



**Penrith & The Border
Labour Party**

**FOR THE
MANY
NOT THE
FEW**

**Labour Party Manifesto
Eden District Council Elections
May 2019**

A BETTER EDEN

The Manifesto of the Labour Party for the Eden District Council Elections May 2nd 2019



Foreword

We believe that the time has come for significant change at Eden District Council. The Tory leadership of the Council has proven that it is not fit for purpose and the election on Thursday 2 May is your chance to begin these changes.

The bungled process of the Penrith Masterplan demonstrated that a small handful of Conservative Councillors have been able to put their own **narrow ideological agenda** first, and democracy and the views of ordinary people last, by making important decisions that affect all our lives, behind closed doors.

The planning process lacked transparency, failed to engage the public and **focused on Penrith even though there would be an impact across the whole Eden Valley**. This monopoly of power needs to be challenged and the 12,000 people who voted for Labour at the General election (In Penrith & The Border) need to know that they are **proportionately represented** on our local councils.

A vote for Labour will be a vote for positive change.

Values

These values, shared by all Labour Party members and supporters are **equality, social justice and opportunity for all**. Our vision for Eden District is that we want our area to work for all of us, **not just the privileged few**. We want to invest our wealth in order to give everyone the best chance. That means building the homes that we can afford to rent or buy, keeping our communities safe with more police officers, giving our children's schools and other educational establishments the funding they badly need, and restoring the NHS to its place as the envy of the world.



A truly democratic council knows what local people want, and local people know what the council is doing. We therefore believe in a Council that operates with the underpinning values of **transparency, accountability, scrutiny and accessibility**. We believe in more democratic accountability with greater involvement by and in the community.

Transparency: we promise transparent, open and democratic local government which will work for the whole population of Eden District. We support the use of a range of open means of communication with the public and seek to involve them before major decisions are made.

Scrutiny: effective scrutiny should take place before, during and after every significant action. There was little or no formal scrutiny before the Penrith Masterplan was unleashed on an unsuspecting public. The District Council must be subjected to more scrutiny and challenge.

Accountability: it is our view that, as a result of existing Councillors being elected unopposed, they have become complacent: 21 of the 38 Councillors were elected unopposed at the last election. Elections provide an opportunity for the public to pass judgement on their Councillors. However, when Councillors are unopposed they have no reason to consider issues of accountability as they are democratically unchallenged. It is essential that our public officials are held to account and the electorate's approval withdrawn if they fail in their duties.

Accessibility: more work is needed to increase the numbers of people standing for election and to support anyone willing to stand for election with informative training opportunities.

Democracy: the council is part of the community and must make sure it is visible at community level, for example, by taking over empty shops to provide services and information at the most accessible level.

Summary of Key Actions



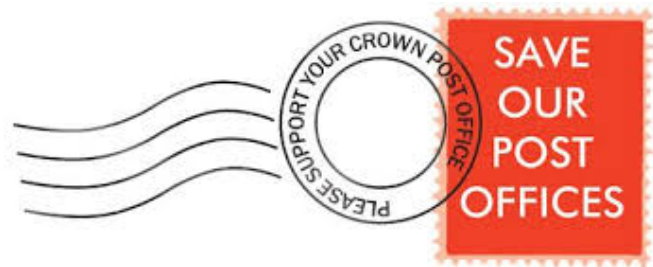
We will:

- Fight the closure of **Penrith Post Office** and support actions that secure its future.
- Oppose the ill-conceived **Penrith Masterplan** until it delivers direct benefits to the **whole Eden District** and has been subject to a full and proper consultation process with the option to dismiss it.
- Campaign for Council contracts to go to **local businesses** and to public ownership, where appropriate, as part of a Community Wealth Building programme.
- Consult on an innovative plan to **combat the decline** of local retail outlets and high streets.
- Invest in and **promote tourist attractions** in our District and consult on the idea of a '**tourist tax**' that will benefit the whole of the district.
- Support families experiencing difficulties with **Universal Credit** and campaign for a strategy to address issues of **child poverty**.
- Lobby for steps to **improve public transport** and access to public services. In particular, we will campaign for the maintenance of all existing **leisure and recreation facilities** and for the development of new opportunities, particularly for children, young people and the elderly.
- Campaign for more **social and affordable housing** for local people.
- Initiate measures to create a **greener Eden District**.
- Seek to reconstitute Heart of Cumbria Limited as a Community Interest Company and review their composition and organisational objectives.
- Bring **workable solutions** to issues of fly tipping, litter and dog fouling.

A more detailed outline of our proposals follow.

Rebuilding Communities & Saving Penrith Post Office

Our facilities and amenities are rapidly disappearing and our high street shops are closing. There is currently a plan to close **Penrith Post Office** and to offer a much diminished service in WH Smith. Nationally, the Labour Party has a plan to rebuild our economy so that it works in the interest of the many, not just handing out the rewards to those at the top. Labour plans to set up a national investment bank and **regional development banks** to help unlock £250 billion of investment and lending to address funding gaps in the private sector, **revive local economies and incentivise economic activity**. There is also a plan to **provide banking services through a network of post offices**. This will protect community banking at a time when the major banks are closing their high street branches. It is estimated that running the Post Bank through the Post Office network could **create up to 3,600 branches**. These initiatives are absolutely essential for rural communities. **Penrith post office must stay** where it is to allow this to happen, to **preserve jobs and services to the public** and to keep Penrith alive.



The Penrith Masterplan

The public hostility attracted by the Penrith Masterplan gave a clear indication of its shortcomings. Issues raised were about the damage to the Beacon and other environmental issues, the shortage of affordable housing, the absence of social housing, the lack of road and transport infrastructure, the absence of planning or clear strategy to attract new employers, insufficient plans to increase education and health provision, etc, etc. **This wasn't so much a plan as an ill-considered wish list**. When the plan re-emerges we will support it if:

- It brings direct benefit and **employment** opportunities to existing residents.
- There is **no environmental damage** to sensitive areas such as the Beacon.
- Housing developments include the provision of **genuinely affordable and social housing**.
- The development of the road **transport infrastructure** includes a time-scaled commitment to 'dual' the A66 and the provision of affordable public transport to connect any new outlying housing.



- Sufficient **health and education provision** is made to cater for the increased population.
- A feasibility study and impact assessment is completed that provides clear evidence that new **environmentally sensitive businesses** will be attracted to the proposed employment space and that the number of new jobs matches the planned social and economic mix of housing development.
- There are guarantees that new housing does not become second homes or retirement and holiday accommodation.
- A solution is found to the current **traffic management** problems (**parking**, peak time traffic jams, **traffic pollution** in the town centre, etc), so that this problem does not become a crisis after the expansion of Penrith.
- Developments planned for Penrith are considered alongside plans for the **whole of the Eden Valley** as, unless this happens, this could lead to greater deprivation and isolation right across the Eden Valley.



The so-called Strategic Masterplan is an example of the unaccountable way that the council has worked; the executive should be held to account throughout the whole decision-making process, not just after the decisions have been rubber-stamped. Future planning should evolve from the Eden District Local Plan with a **focus on developing the economy of the whole district and not just Penrith.**

The Local Economy and Community Wealth-Building

Instead of out-sourcing Council contracts to large businesses from outside of Cumbria whose excessive profits leave Cumbria as soon as they are paid, we will campaign to invest locally by **supporting new and existing Cumbrian businesses and cooperatives**. This will mean that funds spent by the Council will stay in Cumbria and will stimulate the local economy. A strategy of **local investment** and procurement, and using a **locally owned supply chain**, will boost investment in the local economy. For example, instead of using huge national companies to build new houses, we will ensure that all building contracts go to local building companies.

Where appropriate, we will support the strategy of bringing public services back into public ownership under local democratic control. Additionally, we will support a regeneration development strategy of attracting environmentally friendly businesses to our District.

Regenerating High Streets

The high street is struggling under the Tories. Nationally, Labour will introduce a package of reforms to business rates while reviewing the entire system, and will reform local government funding to ensure councils have sustainable funding for the long term.

Locally, we will seek to reverse the decline of town centres to stop them becoming ghost towns by campaigning for:

- **Fairer business rates** for high street shops, pubs and markets
- Opposition to the closure of **post offices** and banks
- An end to charges for cash machines
- The creation of **regional development banks** to invest in local businesses and communities
- Improvements to road and transport links
- Involving the local community, businesses and voluntary groups to identify innovative solutions to vacant retail premises.



The closure of post offices and banks, and the move towards a cashless society, brings significant problems for people living in rural communities and especially for the elderly and disabled. This needs to be addressed.

Tourism

As well as having parts of the Lake District World Heritage site, including Ullswater, Haweswater and Brotherswater and the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty within our District, we also have several tourist attractions in Penrith and the Eden Valley, e.g. Penrith Castle, Lowther Castle, Penrith Museum, Brough Castle, Brougham Castle, Ashgill Force, Shap Abbey, Penrith Beacon, Long Meg & Her Daughters, Little Salkeld Mill, the Pennine Way, part of the Coast to Coast route, Appleby Horse Fair, Rheged Centre.... and many, many more.



However, overall the area's tourist attractions are under-promoted, poorly maintained and neglected. These attractions could generate much more tourist revenue, bringing greatly needed money into the local economy as well as increased employment opportunities.

We will attempt to stimulate a **strategy to attract tourists** into the area and conduct a consultation about the possibility of introducing a **tourist tax** similar to the tax recently introduced by Edinburgh.

Universal Credit and Poverty

Real wages are still lower than they were in 2010 and millions of working families are set to be worse off under Universal Credit. Child poverty has risen to over four million under the Tories.

Nationally, Labour will introduce a real living wage of £10 an hour by 2020, stop the roll out of Universal Credit and implement a new **Child Poverty Strategy**.

Locally, we will provide support for those moving on to Universal Credit by ensuring help for struggling households and by supporting food-banks, clothes banks, and other schemes as interim services while we work on giving

people the assistance they need to enable them to sustain themselves and their families without being forced to use these services.



Public Transport and Public Services

Research has shown that people living in the Eden District suffer the greatest deprivation in the whole of the country in terms of access to public services and facilities (*Reference - Cumbria Revealed: A County Of Contrasts, Cumbria Community Foundation, Published 2017*).

We will lobby for steps to improve public transport and access to public services. Too many people, particularly young people, people with disabilities and the elderly, are excluded from services by the lack of public transport.

We will also campaign for the maintenance of all existing leisure and recreation facilities and for the **development of new opportunities for underprivileged groups and for children in general.**

Housing

The Tories have presided over eight years of failure on housing, with rising homelessness and falling home-ownership. They have no plan to fix the housing crisis. Labour's plan is to build at least a million new homes, including 100,000 genuinely affordable homes to buy or to rent per year by the end of the Parliament.



Labour's New Deal for renters will deliver a consumer rights revolution for renters to improve standards, security and affordability for people who rent their homes from a private landlord.

Locally, we will take steps to tackle the issue of housing, not simply by being concerned with affordable housing but by seeking to improve the supply of social housing. The rents and prices of property in Eden bear no relationship to the average wages and we would make sure that all new housing is protected from the **blight of second homes.**

In Eden District we will work to improve the quality and provision of housing to meet a range of needs and requirements. In particular we will:

- Campaign for the provision of **social housing** and not just ‘**affordable housing**’.
- Work with a genuine definition of what is ‘affordable’ for people living in the Eden Valley.
- Support initiatives to **regulate private landlords**.
- Provide **advice and support** for private tenants.
- Encourage community-led housing.
- Ensure that all new builds abide by **environmental standards**.
- Tackle the problem of **empty properties** and land-banking.
- Campaign for the Heart of Cumbria Limited to be reconstituted as a Community Interest Company.

Environment

We will campaign to create a **greener Eden District**. We believe that the Council should commit to a **zero carbon policy** within 5 years for its own services. It must seek to make it possible for local people to adopt greener lifestyles by providing more **electric vehicle charging points** across the District and by taking steps to require new houses to have facilities for charging electric vehicles.

We want to work with local communities to tackle fly tipping, through a rapid response team, and to also take action with ongoing problems of litter and dog fouling. For example, we pledge to give consideration to a dog chipping scheme that has the



facility to match DNA evidence to dog fouling and could be more successful in enforcing sanctions on dog-owning culprits. At the same time, we would also wish to consider a Green Dog Walking/**Responsible Dog Owners** scheme that encourages greater responsibility matched with more dog waste bins.

We will campaign to renew and scrutinise Eden District Council’s environmental plan, support local community growing projects, take measures to improve air quality, protect open areas, promote renewable energy (new builds and projects) and community-led energy generation, improve recycling, ban plastic bags, support projects / businesses to reduce single use plastic, welcome environmentally friendly businesses and bring a **Climate Emergency resolution** to the first meeting of a new council.

Policing, crime and safer communities

Many local people have raised the issue of crime and the epidemic of knife crime. The Tories have cut 21,000 police officers from forces across the country, and crime is up. Nationally, the police have recorded the highest number of offences in a decade and violent crime has doubled under the Tories to reach record levels. Labour has made a commitment to invest in community safety and give police the resource they need. There will be 10,000 extra officers to prioritise neighbourhood policing and bear down on crime and its causes. Thankfully, the Eden District is not an area blighted by high crime figures though we should never let ourselves become complacent.

Heart of Cumbria Ltd

Heart of Cumbria Limited was formed as a limited company. Its Directors were three Councillors, all members of the controlling Conservative Group, along with two external, non-executive Directors. Other groups on the Council declined to take up directorships.

It defined its areas of activity as: buying and managing housing, buying and managing commercial property, development schemes on non-Council owned land, development schemes on Council land and initiating renewable energy schemes.

The Eden District Council allocated a loan of £1million to the company in the 2017/18 year from the capital programme.

We propose to reconstitute the Company as a Community Interest Company and to review the objectives of the Company to include facilitating social enterprises and co-operatives, as well as more traditional enterprises.

By changing the ethos of the Company, we would seek to recruit Directors more representative of the whole Council.

A Fresh, Positive Approach

Local government and the vital public services that they provide have been hollowed out by savage Tory cuts that have hit the poorest hardest. Decades of neglect combined with 9 years of austerity has led to rising crime, high street decline and the loss of key services. The Tories' cuts to schools, the police and services such as social care, homelessness prevention and children's services are putting family prosperity and Britain's future at risk.

Labour will rebuild our country with investment in services and communities so they can thrive once again, instead of more of



the same failed austerity and cuts with the Tories. We need to elect as many **Labour Councillors as possible on 2 May** to send a message to this Government that real change is needed and austerity must end.

Unitary Authority Status

We believe that there should be wide **public consultation** about the creation of a **Unitary Authority** (s) which would merge the duties, responsibilities and accountabilities of the **County Council and the District Council**.

A Unitary Authority could be a more **cost effective** operation, **saving tens of millions** of pounds. More importantly, if the local District Councils were to be merged with the County Council, there would be a less complex and **more coherent planning processes**, enabling **less fragmentation** of currently disconnected services and more **holistic and 'joined-up' planning**. The Labour Party in Eden District recognises that the creation of a new Unitary Authority would provide a once in a lifetime opportunity to make positive change by giving people in Eden a greater say in shaping the kind of public services they want the local authority to provide and the way in which they want them delivered.



There are also **arguments against a Unitary Authority**. For example, if the District and County Councils are merged we will have fewer Councillors and, therefore, less democratic representation. With fewer Councillors we will have less direct access to our local political representatives. Another possible choice is to have an elected mayor.

In any case, if we are to move to a Unitary Authority or make other changes in our local government, we believe that the **public should be consulted** on whether this should happen, and, if it does, what it would look like. For example there are choices about whether we have Council departments run by democratic committees or by the **Cabinet structure** which focuses power around a smaller number of Councillors. A Labour-led Council will embrace the transparency and public accountability required for a properly functioning local democracy to empower the many to lead richer lives. However, it is our priority to **campaign for public involvement** in the consideration and decision-making associated with any proposals.

Vote 
Labour