

With the general election just two weeks away, DDN gives you a quick guide to the main offerings on drugs and alcohol

Labour

On drugs...

We will crack down on drug dealing and hard drug use to reduce volume crime.

We will expand drugs testing and treatment, and tackle the conditions – from lack of youth provision to irresponsible drinking – that foster crime and anti-social behaviour.

We will expand drug-treatment services for young people.

Communities know that crime reduction depends on drug reduction.

We will introduce compulsory drug testing at arrest for all property and drugs offenders, beginning in high-crime areas, with compulsory treatment assessment for those who test positive. Offenders under probation supervision will be randomly drug tested to mirror what already happens to offenders in custody.

From 2006, the Serious Organised Crime Agency will bring together over 4,000 specialist staff to tackle terrorism, drug dealers, people traffickers and other national and international organised criminals.

On alcohol...

Excessive alcohol consumption fuels anti-social behaviour and violence. The new Licensing Act will make it easier for the police and councils to deal with pubs and clubs that cause problems. Local councils and police will be able to designate Alcohol Disorder Zones to help pay for extra policing around city centre pubs and clubs, with new powers to immediately shut down premises selling alcohol to underage drinkers, and bans from town and city centres for persistent offenders. Police will be able to exclude yobs from town centres for 24 hours when they issue a Penalty Notice for Disorder.

From the Labour Party election manifesto

Conservatives

On drugs...

It is essential that we break the link between crime and drugs by getting young people off drugs and stopping them turning to crime to finance their habit. Conservatives will give the police powers to send addicts to treatment without going through the courts. In the first phase of our policy, young addicts arrested for minor offences will be offered a choice by the police and prosecution service: to go immediately to a residential rehabilitation centre or to face prosecution in the criminal justice system. As the number of young addicts is reduced we hope to extend this policy to older addicts.

The great majority of drug addicts wish to come off drugs completely – not to have their habit 'managed' by state-supplied methadone. A Conservative Government will help people to live drug-free lives by ensuring that an increased proportion of funding is devoted to rehabilitation courses which offer a drug-free programme.

Young people receive mixed messages from the Government. Much (undoubtedly important) information provided by Government agencies about drugs adopts a neutral stance on whether children should actually use them. But there can be no equivocation on drugs. A Conservative Government will fund a major advertising and advice campaign with a clear, consistent anti-drugs message.

Labour have downgraded the classification of cannabis from B to C. This has caused considerable confusion as to the legal status and the risks of cannabis. A Conservative Government will restore the B classification to cannabis. This will resolve the current confusion and send a clear message that the drug is dangerous.

On alcohol...

Currently, local communities are unable to stop the culture of binge drinking because of prescriptive central guidelines. A Conservative Government will give local councils real control over licensing in their areas – including stronger powers to turn down applications for licences where there is already a concentration of pubs and clubs. And we will ensure that pubs and clubs which sell alcohol to minors, or to those who are already drunk, are closed by the police.

From the Conservative Party election manifesto

Liberal Democrats

On drugs...

We would establish a standing Drugs Commission to advise on drugs policy, with a remit extended to cover legal substances such as alcohol, solvents and tobacco. The Commission would keep the classification of cannabis (along with other drugs) under review in the light of new scientific evidence as it emerged.

We would end the use of imprisonment as a punishment for possession for own use of illegal drugs of any class. Drug addicts should wherever possible be in treatment not in prison – unless they have committed other serious crimes (e.g. robbery to feed a crack cocaine habit) in which case prison must remain an option.

We would re-classify ecstasy from Class A to Class B to reflect the fact that it is less harmful than heroin and cocaine, but not re-classifying it further unless recommended by the Drugs Commission subject to evidence on long-term health effects.

We would extend the use of drug treatment and testing as an alternative to other criminal sanctions.

We would develop specialist heroin treatment clinics where heroin or heroin substitutes can be administered under controlled conditions, with other medical treatment and testing, and counselling and withdrawal programmes available.

We will allow GPs to prescribe short term or emergency maintenance doses of heroin,

We will crack down on illegal drug trafficking and drug affected driving.

On alcohol...

Clear labelling with numbers of units should be mandatory. Alcohol problems must be treated as seriously as drug problems.

From the Liberal Democrats Policy Briefing. There is no mention of drugs or alcohol in the LibDem election manifesto.

Monster Raving Loony Party Manicfesto

We fully back the government's policy of discouraging binge drinking by opening pubs for 24 hours. We believe that 24 hours is not quite long enough and propose to make the length of a day 32

hours long so that the pubs can be open for even longer. We also rather like the government idea of coming down hard on drugs by legalising them. Regarding tobacco it will now only be

legal to smoke it with cannabis. Anyone found to have a ciggy not containing any cannabis will be made to walk to Coventry with a stone in their shoe, unless they come from Coventry in which case an

alternative major city will be substituted on the advice of a committee who will meet far too often and eat dope cakes.

Anyone caught breaking the law will be made to mend it.