



Conservatives want to create a 'listening council'

The Tories are aiming to win back control of the civic centre for the first time since 2010

BY SIMON ALLIN,
LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTER

Enfield's Conservative group says its policies will make the borough cleaner, greener and safer if it wins control of the council in May.

The local Tories want to create a "listening council" and reverse policies they claim do not have the majority support of the public, including low-traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs), plans to build on the Green Belt and fortnightly bin collections.

Instead, the Conservatives plan to focus on environmental and road safety policies they believe will attract greater backing from the public, such as more 'school streets' and 20mph zones.

Speaking ahead of the local elections on 5th May, Conservative group leader Joanne Laban told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: "What we want to do is be a listening council. We want to mend the relationship between the community and the council, which we believe needs improving."

A key cornerstone of the Tory campaign is a pledge to protect the borough's Green Belt from development. Last year, Enfield Council published its latest draft Local Plan, which proposes building more than 6,000 homes on Green Belt sites in the north-west of the borough.

"People choose to live in Enfield because of the rich mix of town and countryside that we have," Cllr Laban said. "We are very lucky to be around 35 minutes into central London and still have parks and open spaces that we can enjoy. We saw how much of an asset they were during lockdown, when people used them to walk and exercise every day."

Last year, the government curbed the council's planning powers after the authority failed to meet its housing target for three successive years. Council leader Nesil Caliskan said previously that "we have to build somewhere – if it is not out, it is up" and that "we have heard from residents and councillors that we do not want skyscrapers".

Cllr Laban said the Tories were opposed to using tall buildings, such as the 26-storey tower previously proposed



Conservative councillors and candidates outside Enfield Civic Centre, including group leader Joanne Laban (fourth from left)

for the centre of Enfield Town, to meet housing targets. Instead she said the Conservatives would "accelerate" the delivery of homes at Meridian Water, lobby to build more housing on former industrial land and add more homes to existing council estates.

She added that the Tories believed the draft Local Plan target of building 25,000 homes across the borough over 20 years could be lowered.

The group previously claimed the target "assumes a population growth well in excess of national projections". City Hall has set Enfield a target of building 1,246 homes per year going forward, a significant increase on the 853 built in 2020/21.

The Conservatives are also pledging to remove the two LTNs introduced by the council in Bowes Park and Palmers Green. Designed to stop rat-running, boost walking and cycling and improve

air quality, the LTNs – which use bollards, planters and cameras to close streets to through traffic – have faced significant opposition from some residents, with most of the people responding to the two public consultations saying the schemes had a negative impact on them.

"We feel LTNs have divided the community in both areas," Cllr Laban said. "I have never seen in my time on Enfield

"I have never seen in my time on Enfield Council a scheme that has divided the community as much as LTNs have"

Council a scheme that has divided the community as much as they have."

LTNs are included in the council's climate action plan as a means of cutting emissions and ensuring the borough becomes carbon neutral by 2040. But Cllr Laban said the

Conservatives would not scrap or move the target. Instead, they plan to introduce a range of other measures to make roads safer and cut emissions.

"We believe in people walking more, but as part of our road safety, we don't believe

in using the LTN model," the Conservative group leader said. "We will put [in] more school crossing patrols, 20mph zones, and we support school streets."

Cllr Laban said the Tories had no plans to remove the extensive cycle lanes that have been installed along Green Lanes and Hertford Road/Fore Street, while they do want to install more electric car charging points and find ways to boost recycling.

During a full council meeting in January, amid the 'partygate' scandal over allegations of lockdown rule-breaking gatherings in Downing Street, Conservative councillors refused to support a Labour motion calling on Prime Minister Boris Johnson to resign. At the time of this interview, with the Metropolitan Police still investigating and no date set for the publication of Sue Gray's full report into the allegations, Cllr Laban said the prime minister still had the support of the Enfield Conservative group, although she says they do not condone the gatherings that took place.

Partygate has led to a significant dip in the popularity of the Tories nationally, but Cllr Laban claims the issue is not being raised by voters on the doorstep. Meanwhile, she has praised the government's record on the Covid-19 vaccine programme and said the PM had been "excellent" in responding to the war in Ukraine.

"He is a human being," said Cllr Laban. "He's done things wrong, he's done things right – he is the prime minister, he is the leader of our party, and we support him."

On other local issues, the Tory group leader has pledged to bring back weekly bin collections, support a "total pause" and review of the new Edmonton incinerator, hire more police officers using a match-funding deal with City Hall, as well as take a "zero-tolerance approach to fly-tipping".

Cllr Laban added: "If people want a cleaner, greener, safer borough, and a council that listens to community concerns and respects the community it serves, they need to be voting Conservative in May."

For more information about the Conservatives in Enfield:
Visit facebook.com/EnfieldConservatives