



# MANIFEST DESTINY

A localist guide to party pledges in the 2019 general election

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# INTRODUCTION

## Making sense of the 2019 general election manifestos

Party election manifestos are, in the usual run of things, finely tuned hostage notes to fortune. Promissory notes whose redemption might threaten to bankrupt the political capital held by their party once in power or pamphlets whose very text erases the authors prospects of attaining the commanding heights.

The circumstances of this winter's election are unique and egregious. The voting public, seemingly freed from tribal loyalties as a result of the Brexit process, are in consequence more fluid in their political affiliations than previous generations.

Hence offers on police officers, immigration and hospitals from the Conservatives; four hundred billion extra green and social investment on top of the Labour list and, for the Liberal Democrats, revocation and the plugging of an anticipated £50bn econic gain into rebalancing local economies.

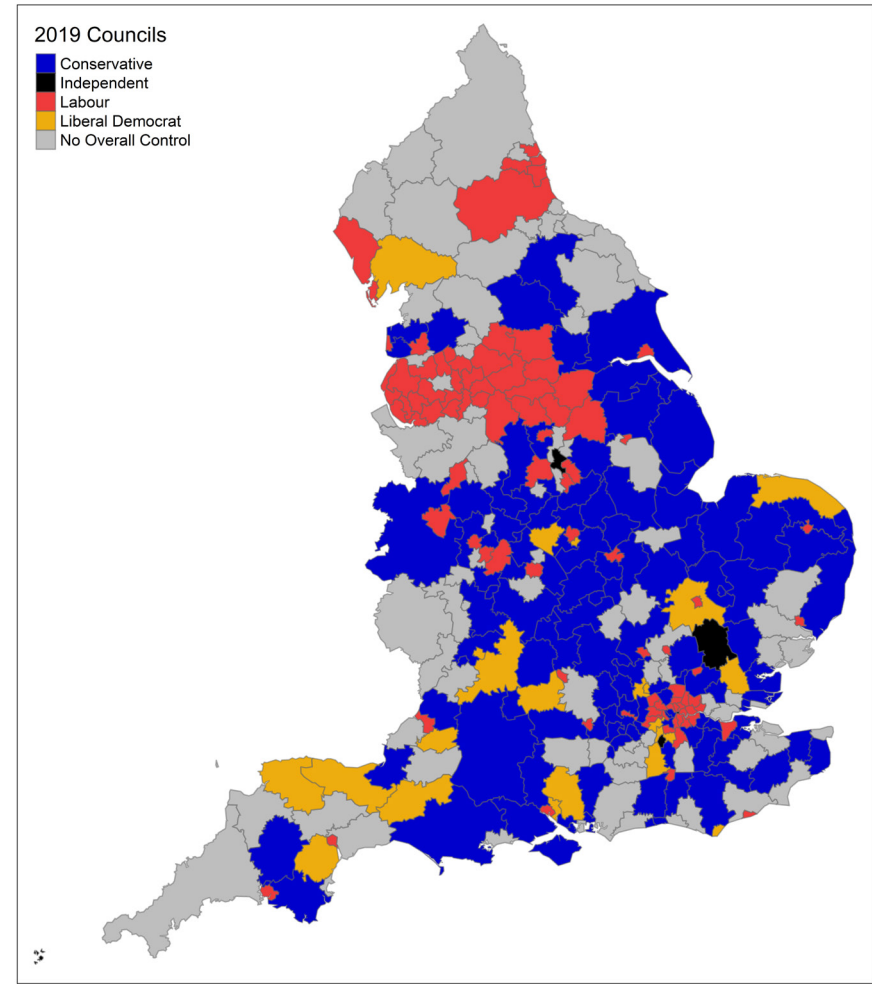
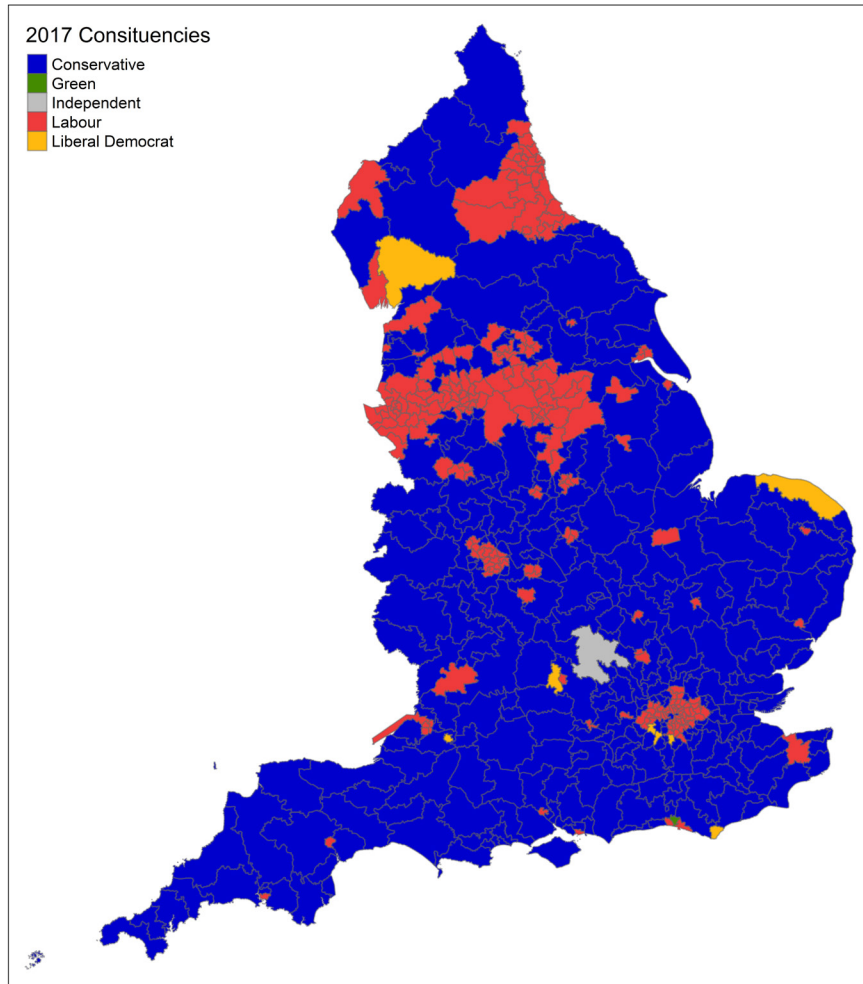
But what do our manifestos have to say about the role of place in policy, in service delivery and reshaping our political economy? The following analysis looks into the localist credentials of the manifestos.

The usual thing to say is that all oppositons are inherent localisers until they get into government. An axiom that is perhaps a bit blasé and cynical. But it more or less holds up. However, for the purpose of this exercise we have treated all the manifestos at face value.

**Jonathan Werran, Chief Executive**



# COUNCILS & CONSTITUENCIES



# DEVOLUTION & FINANCE

## Key policies for local government

### Conservatives

- Towns Fund for an initial 100 towns, with 'they and only they' deciding on how it is spent.
- Devolution White Paper in 2020.
- Reiteration of funding increase for local government from last spending review.
- Continuation of referendum policy on council tax rises.
- Local areas invited to come together and propose growth bodies, like the Oxford-Cambridge arc.
- £500m of UK Shared Prosperity Fund targeted a disadvantaged communities
- Business Rate Relief for small businesses on the high street.

### Labour

- A 'more reactive' funding system.
- A 'radical decentralisation of power'.
- Business rates review, focusing on Land Value Tax option.
- A commitment to insourcing.
- Greater devolution of education policy (control of admissions, power to open new schools.)
- A reunified probation service under council control.
- 'Ruralproofing' of policies, programmes and council funding.
- Central standards for and monitoring of libraries, along with upgrades.
- Suite of high street measures, including council power to take over empty shops.

### Liberal Democrats

- An 'English-only' stage in legislation in England.
- Ability for groups of authorities to form devolved governance, with a 'Yorkshire Parliament' given as an example.
- 'Further revenue-raising powers' including tourism levy.
- Business rates replaced with Landowner Levy.
- £2bn Rural Services Fund.
- Suite of powers for councils as 'Strategic Education Authorities' including opening schools.
- Police and Crime Commissioners to be replaced by boards of councillors.

# INFRASTRUCTURE & HOUSING

## Key policies for local government

### Conservatives

- £100bn for additional infrastructure spending to 'refair and refurbish the fabric of our country'.
- Local libraries and regional museums supported by £250m fund.
- Right to Buy commitment for council tenants maintained.
- Every community to be asked to 'decide its own design standards' for new development.
- Local councils 'encouraged to build more beautiful architecture'.
- £10bn single housing infrastructure fund to fund GPs, roads and schools before development.

### Labour

- National Investment Bank on top of a network of Regional banks, with £250bn to lend over ten years.
- Regional Investment Banks to be governed by boards of local stakeholders, including councillors.
- In England, a Local Transformation Fund in each region.
- Councils charged with delivering two thirds of the 150,000 new social homes promised per annum.
- Review on council's housing debt.
- Power for councils to buy back homes from private landlords.
- Regulation powers for short-term lets.

### Liberal Democrats

- £50bn Regional Rebalancing Programme, with local authorities 'given a say over how it is used'.
- Significant capital resources also promised to the Northern Powerhouse and the Midlands Engine.
- Full control of Right to Buy devolved to councils.
- Councils given the power to raise council tax by up to 500% in the case of second-home ownership, with further stamp duty surcharges for overseas residents.

# HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

## Key policies for local government

### Conservatives

- £1bn additional funding announced in autumn spending review reiterated along with commitment to additional funding in every year of the new parliament.
- Aim to build the 'same level of consensus on social care' as the NHS.
- £74m over three years for community care settings for people with learning disabilities and autism.
- £500m to be invested in new youth clubs and services.

### Labour

- Social Care moved to a 'National Care Service'.
- Promise to 'invest in additional funding packages' for social care.
- Healthcare at the community level to be 'better aligned' institutionally.
- A 'wholesale' review of the current system for children in care.

### Liberal Democrats

- A new 'dedicated, progressive Health and Care tax', producing a single budget for both services.
- Greater local authority integration with the NHS, mental health trusts and hospitals.
- Encourage the pooling of budgets between local authorities and Clinical Commissioning Groups.
- Integration of local government into the governance of Integrated Care Systems.

# TRANSPORT & CLEAN GROWTH

## Key policies for local government

### Conservatives

- Major rail upgrades to increase connectivity around the north, beginning with Northern Powerhouse Rail.
- Investment in Midlands Rail Hub.
- City regions given funding to upgrade their public transport, with electrification and smart ticketing.
- £1bn investment in electric vehicle charging infrastructure.
- Beeching lines restored to better connect non-metropolitan England.
- Investment in 'superbus networks' with lower fares and electric buses, including the UK's first 'electric-bus town'

### Labour

- Nationalisation of district network energy operators, replaced with 'Regional Energy Agencies' holding decarbonisation responsibilities.
- Councils given ability/funding to buy back bus routes, with those that do so also given funding for free bus passes for under 25s.

### Liberal Democrats

- Councils to be held accountable for producing Zero Carbon Strategies. These strategies would have to plan for energy, transport and land use, and councils would be given powers and funding to implement them.
- New transport powers for local authorities, including network-wide ticketing and light rail schemes for improved public transport.
- Ultra Low-Emission Zones extended to ten more cities and towns.

# COMMUNITIES

## Key policies for local control

### Conservatives

- £150m fund for community ownership to be established to encourage community ownership of assets under threat or civic organisations.
- Definition of Assets of Community Value to be extended to pubs and post offices.

### Labour

- A new 'Post Bank' in Post Office branches which would provide loans for small-scale projects directly to communities.
- Communities given 'the powers and resources they need to keep public spending circulating in the local economy'.
- Pubs added to the list of Assets of Community Value.

### Liberal Democrats

- Citizen's Assemblies on climate change.
- Communities empowered to establish local banks and energy cooperatives.



# COMMENTARY

## A watershed moment for localism?

The acute extent of the cultural, social and economic divides which, depending on your preference, have either been unearthed or merely brought to light since 2016, have also served to sharpen the emphasis of place in policy. This is evident from our analysis into the party manifestos.

Economic rebalancing, the need to 'level up' quality of life, work and security in all four corners of the land are common to all three major party manifestos. This covers what has emerged as the common battlegrounds, the need to revivify urban growth, restore the sense of pride of place in small towns and reach out to abandoned rural areas.

The manifestos outline strong choices and approaches to how we fund a strong local state, rebuild economies, invest in skills ahead of the next wave of industrial change, educate, raise, nurture and care for people and invest in our places.

What marks this elections manifestos are the whole range and gamut of additional elements, not the least of which the commitments to transport and clean growth to support radical and accelerated decarbonisation targets. This is indeed a watershed moment for putting this agenda to the forefront of the voting public's consciousness. It may pave the way to an election focused on these issues one campaign in the future.

And to conclude, at the higher levels of place policy, there are some remarkable resurrections of what has been tried and failed in policy terms in the past and some remarkable cross party continuations in the party promises.

As to what localist future we wake up to on Friday 13th December, let the electorate decide. Until then, we hope this pamphlet serves as a reminder of what was promised with a view to understanding what, if any of what has been served up, is deliverable at the local level.

**Jonathan Werran, Chief Executive**

