

GLOUCESTERSHIRE 2005

County Conservative Manifesto



Lower taxes

Cut council waste, debt and perks. Protect frontline services.

Support our schools

Stop closure of grammar schools and special schools.

Support older people

25% more elderly people supported in their own homes.

Repair roads

Double road repair budget.

More police

63 new PCs on the beat.

www.gloucestershireconservatives.co.uk



**A message from
COUNCILLOR BARRY DARE
Leader of Gloucestershire County
Conservative Group**



5 May 2005 marks not only the date of the County Council elections, it also marks 20 years of Labour and the Liberal control at Shire Hall. Even in the last four years since the last County elections both these parties have seriously let down Gloucestershire. Rocketing council tax, threatened schools and crumbling roads are all part of their legacy at Shire Hall. But on 5 May there will be no more excuses, no rigged consultations or fiddled figures – people in Gloucestershire will be able to speak in a voice that even Labour and the Liberals cannot ignore. We would like to let everyone know how things in the county would be better under the Conservatives, which is why we have produced this document – our most detailed manifesto ever.

We think the time is long overdue for change at Shire Hall, we know a lot of people across Gloucestershire think so too. This is our plan for change, the yardstick to measure us by and the promises we will keep. I wholeheartedly recommend it to all.

Barry Dare
Conservative Group Leader
Gloucestershire County Council

<i>Contents</i>	
Keeping Tax Down	3
Excellence in Education	4
Safer Streets, Safer Homes	5
Supporting the vulnerable	6
Transport that works	7
Protecting our environment	8



KEEPING TAX DOWN

Better value for your money

Since 1997 council tax in Gloucestershire has gone up by 94%, costing the average family an extra £430 every year. High council tax hurts everyone in our communities, from pensioners to young families. Some of this is the fault of the Labour Government, but local Labour and Liberal councillors are also to blame. Enough is enough. A Conservative council will take all sensible measures to keep tax down. **We will:**

- ◆ **Make low council tax one of the council's top corporate priorities every year.**
 - ◆ **Scrap money-wasting schemes** including the council newspaper and plugh conferences for councillors.
 - ◆ **Freeze recruitment.** We will freeze all new recruitment except in frontline services and only allow appointments where there is a real need.
 - ◆ **Cut back council debt.** It's not sensible to run the council on borrowed money. The county council owes £1250 for every family in Gloucestershire. We will set a maximum level of unfunded borrowing and work to get the debt down.
 - ◆ **Cut back red tape and paperwork and pointless meetings.** Bureaucracy wastes too much of council employees' time and your money. We'll use computers to cut the amount of paper the council produces, saving money and helping the environment.
 - ◆ **Work smarter.** We'll look at smart ways to save you money, such as switching to open-source software like Linux, which could save £1m over 4 years, and working together with other councils to provide back-office services.
 - ◆ **Support County businesses and County jobs.** Gloucestershire's economy is of vital importance. A Conservative administration will use all its influence and available resources to stimulate economic development in the County.
- Councillors should be held accountable for what they promise and work for you, not to feather their own nests. **We will:**
- ◆ **Never increase councillors' allowances above inflation.** If council tax goes up by more than 5% we won't increase allowances at all.
 - ◆ **End plans for council pensions for councillors.**
 - ◆ **Scrap free lunches for councillors.** Everybody else has to buy their own lunch - councillors should too.
 - ◆ **Fight to stop regional assemblies.** We believe that local decisions should be made locally, not by an unelected bureaucracy in Exeter.
 - ◆ **Listen to Gloucestershire.** Labour and the Liberals have consistently ignored what the public has to say. We will be different. We can't promise to do everything the public wants, but we will always take the views of Gloucestershire people into account.



EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

Stop school closures and plan for the future

Since 2001 Labour and the Liberals have closed two sixth forms and tried to close another, closed and attempted to close four special schools and threatened to close over half of Gloucester's secondary schools. Conservatives have fought side-by-side with parents to save many of the threatened schools. The Liberal Democrats suggested closing every sixth form in Gloucester. Now Labour and the Liberals have begun a campaign to 'review' every primary and secondary school in Gloucestershire, which is likely to lead to more school closures.

Conservatives are sick and tired of schools being undermined for no more than political reasons. We support a system that gives parents choices, where excellent comprehensives, grammar and special schools all play a part. Parents should be the people to choose the school that is best for their children, not council bureaucrats or politicians. Teachers and governors know best how to run their own schools and we will trust them to make decisions and will work to ensure that Heads and Governors have more money to spend in their classrooms and more choice in how to spend it. **We will:**

- ◆ **Stop closure of grammar schools and reduction of places.** We will protect Denmark Road, Sir Thomas Rich's, The Crypt, Ribston, Marling, Stroud High and Pates.
- ◆ **Stop the closure of Alderman Knight and Belmont schools and Battledown Children's Centre.** We will order an immediate review of special school provision elsewhere in the county and expand it if needs be.
- ◆ **Stop the closure of Barnwood Park school.** We will fight the closure of Barnwood Park. If the school has already been closed when we take control we will seek to reopen it.
- ◆ **Turnaround failing schools.** We will make sure that schools in difficulty get the support they need to improve. We will bring in external educational experts to lead this effort where necessary.
- ◆ **Help rural schools.** We will support smaller rural schools and work with them to promote their success.
- ◆ **Take action on truancy.** Since 1997 truancy in Gloucestershire has gone up by a massive 83% - three times the national average. We will increase the number of anti-truancy patrols and set up a confidential truancy reporting hotline.
- ◆ **Attract more high-quality governors.** We will investigate ways to get the highest quality of people to help run our schools, particularly people with a business background. Conservative national plans to cut the bureaucracy governors have to deal with will help this process. We will also improve governor training and support.
- ◆ **Cut LEA bureaucracy wherever possible.** We will look at innovative solutions to make the LEA more efficient and cost-effective.
- ◆ **Replace or remove run down temporary classrooms.** Teachers and pupils deserve to teach and be taught in good-quality buildings.
- ◆ **Promote sport in schools.** We will actively encourage competitive sports and oppose the damaging sell-off of school playing fields.
- ◆ **Will continue to support and develop the work of the Youth Service.** We will particularly work to ensure that it provides good support to *both* rural and urban communities.
- ◆ **Support the development of viable vocational options for Gloucestershire students.**
- ◆ **Support Library Services.** In particular we will support the development and provision of electronic services across the county and closer links with Education.



SAFER STREETS, SAFER HOMES

Protecting public safety

In Gloucestershire a crime is committed every 10 minutes. There is more than one domestic fire every day in the county. It is vital the council fully plays its part in protecting people in the county. The professionals who work in fire service, the police and other agencies responsible for public safety do a good but difficult job, often in dangerous and stressful circumstances. They deserve the resources to do their jobs and we will ensure that they get them.

We will:

- ◆ **Provide 63 new fully qualified police officers, who will focus on visible patrolling.** We will ask for ten to be allocated to each district in the county, subject to the agreement of the Chief Constable. Nothing fights crime and the fear of crime more than police officers on patrol.
- ◆ **Support a Conservative Government's pledge to increase police numbers in Gloucestershire by a further 372**, as part of their pledge to increase national police numbers by 40,000 officers.
- ◆ **Fight to keep Gloucestershire's fire engines controlled in Gloucestershire.** We will continue to fight Labour's plans for regional fire control. These plans will undermine the work of Gloucestershire's Fire Service and endanger people in the county.
- ◆ **Reduce fires in homes, schools and workplaces.** We will provide Gloucestershire's firefighters with the resources that they need to do their job.
- ◆ **Triple the Emergency Planning budget.** The county's emergency management service does a vital job, making sure we are prepared for the sort of major emergency we all hope never happens. We will triple their budget to make sure that Gloucestershire is ready, no matter what happens.
- ◆ **Support Trading Standards.** We will help to reduce unnecessary red tape and focus their priorities on helping the public.
- ◆ **Fight Youth Crime.** We will play our part in fighting youth crime, by supporting the work of the Youth Offending Team. We will ensure that any staff we send them are properly qualified and experienced and encourage them to focus on preventative anti-crime measures.



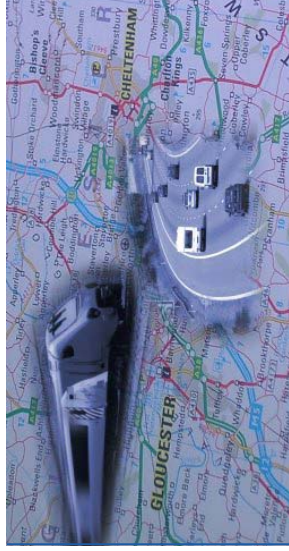
SUPPORTING THE VULNERABLE

Effective Social Services

Gloucestershire's Social Services support over 2,500 older people in care homes, help over 2,600 remain in their own homes and look after around 450 children and young people, most in foster care or children's homes. Conservatives believe we all have a responsibility towards more vulnerable people in our community. We will make sure that the County Council fully plays its part.

Conservatives believe everyone in Gloucestershire should be able to live life to the full. Social services must focus on helping people to lead as full and independent a life as possible, ideally in their own homes. **We will:**

- ◆ **Increase the proportion of older people supported at home by at least 25% by 2010.** Everyone benefits from being in familiar surroundings, near to family and friends. However, Gloucestershire has the second worst level of home care in the South West. Conservatives will change this.
- ◆ **Never move any residents over the age of 85 from a care home, without their permission, if there is a risk that the move could jeopardise their health or well being.** Consistent care, friendships with staff and other residents and security are vital to the quality of life for people in our care homes, particularly with older people in ill health.
- ◆ **Work to support those people with disabilities** who need our assistance to promote and sustain independence, to ensure they remain as integrated as possible with the wider community. We will promote disability access and encourage compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act.
- ◆ **Support our staff.** Front line social services staffs do a hard and demanding job, and do it extremely well. They don't always get the political support they deserve. Conservatives will give them that support they need to do their job to the best of their abilities. We will aim to reduce staff turnover to keep experienced staff at the council.
- ◆ **Support our Foster Carers and adopting parents,** both to help current carers and to encourage new carers and adopters to come forward. We will work with the media to promote the prominence of these vital and fulfilling roles.
- ◆ **Reunite families.** Where children have to be taken into care away from their families, we will do everything we can to get those families back together, as soon as safely possible. If conflict resolution and parenting skills help are needed we will provide it.
- ◆ **Promote fostering and adoption.** Where children cannot be reunited with their birth families we will ensure excellent foster care and promote safe adoption as a long-term option. We will work to reduce the time taken to reach a decision on adoptions.
- ◆ **Cut the red tape that the voluntary sector experience when applying for grants from Shire Hall.** We will ensure robust support across the council for the voluntary sector.



TRANSPORT THAT WORKS

Getting Gloucestershire moving

The County Council is responsible for over 3,000 miles of road in Gloucestershire, enough to stretch from Tewkesbury to New York. However, they are in a far from perfect state. There is a backlog of over £130,000,000 of repairs required to bring all the roads up to standard. That's nearly £41,000 for every mile of road in the county.

We believe it is time to stop the crusade against the motorist. Many people rely on their cars and they can be vital, particularly in rural areas. Conservatives will make life better for pedestrians, cyclists and bus users without making things worse for car drivers. **We will:**

- ◆ **Double road repairs.** We will increase spending on highway repairs by £4m every year for 5 years. By 2010 we will be spending £20m more on repairing and protecting our roads – effectively doubling the amount spent on road repairs.
- ◆ **Stop lorries from using inappropriate roads** as short cuts and encourage HGV 'green routes', which show sensible roads for lorries to take, through the county. We will seek strict enforcement of weight restrictions on Gloucestershire roads
- ◆ **Work to ensure that the Gloucester South-West bypass is completed quickly.** We will break the deadlock between the parties that has created a road to nowhere, already over budget.
- ◆ **Use speed cameras only to prevent accidents – never to raise money.** We will only allow cameras in areas of high risk- either accident black spots or where there is a particular danger – such as near schools. We will remove all others.
- ◆ **Promote sensible speed limits.** We will make twice as much money available to establish 20 mph zones outside schools and in residential areas. We will ensure that main county routes are raised to the highest safe speed limit – encouraging motorists to avoid vulnerable areas.
- ◆ **Triple the amount of money spent on investigating road traffic accidents** and carrying our remedial measures in Gloucestershire. We must learn from our mistakes and fight back against rising levels of road accidents.
- ◆ **Find solutions to parking problems.** We will work with local councils to combat the severe shortage of parking in some areas and seek better enforcement of residents' parking schemes. We will promote good disabled parking facilities and clamp down hard on fraudulent use of disabled driver badges.
- ◆ **Support bus, minibus, taxi and train services across the county** to ensure that, where the demand exists, people have a genuine alternative to car use, if they choose to use it. We will work with public transport providers to improve late night services to help reduce drink-driving.
- ◆ **Promote safer pedestrian routes** and better maintenance of footways.



PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT

A greener Gloucestershire

In Gloucestershire we are lucky to have some of the finest countryside in Britain. Everyone has a responsibility for our Environment – both in Gloucestershire and globally. New technologies can help us face this commitment in a way that is economically viable and acceptable to our communities. New thinking is needed on issues where experience has shown problems to be far harder to solve than many had thought. **We will:**

- ◆ **Oppose incinerators.** Conservatives have already worked to stop incinerators being built in Gloucestershire and we will continue to do so.
- ◆ **Increase recycling and composting.** We will use environmentally friendly solutions to help us cut the amount of rubbish going into landfill sites.
- ◆ **Oppose plans to use Gloucestershire as a regional waste centre.** We will fight regional assembly plans to turn areas such as Sharpness Docks into rubbish tips for the South West.
- ◆ **Support Gloucestershire's farmers and food producers.** We will implement a council policy of buying as much produce as possible from local suppliers, supporting local people as well as saving fuel and energy.
- ◆ **Reduce greenhouse emissions.** We will carry out trials to establish the viability of switching council vehicles to carbon-neutral biodiesel.
- ◆ **Get tough on fly-tipping.** We will work with district councils to ensure a prompt and rapid response to incidents.

Despite Labour removing many of the County Council's planning powers to a remote and unelected regional assembly we can still have a real impact by working effectively with our partners to represent Gloucestershire's views and interests.

In planning we will:

- ◆ **Respect the county's nationally and internationally designated conservation areas,** especially the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and look to enhance them as a valued resource both for local people and the nation.
- ◆ **Take steps to reduce the risk of flooding.** We will co-ordinate with local partners to protect flood plains and encourage landowners and water companies to improve and maintain drainage. We will lobby planning bodies to abide by relevant planning guidance, take speedy and effective action against illegal dumping of waste or landfill in the floodplains and challenge other bodies who don't act in the best interests of our communities.
- ◆ **Effectively enforce planning rules.** Everyone should play by the rules and no one should be allowed to gain an unfair advantage by flouting planning law.
- ◆ **Fight further extensions of the quarry industry close to settlements** and where the road network cannot support more HGV's. The available supplies of aggregates in the South West far exceed demand, extra deposits are not needed.

FOR MORE INFORMATION



FIND YOUR LOCAL CANDIDATE

There is a complete list of County Council candidates on the Conservative Group website at www.gloucestershireconservatives.co.uk or you can call the county Conservative offices on 01242 514551.

PRESS CONTACTS

For press enquiries please contact either:

Barry Dare

Conservative Group Leader

01386 701 280

07802 842202

barrydare@cix.co.uk

Richard Coates

Conservative Group Researcher

01452 425807

07748 278 782

richard.coates@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Published by: Barry Dare, Mill Dene, School Lane, Blockley, Moreton in Marsh, Gloucestershire, GL56 9HU, on behalf of Gloucestershire Conservatives. Printed by: The Vale Press Ltd, 6 Willersey Business Park, Willersey, Glos.