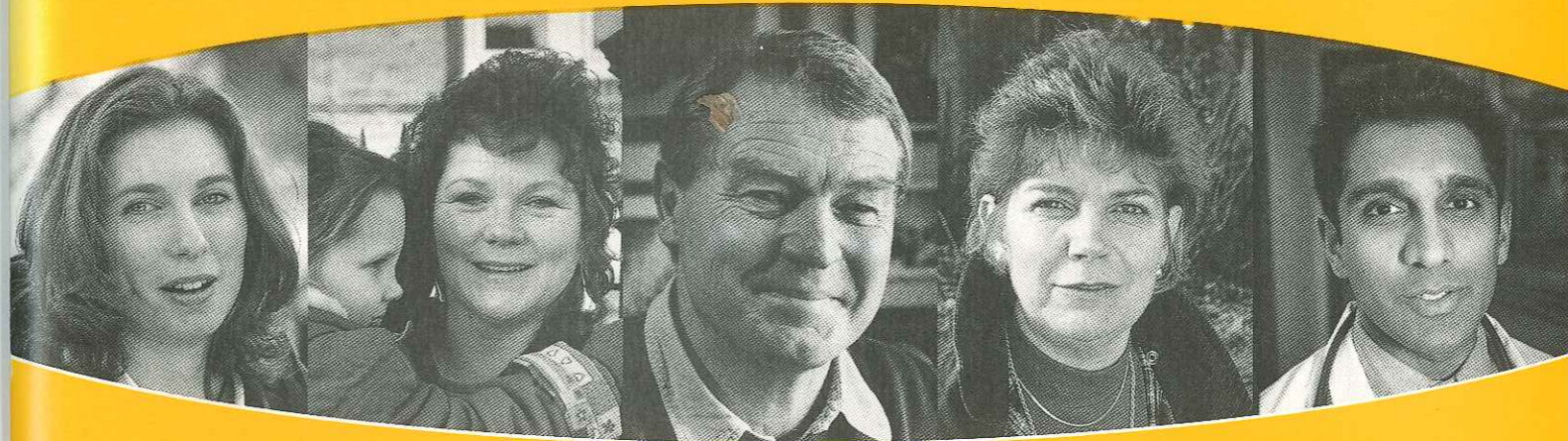


# make the difference



The Liberal Democrat Manifesto 1997

£2.45



EDUCATION  
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'The Liberal Democrats exist to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community, and in which no-one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity.'

Liberal Democrat Constitution



This will be the last election of this century. And one of its most important. We have ducked the challenges that confront our country for too long. It is time to face them. The choice you make will shape Britain's future for the next 50 years.

There are no quick fixes, no instant solutions. Eighteen years of Conservative government have left our society divided, our public services run down, our sense of community fractured and our economy under-performing. There is much to be done to prepare Britain for the next century and no time to waste in getting started.

Yet a terrible fatalism seems to grip politicians. Though the challenges are immense, the solutions we are offered are all too often puny. We are told we can't ask people to pay more for a better education. Or change the way we live to protect our environment. Or share more to give better opportunities to those who have less. Or modernise our politics to give people more say.

The Liberal Democrats reject this timidity.

We are in politics not just to manage things better, but to make things happen. To build a more prosperous, fair and open society. We believe in the market economy as the best way to deliver prosperity and distribute economic benefits. But we recognise that market mechanisms on their own are not enough; that the private sector alone cannot ensure that there are good services for everyone, or promote employment opportunities, or tackle economic inequality, or protect the environment for future generations.

We believe in a society in which every citizen shares rights and responsibilities. But, we recognise that a strong country is built from the bottom, not the top; that conformity quickly becomes the enemy of diversity. And

that the imposition of social blueprints leads to authoritarian centralised government. Liberal Democrats believe that power and opportunity, like wealth, should be widely spread.

Above all, Liberal Democracy is about liberty. That does not just mean freedom from oppressive government. It means providing all citizens with the opportunity to build worthwhile lives for themselves and their families and helping them to recognise their responsibilities to the wider community.

Liberal Democrats believe the role of democratic government is to protect and strengthen liberty, to redress the balance between the powerful and the weak, between rich and poor and between immediate gains and long-term environmental costs.

That is the Liberal Democrat vision: of active government which invests in people, promotes their long-term prosperity and welfare, safeguards their security, and is answerable to them for its actions.

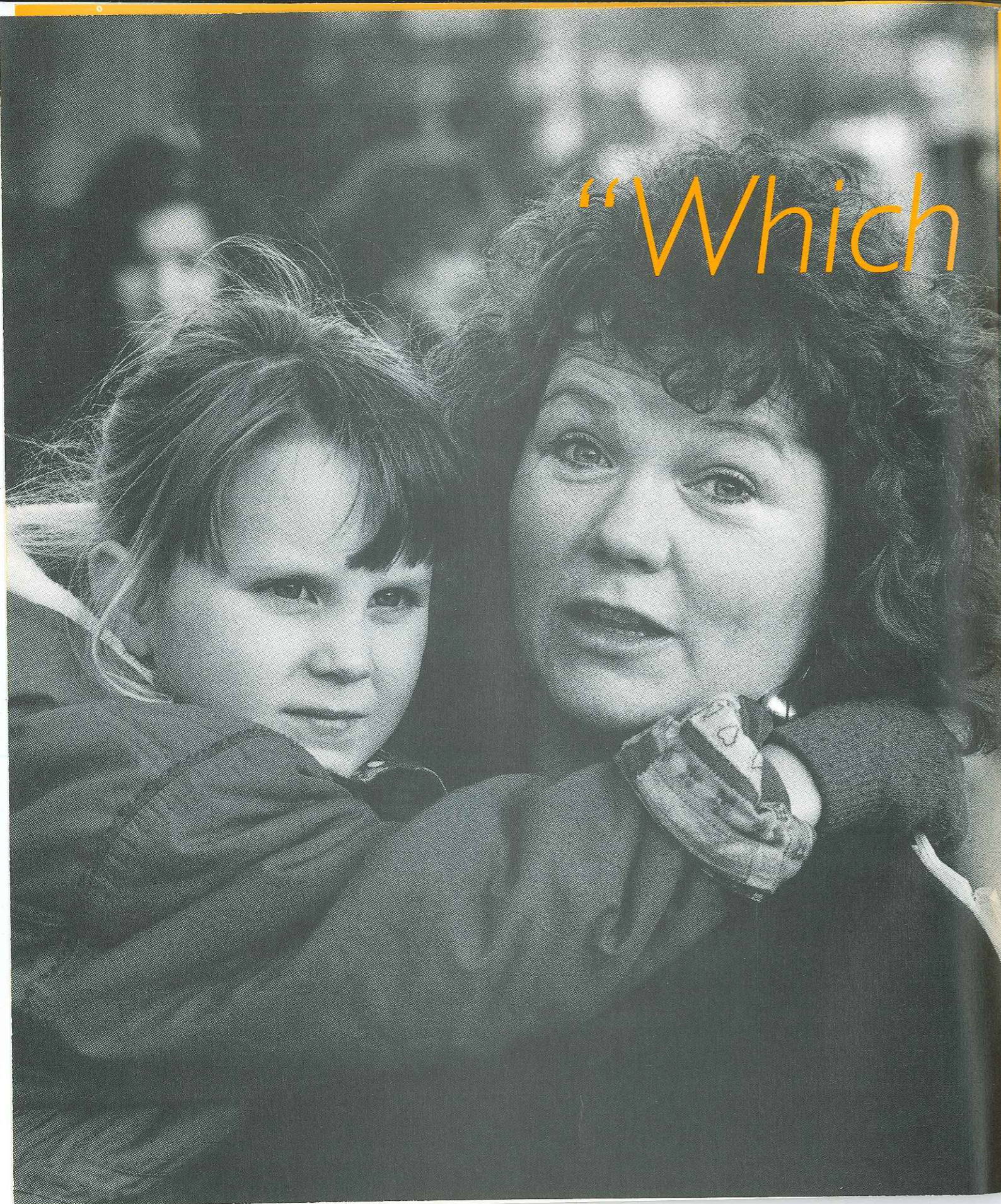
Much of what we propose here requires no money – only political will. But where extra investment is required we say where it will come from. This is a menu with prices.

The purpose of this manifesto is to widen opportunities for all.

And its aim is to build a nation of self-reliant individuals, living in strong communities, backed by an enabling government.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paddy Ashdown', with a horizontal line underneath.

Rt Hon Paddy Ashdown



“Which

party will make  
a real difference  
to my child’s  
education?”

# Which party will make a real difference to my child's education?

**Our aim:** To make Britain the world's foremost learning society by 2010.

**The problem:** This country's education has been underfunded and undermined by repeated shifts in policy. Standards are too low, especially in core skills such as reading and maths. Britain is too low in the world league tables.

**Our commitment:** Liberal Democrats will make education the next government's top priority. We will invest an additional £2 billion per year in education, funded by an extra 1p in the pound on the basic rate of income tax.

## Our first priority is to:

● Give children the best start by providing high quality early years education for every 3 and 4 year-old child whose parents want it.

## Key priorities are to:

- **Increase funding for books and equipment in schools.** In the first year, we will double spending on books and equipment to overcome the effect of recent cuts.
- **Reduce primary school class sizes** so that within 5 years no child between 5 and 11 will need to be in a class of more than 30.
- **Tackle the backlog of repair and maintenance to buildings** with £500m additional investment over 5 years.
- **Boost chances for all adults to improve their skills and get better qualifications.**

## Making the best start

Early years education is the essential building block for higher standards and achievement later on. Every £1 spent on high quality under-fives education raises standards in later life and adds up to £7 of value to the nation's economy.

## We will:

- **Give children the best start by providing high quality early years education for every 3 and 4 year-old child whose parents want it.** This will be the first call on our £2 billion annual programme of extra investment in education.
- **Promote high standards in early years education.** We will set minimum standards for care, curriculum and premises. We will ensure that those in early years education are supervised by qualified staff.
- **Provide choice in early years education.** We will scrap the bureaucratic voucher scheme. We will ensure a variety of provision from a wide range of public, private and voluntary providers.

● **Raising standards in schools.** We will raise standards in schools, especially in literacy and numeracy, which are still far too low.

## We will:

- **Improve teaching standards.** We will set up a General Teaching Council, charged with improving teaching standards and making teaching a profession to be proud of again. We will provide more opportunities for professional development and reward excellence in teaching. We will help poor teachers improve, but if they cannot, we will ensure they do not continue to teach.
- **Encourage schools to succeed.** We will strengthen the inspection system so that it helps schools and we will extend inspection to monitoring Local Education Authorities (LEAs).
- **Strengthen discipline in schools.** We will support teachers in maintaining discipline and provide them with the means to do so – for example, by providing better access to special referral units. We will require every school to develop a policy to tackle bullying and truancy. We will launch a national Truancy Watch scheme. We will oblige LEAs to fulfil their responsibilities to educate pupils excluded or suspended from school.
- **Measure achievement in pupils and schools.** We will give every pupil a Personal Record of Achievement which will enable them to build up a set of nationally accredited qualifications and record their other achievements. We will require schools to publish meaningful information on their standards, achievements and plans for the future.
- **Improve the National Curriculum.** We will replace the National Curriculum with a more focused and flexible Minimum Curriculum Entitlement. We will ensure that religious education provides pupils with an understanding of the major traditions of belief in this country.

- **Boost literacy.** We will establish special literacy programmes involving parents with teachers in a drive to ensure that 90 per cent of all pupils reach their expected reading age by 2005.



#### Investing in schools

Extra investment for well-equipped classrooms and better-maintained buildings is essential if standards are to improve.

#### We will:

- **Increase funding for books and equipment in schools.** In the first year, we will double spending on books and equipment to overcome the effect of recent cuts. A typical primary school of 250 pupils will get an extra £16,000. A typical secondary school of 1,000 pupils will get an extra £110,000.
- **Reduce primary school class sizes** so that within 5 years no child between 5 and 11 will need to be in a class of more than 30.
- **Tackle the backlog of repairs.** We will invest an additional £500 million over 5 years in repairing crumbling and unsafe buildings.
- **Support children with special needs.** We will fully fund the implementation of the Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs.

#### A new partnership for schools

Involving parents in the education of their children and ensuring schools are supported by local communities are both essential to achieving higher standards and a better use of resources.

#### We will:

- **Increase the role of parents in education.** We will extend home/school/pupil links, develop home-school partnership arrangements and support parents with information and resources to help them help their child. We will require the schools inspection service to report on home-school partnerships as part of school inspections. We will promote school councils and guarantee automatic representation on governing bodies to staff and, where appropriate, students.
- **Open up schools to the whole community.** We will encourage schools to develop courses for parents, build links with local leisure organisations to open up school sports facilities to the community and work with local businesses to provide improved computer education.
- **Give all schools more independence and allow them to develop their own styles and strengths.** We will devolve as many powers as possible to schools and give them more control over their budgets. We will make new 'light touch' LEAs responsible for those functions that cannot be undertaken by individual schools on their own, such as coordination, planning and monitoring standards. We will bring grant-maintained schools and City Technology Colleges into this new framework and scrap the Funding Agency for Schools. Liberal Democrats are opposed to selection, but believe that decisions on this should be made by local communities through their local Councils and not by politicians at Westminster.

- **Recognise the valuable role of church schools in the maintained sector.** We will initiate a dialogue with all the major faiths about the role they wish to play in education in the future. Where any of the major faiths wish to establish publicly funded voluntary schools we will enable them to do so, provided that they enjoy substantial community support, offer acceptable programmes of study, provide equality of opportunity and are able to deliver the Minimum Curriculum Entitlement.
- **Forge a new partnership with the independent sector.** We will encourage independent schools to work with state schools. We will phase out the Assisted Places Scheme and use the money saved to enable LEAs, if they wish, to enter into local partnership schemes. These could include assisting the funding of pupils at independent schools. Pupils currently covered by the Assisted Places Scheme would, however, be protected until they finish their studies. We will require independent schools to offer the Minimum Curriculum Entitlement. We will extend charitable status to all schools without affecting total Council funding and maintain the VAT exemption on school fees.

#### Extending life-long learning

In the information age, education must be a life-long activity from which people can benefit anywhere and at any time, rather than being something that only happens in school.

#### We will:

- **Widen access to further education.** We will give every person an Individual Learning Account as the basis for life-long post-school education with contributions made by the state, individuals and employers. Our aim is that the state contribution will be at least equivalent to the cost of fees on approved

courses. We will replace the Student Loans Scheme with a fair repayment scheme linked to salaries in later life. We oppose top-up fees for tuition. Our aim is to ensure that students on approved courses (including part-time courses) up to first degree level are treated equally.

- **Promote flexible learning.** We will create a higher standard credit-based system for all post-14 courses, including the current A-levels and degree courses. We will work with the private sector to link all schools to the Information Super Highway and ensure that they have the equipment and skills to take advantage of this.
- **Promote training in the workplace.** To support companies that invest in education and training, and to encourage others to do so, we will introduce a 2 per cent remissible levy on company payrolls. This would be deductible against the cost of providing accredited training or making contributions to the Individual Learning Account. Small businesses will be exempt. We will give Training and Enterprise Councils the leading role in forging local partnerships to meet youth training and employment needs.
- **Expand training opportunities for young people.** Our aim is to ensure that 16-19 year-olds receive the equivalent of at least 2 days a week education or on-the-job training.
- **Boost chances for all adults to improve their skills and get better qualifications.** We will ensure that all adults on approved courses or training have access to financial support, either through their Individual Learning Accounts or from their employer using our new remissible training levy.
- **Improve the quality of tertiary courses.** We will create a new Quality Council to ensure high standards and value for money in all post-16 education and training courses.
- **Secure academic freedom.** We will ensure the funding of university teaching and research, safeguard academic freedom and standards.

*“Which*

*party will  
be best for  
my job and  
our firm?”*



# Which party will be best for my job and our firm?

**Our aim:** To end the cycle of boom and bust and equip Britain's economy to compete in the global market-place.

**The problem:** Despite the current pre-election mini-boom, the fundamentals of Britain's economy remain weak. We continue to be held back by instability in economic management, an underskilled labour force and chronic under-investment. Britain continues to consume too much and invest too little.

**Our commitment:** Liberal Democrats will lock in economic stability, encourage saving and promote enterprise. We will raise the quality of Britain's workforce through additional investment in education and training. As part of our strategy to build a sustainable economy, we will shift the burden of taxation from employment to the depletion of natural resources.

## Our priorities are to:

- Provide stability in economic management to encourage long-term investment.
- Raise the quality of Britain's workforce and get people back to work.
- Promote enterprise and small businesses.
- Begin to shift taxation from jobs, wealth and goods to pollution and the depletion of natural resources.

## Investing in Britain's future

Long-term investment and economic stability are crucial to future economic success.

## We will:

### ● Secure stable prices and low interest rates.

We will turn the Bank of England into a UK Reserve Bank, free from political interference. We will charge the Bank with keeping inflation low and make it accountable to Parliament for achieving this goal. Lower inflation and greater exchange rate stability can be better secured by working with Britain's European partners. The best framework for this is a single European currency and it is in Britain's interests to take part in this. However, three conditions must be met before this can happen. First, the single currency must be firmly founded on the Maastricht criteria. Second, Britain must meet those criteria. Third, the British people must have said 'yes' in a referendum. If these conditions for a single currency are in place, Britain should join.

### ● Ensure responsible economic management.

We will keep to the 'golden rule' of public finance: over the economic cycle, total borrowing should not exceed total investment. We will make the government accountable to Parliament for keeping to this rule, and subject it to independent monitoring. We will cut wasteful spending and ensure new spending delivers value for money.

### ● Build up Britain's capital assets. We will

distinguish between capital and current spending in the national accounting system. We will promote effective public/private investment partnerships at both national and local levels, with Councils' borrowing carefully controlled.

● **Put Britain's people back to work.** We will enable long-term unemployed people to turn their unemployment benefits into 'working benefits' paid to an employer to recruit and train them. We will break open the poverty traps that stop unemployed people from working. Our plans for boosting investment in infrastructure, promoting small businesses and encouraging energy conservation will create hundreds of thousands of new jobs.

● **Invest in a highly-skilled workforce.** Our investment of an additional £2 billion a year in education and training will improve skills and increase the nation's knowledge base.

● **Promote environmental sustainability.** We will begin a long-term shift in taxation, reducing taxes on jobs, wealth and goods and shifting them to pollution and resource depletion. We will use new national indicators of progress which include measures of quality of life and environmental sustainability.

● **Encourage people to save.** Our aim is to extend the advantages of TESSAs and PEPs to a wider range of savers by developing a new save-as-you-earn scheme. We will encourage personal and portable pension plans.

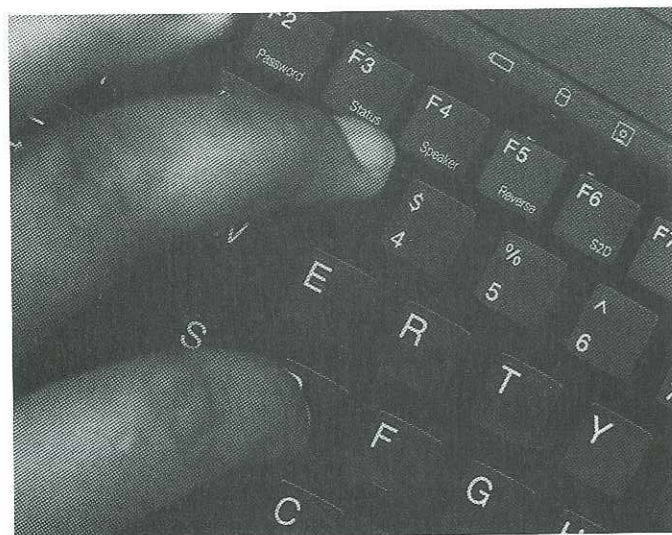
## Investing in enterprise

Small business, enterprise and self-employment are the engine of a modern dynamic economy and a vital source of new jobs and growth.

## We will:

● **Support small and medium-sized businesses.** We will encourage the banks to develop new sources of private finance, including grants, equity finance and mutual

guarantee schemes. We will seek to expand the sources of 'seed-corn' capital. We will legislate for a statutory right to interest on late debt payments. We will require the banks to develop new codes of banking practice for small businesses. We will cut red tape, for example by stopping European institutions interfering where they shouldn't and by preventing Whitehall departments 'gold-plating' European regulations with extra rules. We will, in the long-term, abolish the Uniform Business Rate and bring in a new, fairer local rating system. We will ensure that government purchasing gives special emphasis and easier access to small and medium-sized firms.



- **Boost regional and local economies.** We will set up regionally-based Development Agencies to build new partnerships between small businesses, local Councils, Business Links, TECs and local Chambers of Commerce. We will encourage these bodies to come together to provide 'one-stop shops'. We will enable Councils to raise capital for local infrastructure investment, where they work in partnership with the private sector. We will encourage industrial development by promoting geographical centres of industrial excellence.

- **Invest in research and innovation.** We will expand support for science and research by shifting government funds away from military Research and Development and into civil science and research, and improve specialist research facilities for industry. We will encourage regional technology transfer centres to bring together the resources of industry, universities and government laboratories.
- **Promote tourism.** We will bring together the marketing and infrastructure work of government, local Councils and tourist boards. We will ensure that local communities are involved in the planning of tourist developments from the earliest stages.
- **Build new partnerships at work.** We will give employees new rights to consultation and participation in decisions and give companies and their employees access to advice on the forms of partnership which best suit them. We will promote profit-sharing, mutual structures and employee share-ownership schemes. We will extend the benefits of the Social Chapter of the Maastricht Treaty to all UK employees, while resisting the adoption of new rules that unnecessarily harm job opportunities.
- **Encourage a culture of long-term business investment.** We will require companies to publish information on their long-term investment achievements, including environmental performance, research and development, and training. We will introduce greater shareholder control over directors' pay and appointments.
- **Promote British exports.** We will make export promotion and commercial activity a higher priority for British Embassies.

### **Making Britain more competitive**

A competitive domestic economy is essential if British companies are to succeed in the global market.

#### **We will:**

- **Strengthen the law on competition.** We will tighten the rules on monopolies and adopt a pro-competition stance on take-overs and mergers. We will combine the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and the Office of Fair Trading into a single powerful body, independent of government and charged with promoting competition.
- **Give consumers more power.** We will promote the establishment of industry-wide Ombudsmen schemes to improve complaints procedures and consumer redress. We will strengthen customer guarantees, improve product standards and labelling, especially for environmental purposes, and encourage products that are easier to repair, reuse and recycle. We will insist on clear labelling for food products which include genetically modified ingredients.
- **Reform the privatised utilities.** We will combine the existing regulators into a single Office of Utility Regulation, reporting to a Cabinet Minister responsible for consumer affairs. This new office will contain a regulatory board for each industry and will be charged with protecting the consumer and ensuring that excess profits are used to reduce prices and increase investment in improved services. Starting with the water industry, we will encourage utilities to involve their consumers in ownership and control of their company, through mutual structures.

- **Reinforce consumer and investor protection.** We will introduce independent regulation of financial services and improve processes for redress (e.g. for mis-selling). We will protect pension and life assurance savings from fraud. We will work to maintain the City of London's pre-eminence as a financial centre and promote effective international banking standards.



*“Which*

*party is serious  
about making  
our environment  
cleaner and  
safer?”*

# Which party is serious about making our environment cleaner and safer?

**Our aim:** To make clean air, pure water and a decent environment a central priority of Government.

**The problem:** For too long, the environment has been damaged by greed and indifference. This cannot go on. From global warming to polluted rivers and asthma in children, everyone is already paying the cost of environmental damage. The longer action is delayed, the higher the cost will be.

**Our commitment:** To save energy, cut traffic congestion, stop the unnecessary destruction of the countryside and stem the tide of pollution.

## Our priorities are to:

- Cut taxes on things we want to encourage, like jobs, by taxing pollution instead. This will not mean more tax, it will mean taxing differently.
- Build environmental objectives into every government policy.
- Set tough targets to cut energy waste, reduce traffic congestion and control pollution.

## A greener economy

Environmental protection must be built into every economic decision and every area of government policy.

## We will:

- **Set tough new targets for the reduction of traffic pollution and waste.** This will help reduce global warming, cut air pollution and prevent waste. Our targets include cutting carbon dioxide emissions (the main cause of climate change) by 30 per cent from the 1990 level over the next 15 years.
- **Cut VAT and taxes on jobs, and make up the difference by taxing pollution instead.** This will help create more jobs and a better standard of living.
- **Adopt a Green Action Programme.** We will set targets for sustainability and biodiversity, to be met by central and local government. We will measure these by using new indicators of quality of life, progress and wealth. The Prime Minister will report to Parliament each year on the country's success in meeting these environmental targets.
- **Protect the local environment.** We will pass stronger laws to conserve the countryside. We will cut road congestion and help local Councils make Britain's towns and cities healthier and cleaner places to live.
- **Improve the way environment policy is made.** Environment policy is currently buried, with housing and local government, in a huge

single Government Department. We will put environment and energy policy within a separate, new department and ensure that all government departments and agencies pursue environmentally-friendly policies. We will give the Environment Agency stronger powers to enforce compliance with environmental laws.

## Transporting people, tackling pollution

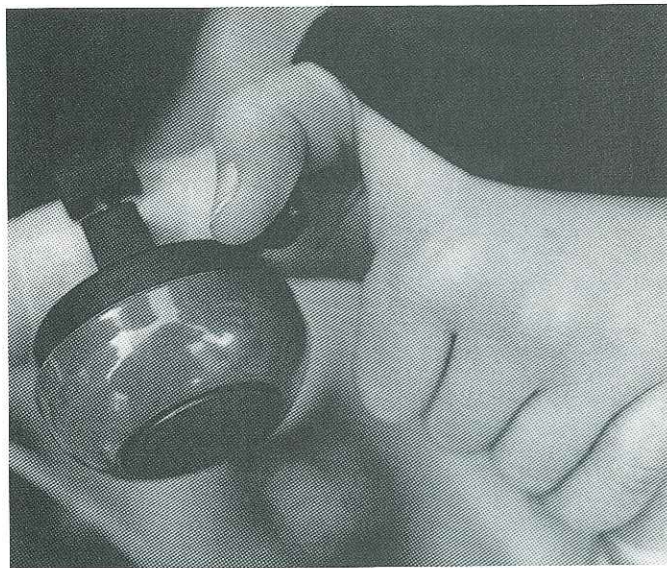
Travel delays and road congestion cost billions of pounds, and pollution damages the health of millions of people.

## We will:

- **Invest in public transport** by building new partnerships with the private sector. We will enable Councils to introduce road pricing in the most congested urban areas and use the money to support clean and rapid public transport, and to improve cycle and pedestrian access. We will retain London Underground in public ownership and give it the right to seek private finance for new investment without an assured government guarantee.
- **Treble the freight and double the number of passengers carried on Britain's railways by the year 2010.** We will strengthen the powers of the rail regulators. We will require Railtrack to meet targets for greater investment and increased passenger and freight traffic. We will withhold public subsidies from Railtrack if the targets are not met and, in the case of persistent failure, use the funds to reacquire a controlling interest in Railtrack. We will provide for legislation enabling this.
- **Encourage people to drive more fuel-efficient cars** by cutting the annual car tax, from £145 to £10 for cars up to 1600cc, over the period of the next Parliament, funded by gradually raising the duty on fuel by approximately 4 pence per litre. Under our proposals, a person with a typical family car could drive up to 23,000 miles per year and still

be better off – even in rural areas, where the average motorist only drives 11,700 miles a year. We will reform tax relief on company cars to encourage smaller cars and give people new incentives to use public transport for getting to work.

● **Reduce the need to travel.** We will reform the planning system so that people have easier access to shops, offices and facilities, and promote the use of information technology to decentralise work.



#### Warmer homes, saving energy

Official government figures show that half the energy used in Britain is wasted. This pushes up fuel bills, worsens pollution and speeds up global warming.

We will:

● **Cut fuel bills and make homes warmer.** We will launch a National Homes Insulation programme to end fuel poverty starting with the 2 million lowest income households. Our proposals will be funded by the Energy Saving Trust and the energy supply companies. This will save these households an average £85 per year and reduce global warming emissions. By

contrast, cutting VAT on fuel bills to 5 per cent would save the average household only £19 per year.

- **Cut taxes on people by taxing pollution instead.** To encourage energy saving, we will gradually introduce a 'carbon tax' on fossil fuels, using the funds raised to cut VAT and employers' National Insurance Contributions (the tax on jobs). This is a tax switch, not a tax rise, and will be phased in gradually.
- **Improve energy efficiency.** We will bring in new minimum standards for the energy efficiency of products, buildings and vehicles. We will cut VAT on energy conservation materials to 8 per cent – the same as for energy supplies.
- **Promote renewable sources of energy and combined heat and power schemes.** We will shift funds from nuclear research into decommissioning and nuclear waste management, and support research for renewable energy sources. We will not provide any government subsidies for nuclear generation. We support on-site dry storage of nuclear waste, pending the long-term development of safe alternatives. Nuclear stations will not be replaced at the end of their design life.

#### Protecting Britain's heritage

Britain's natural environment and heritage are being gradually destroyed.

We will:

● **Clean up Britain's rivers and beaches and ensure that the costs of investment are spread fairly.** We will require water companies to contribute to the cost of national environmental projects. We will reduce the need for new water developments by setting targets to reduce leakage and by promoting efficiency in water use. We will introduce a fairer system of charging for water and require water companies to share excess profits with

their customers through rebates or investments in environmental improvements. We will end, within 10 years, discharges that cause unnecessary water pollution.

- **Tackle marine oil pollution.** We will implement tougher rules on shipping safety and bring forward the designation of marine high risk areas.
- **Reform land use planning.** We will make protection of the natural environment a major feature of the planning system through a new Wildlife Act. This will improve protection of National Parks, Heritage Coasts, Sites Of Special Scientific Interest and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- **Green the countryside.** Our proposed new Countryside Management Contracts will help farmers to protect vital habitats and convert to more environmentally-friendly farming methods. We will use tax and planning reforms to protect rural areas, encouraging development on derelict land sites rather than green fields.

#### Thinking globally, acting locally

Most people understand the importance of thinking globally and acting locally. They want to play their part in protecting the environment. Government should help them do so.

We will:

- **Encourage the manufacture of products that are easier to repair, reuse or recycle.** We will introduce deposit refund schemes and back EU-wide standards for product design, energy efficiency and reuse.
- **Help people to choose environmentally friendly products.** We will press for comprehensive and understandable EU-wide ecologically friendly and energy efficient labelling schemes.

#### Promoting animal welfare

The way a society treats animals is a measure of its civilisation.

We will:

- **Promote animal welfare.** We will set up a compulsory national dog registration scheme. We will halt the trade in endangered species as pets. We will promote and extend training and qualification for those who work with livestock. We will insist on the enforcement of maximum time limits and for transporting live animals in the EU, a stricter timetable for banning veal crates and improved rearing conditions for pigs and chickens across the EU. We will create an Animal Protection Commission to enforce animal welfare laws and improve animal welfare standards. We will ban animal testing for cosmetics, weapons and tobacco products. We will review the law in order to reduce the use of animals in scientific experiments and seek the development of alternatives.
- **Protect wild animals.** We believe that the issues of hunting with hounds and coursing should be decided by free votes in the House of Commons. We will ban snares and leg hold traps. We will press for stronger international laws to protect endangered species. We will ban the importation of products derived from threatened wild animals.



*“Which*

*party will make  
me feel safe  
on the streets  
and secure in  
my home?”*

# Which party will make me feel safe on the streets and secure in my home?

**Our aim:** To give every person in Britain the security of a decent home in a safe, strong community.

**The problem:** Crime, homelessness and insecurity now threaten the very fabric of British society. Many people feel too frightened to leave their homes. Many do not have a decent home. Our country is becoming more and more divided, our sense of community is being lost and our shared values are being undermined.

**Our commitment:** Liberal Democrats will pursue practical measures to rebuild Britain's communities, tackle the causes of crime, reduce homelessness and make people safer in their homes and on the streets.

## Our priorities are to:

- Put 3,000 more police officers on the beat.
- Build more affordable and secure housing.
- End, by the year 2000, the scandal of people being forced to sleep rough on the streets.
- Revive Britain's sense of community.

## Housing

Boom and bust house prices, a shortage of decent homes and poor housing have wrecked the lives of millions and damaged Britain's economy.

## We will:

- **Build more houses.** We will encourage partnerships between the public sector, the private sector and housing associations to build high quality homes to rent and buy. We will, within strict borrowing controls, give local authorities more powers to go directly to the market to raise finance for building new homes. We will begin the phased release of capital receipts from past sales of Council houses and allow the money to be used to build new homes.
- **Give financial security to all, whether they rent or own their homes.** We will introduce a new Mortgage Benefit for first time buyers. They will receive this instead of Mortgage Interest Tax Relief. Those holding current mortgages will retain Mortgage Interest Tax Relief. Our aim is, over time, to merge the new Mortgage Benefit and the current Housing Benefit into one system of housing cost relief, available to those who buy or rent and focused on those most in need.
- **End the scandal of people being forced to sleep rough on the streets.** We will ensure that by the year 2000 no one is forced to sleep on the streets. We will require every Council to set up self-funding rent deposit schemes to help homeless people take up

private tenancies. We will fund more short-stay hostel places as the first rung on the ladder to permanent accommodation.

- **Take action to tackle homelessness and raise housing standards.** We will give Councils greater power to act on unfit private housing, where the landlord has failed to do so. We will strengthen tenants' rights to repair and, in the public sector, give them rights to take part in the management and development of their homes and estates. Our Empty Homes Strategy will enable local authorities to work with, and as a last resort require, landlords to bring empty properties back into use. We will end discrimination against those under 25 by scrapping the 'shared residency rule' when assessing housing benefit.

- **Bring confidence back to the housing market** by targeting low inflation and low interest rates.

## Crime and policing

Crime and the fear of crime affect almost every person and every community in the country.

## We will:

- **Put 3,000 more police officers on the beat.** Within one year, we will give police authorities the resources to put an extra 3,000 police officers on the beat. We will increase the time the police spend on preventing and detecting crime by reducing unnecessary paperwork and making greater use of new technologies.
- **Tackle youth crime.** We will widen the use of schemes that require offenders to repay their debt to society and to confront the consequences of their actions. We will, where appropriate, require parents to participate in support projects where their children have been involved in juvenile crime. We will develop schemes that target disruptive

children from an early age. We will reserve custodial sentences for more serious and persistent offenders. Our voluntary Citizens Service will enable young people to get directly involved in crime prevention schemes.

● **Strengthen the criminal justice system.** We will make the justice system work more quickly and effectively and review sentencing policy. We will overhaul the Crown Prosecution Service. We will encourage the use of community sentences, as an alternative to prison, where the result is likely to be less reoffending, and use prison sentences where they are essential to public protection or to make punishment effective. We will concentrate resources on crime prevention and on increasing conviction rates, rather than spending billions on building prisons.

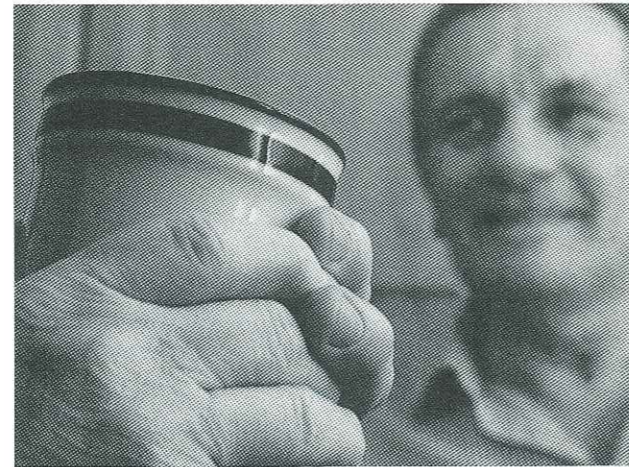
● **Focus on crime prevention.** We will require Councils to take the lead in establishing cross-community partnerships against crime, setting specific targets for crime prevention. We will give Councils powers and resources to support high-quality, targeted crime prevention initiatives.

● **Wage war on drug abuse.** We will give the Police and Customs and Excise the support they need to stop drugs coming into Britain. We will set up a Royal Commission charged with developing policies to tackle the drugs problem at its roots.

● **Give victims a new deal.** We will promote restorative justice, under which offenders can be required to compensate victims for the damage they have caused. We will ensure that the Victim Support movement and the Witness Support schemes play a full role in the criminal justice system. We will provide victims with the practical support they need to prevent repeat attacks.

● **Strengthen public confidence in the police.** We will make police authorities more responsive to local communities by increasing their elected

membership and creating an accountable police authority for London. We will improve co-operation between police forces and work more closely with Britain's European partners to combat international crime, terrorism, drug trafficking and fraud. We will ensure that the police take further steps to reduce the level of racial and homophobic violence.



#### Rural communities

Britain's rural economy and communities have been transformed over the last fifty years. The challenge for the next fifty years is to protect and enhance the richness of rural life, while developing a thriving rural economy.

#### We will:

● **Seek further reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).** We will work to replace the CAP, which currently subsidises production, with Countryside Management Contracts – a targeted system of direct payments to support economic, social and environmental goals in rural communities. Countryside Management Contracts will enable farmers and landowners to choose from a wide range of options, for example, to improve the rural environment, maximise food quality, protect natural habitats or move to less intensive or organic farming methods.

● **Help rural economies through a period of change.** We will, in partnership with the agriculture industry, draw up a national strategy for farming in order to provide a framework for public policy and private decision-making over the next

10 years. We will promote agricultural research and development, and assist farmers wishing to diversify. We will promote local processing of agricultural products and expand support for small and medium-sized enterprises in rural areas.

● **Tackle rural crime.** We will put more police into rural areas, support Farm and Neighbourhood Watch schemes and give Councils the duty to set up crime prevention schemes with the local police. We will enable rural police authorities to introduce mortgage incentive schemes to encourage rural beat officers to live in the areas they serve.

● **Enhance rural services.** We will support smaller village schools through greater use of information technology and specialist teaching teams. We will encourage schemes that enable local communities to make use of school buildings and equipment. We will promote community hospitals and use them for more out-patient consultations.

● **Provide more affordable rural housing.** We will encourage housing authorities, Parish Councils and housing associations to set up partnership schemes with the private sector in order to build low-cost homes for first-time home buyers and social needs.

● **Improve rural transport.** We will give local authorities the power to improve the co-ordination of local bus services and to reopen closed railway stations, in co-operation with Railtrack.

● **Strengthen the network of rural sub-post offices and village shops.** We will encourage the Post Office to invest in new point of sale technologies, in order to provide access,

through sub-post offices, to a wide range of customer services. Where post offices and village shops which are vital to their local community are threatened, we will enable local Councils to support them with up to 100 per cent rate relief.

● **Protect the countryside.** We will help landowners meet the environmental costs of increased access to the countryside. We will take action to reduce the use of chemicals in farming.

● **Protect rural areas from urbanisation.** We will penalise the use of greenfield sites, set and enforce targets for greater use of brownland sites and encourage over-the-shop accommodation in market town centres. We will review the excessive housing totals in the current structure plans and scrap the 'predict and provide' approach to housing development.

● **Work to preserve fish stocks and protect the livelihoods of local fishing communities.** Our aim is to scrap the Common Fisheries Policy and replace it with a new Europe-wide fisheries policy based on the regional management of fish stocks. We will take firm action to end quota-hopping, begin the phased abolition of industrial fishing and strengthen decommissioning incentives.

● **Promote safe food.** We will set up a Food Commission, independent from MAFF and accountable to Parliament, maintain strict controls on the use of bio-technology and press for higher common food standards across the European Union.

#### Urban communities

Britain's towns and cities offer civic pride, accessible facilities and, potentially, a high quality of life. However, many suffer from alienation, joblessness, high crime rates, a run-down environment and loss of population. Urban areas should offer excitement, security and a strong sense of community.



We will:

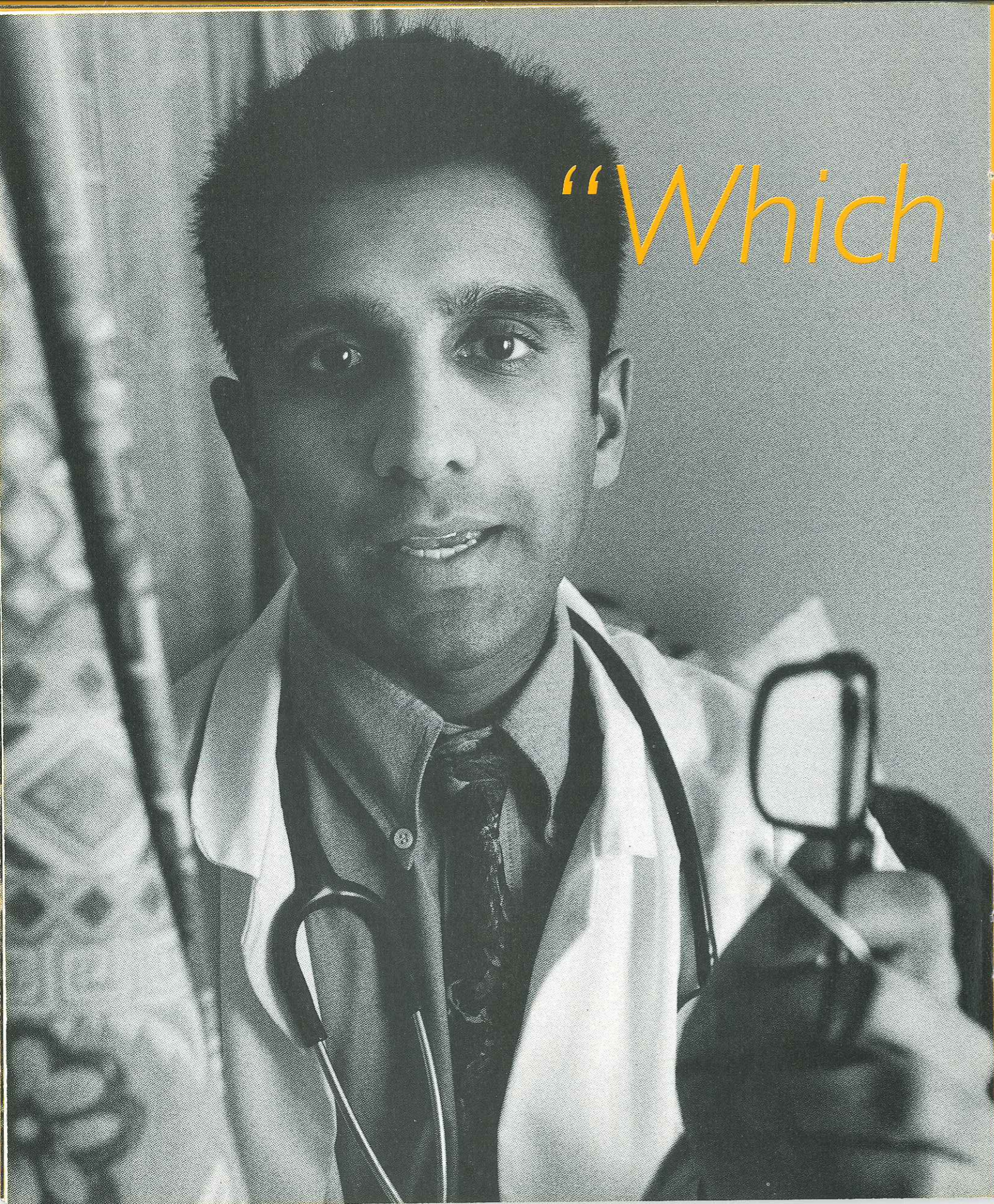
- **Boost local economic development and job opportunities.** We will support local development corporations. We will build new partnerships between local government and the private and voluntary sectors, to regenerate local economies and promote community enterprise. We will link local training to local jobs. We will encourage the establishment of community banks and credit unions.
- **Tackle urban crime.** We will expand community policing, ensure that all new planning takes account of the need to deter crime and focus on crime prevention.
- **Encourage public transport.** We will enable Councils to co-ordinate bus and train services and give them powers to introduce urban road pricing schemes, using the revenue raised to invest in better public transport.
- **Reform and strengthen elected local government.** We will give local Councils greater control over their own affairs. We will create a strategic authority for London. We will encourage the use of 'planning for real' strategies, in which local people can make a direct input into major planning projects in their community.

#### Arts and media

Flourishing arts and a diverse culture are essential for a lively and open society. They can be engines of innovation that bring life to the economy. At the same time, the world is experiencing an information revolution as important and far-reaching as the Industrial Revolution. Britain must maintain a free and effective media capable of being a check on the abuse of power, and of giving people the information they need to make informed decisions.

We will:

- **Tackle the concentration of media power.** We will act to prevent media mergers or take-overs, except where these can be shown to advance quality, diversity and access. We will require the Independent Television Commission to protect the position of smaller regional ITV companies, within the network supply agreement.
- **Maintain the role of the BBC** as the benchmark of public service broadcasting, committed to quality, diversity and universal access. We will protect the independence and impartiality of the BBC through its Board of Governors and its licence fee.
- **Improve access to information technology and the Internet.** We will ensure that everyone in Britain can have access, either individually or through a wide range of public access points, to a nationwide interactive communications network by the year 2000.
- **Increase access to the arts.** We will use the National Lottery to endow, house and improve access to the arts. We aim to move towards the European average for public funding of the arts. We aim to restore the principle of free access to national museum and gallery collections, starting with the removal of charges for school parties.
- **Promote Britain's culture.** We will promote film production in Britain. We will actively support the British Council and rejoin UNESCO. We will enhance the BBC World Service as a national asset.



*“Which*

*party will care  
for the NHS  
and put my  
patients first?”*”