

THE BRITISH INFRASTRUCTURE REVOLUTION

A Liberal Democrat Partnership Plan for Britain's Communities

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A. FOREWORD

The Liberal Democrats have spent the last decade arguing that prevention beats cure, that mental health and physical health should be treated equally, that carers deserve support, that GPs need to be properly resourced, that local councils need real money, and that early years matter more than late-stage crisis intervention.

The 2024 manifesto built on every one of those positions. Mental health hubs for young people in every community. A qualified mental health professional in every primary and secondary school. Free personal care. Carer support. Cross-party convention on social care. Auto-enrolment for free school meals. Penny on income tax for health and social care.

The current government has moved on some of this. Young Futures Hubs are rolling out (50 by 2029, the first eight by March 2026). Free school meals expand to every Universal Credit household from September 2026. Best Start Family Hubs from April 2026. The Social and Affordable Homes Programme commits £39 billion over ten years.

It's good but we must push and deliver more. The hubs are funded at roughly a third of what the sector says is needed. Free school meals are still means-tested rather than universal. Auto-enrolment is missing. Social care reform has stalled again. Carers remain unsupported. Primary care estate is crumbling.

The Treasury cannot fund the rebuild from general taxation without crowding out the NHS, defence, and pensions. The Lib Dem position has consistently been honest about this.

The Community Transformation Fund offers a way through. It funds the rebuild through a partnership with British corporations, off the Treasury balance sheet, on a footing that survives

the next spending review. It does not start anything new. It scales what is in motion and adds the structural permanence that Lib Dem policy has been calling for.

I am the hub lead for the DCMS Young Futures Hubs pilot in Bristol, one of the eight national early adopters. I co-designed / co-developed the hub-and-spoke framework Bristol is operating under. I know what is being delivered, and have clarity around where it falls short. Here I share what changes if the funding is structurally adequate.

Companion documents address the Conservative, Labour, and Reform UK cases.

B. THE NUMBERS

- £1 in, £4 back.
 - £69.43 billion a year in savings by year five.
 - £52.83 billion net annual benefit.
 - 650,000 jobs.
 - 500,000 hospital admissions prevented annually.
 - 15,000 lives saved per year.
 - 4,000 excess winter deaths prevented annually.
 - 300,000 mothers back into work.
 - 5 million people gaining GP access.
 - 14 million people connected through community hubs.
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C. THE FOUR PROGRAMMES

The full framework contains eleven programmes. Four align directly with Lib Dem priorities.

1. NHS COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES — £1.5bn/year

Now. The 10-Year Health Plan committed to neighbourhood health centres in underserved areas. Primary care reform is in motion. The previous Conservative government announced primary care estate investment that has not been delivered at scale.

Gap. The Health Foundation's analysis of the 2024 manifestos found primary care capital spending still falling well short of comparable European countries as a share of GDP. The Lib Dem manifesto pledged £1.1 billion a year of capital investment, against a Health Foundation estimate of £6.4 billion needed. That gap has not closed. GP shortages persist. Mental health waiting times remain unacceptable. The cliff edge between children's and adult mental health services is unaddressed despite the manifesto commitment to extend young people's services to age 25.

Levy adds. £1.5 billion a year. 500+ neighbourhood health centres in underserved areas. 5 million people gaining GP access. 25,000 healthcare jobs. Mental health practitioners and social prescribing link workers integrated into primary care from the start.

Lib Dem case. Prevention beats cure. Mental and physical health treated equally. GPs properly resourced. Care closer to home. Every plank of Lib Dem health policy from the last decade is in this programme.

Returns.

- 500,000 hospital admissions prevented annually.
 - 15,000 lives saved per year through early diagnosis and prevention.
 - £13.8 billion a year in NHS savings from avoided acute care.
 - 25,000 jobs (3,000 GPs, 6,000 practice nurses, 4,000 healthcare assistants, 2,000 mental health practitioners, 2,500 social prescribing link workers).
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2. CHILDCARE 0-5 — £1.5bn/year

Now. The 30-hour funded childcare entitlement for working parents completed rollout September 2025. 3,000 new school-based nurseries committed. Best Start Family Hubs from April 2026.

Gap. Lib Dem analysis, alongside the IFS, NEF, and Sutton Trust, has consistently flagged three problems.

1. The earnings threshold excludes the poorest 30% of families. The bulk of funding flows to families who would have paid for childcare anyway.
2. Nearly half of all under-fives live in a "childcare desert" with no supply at any price.
3. Parents studying or retraining are excluded entirely. Student nurses, trainee teachers, adult learners cannot access the entitlement that would let them qualify for the jobs the country needs.

The Lib Dems have also been the loudest voice on auto-enrolment and on universal provision over means-testing.

Levy adds. £1.5 billion a year. Universal coverage. Capital for new provision in childcare deserts. 12,000 additional early years educator posts. Auto-enrolment built into the framework from the start.

Lib Dem case. Universal provision over means-testing. Early intervention. Parental support. The single biggest cost-of-living relief available to middle-income families (£15,000 a year saved) and the single biggest disadvantage-gap closer for the poorest families.

Returns.

- 2.5 million children supported.
- 300,000 mothers back into work.
- £15,000 a year saved per family.
- £7.9 billion a year Treasury gain.
- 12,000 jobs.
- School readiness gap closed before reception.

3. UNIVERSAL COMMUNITY ACCESS — £1bn/year

Now. A patchwork. Best Start Family Hubs (April 2026, 500,000 children reached), Young Futures Hubs (50 by 2029), DWP Youth Hubs, Lib Dem-advocated mental health hubs for young people. No coherent national community hub network. Existing provision is fragmented across departments, age groups, and funding streams.

Gap. None of the existing hub programmes covers the whole population. Family Hubs focus on under-fives. Young Futures Hubs focus on 10-18 year olds. Mental health hubs are children-and-young-people specific. There is no equivalent for working-age adults, for older people, for carers, for people in social isolation, for people who fall between the existing categories. The result is fragmentation, with people referred between hubs and waiting lists rather than receiving integrated support.

The Lib Dem call for community-based, age-inclusive, integrated provision has been consistent. The infrastructure to deliver it does not yet exist at scale.

Levy adds. £1 billion a year. 2,500 accredited community hubs nationwide, age-inclusive, integrating the existing fragmented provision into a coherent network. Universal Credit households receive free membership. Existing third sector organisations meeting standards become accredited delivery partners, protecting capacity built up over decades.

Lib Dem case. Integration. Localism. Prevention. Dignified support without stigma. Carers and isolated older people supported alongside young people and families. The connective tissue the existing programmes lack.

Returns.

- 14 million people connected through hubs (5.6 million Universal Credit households plus general access).
- £11.5 billion a year in government savings (NHS, social services, criminal justice, mental health crisis prevention).
- 18,750 community jobs.
- Social isolation measurably reduced.
- Carers receive routine support rather than crisis-only intervention.

4. LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESTORATION — £1.6bn/year

Now. English Devolution White Paper. Multi-year settlements. Mayoral Strategic Authorities. Council Housebuilding Skills and Capacity Programme.

Gap. Councils have absorbed roughly £16 billion in real-terms cuts since 2010. Section 114 notices are routine. Adult social care and SEND pressures absorb new money before anything else gets it. Many of the worst-affected councils are Lib Dem-led or have strong Lib Dem representation.

This affects the delivery of every other programme. Hubs need councils to commission them. Housing needs councils to plan it. Free school meals are administered through councils. Childcare runs through council early years teams. A collapsing council sector cannot deliver community infrastructure.

Levy adds. £1.6 billion a year. Restores 10% of the cumulative cuts since 2010. Not enough to fully reverse the damage. Enough to restore the operational capacity councils need to deliver everything else. 29,000 council jobs. Planning officers, social workers, environmental health, parks workers, librarians.

Lib Dem case. Localism. Real devolution requires real money. Councils as the delivery vehicle for community infrastructure rather than a dumping ground for unfunded responsibilities. The single biggest enabler of every other reform.

Returns.

- 56 million UK residents benefit from restored services.
- 29,000 council jobs.
- £4.3 billion a year in government savings.
- Planning processed faster, unlocking the housing pipeline.
- Social workers with manageable caseloads.

D. THE FUNDING

A 0.8% contribution from corporations operating in the UK with turnover above £1 billion. Lower rates for smaller firms. SMEs below £50 million turnover exempt. Roughly 2,000 companies pay. Total: £16.6 billion a year.

Three-year emergency levy. Years one to three only. 5% on annual profits over £1 billion at energy companies and banks. Raises £4.95 billion a year. Funds doubled housing investment and direct energy bill support for 5 million fuel-poor households at £490 each.

AI Infrastructure Levy. One-time 18% levy on UK AI revenue from the major AI companies. Raises £5.67 billion. Funds NHS medical AI, fraud detection, and worker retraining.

Tax-deductible. The corporate contribution is treated as a Strategic Investment Contribution, deductible against UK Corporation Tax.

The Lib Dem distinction. Lib Dem manifestos have honestly said taxation needs to rise to fund the rebuild. The levy is not a substitute for that argument. It is a complement to it. The corporations that have benefited from operating in a deregulated, low-tax environment for fifteen years contribute to the renewal of the country that has hosted them. Working-age voters do not absorb the full cost through general taxation.

Self-funding by year five. £69.43 billion in annual savings funds the framework's continuation. The corporate levy starts to taper to 0.3%. The system becomes self-funding.

E. THE COALITION

Who pays

The 2,000 largest corporations in the UK. Energy companies and banks pay the additional emergency levy in years one to three. AI companies pay a one-time levy. SMEs exempt.

Who builds and delivers

GPs and primary care professionals. The Royal College of GPs, the BMA, the RCN are natural allies. 25,000 healthcare jobs in community health centres include 3,000 GPs and 2,500 social prescribing link workers, restoring job satisfaction in a profession close to collapse.

Local councillors. The Local Government Restoration programme puts £1.6 billion back into councils, with 29,000 council jobs. Lib Dem councillors get to deliver visible improvements (parks, planning, social workers) in their wards.

Teachers and early years educators. 12,000 early years jobs, plus the rebuilt FE workforce. NEU and NASUWT alignment.

The third sector. Hub accreditation protects existing community organisations rather than creating parallel state provision. Faith groups, community charities, small local providers all benefit.

Who benefits

Carers. The Lib Dem signature constituency. Community hubs provide routine support, respite, and connection. Social prescribing link workers in primary care identify carers earlier. Mental

health practitioners support carer wellbeing. The framework treats unpaid carers as a workforce that has been politically invisible for too long.

Families with young children. Universal childcare. Universal free school meals. Family Hubs and Best Start integrated into the wider community hub network. £15,000 a year saved per family.

Young people with mental health needs. Mental health practitioners in every community health centre. Young Futures Hubs at proper scale. The cliff edge between children's and adult services bridged. The Lib Dem flagship policy of mental health support in every community delivered.

Older people and the isolated. Community hubs as the answer to social isolation. Free membership for all households. Routine connection rather than crisis-only intervention.

The professional middle class. £15,000 a year on childcare. £980 a year per child on school meals. £490 a year energy support during the emergency phase. The single biggest cost-of-living improvement available to Lib Dem voter heartlands.

The progressive philanthropy angle

Foundations that have funded the third sector through the austerity years (Joseph Rowntree, Sainsbury family trusts, Esmée Fairbairn, the Health Foundation, Lankelly Chase legacy) get a partner in the state for the first time in fifteen years. The Innovation Fund within the framework provides match funding for community-led experimental programmes.

F. WHY THIS WORKS POLITICALLY

The Lib Dem hand

72 MPs, the largest Lib Dem parliamentary party in a century. Holding the balance in a dozen Conservative-Lib Dem marginals at the next election. Strong council base. APPG influence disproportionate to Westminster numbers.

The framework gives the Lib Dems a coherent, costed, sector-backed plan to push from opposition. It is a plan the larger parties are not yet ready to legislate, and a plan that the Lib Dems can credibly champion as their own work. APPG formation on Community Infrastructure is achievable now.

Polling

70%+ public support for community infrastructure investment. 78% back higher corporate contributions over general taxation. 82% back higher contributions from energy companies and banks.

The framework polls highest among Lib Dem voters of any party (roughly 81%). It also polls strongly with the Conservative-leaning swing voters Lib Dems need to convert in their target seats.

Distinctiveness

The framework lets the Lib Dems offer something neither Labour nor the Conservatives are offering: a complete, credible, fully costed plan for community infrastructure delivered through partnership rather than general taxation. That distinctiveness matters most to a third party that needs to be more than a critic of the other two.

The election test

A general election fought with the framework on the table. Lib Dems offer: the most rigorous, sector-aligned, cross-party-credible community infrastructure plan in the country, with the personal authority of a party that has been making this argument longer than either of the larger parties.

That is a strong opposition platform. It is also a credible coalition negotiation position if the Parliament hangs.

G. THE OBJECTIONS

"Aren't we already calling for most of this?" Yes. The framework is the funding architecture that makes the Lib Dem policy programme actually deliverable. Calling for things and showing how to pay for them at scale are different exercises. The framework provides the second.

"Shouldn't we be honest about taxation rather than relying on corporate contribution?"

The framework does not replace the case for honest taxation. It complements it. Penny on income tax for health and social care funds the NHS staff and capital pipeline. The corporate levy funds community infrastructure. The two are additive. The framework lets the Lib Dems run on both.

"Corporations will leave." 0.8% of UK turnover, tax-deductible, falling to 0.3% within five years, reciprocated by procurement access and a more productive workforce. Not a relocation trigger.

"Localism not centralism." The framework is structurally localist. Hubs are accredited, not state-built. Councils restored as commissioners. Mayoral Strategic Authorities given the

resources to set strategic direction. The Treasury writes the legislation; communities deliver the programmes.

"What about the Lib Dem record on coalition?" The framework is designed to be ownable by a junior coalition partner without being lost in the larger party's narrative. Lib Dem authorship is publicly attributable through the APPG, the manifesto, and the Founding Partner negotiations.

H. THE TIMELINE

2026-2027. Framework published. Coalition-building with the BMA, RCGP, Carers UK, Mind, the LGA, the foundation sector. Bristol Young Futures Hub opens. Manifesto integration. APPG on Community Infrastructure formed.

2027-2028. Legislation, with cross-party support. Designed to integrate with existing delivery architecture.

2028-2029. First £21.55 billion budget deployed. Universal free school meals from September 2029. First 100 hubs accredited. Community health centres begin operating.

2030-2031. Independent evaluation. Self-funding transition begins.

2035-2036. Full national hub network. Universal childcare and free school meals embedded. 641,400 homes built. Programme self-funding.

I. THE ASK

To Lib Dem MPs. Engage. Test the framework against your constituency need, your council leaders, your local healthcare providers, your carer networks. If the case holds, table it. Lead the formation of an APPG on Community Infrastructure. Lib Dem authorship of the cross-party position is achievable now.

To Lib Dem councillors. Engage on the Local Government Restoration programme specifically. The 29,000 jobs and the £1.6 billion a year are deliverable within your authorities. Bristol's hub model is a template.

To Lib Dem-aligned health professionals. Engage on the Community Health Centres programme. The 25,000 jobs and the prevention-led design are aligned with Lib Dem health policy of the last decade.

To Lib Dem-aligned philanthropy and the third sector. Engage on the Innovation Fund, the hub accreditation model, and the role of foundations as state co-investors.

J. WHY THIS WORKS

The architecture is operating now. The Bristol Young Futures Hub opens March 2026 as one of eight national early adopters. The hub-and-spoke framework is being delivered. The SAHP is awarding contracts. Best Start Family Hubs roll out from April 2026. Free school meals expansion implements September 2026.

What is missing is not the institutions. It is the funding that lets the institutions work at scale, and the integrating connective tissue (the universal hub network, the restored council base) that turns fragmented programmes into a coherent whole.

International evidence is consistent. Finland's universal school meals, since 1948, produces the highest educational attainment in Europe. Vienna's social housing, covering 60% of the population, has produced the most liveable city in the world. Denmark's youth services produce the lowest youth unemployment in Europe. Scotland's free childcare expansion in 2014 returned 65% of mothers to work.

These are not radical experiments. Normal in successful countries. Britain is the outlier.

K. THE EMERGENCY PHASE, THE JOBS, THE GENERATION

The first three years are different

Years one to three are the emergency phase. Years four onwards are steady state.

Emergency phase budget: £21.55 billion a year. It delivers 71,700 social homes a year, £490 a year in energy bill support to 5 million fuel-poor households, the first wave of community hubs, the rollout of universal free school meals, and the acceleration of youth services.

By year three: 215,100 families housed. 6,000 excess winter deaths prevented. 200 youth clubs reopened. Universal free school meals delivered to 8.9 million children. First community health centres operating.

This is what an emergency response looks like when it is properly funded. It is also the phase that proves the framework works ahead of the next general election.

Where the 650,000 jobs go

- Construction and trades: 181,000 at peak.

- Youth and community work: 49,200. Including 20,000 youth workers and 15,000 paid Young Leaders aged 13-16.
- Healthcare: 25,000. Including 3,000 GPs, 6,000 practice nurses, 2,500 social prescribing link workers.
- Education and early years: 12,000.
- Sports, recreation, culture: 29,500. Including 3,000 librarians, 8,000 leisure centre staff.
- Local government: 29,000 restored. Parks, planning, social work, environmental health.
- Community hubs: 18,750.
- Green trades: 25,000. Including 8,000 solar installers, 6,000 insulation workers.
- Innovation and project work: 6,000.

Plus 200,000 indirect jobs in supply chains.

What happens after Year 10

Construction workers do not lose jobs at the end of the housing programme. Years 11-20 deliver school rebuilding, hospital construction, transport infrastructure, renewable energy, home retrofitting at scale, and ongoing social housing. Total construction employment in years 11-20: 233,000, higher than the housing peak. Long-term maintenance: 120,000 permanent jobs.

Workers trained in 2027 have forty years of work ahead of them.

The generation this is for

Children born in 2027 are now starting school. By the time they are eighteen, in 2045, the framework will have built 641,400 social homes, opened 2,500 community hubs and 1,000 youth clubs, fed every British child at school for two decades, and saved an estimated 200,000 lives.

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ONE FINAL THING

I am not a politician. I am the hub lead for the DCMS Young Futures Hubs pilot in Bristol. I drafted the hub-and-spoke framework Bristol is delivering under.

The Lib Dems have spent a decade making the policy case that is at the heart of this framework. Prevention. Mental health parity. Carers. GPs. Localism. Early years. The arguments are settled. What has been missing is a credible, costed, deliverable funding architecture that lets the policy actually work at scale.

The framework is that architecture. It is also the most credible cross-party platform available to a Lib Dem parliamentary party of 72 MPs, in a Parliament where the larger parties are constrained by their own coalitions.

The work has started. The framework is the way to finish it.

Char Lawrence Founder, The Lawrence Institute Est. 2025

This is one of four party-aligned partnership documents prepared by the Lawrence Institute. Companion documents address the Conservative, Labour, and Reform UK cases. Cross-party crossover documents address shared programmes. The full British Infrastructure Revolution framework remains the underlying evidence base. All documents available at www.LawrenceInstitute.co.uk.