CONSERVATIVE TECHNOLOGY MANIFESTO

Conservatives

Making the British government the most technology-friendly in the world to create new jobs and kickstart the recovery
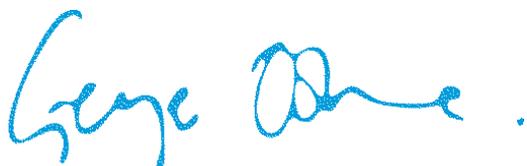
The Conservative Party is committed to getting the economy moving again. It's clear that we cannot go on with Labour's model of an economy built on debt. An irresponsible public spending boom, an overblown banking sector and unsustainable consumer borrowing on the back of a housing bubble were the features of an age of irresponsibility that left Britain so exposed to this economic crisis. They cannot be the sources of sustainable growth for the future. Indeed, the record fall in business investment and the growing loss of international investor confidence in the British economy threatens to drag Britain back into recession. We can't go on like this.

We need to build a new British economic model, with saving and business investment as the bedrock of our prosperity, helping to create new, highly paid jobs in every region. As part of this urgently needed agenda, the Conservative Party has already set out detailed plans to cut taxes on new jobs created by entrepreneurs, and to reduce business taxes and regulations. In addition, we have published the Sir James Dyson Review, which sets out a road map to make Britain the leading high tech exporter in Europe and, as we have said, we are looking at how we can implement as many as possible of James Dyson's recommendations as fast as possible.

This Conservative Technology Manifesto outlines the most ambitious technology agenda ever proposed by a British political party, and will provide a boost to British business and help create highly paid new jobs across the country. Our plans will give Britain the fastest high speed broadband network in Europe, helping to create 600,000 additional jobs. We will make the British government the most technology-friendly in the world, and meet our ambition that the next generation of Googles, Microsofts and Facebooks are British companies.

In addition, our plans to open up government data and spending information will not only help us to cut wasteful spending, but according to new research by Dr Rufus Pollock of Cambridge University, the lead author of the HM Treasury report on the economic value of open data, it will also create an estimated £6 billion in additional value for the UK. This boost to British jobs will come from the synergies and positive spillover benefits that result from businesses and social entrepreneurs building new applications and services using previously locked-up government data.

The Conservative Technology Manifesto is yet more evidence that the choice at the next election is between 5 more years of Gordon Brown's tired government making things worse, or David Cameron and the Conservatives with the fresh ideas, energy and leadership to get the country moving.

1.1 CONSERVATIVE TECHNOLOGY MANIFESTO: KEY POLICIES

We will legislate to enforce the freedom of government data. We will create a powerful new 'Right to Government Data', enabling the public to request – and receive – government datasets. This will radically increase the amount of government data released – and will provide a multi-billion pound boost to the UK economy. President Obama's administration has already implemented a 'Right to Data' policy.

We will be the first country in Europe to extend superfast 100 mbps broadband across most of the population. This is up to 50 times faster than Labour's planned broadband network.

We will publish online every item of central government and Quango spending over £25,000 – including every contract in full. We will also publish online all government tender documents for contracts worth over £10,000 via the existing Supply2Gov website. This will create new jobs by opening up government procurement to more SMEs. We will also publish online every item of local government spending over £500 – including every contract in full.

We will create a level playing field for open source IT in government procurement and open up government IT contracts to SMEs by breaking up large IT projects into smaller components.

We will also create a small IT development team in government – a 'government skunkworks' – that can develop low cost IT applications in-house and advise on the procurement of large projects.

We will require all credit card providers to send their customers a data file containing information on pricing and usage. This data file can be uploaded onto third party price comparison websites, helping people to make better informed choices and tackling consumer rip-offs.

We will publish online the names and salaries of all central government and Quango managers earning over £150,000 per year, and in addition we will put online the salaries of the 35,000 most senior civil servants. Senior civil servants will also be required to publish online and in full details of expense claims and meetings with lobbyists. We will also require councils to publish online the senior salaries of officials and expenses claims by councillors.

We will build a smart energy grid that enables a huge increase in the use of renewable energy technologies, and we will invest in the next generation of wind, marine and carbon capture technologies.

We will throw open the doors of Parliament by introducing a technology enabled Public Reading Stage that will involve the public in the legislative process, and harness the wisdom of crowds to improve bills and spot potential problems before legislation is implemented.

1.2 CREATING NEW JOBS AND CUTTING COSTS: OPEN DATA

New technologies are opening up new opportunities for businesses and social entrepreneurs to create billions of pounds of economic value by building innovative applications and services that make use of government data. The Conservative Party will unleash this innovation by opening up government data and publishing government datasets in full and online. **Dr Rufus Pollock of Cambridge University, the lead author of the HM Treasury report on the economic value of open data, has produced a new calculation that our plans to set government data free will create an estimated £6 billion in additional value for the UK.**

In addition to this multi-billion boost to the economy, setting government data free will make it easier for the public to hold ministers to account for the performance of public services and wasteful spending, and exert downward pressure on wasteful spending and unjustified wage inflation amongst public sector fat cats.

We will **legislate to enforce the freedom of government data. We will create a powerful new Right to Government Data,** enabling the public to request – and receive – government datasets. This will ensure that the most important government datasets are released – providing a multi-billion pound boost to the UK economy. President Obama's administration has already implemented a 'Right to Data' policy.

We will unleash an open data revolution – going far further than the Labour Government's limited reforms – by setting free a wide range of government datasets, including the **monthly online publication of local crime data on a street-by-street basis, education and health performance data** and **detailed information about all of DFID's projects and spending programmes** including the results of impact evaluations. In addition, we **will publish online the energy consumption of all buildings in Whitehall.**

To open up government spending to public scrutiny, we will **publish online, and in an open and standardised format, every item of central government and Quango expenditure over £25,000.** In addition, from 1 January 2011, a Conservative government will **publish government contracts for goods and services worth over £25,000 in full,** including all performance indicators, break clauses and penalty measures. In addition, we will increase the accountability of EU spending by **publishing online details of every UK project that receives over £25,000 of EU funds.** This will include the stated goals and outputs of the project, the geographical area that will benefit, and the contractors or delivery mechanism used. The Treasury will take the lead in ensuring that this spending information is published. To create new jobs and enable more small businesses to bid for government contracts, we will **publish all procurement tender documents for contracts worth over £10,000 online and make it accessible, free of charge.**

A Conservative government will also apply our radical transparency agenda to public sector salaries. We believe greater public scrutiny will serve to provide downward pressure on excessive and unjustified wage inflation amongst public sector fat cats. **We will publish online the names and salaries of all central government and Quango managers earning over £150,000 per year,** and in addition we will **put online the salaries of the 35,000 most senior civil servants.** These civil servants will also be required to **publish online and in full details of expense claims and meetings with lobbyists.** We will also require public bodies to publish online departmental organograms showing the job titles of every member of staff.

We will also throw open the doors of local government, enabling greater scrutiny that will help to cut costs and tackle wasteful spending. **All local councils will be required to publish online every item of spending over £500.** In addition, we will require **local councils to publish procurement contracts and tender documents in full.** To tackle runaway local council salaries, **we will require councils to publish the names and the full remuneration package of all senior local authority staff earning over £60,000.** We will also **require councils to publish data on individual councillor expenses,** enabling the public to compare councillor expenses across the country.

To restore trust in politics, Conservative shadow ministers and MEPs voluntarily publish online full details of their allowances and expenses. A Conservative government will apply this practice to all MPs. **We will require all MPs to publish regularly online details of their individual expenses claims.** We will also **throw open the doors of Parliament by introducing a technology enabled Public Reading Stage for legislation.** This will involve the public in the legislative process and harness the wisdom of crowds to improve legislation and spot potential problems before a bill is implemented.

1.3 CREATING NEW JOBS: BUILDING A 21ST CENTURY TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE

A Conservative government will build a new model of economic growth, based on high tech and high value industries. This means harnessing and catalysing the next generation of technologies, and helping businesses to create highly paid new jobs in every part of the country. We will build a high tech 21st century infrastructure that is fit for purpose, and we will lay the foundation for a British technology revolution.

We will be the first country in Europe to extend superfast 100 mbps broadband across most of the population. This is up to 50 times faster than Labour's planned broadband network – and will open up new opportunities for the next generation of British high tech companies, and put Britain at an advantage when it comes to developing innovative online platforms and services.

We will unleash private sector investment to build this superfast broadband network by opening up network infrastructure, easing planning rules and boosting competition. This approach has proved successful in other countries such as Singapore and South Korea: these countries are global leaders in superfast broadband infrastructure. If the market does not deliver superfast broadband in certain areas, we will consider using the proportion of the licence fee dedicated to digital switchover to finance superfast broadband roll out under the new BBC licence fee settlement, starting in 2012. This amount would be leveraged to maximise the investment made, either by making it available as loans or on a matched funding basis.

NESTA calculate this will generate 600,000 additional jobs, adding £18 billion to Britain's GDP. We want Britain to become a European hub for the digital and creative industries – but this can only happen if we have the right infrastructure in place.

To provide the infrastructure that a high tech economy needs, we will begin work immediately to create a **high speed rail line connecting London and Heathrow with Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds,** with construction to begin in 2015. This is the first step towards achieving our vision of **a national high speed rail network to join up major cities across England, Scotland and Wales.**

A Conservative government will put Britain at the forefront of the green technology revolution, creating jobs and business opportunities across the country. We will **transform our electricity networks with 'smart grid' and 'smart meter' technology** that automatically matches supply and demand, allowing a huge increase in renewable power. We will stimulate the development of **new wind and marine power technologies by backing a network of large-scale Marine Energy Parks,** and we will urgently accelerate the demonstration of **cutting edge carbon capture and storage technology.** We will also **create Britain's first Green Investment Bank,** which will draw together money currently divided across existing government initiatives and leverage private sector capital to finance the next generation of new green technology start-ups.

As recommended by the Dyson Review, **we will keep R&D tax credits but will simplify and refocus them on high tech companies, small businesses and new start-ups** in order to stimulate a new wave of technology. We will also implement a wide range of the Dyson Review's recommendations to build the skills base that a high tech economy needs. We will **establish new technical Academies in each of the 12 biggest cities in England,** with the long-term ambition to have one in every area of the country to provide credible, high quality vocational education. In order to provide our schools with specialist science and technology teachers, we will **encourage our top STEM graduates to go into teaching by paying off their student loans and offering competitive salaries.** In addition, we will **expand the apprenticeship programme** so that all 14-16 year olds have access to genuinely vocational qualifications.

We will ensure that Britain has **the most favourable intellectual framework in the world for innovators and high tech businesses.** We recognise the need to tackle digital piracy and make it possible for people to buy and sell digital intellectual property online. However it is vital that any anti-piracy measures promote new business models rather than holding innovation back.

A Conservative government will also **reform regional business support to create business-led local economic partnerships** that will be more responsive to business needs. At the same time we will re-establish **clear national policy leadership for key technology sectors** such as aerospace, pharmaceuticals, IT, the creative industries, high value manufacturing and high tech engineering that generate high-quality jobs around the whole country. Britain's world-class science and engineering base will underpin a successful high tech economy. We will allocate a **multi-year Science and Research Budget to provide a stable investment climate for Research Councils.**

We will also take action to harness new technologies to make the market more efficient, make it easier for new entrants to compete, and tackle consumer rip-offs. A Conservative government will **require all credit card providers to make information available to their customers on their usage and spending history.** This information can then be used by third party analysts, such as price comparison websites, to help people to make better informed choices and tackling consumer rip-offs. We will explore the scope for extending this approach to other sectors. A Conservative government will also **install smart meters in every home** to enable the public to use new technologies to take greater control of their energy consumption, switch between suppliers and reduce bills and emissions.

1.4 CREATING NEW JOBS: FIXING GOVERNMENT IT PROCUREMENT

The Labour Government have spent more per capita than any other government in Europe on IT – but too much money has been wasted on failed projects, and they have failed to use these procurement projects to stimulate innovation and growth in the economy. Conservative government will open up government IT procurement to innovative new companies and small businesses. Under Labour, just nine IT companies received 60% of public sector IT spending. We can't go on like this.

By opening up IT procurement to SMEs, we can increase competition for contracts and so drive down costs, and we can help to create new jobs and support high tech British enterprise. We will transform the way that government procures IT by strengthening **the capability and accountability of Whitehall departments for procurement and management.** We will **appoint senior private sector non-executives to departmental boards,** and in any department where ICT plays a significant role in delivering services, we will recommend that at least one non-executive board member has strong ICT/operational expertise.

In addition, **we will reform the design and procurement process for government IT.** The design process should first explore simple, low cost solutions and examine existing solutions before contemplating bespoke commissioning. Procurement can be much faster and cheaper than at present, without sacrificing quality and competitiveness. We will ensure that the government becomes an intelligent and capable customer able to manage such procurements in-house.

We will **create a level playing field for open source IT by implementing open standards across government IT systems.** Open standards will also enable large contracts to be broken into small modular components, so reducing risk and enabling more small businesses to bid for government IT contracts. To ensure that high tech small businesses are not locked out of the IT procurement process, **a Conservative government will also introduce a presumption against government IT contracts worth over £100 million.** These policies will not only save costs, but will also help to catalyse the growth of the next generation of high tech British IT companies. In addition, **we will publish online all IT tender documents and IT procurement contracts** to enable the public to root out wasteful spending and to help more small businesses bid for government contracts.

To ensure that value for money is delivered, a Conservative government will impose an **immediate moratorium on planned IT procurement projects** in order to evaluate upcoming projects and ensure that small businesses and open source IT providers are not locked out of the bidding process. We will **also create a small IT development team in government – a 'government skunkworks' –** that can develop low cost IT applications in-house and advise on the procurement of large projects.

The Conservative Party believes that government websites should not be treated like secure government offices or laboratories, where public access is to be controlled as tightly as possible. We see government websites as being more like a mixture of private building and public spaces, such as squares and parks: places where people can come together to discuss issues and solve problems. Where large amounts of people with similar concerns come together, for example filling in VAT forms or registering children for schools, we will take the opportunity to let people interact and support each other.

A Conservative government will **also strengthen the role of the government CIO,** which will have the power to implement IT open standards, open data and other IT policies across government departments.

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