

Liberal Vannin

Policy Discussion Paper

On

Housing

Manifesto Pledge (What we will do)

While it is not Government's responsibility to control the price of housing in a free market economy the Liberal Vannin Party recognise that we have a responsibility, as custodians of a prosperous and caring society, to ensure that all members of the community have safe, comfortable and affordable homes in which to live and raise their families.

The Party is committed to introducing a series of measures that will allow affordable quality housing for all who need it. Our Housing Policy will seek to break the hold of developers in the housing market and follow a sustainable policy of creating a long term sustainable housing stock which accurately reflects the changing needs of the population. We would advocate the use Government owned land for the development of affordable housing and plots for self-build.

We will create an environment where those people who need public housing are able to choose from a sustainable stock of Government owned homes. Those who need additional care will be offered the correct level of sheltered housing to meet their needs while those who choose to enter the private housing market are given the necessary assistance where appropriate.

We will address the key issue of affordable housing by following a policy of creating nests for people and not nest eggs for investors.

Policy Statements (How we will do it)

Affordable housing

Our current housing stock is delimited at one end by the private sector and the other end by local authority and community housing. Currently there is no 'middle ground' and the Liberal Vannin Party will seek to create a 'Protected Local Housing Market' which will allow the transition from local authority based housing into the private sector thus allowing more working people to gain a foothold on the property ladder and enjoy the benefits of home ownership.

By creating a new 'middle ground' of affordable private housing targeted at Isle of Man workers we will create a sustainable long-term solution to the current housing crisis which ultimately threatens our long-term prosperity. Within this sector, restrictions such as who is eligible to purchase and the types of properties available would help to create a sustainable middle tier which will primarily be dictated by market forces rather than Government interference. This policy will have many social benefits as it will encourage and support the transition from local authority housing into the private sector thus freeing up local authority housing for those that need them and without intensive Government capital investment. Additionally, Government owned land may be used to support the development of a new housing stock within this sector. Private developers will be encouraged to assist in the creation of this new market through a private and public partnership. In instances where it is deemed to be of benefit to both the local community and the environment restrictive planning policies may be reviewed if developments are in the overall interest of the community as a whole.

A 'Protected Local Housing Market' Policy would create a two-tier private housing market with the following criteria:-

- Properties can only be used for owner occupation and not for rental or investment
- Only Manx workers can purchase these properties based on the 10 year rule
- Once properties are in this market they stay in this market
- Properties can be subjected to the Part Equity Mortgage Scheme
- Properties from both the existing housing stock and new developments will be part of this new initiative
- The redevelopment of brown field sites to encourage the renovation of derelict buildings
- A comprehensive policy to ensure that restricted properties are located in ordinary streets in ordinary towns throughout the Island

Home Ownership

As part of this housing policy, we would seek to introduce the Part Equity Mortgage Scheme which will provide assistance for all local authority tenants over the age of 40 years who want to enter the private housing market. This policy would be based on schemes already successfully operating in places like London. For those who are eligible under the scheme the Government could provide for up to half the cost of the property with the purchaser funding the remainder. This would give people who have raised families and who want to invest in their own property the chance to do so. When the property is sold, the pro-rata percentage of capital provided comes back into the scheme fund. This would effectively release local authority houses up to 30 years earlier, making them available to people who are waiting desperately for local authority housing. To qualify under the Part Equity Mortgage Scheme only persons who have lived on the Island for 10 years would be eligible to purchase such a property.

The Liberal Vannin Party views with concern the plight of divorced people who are not able to afford to stay within the private housing market and as a result can pay extortionate rents in the private sector. As a Party we will investigate the possibility of extending the Part Equity Mortgage Scheme to include divorced people and which would be based on their financial situation. This initiative could help prevent divorced people from losing equity which could otherwise result in them being forced to seek Local Authority housing which would in the long term cost the taxpayer more.

Key Worker Housing

It is often the case that key workers such as nurses and teachers pursue their careers for the social rewards rather than financial gains. These members of society are just as important as their more affluent counterparts working in other market sectors and the Part Equity Mortgage Scheme would assist these lower paid key workers the opportunity to live in areas of choice depending on their personal requirements. A Liberal Vannin Party would 'ring fence' a proportion of the communal housing stock to ensure the needs of this sector are met and as a better alternative to the resettlement grants system presently in operation.

Local Authority Housing

In a prosperous and caring society there will always be a need for state funded social housing for some members of society. The Liberal Vannin Party is committed to maintaining a core stock of quality Local Authority houses and flats to ensure the needs of this sector of society is met with dignity and to reverse the trend of outrageous rents in the private sector.

Sheltered Housing

The Liberal Vannin Party believes that in order to house the vulnerable and needy there must be partnership between the DOLGE and the DHSS to establish small units of sheltered housing. Not only for senior citizens, these units would house other groups such as the homeless and people in recovery from addictions, such as drugs or alcohol. Such units must receive proper funding with accompanying support schemes such as counsellors, therapists and social workers.

The Provision of a young chronic sick facility and long-term respite care unit especially in the East of the Island is long overdue and this needs to be addressed as a priority.

Brown Field Redevelopments

Where buildings have been empty for considerable lengths of time incentives will be given to encourage the owners to refurbish these properties and in return make them available to the social housing sector for a reasonable length of time, say 5 years minimum. Where owners, after a substantial length of time, refuse to redevelop their properties then compulsory purchase order legislation would be introduced to allow the Government to acquire these properties at a discounted yet fair market price for development at the Governments expense for inclusion into its own housing stock.

The benefits of this policy include:-

- Encouraging the redevelopment of derelict buildings in a timely manner to bring them back into operational service for the benefit of both the landlord and the Housing Department
- The provision of medium term affordable housing with minimum capital outlay
- The introduction of a public/private partnership to redevelop brown field sites
- An obvious improvement on the environment and immediate local area

The Liberal Vannin Party is concerned about other issues that need addressing to end housing abuse in our society. Overcrowding as a result of multiple occupancy in the rental market and the associated social problems that ensue need to be investigated and to this end we would look at the possibility of setting up a register to control and licence greedy and unscrupulous landlords. The establishment of an 'Approved Landlords Registration Scheme' would encourage professional landlords to work alongside Government Housing Standard Officers to comply with a new minimum standard for rental properties.

Long-Term Planning

The Liberal Vannin Party is committed to creating and implementing a strategic plan for the Island to support our plan for long-term economic growth. Currently no long-term strategically coordinated plan exists – the last one was agreed in 1982 which results in pockets of development without any thought being given to the overall 'bigger picture'. We need to provide the facilities where they are needed and where they can support a sustainable economy in the long term.