A BLUEPRINT FOR STIRLING

The Scottish Conservative & Unionist
Manifesto for Stirling Council
This year’s local government election in Stirling is vitally important. Voters have a clear choice – electing strong local voices who will focus all their energies on improving local services or voting to go back to the divisions of the past.

Despite promising it would be a “once in a generation” decision, it didn’t take long for the SNP to start demanding a second referendum on independence.

The Scottish people don’t want another independence referendum, they just want government at all levels that gets on with the day job and delivers on the things that matter.

So the Council elections in May will be an important opportunity for you to tell the SNP – we voted No to independence, respect that result and stop trying to put us through it all again.

Along with my team of MSPs, I am leading the opposition to the SNP in the Scottish Parliament. Every day we are challenging the SNP to get the government focussed back on the important issues; jobs, education and our public services.

A vote in May for the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party will help strengthen that message in your own community, in all of Stirling and across Scotland.

The simple fact is that every SNP Councillor elected here on 4th May will use their position to agitate for another referendum, while every Scottish Conservative elected will oppose one.

We need to make our voice heard loud and clear. We said No to independence and we do not want another independence referendum. Let’s focus on improving our local services instead. That’s what your Scottish Conservative & Unionist councillors will do every day.

Ruth Davidson MSP
Leader of the Scottish Conservative & Unionist Party
Stirling District encompasses a huge diversity of landscape, people and communities. Its wide and varied economy reflects Stirling’s place in the centre of Scotland, its long history and its great future.

Stirling’s future is bright, the City Region deal, secured by Conservatives on the Council and in the UK Government working together, has projects that will regenerate some of the poorest and physically run-down areas of Stirling. It also has new parks that will improve the quality of life and attract new visitors. The Digital District in our city centre will bring new businesses and jobs in the digital economy.

We shouldn’t underestimate the potential of the city deal to completely transform the economy across the entire Council area.

Beyond the City Region Deal we have comprehensive plans for a new focus on road investment and getting basic services delivered effectively. We want to deregulate to help our businesses and our high streets evolve. We need our social services to be funded properly and deliver care for those who need it, especially in rural Stirling where it is difficult to find a care worker. We need internet connectivity and mobile phone signals to improve throughout our area.

In this document, we have a blueprint for a Council that focuses on services for today and keeps an eye on the future. We have a positive vision for a Stirling that is well served for citizens and businesses alike, and has a future with a diverse economy, strong public services and a great quality of life.

Cllr Neil Benny
Leader of the Scottish Conservative Group on Stirling Council
Roads & Infrastructure are one of the most important things that the Council does. Ensuring that the roads that we drive on, cycle on and the pavements we walk on are well maintained will be one of our highest priorities. Scottish Conservatives will fight to increase the level of investment in this area and ensure that the money spent here is spent effectively and not wasted.

To secure a strategic focus on key routes we will lobby to make rural routes like the A811 trunk roads. Having alternatives to driving, whether that be public transport, walking or cycling does not mean that the council should be anti-car and we will review council policies to ensure that motorists are catered for. Especially those in remote rural areas where a car is a lifeline.

Walking is a key component of our roads strategy. Focus on pavements throughout the district, not just the latest pedestrianisation craze in the city centre are important to us and we will fight to make sure that funding is made available for more pavement and path improvements.

Our cycling routes need to be better joined up to ensure they get the use that they deserve. We want cycling to be a key part of our roads strategy. To encourage tourism and cycling, we will look at a long distance cycle path to follow the route of the old railway connecting Stirling with Drymen.

Public Transport in Stirling needs a more strategic approach. Scottish Conservatives brought forward Demand Responsive Transport in rural Stirling and we will bring together a transport strategy that works with operators to make transport affordable and convenient for residents across Stirling.

We will bring forward a comprehensive review of the Council’s winter gritting policy to ensure it serves all of Stirling with the correct priorities.

Ensuring that the Council focuses on the universal services that we all care about, like waste and recycling would be the major focus of a Conservative Administration at Stirling Council. This service needs to work efficiently and ensure that waste is picked up on time.

Scottish Conservatives will not reduce the frequency of non-recycled waste collection. We will also strive to keep waste services as user-friendly as possible, keeping waste collection sites open at Balfron and Callander, encouraging composting and increasing the opening hours and range of recycled material that is accepted.

We will ensure a full review of the new collection service is conducted, including the allocated collection days to ensure they are appropriate for each area.
EDUCATION

Scottish Conservatives will put Education at the front and centre of a future Conservative administration. We have had some success in Stirling in driving up standards among the poorest performing students in the Stirling system, but there is still a great deal of work to do.

Scottish Conservatives believe that the Stirling Schools are very good, but there are gaps in provision, especially for the bottom performing 20% of pupils. This will remain the focus for a Scottish Conservative Administration.

We will work with the College and the University to ensure that there are vocational and academic options for our children either at School or after school. These should and will be valued equally by the Stirling School system.

We have had some success in the Stirling Employment Incentive, this scheme encourages local businesses to employ people straight from School. It helps those with special needs and those who need support to access employment. A Scottish Conservative administration will extend and continue this scheme.

Scottish Conservatives believe that by involving parents, carers, the local community and local businesses in the running of schools they will serve students better. We will bring forward a new forum of parent councils to advise the Council on strategic education policy and expand the membership of parent councils to bring in the local community and local businesses.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Social Services, especially support for those who need it, is key to having a society in Stirling which cares for each other.

We will finish construction of the Stirling Care Village, delivering on the promise of joint working with the NHS to deliver care for the elderly.

Rural Stirling has a chronic shortage of care workers. We will develop a strategy to deal with this significant issue.

We will work with the third sector, the NHS and other partners to bring a new emphasis to mental health needs to address issues of increasing isolation among people of all generations.

We will work with our schools and social care services to intervene early to ensure that people are supported. This will build into a wider project that supports volunteers and volunteering to build a strong, caring society.
REGENERATION

There is still a great deal to do in Stirling to ensure that the promise of regeneration is met for areas that need it. A new focus on St Ninians, Cornton, the Eastern Villages as well as the regeneration efforts in Raploch is needed. This should be a pragmatic and robust plan for regeneration.

Scottish Conservatives will build more new Council Houses. We will explore ways of raising money including borrowing or community bonds with an aim to build out all the vacant sites on the Council Housing Land supply by the end of 5 years. By financing this privately we can do this at no cost to the taxpayer and meet the needs of those waiting for council houses.

Housing allocation policy must be reviewed to ensure that local people get top priority for any new housing.

The communities we live in need to be protected while providing much needed housing for the future. Scottish Conservatives will fight to preserve the green belt and encourage more development on brownfield sites throughout the district. We will bring forward changes to the planning policies to ensure that brownfield developments are not stymied by red tape and overly prescriptive policies.

PARKS & RECREATION

Parks are important to the Scottish Conservative in Stirling. We have secured £1.5m in investment in the King's Park over the past 8 years. We also re-established the Parks investment budget after it was abolished by Labour in 2005. Parks will be a major area of spend and focus for the Scottish Conservatives in Stirling.

Sport is valued and enjoyed by many people in Stirling, whether it be as spectators at Stirling County, Knights or Albion or as participators in one of the many facilities throughout the district. We want to broaden and increase the range of sport provision in Stirling. We will work to implement the sports strategy, keep it under review and fund new initiatives to focus on broadening participation, especially amongst young people.

To help with this we will look to bring together our sports teams to help support their work in schools and with young people. We will continue to support the daily mile throughout our school network and work with organisers of the major races such as the marathon, the Trossachs 10k and the Crit under the Castle to inspire and offer opportunities to residents.
Stirling’s Cultural offering is fantastic, although the council’s role often goes unnoticed (the focus is rightly on artists). We need a cultural offer which delivers on what residents want and not only brings in acts and exhibitions from outside of Stirling, but also nurtures local talent.

Music is hugely important in Stirling. We will review licensing and planning policies to ensure that live music is encouraged in Stirling, to further this agenda we will look at incentives and availability of Council facilities to encourage this. We will bring forward by-laws for busking in our centres that encourages local talent. We will support youth bands and continue to fight for music tuition in our schools.

**LOCAL ENVIRONMENT**

Stirling’s unique and diverse environment needs more care. Issues like river networks, soil diversity, erosion, invasive species, access, tree preservation and air quality need to be looked at more. The focus of the Stirling Council environmental strategy should be to look at the local environment in this kind of detail and offer a package of measures to deal with the issues that are raised. The Council should lead on these issues and work for a better local environment this way.

We will work with experts, community groups and volunteers to bring forward specific plans for tree maintenance and renewal, air quality, invasive species and river network management. These are major issues that need a new focus from our Council.

We will also defend the greenbelt, bringing forward policies to strengthen the protection of our unique landscape. We need homes for people who want to live here, but we must maintain the character of our City, towns and villages.
Rural issues in Stirling Council tend to be ignored as repeated Council administrations led by the SNP and Labour have focused on the city centre. The Scottish Conservatives will put rural Stirling at the heart of Stirling Council policy.

We will ensure that the promises of the City Region deal are delivered beyond the City Centre. Economic development and diversification is needed to ensure our villages and remote communities can thrive.

We must also continue to ensure that the visitor and tourism economy thrives in rural Stirling. We need to position our rural villages as centres for tourism and capitalise on the amazing natural assets we have. Accessibility must be improved both via public transport and parking at key tourist sites.

Broadband, mobile connectivity and future digital connectivity is essential to the future of rural Stirling. Scottish Conservatives will continue to support the work of community groups and support new areas that have no coverage by employing two rural broadband project officers to deliver on community broadband schemes. With more home working than ever adding to the vibrancy and viability of our rural villages.

The Scottish Conservatives will rebalance Council policy, ensuring that all new policy and spend proposals are assessed for their impact on rural Stirling. This way officers and councillors in the city will be forced to consider the rural area and whether any alterations to their policies will be needed for specific communities.

Stirling’s rural areas like the Carron Valley shown here need to have their views heard at Stirling Council.

Stirling’s rural economy relies heavily on farming, food production and tourism. The rural economy must be a higher priority for Stirling Council.
STIRLING CITY CENTRE

The state of Stirling’s city centre should be of concern to all of us. The number of empty units as a result of the Scottish Government's inactivity on the issue of business rates is a scandal. Stirling city centre has a number of other issues though including parking enforcement, littering, anti-social behaviour and general maintenance.

There is no one solution to the problems facing our city centre, however there is need for more involvement from the trader community and the Scottish Conservatives will establish a formal traders forum, led by the new Place manager that will be a place for policies and strategies to be discussed as well as for partnership working on the simple everyday issues that will keep the city centre functioning.

Longer term there is a need for a full review of City Centre policy. The City Centre in Stirling is too big and there needs to be a look at planning, transport, asset and environmental policies that have an impact on the city centre with the aim of building a long term future.

COUNCIL FINANCES

Thanks to the Scottish Conservative leadership of the Finance Committee at Stirling Council we have one of the healthiest financial situations in Scotland. This has happened due to robust project management of financial savings options. There has been a huge amount of organisational change at the Council and this process needs to continue and accelerate.

Making sure that we have a firm financial basis to fund the pledges we make in this document underpins all that we do. Scottish Conservatives will pursue a relentless war on waste in the council and look at reductions to the senior management wage bill. We will also look at ways that we can change the way the organisation works to make it cheaper and more effective. These objectives are often compatible as we modernise working practices, automate processes and cut red tape.

We will only support any increase in Council Tax where it is proportionate, fair and the money raised is dedicated to frontline services.

With the assurance that the Council is becoming more efficient it may be necessary or desirable to allow Council taxes to rise in line with inflation over the coming years. We believe in lower taxes and we believe in well-funded services. We will not raise Council taxes by more than 2% per annum over the next five years, aiming to keep the overall rise lower than inflation.
Scottish Conservatives have been out and about round our community and have a full slate of candidates for all of the wards. Conservative Councillors will always put their community first, serving the citizens of their ward. This blueprint is our plan for Stirling Council and it is how we will work together to deliver our positive vision for a Stirling that is well served for citizens and businesses alike, and has a future with a diverse economy, strong public services and a great quality of life.

Scottish Conservative Councillors will always put Stirling first.