

SECURING OUR FUTURE A PLAN FOR COVENTRY

Our five year plan for Coventry
Vote Conservative on 2 May 2019



 **Vote Conservative**

#PlanforCoventry

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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 our 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 record levels of investment 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've set out our ambitious five-year plan for Coventry. We've explained how we will prioritise job creation and improve service delivery by the Council. We've explained how we will end wasteful spending and deliver a balanced budget.

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

CLLR GARY RIDLEY
CONSERVATIVE GROUP LEADER, COVENTRY CITY COUNCIL

MANAGING SOUND PUBLIC FINANCES

HOW WE'LL BALANCE THE BOOKS IN COVENTRY:

- We will produce a balanced budget and have already identified over £3 million in savings for Council services over the next five years.
- We'll reduce the amount of money paid out in councillors' allowances.
- We will review the use of 'gagging orders' for former employees which cost the Council nearly £500,000 over the last three years.

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.

For the last two years Labour hasn't produced a balanced budget; that has to change. Council debt currently exceed £246m and interest payments are costing taxpayers more than £11m every year.

Conservatives will produce a balanced budget and prioritise debt reduction over whacky schemes, like the purchase of Coombe Abbey Hotel.

We have already identified savings 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 this failing Labour administration has given trades unions £9 million of taxpayers funds since they were elected.

In these difficult times we'll also reduce the amount of money paid out in councillors pay by abolishing 'do nothing' deputy cabinet members. We will also reduce 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 deliver back room functions such as HR, payroll and procurement services more efficiently.

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 and improve accountability by introducing an annual report. This will show taxpayers how their money has been spent and will 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 so the Council can't hoard taxpayers money in questionable offshore accounts. We will also work with the West Midlands Pension Fund to ensure assets are invested ethically.

Finally, we will review the use of so called 'gagging orders' which prevent former employees from talking about their time at the Council. Their use is increasing and cost taxpayers nearly £500,000 over the last three years. This coincides with a significant rise in allegations of bullying.

REGENERATING OUR CITY

HOW WE'LL SHAPE COVENTRY'S FUTURE:

- We will set up a High Street Challenge fund worth £310,000 to support local businesses.
- We will support our city centre retailers by providing free late night parking.
- We will develop a truly mixed economy in the city-centre providing space to make Coventry the number one destination for start-up IT companies.

With support of around £800 million from the Government the Council has never before had so much money to invest in regeneration. However, the Council can't do everything on its own and must work in partnership.

Our top priority is the regeneration of the ailing city centre. In control of the Council, we attracted Severn Trent to the city centre and created a first-class public space outside Cathedral Lanes.

However after nine years of Labour rule, regeneration in city centre south and Friargate is stalling. This is partly due to changing circumstances in the retail market - and partly because Labour are ineffective.

Shopping behaviour is changing so we need to find new ways of packaging the city centre as a destination and not just a shopping centre. This means attracting more organisations like Severn Trent, improving the leisure and food offer while expanding our cultural possibilities.

To achieve this we'll stick with plans to re-open the River Sherbourne and improve the public realm. However, we'll review labour's overall approach with some immediate changes. For instance, we'll offer retailers turnover based rents and entice more shoppers by providing free late night parking.

We will also provide space to make Coventry the number one destination for start-up IT companies in the UK. Our aim is to build the next Silicon Valley, creating jobs and wealth.

However we must recognise the limitations of what we can do. It's not right to squander taxpayers money on unviable schemes such as the creation of a 'boutique hotel'. This was described by experts as 'unviable' without a reported £6m public subsidy.

Nonetheless, we will not be afraid to invest in viable schemes where there is a clear benefit to the city and taxpayers. So where necessary, we will act as the accountable body for borrowing and funding from Government.

Perhaps it's too easy to focus on the city centre and forget that some of our smaller high street destinations are struggling too. That's why we will introduce a new High Street Challenge fund worth £310,000 over five years. Businesses and community groups will be able to bid for match funding to improve their shopping district and increase footfall.

We will set up a task force to maximise the benefits from 'next generation' technology working with government and partners to attract new 'green collar job' opportunities. For example, those offered by autonomous vehicles, electric vehicle and battery manufacturing.

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

Finally, we will work with telecoms providers 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 review the Local Plan and carry out a full and detailed housing needs assessment to direct the kind of housing being built.
- We'll bring more of the 2,500 empty homes back into use using new powers if necessary and clamp down on student property conversions.
- We'll claim money from the Mayor of the West Midlands to tackle homelessness - left unclaimed by Labour.

Getting on the property ladder is a real challenge for most people. However, home ownership is about more than having a roof overhead, it offers people a stake in society.

That's why it's more important than ever to deliver more housing - but they must be the right homes in the right places.

Building huge five bedroom homes on the greenbelt will not solve the housing crisis or give young people the start they need. So we will carry out a full housing needs assessment which will tell us what kind of properties are required and where.

We remain unconvinced of the need to develop greenbelt land and believe that every inch of brownfield land should be built on first. We are deeply concerned that Labour are now planning even more houses than was agreed in the 'Local Plan'. This will increase density and put more strain on local infrastructure.

Conservatives believe that such a significant move invalidates the Local Plan and justifies activating the review clause contained within the Local Plan.

Once the greenbelt is gone, it's gone forever so we must first use what we already have more effectively. In some cases that means development on brownfield sites first but it also means bringing empty homes back into use.

The latest figures show that there are currently over 2,500 empty homes in the city.

This equates to 1% of the city's entire housing stock. This isn't acceptable and we'll make every effort to bring them back into use. This includes the use of Empty Dwelling Management Orders which allows the Council to take control of a property if the owner can't be traced.

It's also important that we prevent yet more family homes being turned into student accommodation and Houses in Multiple Occupation (HIMOs).

So we will support the construction of more purpose built student accommodation but this must be backed up by a change in planning regulations. This will make it harder to convert family homes into student accommodation.

We'll also undertake a comprehensive review to understand the main barriers to downsizing for older residents. Where they wish to do so it can be a better option for many people in older age while freeing up larger homes for younger families.

Finally, we supported the creation of specialised accommodation for homeless families in Coventry. However, there's more the Council could do. Labour hasn't claimed most of a £2 million fund allocated to the city by the Mayor of the West Midlands.

That's not right so we'll ensure Coventry gets its fair share of funding. Unlike Labour, we'll work with Andy Street to make a success of the Housing First scheme.

CELEBRATING CULTURE IN OUR DIVERSE CITY

WE'LL EMBRACE OUR CULTURE BY:

- Keeping the Godiva Festival free for everyone to attend and opposing Labour's visitor tax.
- Supporting the City of Culture 2021 delivery team to ensure Coventry's year in the spotlight is a real success.
- Building a memorial to the victims, and survivors, of the Coventry Blitz as part of our regeneration plans.

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. We will oppose Labour's plans for a visitor tax and ensure that the Godiva Festival, remains one of the country's top free music festivals.

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

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!

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 will 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 it 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 £500,000 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.
- Planting a 'Coventry Forest' with a tree to represent every citizen.

A Conservative administration will work hard to protect and enhance our environment today and for future generations. Our immediate priority is to improve the city's air quality with a sustainable, long-term plan.

We'll start by working with schools to involve children in the planting of a Coventry Forest. This will contain a tree for every citizen, will clean the air we breath and teach children about sustainability.

We'll also use our influence with neighbours to protect shared greenspace. Particularly the Meriden Gap which separates us from the Birmingham conurbation. That's why 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. However, under Labour we've seen a huge rise in fly-tipping of 44%. So we'll invest an extra £500,000 over the next five years to tackle it along with dog fouling.

We'll also clean up the litter on our streets 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 collection 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.

Another scourge on the environment is plastic. We've all seen the horrific tales about where much of it ends up. In many cases it will remain in the sea for thousands of years - it may even enter the food chain. So we will support the introduction of a Government plastic bottle recycling scheme and seek to become a pilot area for any roll-out.

We're committed to tackling climate change and will review the efficacy of the Council's climate change strategy - a strategy implemented by a Conservative Council in 2007. We'll underline this commitment by creating a Cabinet Member for Environment, Climate Change and Sustainability issues.

Finally, the Council still invests in fossil fuels through the West Midlands Local Government Pension Scheme. Although we recognise the fund needs to maximise returns there is a balance to be struck.

These resources could be used to support the development of sustainable, and renewable, energy sources. That's why we'll seek to build a cross-party consensus on how best to reduce, and eventually, divest public resources from fossil fuel energy producers over the long-term.

GETTING COVENTRY MOVING

WE'LL IMPROVE OUR TRANSPORT NETWORK BY:

- Spending an additional £750,000 on road safety schemes and an extra £500,000 on pot hole repair with the creation of a highways sponsorship programme to boost funds.
- Prioritising cycling with the creation of a new north-south cycle superhighway.
- Pursuing the opening of two new rail stations in Coventry.

Our country moves on rails, yet in Coventry we are not realising our full potential. So we propose a radical overhaul to the network with an expansion of rail services available to passengers.

To do this we will explore the viability of re-opening Coundon Station and opening another new station in the east. If these options are feasible we will develop a business case working with partners to deliver them.

We will lobby the Government for improved links with Nuneaton and the East Midlands. We will also continue to fight for the retention of three express services to London every hour.

As part of an integrated approach to public transport we will champion improvements to bus services. We will protect Pool Meadow Bus Station from closure by Labour and we will only support the removal of bus lanes where there is a clear overall benefit on a case by case basis.

We will introduce a new transport user's forum bringing together operators, the Council and the combined Authority. This will help to resolve issues with timetables and service performance.

Active travel can help us to lead healthier lives and clean up our environment so cycling and walking will be important for the next Conservative administration. Our first priority will be the creation of a north to south cycle superhighway as a trailblazer for future plans.

We will keep our highways moving by protecting the integrity of the Ring Road. We will also resist a knee-jerk reaction to close Coundon Road.

To improve the quality of the network we will invest an extra £500,000 in pot hole repairs over the next five years. We'll also look at a highways sponsorship programme to raise extra cash for their maintenance. This has been successful on the city's roundabouts so why not extend the scheme?

We will make our network safer by spending an additional £750,000 on road safety schemes over the next five years. In addition, we will purchase another 'ANPR car' to improve enforceability on yellow lines and outside schools.

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.

Finally, it was wrong that hundreds, if not thousands, of coventrians were wrongly fined due to inadequate signage. The Council should admit its mistakes around bus lane enforcement and the Restricted Parking Zone. It should work with residents when they report an issue, not against them.

That's why we will set up a citizen's panel to identify issues such as incorrect signage so we can use the information provided by residents constructively.

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.

Despite nine years of Labour rule Children's Services still requires improvement according to 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.

Finally, we will ensure the Council maximises the opportunities for young people to advance their career.

We'll do this 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:

- Establishing a Community Library Development Fund worth £300,000 over five years.
- Encouraging and supporting community groups to take ownership of land or buildings by giving advice, funding to test ideas and sharing knowledge.
- Making it easier for residents to organise events like the Earlsdon Festival or the Bannerbrook Park summer fete.

What makes Coventry special is its people and 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.

Currently, 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 Earlsdon Festival, Finham Festival or the Bannerbrook Park summer fete.

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

Many of Coventry's libraries have only remained open because of this approach and are now dependent on volunteers. To consolidate this partnership we will set up a Community Library Development Fund, worth £300,000, over the next five years. This will lend a helping hand to some of our greatest community assets so they're still there for future generations.

Another threat faced by our 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 supporting 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. Where appropriate, a Conservative led Council will use these powers to tackle a range of anti-social behaviour problems across the city.

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.
- Setting up a citizenship course for local students.

Last year saw the 100th anniversary 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 politicians have systematically dismantled the structures of accountability in place under the previous Conservative Administration.

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. Every year they allocate £100,000 to a secretive account known as the 'policy contingency fund'. This money is spent at the discretion of the leadership team completely avoiding scrutiny.

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

We support the principle of devolution and will involve residents in decision making at

every opportunity. We'll restore ward forums where residents want them. We will 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 could 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 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 produce a balanced budget and end wasteful spending - like sending Labour councillors to a 'peace conference' in Russia. We will direct an additional £3.3 million towards frontline service delivery over the next five years.	For the last two years Labour hasn't produced a balanced budget. Crippling interest payments on the Council's debts exceed £11m every year.
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 wage bill for councillors. We'll achieve this 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 review the Local Plan and defend our green spaces from inappropriate development.	Labour enthusiastically approved development on huge areas of greenbelt in Coventry. They recently announced thousands more houses on the greenbelt on top of previous plans.
Conservatives will clean up Coventry with an extra £500,000 to tackle fly-tipping	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 instigate an independent QC-led investigation into allegations of institutionalised bullying. We will implement a moratorium on the use of gagging orders.	Over the last three years the Council spent nearly £500,000 on 'gagging orders'. In the same period complaints of bullying have rocketed and a recent survey found that 85% of Council staff felt they'd been bullied.
Conservatives will invest an extra £500,000 in pot hole repair over the next five years. We'll also explore the feasibility of a highways sponsorship programme to raise additional funds.	A recent study by the RAC found that the Council were the slowest in the country at filling in pot holes.
We will retain free admission to the Godiva Festival and clamp down on massive cost overruns.	Labour racked up a massive £460,000 overspend on the Godiva Festival last year and plan to introduce a visitor tax so guests make up the shortfall.
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.