SCOTTISH CONSERVATIVE UNIONIST
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AN AGENDA FOR GOVERNMENT

The Scottish Conservatives aspire to lead the next government of Scotland.

But to turn this aspiration into a reality, we need to show we are not just an effective opposition, but also a party with the people and the ideas to achieve in office.

This short collection of essays, published to coincide with our party conference, is part of a whole programme designed to demonstrate that.

From Murdo Fraser’s article setting out a brief history of the party, to Annie Wells’ chapter on how she became a Scottish Conservative MSP, to Adam Tomkins’ contribution on poverty, the collection sets out both the historical and personal backgrounds within our party, and the modern-day thinking which springs from that experience.

It comes at an exciting time for the Scottish Conservatives. After doubling our number of MSPs in 2016, Scotland elected 13 Conservative MPs in last year’s General Election. With more than 270 Councillors elected last year as well, the party is once again working hard for communities in every party of the country. We are a national party once more.

But we know the work is only beginning. While we will continue to defend Scotland’s place as an integral part of the United Kingdom, we also want to set out a positive agenda on social policy that shows how Scotland can build on that firm foundation.

That agenda will focus on restoring Scottish education so it is seen, once again, as the best in the world. It is about tackling the underlying causes of social injustice that continues to damage the life chances of families across the country. Its aim is to make Scotland a genuine meritocracy, where everyone is given the opportunity to make the best of themselves, without barriers to their advancement.

We want to persuade people across Scotland that our belief in freedom, responsibility, and in active government can help to meet the challenges of the future. I hope this collection shows that we have the determination and focus – and the people - to do just that.

Rt Hon Ruth Davidson MSP
WHIGS, TORIES AND LIBERAL UNIONISTS – PAST ECHOES SHAPE SCOTTISH CONSERVATIVE FUTURES

Murdo Fraser MSP
Shadow Finance Secretary

“So tremble false Whigs in the midst o’ yer glee,
For you’ve no’ seen the last o’ my bonnets and me.”
Walter Scott, Bonnie Dundee

The irony of the former leader of the SNP, Alex Salmond, quoting these words from one of Scotland’s greatest Tories, during his concession speech following the loss of his Gordon constituency in June 2017, was not lost on many observers. Salmond was, perhaps inadvertently, referencing the Whiggish roots of modern Scottish Conservatism, the very cause that had brought his political career to an abrupt end.

The Whigs derived their name from the Whiggamore Raid of 1648, an attempted military coup by Lowland Presbyterians from South-West Scotland, aimed at toppling the Duke of Hamilton’s pro-Royalist Scottish administration of the day. The raiders’ champion was Hamilton’s rival, Archibald Campbell, Marquis of Argyll, the prototype Whig politician and effective leader of the Covenanters during the Scottish Civil Wars between 1638 and 1645. Argyll was to be executed by the Maiden in Edinburgh in May 1661 for treason, following the Restoration of Charles II to the throne.

The term “Whig” was a derogatory one, intended to mean a yokel or backwoodsman (“whiggamore” meaning a cattle driver, the supposed profession of those who took part in the raid). What began as a term of abuse from political opponents would come to represent the political faction opposed to the unfettered rule of the Stewart kings, championing the rights of Parliament against the Crown, and representing the mercantile class, Scots Presbyterianism, and political reform.

Arrayed against the Whigs were the Tories, supporters of the Stewart dynasty, of Episcopalianism, and defenders of privilege and the interests of the landed classes. As with the Whigs, the name started as an insult, the Tories being originally Irish brigands beyond the rule of law. Tories were associated with opposition to the Act of Union of 1707, and in time with the Jacobite cause.

As Parliament became more powerful throughout the 18th and 19th Centuries, the Whigs and Tories alternated in positions of power, in time transforming themselves into Conservatives and Liberals. With the extension of the franchise to all adult males by the end of the 19th Century, political organisation on the ground became even more important, and both parties started to recruit grassroots members in order to campaign effectively.

Given the Scots Presbyterian origins of the Whigs, it is not surprising that throughout most of the 19th Century in Scotland it was the Liberals who
dominated, particularly in Lowland Scotland, but there were still Tory strongholds in the likes of Perthshire and the North-East. The Scottish Tories were not without their champions, most notably Sir Walter Scott who through his writing rekindled interest in Scottish history and traditions.

When George IV visited Scotland in 1822, the first British monarch to do so in nearly two centuries, it was Scott who arranged the programme. His intention was to bring back to life ancient Scotland and present George as a new Jacobite king, and he had the monarch dressed in a short kilt, but with pink tights to protect the modesty his bare legs. The sight of the King in such bizarre garb was enough to scandalise some sections of society, but commenting on the unprecedented public appearance of his legs, Lady Hamilton-Dalrymple remarked: “Since he is to be among us for so short a time, the more we see of him the better”. Walter Scott’s championing of the Scottish interest went beyond just symbolism. Under the pseudonym Malachi Malagrowther, he led a successful campaign in 1826 for the Scottish banks to have the right to continue to issue their own notes, in the face of opposition from the Bank of England. This was Scottish Toryism of the 19th Century - promoting Scottish rights and identities.

The pursuit of a policy of home rule for Ireland by the Liberal leader William Gladstone in the 1880s led to a split in that Party, with the formation of the Liberal Unionists in 1886. Led by Lord Hartington and Joseph Chamberlain, the Liberal Unionists formed a political alliance with the Conservatives in opposition to Irish home rule. Given the close connections between Presbyterian Lowland Scotland, particularly in the West, and Ulster Protestants, it is not surprising that Liberal Unionism was particularly popular in Scotland. This, combined with the emergence of the Labour Party with an appeal to those working class voters who had once been the bedrock of Liberal support, marked the end of Liberal ascendancy in Scotland.

With both the Conservatives and the Liberal Unionists opposing Irish home rule, and effectively competing for the same votes, a merger of the two parties made good political sense. And so, in 1912, the Scottish Unionist Party was created with these two rival groupings coming together. The fusion of two quite different political traditions gave the Scottish Unionists a much broader appeal than they would ever had had as simply Conservatives, although their MPs continued to sit on the Conservative benches in the House of Commons.

The 1912 merger was the catalyst for substantial growth in the Conservative vote, leading the Unionists to become the dominant political force in Scotland for much of the middle part of the 20th Century. In the 1955 General Election the Unionists became the only party in modern Scottish political history to poll an overall majority of both seats and votes – something that even the SNP failed to match at their peak in 2015.

Crucial to this Unionist success was a policy of what the writer David Torrance describes as “nationalist unionism”. The Scottish Unionist MPs in the House of Commons might sit with the English and Welsh Conservatives, but it was accepted that they preserved a distinct identity. The Scotsman reported in 1947 that these
Unionist MPs were seen as “standing up for Scotland” and “busy in the assertion of Scottish rights and viewpoints”.

The old Scottish Tory tradition was evident in speeches made by the likes of John Buchan, Unionist MP and celebrated author, who told the House of Commons in 1932: “Every Scotsman should be a Scottish nationalist”. By that he was not by any means advocating Scottish independence, but, like many Unionists of the time, he championed the notion of a Scottish Parliament within the United Kingdom, and was happy to place himself firmly in the Walter Scott tradition of strongly promoting Scottish identity.

Whilst the Unionists were never to formally adopt a policy of home rule (although sometimes the Party came close), throughout much of the 20th Century there was not the stark dividing line between nationalism and unionism that we see today. Indeed, at the Paisley by-election of 1948, the Unionists agreed not to field an official candidate but instead to support the independent nationalist, John MacCormick, against Labour.

Unionist political success was not just built on being seen to stand up for Scottish interests. A second element was the pursuit of an avowedly centrist political platform, explicitly advocating a “middle road between two extremes – the extremes of laissez-faire and socialism” as the party’s 1955 East of Scotland Yearbook put it. It was the Liberal Unionist tradition, rather than the Tory one, which influenced this moderate stance.

Electoral setbacks and the influence of the new UK Conservative Leader Edward Heath led to the Scottish Unionists changing their name to “Scottish Conservative and Unionist” in 1965, thus losing the distinct identity which had been fundamental to the party’s success. In due course the Party would firm up on its own position to devolution, putting itself on the wrong side of the constitutional argument from the Scottish majority, and contributing to decades of electoral decline.

It is no coincidence that the areas of Scotland where the SNP started making electoral inroads in the 1980s and 1990s, such as Perthshire and the North East, were historically strong Conservative/Unionist voting constituencies. Voters who had once been attracted by a “nationalist unionist” stance were perhaps not surprisingly inclined to vote for a more transparently nationalist party once the Conservatives were no longer perceived to be fighting as energetically for their interests. It is only in the last two years, with the benefit of an energetic pro-Union stance, that the Party’s long-term decline has been reversed.

Today, there is much in Liberal Unionist tradition which influences Scottish Conservative thinking. Already the Party takes distinct policy positions from those of our colleagues down South; for example, on funding free personal care for the elderly, or on free prescriptions. On other issues, such as Europe, or on immigration, the Scottish Conservatives tend to adopt a more liberal tone than some of our English counterparts.

There are other areas where this Liberal Unionist tradition can be seen in policy
positions. The championing of localism, pushing power out from the centre down to communities, families and individuals, is at the heart of what modern Scottish Conservatives stand for. Ruth Davidson’s speech in September 2017 on housing indicates a willingness to address societal problems with radical action in a manner in which the Party has shied away from for too long.

The old Unionist slogan of “Standing up for Scotland” has now been adopted by the team of 13 Conservative MPs elected to the House of Commons in the 2017 General Election, the highest number from Scotland in more than three decades. Being at the heart of government, and sitting on the Conservative benches, this is a group able to articulate the Scottish interest in a manner that the SNP MPs shouting from the sidelines, whom they replaced, were never able to achieve.

The evidence of this approach could be seen in the Chancellor Philip Hammond’s 2017 Budget, where he explicitly acknowledged the influence of the Scottish Conservatives when announcing changes to VAT rules to allow the Scottish Police and Fire Services to reclaim tax, changes to the fiscal regime to help the North Sea Oil industry, and a freeze on spirits duty to help the whisky industry. In the tradition of John Buchan and many other Scottish Unionists of previous generations, today’s Conservative team at Westminster are there to do the best for their constituents and make sure that the Scottish voice is heard.

For the first time in a generation, the fortunes of the Scottish Conservatives are on an upward trajectory. We have gone from being the third Party of Scottish politics, to be one challenging to be in government. It is no coincidence that both the Tory Bonnie Dundee, and his Whig opponents, would likely find themselves at home in today’s Scottish Conservative Party. That is a broad coalition of interests whose support can be harnessed to ensure that our Party grows to greater success in the future.
NO MAN IS AN ISLAND: THE ROLE OF THE ENABLING STATE

Donald Cameron MSP
Shadow Environment Secretary

If you head north from the Hebridean island of Eriskay, travelling along the main road which runs up the spine of the Western Isles, you need to cross a number of small causeways in order to make your way from island to island. Eriskay, South Uist, Benbecula, North Uist, and Berneray: all connected by such causeways. You would be forgiven for failing to notice these unremarkable structures given the majestic views offered to you, with the Atlantic stretching away to your left and the Minch on your right, framed in the ever-changing light for which these islands are renowned.

But these causeways are important in the long, rich story of the Hebrides, and the tides of history which brought cultures and peoples to and from their shores. The Bronze Age builders who crafted the stone circles of Callanish. Gaels from Ireland. Vikings from Norway. Waves of men and women, sweeping in and sweeping out. And it was the last receding tide of people, ebbing away from the islands as a result of eviction, world war, and emigration, which pre-empted the building of the aforementioned causeways. Not the massive engineering extravaganza of the new Queensferry Crossing by any means, but quietly, steadily, these small edifices of rock and concrete were built from the 1940s onwards in a bid to stem depopulation. Funded by local and central government they linked tiny communities and so ended the isolation of centuries, with an obvious practical benefit to the villages and townships they conjoined.

A small achievement occurring at the very edge of our country, far removed from the cut and thrust of metropolitan politics. Yet, these causeways, built at the periphery, represent one example of what government should be doing everywhere. Because surely one of the purposes of government is to build the causeways for our citizens to walk safely over, both literally and metaphorically. Government that connects its independent citizens and communities, and allows them to realise their own potential. Government that enables and empowers. Government that ends isolation and ensures, as John Donne so famously stated, that “No man is an island entire of itself, every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main”.

The “enabling state” is not a novel idea, but it deserves fresh impetus, and finds a new resonance in contemporary Scottish politics. Naturally, much conservative thought considers the size and scope of the state. But all too often we assume the state can only be one size, or, worse, seek to set its size at some arbitrary threshold, usually expressed as a percentage of GDP. That is to simplify its purpose. The state can be flexible. Like Gulliver, the state can be a lumbering giant who wields big, blunt tools but it can also be a miniscule agent, executing tiny, delicate handiwork. Which is why the state can build both the Aberdeen bypass – almost a decade late, chaotically managed, and with a massively bloated budget – and the Great Bernera Bridge, constructed in 1953 to link two Hebridean islands and a feat of modern engineering in its time, but built by 25
local men using wheelbarrows to transport the stone and earth for its construction. This is not an argument for greater government per se but it is very distinct from the two main rival ideologies in modern Scotland, socialism and nationalism. They both have pre-conceived destinations they want to impose on people – an abstraction into which citizens must fit. Our view is that government should be a means, not an end – and the ends should be determined by people for themselves.

Another lesson to be drawn from the above is this. If government’s role is to enable individuals and communities to make their own decisions for themselves, then it must step back and allow them to do so. Borrowing from Catholic social teaching, the principle of “subsidiarity” says that decision-making should be at the lowest practicable level – which means at the level of those who are living with the consequences of those decisions. In that way, the individual does what she can. Then households and families do what they can. Then villages and communities take on those matters which are too great for individuals or families. Then regions, and so on. Any intervention by central government should be strategic, and for the purpose of enabling smaller units to function. In essence, this is neither rugged individualism nor stifling collectivism, but a philosophy anchored in the dignity of every human being. A dignity which recognises that people should have some say in how their lives are arranged day-to-day. A dignity which allows a human being to develop as a person so they can contribute to our common life, and the role of government in giving every person the chance and the tools to achieve this.

There are other lessons here too, not least as constitutional whirlwinds continue to beset us in Scotland and the wider UK. All too often in these debates we find ourselves locked into an argument over numbers, as if the latest round of economic statistics alone justify one side or the other. The idea of subsidiarity, however, lends logic and moral force to a devolved settlement, on the basis that whatever needs to be done by devolved government should be, but there will always remain a category of policy that should rightly be done at a higher level. These are not just financial arrangements but part of a wider vision of where power should lie, and how devolution down from Holyrood can happily sit alongside the argument for national and supra-national frameworks where necessary.

Further, it illustrates the importance of resisting centralisation of services, especially when that centralising instinct co-exists with an ideology that struggles to conceive of any political or geographic unit other than the Scottish Government holding significant power. For most people, it is their families, their regional identities, their city loyalties, their hobbies, and their place of worship (church, mosque or football stadium) that makes up the most important circles of their lives, and shapes their identities. It is simply wrong to believe, as nationalists do, that a single national project takes precedence over all because this plays down the much richer, and more important, subsidiary units that lie beneath, be they individuals or communities.

As Scottish Conservatives and Unionists, we can trace a direct line from the
luminaries of the Scottish Enlightenment to their liberal heirs, and can point to the deep and lasting heritage of Scottish, liberal unionism which in many ways is more significant in our party’s historical tradition than its conservative antecedents, as Murdo Fraser shows elsewhere. Thinkers like Noel Skelton, who in the midst of seismic social change between the wars, grappled with a populist socialism that was proving to be superficially attractive to the electorate (an eerily familiar scenario). Skelton stated that for people to be part of a capitalist society then - unequivocally - they must have capital – and so he trumpeted the importance of property owning and schemes where employees had a stake in the businesses in which they worked, all with the aim of ensuring ownership is shared more equally and more widely, underpinned by the crucial idea that everyone can hold an asset in society. Again, no man is an island.

But while our philosophy may offer convenient counterpoints to nationalism and socialism, it would be churlish to dwell here, notwithstanding the lingering, tribal bitterness to Scottish politics at present as we languish in the wake of two divisive referendums. These wounds will heal. Putting it simply: as the next Scottish Government it should be our overarching ambition to enable individuals and communities to achieve their full potential by giving them an equal opportunity to make their own way. In other words, empower us so we can empower you.

Now for the hard part: creating solutions to the fundamental challenges currently facing Scotland. These are manifold especially in the short term, not least the need to reinvigorate our stuttering economy and craft a social policy which addresses the severe inequalities and the ingrained poverty which remains endemic in some parts of Scotland. As a recent commentator pointed out, the same neighbourhoods in Glasgow that were among the poorest in Britain 150 years ago, remain the poorest in 2018. A record that shames us all. But there are also long-term challenges to face, including technological change, an ageing population, and environmental damage. It is part of government’s role to raise its sights to both the middle distance and far distance too; to think in terms of the future not just the present. Government has responsibilities across the generations because it is inherent in us all to honour not just our father and mother but also our son and daughter, our nephew and niece, our kith and kin.

We are some way off the detailed manifesto that we will ask the electorate to endorse in 2021. However, the analysis above provides some areas of focus where government can enable us all, whether by building the homes we need for our families, by increasing opportunities for people and developing the skills they need for an uncertain future, or by a renewed commitment to real, tangible localism.

Whatever else, we will promote a vision for a liberal, confident Scotland. It will be a vision avowedly of the centre, not of the extremes. It will be a vision of hope not fear. It will be a vision which seeks to improve the lives of every Scot in a meaningful way. It will be a vision that seeks to narrow divisions between rich and poor, old and young, town and country, nationalist and unionist, island and mainland.

Returning then, finally, to the causeways of the Hebrides. It may be strange to find
inspiration in these small, solid structures, amidst the crash of the Atlantic and the
cry of the oyster catcher on the wing. But at a time of isolationism in the UK and
beyond, liberal conservatism must stand for the idea that fragments of society
need reconnecting, and that by strategic and limited interventions, government
should endeavour to bridge the gaps that divide us. In short, individualism must
be tempered by the associations and covenants we make with each other, and
the duties and respect, that we, as citizens, owe each other, in the service of a
cause greater than our own self-interest, and the enduring role of government in
enabling those relationships to flourish.
WHY I AM A CONSERVATIVE

Annie Wells MSP
Spokesperson for Public Health, Mental Health and Equalities

Growing up and living in one of the most deprived areas of Glasgow, no one would have thought I would have been a politician – let alone a Scottish Conservative one.

I still live in the same 4-in-a-block house I grew up in in Springburn in the North East of Glasgow, formerly in the shadows of the infamous Red Road Flats: now just a pile of rubble at the end of the street.

Coming from a working class Labour family, daughter of a railway man and a cleaner, I was encouraged by my Mum and Dad that I could be anything I wanted to be.

As a teenager growing up in one of the most deprived areas of Glasgow, I hadn’t really heard of a Glaswegian Conservative. All I ever heard, was that Labour was the party for the working class people.

My Dad even helped his friend campaign to be a councillor and then Leader of Strathclyde Regional Council, so as you can see Labour it was for the Wells household.

I therefore went through most of my adult life believing this to be true, casting my vote for Labour at every election and waiting for them to do something for me and my family.

I started my political journey during the Independence campaign. During a holiday in Spain in July 2014, I was sitting at the pool and an English guy said to me, “So you want Independence?” I replied, “No!” to which he retorted, “You’re Scottish though, you all want it!”.

This made me realise that the SNP thought they were Scotland, and that people outwith Scotland thought the same.

The night I came back my holiday, I phoned Better Together and asked what I could do to help and the next night I was out on the doors in Govan. The very next day I was on a street stall in Garrowhill in Glasgow’s East End with the realisation that I could do this and that people were beginning to speak out more and more about not wanting to leave the United Kingdom.

During the couple of months in the run up to the vote, I spent every second I could helping out with the campaign, whether that be on the phones, on the doors, doing street stalls or just speaking to friends, neighbours and colleagues about the referendum.

As the 18th September arrived, I was exhausted and whilst I had only been doing
this for a couple of months, others had been on the campaign trail for the last couple of years! When the results came in, I remember standing in the Emirates Arena in Glasgow thinking that I had made a small contribution to this historic moment, and it felt good.

It’s true what they say though, that after you have campaigned, you do get the bug.

I decided the time was right for me to have look at what the political parties in Scotland had to offer, and which one I believed represented me and my beliefs. One thing I knew for sure is that it wasn’t going to be the SNP.

I started to have a look at what both Labour and the Scottish Conservatives had to say and I was finding myself agreeing more with conservative values and policies than I ever had labour. At the ripe age of 42, I realised I was in fact a Tory.

It was after all a Conservative government led by Margaret Thatcher that allowed my parents to buy their home. It was a Conservative government that allowed my parents to make choices as to where I received my education and a Conservative government that pushed my family to be ambitious in getting on in life.

I joined the local association hoping to be able to help out in the upcoming General Election in 2015. Little did I know that I would end up being a candidate following Ruth Davidson’s road into politics by standing as the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Candidate in Glasgow North East.

I hadn’t quite got round to telling my family that I was a candidate, so you can imagine my Mum’s surprise when a customer in work blurted out, “I see your Annie’s a Tory?”. “No, not my Annie”, my Mum replied and then he proceeded to show her my picture in the Glasgow Evening Times – headline: “Tories select their candidates for General Election”.

I was well and truly outed.

I didn’t win my first election, but I did increase the vote and I do occasionally like to remind Ruth of this.

I didn’t have long to wait until campaigning started again, this time it was the Scottish Parliament election and I put my myself forward. To my joy and surprise, I was ranked second on the Glasgow list.

Working full time in Marks and Spencer, being a support to my mum and looking after my family, I threw myself into the campaign, even though it seemed my chances of being elected were quite low.

From leafleting before I started work in the morning, to meeting the team straight from work at night, I put my heart and soul into the campaign. There were no, no-go areas for me because I believed in the Scottish Conservatives and wanted to show that we are the party for everyone.
The two weeks before the election I took annual leave from work and was out morning, noon and night doing everything I could to spread the word. It felt like the 5th May 2016 came hurtling towards me with no warning. After an early start in the day to get out the vote, it was time to head to the count in Glasgow. I honestly had no expectations about being elected and I was ready to start back work at M&S in Dumbarton on the Monday.

It must have been somewhere between 5 and 6 am on the Friday morning that the final results came in for the regional count. We had defied the odds in Glasgow and I was an MSP.

From that moment on, it was a complete whirlwind. I had the BBC and STV wanting to speak to me. I received a call when I was half asleep from the Chief Executive of the Scottish Parliament explaining that I started work on Monday as an MSP. My life changed instantly, and the day I took my oath in the Parliament was one of the proudest days of my life, with mum and partner looking on from the gallery.

The last 21 months have had their ups and downs but I’m glad to say there have been more ups than downs.

My current role in the party is Spokesperson for Public Health, Mental Health and Equalities and I have spent the last 7 months meeting with individuals, health professionals and third sector organisations to understand what I can do to help support them and hold the SNP to account on their failures.

I only have to look around me to see the lasting effects that drug addiction has on people, including those I have grown up with and known my whole life. Only a couple of months ago when I was leaving the house to head to work, I saw the emergency services along the street. Later that night I was told at the local shop that it was a childhood friend of mine who had died of a drug overdose.

I want to help and support those who are most vulnerable. I want to help change things for future generations and I want to see people beating their addictions altogether and not resigning themselves to a life on drugs.

The Scottish Conservatives like me have bold ambitions. Instead of soundbites and sensationalism, we want to create a Scotland that is fit for the future and find long term solutions that the people of Scotland deserve.
CONFESSIONS OF A CONSERVATIVE IMMIGRANT

Marek Zemanik
Director of Policy, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party

I still see it almost every week. I go into a stakeholder meeting, shake hands and then start a conversation in my thick Slavic accent. And that’s when I see it. Sometimes it’s well-hidden, sometimes it’s there as clear as day, but it’s almost always there for a split second. What I see is a momentary puzzled look of bewilderment, hidden behind a very polite smile. People simply don’t expect an immigrant Conservative supporter, let alone an employee or advisor. As so often however, expectations don’t tally with reality. This Party – the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party – is my political home and I’d like to think it should be a natural home to those like me. Allow me to explain.

I’ve written in the past about why I am a Unionist and in many ways that’s easier to trace. My family tree is unquestionably international and nationalist sentiment has always been alien to me. My childhood memories of Czechoslovakia and her breakup influenced my views on political unions. More specifically, my relationship to the UK has firm roots in my bilingual school, which was set up by the British Council after the fall of communism. Once I moved to Scotland, I couldn’t understand why being able to claim both Edinburgh and London – two of the most amazing places on the planet - as capital cities of my country was somehow a bad thing. And beyond the emotion, I simply can’t brush aside the broader economic questions that the SNP are still trying to find an answer to. That’s my Unionism in a nutshell.

I guess my reasons for being a Conservative can be traced back in a similar way – through personal experiences peppered with a bit of political history. You won’t find any statistics here, no comparative data, no scientific method applied. Because the truth is, as much as we try to understand all strands of political philosophy, we only believe in one if it aligns with our own life story.

One of my earliest memories from childhood is of me sitting in front of the TV in November 1989 jangling our house keys. I was watching thousands march across cities in Czechoslovakia, jangling their keys as a sign of protest against the communist regime. Every one of them expecting to be met by the full force of the police and yet still marching on. The riot police did what they were asked to that day, but the regime knew its time was up and a few days later 40 years of communism were over.

Except it wasn’t really over - its legacy lives on. In all honesty, maybe that memory I described is not really a memory. It’s just something that has been ingrained in my brain because my parents speak about that moment to this day. To them, the Berlin Wall was there to stay. To them, crossing into Vienna a few months after the revolution was as unthinkable as walking on the Moon. To them, the thought of their toddler son marrying a Scot some 20 years later was a fantasy. The legacy of 40 years of communism, including its fall and the aftermath, is a part of our collective memories, it is part of our culture, it exists
in films, in books, in music, in poetry. And yes, it still dominates our politics. The impact of a totalitarian regime on who we are is something I tried to explain to my new Scottish friends and family many times. But it is not something that can be explained – it had to be lived and it had to be felt.

Did you know that even 10 years after the Velvet Revolution schoolchildren in Slovakia had annual gas mask fittings in their schools? You’d get your head measured and then get to try on a fetching army green mask, memorising your mask size and demonstrating you knew how to put it on properly. Of course, all this was done alongside lessons on the different types of early warning systems for chemical, biological or nuclear attacks and day trips to identify the best places for shelter alongside some basic survival techniques. That sort of stuff really lingers in a child.

I don’t want this to descend into a cliched reference of Orwell’s 1984, but it goes without saying that – despite being a work of fiction - it remains one of the most chilling descriptions of what totalitarianism can feel like. I had goosebumps the first time I read about Parsons being so very proud of his own daughter for turning him in to the thought police for something he said in his sleep. But those goosebumps were nothing compared to the chill I felt when, many years after I first read Orwell’s book, my dad was recounting how as a teenager he was hauled in front of the local communist apparatchik, questioned, blackmailed and threatened with being banned from going to university. That was not a book, it was real life – my family’s life. His experience, mirrored in the experiences of thousands upon thousands of others, are a source of anger, mistrust and pain to this day.

These personal experiences and the collective memory of a state that operated through fear and intimidation while wrapped in slogans of equality and solidarity built up a natural suspicion towards authority in me. They emphasised the importance of checks and balances to the power of the state and meant that by default I will rather look for the power of the individual, the power of family and the power of community before looking for solutions derived from the top. They meant that I have always thought that maximising freedom – be it of speech, of choice, of thought – is a virtue in and of itself, not just a means to an end. There is a reason I don’t describe myself as a small c conservative - I was always closer to the liberal/libertarian worldview - I tie my morality to something innately human rather than religion. I guess my suspicion of a higher power goes beyond just statecraft.

This individual agency – the power derived from making your own choice – is what often drives immigrants to take that leap of faith. It is certainly what drove me to apply to go to university in Scotland. I always felt that my primary goal growing up was to achieve the best possible qualifications to result in the best possible chance of success in a future career, even before I knew what career I wanted it to be. Yes, it meant not always being a part of the cool crowd at school, but I’ve never looked back. In search of the best possible future, I started studying at one of the ancient Scottish universities (Aberdeen), even though I knew from the start that I would have to work throughout my time there. I had savings to see
me through the first 3 months in Scotland, but I took the risk. It paid off, I found a job and have basically worked from that moment to this day. Most weeks I would spend more time at work than at university, but I probably learned as much from the series of minimum wage jobs as I did from lectures on political history. Long story short, I graduated at the top of my class, went on to do the same on my commercial-bank-loan-funded postgraduate degree, and ended up getting a pretty competitive job. I did that, nobody did that for me.

But experiences kept coming and I have moved on from my rebellious libertarian streak of my youth. I know now that for every one of my hungover classmates sitting half asleep through a university lecture, there is a kid from a broken family surrounded by addiction and violence whose fortunes do not depend on the strength of their will alone. I recognise that making difficult choices takes courage and that when people fail, trying again can feel impossible. I understand now that people are not just rational agents, but are also driven by emotion, by fear, by anger which can easily overpower reason. People without support networks – without family, friends, community – are vulnerable. And governments can help.

Of course, many of those who emigrate do not do it for themselves alone. Their primary concern is their family. I didn’t understand this enough 15 years ago, but few things change a person as much as having a family of their own and I’m no exception. I can safely say that nothing matters to me more than the wellbeing of my family. I wish I knew better as I watched my mum care for her own mum in her final years with dementia. I do not know where she found the strength to deal with an exceptionally arsy teenager, a small schoolgirl and a full-time job while watching her own mum disappear into a mere shadow of her former self as she cared for her 24/7. We don’t talk enough in this country, in fact probably in this continent, about the last stages of a person’s life. Raising children is what parents do without questioning it. So why do so many children outsource looking after their elderly parents when the tables are turned? I don’t have an answer, but I suspect my mum found her strength in the same source that drives people to uproot and move hundreds or thousands of miles away in search for a better life for those they leave behind. Leaving your family for the good of the family, how about that for a paradox.

All the evidence out there is conclusive on the causal link between broken/troubled/unstable families and a range of negative outcomes from educational attainment through health outcomes to poverty levels. That’s why Conservatives focus on families – of all kinds I must add – as the bedrock of society. Governments can enable support networks to provide relationship advice, to help with mediation, to ensure an amicable separation, to provide help with drug addiction or to offer shelter from domestic abuse. And it is not just about help when things go wrong, it is about intervening early to avoid things breaking down in the first place. A health visitor helping a mother bond with her baby. Free community spaces open for kids to burn off energy. Activity groups for people whose shared interests help avoid depression. When communities are supported, they can offer support too. Yes, free competitive markets deliver huge choice in goods and services, they drive innovation and create unparalleled wealth. They are unquestionably a good thing. But where they fall short, be it in social, health
or environmental outcomes, governments can and should step up to the mark. However, should governments and politicians lead or simply serve as instructed by the electorate? For me, the answer has to be a bit of both. Let me address the proverbial elephant in the room - the EU referendum result. Yes, it was a hard pill to swallow, but it wasn’t entirely unexpected. If people spend decades only hearing about the Strasbourg travelling circus rather than European research cooperation, banned toasters rather than Erasmus and straight bananas rather than international intelligence sharing, is it any wonder they start flirting with Euroscepticism? Combine that with a populist wave of people power challenging an untrusted establishment and this flirtation becomes a full-blown affair. I did not support Brexit, for pretty obvious reasons, but I am a democrat. Our task now is to understand why Leave won and to learn from that. I am convinced that rebuilding trust between politicians and those who they represent should be the focus of attention for all of us involved in politics. The worst way to start would be by undermining the result of a democratic vote.

So, a suspicion of authority, a belief in individual agency, the primary importance of family and a trust in the power of the community – that’s how I ended up in the Conservative Party. If you think that Eastern European immigrants yearn for the return of communism, then you haven’t spoken to many. Most of the ones I know recoil at some of Jeremy Corbyn’s ideas. But I will say this – just like with the EU, rhetoric matters. How politicians talk about immigration matters. Calling out racism and xenophobia matters. Challenging the myth of Schrödinger’s immigrant – who comes here to live on benefits while simultaneously stealing jobs – matters. The morning after the EU referendum, with the Prime Minister having just resigned and the First Minister having announced she’s drawing up a new independence referendum bill, among the massive political shocks of those events, Ruth took me aside and merely asked me if I was ok. I just nodded. I couldn’t speak because my throat simply closed up. Not because of the referendum result or that morning’s politics, but because I saw someone who genuinely cared. And I know that there’s more of us in this Party who care than those who do not.
Elizabeth Smith MSP
When people talk about Scottish education these days they often do so with a rueful glance back to the past; to a time when Scotland’s schools led the world. The Scottish Conservatives contend that Scotland can again lead the world but only if there is a radical change to the current culture of thinking which drives education policy. Above all, we need to shake off the shackles of conformity and replace it with greater freedom, greater ambition and greater creativity and imagination.

What made Scottish education so special in years past was the universal understanding that good schooling was the key which could unlock so many opportunities in life, never mind in employment. There was an expectation—irrespective of class or background or whatever type of school you attended—that everyone should be able to read, write and count properly and that poor standards would not be tolerated. Teaching was a highly valued profession, leadership was strong and good schools were seen as the central component in building strong communities. In short, Scottish schools were synonymous with excellence. They did not need edicts from either local or central government telling them what to do. Aspiration was ingrained in the DNA of every school.

Now, notwithstanding the fact that many good things are still happening in Scottish schools, we can no longer make that claim of all-round excellence. The evidence, sadly, is incontrovertible; the persistent and long term poor showing in literacy and numeracy for far too many young people, the fundamental weaknesses in the delivery of the Curriculum for Excellence and too few teachers to serve the best interests of our young people, felt most acutely in some core subjects and by those who have additional support needs, are the main areas of concern.

The OECD, in its recent comprehensive review of Scottish education, commended many of the attributes of Scottish education and its basic ethos but said that we were very far removed from ensuring the current system can actually meet our potential. That is a big worry and it is why the current review of school governance is so important since it presents the opportunity to change where real power lies when it comes to decision-making.

The Scottish Conservatives believe – just like many parents and teachers – that a large part of the problem in our schools is the weakness in the delivery of the Curriculum for Excellence. At its inception 15 years ago, the argument was that, in the modern world, society would require a greater focus on skills and on personal and social responsibility than in the past. Education should not be about knowledge in the abstract but how it is applied. Young people should understand why they are learning something just as much as what they are learning.
No-one should disagree with this but the trouble is that the curriculum has completely lost its balance. The focus on core knowledge has been diminished – so too has the essential focus on basic literacy and numeracy. Our hard pressed teachers have been so busy measuring “experiences and outcomes” and wading through thousands of bits of paperwork issued by the education agencies that they have had less time to get on with the business of actually teaching our young people. Worse still, the very same education agencies have kept changing all the paperwork so teachers feel they are going round in circles. Increasingly, when parents, teachers and young people are asked to say what the Curriculum for Excellence means they are unsure of the answer.

This is why, in recent months, we have spent a great deal of time listening to the teaching profession and listening to parents and young people and, why, in January this year, we set out a five-point plan to address the problems with the Curriculum for Excellence.

Firstly, we believe the rationale for the Curriculum for Excellence needs to be completely clear and easily understood. Parents, teachers and young people need to know exactly what Curriculum for Excellence is expected to deliver at the key stages in a young person’s educational career, both in terms of knowledge and skills. There should be no scope for ambiguity or misinterpretation.

Secondly, there has to be more focus on basic literacy and numeracy and on the learning of core knowledge. Every child, no matter who they are, should expect good quality teaching in learning to read, write and count and, in the later stages of primary school and the early years of secondary school, there should be a stronger focus on core subjects. Standardised testing is vitally important in assessing this core knowledge prior to young people making their SQA choices.

To this end, we believe the capacities to teach literacy and numeracy should have greater focus in teacher training. That, of course, depends on ensuring trainee teachers have the requisite skills themselves and, in this respect, we agree with the Royal Society of Edinburgh when it makes the calls for teachers to have Higher Maths as well as Higher English.

The third point in our plan is to reform the education agencies. It is essential that there is full public trust in our education agencies including Education Scotland, HMie, SQA and the GTCS but it is very clear from the evidence submitted to the Scottish Parliament’s Education Committee in 2016 that many teachers do not feel these agencies are working well enough to deliver higher standards in our schools. On too many occasions, they have felt trapped by a myriad of directives - some from national government, some from local government and some from the education agencies, and not always with the same message.

In particular, we want to see a radically reformed Education Scotland which is totally separate from HMie. This is because the same agency should not be responsible for both curriculum development and for inspecting it. That cannot be right.
Going hand in hand with this is the need to extend school autonomy. Based on international evidence, the best educational standards are delivered when there is wholesale autonomy for schools; when that autonomy allows strong leadership to flourish, when there is a really strong “buy in” from parents and the local community to the general ethos of the school, and when there are high aspirations across the board.

The interesting comparison here is to ask why Scottish universities have been able to come much closer than schools to retaining the gold standard of education and why college education saw such a huge improvement beyond the 1992 further education reforms introduced by the then Conservative Government. The answer is autonomy. Until recently, when the Scottish Government has sought to place greater controls on both the further and higher education sectors, especially in terms of governance, these institutions were free to decide their own destinies. Most succeeded and, as a result, Scotland has been able to boast five universities in the top 200 in the world – at least for now.

Autonomy is surely also important for schools. What matters is what works in terms of delivering higher standards – not being bound by a one size fits all approach which allows no room for headteachers to pursue different approaches according to the specific educational interests of their own pupils. Scotland’s schools cannot thrive on the lowest common denominator. We need a system which delivers excellence because it inspires teachers, parents and young people.

For example, schools now have the benefit of being able to access the Pupil Equity Fund – an important reform in terms of raising attainment - but they key test is who will have the final say as to how it is spent? As things stand at present, it looks like schools will have to work within both national and local government guidelines. They will have more freedom to make suggestions but they will not be in full command of the final decisions. Scottish Conservatives believe they should be, otherwise the push for greater autonomy will mean nothing. If local and national government can still call some of the shots, headteachers will still face some of the constraints which have caused the present system so many problems.

Likewise, we need a much more diverse system of schooling which responds to a fast changing world and to the needs of all our young people, most especially those who feel isolated within the current system. Take Newlands Junior College for example – a radical departure from the status quo and an institution that is delivering top class results for those young people who have felt disengaged elsewhere and which is inspiring others to follow suit. So why is it that John Swinney has chosen to rule out greater diversity of schools? We know that the parents of St Joseph’s School, the Al Qalam School, the Glasgow Steiner School, Mirren Park School and the Green/STEM school in Maryculter want to do things a bit differently and so too do several philanthropists. So, providing these new institutions uphold the highest standards of HMIe, the Care Commission and other professional bodies why should they be held back by a system which constrains choice?
Of course no education system will work unless we have sufficient teachers and that is clearly not the case in Scotland right now.

Notwithstanding the fact that teacher numbers are bound to fluctuate as a result of changing pupil demographics, the very significant drop of 3,500 teachers since 2007 has had a profound effect on the ability of schools to deliver top class education given the resulting pressure on resources. In particular, there is very worrying data which tells us that some of the most disadvantaged pupils, including those with additional support needs, are losing out the most.

The inability of some local authorities to find teachers to employ – often after extensive advertisement - lays bare the fact that workforce planning is, in some crucial areas, inadequate. There are clearly barriers within the system which are preventing a more flexible and free movement of the qualified teaching workforce but there is also a problem with the restricted routes into teaching that have been in place for several years. This needs to change.

The Scottish Conservatives would like to see more work undertaken to make it possible to have more flexible routes into teaching. We believe there remains a strong case for a Scottish version of Teach First which can meet the rigorous academic standards required by our universities and teacher training institutions, the necessary accreditation with the General Teaching Council of Scotland, and also the high expectations of parents.

Those within business and industry whose employees would like to make a commitment to teaching should be encouraged to do so via bursary support and philanthropic support to undertake the necessary training.

Likewise, we hope much faster progress can be made to ensure that those teachers who have qualified and demonstrated professional expertise from jurisdictions outwith Scotland can be quickly accredited with the GTCS. It is not acceptable that there is a long wait for paperwork to be completed and that potential teachers can be turned away on account of red tape. The Scottish Government has intimated that the ongoing work within the GTCS to improve the situation will not be complete until January 2019. This seems a worrying length of time given the urgency of finding a wider, well qualified pool of teachers.

It has been said many times that part of the unattractiveness of teaching is often the growing burden of paperwork and assessment which is distracting teachers from the vocation they have chosen. The Scottish Conservatives believe this is a valid concern and that is just another reason for changes to be made to the delivery of the Curriculum for Excellence.

Education is many things. It is the foundation on which we base our hopes and ambitions for our children as well as something that touches our deepest emotions. It is the prerequisite for economic wealth, the guardian of our culture, the vehicle by which we learn about our rights and responsibilities, and it is the key with which we can unlock many doors to the wider world.
Most people know when they meet someone who is well educated. It shows in the way he or she behaves, in their conversation and in their range of interests. A well educated person knows how little he or she knows, how much there is still to learn and how to set about learning it. A well educated person does not just have a thirst for knowledge but a thoughtful curiosity and a deep understanding of humanity.

In short, education is the most precious gift we can give to our young people but, for too many of them, the current system of schooling in SNP Scotland is letting them down. The Scottish Conservatives believe things could and should be so much better so that Scotland can, once again, lead the world.
Welfare and Work
The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has been promoting research into Britain’s social problems for more than a century—it has unparalleled expertise on poverty, social exclusion, mobility and social justice. In 2016 the JRF published a ground-breaking report, We Can Solve Poverty in the UK. Among the most striking statements made in this report are these two: “for those who can, work represents the best route out of poverty” and “additional spending on benefits without addressing the root causes of poverty has failed to reduce poverty”. These two claims are a good summary of the Scottish Conservatives’ modern approach to poverty and social justice.

Let’s start with work. There are more jobs in the British economy today than at any other point in our country’s history. Since David Cameron returned the Conservatives to government in 2010, some three million additional jobs have been created in the United Kingdom. We have more women in employment than ever before. And we have more people with disabilities in employment than ever before. This modern jobs miracle is one of our party’s crowning achievements—and we should be proud of it. Employment—and self-employment—bring people and families into the economy; work makes people economically active, enabling them to contribute to our public resources. It is a truism, but it cannot be repeated too often, that we cannot have the world-class public services we rightly demand unless we have the underlying economic growth to pay for them. But the jobs miracle is good not only for the collective interest: it is the essential underpinning for lifting families out of the misery of welfare dependency, into the liberation, freedom and control that come with the weekly wage or monthly salary: “for those who can, work represents the best route out of poverty”.

Understanding that relation of welfare to work has been core to the social security reforms we have seen in the UK since 2010. Universal Credit is expressly designed to enable people to move more quickly and more smoothly off benefits and into work. And it is delivering. Universal Credit puts people in better work for longer and more quickly than was the case with the legacy benefits Universal Credit has replaced. There have been significant issues with the roll-out of Universal Credit, notably over the unnecessary period of time new claimants may have to wait before their initial claims are processed, and the Scottish Conservatives have led calls—now heeded by the UK Government—to address and resolve these issues as Universal Credit is further rolled out. Likewise, we have been supportive of the flexibilities available in Scotland to deliver Universal Credit differently (for example, with fortnightly rather than monthly payments). As long as these flexibilities do not undermine the core mission of Universal Credit—to move claimants off welfare and into work—we will continue to support them.

There is an important qualifier to the insight that work represents the best route out of poverty: “for those who can”. For those who cannot work, the Scottish Conservatives, like all modern political parties, believe that we must provide support. That is why
we have championed the fact that, since 2010, the United Kingdom has invested more in disability benefits than ever before in our country's history. Working-age benefits serve two quite different purposes: they can either support those with very low incomes (Universal Credit is the principal example), or they can support those with additional needs—needs which may arise as a result of disability, or through the responsibilities that come with raising young children, or the additional expenses that are incurred as a result of caring for others. Most of the working-age benefits in this group are devolved in full to the Scottish Parliament. As a party we fought for this in the Smith Commission; as a government in Westminster we legislated for it in the Scotland Act 2016; and as the principal opposition to the SNP in Holyrood we pressure the Nationalists to get on with exercising their new social security powers as quickly as possible. There should be no foot-dragging on the SNP’s part. At the same time, we keep a very close watching brief to ensure that the design and delivery of devolved social security produces both fairness for welfare claimants and value-for-money for the hard-pressed taxpayer.

This is where the Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s second finding comes in: “additional spending on benefits without addressing the root causes” of poverty “has failed to reduce poverty”. Of course benefits are and will continue to be one tool that any government will want to use to assist in alleviating poverty. But focusing on benefits alone, without addressing what the JRF call the “root causes” of poverty, has failed. That is a damning indictment of the way the political left (including the SNP) has thought about poverty for decades. We can and must do better. But we will achieve more only if we are prepared to have an honest, open and robust debate about the social wrongs that drive people into poverty in the first place. In Scotland there is only one party that is prepared to lead that debate—and that’s the Scottish Conservatives.

**Poverty Safari**

One author who writes with brutal honesty and candour about poverty, its effects and its causes, is Darren McGarvey. He is no Tory—in the independence referendum he was a prominent online campaigner for a Yes vote—but his extraordinary book Poverty Safari, published in 2017, has established itself as a must-read for anyone in Scotland interested in the truth about social policy. The book is not an easy read. It is a personal memoir of deprivation, abuse, violence, addiction, family breakdown, neglect and social isolation. But it is also a positive book, a book of hope and no little courage. At the same time, it contains both challenges to and insights for the competing ways in which the political left and right view and seek to respond to poverty. Because of this, the book has not been well received amongst certain members of Scotland’s “poverty industry” (McGarvey’s phrase)—it makes uncomfortable reading for anti-poverty campaigners who situate themselves on the left wing of modern politics. All the more reason to engage with it, then.

Crucially, McGarvey rejects the cosy left-wing nostrum that poverty has nothing to do with individual behaviour and the personal choices people make over their lives. He also rejects the opposite (and deeply ill-informed) contention that poverty has nothing to do with the structure of the economy and can be solved once and for all if only the feckless poor would spend their limited money more wisely. McGarvey
is correct on both counts—each of these one-dimensional views deserves to be rejected. This is what he writes:

“I no longer believe poverty is an issue our politicians can solve. Not because they don’t want to, but because an honest conversation about what it will require is too politically difficult to have. If those in power were straight about what addressing this problem would require it would shock us to our core. And not merely because of the magnitude of the task facing society, which is unconscionable in scale, but also because there is a certain level of personal responsibility involved that’s become taboo to acknowledge on the left”.

The only thing here I would disagree with is the opening sentiment, that our politicians cannot work together to solve poverty. I believe we must; and I believe we can. But we will achieve this only if the left accepts that it’s not all about structural inequality (even though some of it is) and if the right accepts that it’s not all about poor personal choices (although some of it certainly is).

Child Poverty Act
In 2017 the Scottish Parliament passed a Child Poverty Act. Support for the legislation was unanimous across all five parties represented in Holyrood. The Act puts back into statute—albeit in a much improved and strengthened way—provisions first enacted at UK level by Gordon Brown’s Labour government and then repealed by David Cameron’s coalition government. The Scottish Conservatives decided not to follow the UK party’s lead, but to plough our own course. We would support the new Scottish legislation, seeking to make it stronger as it went through its Holyrood stages. The problem with the legislation as it was when it was introduced by the SNP into the Parliament was that it focused uniquely on income targets. It would not have lifted a single child in Scotland out of poverty—but it would have measured how many children in Scotland were living in poverty, and it would have set targets requiring this number to decrease over the coming decade. But, as amended by the Opposition parties, including by the Scottish Conservatives, the legislation as enacted now includes, in addition to the income targets, requirements on government to take concrete steps to deliver policies that will reduce child poverty. And here is the core point: these concrete steps go well beyond the political left’s pre-occupation with income, and require the government to confront not only the symptoms of poverty (too little money) but what the Joseph Rowntree Foundation called its “root causes”—although I would prefer the term “underlying drivers”.

What drives people—including families and children—into poverty in the first place? No anti-poverty strategy can hope to succeed unless it addresses and confronts the underlying drivers of poverty and, thanks to Conservative amendments, the Child Poverty Act now requires the Scottish Government to do exactly that. There is no mystery about what these underlying drivers are. The Centre for Social Justice has been researching this question for years. Drug and alcohol addiction; family breakdown; educational under-attainment; unemployment. These are the drivers of poverty and, if we are serious about wanting to prevent people from falling into or remaining in poverty, we must as a matter of priority direct our resources to battling them. For the truth is, if fewer parents had drug or alcohol problems, there would be fewer children living in poverty. Likewise, if more children grew up in families with
at least one parent in full-time paid employment, more children would grow up free from poverty.

As enacted the Child Poverty Act requires the Scottish Government to produce detailed delivery plans, setting out the measures they propose to adopt in order to address these underlying drivers of child poverty. It is not enough to measure poverty—that's all the SNP wanted to do at first—we need to take action to eradicate it. And we will never do that unless we are honest and robust about identifying and tackling the pathways that lead people to poverty in the first place.

**The SNP’s Record**

Let us examine the SNP’s record on some of these matters over their last decade in office in Scotland. Take, for example, drug addiction, which has been estimated to cost the public purse £3.5 billion every year. Despite bold words from the SNP in its 2008 national drugs strategy, *The Road to Recovery*, the number of drugs-related deaths in 2016 was the highest ever recorded in Scotland, and more than double the figure a decade ago. Drugs fatalities north of the border are now the highest in Europe and more than two-and-a-half times the rate of the UK. Analysis shows that in previous years, more than half those who died lived in the most deprived neighbourhoods in Scotland, and that the deprivation profile of drug-related deaths has barely changed since 2009. Over the same period, there has been no significant change in the number or rate of problem drug use, while the rate of drug-related hospital admissions has increased by 47 per cent since 2009.

Meanwhile, the SNP cut the funding for Alcohol and Drug Partnerships by more than £15 million and continues to pursue policies such as Safer Drug Consumption Facilities, which would supervise addicts as they administered drugs—rather than help them to become abstinent from illegal substances. This is contrary to the aspirations of many problem drug users, with a survey of 1,000 drug addicts in Scotland revealing that less than 5 per cent wanted help to inject more safely and that the overwhelming majority instead wanted help to become drugs free.

Some of the most compelling passages in Darren McGarvey’s *Poverty Safari* are about addiction. Consider, for example, what he writes near the end of the book, in a remarkable chapter called “The Metamorphosis”:

“Taking responsibility is a hard thing to do ... all I can say is that my own life began to improve when I stopped blaming other people for the things that were going wrong in it ... I toured mental health services for years, genuinely believing I was either severely depressed or insane, when really, I was an exhausted, malnourished alcoholic, oscillating wildly between the high of inebriation and the crushing low of withdrawal and financial ruin. All the while I was demanding immediate change; rubbing my hands, awaiting the imminent collapse of society. My self-righteousness totally blinded me to the fact that the very society I was praying would fall, for all of its glaring flaws, was providing for my ever mutating needs. I had a slew of professionals on call, as well as accommodation, benefits and other forms of support ... Yet somehow I was blind to all of this ... Because I wasn’t ready to honestly examine my problems which were, in the end, as much about my own attitudes and behaviour as they were about poverty or child abuse ... I could only see where I had...
been wronged, never where I had done wrong. And this was never challenged in left-wing circles ... People cheered me on, maniac that I was ...

The Scottish Conservatives are and always have been the party of freedom and responsibility. We believe that people must take responsibility for their own lives. Of course taxpayer-funded public services are there to help when help is needed. But the good that government can do includes the shaping of those public services so that they do not simply “cheer on the maniacs”, adopting McGarvey's words, but facilitate a move away from drug- or alcohol-fuelled mania towards an addiction-free life in which the individual can make a positive contribution to society, rather than relying on society to feed the “delusional self-obliteration” of addiction (McGarvey’s words, again).

The SNP’s record is no better when it comes to educational under-attainment. The Centre for Social Justice has rightly argued that “educational failure can have a catastrophic impact on a child’s life chances and opportunities...that creates and perpetuates cycles of disadvantages. Children leaving school with few or no meaningful qualifications are less likely to enter into and progress in work and less likely to be able to support the learning of their own children.” The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has said that educational under-attainment is the “biggest driver of future poverty”.

Nicola Sturgeon once pledged to make education her government’s “defining mission”. But the attainment gap has widened under the SNP’s stewardship, hitting the most deprived children the hardest. According to the Scottish Government’s most recent figures, in both writing and in numeracy the number of children from Scotland’s most deprived communities performing well at P7 is declining. That is to say, the attainment gap is getting worse under the SNP, not better. This appalling trend is reflected even more acutely among school leavers. Figures for 2015-16 also show that just 85 per cent of school leavers from the most deprived backgrounds ended up in a positive destination, compared with 96.2 per cent of those from the most affluent areas, a gap that widened on the previous year by 1.2 percentage points, representing hundreds of children across Scotland. And so the cycle of poverty continues. It’s not the children who are failing: it’s the SNP who are failing Scotland’s children.

Finally, consider family breakdown. According to Relationships Scotland, the accumulative cost of family breakdown in Scotland to the public purse is £3 billion. Figures show that children in lone parent households are almost twice as likely to experience deprivation as those in couple families. Relationship breakdown is also responsible for almost one third of homelessness applications in Scotland—and while the number of homelessness applications has decreased in recent years, this figure has remained largely unchanged since 2007.

During his opening speech for a recent parliamentary debate on the Scottish Government’s budget for the coming year, the SNP’s Finance Secretary Derek Mackay said: “If we are to achieve our full potential, we must do more to address the inequalities that exist in our society. Regrettably we do not have many of the levers that are necessary to do that.” Mr Mackay is profoundly wrong. Health, education
and justice are fully devolved to Scotland, and have been for decades. The SNP has had the power to tackle poverty and inequality in Scotland since it first took office, but a lack of drive and leadership and a woeful paucity of ideas has let our most deprived communities down.

**What the Scottish Conservatives Will Do Differently**

Poverty is not inevitable, but we must work tirelessly to eradicate it at its roots. We have an economic imperative and a moral duty to do so. Poverty is a waste of human potential and a betrayal of aspiration. Today, poverty is as much an absence of opportunity as it is a lack of material wealth. The cycle of poverty is not inevitable: it can and it must be broken. In this essay I have sketched how the Scottish Conservatives would achieve this. In summary, our approach starts from the following simple propositions:

- **Work must always pay and the benefits system must be designed to move people off welfare and into work wherever possible.** This is not an ideological fixation: it is grounded in evidence—for those who can, work represents the best route out of poverty.

- **Tackling the symptoms—or consequences—of poverty without addressing its underlying causes, drivers or pathways has failed to reduce poverty. Yet still the political left seems to think that the only necessary answer to poverty is ever-increased spending on benefits.** This approach has failed, and we need to be honest about that.

- **The Scottish Conservatives’ core principles—freedom and responsibility—apply not only to industry, enterprise and the economy, but to social policy too. People must be free to make their own decisions, and must take responsibility for them.**

- **There is no mystery surrounding the underlying drivers of poverty—we know what they are: namely, drug and alcohol addiction; family breakdown; educational under-attainment; and unemployment.** No anti-poverty policy can hope to succeed unless it robustly confronts and tackles these underlying drivers—indeed, tackling these underlying drivers should be the first priority.

- **On addiction, we need to reorient resources and interventions towards prevention, abstinence and recovery.** Parking people on methadone or other opioid replacement therapies has gone on for too long in Scotland and has not worked; likewise, safe injecting centres and other steps along the road to decriminalisation would be moves in entirely the wrong direction.

- **On family breakdown, we need to offer much more systematic support for families across Scotland; we need to audit public policy to ensure it impacts positively on families—we need to put the family at the heart of our social policy; and we need more targeted “whole family” support services in family hubs across Scotland.**
And in education, we urgently need to reverse the SNP’s decade of declining standards; we need to close the attainment gap, not widen it as Nicola Sturgeon has done; we will do this by driving power away from local authorities so that schools themselves can manage their resources in a more tailored fashion; we need to diversify access to higher education; and we need to promote further education and skills training, again reversing the ruinous decline seen in Scotland’s hard-pressed Colleges under the SNP’s mismanagement.
CREATING A LADDER OF OPPORTUNITY

Paul Masterton MP
Member of Parliament for East Renfrewshire

An anchor principle for Conservatives, from all ends of the country, and all wings of the party, is a belief in the just reward of hard work. But right now we have a problem: workers and parents across the UK often feel like their sacrifices aren’t making a difference to their life chances and those of their children, and that ‘doing the right thing’ isn’t getting them anywhere.

The public’s views on social mobility have never been so negative, there is a fierce and deep inter-generational divide, and the Social Mobility Commission’s latest report made difficult reading. My own constituency of East Renfrewshire found itself in a strange position of having one of highest median weekly salaries for residents in Scotland, but also the highest rate of low pay. A discrepancy caused by 30% of jobs in East Renfrewshire paying below the living wage, but the local population being twice as likely to hold managerial or professional professions than the average, often commuting into the central belt for well-paid jobs. House prices here are around 8 times median salary.

Conservatives, at both Westminster and Holyrood, need an ambitious social justice programme not just out of economic interest, but because it is the right thing to do. Too many people feel the deck is stacked against them, that Government is not on their side, and that the ladder of opportunity runs out of rungs too quickly. It is that pervasive sense of unfairness that threatens social cohesion, and has left people lurching to populists from left and right, seeking the cosy blankets of socialism and nationalism in search of someone to blame and an easy answer.

The Prime Minister identified the barriers that stand in the way of people fulfilling their potential – because of their age, family circumstance, race, disability, sexuality, their postcode, or how much their parents earn. But there is a danger that with both Scotland’s parliaments understandably finding their timetables consumed with Brexit, those issues will not get the time they need.

For some, Brexit was about asserting sovereignty and ‘taking back control’, but in many parts of the country a Leave vote was an anguished rally cry from those who felt forgotten and dispossessed. We must not only deliver Brexit, but progress with social reform to address the issues which resulted in the vote to Leave.

In my view, the first step is for the Party to again view the world as it is, not as it might wish it would be. Most people don’t care about ideology – they want a home, a decent job, a safe environment to raise their kids in and for public services to provide a good, effective service that is flexible and moves with the times.

Linked to this is that more of the population are working ‘A-typical hours’, conflicting with the opening of essential public services. This has consequences
- if you don't have a network to fall back on to, to pick your kids up from school for example, you are more likely to drop out the job market. If you struggle to get a doctor’s appointment you’re less likely to seek early assistance for a medical problem. Public services need to adapt to reflect the people they serve. Failure to do so is one reason why in Scotland we spend so much money on treating consequences, rather than on prevention.

Social exclusion is one of the great ills of our age, not just in relation to the elderly. Identifying and strengthening weak social networks must be a priority. We cannot expect individuals to be upwardly mobile if they are unable to access or even hear about opportunities, or have no ability to draw on the support of their wider family or community which would allow them to do so.

Of course, a huge driver in social mobility is earning power, and the confidence and self-reliance that comes from being in work. Conservative action, supporting a modern industrial strategy, investing in infrastructure and City Deals, cutting taxes for small businesses, corporations and working families alike, is helping drive growth in employment.

We see more jobs, record unemployment, more low-paid people out of taxation, the introduction of the national living wage. These things matter, broadening opportunity and delivering jobs.

But in-work poverty is too high. Yes, there are UK-wide levers around tax and benefit policy, and national minimum wage setting for which the UK Government is answerable, but the agenda can be set at a more regional level, both by the Scottish Parliament (particularly with transfers of tax and social security powers) and by local councils - that should not be overlooked.

Regional economic development can drive up wages and increase the demand for employees to work more hours, skills development can help workers move into better paid jobs, and a focus on economic diversification can aid unsatisfied workers change industry (for example, the underemployed are more likely to work in fluid sectors such as hospitality and retail). That all helps to motor social mobility and must continue to form the cornerstone of the policy agenda.

Crucial too, is encouraging and cultivating an environment of aspiration and ambition in which children can be confident in themselves and their goals, and given the tools to succeed. Scotland’s children are being let down by a SNP Government that has introduced a climate of low expectations.

The driver to social mobility is the crucial early years where the attainment gap takes root, and those must be the unremitting focus of government at Holyrood and Westminster.

Before increasing hours for 3 and 4 year olds (which most parents cannot access anyway), provision of the basic hourly entitlement should be extended to all two year olds and the most vulnerable one year olds.
Early years education and child care needs to have real purpose and intent – developing literacy, numeracy, social skills, and helping to narrow the divide that is ingrained by the time our kids walk through the primary school gates. Funding must be made available to provide and re-train a highly skilled, professional workforce.

There are too many parents who are unable to read their child a bed-time story, and too little help available for those who desperately want to give their kids a better start in life. Health visitors and community midwives need the funding, resources and time to provide real hands on support to child and parent. And not just for the first few months, but right up until age 7. Building close and trusted relationships with the family, understanding their issues and needs and signposting to specialist support where required. That is what our children need, not the intrusive disgrace that is the SNP’s Named Person policy.

A shortage of teachers in several subjects means many kids are unable to take subjects of their choice, immediately limiting their options. Let us not be afraid to learn from other countries – let us look properly at Teach First, the London Attainment Challenge, and let’s offer student loan forgiveness schemes to graduates looking to teach subjects where there is the greatest need (STEM subjects in particular).

Students from poorer backgrounds who do make it to university in Scotland now typically face a Scottish Government debt after four years approaching £25,000, while those from better-off homes will finish with less, often no, such debt. The repayment threshold remains lower than in England. The Scottish system means that those who started from a poorer background will pay back a larger share of their future income in student loan repayments than those who came from better off homes, whose incomes will be less affected, if at all. That makes it easier, for example, for the latter group to save for a deposit on a house, with higher disposable incomes to spend on boosting the possibilities for their own children further engraining the divide.

Additionally, vocational education should be given equal kudos, equal precedence and kids should not be funnelled through to a university education as a default. Kids learn differently, so we need to allow them to be taught differently. They have different skill sets, so we need an education system that enables all those skill sets to be nurtured and developed. They have different aspirations and goals, and we need to ensure we have guidance and routes in place to help every child get to where they want to be.

The balance of the social contract between the generations is out of kilter, and this should be particularly concerning to Conservatives, for whom it should be fundamental that things are better for the next generation than the last.

That will mean taking difficult decisions. Former Pensions Minister Baroness Altmann was right to last year that the “one size fits all approach” to the state pension may no longer be fit for purpose, and that the Government should now begin to consider introducing flexibility into the system.
Such a system should, for starters, allow people to retain their original state pension age, accessing the benefit as originally intended, but reduced for early payment. This not need cost the Government money, it is common for such reductions to be cost neutral (so that the capital value of the pension over its payment period remains the same). Administration costs could be limited by providing an individual with a single retirement quote 6 months prior to their original state pension age, and asking them to select whether to retire then on a lower pension, or to wait to receive the full pension at their new state pension age.

For some, early access may be necessary because the job they do makes working into their late 60s unrealistic. For others, it may allow them to continue working on a flexible or part-time basis, stepping down into retirement, but remaining economically active for longer.

It is worth remembering that you can already choose to defer taking your state pension, which is then increased on the basis you are expected to receive payments for a shorter period of time. There is no good reason for this flexibility to only work one way, to the benefit of those healthy (and indeed wealthy) enough to wait.

Complaints around the operation of the state pension on the whole relate to an unfairness that does not stem from the age at which the pension is due, but its basic design: a uniform retirement age and uniform rate, for a society that is not uniform.

Government should begin now the detailed and practical thinking required to not only ensure state pension provision is on a sustainable footing, but that it better reflects the modern world of work.

Ultimately, social mobility isn’t about wanting your children to follow in your footsteps. It’s wanting them to walk alongside you, hand in hand. And then, when the day comes when you can walk no further, for your children to have the will, the ability, and the strength, to continue walking further than you ever dreamed possible.

This most basic of aspirations should not be conditioned on wealth or social standing, but be a right we can all expect to enjoy. It’s time for the Conservatives to demonstrate to the wider public what we already know: that it is only our party who are truly able to assist in clearing the path.
Gordon Hector
Director of Research, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party

On the last day of the 2017 election, I found myself with 30-odd volunteers in the small village of Fallin, just outside Stirling. It was the last photocall and rally of the campaign. It was hot and sunny and spirits were high. But there was still a sense of curiosity about where we campaigning. Fallin is an ex-mining village, and it is predominantly council and ex-council housing. In the miners’ strike, it was the only pit town where support for striking miners was so high, there was no need for a picket. Both for the eager volunteers, and for the election-weary voters we were meeting, there was a recognition this was quite telling. For the first time in years, the Tories were campaigning in Fallin.

This was just one day in one wee place in a long campaign. But there’s something about this sort of village that our party needs to understand.

What makes Fallin typical is that it had one, dominant employer: coal. The Polmaise pit was opened in 1904, at the peak of Scotland’s industrial pomp and confidence, and from then on it was the only employer of size, employing around 600-700 men in a village that hovered around 1500-2000 people. In the 1930s its miners broke the record for the longest recorded strike, and they were the longest-striking miners in the 1984-5 strike. British Coal announced the pit’s closure in 1987 and it closed with 2 days’ notice. Ten years later, The Herald reported that almost all the ex-miners were still out of work. The main work destination for the rest was coal-fired Longannet power station - which in a final insult, was then also earmarked for closure.

Scotland is full of similar places. Whether steel, mills, fishing or coal, they generally sprung up around a single industry. Their pattern on a map is seemingly random - but is in fact a record of where natural and man-made resources collided. They generally built up a neat and modest 19th-century infrastructure of banks and libraries and churches. They usually remained small-ish, with industries limping on through decline and nationalisation until the final end any time after the 60s. It is easy to romanticise their harsh, hard, carbon-heavy past. But nonetheless, their potted history is that they had jobs and a purpose: then suddenly, they didn’t.

And in many ways, these small towns and post-industrial villages represent our greatest economic and social challenge.

Cities have enough social issues, of course. But they retain three huge advantages over smaller places.

First, cities are diverse and usually hold different industries and sectors in close proximity. Anyone leaving an old industry, by choice or not, has ready connections to new ones. This is relatively easy, policy-wise, and allows a conservative quite a straightforward answer - just get the economic fundamentals
right, keep labour markets flexible, and let people get on with it. But smaller towns represent a greater challenge, and highlight competing strands of conservative thought: because while businesses move, and jobs move, and the economy as a whole can move upwards to dizzying affluence, people are often reluctant to move, often for very good reasons. A sense of place matters hugely to most people, and doesn’t end overnight even if employment does. Even more specifically, home-ownership is rightly valued as an incubator of responsibility and for offering a stake in capitalism. But it makes mobility less likely: someone who owns their house is less likely to move on, even if all the jobs have.

In other words, one aspect of conservative principles - the dynamism and wealth only a free market brings - is held in tension with another, which recognises the importance of community, identity and tradition. Small town Scotland generally has the latter in bucket loads: just try asking any small town what they think of their nearest rival’s football team/accent/chippy. But the former, once the dominant employers have gone, is much harder.

The second advantage of cities is that they are connected and generally easier to get around. There are exceptions, largely in psychological or cultural exclusion - highly localised job aspirations persisting even in huge cities, for example, or quite specific cultural influences like sectarian divides, or even gang territories. But however challenging the circumstances of a deprived area in a city, it is still usually only a short bus ride away from a job. Many smaller towns in Scotland, on the other hand, are remarkably isolated. Ayrshire’s pit villages are up to a half-hour drive from the town itself. An ex-mill town like Langholm is technically in Dumfries and Galloway, but it’s also an hour’s drive from the county town. Fraserburgh is an hour’s drive from Aberdeen, and two by public transport. Even the larger towns of the central belt can be surprisingly poorly connected. And this is only physical connection - if bits of cities are subject to psychological isolation and a sense of being apart, then how much easier is it for a small town to feel that way?

Finally, cities benefit from new methods of consumption which can hurt smaller places. The clearest example is online shopping: an urban consumer can click and collect just about anything. If a physical shop closes, then the city has a critical mass that means often it isn’t noticed, especially if they shift up to even tinier, high-end businesses. In smaller places, the high street is being killed by Amazon, and the To Let signs are unlikely to be replaced by hand-knitted artisan gluten-free fro-yo shops any time soon.

Similarly, it’s not that purely rural areas don’t have real challenges, and rural deprivation is also often overlooked. But the countryside has the opposite advantages - the reliance on a handful of industries means that significant policy thought, and indeed often direct financial support, is offered for farming, or food and drink. Scotland’s islands are getting their own bill giving them a (largely symbolic) right for policy to be island-proofed. It’s hard to imagine anything similar happening for Fallin and its peers. And when times do get tough in the countryside, a sparser population can actually avoid a concentration of sudden
unemployment or financial pressure from which it is hard to recover.

So in their economic monoculture and their particular in-between population density, small-town Scotland is uniquely challenging to policymakers. Placed in a global context, it might be useful to borrow an appalling bit of pretentious wonk-speak. That is, sometimes policy writers talk about the four industrial revolutions: the first, of mechanisation and steam in the late 18th century; the second, of mass production, electricity and combustion in the late 19th century; the third, of IT and automation in the 1970s; and the fourth, which we are living through, of connected devices, advanced materials, the internet of things, and worrying about the robots coming to steal the remaining jobs and then kill us all. One way of thinking about Scotland is that we have a mixed economy of the third and fourth revolutions, plus oil - but it is stretched over the urban pattern built for the first two. The question facing small towns is how they can adapt, and what happens to their people if they can’t.

The answers are not easy. But a number of responses, both thematic and specific, could be suggested.

First, adult skills. Places take a long time to recover from a major employer leaving, and retraining has to be an essential part of that. Indeed, it’s so often mentioned it’s something of a cliche.

But there are good reasons to renew the idea. For a start, it is no longer just a belated response to the deindustrialisation of the 1960s-80s. Rather, as advanced robotics pushes on, and as new industries emerge, the importance of a nimble workforce capable of adaptation will become more, not less, important. Some technologies even create the possibility that cities will no longer be automatically at an advantage: 3D printing, for example, could be done just as easily in Shotts as it can Shanghai. We have no real way of predicting what new ideas and markets might produce, and in what urban pattern they might happen - so flexibility has to be the watchword, and education seen not just as a one-off process at the start of life but as something everyone continually engages in.

And what’s more, it bears repeating because SNP policy has been spectacularly wrong - essentially 180 degrees out from the required direction of travel. Since 2007, official policy has been to prioritise full-time and more formal further education courses at the expense of part-time and informal, in a shrinking sector. Overall college places have fallen by about 150,000, and within that, part-time have fallen the most. But it is precisely those courses we need. They are essential for people on the fringes of labour markets trying to break in, those who need flexibility, like mothers returning to work, and those who need to quickly adapt to new circumstances. SNP policy confuses rigour (which we want) with rigidity (which we don’t). A more agile skills policy, that actively promotes part-time and some-time training as a means of economic adaptation should be a priority.

Second, the city deals must have proper governance. The principle of the deals is exciting for many reasons - partly because it sees direct investment by both UK and Scottish Governments together, but mostly because of the spatial level
at which they work. Much economic development takes place at too small a level - for example, councils which have fairly arbitrary borders. Much of it is just too big - like the national economic agencies which cover the entire country from Stranraer to Stromness. City deals take a city region, which is a much more sensible functional economic unit. Edinburgh’s, for example, includes the Borders, the Lothians and Fife; Glasgow’s includes most of Strathclyde, and Aberdeen’s all of the shire.

For the smaller towns in those regions, this offers the chance to think strategically about their long-term role. Is their future as a commuter town, for example, best served by upgrading housing and amenities? Or is there a cluster of skills apparent across the region that isn’t clear when you only consider one place - that suggest a concerted focus on that sector? Seen in the context of an entire region, can you re-skill entire populations to better connect them to another town’s industries? Do you have some legacy that could be turned into a new, unique asset - like the unexpected emergence of East Lothian’s ash lagoons as a bird-watching centre, or Falkirk repurposing an industrial canal into a tourist attraction? Or once you think regionally, do you realise that attempts to regenerate through culture really do require something stand-out to work, and you just can’t compete with nearby offerings?

City-regions are the right level to discuss these questions, and city-deals offer small towns the chance to confront such hard choices backed up with investment. That potential is too much to squander, so we need strong governance, clear strategic leadership in each region, and clear accountability on what is spent, how, and to what effect. The purpose of city deals is to devolve to functional economic areas in order to achieve growth. If that is forgotten, they will just become public spending - and nothing will change.

Third, connectivity. There are the obvious rail links that should, at the very least, have proper cost-benefit analyses done - the leven loop, the north Aberdeenshire line, the remainder of the Waverley route. Buses and roads are duller, but just as important.

Finally, the planning system could offer greater recognition of the evolution of small towns, in a number of ways. It could offer more flexibility, for example. Properties usually gain planning permission for a single use. This is understandable, but it tends to mean that adaptation is slower. For example, if a small clothes shop in a town goes bust because it can’t compete with online retail, then levelling the playing field to prevent that happening would take an immense arsenal of policy measures. So would enticing back another clothes shop. But the simple ability to change usage from retail to residential or light manufacturing might just avoid months of to-let signs - and allow another, more in-demand activity, to take place at a rent the market could support.

Second, an awareness of the effect of development on existing economies. Look at the map of new house building around the big cities and it is striking how patchy it is. Edinburgh, for example, has great chunks of fields within the bypass,
but the towns of East Lothian are adding pockets of new estates at a great rate - while the towns of Midlothian, which could perhaps benefit from an injection of new vitality, are left alone. It is far easier said than done to make thinking more strategic when the planning system remains fundamentally reactive (which does also have huge advantages). But at the very least, an understanding could be built into planning of what concentrating people - or equally, the alternative of creating dollops of development far apart - does to the economy and to places.

There are many more specific things that could be done. Our local manifesto set out a wider range, from new forms of business improvement districts for town centres, to devolving greater control of business rates to councils, incentivising local growth. And of course, it all needs to be set in a competitive business environment, and a strong school-age education system. So these themes - skills, city deals and planning - need wider efforts. But they do represent areas of obvious focus.

When we left that sunny day in Fallin, we felt we were going to do ok. In the end, we won Stirling by 148 votes. With a margin of victory that tight, it felt like every last conversation counted. For some of the team, it will always be Fallin wot won it. But it’s also a reminder that representing this sort of community takes commitment and policy thought. If we don’t understand how many of Scotland’s small towns came into being, how they came to rely on dominant industries and how many are still recovering from their loss - and if we don’t balance our taste for an ambitious economy with an understanding of community rooted in place - then we will not win in these places again. More importantly, we will not deserve to, either.