

The Conservative's manifesto, *An Invitation to join the Government of Britain*, has been published today as the party tries to seal the deal with voters.

The manifesto, written by Oliver Letwin MP, Steve Hilton, Director of Strategy, and with input from James O'Shaughnessy, Director of the Conservative Research Department, sets out the long-term vision for how the Conservatives will achieve their 'Big Society.' Transferring the state's powers to individuals and inviting voters to take control of their own lives has been the underlying narrative of Cameron's leadership, embodied in a phrase used in his acceptance speech, "there is such a thing as society, it's just not the same as the state."



**INVITATION TO
JOIN THE GOVERNMENT
OF BRITAIN**

To achieve this aim the manifesto focuses on policies to end the culture of entitlement and devolve power variously to local authorities, to workers and/or voters themselves and giving them a greater say over the delivery of public services. The idea is to create a new kind of Government in which local people, rather than Whitehall, can run or have greater influence over services such as the police, schools and hospitals.

Proposals announced reflect the themes the party has been focussing upon including support for the NHS, which has become a personal issue for Cameron, making Britain the most family friendly country in Europe, reducing the number of MPs and the scope of Whitehall and raising standards in schools by harnessing the potential the so-called Swedish schools model in which parents can set up schools themselves or commission providers to do so.

HOUSING AND PLANNING

On housing and planning, the manifesto features many of the policies previously announced in Conservative green papers. These include the council incentivise scheme for new builds, paid for by redirecting the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant, abolishing Regional Spatial Strategies and HIPS and permanently raising the stamp duty threshold to £250,000 for first-time buyers.

Similarly, for affordable housing, the controversial Right to Move policy is included, as is the foot on the ladder scheme to offer equity stakes to 'good' tenants. Despite concerns raised by the National Housing Federation, the manifesto includes a commitment to replace the Community Infrastructure Levy and the Section 106 agreement with a tariff which developers must pay to compensate for the loss of amenity of additional infrastructure. The empty homes pledge announced in the Housing Green Paper has been omitted.

Interestingly, they have committed to respecting the tenures and rents of tenants, meaning that any deregulation of the sector will leave the Conservatives open to accusations of breaking a manifesto promise.

There is a clear ideological undercurrent to the manifesto, with the Conservatives proposing a long-term vision of “the good society”. This small state, big civic society, approach is set up to contrast with the more interventionist approach to economic recovery set out by Labour.

EDUCATION

The Education chapter of the manifesto opens with praise of the Swedish school model. The four pages devoted to Education do not significantly add to the Conservative public position hitherto but further emphasise how the Conservatives will draw on the experience of the Swedish School Reforms and the Charter School movement in the United States to break down barriers to entry so that any good service provider can set up a new Academy School.

The Conservatives regard the school reform programme as a major part of their anti-poverty strategy and that is why their first task will be to establish new Academy Schools in the most deprived areas of the country. All existing schools will have the chance to achieve Academy status, with ‘outstanding’ schools pre-approved and the Academy programme will be extended to primary schools.

The chapter is divided into four main sections

- Raising Standards in School
- Better teachers and tougher discipline
- A rigorous curriculum and exam system
- Giving every parent access to a good school

Below are some edited highlights:

Conservatives plan to expand Teach First and introduce two new programmes – Teach Now, for people looking to change career, and Troops to Teachers, for ex-service personnel – to get experienced, high-quality people into the profession. The Conservatives plan to make it easier for teachers to deal with violent incidents and remove disruptive pupils or items from the classroom. They believe that heads are best placed to improve behaviour, which is why they will stop them being overruled by “bureaucrats” on exclusions.

Drawing on the experience of the Swedish school reforms and the charter school movement in the United States, the Conservatives will break down barriers to entry so that any good education provider can set up a new Academy school. Their schools revolution will create a new generation of good small schools with smaller class sizes and high standards of discipline.

To raise the status of teaching and toughen school discipline further, the Conservatives will:

- raise the entry requirement for taxpayer funded primary school teacher training;
- expect new graduates to have at least a 2:2 in their degree in order to qualify for state-funded training;
- pay the student loan repayments for top Maths and Science graduates for as long as they remain teachers, by redirecting some of the current teacher training budget;
- give teachers the strongest possible protection from false accusations;
- reinforce powers of discipline by strengthening home-school behaviour contracts;
- allow all state schools the freedom to offer the same high quality international exams that private schools offer – including giving every pupil the chance to study separate sciences at GCSE;
- create 20,000 additional young apprenticeships;
- allow schools and colleges to offer workplace training;
- publish all performance data currently kept secret by the Department for Children, Schools and Families;
- establish a free online database of exam papers and marking schemes.

To give parents better access to a good school, the Conservatives will

- give parents the power to save local schools threatened by closure, allowing communities the chance to take over and run good small schools;
- make sure Academies have the freedoms that helped to make them so successful in the first place;
- ensure failing schools are inspected more often – with the best schools visited less frequently.

ENVIRONMENT: Vote Blue, Go Green

The eleven pages devoted to the environment further emphasise how the Conservatives would promote both small and large-scale low carbon energy production including nuclear, wind, clean coal and biogas. Areas covered include climate change, promotion of low-carbon energy production and the promotion of sustainable farming policies.

Climate Change

The Conservatives will work towards an ambitious global deal that will limit emissions and make available substantial financial resources for adaptation and mitigation. As part of their commitment to move towards a low carbon future, they intend to reduce carbon emissions by 80% by 2050.

In government the Conservatives plan to lead by example by delivering a 10% cut in central government emissions within twelve months and by working with local authorities and others to deliver emissions reductions.

Promote low carbon energy production

The Conservatives plan to create an 'electricity internet' – a highly interactive network, based on a new smart grid that will interact with smart meters in people's homes to manage supply and demand.

To limit harmful emissions from UK power stations, the Conservatives plan to take steps to encourage new low carbon energy production by:

- introducing an Emissions Performance Standard to limit the levels of greenhouse gases our power stations produce;
- clearing the way for new nuclear power stations – provided they receive no public subsidy;
- creating four carbon capture and storage equipped plants, taking coal – one of the most polluting fuels of all – and transforming it into a low carbon fuel of the future;
- delivering an offshore electricity grid in order to support the development of a new generation of offshore wind power, and establishing at least two Marine Energy Parks;
- giving local authorities the power to establish new district heating networks which use biogas and other low carbon fuels;
- allowing communities that host renewable energy projects like wind farms to keep the additional business rates they generate for six years;
- giving incentives for smaller-scale energy generation, including capturing heat that is currently wasted.

The Conservatives will cut the number of quangos intervening in the energy market and reform Ofgem so that;

- it focuses on executing energy policy;
- it is tasked with monitoring the spare capacity in the energy market and making provisions for additional capacity where required;
- its competition policy and consumer protection powers pass to the Office of Fair Trading.

Help people go green

The Conservatives intend to give every home up to £6,500 worth of energy improvement measures – with more for hard-to-treat homes – paid for out of savings made on fuel bills over 25 years.

They will increase consumers' control over their energy costs by ensuring that every energy bill provides information on how to move to the cheapest tariff offered by their supplier and how their energy usage compares to similar households. In order to improve energy efficiency, the Conservatives will draw on the experience from Japan.

Other plans include

- ensuring that 10 per cent of the staff directly employed by 'Green Deal' providers are apprentices, helping to build a green collar workforce for the future;
- keeping Energy Performance Certificates to help people improve the environmental rating of their property;
- giving Post Office Card Account holders the chance to benefit from direct debit discounts, worth up to £150 a year.

Promote sustainable and productive farming policies

The Conservatives will support the Campaign for the Farmed Environment and seek to create a more effective system of environmental stewardship and ensure that consumers have the right to choose non-GM foods through clear labelling.

They will also:

- not permit any commercial planting of GM crops until and unless it has been assessed as safe for people and the environment;

- develop a legally-binding protocol covering the separation of GM and non-GM material, including clear industry liability.
- negotiate for further reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to deliver greater value for money while supporting the sustainability of British farming.

Use natural resources responsibly

In order to incentivise households to go green, the Conservatives will reward people who do the right thing by encouraging councils to pay people to recycle, while scrapping Labour's plans for new bin taxes on families.

To achieve this, the Conservatives will encourage alternative forms of waste disposal by putting a floor under the standard rate of landfill tax until 2020.

Building a greener economy

Although not contained in the environment chapter, the manifesto contains a short section on how the Conservatives plan to create a Green Investment Bank which will draw together money currently divided across existing government initiatives, leveraging private sector capital to finance new green technology start-ups. This section also details how a Conservative government would reform the Climate Change Levy and increase the proportion of tax revenues accounted for by environmental taxes.

The Manifesto can be found at <http://www.conservatives.com/Policy/Manifesto.aspx>