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Putting Community into the heart of Local Government [Table of Contents](#)

The Green Party/
Comhaontas Glas

Local
Government
Election
Programme

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The Green Party/Comhaontas Glas has developed a deserved reputation for being the political party with the most concern for the environment. While being successful in highlighting and forcing the political system to respond to environmental issues, being seen as the environmental party has also become something of a straitjacket that has restricted Greens from highlighting our wider policy agenda. These local elections offer an ideal opportunity to inform the electorate as to how wide the Green agenda is.

Irish politics is filled with political parties who differ not at all from each other. Only the Green Party can truly claim to be distinct. Local authorities are badly in need of a fresh approach. Only the Green Party is offering the electorate that choice.

Four policy pillars inform Green Party thinking.

Social Justice

Grassroots Democracy

Equality

The Environment

From these pillars all other policies follow. These are the values that the Green Party will seek to put in place in local councils, and they will inform the policy positions we will be highlighting within this manifesto, and later hopefully in the council chambers throughout the country.

[up Social Justice](#)

Despite a booming economy we live in a grossly unequal society, where success is still too dependent on where you live, how well connected or situated you or your family is, your opportunity to be educated, and even the ability to move from place to place.

The Green Party questions more than any other political party, how we define wealth, how wealth is distributed and to what extent, what wealth in the short term can continue to be wealth in the future.

How we structure our society, especially in identifying those in society who most deserve the fruits of economic success, should be the real indicator of progress - not the rate of inflation, not the level of interest rates, not the value of houses.

Grassroots Democracy

The Green Party/Comhaontas Glas believes that the way decisions are made is often as important, if not more so, than actual decisions made. The overriding principle should be that any person who is affected by the making of a decision should be involved in the making of such decisions. We rigorously oppose any attempt to take power further away from people, and in seeking election to political structures we attempt to redistribute power, so that all decisions are made at the most local level possible.

Bringing about a better democracy means assisting people in becoming better informed, engaging in wider consultation, and ensuring that properly agreed decisions are quickly and effectively implemented. It means changing from a 'winner takes all' system of politics to a system where everyone is a winner.

Equality

The world of politics is too oriented by grey middle aged, able bodied men. It is a world where point scoring is thought more important than issues, where he who shouts loudest is thought more of than he who argues best. How meetings are organised and where they are held, favour men over women - highlighting issues that are important to men, while ignoring issues vital to women. There are too few women in politics. Not only should there be more women in politics, but our system also needs to be changed by feminist values. Equally, minority interests are not only having their views heard, they are not being allowed to be seen to represent themselves.

The Environment

Environmental issues will always remain high on the Green agenda, but we believe that we have environmental problems because of how decisions are made, and how we structure society and the economy. Our priority will be to maintain and protect and enhance our environment - improving the very quality of life.

The Issues

Local Government That Works

The Green Party/ Comhaontas Glas believes that our system of government should be restructured into a three tiered system of District, Region and National government. We will promote changes in this area.

Through a significant Green Party presence on local councils, we intend to challenge the style and the culture of how local government operates. Among our objectives will be:

Changing the timing and structure of council meetings to maximise public participation.

Arranging for the holding of meetings in local community venues.

Restructuring the decision making process so that consultation is engaged at the beginning and not towards the end of any process.

Ensuring that Strategic Policy Committees are made to have an active part in the decision making process of local councils, and that the nominated members from outside bodies of these committees can be made feel fully involved.

Increasing the ability of local councils to bring about legislation through the passing of bye-laws.

Refusing to participate in exclusive pacts designed to create jobs for the boys , working to see that appointed positions within the councils are done fairly and on merit.

Improving reporting procedures from outside agencies (Health Board, Vocational Education Committee), with the holding of debates and the producing of regular reports.

Actively opposing attempts by any public representative who operates a Dual Mandate to be appointed to any outside body or agency. The Green Party/Comhaontas Glas actively opposes and does not operate the Dáil/ local authority dual mandate.

Developing a code of practice whereby knowledge and information gained through attendance at conferences and seminars can be made more widely available.

An Teanga Ba chóir go mbeadh obair na gComhairlí dá-theangach chomh fada agus is feidir.

Producing proposals that would allow for the regular holding of local referenda and initiatives.

Community Development

The extent to which community issues are to be addressed by local authorities, should determine how successful changes in local government can be. To achieve these goals the Green Party will attempt

To double spending on Community Development, on a year on year basis, during the lifetime of the next local councils.

To devise ways in which expenditure can be directly allocated and used within local communities, by recognised community groupings

To make use of a Community Forum where potential areas of controversy can be first aired, and methods of eliminating conflict can be agreed.

To have implemented within the City and County Development Plans a minimum standard of community facilities to exist in each identified community.

To campaign to have Community Employment schemes restructured into volunteer support programmes, recognising the valuable work such schemes do in local communities.

To transform twinning arrangements with sister councils onto a more community oriented focus.

Housing

The provision of housing has become this country's most serious social problem. As Housing Authorities, local authorities will be pushed by the Green Party to properly fulfill their obligations in this area by

Ensuring that each council operates an open system of housing allocation, so housing applicants can visually see where they stand and how long they have to wait to secure housing.

Developing a Housing policy that concentrates house building on derelict sites rather than green field sites; that limits the number of houses that can be built on any one site; and that rules out the use of multi-storey apartment blocks.

Adopting the widespread use of effective Estate management schemes, allowing for proper maintenance budgets being spent in local communities

Increasing use of eviction powers for proven deviant tenants.

Making greater use of voluntary housing agencies to provide social housing throughout the city.

Promoting the concept that all private housing developments will contain a social housing component.

Encouraging the development of rural resettlement schemes.

Exempting from stamp duty all houses under the value of £150,000

Re-introducing Certificates of Reasonable Value to curb developers profit margins.

Working to ensure that sufficient serviced halting stop spaces, and varied accommodation types are made available to meet the needs of the Travelling Community, in consultation with travellers and travellers groups, eliminating the practice of unofficial road side sites.

Encouraging the settling of refugees in a sensitive and proportionate way, that will help make an appropriate response to the difficulties that such people find themselves in, and will add to the cultural make up of our population.

Ensuring that all future housing is fully accessible to people of all abilities.

Developing a plan to identify and acquire institutional land for use in housing development.

Substantially increasing funding for social housing, increasing the unit grant available, and raising the percentage that can be retain by voluntary housing agencies

Improving security systems, especially in housing areas where large numbers of tenants are elderly.

Promoting the instant transfer of properties, to stem vandalism, speed up housing transfers, and reduce maintenance costs.

Insisting that housing repairs will be made within the shortest period of time through the **introduction of a Tenants Charter.**

Encouraging the use of materials in the building and repairing of houses that will lead to near maintenance free housing, using materials that are energy efficient and will help reduce house running costs.

Calling for the full registration of private rented properties and of landlords, making sure

that local authorities oversee that acceptable standards exist in rented accommodation. We will campaign to refuse the payment of Supplementary Rent Allowance to landlords whose names and whose properties are not listed on these registers. We further believe that the payment of Supplementary Rent Allowance should solely be the responsibility of local authorities and not health boards.

Increasing support for agencies that work on homelessness, bringing to higher common standards payments such as overnight bed stay supports.

Economic Development and Planning

The Celtic Tiger has become a much abused animal. Undoubtedly there has been an increase in economic prosperity, but recent job losses show how fragile this economy can be. With new powers for local government, the Green Party believes that local councils can play a stronger role in developing the economic future of their regions. Fás, the IDA, and the City Enterprise Board should make regular reports and presentations to these councils.

Local authorities should consider making more adventurous use of their rates collection systems to act as an incentive to encourage business as to where its locates and the physical appearance it shows. For example better frontage and signage can be achieved using such methods. The emphasis should be placed on encouraging medium sized Irish based industries to develop and prosper. Overdependence on large multi-national companies could bring us back to a Fords or Dunlops in Cork, Fruit of the Loom in Donegal, or Packard Electric in Tallaght situation.

We believe in the importance of the social economy, and will discourage the use of employment schemes such as Community Employment in providing work that otherwise should be full time-employment (e.g. janitors, school secretaries etc.). Further we believe in increasing the numbers of places available in such schemes for more effective use in voluntary, community programmes. Local authorities should be playing a major role in developing the tourism potential of their regions.

Our basic planning principles should be that we preserve rather than knock, and that we build in harmony with what is there, rather than accepting buildings for buildings sake.

Information on planning needs to improve, we would favour the adoption of the Scottish system of informing all residents within a set distance of a planning development, by letter.

Retention planning permission should no longer be available, either permission exists beforehand or no building work should take place. We favour the need for planning permission to be sought before the removal of hedgerows over large areas.

We favour the promotion of tree-linked development where every planning permission given for each housing unit should be accompanied by a condition to plant a tree.

The number and range of bodies statutorily entitled to comment upon planning applications should increase.

We will evaluate and alter Urban Renewal Schemes whose effects have been patchy and have benefitted high earners disproportionately.

City boundaries in Cork, Limerick and Galway need to be redrawn. Any further development in Dublin, outside of that already zoned, needs to be frozen, pending completion of the Strategic Land Use study of the Greater Dublin area.

We also need to present a system of planning that is as open as we need our system of politics to be. We must work to avoid the appearance of collusion with corrupt interests that have produced the current tribunals of inquiry.

Funding Local Government

The Green Party will continue to oppose service charges. We believe that any money collected should be instead of, and not in addition to national taxation. We favour services being free at the point of use, with any charges being made to discourage the abuse of these services. We support stronger legislation against the making of spurious compensation claims that have been such a huge drain on the finances of local authorities.

The Environment

Air Quality

Having campaigned successfully to have a smoke free zone created in Dublin, in Cork, and in several other urban centres and having secured the closure of many hospital incinerators throughout the country, the Green Party will continue to make the improvement of air quality a priority. We will be working for

A comprehensive health survey to measure the extent of respiratory conditions, in particular childhood asthma, and the developing of a tracking system to see whether the numbers suffering from these conditions is lessening or increasing.

Increasing the number of air monitoring stations, measuring for more air pollutants, at half hourly peaks instead of 24 hour averages.

Better monitoring to halt the sale and use of smoky coal, which has been steadily increasing.

Include air quality reports as part of local weather reports, stating if air quality is poor and reasons why it is poor.

Water Quality

To insist that the treatment of sewage is done to the most advanced level possible, appropriate for the population area being catered for.

To adopt a get tough policy in relation to the far too regular pollution of waterways.

To challenge the continuing addition of fluoride to drinking water supplies.

To ensure that Regional Fisheries Boards be given much stronger powers to deal with marine and freshwater pollution and other threats to fisheries and water quality.

Waste and Litter

EU and Irish laws should be prohibiting, wherever feasible, the manufacture of goods destined solely for disposal.

Producer Responsibility Obligations (PROs) requiring industrial, agriculture and commercial facilities to prevent and minimise waste production need to be greatly extended and enforced. We consider Repak, established in 1995 by IBEC and the Department of the Environment, to have been an abject failure.

Deposit/refund schemes should be re-instituted for beverage containers.

Separation of waste must become mandatory - Irish recycling levels at 8% are the second lowest in the EU.

Policy needs to be developed to deal with Construction and Demolition waste, vastly growing through the building boom. Much of this waste has a reuse value.

Landfill sites, where they exist, should be of limited size and of fixed tenure, situated as close as possible to where waste is being produced.

We oppose any attempt to use incineration, even when promoted as Waste to Energy, as a means of dealing with the waste problem. We remain opposed because incineration merely transfers the waste problem into another form. Far from decreasing the amount being produced, incineration needs additional waste to make the technology economically feasible.

Campaign for the collection of recyclable materials from houses.

Make local authorities and other state agencies use combined purchasing power to promote the use of recycled products.

Bring into being bye-laws that will contain punitive litter fines, to be policed by additional litter wardens operating in more areas of the city.

Introduce a name and shame policy for litter offenders.

Agenda 21

To push local councils into having real consultation with local communities in helping to produce an environmental plan (Agenda 21). Such a plan should be updated each year through an annual report, containing proactive environmental policies on areas such as protecting and enhancing the built environment; preserving and increasing green space and amenity areas; introducing a tree protection plan; and promoting the use of environmental materials.

To include in local Agenda 21s the need for greater numbers of pollution officers in each local authority.

Every Borough Corporation should develop its own 'urban forestry' strategy.

We will continue to encourage the continued co-ordination of local authorities in their combined opposition to the Sellafield nuclear plant, and nuclear facilities throughout Britain.

Masts and Pylons

We will oppose the construction of any further electricity pylons, and seek to have a programme implemented that will replace existing pylons, freeing land that can be made available for housing or amenity use.

We will campaign against any increase in mobile phone or communications masts, insisting that existing facilities will be shared. We will be seeking that planning permission for these structures be reviewed on a regular basis.

Animal Rights

Introduce programmes to deal with abandoned or feral domestic animals in urban areas

Introduce legislation to prevent local authorities from hiring out council owned land to circuses which use wild animals in their acts.

Remove state support to Dublin Zoo and install an independent monitoring commission to oversee all operations at the zoo. Ensure that no further land is allocated to the zoo, in particular the 32 acres being sought at Aras an Uachtarain.

Halt the killing of badgers with snares. Lobby for funding for badger vaccine as a means of controlling bovine TB.

Roads and Transport

The Green Party will be encouraging local authorities to change the emphasis of its roads and transport policies by

Allocating money to repair roads before building new roads.

Introducing more restricted traffic systems, barring large vehicles from travelling or parking on many city and town streets.

Prioritising footpath repair before road repairs.

Increasing the pedestrianisation programme to produce largely car free City and Town Centres.

Reducing reliance on City Centre Multi-Storey car parks, and increasing use of out of town park and ride facilities.

Reviewing facilities and regulations as they apply to taxi-cabs, to encourage widest possible use, taking particular care in ensuring that licenses granted for wheelchair accessible taxis are used mainly for this use.

Doubling the length of cycleways available, on a year on year basis, to complete a nationwide cycleways network within the next five years. Identifying and passing bye-laws that will allow cyclists greater advantage in using the roads network.

Introducing far more bus priority routes to cut bus journey times.

Introducing a national school bus programme. This will also help eliminate morning and afternoon traffic jams in built-up areas.

Examining and proposing By-passes on a case by case basis. We will continue our opposition to the Eastern By-pass in Dublin.

Campaigning to open suburban rail services in Cork and in Limerick. Promoting a light rail system for Cork. Pushing for the quickest implementation of a Luas system for Dublin, including an airport link with connection to Ballymun.

Health and Childcare

The Green Party will be seeking that local councils have greater involvement with Health services and Health issues. To be more responsive to the needs of the people this is very necessary, especially in relation to health services and women. Issues such as domestic violence towards women demands a more proactive response from local councils in highlighting the existence of the problem, and in providing material support. On the issue of child care, local authorities have a responsibility to provide child care facilities at its administrative and recreational centres.

The record of investment in childcare in Ireland is very low by European standards. Within the EU Ireland has the lowest employment rate of mothers with children under 10 years of age. Irish parents spend two and half times more on child care than elsewhere in Europe.

Managing the social crisis caused through the abuse and misuse of drugs needs radically different approaches. We decry the continuing failure to provide professional, properly resourced treatment centres for young people suffering from drug abuse, and we are especially worried that children under the age of fifteen are totally uncatered for in this regard.

There needs to be greater liaison in identifying and dealing with risks that come about through poor environmental conditions, for example air quality. In nominating members to sit on the various Health Boards, local authorities need to insist that such policies come into being.

The purchasing policies of local authorities and health boards should also be examined to ensure that best health policies can be promoted, for example by refusing to purchase any genetically modified food.

Disability

The Green Party/Comhaontas Glas undertakes to ensure that all public buildings become wheelchair accessible.

Any person appointed to a public body to represent disability interests must only be done so after appropriate consultation with the relevant disability groups.

All local authority expenditure and spending must be disability proofed.

Many libraries and museums, especially mobile libraries, are not properly accessible. This needs to be rectified.

All public meetings of local authorities must be accessible to all members of the public. This includes providing information in accessible formats.

Agriculture, The Marine and Rural Development

To oppose the closure of any further essential services in rural communities based on population criteria, and on developing new criteria based on distance from such services.

Encourage the development of open markets in all towns, particularly for the sale of local produce.

Use purchasing power of local authorities to assist organic, small scale, less intensive farming.

To draw up and implement local plans for integrated coastal zone management

Each Council or Region to designate marine nature reserves and seek support from national and EU authorities

Local action plans for small fishing ports, processing plants, hatcheries and restocking projects of suitable species in new sanctuary areas.

Education and the Youth Service

Through their involvement with the Vocational Education Committees, local authorities similarly need to promote better educational policies. The problem of adult literacy needs greater resources and a more proactive approach from state agencies. The developing Youth Service needs recognition from local councils in maximising use of all current public facilities and in ensuring that facilities are provided where none exist.

Emergency Services

The Green Party will work to ensure that emergency services the Fire Brigade and the Civil Defence - are given the maximum amount of resources necessary to be kept in a state of constant readiness in the

event of any major disaster. The Major Emergency Accident Plans for each region will be reviewed, and procedures relating to the reporting of accidents, in particular industrial accidents will be prepared through new bye-laws. Planning requirements will be strengthened to ensure that every resident can be properly accessed by the emergency services and by emergency equipment.

Recreation and Amenity

The Green Party will work to enhance and improve upon Local Authority recreational facilities by:

Restructuring the admission charges for recreational facilities, so that senior citizens, young people and the unemployed can access these facilities at minimal or no cost, helping to maximise participation.

Bringing about a large increase in the number of playground facilities, by developing the concept of No Insurance Zones.

Fully utilising waterfronts to construct riverside walks.

Arts and Culture

We need greater investment in the Arts. Not enough use is made of the responsibilities of local authorities under the Arts Act to make such expenditure. Green Party/Comhaontas Glas representatives will encourage local authorities to take their responsibilities towards the Arts by:

Placing a greater community emphasis on arts activities

Continuing to increase resources to libraries putting particular emphasis on information technology.

Popularising the use of museums and archive centres.

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