

SECURING OUR FUTURE A PLAN FOR COVENTRY

Our five year plan for Coventry
Vote Conservative on 3 May 2018



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A PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM THE LEADER OF THE COVENTRY CONSERVATIVE GROUP

Dear Resident

Soon it'll be time to cast your vote for a Councillor who will represent you for the next four years. In doing so you are also making a decision about who you want to lead the city.

As a Coventrian myself I thought it was important that I set out my party's vision for Coventry from the start. It's a vision where Coventry is a growing, prosperous and healthy city with a strong identity distinct from the West Midlands. It's a vision where there is affordable quality housing for everyone, a good education for your children and quality jobs for all.

Much of this is starting to happen under the direction of a Conservative Government already. We have investment of around £600 million by the Government into our regeneration, employment has reached record levels and we've been designated City of Culture.

We've been a responsible opposition and worked with Labour when it's in the city's interests and will continue to do so in control. However we need a Conservative led Council to manage this investment efficiently and make the most of our opportunities.

In this manifesto we'll set out our ambitious five-year plan for Coventry. We'll explain how we will prioritise job creation and improve service delivery by the Council. We will end wasteful spending and direct resources towards front line service delivery.

As a Coventrian I feel excited about the future. The good times are there for the taking—if we're brave enough to grab them. This document is a sky blueprint for change and I urge you to join with us and elect a Council that works for everyone.

Gary Ridley



Councillor Gary Ridley

MANAGING SOUND PUBLIC FINANCES

HOW WE'LL BALANCE THE BOOKS IN COVENTRY:

- We've identified savings of over £3 million which will be ploughed back into service delivery over the next five years.
- We'll reduce the amount of money paid out in councillors' allowances.
- We will take steps to reduce the £279 million of debt the Council has built up. This is equal to £797 per person in Coventry and costs taxpayers' £13 million in interest every year.

Like many local authorities Coventry has faced significant pressures on its budget as a result of the deficit left by Labour's recession. This has resulted in difficult choices needing to be made locally and nationally.

A Conservative Council will always put the people of Coventry first and will lobby central government for more funding at every opportunity. However, we have to manage the resources we have carefully.

Conservatives have identified saving of over £3 million which could be ploughed back into service delivery over the next five years. These savings start with Labour's paymasters in the trades' unions.

Despite making cuts to services across Coventry this Labour-led Council has provided trades unions in the city with around £8 million of taxpayers funds since they were elected. This money is used by them to represent some staff at the Council.

In these difficult times we'll reduce the amount of money paid out in councillors pay. We'll do this by abolishing do nothing deputy cabinet members and reducing the size of the cabinet from ten to eight.

In the longer-term we will explore the feasibility of working with other local authorities to more efficiently deliver back room functions such as HR, payroll and procurement services.

We will continue to lobby the Government to

change the business rates regime to include students' landlords and HMOs in business rates the same as any other business. This would generate an additional £6m for the city every year.

We will work to keep council tax to the lowest level possible. We will improve accountability for taxpayers by introducing an annual report showing how the Council's funds are spent to be included with council tax demands.

Where possible we will use the Council's buying power to buy from local businesses and social enterprises to benefit the local economy with an annual report to councillors.

We'll introduce an ethical investment policy to ensure that the Council never hoards taxpayers money in disreputable offshore accounts. We will also work with the West Midlands Pension Fund to ensure assets are invested ethically.

Finally, The Council owes £279 million of debt, equal to £797 per person in Coventry. Some of these debts are earning 8% interest repayments for creditors. In total the debt costs taxpayers' £13 million in interest every year.

Wouldn't it be better to prioritise the repayment of these debts over risky schemes like the secretive purchase of Coombe Abbey Hotel for £9 million?

A Conservative led Council will balance the books putting the city in a strong position.

REGENERATING OUR CITY

HOW WE'LL SHAPE COVENTRY'S FUTURE:

- We will work with the Government, industry and partners to ensure Coventry businesses are able to access venture capital funding to scale-up at pace.
- We will work with the private sector to open the River Sherbourne and revitalise the south of our city centre with a new retail development.
- We will provide space in the city centre to make Coventry the number one destination for start-up IT companies.

Conservatives believe the Council can't deliver the regeneration we need on its own. So we will work in partnership with other stakeholders enabling us to attract investment and funding through many different sources.

Will work with the Local Enterprise Partnership and the Combined Authority to attract funding which boosts job creation and boosts skills. Where necessary we will act as the accountable body providing guarantees for the funding we've received.

We will work with the Government, industry and other stakeholders to ensure that Coventry businesses are able to access venture capital funding to scale-up at pace.

In opposition we've worked responsibly for the people of Coventry, working with Labour when it was the right thing to do. As the controlling group we'll continue to seek a cross-party consensus on regeneration issues.

The key to Coventry's future prosperity is job creation matched by a skilled and flexible workforce, able to meet the demands of the 21st century. Our universities are helping to develop that workforce and we will work closely with them to develop and drive forward innovation in Coventry.

The city centre and Friargate initiative is key to the regeneration of the city. In control of the Council, Conservatives created a first-class public space in Broadgate by removing the canopy outside Cathedral Lanes. Thanks to

unprecedented investment of around £600 million by the Government our revitalised city centre will be the backbone of the economy.

The next Conservative led Council will invest this funding wisely and continue to improve the city centre. We will work with the private sector to open the River Sherbourne and revitalise the south of our city centre with a new retail development.

To make it easier for shoppers to access the city centre we will review the city centre car parking strategy. We will roll out free late night parking as a pilot project to increase footfall.

We will embrace the potential offered by new technology in a changing world. We will provide space as part of the redevelopment of the city centre to make Coventry the next Silicon Valley and number one destination for start-up IT companies.

We will also ensure that Coventry benefits from next generation sustainable technology. To maximise these opportunities we will set up a task force to support the development of green collar jobs in the city.

Elsewhere, we will support, and protect, Coventry Airport, and ensure it remains a vital asset for our city.

We will also work with telecoms providers and the Government to ensure the smooth roll out of high speed broadband across our city, holding them to account where necessary.

DELIVERING HOUSING FOR MODERN COVENTRY

HOW WE'LL IMPROVE HOUSING:

- Conservatives will carry out a full and detailed housing needs assessment to direct the kind of housing being built.
- We will also work with the not-for profit sector to ensure the delivery of a new retirement village in Coventry like the one in Earlsdon.
- We will work hard to prevent inappropriate development of the greenbelt ensuring the best possible outcome.

Housing is one of the biggest challenges facing the younger generation today. We know there's a shortage of all kinds of housing stock in Coventry today. Getting on the property ladder is a real challenge for many young people and a distant dream for others.

However, home ownership is about more than having a roof overhead, it offers people a stake in society. It gives them something solid to build on as they start their journey through life.

That's why it's more important than ever to deliver more housing - but it must be the right kind of housing. Developing huge five bedroom homes on the greenbelt will not solve the housing crisis or give young people the start they need.

That's why a Conservative Council will carry out a full and detailed housing needs assessment of the kind of housing that we need to build - and where.

We'll work with Andy Street, the Mayor of the West Midlands, to attract funding to prioritise the development of accessible housing on brownfield sites. We'll also ask the Government to introduce a tax on developers who hoard land rather than develop it.

We must also get better at using what we have already. There are currently over 1,000 empty homes in the city. This can't be right and we'll provide resources to bring these empty homes back into use right across Coventry.

We will undertake a comprehensive review to understand the main barriers to downsizing where older residents wish to do so. This can be a better option for many people in older age and can free up larger homes for younger families.

We will also work with 'the not-for profit' sector to ensure the delivery of a new retirement village in Coventry.

We support the construction of more purpose built student accommodation so that more traditional properties and Houses in Multiple Occupation (HIMOs) can be brought back into use as family homes.

However this must be backed up by a change in policy and we will also consult upon changes to planning regulations making it harder to convert family homes into student accommodation.

Despite significant additional funding being provided by the Government, homelessness remains a problem in the city, as it does in many parts of the UK.

We will work with the Mayor of the West Midlands, Andy Street, to ensure that Coventry gets its fair share of funding through the recently announced Housing First pilot and to implement the Government's Homelessness Reduction Act in our city.

CELEBRATING CULTURE IN OUR DIVERSE CITY

WE'LL EMBRACE OUR CULTURE BY:

- Supporting the City of Culture 2021 delivery team to ensure Coventry's year in the spotlight is a real success.
- Ensuring that a memorial to the victims, and survivors, of the Coventry Blitz is built as part of the regeneration of the city centre.
- Reintroducing the ancient role of Town Crier to so we can shout about our great city during our year as City of Culture and beyond.

Coventry can trace its long and proud history back to Roman times. It has been the city of reinvention embracing technology and welcoming new citizens throughout that time.

Now that we have been designated as City of Culture in 2021 we will be back in the national spotlight. This presents us with a unique opportunity to celebrate, and showcase, our diversity before, during and after our year as City of Culture.

A Conservative administration will embrace these transformative opportunities and ensure that many much loved events, such as the Godiva Festival, remain one of the country's top music festivals.

We will work with the Coventry Business Improvement District to market and promote the city centre as a key destination for shoppers, tourists and investors

We will also reintroduce the ancient role of Town Crier so we can shout about our great city during our year as City of Culture and beyond!

We will ensure that access to our museums remains free so they continue to be enjoyed by all our citizens and visitors alike.

A Conservative Council will celebrate, and enhance, our links to the key literary figures connected to the city. In particular writer George Eliot. We will explore options to make her Coventry home accessible to the public and work with the George Eliot Fellowship in

Coventry to celebrate her life and achievements. The city should celebrate her legacy and we believe it's time to bring George Eliot home.

For many years socialists wanted to sell Coventry's historic Council House. We believe that this famous landmark belongs to the citizens of Coventry and should stay that way.

Despite the construction of new Council offices at Friargate we will ensure the Council House remains the centre of civic life in Coventry.

We will also examine ways to make it more open and accessible to citizens. This includes opening to the public for heritage weekends and holding open days.

The hidden gem at the rear of the Council house is St Mary's Guildhall. We will explore ways to make this more accessible to the public and will open 'The Crypt of St Mary's' restaurant for longer hours. We will open it into the evenings, so that people and visitors can enjoy a unique Coventry dining and socialising experience - whilst raising income to re-invest into our key local public services.

The regeneration of the city centre represents a better future - but we shouldn't lose sight of the past. So we'll build a memorial to the victims, and survivors, of the Coventry Blitz as part of the regeneration of the city centre. Future generations must never forget the sacrifices made by many brave coventrians.

TAKING PRIDE IN OUR ENVIRONMENT

WE WILL IMPROVE OUR ENVIRONMENT BY:

- Investing an extra £1.3million over the next five years to tackle fly-tipping, dog fouling and to clean up the litter on our streets
- Using the Council's shareholding in Birmingham Airport to oppose the construction of a second runway.
- Consulting upon the introduction of a plastic bottle recycling scheme in Coventry.

A Conservative administration will work hard to protect and enhance our environment today and for future generations.

We will make Coventry a greener place to live by working with schools to involve children in the planting of a Coventry Forest planting a tree for every citizen.

We will work hard to protect and enhance the countryside around Coventry, particularly the Meriden Gap which separates us from the Birmingham conurbation.

Although Labour has just approved the use of huge greenbelt sites for development we will work hard to prevent inappropriate development on the greenbelt, promoting a 'brownfield first' approach.

We will use our influence with our neighbours to protect and respect shared greenspace. So we'll use the Council's shareholding in Birmingham Airport to oppose the construction of an expensive and unnecessary second runway.

Residents deserve to live in a clean and vibrant city. It's now more important than ever with Coventry being designated as the City of Culture in 2021.

However, we've seen a huge rise in fly-tipping of 44%. So we'll invest an extra £1.3million over the next five years to tackle it along with dog fouling. We'll also clean up the litter on our streets.

We will do this by hiring more operatives and exploring new ways of tracking dogs owners who cause a persistent nuisance.

Technology has a part to play in making our teams more efficient too. We'll roll-out 'smart-bins' across the city centre. These bins tell operatives when they're full freeing them up to tackle other jobs.

Residents can play their part in tackling litter and fly-tipping too. So we'll make resources available to support litter picks organised by schools and communities.

We've all seen the horrific tales about where waste plastic ends up. Much of it will remain in the sea for thousands of years - it may even enter the food chain. We have a moral duty to tackle this scourge on our society.

So we will support the introduction of a Government plastic bottle recycling scheme and seek to become a pilot area for the scheme.

We're committed to tackling climate change and so we'll review the efficacy of the Council's climate change strategy - a strategy implemented by a Conservative Council in 2007. We will also bring forward a report to examine air quality issues and begin a debate about how we can improve it in Coventry.

We'll underline this commitment by creating a Cabinet Member for environment, climate change and sustainability issues.

GETTING COVENTRY MOVING

WE'LL IMPROVE OUR TRANSPORT NETWORK BY:

- Spending an additional £750,000 on road safety schemes over the next five years.
- Working with the Mayor of the West Midlands to create more dedicated spaces for cyclists.
- Reversing the fall in pot hole repairs and making it easier to report them.

Sitting at the heart of our nation, Coventry is well connected to the rest of the country. However it's vital that we invest in our infrastructure to keep pace.

From bicycle revolution to motor city transport has always been important to Coventry. That's why a Conservative Council will work with the Government and the Mayor of the West Midlands, Andy Street to deliver a number of key improvements across our city.

We will work with the Mayor of the West Midlands to create more dedicated spaces for cyclists and implement the West Midlands Cycling Charter – increasing spending to £10 per head. We will also implement a requirement for new development to consider cycling provision in the development of their green travel plans.

We will support improvements to public transport so there is an accessible and inclusive bus service for all. We believe that Pool Meadow Bus Station is an integral part of that and will protect it from closure by Labour as we have done before.

Changes to bus schedules and issues with services are regularly raised with councillors. To address these issues we will seek to establish a new transport users forum.

This will bring together operators, the Council and the Combined Authority to enable better discussion of service issues and help to identify solutions.

We will work to improve and protect our city's rail links starting with the re-development of Coventry station. We will lobby the Government to improve links with Nuneaton and the East Midlands and campaign for the retention of three express train services to London every hour.

To keep our highways moving we will protect the integrity of the ring road. On a case by case basis, we will support the removal of bus lanes where there is clear benefit.

We will reverse the fall in pot hole repairs and make it easier to report them. We will introduce a dedicated telephone line and explore the development of a 'pot hole app'.

We'll also work with residents, and not against them, when they report highways issues to us. It was wrong that hundreds, if not thousands, of coventrians were wrongly fined due to inadequate signage around Bus Lanes.

The Council should be prepared to admit its mistakes so we'll set up a citizens panel to identify issues such as incorrect signage and use the information provided by residents constructively.

We will make our network safer by spending an additional £750,000 on road safety schemes over the next five years. We will also improve the liveability of our street scene by reducing unnecessary signage. This contributes to 'pavement clutter' making life harder for people with mobility issues.

IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG PEOPLE

WE'LL HELP CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE BY:

- Implementing the recommendations from the OFSTED inspection to improve Children's services.
- Making it easier to foster children by reducing council tax by 50% for carers producing a saving of £880 on a band D council tax property.
- Reviewing the demand for school placements around the city - particularly in light of the city's expansion.

One of the most important duties of the Council is to provide help to vulnerable children when they need it most. Sadly at times the Council hasn't lived up to this requirement.

Although things are getting better, Children's Services has been rated as 'requiring improvement' by OFSTED.

There's still some way to go before it becomes a 'good' service. So we will give staff the resources they need to implement the recommendations from the OFSTED inspection into children's services.

We believe it's vital that looked after children are given the best possible chance of a normal home life. That's why we'll make it easier to foster children by reducing council tax by 50% for carers - producing a saving of £880 on a band D council tax property.

Our vision of improving skills and creating jobs in Coventry starts today with the children who are our future. The Council has a duty to those who are in education today. However, for too long they've been let down by Labour's dogmatic approach to academies and free schools. There are examples where the Council has refused to support new schools because they would need to be an academy or a free school.

A Conservative Council will take an evidence based approach to education and we'll review the demand for school placements around the city - particularly in light of the city's expansion.

We will also provide support to existing schools that wish to become an academy.

We will strive to make Coventry a healthier city and work hard to reduce health inequality and variation in life expectancies across the city. That work starts with young people and we will strengthen the role of schools in promoting health for young people.

We'll also encourage schools to have particular strengths or specialisms which can be shared with other schools in the locality.

We will ensure that there is a greater say for school communities (parents/carers, pupils and staff) in the day to day running of a school, with more support and help for those school communities who need it.

We will ensure that Coventry City Council is a family friendly employer setting a good example to other employers. We will make flexible working available and hold employee forums with senior Councillors and officers to develop ideas to make the organisation more family friendly.

We will also ensure the Council maximises the opportunities for young people to advance their career by reviewing and enhancing the range of apprenticeships offered by the City Council.

We'll also support and encourage the 'Mayor's Mentor's' scheme led by the Mayor of the West Midlands, Andy Street.

BUILDING STRONG COMMUNITIES

WE'LL BUILD STRONG COMMUNITIES BY:

- Encouraging and supporting community groups to take ownership of land or buildings by giving advice, funding to test ideas and sharing knowledge.
- investigate the feasibility of a new order to make it an offence to carry acid
- Making it easier for residents to organise events like the Earsldon Festival or the Bannerbrook Park summer fete.

What makes Coventry special is its people and its diverse communities. A Conservative administration will protect and strengthen those communities by working with residents to put them in control of service delivery.

Our communities are at their strongest when we allow them to work together and live up to their potential. So we'll encourage and support community groups who wish to take on land or buildings by giving advice, funding to test ideas and sharing knowledge.

We'll increase community involvement in the running of parks and green spaces by creating more friends groups.

There are too many examples of the Council's bureaucracy stifling community groups who want to organise projects for themselves. Paperwork, or health and safety, shouldn't be used as an excuse to block road closures or charge residents for using parks when there's clearly a public interest in supporting them.

Therefore a Conservative Council will make it easier for residents to organise events like the Earsldon Festival or the Bannerbrook Park summer fete.

Conservatives also believe it's vital to support the many charities and voluntary organisation in the city. We will work in partnership with the third sector so we can build a better, fairer Coventry.

One of the greatest threats to the community is crime and the fear of crime. This can have a big impact on people's lives and we shouldn't tolerate it in a civilised society.

A Conservative administration will empower residents to stand up to crime by organising regular liaison meetings between residents groups and the police. This will help to improve information sharing and help to reassure communities.

Conservative councillors will also support the speed watch scheme, where residents help to detect speeding vehicles. This scheme can help to gather information about the scale of speeding, act as a deterrent and reassure the public.

Coventry City Council has a role in ensuring good public order and community cohesion too. One of the powers which the Government has made available is the Public Spaces Protection Order. This can be used to tackle a range of issues, including drinking in public spaces and being in possession of so called 'legal highs'.

We've seen a rise in the number of victims attacked by acid so we'll investigate the feasibility of a new order to outlaw possession of acid in public places if legislation is not forthcoming.

In keeping with our pledge to work with the voluntary sector we'll support the street pastor programme in Coventry and investigate the feasibility of expanding it.

STRENGTHENING OUR DEMOCRACY

WE WILL STRENGTHEN OUR DEMOCRACY BY:

- Restoring ward forums where residents want them.
- Consulting residents on a move to all-out elections every four years instead of electing a third of the council every other year.
- Exploring the feasibility of setting up a citizenship course for local students.

This year's local elections coincide with 100 years of votes for women. In modern Britain it may seem strange that so many people were denied the vote so recently.

That's why we must never forget the sacrifices that were made by so many to bring about a fairer society. However, today it's common for local election turnout to be poor and often as many as seven out of ten voters abstain.

Research tells us that this, in part, is due to a breakdown in trust of politicians and a lack of faith in their ability to change anything.

Our city's councillors are democratically elected representatives of the people, although sometimes you wouldn't think it. Since their election in 2010 Labour has systematically dismantled the structures of accountability in place under the previous council.

They've abolished ward forums, where residents could hold them to account, restricted residents' rights to speak at planning hearings and made decisions in secret - like the purchase of Coombe Abbey Hotel.

For the sake of our democracy it's vital that we restore faith in politics and that starts with accountability and engagement.

A Conservative Council will support the principles of devolution and will involve residents in decision making at every opportunity.

We'll restore ward forums where residents want them. We'll go a stage further by considering new parish councils where there is a demand from the public.

We will consult residents on a move to all-out elections every four years instead of electing a third of the Council every other year. This costly and complicated process is costing the taxpayer a small fortune and is difficult to explain, let alone justify.

This will save the taxpayer £0.5 million over a five-year period and make local elections genuinely count as residents will have the chance to elect a new administration at every election.

At all times we will ensure the Council is run in an open and accountable way. Where possible, we will make council processes more accessible by expanding the use of web streaming of Council meetings on the internet.

The guardians of our democracy are young people. We cannot allow the next generation to become marginalised and disaffected. So we will continue to support Local Democracy Week encouraging our young people to become fully engaged in our political system.

We will also engage with the UK Youth Parliament and explore the feasibility of setting up a citizenship course for local students.

THE CHOICE AT THIS ELECTION



A Conservative administration will end wasteful spending and put resources where they can make the biggest difference. During our ambitious five-year plan we'll plough an extra £3 million into services and tackle Labour's 'jobs for the boys' culture.

CONSERVATIVES	LABOUR
Conservatives will end wasteful spending and direct an additional £3 million towards frontline service delivery over the next five years.	Labour has given around £8 million to their paymasters in the trades unions' since they took office in 2010 while cutting frontline services.
Conservatives will spend an extra £750,000 on road safety initiatives around over the next five years.	Labour has already blocked Conservative plans to increase spending on road safety schemes while in control.
Conservatives will reduce the councillors allowances bill by shrinking the size of the Cabinet and axing do-nothing deputy cabinet members altogether.	Labour ignored the findings of an independent pay review. They reduced recommended allowances for some Conservative members and increased it for other Labour members.
Conservatives will defend our green spaces and prioritise development on brownfield sites	Labour has enthusiastically approved development on huge areas of greenbelt in Coventry.
Conservatives will clean up Coventry with an extra £1.3million to tackle fly-tipping and clean up our streets.	Labour has presided over a 44% rise in fly-tipping. They voted against Conservative proposals to increase funding to combat this growing problem in Coventry.
Conservatives will use resources carefully. We'll take measures to balance the books and reduce debt and interest payments.	Council debt exceeds £279 million but Labour still bought Coombe Abbey Hotel for £9 million. The Council pays £13 million in interest annually.
Conservatives will introduce an ethical investment policy to ensure public funds don't end up in an offshore account.	Labour councillors refused to implement an ethical investment policy. The Council admitted taxpayers money could 'indirectly' end up in offshore accounts.
Conservatives will reduce council tax for foster carers by 50% making it easier to foster children.	Labour voted against these plans.
Conservatives will bring back ward forums and restore faith in politics by making the Council open and accessible.	Labour has abolished ward forums, restricted residents rights to speak at planning hearings and even given the Leader the power to block petitions.