

Critique of the Tory Manifesto

Put Northampton Back on Track

The last time the Tories ran Northampton they took the Council from bad to being the very worst. Under Lib Dems the improvement is there for all to see.

Their manifesto:-

- Is misleading the public – making promises that they know cannot be delivered or, particularly, making claims about the current Lib Dem administration that are blatantly dishonest. Throughout the text the little pig points these up.
- Full of empty rhetoric – saying nothing and making no commitment. The empty box shows these.
- Promising to do what the Lib Dems have already done or have put in train. The Lib Dem bird shows these.



Five Pledges

1. **Put Northampton Back on Track.** Their record speaks for itself. Last time it was a train wreck and the government had to step in until the Lib Dems could sort the problems out. Tories will take us backwards again.
2. **Reduce waste to protect public services.** The last Tory administration wasted millions in pay offs to two Chief Executives and a couple of dozen senior managers – leaving the government no option but to step in. Today NBC is well managed and costing 30% less to run. Tories talk, Lib Dems do.
3. **Invest in safer, cleaner neighbourhoods.** An empty promise. How, what, when? What is the vision?
4. **Demand better homes for the future.** Honesty of housing needs would be welcome. There has been no evidence of it from Northampton Tories. Tory plans will mean our children and grandchildren will struggle to find a decent home of their own in Northampton.
5. **Empower communities with pride in Northampton.** A fine aspiration but an empty promise. How, what, when? What is the vision?



Northampton – a Vibrant Town

Firstly, look at the improvements of the last 4 years.





- Market Square revitalised with more traders and greater footfall.
- Market Square lighting, fountain, events.
- Sunday Arts & Antiques markets.
- Big screen events.
- Festivals.
- Legal & General plans for Grosvenor published (with a planning application this year and physical work starting in 2014).



- New family restaurants opened – Nandos, Prezzo and others.
- Café culture in Fish Street.
- Lions and Britain in Bloom flower displays.
- New private sector investment in our town – Travelodge, Tesco, Costa Coffee, House of Frazer etc.
- Marina.
- Plans for the waterside and rail station.
- Investment in our parks.
- Connect2 cycle and footpath to Upton.
- Marefair and Gold Street improved with partners.
- £30 million investment programme in our council homes with £49 million following.

Pretty good given that the draw marked 'Plans' was empty when we took control in 2007.

The Tory Vision

1. **Open up Abington Street.** It's a county council issue. Their colleagues could have done it – but haven't. What are the benefits? You could drive down to Wellington Street and then be looped back to where you started from. 
2. **Borough Wide Planning.** By which they mean that they will allow pretty much any development anywhere – particularly if one of our sports clubs can benefit – regardless of the impact on local neighbourhoods or the town as a whole. A Laisé Faire, let the market decide approach that nearly destroyed Northampton in the 70's and 80's and has left us with a weak town centre and one of the largest concentrations of out of centre retail parks in the country.. 
3. **Abandon 'Town Centre First'.** How? It is enshrined in National Planning Policy. The actions of both Sainsbury and Tesco on recent applications show that those companies know the legal position and the strength of our local evidence base. The Tories will risk the future of our town to let Tescos build wherever they want. 
4. **Ghost Town.** Northampton has weathered the recession reasonably well. The number of empty units in the Grosvenor Centre is very low and in the town as a whole better than in many equivalent centres. 

The town centre Business Improvement District initiative (strongly supported by Lib Dems after years of talk by previous administrations) will further improve the prospects of our town centre.

Private sector investment in the town centre.

- Refurbishment of Market Walk (formerly Peacock Place).
- Travelodge in Gold Street
- Tesco in Abington Street
- £1 million refurbishment of House of Frazer in the Grosvenor Centre.
- Nandos, Prezzo's and several other eateries.
- A thriving café culture on Fish Street.

Don't let the Tories talk our town down.

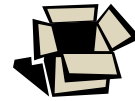
5. **Kingsthorpe Corridor.** The County Tories have slashed plans to improve this vital route – to pay for nicer roads in rural parts of the county. An empty promise from the Tories.



6. **Toilets.** Name the ones we have closed! The only toilets closed by the Lib Dems have been those on the Racecourse because the police asked that we did to prevent anti-social behaviour. There are now many more toilets available to the public because of our innovative Community Toilets Scheme.



7. **Town Centre Czar.** Town centre businesses have set up a Business Improvement District and are working, with the Borough Council, to improve our town centre. A Council appointed Czar would simply get in the way of their efforts.



8. **Governance of the Market Square.** Such a committee as they propose already exists.



Safer and Stronger Communities

This section is full of worthy aspirations and little action. Where they propose action we have already been doing it (better).



Community Payback has been used extensively by NBC over the last 3 years. They are simply promising what we are already doing and trying to sound tough by doing so.

Reintroducing more Neighbourhood wardens is populist but they would simply duplicate PCSOs (with fewer powers) and would not be effective. Wardens are popular – but they need to be effective to provide value for money.



Community Centres. Claims that we have damaged relationships are false. We want to release the dynamism of local groups. Tories want to return to a better 1960's nanny state.

A New Approach to the Council

Mostly empty rhetoric – promising what we have achieved.



They have an almighty cheek claiming they would cut waste. Why didn't they when last in control. We have slashed some 30% off of the General Fund budget with no significant reduction in services, massive investments and improved performance all round. Who would you trust?



Those who failed last time or those who have quietly done it and have the tee shirt?

Councillor Allowances. Populist. The Lib Dems (with the private support but public politicking of the Tories) sorted out the chaotic system that had been in place and introduced a fair and proportionate set of allowances that reflect the amount of work done by councillors but recognise the significant amount of public service involved. Allowances do rise annually, linked to the national rise negotiated for Council officers. In the current economic climate rises are zero or negligible.



Freezing allowances will save pennies and simply return the system to chaos over time.

The Tory claim that we put allowances up by up to 63% is technically true – we now pay the Deputy Leader a sensible allowance – something never done before – so the figure looks large.



Shared Services. Our record is fantastic – Environmental Services shared with Daventry, Planning Policy shared with Daventry, South



Northants and (until they pulled out) NCC, SEMLEP – a cooperation across the South East Midlands for economic regeneration, the Northamptonshire Waste Partnership, our Fish Street initiative bringing Police, Council and Voluntary Sector together to fight Anti Social Behaviour and many more. Their record was somewhat less impressive!

Senior Management. We have to keep this under constant review – particularly as the shape of the Council changes. For example, outsourcing Environmental Services means we need less operational managers in that division – but we need more and better Contract Management.



Last time the Tories wasted millions in pay offs to two Chief Executives and a couple of dozen senior managers – leaving the government no option but to step in. When we took over there was no Chief Executive in post (we had a government appointed interim) and management was so weak that the organisation could not run itself effectively.

The Tories are trying to sound tough and be populist here.

Consultants. Consultants provide a vital service. We buy in particular expertise when we need it rather than use less well qualified staff who we have on the books. (The equivalent of bringing in a professional plumber or builder at home rather than do-it-yourself).



The Tories are trying to sound tough and be populist here.

However, look at their record. They tried to sell off Council homes in 2005. The latest Tory plan – to sell off our 12,000 council homes – shows their incompetence.

They wasted many hundreds of thousands of pounds paying consultants for shoddy work. They failed to manage their consultants properly.

Their county colleagues spend squillions on consultants – and then ignore their advice.

Consultants can provide great value for money – but only if you employ real experts, ask the right questions and manage them properly.

Parish Councils. They have simply copied our 2007 Manifesto.



Spending Council Tax Effectively

“Northampton Conservatives believe that local authorities have a moral responsibility to spend tax-payers, money wisely”.

- 1. So why did they blow millions of pounds last time they were in power and yet fail to tackle the gross inefficiencies and waste that the Liberal democrats have spent the last 4 years putting right?***
- 2. And why are their County Colleagues demonstrating financial incompetence in spades with illegal contracts (Carillion), failed bid to flog off assets (school sites) and £73 million of cuts – despite being warned 5 years ago that the County Council was not financially viable in its current form (by highly paid consultants!!)***

The Liberal Democrats have cut the General Fund budget by nearly 30% while providing better services. In one breath the Tories accuse us of ‘cutting’ £20 million and in another promising to ‘make savings’. They cannot have **our** cake and eat it.

Most of this section is simply claiming credit for what the government are doing and promising to do what we have already done (and they failed to do).

Attractive Environment



“We will work towards securing “Green Flag” status for more of our parks”. Lib Dems have delivered already!



Park Rangers. Clearly in their manifest to keep Tony Ansell quiet. The days of the ‘Parkie’ are long, long gone and there are better ways of providing the service today. The Tories simply want to go back to a better 1950’s. An empty promise.

Give Communities a role in the management of our parks. Lib Dems have delivered already!



A Conservative administration will work with neighbouring authorities to find better ways of reducing waste and encouraging residents to recycle more. A naked attempt to steel our clothes (again). **Done it. Got the tee shirt!!**



Conservatives will “Reinstate fortnightly brown bin collections and introduce weekly food waste collections”. Wonderful. We just did it as part of the Environmental Services contract. It will start in June. As usual the Tories are a day late and a dollar short!!



Meeting the Town’s Housing Needs

They won’t but they will try to mislead the public.

Indeed, they question the numbers of houses and jobs needed as set out in the Joint Core Strategy – numbers developed with Tory Controlled Daventry, South Northants and Northamptonshire County Councils – and which are (probably) too low to meet the real needs of the town as we move out of recession.



The Tories are making no real promises here – but they are actively appealing to the Nimby tendency by questioning the detailed work done to date.

Council Housing. They are proposing whole scale stock transfer. This would have been the right answer 5 years ago but not at the bottom of the housing market and at a time when government are reviewing social housing policy. A recent letter to the press summed up the situation:

The latest Tory plan – to sell off our 12,000 council homes – shows their incompetence.

They tried and failed to do this in 2005.

The Conservatives wasted many hundreds of thousands of pounds paying consultants for shoddy work. They failed to gain the trust of tenants; failed to manage their consultants and failed to convince anyone that selling off council homes was in the best interests of either the Council or tenants.

However, this abject failure is not the main reason to oppose the latest plan from yesterday’s men.

The coalition government are actively looking at reforming the system of council and social housing. The last Labour government allowed a huge debt mountain to build up – charging every council tenant in Northampton over £1,000 per year in “negative subsidy” to service this debt. Tenants receive nothing in return. It is simply a stealth tax.

The new government will soon come forward with plans to reform council and social housing. Until we know what those plans are it is simply wrong to proceed with a doctrinaire sell off – at the bottom of the housing market – and again spend vast sums on yet more consultants to repeat the work done so badly before.

Better by far is to continue as the Lib Dem administration has been doing over the last 4 years – drastically improving maintenance, investing £30 million of our own money in improving our existing housing stock, securing a further £49 million from government to

bring the rest up to the Decent Homes Standard and lobbying government for a fundamental reform of the system so the £1,000+ per year “stealth tax” can be invested locally to maintain existing homes in the future and to build desperately needed new council homes for Northampton people.

Developments and Improvements

“The failure of the Liberal Democrats to consult properly with local residents as part of the failed Eastfield PFI bid caused unnecessary worry amongst tenants and homeowners” – because, of course, the Tory MP and County Councillor were spreading scare stories,



“Local residents will be properly consulted on any changes that may affect their homes or communities”. Actually, the PFI consultation was a model of good practice though made difficult by the activities of local Tories and the confidentiality requirements set by the process.

The Tories are sounding good here but it's empty, meaningless rhetoric.

Sheltered Housing. No promise of more Wardens this time.



Houses in Multiple Occupancy. More empty rhetoric. Lib Dems have taken the necessary action to sort the problem out.



Homelessness. Under the Lib Dems Northampton has become an exemplar of good practice on homelessness prevention. The Tories did nothing in the past are seeking to sound kind now.



Travellers. Hardly a problem any more after 4 years of firm Lib Dem action.

This whole section is a collection of issues that have been live at some point where the Tories are adding lines to their manifesto to pacify one group or another.

Parking – the Key to the Town's Future

If parking charges – where we are broadly in line with similar sized towns – is the key to our future then we may as well give up now. It isn't – but it does show how car-centric the average Tory is.

Given that 30% of households do not have access to a car a car-centric solution is simply not an inclusive solution to any problem.

Giving charge free parking for 1 hour would cost the Council very significantly – possibly up to £1 million – which would mean increasing Council Tax or massively cutting services.

But – it is populist.

As usual with our local Tories, it is also financially irresponsible.

Remember the facts:-

- Tories put up car parking charges massively in their last crisis budget in 2007.
- Shopper's parking charges have remained frozen since.
- Tory NCC have raised on street parking charges by 25% in the same timeframe.
- Lib Dems have introduced 80p all day parking on Sundays. (80p rather than free because the meters need a payment to trigger them to open the gates).

- Lib Dems have introduced Pay on Foot in all multi-storey car parks (except the Grosvenor Centre where the short time before refurbishment made it uneconomic).
- Tory NCC run the parking wardens who are so quick with a ticket and are so unpopular.

Celebrating our heritage and culture

This section says very little but waves a flag at a number of interest groups.

The key line is probably:-

“Northampton Conservatives believe that, due to the Liberal Democrat’s “town centre first” planning policy, the wider Borough is losing out on investment which is in turn having a negative impact on sports and leisure.

“A Conservative administration will actively support development plans for retail and commercial opportunities that will provide our sports clubs with funding for the development of their teams and facilities.”



This is blatantly misleading.

1. National Planning Policy insists on a Town Centre First policy.
2. It is not possible to accept one planning application over another because a local sports club benefits. Each application must be judged on its merits.
3. Excessive retail development out of centre would destroy any prospect of Northampton Town Centre being improved.

In other words – the Tories want to destroy our town centre.

Building the Big Society

Empty words.



Note:-

1. NBC have increased support for the Voluntary & Community Sector.
2. Tory NCC have cut.
3. Under the Tories, NBC cut support for the VCS.

They promise a Councillor Empowerment Fund. It depends on how this is administered as to how effective it can be. Too many Tory County Councillors use their money on pet projects of limited social worth.