Introduction.

The Sunderland Conservatives believe that our city has the potential to be an

attractive destination for businesses, professionals and tourists.

It is also our belief that the Labour Party is holding our city back and making

poor decisions which are not taken in the best interests of its people. From

spending £41m on relocating the Civic Centre to a £50,000 subsidy for a Spice

Girls concert, Labour in Sunderland is out of touch and out of control.

We recognise the frustration of Sunderland residents: they are told that there is

no money for frontline services by the same group of Labour councillors that

voted to spend £10,000 of taxpayers’ money on their free meals while claiming

around £1m allowances.

The Sunderland Conservative councillors are a strong voice of opposition to

the Labour administration, but – unlike the city’s Liberal Democrats – we are

also a trustworthy and professional one.

At the time of writing, the Lib Dem Deputy Leader is facing two investigations

for misconduct: one for the misuse of public money and the other for libellous

accusations against another councillor. Elsewhere in the region, the Lib Dems

voted to impose massive cuts on our fire service (including Farringdon station)

while Councillor Robert Oliver voted to postpone them.

Only the Sunderland Conservatives will put the people of the city first – and this

manifesto highlights our priorities for Sunderland.

The City Centre.

The Sunderland Conservatives regret the state of the city centre. We recognise

that high streets across the country are facing challenges because of internet

shopping, supermarkets and retail parks, among other things, but we also feel

that much of the blame in Sunderland lies at Labour’s door.

The Labour Party has been in control of Sunderland for decades and its

leadership has become complacent. The Sunderland Conservatives believe it

is time that we have a positive, long-term vision for the city centre.

Policies.

• Oppose Civic Centre move – we oppose Labour’s plans to move the

Civic Centre to the Vaux site, costing £41m. Not only is this an admission

of Labour’s failure to attract businesses to the site, it is a self-indulgent

decision by a Labour Party that puts politicians before people. The

Sunderland Conservatives would invest £11m of the capital funding in a

leisure centre on the sea front and explore cheaper alternatives to move

the Civic Centre into empty buildings in the city centre.

• Free city centre car parking – the Sunderland Conservatives have long

supported free car parking schemes, such as “Free after 3” in the city

centre. We repeat this year our long-standing commitment to

reinvigorate our city centre by offering shoppers, workers and visitors

more attractive parking schemes.

• Extend the metro to Washington – as well as our commitment to free

parking, we again reiterate our support for the extension of the Tyne and

Wear Metro to Washington. This would provide better access for

Washington residents into Sunderland city centre and beyond.

• Reduced business rates – naturally, as Conservatives, we support a

reduction in business rates to help improve the city’s retail offer. We

would also seek to make clearer to small business owners when and how

they can request a rate valuation. Combined with our free parking

policy, this would help turn Sunderland into a more vibrant city.

A Cleaner and Greener City.

Sunderland, Washington and Houghton residents are proud of being from here

and feel a strong attachment to our city and the distinct communities within it.

However, no amount of pride can mask the fact that our city has suffered at

the hands of incompetent Labour administrations for decades.

In 2017/18, Sunderland Council’s record on environmental enforcement was

poor compared to other North East Councils. Sunderland Council issued just 14

fines for littering, 35 for fly-tipping and a mere one fine for dog fouling.

Policies

• Protection of parks and cemeteries – the Sunderland Conservatives

would direct money from the five Area Committee budgets to create

new city-wide Park and Cemetery Wardens. These people would be

responsible for securing parks and cemeteries on an evening and

opening them on a morning. We see this as necessary step after antisocial behaviour and vandalism in Roker Park, Barnes Park and

Bishopwearmouth Cemetery among others.

• Reintroduction of weekly bin collections – the Sunderland Conservatives

have long supported the reintroduction of weekly bin collections. We

support without reservation Environment Secretary Michael Gove’s plan

to introduce a scheme for councils to bring back weekly collections.

• Improvements to cycle lanes – we fully support the improvement of the

city’s cycle lanes. At present, the cycle route along the riverside is dark

and littered with rubbish. We believe that cleaner, brighter and safer

cycle lanes would promote a healthier, cheaper and sustainable

alternative to driving – as well as providing a better experience to those

many cyclists who already use them.

• Enforcement of littering and dog fouling – in the last year, Sunderland

Council has issued just one fine relating to dog fouling. Enforcement of

penalties relating to litter and fly tipping is also inadequate. While we

recognise that some progress has been made in recent months, we

believe that much more must be done in this regard. We would therefore

intensify the council’s enforcement efforts to tackle the dog fouling,

littering and fly tipping incidents that blight our communities.

Slashing Allowances.

At a time when Labour claims our council is facing a funding crisis, we do not

believe it is right – morally or economically – that its councillors take over a

million pounds in allowances. Some Labour councillors receive more in

allowances for chairing meetings than somebody working a full-time minimum

wage job earns in a year. We would oversee deep cuts to the Council’s gravy

train and introduce a fairer system that voters have faith in.

Policies.

• Reduce councillors’ allowances – we would radically cut Special

Responsibility Allowances including those for the five Area Committee

Chairs (who received £10,350 each), the ten Area Committee Vice

Chairs (£6,277 each), the four Scrutiny Chairs (£12,556 each) and the

Mayor (£17,205 per year). We would cut Leadership allowances for all

parties and remove both SRAs from the Minority Party in Opposition.

• Scrap Policy Advisor roles – these are unnecessary positions and the

postholders are paid £12,556 a year (in addition to a basic allowance)

for next to no work. We would get rid of these positions entirely.

• End free meals for councillors – scrapping free meals after meetings of

the full council, saving £10,000 per year. Conservative councillors will pay

for these meals for as long as the scheme continues.

• 2 councillors per ward – we support reducing the number of councillors

from 3 per ward to 2.

Transparency for Sunderland.

The Sunderland Conservatives believe that Sunderland City Council is

insufficiently transparent and avoids scrutiny. We believe that greater

transparency would help repair the relationship between the people of

Sunderland (many of whom believe the Council’s leadership is corrupt) and its

elected representatives.

Policies.

• DBS checks for councillors – following the Paul Middleton scandal, we

acknowledge that voters wish to know more about the people they are

electing. We therefore support DBS checking for councillors and have

proposed a motion to Council to ask the Chief Executive to explore the

means by which this can be introduced.

• A more responsive press office – in recent weeks we have seen the

Taxpayers’ Alliance produce a study of how much councils across the

country spend on awards and award ceremonies. Sunderland Council

refused to disclose the figures. We have also seen this behaviour in the

past, with the Council refusing to be up front about the many problems

relating to the Aquatics Centre. We believe that this damages relations

between Councillors and the people we serve: the Sunderland

Conservatives would therefore introduce a much more open,

transparent and honest way of dealing with the press and making

information available.

• ‘Gagging orders’ – the Sunderland Conservatives recognise that

members of the public are rightly concerned with how much Sunderland

Council pays its own staff to keep quiet. Not only would we end the

practice of using ‘gagging orders’ entirely, but we would disclose the

details of all historic ‘gagging orders’ issued by the Council.

• Remove cabinet members from the scrutiny calculation – at present,

members of the Labour cabinet are included in the overall calculation

of how many positions on key committees are allocated to opposition

councillors. We do not believe that members of the cabinet should be

allowed to scrutinise themselves and would therefore discount them

when allocating committee positions to backbench councillors.

• An end to propaganda – the Conservatives voted against funding for

the Community Vibe magazine, but Labour supported it. We were

assured that the magazine would not be used for Labour propaganda,

but the magazine was used to promote Labour’s Stuart Porthouse as he

faced re-election. We do not believe that taxpayers’ money should be

used to pay for de facto Labour campaign literature and would

therefore cut the £9,000 a year the Council puts towards the magazine.

Housing.

The Sunderland Conservatives support the development of more executive

housing in the city. With the development of the new medical school at the

University of Sunderland, we believe it is essential that we provide the housing

and infrastructure that will keep professionals – such as doctors, nurses and

medical educators – in Sunderland.

Policies.

• Executive housing – build more executive housing to increase council

tax receipts and thereby alleviate the need for future council tax hikes.

• Protect green spaces – while we believe in a need for executive housing,

we do not believe that these housing developments need to be at the

expense of the greenbelt. Instead, we favour using brownfield sites for

future developments of this kind. We only promote using greenbelt

developments in exceptional circumstances, such as the construction of

the International Advanced Manufacturing Park.

• Fill empty homes – we share the Labour council’s ambition to fill empty

properties, but we regret that progress on this front has been so slow. We

promote speeding up the process of occupying empty properties.

• Better preservation of listed buildings – we believe that the council has

a duty to support the preservation of the city’s listed buildings. At present

we do not think that its provision in this regard is sufficient and we

encourage more action around the protecting the city’s architectural

heritage.

City Events.

Sunderland is host to numerous regional, national and international events. We

wish to continue to attract event organisers to the city but believe that much

more can be done to highlight the events we have and to improve the city’s

events offer.

Policies.

• Oppose pop concert subsidies – while we are committed to bringing

internationally successful artists to Sunderland’s Empire Theatre and

Stadium of Light, we oppose the £50,000 subsidy that Labour has given

to the Spice Girls for their upcoming concert. The Council has previously

given subsidies of the same amount to Beyoncé and One Direction.

• International Air Show – we recognise that the Sunderland International

Air Show is enjoyed by many, but the Council’s own feedback has

indicated that many Sunderland residents now feel it is a tired and dated

format. In addition, the Council has had to subsidise the event in recent

years due to a lack of sponsorship and because it has been run at a loss.

The Conservatives would therefore seek to hold the International Air

Show once every two years instead.

• Promotion of lesser-known events – Sunderland is or has been host to

multiple events which are less well known, such as the Coast to Coast

bike ride. We would seek to highlight these events and put Sunderland

on the map as a city known for its cultural and sporting offer, without the

need for taxpayer-funded subsidies for millionaires.

Conservatives in Government.

The Conservative Association in Sunderland works with the Conservative

Government via its Conservative Policy Forum contributions. In recent months,

we have contributed policy ideas on issues such as Global Britain, healthcare,

education, and the digital age.

The Conservatives are the only party on the ballot paper in Sunderland this

May to oppose a so-called People’s Vote (i.e. a second referendum on our

membership of the European Union). A majority of Sunderland, Washington

and Houghton residents voted to leave, and Labour and the Lib Dems should

(but don’t) respect that.

Local Conservatives continue to be proud of much of what our party has

achieved nationally:.

• Proscribing the terrorist organisation Hezbollah.

• Record high employment and record low unemployment, with wages

growing faster in the last year than in any year in the last decade.

• The introduction of a Domestic Abuse Bill which gives new protections to

adults (especially women) and children affected by domestic abuse.

• Stamp duty cuts have led to a 12-year high in first-time buyers – with

more young people owning a home of their own.

• Training school children to look after their mental health and to support

their peers with mental health issues, following a series of teenage

suicide and self-harm cases.