

Revitalising Town Centres and High Streets

Town centres and high streets are the beating heart of communities up and down the country. They are the places where we connect, shop, and take pride in where we live. But for too long, they have been allowed to fall into disrepair – blighted by empty shops, cracked pavements, and anti-social behaviour.

The former Conservative Government's economic mismanagement, and a lack of vision now from Labour, have left our local businesses struggling with unfair taxes and soaring energy costs.

Liberal Democrats have a plan to breathe life back into our town centres.

Today, our members passed a comprehensive new policy to revitalise our high streets, support local entrepreneurs and make our shared spaces safe and sustainable.

Boosting Local Business and Cutting Costs

Our high streets cannot thrive if shops sit empty and small businesses are taxed out of existence. We are calling for immediate action to lower the barriers for local traders:

- **An Emergency VAT Cut:** A temporary cut in VAT from 20% to 15% for hospitality, visitor accommodation, and attractions to boost footfall and help families with the cost of living.
- **Business Rates Reform:** Replacing unfair business rates with a Commercial Landowner Levy to shift the tax burden from struggling tenants to commercial landowners, to stop penalising productive business investment and use land and buildings more efficiently.
- **Cracking Down on “Ghost” Landlords:** Requiring overseas landlords to provide UK contact details and closing loopholes that allow units to be leased to shell companies.
- **An “Out of Town” Levy:** Ensuring large-scale out-of-town developments contribute to a fund that reinvests directly into our high streets.

Creating Spaces People Love

A successful town centre must be more than just a place to shop; it must be a place to belong. Our plan focuses on design, culture, and community:

- **Community Hubs:** Making it easier to convert vacant shops into community spaces without bogged-down planning rules.
- **High Street Culture & Community Fund:** Partnering with the Arts Council to provide five-year grants for community-led cultural initiatives and local events.
- **Community Investment Schemes:** A “High Streets Back Home” scheme allowing local people to invest directly in their community – by supporting community asset purchases, restoring heritage buildings or backing local enterprise space.
- **Homes Above Shops:** Encouraging the conversion of upper floors into quality housing to bring residents – and life – back to the heart of town.

Safe, Clean, and Accessible

No one wants to visit a high street where they don't feel secure. We are taking a zero-tolerance approach to the issues that drive shoppers away:

- **Tackling Organised Shoplifting:** Calling on the National Crime Agency to set up a dedicated unit to dismantle the organised gangs targeting our local stores.
- **Smarter Design:** Investing in strategic lighting and CCTV to discourage anti-social behaviour.
- **Better Access:** Funding high-quality pedestrianisation projects and promoting active travel while reviewing parking charges to ensure they support, rather than hinder, evening and weekend footfall.

Read our new policy in full

Liberal Democrats are committed to building town centres that inspire pride for generations to come. It is time to stop ignoring the decline of our high streets and breathe new life into them as vibrant hubs for the future.

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Author:

[Archibald calls for urgent support for those hardest hit by rising energy prices](#)

Following discussions this evening on rising energy prices with the British Government, Economy Minister Dr Caoimhe Archibald said it was essential that any planned intervention was “meaningful, targeted, and delivered without delay.”

[Preserving Trial by Jury](#)

The right to a trial by jury has been a cornerstone of our democracy for over 800 years.

But today, that fundamental right is under threat.

The former Conservative Government left our criminal justice system in a state of total dysfunction. Now, the Labour Government is taking a sledgehammer to the principle of jury trials instead of tackling the real problem: inefficiency. Their proposal to replace juries with judge-only trials for many offences is a short-sighted mistake that risks permanently damaging public trust in our courts.

Liberal Democrats are standing up to protect trial by jury.

Today, our members passed a clear plan to tackle the court backlogs without scrapping juries:

- **Protect the Right to a Jury:** Immediately abandon plans to expand judge-only trials and preserve the right to a jury.
- **Boost Court Productivity:** Implement an evidence-based strategy to reduce backlogs, including a “two trials a day” model in courtrooms across the country – a system proven during the pandemic to increase court productivity.
- **Fix Broken Infrastructure:** Cancel planned real-terms cuts to the justice

budget and invest in repairing underused court buildings so they can be used effectively.

- **Renegotiate Court Contracts:** Tackle the failures in private contracts, such as prisoner transport, which currently cause 1 in 4 trials to be cancelled or delayed at the last minute.
- **Prioritise Victims:** Deliver a system where victims aren't left in limbo for years, ensuring evidence remains fresh and cases don't collapse due to unnecessary delays.

Read our new policy in full

By focusing on common-sense efficiencies – like making better use of underused buildings and addressing the 20% drop in court productivity seen since 2016 – we can deliver the swift justice victims deserve while keeping our most sacred legal protections intact.

Trial by jury works. 6 in 10 people express confidence in jury verdicts, compared to just 4 in 10 for the court system more generally. **Removing juries won't just fail to clear the backlog; it will alienate the public from the justice system itself.**

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Author:

[Driving Forward – Road to Access](#)

Learning to drive is more than just a rite of passage – it is a vital life skill. For many young people, a driving licence is the road to economic freedom, education, and independence.

But after years of Conservative mismanagement and continued inaction under Labour, the road to independence has become a dead end.

Average waiting times for driving tests have spiralled to over 20 weeks, with some learners waiting half a year just for a slot. This scarcity of test slots has enabled bots and resellers to snap up bookings and sell them back to desperate learners at inflated prices.

Combined with soaring average annual insurance premiums of over £2,000 and

lesson costs exceeding £1,500, we are facing a crisis where too many are being prevented from learning to drive because of their income or where they live.

Today, Liberal Democrat members passed a new plan to clear the backlogs, end the rip-offs, and get the next generation moving:

- **Slash the Test Backlog:** Provide urgent investment to the DVSA to recruit and retain more examiners and expand test centre capacity in underserved and rural areas.
- **Launch a 'Young Drivers Support Fund':** Establish a national bursary scheme to subsidise lessons and test fees for low-income and disabled learners.
- **Ban the Booking Bots:** Implement identity-linked bookings and anti-bot protections to stop third-party touts from exploiting learners.
- **Fix the Insurance Rip-off:** Launch a formal review into car insurance for under-25s to improve pricing transparency and limit unfair age-based price hikes.
- **Modernise Training:** Update the driving test to ensure learners gain real-world experience in night-time driving, motorways, and adverse weather.

Read our new policy in full

By helping young people get to work and study we are breaking down the barriers to opportunity.

For too many, the nature of rural geography, or the lack of safe cycling and walking routes or reliable public transport, means being able to drive a car is a necessity, not a luxury. It's also a requirement for many jobs. We will continue to champion better active travel and public transport, but we cannot allow a broken testing system and predatory pricing to stall the lives of young people.

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Author:

New 'Legenderry' visitor campaign shines a spotlight on vibrancy of the city

Economy Minister Dr Caoimhe Archibald has welcomed a 'Legenderry' visitor campaign celebrating the energy, culture and unforgettable experiences that make the city stand out.