

# Background and policy program

## Background

The Local List Årø was founded at a general meeting on 18 August 2025. Not as a protest movement – but as an expression of the fact that we are many islanders who feel that the current challenges of the island and the islanders are not taken seriously enough. Many simply do not feel represented in the municipal council.

It is a nationwide, democratic problem that less than 3% of the population is a member of a political party, and that the majority of the remaining members are typically older men. It is primarily the members of the local party associations who decide who is nominated as candidates for municipal elections – that is, who we can vote for. And with the lack of diversity, our opportunities to find a good match are limited at the ballot box.

At the same time, it is the same limited group of activists who make up the politicians' backbone in their daily political work. This means that there is not the breadth, diversity and insight into the state of affairs and behind the political decisions that there was years ago, when over 20% of the voting population was a member of a political party. This leaves our representative democracy in a crisis where politicians lack sufficient knowledge to what concerns citizens, what we experience, want and expect.

The fact that more than 40% of the time was spent at the open meetings of the municipal council in 2024 talking about ferries, without anything significant coming out of it, is a clear example of our politicians being out of touch with the citizens. The fact that the municipal council in the same meetings did not once spend time on an overall discussion of where we should go with the development of the children's daycare centers or the local primary school – or a strategy for how we should solve the obvious challenges in elderly care now and in the future – underlines the problem.

In the Local List Årø, we will take democracy seriously. Årø Municipality is ours together, and we have both faith and confidence that we who live here can and will contribute to an island in balance – even if we cannot identify with one of the old parties to a sufficient degree to join or vote for them.

Therefore, it is our mission to initiate a movement where the islanders' commitment and participation in democracy is promoted in order to achieve a sustainable, up-to-date and representative policy in the municipality – with a focus on local conditions and free from party politics and special interests.

## Political program

Preface:

At the founding general meeting, the local list Ærø's first political program was adopted as the basis for the association's political activities. The program is our take on which local political areas require the most attention in the parliamentary term starting on 1 January 2026 – and at the same time some of our proposals for how the current challenges can be addressed.

Our program is dynamic. The world changes, problems are solved and new ones arise. That is how it is, and therefore we will always be ready to meet current challenges with necessary focus areas and new solutions in collaboration with everyone who wants to participate.

**Our vision** is a sustainable island in a broad sense.

A healthy municipal economy and a sufficient population base must ensure the framework for us as islanders to live the life we each want on an island that is becoming increasingly rich in nature year by year.

## Our key issues

### **Economy**

As an island municipality, we must constantly be careful about how we spend tax money so that we get the most value for money – both in the short and long term. A common vision, strategies and clear objectives are necessary if we are to be able to set the most sensible priorities.

**We will** start an initiative where everyone who wants to, is invited to contribute to a common vision that can form the basis for the development of our island in the coming years.

And then the municipality's budgets must be scrutinized in order to free up funds for core welfare and for new initiatives.

**We will** make use of the well-developed management models and tools that are already used extensively in other municipalities - and systematically make use of the measurements, reports and key figures that are presented annually for the municipalities' free use.

And at the same time, we must constantly stand on our toes to ensure that we have enough money in the municipal – both to maintain and strengthen the quality of core welfare, but also to make necessary investments in our common future. Here, tourism contributes greatly, but the declining population unfortunately pulls in the wrong direction.

### **Settlement**

The declining population is the island's biggest challenge, because at the end of the day, it is we who live here who have to keep all the wheels turning.

As we become fewer islanders, the municipality's income decreases, we become fewer to perform the necessary work, the customer base for the island's commercial life dwindles, and it becomes more difficult to maintain a varied cultural life.

We are in a downward spiral, where we are getting fewer with each passing month. And if we don't stop depopulation very soon, it will bite itself in the tail, and then it can suddenly go downhill even faster.

**We will** do everything we can to reverse this trend.

In the short term, **we will** work purposefully for attractive pay and working conditions in the welfare areas; for varied, exciting and alternative forms of living; for the establishment of nature and forest kindergartens; to introduce the road principle for islanders on the Årø ferries in order to make tickets cheaper; for subsidies for home care; for a strengthened settlement effort in connection with the tourist and business association.

But if we really want to move mountains, and we are forced to do so, if we are to survive as an independent and sustainable island community, then we must create a completely new basis for life.

The focus we already have on the island's DNA in the form of the maritime and historical villages, which attracts thousands of visitors every year, must be expanded with at least as much focus on the local identity and the love of nature. It is the sea around us, the natural landscape, the proximity, the security and the communities that make daily life something very special on Årø, and that is what we will live off in the future.

Therefore, **we will** take initiative a strong, popularly rooted movement towards an island in healthy balance with the nature we live in.

... and where the municipality becomes an active player when locally rooted projects and ideas are to be brought to life.

### **Forest, nature and clean drinking water**

As an island, we are up against strong forces.

We are affected by global climate change, and we are under pressure from the movement that is going on throughout society, where large parts of the population are moving towards the larger cities. Locally, nature and ecosystems have suffered from intensive exploitation of the earth's resources for a very long time, so we are in a situation where the balance must be restored both on land, at sea and in the air.

It requires a great commitment and a joint effort, where the municipality plays together with the grassroots, agriculture, research, associations, companies, churches, foundations and, not least, the islanders.

In the short term, **we will** work purposefully to establish a municipal soil and nature fund combined with a KLIMA+ partnership with the Climate Forest Foundation. And we will support and work actively to realize any project that contributes to more forests, ensuring clean drinking water and better conditions for biodiversity.

**But we want much more than that.** We believe that the key to the island's growth and survival lies in our unique nature, in the proximity between people, in our communities and in the rich opportunities we have on Årø to create a life in balance – for ourselves and for each other.

The country's large cities draw in many people. This has been the case for generations, and the fight against that movement is lost in advance. Therefore, we must concentrate on and target our efforts at

those who also emphasize precisely the living conditions we have as our natural basis here on the island.

Around the country, many are already well underway. Ecovillages, production communities, locally rooted dairies and mills, local fruit and vegetable production, conversion to non-toxic agriculture, cooperative farms, sustainable buildings and much more.

We must be careful that we do not enter too late in the battle for the part of the population that dreams of and seeks a life based on the very values that we have the potential to offer here on the island.

Therefore – rooted in our local population - **we will** initiate a strong movement towards an island in healthy balance with the nature we live in – and at the same time we will work for a strengthened local identity – both internally and externally – rooted in the love of the Årø nature.

A strong green focus is the opportunity for the necessary growth in the population, in new jobs and in the economy - and at the same time, an increased natural wealth will be of joy and benefit to all living things.

### **Children, young people and family policy**

It should be self-evident that the municipality always has an up-to-date child and youth policy, where the very basic goals and focus areas for well-being and development are continuously evaluated and adjusted.

**We will** take the initiative to incorporate an annual cycle in which the elected representatives, together with managers, employees, school and parent boards, continuously evaluate and set new goals for the development of the municipal services for children and young people.

But it takes more than ordinary welfare services if we are to take the goal of Children's Island seriously, and we must, because we really need to be able to retain and attract happy and satisfied families with children.

For families with children, it is also the love of nature, the sea around us, the natural landscape, the proximity, the security and the communities that make daily life something very special on Årø. Herein lies a large part of the local identity as something valuable that we must pass on to the new generations.

At a time when children and young people are massively affected by screen use, where many find it difficult to find themselves and navigate in a world full of opportunities, it is more important than ever that we help and support them in forming strong roots so that they can face life's challenges without being knocked over.

Nature must be used actively and purposefully in the pedagogical work in the children's institutions, and as a natural element in the teaching in primary and lower secondary schools. Learning and knowledge about ecosystems, about plants and animals in the local nature, about sustainable diets and about the connection between our consumption and climate impact expands awareness and enables children and young people to make better choices along the way.

It is crucial that everyone feels like an important part of both the small and the very large community.

Through a focus on outdoor life and communities, **we will** focus on children and young people's general education and nature education – also across generations.

... And then we must all make an effort to create a diversity of leisure activities, so that children and young people have good opportunities to discover and develop their inherent potential and talents.

### **Senior and elderly policy**

Årø acts as a magnet for seniors, and that is worth its weight in gold. People who want to enjoy their retirement on the island come with both purchasing power and free time to take an active part in the island's many cultural and leisure activities. We must hold on to that movement.

But at the same time, there are major challenges when the need arises for housing suitable for the elderly or for an assisted living facility. This is a problem that needs to be addressed.

**We will** work to ensure that the traditional nursing homes are transformed into living environments, where the individual can preserve him- or herself and the content of his or her own life to the greatest extent possible.

We also believe that there is great potential in the generations being able to come together in modern co-housing. The proximity and common areas both outside and inside make it possible and easy to reach out and become part of a fruitful community, where it is natural to help each other.

**We will** work to ensure that the municipality actively explores the possibilities of collaboration with housing associations or investors who can contribute to the construction of owner-occupied, cooperative and rental housing in one or more modern housing communities.

Many elderly people will need help to make everyday life work. It can be both practical help, help with personal care or nursing. It is a core task of the municipality to ensure that help can be provided in a timely and continuous manner.

Unfortunately, home care on Årø is under pressure, and it has been in recent years. The lack of qualified staff and skyrocketing sickness absence have consequences for the quality of the help our elderly citizens receive.

In the short term, **we will** have a sustained focus on the management of the area. The working environment must be corrected, and there must be the necessary time for the staff to make a loving and caring effort. This is necessary if we are to develop attractive workplaces with low sickness absence.

The need for qualified labour for the entire elderly area will increase in the coming years. For this reason, too, there is a need to speed up the settlement efforts so that more of us can do the necessary work.

### **Vibrant local democracy, co-creation and civil society resources**

We are not the citizens on the one hand and the municipality on the other. The municipality is the citizens' community, and it is here to safeguard and promote our common interests.

And precisely by virtue of the fact that we are a small municipality, we should be much better at thinking in terms of quality of life and whole people rather than in systems. We are first and foremost equal citizens in society in need of recognition and respect.

It is not far from being a lonely elderly person to becoming a reserve grandmother, or the one who reads aloud to the children in the daycare in the afternoon; from being an early retiree to being a homework helper or arranging fishing trips for after-school children; from being a nursing home

resident to growing vegetables or playing the piano; from being young in front of the screen in his room to reading the newspaper aloud to or watching a movie with a group of elderly people in the living room; from being retired to spreading interest in and knowledge about his subject in primary school. The possibilities are endless...

We want to do away with the limitations that follow from structural thinking, and we want to see people's opportunities rather than limitations.

But if we are to get involved and bring our knowledge and resources into play, it requires that space is created for ongoing and direct dialogue and co-creation between the elected representatives, the municipality's administration and the islanders.

Openness about the political decisions, frameworks and challenges, as well as the opportunity to influence the decisions that affect us, are essential for a trusting and fruitful cooperation between the population and our politicians. If we can achieve this, it will open up enormous potential that can increase the quality of life for many, benefit the municipal economy and promote the development of the local communities and the island as a whole.

**We will** start an initiative where we jointly find the best models for how democracy can be given new life and brought into play between elections.