

VOTE FOR CORNWALL

... and a new approach to politics



**Mebyon Kernow – the Party for Cornwall
Manifesto for the 2015 General Election**

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MK POLICY STATEMENTS

Mebyon Kernow - the Party for Cornwall is a modern and progressive political party. It is a party of principle, campaigning for a better deal for Cornwall and a fairer, more equitable World.

We exist to fight for ALL the people of Cornwall, with a political programme that puts Cornwall first and offers an alternative to the London-based parties.

We will play our part in building a confident and outward-looking Cornwall, that has the power to take decisions for itself.

To achieve this, our detailed policies are founded on the core values of prosperity for all, social justice and environmental protection.

CAMPAIGN PLEDGES 2015

For this election campaign, Mebyon Kernow – the Party for Cornwall is focussing on 12 key campaign objectives:

- Greater self-government for Cornwall
- Fair funding for Cornwall
- An end to austerity politics
- Decent public services for all
- A strategy for a sustainable economy
- A fair tax system
- Planning in and for Cornwall
- Affordable homes for local people
- A Climate Change Act for Cornwall
- A more just and peaceful World
- A reformed Europe
- Recognition for Cornwall

Greater self-government for Cornwall

Mebyon Kernow believes that the historic nation of Cornwall, with its own distinct identity, language and heritage, has the same right to self-determination as other constituent parts of the UK, such as Scotland and Wales.

We believe that the people of Cornwall should have more say in how their lives are run and that locally elected politicians should be taking the key decisions about Cornwall's future – not unelected civil servants or disinterested ministers in London.

But Cornwall is alone amongst the Celtic nations in having no form of effective self-government. Government bodies, quangos and agencies which develop key strategies and policies are located outside of Cornwall and inevitably fail to recognise the strengths of Cornwall or understand the special needs of its communities.

There is certainly a desperate need to address the unequal constitutional relationships between the various nations and regions of the UK, as well as the centralising influence of London and the South East of England.

Mebyon Kernow believes that there needs to be a mature, respectful and wide-ranging debate about the future of the whole of the United Kingdom and how it is governed – with the future constitutional status of Cornwall at the very heart of this debate.

Mebyon Kernow continues to be the only political party campaigning for the recognition of Cornwall as a distinct national community for all forms of governance, administration and service provision.

MK is committed to building a new democratic settlement, with the meaningful devolution of significant powers to a National Assembly of Cornwall, within the framework of the United Kingdom.

It is the view of MK that Cornwall merits stand-alone legislation, like the other Celtic parts of the UK. It should not be dealt with as a so-called "English region" or, as is often the case, a mere portion of such an "English region."

Mebyon Kernow – the Party for Cornwall is campaigning for:

- The introduction of bespoke legislation to create a National Assembly of Cornwall with powers at least equal to those of the Scottish Parliament, as set up in the Scotland Act 1998, which would set the funding and policy framework for the majority of the public sector within Cornwall. This would include responsibility for Health, Education, Training, Local Government, Housing, Economic Development and Transport, Energy, Law and Home Affairs, Environment, Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing, Sport and the Arts.
- An end to the power and influence of unelected and unaccountable bodies such as the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Enterprise Partnership.
- The strengthening of local government and an end to the dictatorial top-down control of Whitehall.
- The creation of public services for Cornwall which would include, for example, a Cornish Constabulary and Cornish emergency services.

For more information about Mebyon Kernow's proposal for greater self-government for Cornwall, and related democratic reforms, see "Towards a National Assembly of Cornwall."

Fair funding for Cornwall

Mebyon Kernow – the Party for Cornwall has a proud record of campaigning for fair funding for Cornwall and its local communities.

We know that Cornwall gets a raw deal from Westminster. Our hospitals, schools and vital public services receive less funding than other parts of the United Kingdom – while infrastructure spending by central government is disproportionately centred on London and the South East of England.

At the last General Election, the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats condemned the failure of the-then Labour government to allocate fair funding to Cornwall. But they have failed to act on their own election promises.

What is more, the Coalition parties have made the situation much, much worse by their devastating cuts to Cornwall's public sector.

Reductions in funding to local government have been disproportionately high. Cornwall Council has already made cuts totalling £170 million and announced further cuts of £196 million. The Devon and Cornwall Police Force meanwhile lost £50 million in 2011-2015, and is now having to make further cuts of another £9 million in 2015/2016.

In this election, Mebyon Kernow is demanding a Commission to investigate the full extent of this Government under-funding of Cornwall.

MK is pressing all of the London-based political parties to support our call for a Commission and to agree to abide by the Commission's findings, thereby guaranteeing Cornish communities their fair share of central government funding in the future, as well as additional investment for compensate for past under-funding.

An end to austerity politics

Mebyon Kernow – the Party for Cornwall is working with progressive alternatives across the United Kingdom, such as Plaid Cymru and the SNP, to bring an end to the austerity agenda of the London-based political parties.

The financial crash of 2008 – and the economic crisis which has continued to the present day – was caused by bankers, an overheating housing market, irresponsible lending and the failure of the Westminster's political class to regulate the financial sector.

But the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition has used these problems as an excuse to wield an ideological axe to turn a crisis caused by the private sector into a crisis for the whole of the public sector.

The savage cuts of the Coalition are having a devastating impact on local government, the National Health Service, policing and a wide host of public bodies, and they have privatised many aspects of our public services and healthcare. The Coalition even sold off the Royal Mail and the helicopter search and rescue service.

The cuts have fallen hardest upon the poorest in society, who are struggling to make ends meet. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats slashed welfare spending, cut benefits for the disabled and introduced the inequitable "bedroom tax." At the same time, they have delivered tax cuts for millionaires, allowing inequality to grow and the rich to get richer, while forcing thousands of poorer families to rely on foodbanks.

There is little between the three largest London-based political parties, as shown by the Commons vote on George Osborne's "Charter for Budget Responsibility," which set three more years of austerity politics and another £30 billion of damaging cuts to our already struggling public services. It was supported by 515 MPs, a "Grand Coalition" of the Conservative Party, Liberal Democrats, both UKIP MPs and almost all Labour MPs.

Mebyon Kernow is different and will resolutely fight to protect Cornwall's public services.

Decent public services for all

Mebyon Kernow – the Party for Cornwall is committed to a just and fair society. We believe effective public intervention is needed to combat poverty, tackle social deprivation and fight for the disadvantaged, and to tackle ills in Cornish society, such as social deprivation, unemployment, low wages and poor housing.

We will strive to build strong inclusive communities with free and equal access to well-funded education, healthcare, social care and welfare services.

Mebyon Kernow supports a universal health service for the people of Cornwall which supplies the best possible healthcare free at the point of use. We deplore the policy of the present and recent governments to turn the provision of a basic human right into an exercise in business management.

MK is also committed to the provision, by the state, of a just, proper and high quality education – at all levels – for all as of right. We support moves to end tuition fees for university students, through a progressive shift in taxation.

As a party, we have long maintained that important services such as energy, water and rail should be publicly owned and publicly accountable, based on community, social need and environmental protection rather than a private system based on profit.

Mebyon Kernow has been an out-spoken opponent of the savage cuts of the Coalition and its associated privatisation agenda, the damaging impact of which cannot be over-stated.

MK will continue to oppose the cuts of the London-based political parties and the privatisation of the National Health Service and other public services, which are desperately needed to support the young, the elderly, the sick, the less well-off and those in search of work.

A strategy for a sustainable economy

Mebyon Kernow is campaigning for the rebalancing of the United Kingdom economy, away from the present concentration on London and the South East of England. This includes a commitment to an Economic Fairness Act to ensure that Cornwall gets its fair share of government investment.

It is unacceptable that Cornwall is the poorest part of the United Kingdom, that our economic performance (GVA) is only 65.8% of the United Kingdom average,¹ and our workers earn 20% less than elsewhere. Such figures show that UK governments have failed Cornwall for decades and have failed to address the massive economic inequalities between the regions and nations of the UK.

MK supports a range of measures to improve Cornwall's economic performance, which will help people to provide a better future for themselves and their families, whilst protecting our exceptional natural environment. This would include higher levels of both public and commercial capital investment to boost economic activity and improve our skills, productivity, infrastructure, housing stock and public services.

Commitments include reduced business rates for small and town centre businesses, controls to ensure more public sector contracts in Cornwall are awarded to local firms, increased local production to meet local needs, more value-adding processes within Cornwall, the greater use of natural resources, investment in Green technologies such as energy efficiency, investment in high technology industries to create skilled high value jobs, and the enhancement of higher education facilities within Cornwall.

MK is also committed to tough regulation of the big supermarkets to prevent them operating as a virtual cartel to force down farm prices to uneconomic levels. An economically viable farming sector is fundamental to security of food supply and the character of the Cornish countryside and way of life.

¹ In comparison, England's GVA is 103% of the UK average. It is 94% in Scotland, 76.7% in Northern Ireland and 72.2% in Wales.

A fair tax system

MK is committed to effective public intervention to tackle ills in society such as unemployment and poor housing. This means that there is a need for a sufficient public resource and this implies fair and redistributive taxation.

Fair taxation based on ability to pay, with increased spending to be partly funded by shifts in taxation onto the better-off, lies at the heart of our policies.

Since 1979, there has been a major shift in taxation from direct to indirect taxation. Tory and Labour reforms have meant lighter taxes on wealth and profit, but a financial squeeze upon the poorest in society.

Mebyon Kernow – the Party for Cornwall supports:

- A living wage for local workers, to be partly met by reductions in pay for those at the top.
- An increase in the personal tax allowance to £12,500 and a reduction in indirect taxation which falls most severely on the less-well-off.
- An end to the inequitable council tax and its replacement with more progressive local taxation based on income, with the rich paying their fair share.
- More action to crack down on tax avoidance / evasion which is costing the Treasury billions and billions each year.

MK will also oppose all plans for regional pay presently being promoted by central government and other bodies, with pay scales in Cornwall equivalent to those in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Planning in and for Cornwall

Mebyon Kernow – the Party for Cornwall supports well-balanced planning policies which protect the Cornish countryside, while allowing appropriate developments that meet the needs of local communities (ie. proper local-needs housing).

MK councillors have also consistently opposed unacceptable developments such as the incinerator at St Dennis and the “park and ride” expansion to the east of Truro, as well as excessive levels of housing and other growth in Bodmin, Camborne, Falmouth, Newquay and St Austell.

But the approach of central government through their National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is turning Cornwall into a “developers’ paradise.” The Coalition’s “presumption in favour” of growth has led to unchecked and damaging development, with developers lining up to ride roughshod over local communities. The Coalition has also put in place a regime which forces Councils to set high housing targets and limits any meaningful local discretion.

Mebyon Kernow is campaigning for all decisions about planning to be taken in Cornwall.

This would include the production of a Cornish National Planning Policy Framework to replace the NPPF produced by central government, which would allow housing and other targets to be agreed locally without interference from Whitehall. And MK is also determined that any appeal process is also be controlled from within Cornwall – so that planning inspectors from Bristol do not over-rule the views of local communities and their elected representatives

MK is committed to a lower and more sustainable housing target, with development geared to meet local needs, and planning policies that defend the Cornish countryside and protect town centres from out-of-town developments.

Affordable homes for local people

Mebyon Kernow – the Party for Cornwall believes that local families have a fundamental right to good quality housing, both for purchase and rent, in their own communities and at a price that is truly affordable to people of Cornish wages.

But an out-of-control housing market means house prices in Cornwall have rocketed, leaving a clear mismatch between local wages and house prices. Private rented properties have become extremely expensive and getting a “council house” is but a distant dream for the many thousands in housing need.

The market was fractured by the Thatcherite sell-off of council houses in the 1980s. And it has been worsened by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition Government, which has massively slashed investment in affordable housing, replaced the social rent model with a new “affordable rent” model that sets rents at 80% of the inflated cost of private sector rents, allowed tax-breaks for buy-to-let “investors,” and reinvigorated the “right-to-buy” of council houses.

They have even raised the threshold to trigger affordable housing on smaller sites and undermined the ability of Councils to provide for the needs of their communities, while large house-builders have posted record profits.

Mebyon Kernow is campaigning for:

- A planning system which focuses on providing local-needs affordable housing – not large amounts of open market housing to benefit speculative builders.
- The development of council houses as a priority, alongside initiatives to increase the number of proper affordable homes through registered providers, charities, co-operatives and Community Land Trusts.
- Legislation to halt and reverse the spread of second homes, as well as additional local taxation on those properties which are not permanently occupied.

A Climate Change Act for Cornwall

Mebyon Kernow understands that unsustainability is truly global and must be tackled through action at worldwide as well as local levels.

The threat of climate change is one of the defining issues of modern politics and the world is facing serious environmental threats. All nations around the World must meet this challenge head-on and put the issues of sustainability at the heart of decision-making.

MK is committed to the creation of a National Assembly, which would produce a Climate Change Act to set out actions to reduce greenhouse emissions and develop a truly sustainable, low carbon economy across the Duchy. MK is particularly determined to make Cornwall more self-sufficient, with greater resilience in terms of food production, energy production and supply networks.

Mebyon Kernow understands that to achieve real sustainability we must foster radical changes to every aspect of our lives. Our policy commitments include working towards:

- A Green New Deal for Cornwall that creates high-quality jobs in environmental sectors, through initiatives such as an enhanced programme of home insulation, green electricity through renewable energy schemes, in particular geothermal, and the development of a green integrated transport system.
- A decentralised and sustainable economy which provides local needs as locally as possible, invests in local food production, and reduces levels of long-distance travel and dependence on imports.
- A zero waste strategy which invests in the radical reduction of waste and increased re-use and recycling, eliminating landfill and incineration.

MK is also campaigning to protect Cornwall's green fields from inappropriate and unsustainable development.

A more just and peaceful World

Mebyon Kernow is an internationalist and outward-looking political party. Our vision for Cornwall and the World is underpinned by respect for the diversity of the planet, both its human cultural traditions and its natural environment.

It is our belief that nations and regions throughout the World should work together to foster global peace and stability. Indeed, the strongest argument for working together in Europe remains the two World Wars which ripped the continent apart.

MK is committed to a Nuclear-Free Cornwall and the eradication of nuclear weapons across the globe. It is our view that there is no strategic rationale for the retention, still less the renewal, of the British nuclear arsenal and it should be disarmed immediately.

MK also supports all moves to control the arms trade, which is having such a terrible impact on developing countries.

Mebyon Kernow spoke out against the military invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and has also backed improved support for military personnel who have participated in these recent conflicts.

MK fully supports the UN's target of 0.7% of GDP for overseas aid, which we believe must be targeted at those areas in greatest need and not be linked to inappropriate trade deals.

It is absurd that poor countries are being forced to destroy their environments and ransack their natural resources in a vain attempt to pay back unfair debts. We believe that such Third World debts should be written off.

A reformed Europe

It is our belief that nations and regions throughout the World should work together, but that does not mean we are not critical of how the European Union is presently constituted.

The Europe of today is one of centralisation, limited democratic control, big business and bureaucracy, and MK – along with many other progressive groups in the European Free Alliance – is campaigning for the increased democratisation of the EU, greater transparency and increased Cornish representation.

Mebyon Kernow believes that sovereignty resides with the people, and that responsibility for decision-making should be retained at the most local level possible.

Our compelling task is to build a decentralised Europe on this basic principle, which means we must limit the centralisation of powers both to Europe and to the current state capitals such as London and Paris. We must create a new Europe that is relevant to the needs of ordinary people.

Since Cornwall was recognised as a European region, it has secured significant and much-needed investment through structural funds, including Objective One and Convergence. But over the last five years, the cost of EU membership to the UK taxpayer as a whole has quadrupled, which needs to be addressed as part of future reforms.

Recognition for Cornwall

In 2014, central government bowed to years of pressure and recognised the Cornish people through the Framework Convention on National Minorities.

This cultural recognition, embodied in minority status, is a landmark ruling. The challenge now for the people of Cornwall must be to achieve a wider acceptance of our right to greater control over our political, civic, and economic lives through the creation of a legislative National Assembly of Cornwall.

Cornwall has a unique national identity, grounded in its culture, language, traditions, history and distinct constitutional position. And MK members work hard to protect Cornwall's unique identity, its language, traditions and its distinct constitutional position. They have been instrumental in numerous campaigns including those for increased signage in the Cornish language, and also played leading roles in the fight against Coalition plans for a Devonwall parliamentary seat and the "Pasty Tax."

Mebyon Kernow is campaigning for the:

- Greater local control over all aspects of Cornwall's heritage, culture and identity, including the transfer of responsibility for work currently undertaken in Cornwall by agencies such as English Heritage.
- A National Curriculum for Cornwall, that ensures subjects such as Cornish history, culture and language are taught in all local schools.
- Increased investment in the Cornish language (Kernewek) for the training of language teachers, the provision of courses and its wider dissemination.
- A full Inquiry into the Duchy of Cornwall and Cornwall's ambiguous constitutional relationship with the Crown, and the contradictions between our constitutional status and current administrative arrangements.



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