

Banning plastic bags

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Issue

Plastic bags harm the environment and make local areas look untidy and neglected. Charging, taxing or enabling local bans has not worked so far.

Proposal

Lobby central government to ban plastic bags altogether.

Benefit

Less damage to the environment and less rubbish on streets.

Supporting local people to improve the environment

Issue

Residents want to live in cleaner and safer neighbourhoods.

Proposal

Council to be allowed to keep a proportion of its business rates. These could be invested in supporting the formation of local groups to work for the community e.g. volunteer litter pickers provided with the necessary equipment.

Benefit

Cleaner, safer neighbourhoods. Crime is less likely to occur when a neighbourhood is clean and used frequently by residents. By encouraging community action there will be increased dialogue between groups which improves relationships and increases their satisfaction with the service provided.

More control over planning applications

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Issue

Planning applications are often exploitative and focussed on the developer's private benefit (e.g. large supermarkets or unsuitable housing developments).

Communities have no legal powers to halt their plans - even if the Council refuses a planning application, the Mayor of London and the National Planning Inspectorate can overturn this decision.

Proposal

A change in planning laws and regulations to give communities more authority to control planning matters to suit their own circumstances and needs e.g. by being able to influence the types of development that take place in their areas.

Benefit

A reduction in developments that reduce the quality of the urban environment and which are detrimental to the well-being of local residents.

Protecting the green belt and the community

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Issue

Kingston has infrastructure problems which can only be resolved by minimal intrusions into the green belt.

Proposal

A change in planning laws to maintain the general protection of the green belt, but which would allow Kingston, in exceptional circumstances, to be developed for projects on green belt land deemed of major value to the community.

Benefit

Improvements to infrastructure problems. One example is the crossroads on the A243 at Malden Rushett, where many accidents occur. The safest solution here would be to build a large roundabout, but this would intrude onto green belt land.

Reduce the number of cars on the road

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Issue

Growing numbers of cars means that pollution levels are rising and there is widespread traffic congestion on our roads.

Proposal

That the government give local authorities the power to introduce congestion charging.

Benefit

This would reduce pollution and congestion in Kingston.

Issue

Businesses have little incentive to 'go green'. As long as businesses do not take environmental sustainability seriously, consumers have the excuse not to do so either.

Proposal

Empower councils to enforce standards on the amount and type of packaging used in shops and how it is disposed of. Enable business rate discounts to be given for positive measures.

Benefit

This would provide local leadership and direction on the environmental challenges we face in the borough.

Reinvestment of a percentage of business rates/increase in rate relief for businesses.

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Issue

Kingston is the fourth largest shopping centre in London, as well as significant industrial areas. These businesses contribute large annual sums in taxation, but Kingston receives little in return from the government to reinvest compared with other authorities.

Proposal

Central government to allow local authorities to apply rate relief to help support businesses, or to return a percentage of the business rates collected to be invested in infrastructure improvements. Could be used to support the economic regeneration of district centres; e.g. through highways improvements, and new street furniture / lighting.

Benefit

- Improved relationship between businesses and RBK.
- Encourage more people to visit district centres, increase number of shoppers as a result and contribute to the economic regeneration / viability of the centre.
- Improved environmental appearance.

Devolution of PCT health commissioning functions

Issue

Primary Care Trusts are accountable to Health Secretary but have little connection with their local communities. Board members are appointed, not elected, and although they are drawn from the local community they do not 'represent' it.

Proposal

The powers of the Primary Care Trust should be placed under the control of the Council, and local councillors should be given places on the PCT board.

Benefit

Greater integration in health and social care.

Would improve responsiveness and community ties with the health service.

Greater accountability to local people.

Proper joint planning and working between health and social care.

Disability and general toilets

Issue

Disabled toilets in public spaces such as bars, restaurants etc are often used as storage areas, and general toilets with easy accessibility are now closed in Kingston Town, Surbiton and Tolworth. People with disabilities do not feel confident visiting town centres without easy access toilets.

Proposal

Inspection on toilets to ensure that they are maintained to a certain standard. General toilets in council area to be revamped and reopened.

Benefit

Town centres and other local areas would be more accessible to the disabled.

Redistribution of community engagement funding and binding local meetings

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Issue

New legislation means that local authorities have more responsibility to involve local people in decision making. Councils lack the resources to do this effectively.

Proposal

There should be a redistribution of community engagement funding from central government to local government to support the increased responsibilities for community engagement.

Benefit

More effective community engagement programmes, and a better understanding of the issues affecting Kingston and things residents care about. Residents will have a greater say in the decision making process.

More places in Kingston schools for local children

Issue

Under the Greenwich Judgment, it is illegal for schools in any borough to allow preference in admissions to a family living in the area. As a result, Kingston's schools are heavily oversubscribed and many local children miss out on a place because they are going to children from outside the borough.

Proposal

Overturn the Greenwich Judgment and give local children priority over those from outside the borough for school places.

Benefit

There would be more places for local children to attend Kingston schools, which would be fairer. There would also be a reduction in traffic congestion from people coming from outside the borough.

Build more social housing

Issue

Councils are not empowered to build housing. This means that thousands of people are on the housing list with little hope of being housed. Current arrangements mean that it is hard for the council to access funding to build new homes.

Proposal

Change the way central government funding can be accessed to allow the Council to build more housing.

Benefit

Affordable, good quality housing stock available to residents who need it most.

Enforcing better standards of care in pet shops

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Issue

Under the 1951 Pet Animals Act, councils can only refuse a licence to pet shop owners on the grounds that basic standards of animal well-being (i.e. availability of water) are not being met.

Proposal

Give local authorities the power to challenge the retail license or working practices of local pet shops if it is suspected that the animals in their care are being mistreated, are in poor health or are sourced from 'puppy farms'.

Benefit

Animals kept in pet shops would have high levels of welfare.

Reducing unemployment in Kingston

Issue

Unemployment levels in Kingston.

Proposal

To allow the Council to keep and reinvest a proportion of the savings made through reduced Job Seekers Allowance payments if it sets up and runs a programme which gets unemployed residents back to work. Savings would be reinvested into the back to work programme.

Benefit

Reduction in unemployment levels in Kingston.