

A RECORD OF ACTION A PROMISE OF MORE

The Conservative Manifesto for the
Reading Borough Council elections on
3 May 2012



A PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM THE CONSERVATIVE GROUP LEADER

Thank you for taking the time to read our Manifesto.

When the Conservatives led the council in 2010/2011, we were faced with some immense challenges left by the previous Labour administration. A debt mountain, massive local tax payer donations being handed out to unions, not to mention a legal time-bomb set to explode due to the unbelievable unequal treatment of women staff - to mention just a few.

Getting to grips with this was a challenge which your local Conservatives both rose to and exceeded. We made tough decisions which ensured Reading now sustainably offers high quality schooling and care for the elderly and vulnerable, the cornerstones of what we stand for.

We managed to deliver the first Council Tax freeze for a generation, increase the money given to voluntary organisations, increase library opening hours and we began to get Reading moving again. Strategically, we ensured our Station was redeveloped, leading the way for the new Station Hill development, dramatically improving our town.

As a complete endorsement of our year, Labour (supported by the Green Party) has fully adopted the vast majority of the initiatives we introduced from Community Care through to Parking. This year our national policy delivered the 2nd ever council tax freeze in Reading.



Cllr Tim Harris

A PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM THE CONSERVATIVE GROUP LEADER

This Manifesto sets out to build on the successes we achieved in our period of leading the Council. Building a better Reading where every Pound spent delivers value for money, better quality care, better schools and roads that actually allow traffic to move.

We pledge to reconnect elected politicians with the people we represent. An elected executive Mayor would help put Reading on the map and win much needed new investment. Changing to all-out elections every four years would make political parties work harder for your vote as there would be the chance of the Council changing control; it would also save Council Tax payers a considerable amount of money.

Whatever your background, gender, ethnicity or sexuality, the Conservative Party is here for you. I am proud that we will be fielding a more diverse and representative slate of candidates than any other party, they also bring much experience from industry.

On 3rd May I urge you to vote for your local Conservative candidate. In return we pledge to innovate and work tirelessly to ensure Reading offers you the best services possible.

CLlr Tim Harris
Conservative Group Leader

2010/11 A YEAR OF ACHIEVEMENT

FROM MAY 2010 UNTIL MAY 2011 READING BOROUGH COUNCIL WAS RUN BY A CONSERVATIVE-LED COALITION WITH THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS. WE TACKLED MANY OF THE PROBLEMS LEFT BY LABOUR AND BEGAN TO PUT THE COUNCIL'S FINANCES ON A MORE SUSTAINABLE FOOTING AFTER YEARS OF COUNCIL TAX INCREASES AND RISING DEBT LEVELS.



A RECORD OF ACTION

We froze the Council Tax for the first time after many years of Labour's above inflation increases

We persuaded the Government to release almost £1bn of investment to upgrade Reading Station and the surrounding area

We stopped the funding of Trades Union officials' posts from Council Tax

We increased the funding given to the voluntary and community sector at a time of great pressure on the budget

We protected the tree planting budget and planted more trees across the Borough

We protected the budget for Readibus which serves the mobility impaired across the Reading area

We provided money to the Central Club to enable it to reopen and a major grant to the Gurkha/Nepalese community for the first time

We began removing unnecessary traffic lights as part of a Borough-wide review and removed the "build out" on London Road enabling better traffic flows

We doubled the quantity of cycle parking in the town centre and provided more motorcycle parking bays

We froze short term car parking charges at all town centre car parks and froze all charges in Tilehurst and Caversham

We revamped the Residents' Parking scheme and protected the free first parking permit which Labour were pledged to charge for

We scrapped Labour's plans to remove the roundabouts and replace with traffic lights at Caversham Bridge and TGI's roundabout

We scrapped Labour's plans to close the Chatham Street slip roads and introduce a new traffic light junction on the IDR

We prioritised protection of vulnerable children, young people and the associated budgets

We increased collaboration with neighbouring Local Authorities: Wokingham BC on School Improvement, and with West Berks and Wokingham on strategies for NEETs, across Berkshire to address Special Needs

We doubled Foster Carer recruitment levels from 12 to 25 per year

We championed the provision of apprenticeships, more than doubling them in Reading

2010/11 A YEAR OF ACHIEVEMENT



A RECORD OF ACTION

We increased the reach of Children's Centres to groups of key mothers: now 57% of those living in the '30% most deprived areas'

We improved the Authority's support of children and young people at risk as well as providing better facilities support for Children's Services practitioners

We created more than 90 vital new Primary School places at Katesgrove, Wilson and St John's Primary Schools. All Saints Free School was secured with the support of Alok Sharma MP

We commissioned a new V1th form classroom for Highdown School and essential secondary school places for east Reading, championed by Rob Wilson MP through development of the University Technical College bid with Reading College

We commissioned 16 much needed places at The Avenue Special School, bringing the capacity to 122 and worked with the National Autistic Society on a bid for a 'free school', to cater for the increasing number of those on the autistic spectrum

We introduced a new, transparent commissioning system for partners in the voluntary sector based on achievement of Service Level Agreements, rather than opaque rewards for Labour's favoured few

We revamped how the Council allocates money to charities. With both the Cultural Partnership and the long term changes to how funds are allocated, the Conservative group transformed the process of spending tax payers money on external organisations. This was to get the best benefit for every single penny of Reading tax-payers' money.

We began to review how we deliver services to the people of Reading. While protecting the most vulnerable we looked at ways of ensuring that the long term aims of our services were considered and not just short term political gains

We built the first new social housing in Reading for 20 years (at the Avenue School's old site on Old Basingstoke Road)

We launched the Cultural Partnership – this has secured over £2.3m of external investment and there are more bids in the pipeline – with a total of over £10m (if all successful)

We promoted the Abbey Quarter as a major area in need of focus and regeneration – as a result the Council is currently in a bid process to get external funding



OUR PLEDGES TO YOU

DEMOCRATIC AND CONSTITUTIONAL

Reading under the Labour party has a history of ignoring local opinion. One leading Labour Councillor even said recently that when in control “you can do what you want”. We believe that the people of Reading should be in control and therefore propose several ways to revitalise our local politics.

- We will hold a referendum for an Elected Executive Mayor. Elected Mayors have been agreed in several major cities and Reading as an aspiring city needs the focus and leadership that an elected Mayor can bring
- We will change to all-out elections once every 4 years, saving money and allowing the people of Reading to choose who controls their Council. At present with annual elections only a few marginal wards receive close attention from more than one party. If “all out” elections were held every four years, as in many neighbouring authorities, there would be the chance to change the political control of the Council forcing local parties to work harder to gain support across the Borough
- We will continue to support the case for City Status at no cost to the Council Tax payer

OUR PLEDGES TO YOU

EDUCATION & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

A Conservative Council will support families, to overcome disadvantage and reduce disparities in children's school readiness, while embracing Government initiatives to improve the quality of teaching in our schools, raise levels of achievement for all, enhance the currency of qualifications and equip our young people for employment and independence.

- We will combat child poverty and protect vulnerable children
- We will enhance 'School readiness' through retention and development of Children's Centres, delivering focused parent and early years support
- We will provide vital Primary and Secondary School places for Reading's children, including more places in Reading's Grammar Schools and via Free School and partnership projects
- We will improve school and pupil performance via an emphasis on early years, school readiness, early literacy/numeracy and school leadership support

TRANSPORT AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

Reading suffers from major congestion at peak times. When in control of the Council we began to get Reading moving by tackling congestion choke points, supporting the bus company and encouraging cycling.

- We will implement a major bike-hire scheme on the lines of London's scheme together with the supporting cycling infrastructure
- We will campaign for improved train services to London and the west, and for a new direct rail connection to Heathrow airport
- We will increase the funding for tree planting year on year with an emphasis on replacing trees which have had to be felled and planting in areas which have few trees
- We will improve broadband provision to ensure Reading remains at the forefront of the IT industry in the UK by bidding for Central Government money to introduce "ultra-fast broadband" in Reading

OUR PLEDGES TO YOU

COMMUNITY CARE & HEALTH

Reading Borough Council has a big role in ensuring our elderly and disabled populations are properly looked after, we will expand this to ensure needs are considered across every department at the Council.

- We will work to introduce a timetable of activities for the elderly and vulnerable to help prevent isolation
- We will fight for local health facilities to be maintained and enhanced across Reading
- We will work with local traders and supermarkets to bring supplies directly to individuals and groups in need

CULTURE & SPORT

In this Olympic year the Council has a fantastic opportunity to build on residents' awareness by enabling them to get involved and sample new sporting or even cultural activities both as spectators and participants.

- We will further promote Reading's history, cultural heritage and civic pride – for the wellbeing of Reading's residents as well as to encourage tourism, businesses and jobs to the town
- We will continue to support the Cultural Partnership as a way of opening up Reading's cultural offering to more people and of attracting external investment
- We will improve the “Your Reading Passport” to make it flexible and increase take-up so that more than the current 1/3 of residents can benefit from it
- We will build on the effect of the London Olympics to increase participation in sport at all levels and throughout the generations

OUR PLEDGES TO YOU

FINANCE & PROPERTY

When Conservatives led the Coalition in Reading 2010-11 we made it a priority to help hard pressed residents by freezing Council Tax. This was fully supported by the government at Westminster and this year central government has again provided a grant to local authorities on the condition that they continue to freeze council tax.

- If returned to office locally, we will ensure that freeze continues until the borough is running as efficiently as possible.
- We are concerned that the Labour administration has sought to balance the books by increasing the charges for many of the services provided by the authority. If elected to control the authority, we would undertake a comprehensive review of fees and charges and freeze many of them.
- We remain convinced that there are further efficiency savings to be made. Last year Labour opposed all our savings measures and yet were able to achieve a balanced budget without resorting to cutting services. We think that there is still more to be done.

HOUSING & ENVIRONMENT

When the Council was Conservative led we began building the first new Council homes in many years. Conservatives understand the importance of having a decent home and environment.

- We will publish a register of private landlords who accept tenants on benefits to be made available to local residents to make finding private rented housing easier
- We will explore ways to help first time buyers and those on lower wages onto the property ladder, improve signposting to opportunities provided by Government and mortgage lenders
- We will increase recycling levels & investigate a return to weekly collections where the majority of residents request it, bid for the Government's new funding to increase the range of materials recycled – thereby increasing recycling levels - and at the same time return to weekly collections

OUR PLEDGES TO YOU

TRANSFORMATION, POLICY CO-ORDINATION & SCRUTINY

Reading Borough Council should serve the needs of its residents, not the other way round. The Conservatives would ensure that we place the resident first and that the Council has a culture of service from the bottom to the top.

- We will ensure that every resident has an agreed service commitment, so they know when they will get an answer to their queries and issues, and what steps need to be taken to ensure that is met. We pledge to publish our success rate so that all residents can see how we are doing on our pledges
- We will become an inclusive Council. Conservatives want to see active participation of local residents in decisions that affect them. We pledge to improve the access of residents to the decision making process so things like the One Way IDR or Shinfield Road fiasco don't happen against the wishes of residents
- We will ensure that our local shopping arcades and precincts have a future. All residents of Reading want to have local amenities, whether that's a Post office, local shop or library. The Conservatives will ensure our local precincts have plans developed so they fit into the bigger long term economic future of Reading.

VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

Reading has a rich and diverse community in which equality and cohesion is very important. Our continued commitment to reach out and work with all communities, neighbourhoods and organisations across the Borough will help ensure greater tolerance and understanding. During our administration we made improvements to the way organisations in Reading applied for grant funding.

- We will maintain our commitment to the voluntary and community sector which does so much to make our town a great place to live and work
- We will continue our commitment to equalities and cohesion building on Reading's long tradition of harmony across our communities
- We will guarantee the flexibility and transparency of the allocation of grants via a bidding system