

A RECORD OF ACTION A PROMISE OF MORE

The Conservative Manifesto for the
Reading Borough Council elections
on 22 May 2014





CONTENTS

A PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM THE CONSERVATIVE GROUP LEADER	4
FINANCE AND PROPERTY	5
DEMOCRATIC AND CONSTITUTIONAL	5
TRANSPORT AND STRATEGIC PLANNING	6
HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT	6
CULTURE AND SPORT	7
EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES	7
ADULT COMMUNITY CARE AND HEALTH	8
VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR	8
THE CHOICE AT THIS ELECTION	9
CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATES	10

For more information about the policies contained in this manifesto, please contact us:

Reading East Conservatives, 12A South View Park, Marsack Street, Reading RG4 5AF
0118 967 5797 office@readingeastconservatives.com

Reading West Conservatives, 16C Upton Road, Tilehurst, Reading RG30 4BJ
0118 945 4881 office@readingwestconservatives.com

A PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM THE CONSERVATIVE GROUP LEADER



Cllr Jeanette Skeats

Dear Resident,

On 22 May you have an opportunity to decide who will run Reading for the next year. At the moment Labour is in power with a small overall majority, a majority they have used to increase Council Tax, increase car park charges, close Arthur Clark Care Home, increase spending on the Council's own PR machine, and insult campaigners who were fighting to stop Christchurch Meadows being partly concreted over.

It doesn't have to be this way. When the Conservatives ran Reading in coalition with the Liberal Democrats we froze Council Tax, froze most car park charges, reformed the process of giving grants to the voluntary sector and cut senior Councillors' allowances by 10%.

We won the funding to build a new Reading Station, a new northern interchange on Vastern Road, and laid the ground for a new pedestrian/cycle bridge over the Thames and a Reading-wide cycle hire scheme.

If you give us your support this May I pledge that we will freeze the level of Council Tax next year and aim to reduce it, as so many Conservative Councils elsewhere have done. We will achieve this by accepting the Government's Council Tax freeze grant, cutting back support to Labour's Trade Union allies, cutting the amount spent on Council PR, and scrutinising every last penny spent. Conservatives never forget that it is YOUR money we are spending and we believe that you know best how to spend your own hard-earned money.

This manifesto sets out our thoughts and plans for a better Reading. I commend it to you.

Jeanette Skeats

CLLR JEANETTE SKEATS
CONSERVATIVE GROUP LEADER, READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

OUR PLEDGES TO YOU

FINANCE AND PROPERTY

- If elected to run Reading Borough Council we will freeze and aim to reduce Council Tax by ensuring that the Council is run more efficiently.
- Labour has sought to balance the books by increasing fees and charges. If elected we will review all fees and charges and freeze as many as possible.
- We remain convinced that there are further efficiency savings to be made while protecting essential services.

When Conservatives led a Coalition in Reading in 2010-11 we made it a priority to help hard-pressed residents by freezing the Council Tax. This was fully supported by the Government at Westminster and this year the Government again offered Reading a grant of £700,000 to freeze the level of Council Tax.

Labour chose instead to refuse the grant and increase our Council Tax by 1.9% to raise an extra £1.2m. Therefore, not only will local people have to pay more Council Tax to the Labour-run Council but £700,000 was lost!

Labour also continues to fund its friends in the Trade Unions through hidden subsidies from local tax-payers. Trades Unions receive rent free office space in the Civic Offices and paid time off from their normal employment in order to carry out Union duties. Trade Unions continue to be the major donors to the Labour Party.

DEMOCRATIC AND CONSTITUTIONAL

- We will change to all-out elections once every four 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 are closely contested by 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 political parties to work harder to gain support across the Borough.
- We will continue to support the case for City Status for Reading at no cost to the Council Tax Payers.

Reading under the Labour Party has a history of ignoring local opinion. One leading Labour Councillor was heard to say in the Council that when in control “you can do what you want”. Another branded a resident-led campaign against building on part of Christchurch Meadows “an absurd campaign”!

Conservatives believe that the people of Reading should be in control and therefore we propose to revitalise our politics.

Switching to all-out elections in Reading every four years would give voters the chance to change the control of the Borough Council. It would also ensure that political parties spent more effort across all wards rather than focussing on the marginal seats and ignoring those deemed to be “safe”.

OUR PLEDGES TO YOU

TRANSPORT AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

- We will continue to campaign for improved train services to London and the west, and for better capacity on existing services.
- We will work with neighbouring authorities for a third Thames bridge and a link road between Reading Station and the A329M.
- 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 with few trees.
- We will bid to the Government to support the introduction of “Ultra-fast” broadband provision in Reading.
- We will retain Council ownership of Reading Buses.

In 2008 Reading Conservatives published a transport manifesto which called for a major cycle hire scheme, a new pedestrian/cycle bridge over the Thames, and improved cycling infrastructure. All of these are in the process of being delivered thanks to a year of Conservative control of the Council and central Government funds being granted to Reading Borough.

We also removed the crazy build out on London Road and several unnecessary sets of traffic lights across the town to get traffic flowing better. Sadly Labour returned to control of Reading and stopped the traffic light review process and the proposed ban on verge parking. If we return to control of the Borough we will restart these popular policies.

HOUSING 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 good quality 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 and investigate a return to weekly collections of household waste with support from central Government funding.

Reading has a poor record on recycling compared to its neighbouring authorities. Last year Reading’s performance worsened slightly to just 36% recycled. In Berkshire only Labour controlled Slough has a worse recycling record while Conservative West Berkshire tops the table with 50% recycled. Conservative South Oxfordshire recycles a huge 65% of household waste.

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.

OUR PLEDGES TO YOU

CULTURE AND SPORT

- We will further promote Reading's history, cultural heritage and civic pride for the wellbeing of Reading residents and to encourage tourism, businesses and jobs to come to the town.
- We will continue to develop our idea of an Abbey Quarter in the heart of our town with a new privately funded Arts Centre.
- We will invest in Reading's many leisure facilities especially our neglected swimming pools which have become squalid and dilapidated.
- We will continue to support the Cultural Partnership as a way of opening up Reading's cultural offering to more people and attracting external investment.
- We will work with residents to protect our parks and open spaces from Labour's plans for development.

Under Labour control our heritage has been neglected. The historic Reading Abbey ruins are crumbling and dangerous and as a result have been closed to the public. Bids to the Heritage Lottery Fund for money to stabilise the ruins have been unsuccessful to date due to the Council's lack of a heritage strategy and poor record of stewardship of those assets in its control.

Conservatives have a vision of an "Abbey Quarter" with a privately funded Arts Centre for the benefit of all of the people of Reading.

EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

- 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 supporting more places in our Grammar Schools and via Free Schools and Academies.
- We will improve the provision of Special Educational Needs support in our schools.

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.

Conservative Councillors have supported Rob Wilson MP in delivering a world standard University Technical College in east Reading, a new Maiden Erlegh School and a £6m investment in The Bulmershe School. Both Alok Sharma MP and Rob Wilson MP have supported parents in setting up new Free Schools, schools that Labour would prefer to close down.

OUR PLEDGES TO YOU

ADULT COMMUNITY CARE AND HEALTH

- We will work to introduce a timetable of activities for the elderly and disabled to help prevent isolation.
- We will continue to fight for local NHS health facilities to be maintained and enhanced across Reading with better joined up services across health and social care.
- We will work with local traders and supermarkets to bring supplies directly to individuals and groups in need.

Reading Borough Council has a major role in ensuring that our elderly and disabled residents are properly looked after. We will expand this to ensure that their needs are considered across every department at the Council.

We owe it to our elderly folk to ensure that they get the best care possible from our Council and NHS Services.

VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

- 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.

Reading has a rich and diverse community in which equality and cohesion are 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 that organisations in Reading applied for grant funding. Sadly Labour has reversed some of our reforms ensuring that their favoured client groups receive grants from our Council Tax revenues.

THE CHOICE AT THIS ELECTION



In Reading only the Conservatives or Labour can form an administration. No other party has the support base or number of Councillors to win control of the Council. This election is a clear choice between Conservative and Labour candidates.

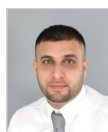
CONSERVATIVES	LABOUR
When we ran the Council we froze Council Tax and our aim would be to reduce it. We would accept the Government's Council Tax freeze grant.	For the last two years Labour has increased Council Tax by the maximum it can get away with without having to hold a local referendum.
We would protect the facilities for our elderly residents and listen to local people if any changes are necessary.	Labour ignored a popular local campaign and closed the Arthur Clark Care Home and Albert Road Day Centre.
We will protect our parks and open spaces and work with residents to keep them as places to enjoy with all the family.	Labour planned to concrete over part of Christchurch Meadows and branded the residents' campaign as "absurd"!
We support parents who want to open up new Free Schools to serve local needs. We want to see ALL local schools providing excellent education.	Labour locally is ideologically opposed to Free Schools and Academies which are not under the control of the local Council.
Conservative Councillors are working with Reading's MPs to make the case for a third Thames bridge and win the funding needed.	Labour has failed to deliver a new bridge despite many years in control of Reading Borough Council.
We created the concept of an "Abbey Quarter" in the town centre and are working to provide a new privately funded Arts Centre for the town.	Labour has neglected our heritage. The Abbey ruins are closed to the public and the historic Keep on Oxford Road is crumbling.
When in control of the Council we invested in the Central Pool and are pressing for much needed improvement to our pools and leisure centres.	Reading's swimming pools and leisure centres are in an appalling state after years of Labour neglect.
Conservatives are enthusiastic about improving Reading's recycling rate to that of neighbouring Conservative controlled authorities.	Under Labour Reading has a poor recycling record, being the second worst in Berkshire and way behind Conservative led South Oxfordshire Council.
Conservatives removed the unnecessary "build-out" on London Road and several sets of traffic lights across Reading.	Labour is anti-motorist and prefers to create new obstacles to free-flowing traffic. They have introduced ever more traffic lights.

YOUR CONSERVATIVE COUNCIL CANDIDATES



LAURENCE TAYLOR
ABBAY WARD

0118 967 5797
office@readingeastconservatives.com



IMRAAN ISHTIAQ
BATTLE WARD

0118 945 4881
office@readingwestconservatives.com



GEOFF POLAND
CAVERSHAM WARD

0118 967 5797
office@readingeastconservatives.com



PAUL CARNELL
CHURCH WARD

0118 967 5797
office@readingeastconservatives.com



EMMA WARMAN
KATESGROVE WARD

0118 967 5797
office@readingeastconservatives.com



TOM STEELE
KENTWOOD WARD

0118 945 4881
office@readingwestconservatives.com



KATIE BLACK
MINSTER WARD

0118 945 4881
office@readingwestconservatives.com



CLARE VOSE
NORCOT WARD

0118 945 4881
office@readingwestconservatives.com



MOHAMMAD BASHARAT
PARK WARD

0118 967 5797
office@readingeastconservatives.com



SIMON ROBINSON
PEPPARD WARD

0118 967 5797
office@readingeastconservatives.com



HELEN HOPPER
REDLANDS WARD

0118 967 5797
office@readingeastconservatives.com



ELLIS WIGGINS
SOUTHCOTE WARD

0118 945 4881
office@readingwestconservatives.com



DAVID STEVENS
THAMES WARD

0118 967 5797
office@readingeastconservatives.com



ROBERT VICKERS
TILEHURST WARD

0118 945 4881
office@readingwestconservatives.com



NICK BROWN
WHITLEY WARD

0118 945 4881
office@readingwestconservatives.com



SHANAZ AKHTAR
PARK WARD BY ELECTION

0118 967 5797
office@readingeastconservatives.com