

Island Lib Dem budget prioritises communities, business, and the environment

A budget amendment from the Isle of Wight Council's Liberal Democrat group once again aims to enhance local communities, boost local entrepreneurial spirit, and back initiatives that tackle the climate emergency.

Lib Dem group leader, Cllr Andrew Garratt, says:

"The Covid pandemic has meant this has been an extremely hard year for all Islanders. The council's top priority has rightly been on the public health response to the pandemic and on supporting local communities.

"The Lib Dem budget amendment again shows there is a better approach than the one being taken by the Conservative administration when delivering its usual day-to-day services.

"Just over two months from now, Islanders will go to the polls to elect a new Isle of Wight Council. Our amendment highlights the priorities of a future Lib Dem led council – enhancing Island communities, boosting the Island economy, and playing our part in tackling the climate emergency.

"As we recommended last year, the Lib Dems would set up a major Climate Emergency Initiatives Fund following the Council's cross-party declaration of a climate emergency in July 2019.

"The Lib Dems believe that the best decision-making comes when working in partnership. Our town, community and parish councils are closest to our communities. Our Community Public Realm Fund proposal would go to joint initiatives with these councils and others that enhance community life.

"The Covid pandemic has seen exceptional work done by Island community and voluntary groups. We propose setting up a Community Resilience Transformation fund to make sure that we capture best practice in partnership and community work.

"Under the Conservatives the Island's library service has suffered many cuts. The Lib Dems believe our libraries have an important role at the heart of our communities and so we would reverse the cuts proposed by the Conservatives.

"The Covid pandemic has taken its toll on Island businesses and jobs. We would provide extra support for those looking to found and grow new businesses with a dedicated Enterprise Fund.

"We would provide for free 30-minute parking in Newport, in line with the motion backed by Isle of Wight councillors in November 2020 aiming to bring back retail vibrancy to our county town as we emerge from the pandemic. We would also not go ahead with doubling the overnight car parking charge.

"The Conservatives have targeted two Island attractions for cuts in opening hours – Newport Roman Villa and Dinosaur Isle. We would not go ahead with these cuts. As lockdown eases and when people can visit attractions, maximising opening hours should be a priority.

"The Conservatives propose raising more money from a massive 7 per cent increase in crematorium and cemeteries' fees. We would limit the increase to 2 per cent, broadly in line with projections for inflation.

“Our plans are consistent with proposals we have been putting forward year after year. They are also financially sound. We would redirect about £600,000 that the Conservative leadership wants to put into the ‘Transformation Reserve’, which already has a healthy balance. We would also reallocate the £300,000 set aside for two speed cameras, allowing money to be spent more broadly on supporting our local economy, and on joint initiatives with parish, community, and town councils.

“Above all our budget amendment is underpinned by the liberal principles set out in our party’s constitution: *‘to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society, in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community, and in which no one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity.’*”

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The figures for the Lib Dem budget proposals are set out below.

1. £275,000 to establish a Climate Emergency Initiatives Fund – this fund will help the Council deliver on its strategy respond to its cross-party declaration of a climate emergency.
2. £100,000 Community Public Realm Fund to support joint initiatives with town, parish and community councils – these councils are the closest to their communities; in partnership with the Isle of Wight Council, this fund will help them make improvements to public spaces that enhance community life.
3. £100,000 Enterprise Fund – to further support entrepreneurs as they get their businesses under way. As the Council has previously noted, the Island *“benefits from an entrepreneurial culture with micro businesses (with five or fewer employees) accounting for 85% of local business.”*
4. £25,000 to establish a Community Resilience Transformation Fund – to ensure good practice in partnership working learned from the Covid pandemic can be developed for day-to-day service delivery
5. £175,000 for free 30-minute parking period in Newport streets and car parks
6. £80,000 to reverse the proposed doubling of overnight car parking charges
7. £10,000 to reverse cuts to the library book fund
8. £3,600 to reverse the closure of the mobile library service
9. £25,000 to reverse the cut in Newport Library opening hours
10. £19,000 to reverse the cut in Dinosaur Isle opening hours
11. £5,000 to reverse the cut Newport Roman Villa opening hours
12. £85,700 to reduce the proposed 7 per cent increase to crematorium and cemeteries fees to 2 per cent broadly in line with inflation projections