better to trust councils and [their existing expertise at local track and tracing for environmental health work](#).

The approaches that work best involve a generous society, one that supports those who most need help during such tough times. As with internationalism and devolution, such generosity of spirit and of government [lies at the heart of liberalism and Liberal Democracy](#).

Our party's challenge is to become a more effective political force for those values which are so needed to overcome the big challenges of our time.

Improving how we work

That is why both implementing the [Thornhill Election Review](#) and the other reforms I have talked about in previous reports is so important. Dorothy Thornhill has reported directly to members on [how we are doing at implementing the review](#). She concludes, "I believe the review has been recognised, that the process of making changes has started, and that the path to success is starting to emerge".

With brief exceptions, for a decade now we have been in single digits in the opinion polls. That shows how the challenges we need to overcome are long-term ones.

The good news is we've recovered before. There's a common trigger in previous recoveries: winning elections, whether Parliamentary by-elections or (especially now that such contests are rarer) the big rounds of May elections. It was a [stunning performance in the May 2019 elections](#), remember, that propelled us to those great European results and a polling surge.

That's why we've made a big switch of resources to investing in a hugely increased grassroots campaign support operation. Many thanks to colleagues in state parties, regional parties and ALDC who have cooperated so positively in making similar and coordinated efforts.

Frustratingly, we have only had the very occasional council by-election since all that work started being put in place. This May's elections are a great opportunity for us with general elections in Scotland and Wales and two rounds of local elections rolled into one, including for many Mayors.

It is an opportunity that the Conservatives in Westminster are cynically trying to stifle by insisting on both holding elections and also trying to ban much campaigning. If it's not safe for people to go campaigning, it's not democratic to hold an election. It should only be dictators who try to hold votes without letting the opposition campaign properly.

Our advice on what campaigning can be safely, responsibly and legally done is kept updated at libdems.org.uk/covid19. Training, resources and bulk-buy deals for paid-for delivery and digital advertising are all being made available by Lib Dem HQ and ALDC. To make sure you always get the latest information on them, please ensure that the key campaigners in your area are on the party's special campaign news email list.

It's never been more important to innovate in our campaigning, which is why the new [Campaign Innovation Fund](#) has been launched to fund measurable experiments so that we learn better what does and does not work.

As well as getting our campaigning right, we are continuing to fix things behind the scenes, and have had two Steering Group meetings so far this year ahead of a one of our day-long Board strategy sessions at the end of February.

You'll see some of the outcome of our work coming to spring conference, including in the Board report and in business and constitutional motions. [Spring conference registration is open](#) and I look forward to the discussions, debates and votes. You can always also [get in touch directly with any questions](#).

At that Board strategy session we'll be looking at how our political and organisational plans fit together into one coherent overall plan. A plan that we can use for guiding the work of the federal party and one that members and supporters across the party can use to understand what we're doing, why, and how they can contribute to it. I'll report back on the plan in more detail next time.

Other Steering Group work this month has included examining how the party manages risk, with a proper risk register and risk management system now in place, along with appropriate oversight of the changes being made at HQ, including ensuring we continue to provide the right pastoral care support to staff and members. Our February Board will also be looking at both the complaints process and the work of the Federal Appeals Panel, meeting with its new chair.

As well as getting in touch with myself directly, you can always also find details of the Board and Steering Group members up on the party website and reports from federal committees appear regularly in the AdLib section.

I look forward to hearing from you.

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Tackling Vaccine Disinformation

Mass vaccination is our best way of pulling through this terrible pandemic.

Sadly there has been a worrying rise in fake news and disinformation about the vaccine. Often this is spread by social media, with no scientific evidence.

That's why it's so important that we have dedicated councillors like Rabina Khan going into her community, meeting with people in a socially distanced way, and addressing their concerns directly.

We will pull through this together – but **we must tackle vaccine disinformation.**

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Spring Conference Motions – Explained

Our first ever online conference in September was a huge success – so we'll be back online for our Spring Conference from 19th to 21st March. You can find out more and register for it [here](#).

[Register for conference](#)

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