

Wiltshire Council Budget 2012/13



The
Liberal Democrat
Response

The Headlines

Spending Proposals

1. First hour free parking across Wiltshire
2. Free swimming for under-16's and over-60's
3. Re-open leisure centres on Bank Holidays.
4. Tripling funding for local communities to spend on improving roads.
5. New money for school improvements

Savings

1. LED streetlight installation programme
2. Ending publication of 'Your Wiltshire' magazine
3. Further reductions in Communications Department
4. Senior Management Reductions

Introduction

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This year cuts from central government mean again the production of a balanced budget for local authorities is a challenging and difficult process.

The ruling Conservative administration on Wiltshire have produced their budget proposals and we have carefully examined and scrutinised them. Whilst there is much that we find challenging in their proposals we must also recognise that they have, for now, been chosen by the people of Wiltshire to run the county.

We particularly welcome the partial u-turn on free swimming for under 16's which the Conservatives have conceded, one of our proposals in last years budget which they at that time rejected. However, their proposal is only for free swimming during the six weeks of the summer holiday and at Easter, and we would like to see that expanded to the whole year.

Our main budget amendment this year centres on returning one hours free parking in every Market Town in Wiltshire, and introducing it for the first time in the City of Salisbury.

Keeping our towns vibrant is essential and we do this by investing in them, not by trying to squeeze every last penny out of them. Wiltshire is surrounded by alternative and attractive shopping venues out of the county, Bath and Swindon to the north and Southampton and Bournemouth to the south.

It's time to support our towns, and I hope that on Feb 28th the Conservative administration will choose to back our proposals to amend their budget.



Cllr Jon Hubbard

Leader, Wiltshire Council Liberal Democrat Group



Our Proposed Amendments

Wiltshire Liberal Democrats are the main opposition on Conservative-administered Wiltshire Council. In 2012, we've selected key area of the Conservative Budget where we will be challenging their wasteful spending, or suggesting new spending commitments.

Throughout this document, we make no spending commitment without having found the money from elsewhere in the Council Budget. Wiltshire Council can afford these

Throughout this document you can see the exact amendment made to Council in these boxes.

A rescue plan for town centres

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Wiltshire's town and city centres are in trouble. Anybody out and about in Wiltshire will have seen the corrosive effect of the economic downturn, as well as out-of-town supermarkets, on our High Streets.

With our town centres in trouble, Wiltshire Council might be expected to step in and help local communities out. Instead, they've done the reverse, and hiked up parking charges by unprecedented levels. Our town centres are now at crisis point.

We believe that a major change in thinking is required, we think that it is the job of local government to support our towns and city, not fleece them.

Therefore we propose the introduction of one hours free parking in every single Wiltshire Council owned car park across the county. This will send the message loud and clear; Wiltshire's many communities are open for business.



Our Proposed Amendments

Introduce one hours free parking across all Wiltshire Council controlled car parks, at a cost of £1.53m.

Olympic Year 2012- Keeping Wiltshire Healthy

In 2011, we challenged Wiltshire Council to take action on the plans to make Wiltshire the healthiest county in England. Wiltshire Lib Dems identified free swimming for young people and older people as a great way to boost health and fitness. At the the time, the Conservative Group threw out our proposals.

This year we are delighted that that Wiltshire Council has announced that free swimming for under-16's will be introduced during school holidays. A good start, but not enough. We have again identified the money available to make free swimming a reality for under 16s and over-60s, without exception.

Unfortunately, since the last Budget, Wiltshire Council have closed leisure centres on Bank Holidays. The Lib Dems are proposing to reverse this cut to frontline services, and ensure Wiltshire's facilities are available, at the times when people need them.

Providing a means of encouraging take-up of regular exercise at a young age, and for the elderly, will reap savings for many years to come. We're challenging the Council to go further, and enact the full Lib Dem proposals.



Our increased funding will:

- Open leisure centres on bank holidays
- Provide free swimming for all those aged under 16
- Provide free swimming for all those aged over 60
- Be available for Wiltshire residents



Our Proposed Amendments

£0.505m annually to re-introduce free swimming for under-16s and over-60s; As part of the Olympic preparations, and to meet Wiltshire Area Board commitments in the 2014 Leading by Example initiative. This investment emphasises the importance of health in a good quality of life in Wiltshire.

£0.115m annually to re-introduce bank holiday opening for Leisure Centres. This investment ensures all people in Wiltshire have access to the facilities that allow them to stay healthy.

Supporting Schools

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Changes in government policy has seen an ever increasing number of schools choosing to become Academies.

We congratulate the administration for continuing to provide services to schools and for the initiatives in trading with the newly formed academies. However, we believe there is a real opportunity to increase income to the council by increasing trading with other out-of-county schools.

We propose investing £0.250m in increasing the services offered by Wiltshire Council to neighbouring authorities. We believe this would result in additional income of £0.300m, thus contributing £50,000 towards the cost of running Wiltshire.



Our Proposed Amendments

Supporting Schools

£0.250m on additional staff for school improvement via traded services earning an additional income of £0.300m

Giving Communities Control

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Week in, week out, Liberal Democrat Councillors are tackling decisions made by the Conservative Administration in County Hall which ignore the needs and demands of local communities.

We've seen an increasingly unaccountable Council take decisions over which they have little understanding. Wiltshire Liberal Democrats know that local people know best, and a key theme in our work is returning power back to local communities.

In the 2012/13 Budget, we're proposing that each community gets to decide how it spends money on roads and infrastructure. If a Local Community Area Transport Group wants a new zebra crossing, it will no longer have to wrestle with County Hall for the cash.

Currently local communities have devolved budgets for local Community Area Transport Groups that don't give sufficient funds for anything but the most basic of projects. Most towns don't even get enough money each year to cover the cost of putting in a basic zebra crossing.

We want to increase the funding to local communities and give them more opportunity to decide how their money is spent.

This is a big step. It involves Wiltshire Council trusting local people to make the choices. It will move power away from the centre and out around Wiltshire. It is the right thing to do.



Our Proposed Amendments

Tripling the cash available to Community Area Transport Groups is a revenue neutral proposal. The money will be moved from Wiltshire Council's strategic transport funds, and out to local communities.

Where local communities wish, they can remain in a County-wide strategic fund where the additional funding instead contributes to major infrastructure projects decided by County Hall.

Communities in the central fund would need to remain in the fund for a minimum of three years.

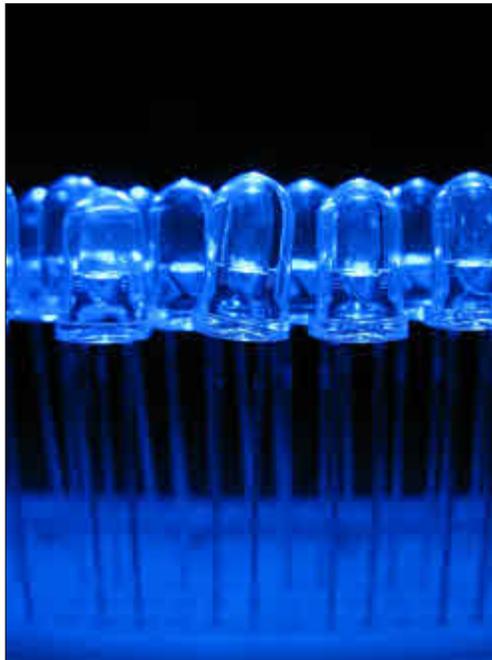
Save money, go green, stay safe

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Wiltshire Council are looking for savings everywhere, and that includes streetlights. All over the County, streetlights are being switched off, to save cash, and to cut Wiltshire's carbon emissions.

Sometimes, this is the right thing to do, but there are also areas where streetlights are crucial for road and pedestrian safety.

Wiltshire's Liberal Democrats think there's a better way to save money than just switch off our streetlights. We're proposing a replacement programme, getting rid of the old, dull and inefficient streetlights, and replacing them with the latest technology.



This could drastically cut the street lighting electricity bill, drastically reduce carbon emissions, and all whilst continuing to light the roads and pavements which need it.

Results from progressive Councils elsewhere are showing that new technology streetlights not only pay for their installation with reduced energy bills, but make savings over and above this on reducing fines for carbon emissions (Wiltshire's was fined £0.6m last year!).

New technology streetlights also give a better light, which make pedestrians and cyclists easier to see, meaning less accidents and safer roads.

Wiltshire Council mustn't be left behind here, when the potential rewards are so great.



Our Proposed Amendments

£0.25m capital investment gives capacity for £2.8m of borrowing, allowing a programme of replacing inefficient, dull street lights with brighter, safer Light Emitting Diode streetlights.

Investment is matched by at least £0.25m savings on reduced energy costs.

Finding the Savings

It's very easy for opposition politicians to make spending commitments without any idea how they will fund them.

We have costed every one of our proposals and identified how we will fund them. Not by cutting services but by cutting wasteful spending such as the unnecessary and expensive Your Wiltshire magazine.

New income

- £0.300m additional income from Schools Trading

Energy

- £0.250m saving from reduced electricity consumption from street lights

Senior Management

- £0.150m saving from Senior Management (Service Director and Heads of Services)

Communications Department

- £0.750m from Communications Department and removing Council's needless free magazine

Transformation Programme

- £0.400m from Transformation (2.7% cut)

Capital Savings

- £0.600m from Capital Savings

'Big Society' Fund

- £0.200m from 'Big Society'



Our Proposed Amendments

We have identified savings which allow us to make each one of the spending commitments outlined in this document.

We've identified a number of areas where we think the Council Budget is still bloated, but we're challenging the Conservatives particularly over the pointless and expensive 'Your Wiltshire' magazines and the Council's enormous spin Department.

	£m
<i>Administration Investments not accepted</i>	
Investment Communities (Big Society)	0.200
	0.200
<i>Additional Savings</i>	
Net increased income from school improvement trading	0.050
Street Lighting LED energy savings	0.250
Additional Senior Management savings from reduction in Service Directors and Heads of Service	0.150
Reduce growth in Transformation base budget by 2.2%	0.400
Reduce spens on Communications and Branding	0.750
Defer capital borrowing costs	0.600
	2.200
Total Resources Freed Up	2.400

	£m
<i>New Initiatives</i>	
1 hour free parking across the County	1.530
Street lighting LET infrastructure - funding for capital spend / borrowing	0.250
Re-open leisure centres on bank holidays	0.115
Free Swimming - Under 16's	0.355
Free Swimming - Over 60s	0.150
	2.400
Total New Spending Initiatives	2.400
Change in Overall Budget Position	0.000