



Caroline Flint Speech to Labour Party Conference 2011

Conference, nearly 45 years ago, in this great city, the Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral opened.

Built from the donations of ordinary people, when they had so little to give.

As the dedication reminds us, they did it by touting the streets and pubs and knocking on doors like their own.

They did it with dolls and raffle tickets.

They did it with pools and bingo.

They did it with silver paper and tuppenny legacies.

They did it with cigarette and Green Shield stamps.

They did it with old newspapers and wedding rings.

They did it.

And the day it opened was their day.

That is the history of our party.

From the Christian socialism of the Welsh valleys.

To the self-help tradition of the Rochdale pioneers and the co-operative movement.

And visionary trade unionists like Doncaster railwaymen Thomas Steels and Jimmy Holmes, who moved the motion that persuaded the trade unions to create our great party.

Ours is the story of ordinary people in ordinary communities achieving extraordinary things.

They said that Labour could never win in Dartmouth.

Ben Cooper was prepared to stand up for Labour values.

And he won.

In Barking and Dagenham, when people feared the rise of the British National Party, brave men and women like Josie Channer, stood up against ignorance and prejudice

And won.

In York, Liberal Democrats said that 29 was too young for someone to run the council.

James Alexander proved that only Labour could bring the change that city wanted.

And Labour won.

Labour's 800 - our new generation of councillors elected in May, prove day in day out that it is not age, it's attitude that matters.

Every day, in the face of huge, frontloaded cuts.

Thousands of Labour councillors are:

Giving voice to their communities.

Defending the services people rely on.

And building the good society.

The Tories like to talk the language of localism.

But it's a strange localism that imposes cuts that fall deeper and faster on local councils and communities, than on almost any central government department.

It's a strange localism that dismantles local services and puts blind faith in volunteers taking up the reins - because, as Ed Miliband has said, you can't volunteer in your local Sure Start centre or library when it's already been closed.

It's a strange localism that sees Eric Pickles take to the TV studios to smear local councillors with cynical, politically motivated attacks.

It's a supreme irony that a man of Eric Pickles' stature is the Minister for Meals on Wheels.

And barely a day goes by without another missive from Mr Pickles to local councils.

Frankly, it would take more than a weekly bin collection to get rid of his rubbish.

Labour councils are showing that we are the real party of localism.

Not the party of big government, or an over-bearing Whitehall.

But the party of quality local services, of modern housing, and stronger communities.

Giving people a voice.

Giving them hope - when all the Tories offer is chaos, confusion and fear.

And I want to tell those councillors that we are doing our bit to ensure your voice is heard by the Government.

I am proud of the support my Shadow Team give to you.

So my thanks to:

Barbara Keeley

Alison Seabeck, to

Jack Dromey

Chris Williamson

Angela Smith

And Julie Elliott.

And our Lords team:

Jeremy Beecham

Bill McKenzie and

Roy Kennedy.

And most of all, our thanks to friends, old and new, in local government.

Who keep us on our toes.

And show us the impact of this Government's failed policies.

And Dave, thanks to you. Your support has been invaluable in the last year.

Conference, one Tory MP said that chaos in the planning system is a good thing.

Well, they've certainly delivered on that.

Their planning reforms have already caused confusion and alarm.

But we are living in strange times when the Government reveals that the National Trust is part of a vast left-wing conspiracy

I must be going to the wrong meetings.

Of course, we all want an effective planning system that is able to meet our future needs for housing, transport and infrastructure, and which supports jobs and growth.

And that is exactly what we did in government.

Building businesses and homes, creating jobs, supporting growth.

And we did so, while we created new National Parks.

And protected over 1.6million hectares of green belt.

Labour did so, while ensuring brownfield and town centre first policies.

And we won't let them undermine this now.

It is a disgraceful sight.

To see Tory and Liberal Democrat ministers proudly publicising their opposition to local housing schemes in their back yard.

While standing in Parliament wringing their hands about the need for more homes.

Pure hypocrisy.

The truth is the economy isn't stalling because of the planning system.

It's stalling because of the Tories.

Cuts that go too far, too fast. And no plan for growth.

Look at what they're doing on housing.

First time buyers waiting longer.

Fewer houses built last year than any year since the 1920s.

200,000 new homes cancelled in 18 months

Waiting lists for council houses soaring.

And only half a million mortgages provided last year.

Half the number provided each year during Labour's first ten years.

Conference, the Tories have sucked the life out of our economy.

And hit the building industry hard.

And for every one of the housing developments cancelled there are skilled people put out of work and small suppliers put out of business.

That's why we must kickstart the building industry by repealing the bankers' bonus tax to fund 25,000 new homes.

And why a temporary cut in VAT to 5% on home improvements is vital.

Because George:

You might enjoy it hurting.

But it certainly ain't working.

Conference, I am proud of what we achieved in our 13 years in power.

Proud of the one and a half million homes modernised.

Proud of the 250,000 affordable homes built in the teeth of a recession.

And proud of the 1 million extra families able to buy a home for the first time.

But I'm honest, too, that we did not do enough.

So today I reaffirm our commitment:

To a decent home for all.

At a price within their means.

In a place they want to live.

To the many people who want to own their home.

Who want to build an asset.

Who want security.

Who want a little more control over their own life.

We will support that dream.

But I also want those same benefits to be spread to those who live in social housing or the private rented sector as well.

Conference, we have ambitions for social housing.

To once again serve its original purpose.

A positive choice for many.

Homes for heroes.

Homes for those in need.

Homes for the hardworking.

And I'm not going to take any lectures on aspiration from a prime minister who believes that, if you get a pay rise you should be kicked out of your council house.

Under Labour, the private rented sector will be properly regulated, so every family that rents has security and choice.

And we will not ignore that more than a million properties in the private rented sector would not meet the decent homes standard.

It cannot be right that housing benefit continues to go into the pockets of landlords who have tenants in sub-standard properties.

Under Labour.

We will end it.

To the family who own their home but worry that their children never will.

To the older person wanting a smaller house.

But close to the church or community they've known their whole life.

To the son or daughter still living with relatives.

Or sleeping on the sofa of a friend.

For all those whose voice is never heard.

I say, we are on your side.

And we will fight to keep housing at the top of the agenda.

But we will only do that if we give councils the powers they need to build the homes their communities want.

In government, we were too slow to trust local councils and communities.

We were too reluctant to relinquish the levers of the state.

Too often, we looked like the party of Whitehall.

Not the town hall.

But Ed Miliband and I both know:

The only way you create stronger, safer, fairer communities is by trusting people to make their own decisions.

As our film showed, Labour Councils are pioneering new ways of delivering services.

Reinvigorating civic life.

And empowering local people.

But localism can never mean cutting councils loose.

Leaving communities to fend for themselves.

Or pitting North against South.

Where the Tories try to divide our country, we will seek unity.

Around a funding system fair to everyone, and which reflects need, as well as encouraging growth.

So that every council is able to deliver the services its community relies on.

On May 5th, we took another step forward.

From Gravesham to Gedling, Telford to Ipswich, Hull to Barrow in Furness.

In our great cities.

And in our market towns.

In our villages.

And in our seaside resorts.

Labour is regaining the confidence of the British people.

Town by town.

Street by street.

Door by door.

At every opportunity:

We must win more seats.

And more councils.

Until the Tories' onslaught on local government is stopped in its tracks.

Today, I say to the British people:

Labour is once again finding its voice in all corners of our country.

The party of community.

The party of localism.

And in 2015, the party of government.