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# My Values – My Liberalism

## Tim Farron MP

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Liberalism is under threat like never before, but never has liberalism been more necessary.

I am ready to lead us in the fight of our lives to make certain that our party survives and then thrives. The general election was won by the politics of fear and division – and we suffered a heavy defeat. Britain needs the Liberal Democrats, but that is no good if Britain doesn't know that! Our task is to prove that we are relevant to people across the country, to motivate and inspire the millions of liberals out there to become Liberal Democrats - to show them what we believe, why we matter, to give people compelling reasons to vote for us and to work with us to create a strong, impactful liberal movement in Britain.

### Why Britain needs liberalism

To do this we have to be clear about the philosophy and the values that set us apart. Liberalism is about championing the individual against the powerful, that means standing firm for our Human Rights Act, against internet surveillance and illiberal extremism orders. But it's also about protecting individuals from those giant evils that rob people of their freedom: poverty, poor housing, inequality.

For me, liberalism has always been about much more than policies and manifestos – about more, even, than campaigns and *Focus* leaflets!

My liberalism is about turning my anger at injustice into action. Some parties want to win power so that they can hold office, I want us to win so that we can make a difference.

I have an optimistic confidence in the capacity of everyone to make the most of their lives, to fulfil their talents and to realise their dreams. It is the belief that government has a duty to make this possible – to create the conditions in which people and their communities can flourish.

This has always been the great cause of Liberalism, a creed which is now needed more than ever. Over the coming months and years, we must stand up for the values that lie at the heart of our philosophy.

### Our core values

The first core value is freedom – the right of people to live their lives free to say what they think and to protest against what they dislike according to their own values, free of a controlling, intrusive state and of a stifling conformity and free to choose their own

occupation or to set up their own business. A free society that glories in diversity is a stronger society.

We have a steadfast commitment to human rights, because there are some things no government should ever be allowed to do to anyone, because the rule of law is the bedrock of freedom and prosperity, and because people are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect whatever their nationality. There's a major political battle coming over the Human Rights Act, which lies at the heart of Britain's commitment to human rights. Liberal Democrats should lead the fight to defend it.

The second core value is democracy. For us, democracy is much more than just a mechanism for counting heads. It means a spirit of equality, openness and debate, a coming together to decide our future fairly and freely, without being dominated by entrenched interests or the power of money. A state that supports freedom has to be a democratic state, with power dispersed as widely as possible and built up from below, in which politics is not an activity confined to a tiny elite but something everyone can take their part in, as and when they choose.

Our third core value is fairness. That means that the state must treat citizens fairly – whether in the way police officers deal with young people on the streets or the way Jobcentres treat benefits claimants or the way the tax authorities treat small businesses. It also means fairness in other aspects of life, for example in the degree of control employees can exercise over their conditions of work. Fairness is not only right in itself, it also leads to people working better together.

And fairness alone is not enough: A deeply unequal society – and Britain is one of the most unequal in the Western world – is weaker not just for those at the bottom of the pile but for everyone. We believe that everyone is entitled to equal respect, whatever their income, personal characteristics, way of life, beliefs or sexuality.

Our fourth core value is liberal environmentalism. Climate change, pollution and the degradation of the natural world pose one of the biggest threats to our welfare, to our economy and to our freedom that we have ever seen. We have to act at home and internationally to promote green technologies, producing clean energy and transport, stopping the waste of natural resources and energy and protecting nature.

The market by itself cannot achieve this; government action is needed across

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**“ Inequality, poverty, ill-health, poor housing and a lack of education are all the enemies of freedom.”**  
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the board to set standards, provide new infrastructure and promote innovation – and in the process build a competitive economy and improve everyone’s quality of life. We won’t defeat climate change with piecemeal ‘hairshirt’ austerity.

Our fifth core value is that quality of life matters – because some things, like the beauty of the natural world, music and poetry and art, popular culture in all of its variety, and simply spending time with other people, should never be sacrificed on the altar of profit or growth. A society in which people are treated merely as production and consumption machines, as though they respond only to greed or fear, is one that has deeply failed.

### The threat to freedom

All this is under threat from a Conservative government in thrall to its right wing; and Labour’s record, particularly on civil liberties, on failing to tackle the power of money in politics and on equality, which got worse over its time in office, shows that it cannot be trusted to stand up for liberal values. As Nick Clegg said when he resigned, Liberalism ‘is more precious than ever and we must keep fighting for it ... there is no path to a fairer, greener, freer Britain without British Liberalism showing the way’.

### Our Objectives

We achieved much to be proud of in the coalition, but it muzzled our voice and blurred our identity. Like many people who have contacted me since the election, I am frustrated that we couldn’t make the case for a fairer, greener, freer Britain.

Now, as we look to the future, I want to argue for four main objectives:

- **Active, ambitious, liberal government to create a new economy** – low-carbon, high-skill, innovative, enterprising and resource-efficient, because this is what we need to generate jobs, prosperity, opportunity and wealth in a competitive world; an economy where the government thinks long-term and new ideas flourish, and where wealth and opportunity are spread across the whole country; and a government open to new economic thinking, ditching the failed orthodoxy that brought us the Great Crash and embracing new ways of thinking that are realistic about how markets behave and in which ethics matter.

- **Leading a national campaign to tackle our growing housing crisis.** Fighting the Conservatives’ attempts to sell off housing association homes, building a movement alongside the housing associations and groups like shelter so that we build the affordable homes that people need. Nowhere else is the need for Liberal Democrats to stand proudly as the advocates of the people so clear.

- **Openness and Internationalism** – because nationalism is a force for division, aggression and intolerance and because cooperation with our European neighbours is needed more than ever, for peace and security, for a clean environment, for open trade, to stand up to corporate power and to protect the victims of conflict from those who would exploit and abuse them. We must take the lead in fighting for Britain’s membership of the European Union and within the EU fight for democratic reform.

- **Reform** – to deliver a new federalism, which is the only way to preserve the United Kingdom; a new voting system where parties can’t win outright power on just 37 per cent of the vote, and an end to the power of money in politics; and a framework which provides security against crime and terrorism without trampling on civil liberties or human rights, which champions the rights of individuals and their communities.

After the devastation of May 7<sup>th</sup>, lets resolve to mount the mother of all fight-backs. Britain needs us, we need to help them to realise that! Let’s work together to turn our liberal values into action and build a liberal society. Our comebacks in the past under Grimond, Steel and Ashdown give us confidence that we will rise again, and soon. But those comebacks were the result of hard work, campaigning and an ambitious strategy.

We need a fresh start. I hope you will give me your support.

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“ We need an almost joyful national collective endeavour to build a prosperous economy that is carbon free.”  
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“ Our survival is necessary but not inevitable: we have to earn our right to win, to thrive, to change lives, to make a difference.”  
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