



LGBT+
Conservatives

**Why Conservatives
should take
part in Pride?**



At the 2015 election LGBT+ voters began to shift their traditional left-wing allegiances and started to vote Conservative in large numbers. A poll before the General Election saw support for the Conservatives among LGBT+ voters draw level with Labour for the first time. Gay marriage, although controversial at the time, had a large role to play in this shift. All Conservatives should be campaigning on this record of equality, whether they supported gay marriage or not. Theresa May has long been a champion of gay marriage and there is now an opportunity unlike any before to persuade the LGBT+ community to vote Conservative.

WHAT IS PRIDE?

Pride is a parade or festival where the LGBT+ community and their allies come together to promote equal rights as well as self-affirmation. The celebration originated in New York City to mark the "Stonewall Riot", a demonstration following a police raid on a gay bar. In countries where LGBT+ rights are less advanced than the UK, Pride parades remain political, but in this country, Pride is usually an excuse for a party, bringing together a large cross-section of society, both gay and straight. The nearly 70 Prides which take place across the UK each year are increasingly more akin to outdoor family-friendly summer festivals.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED?

Getting involved in your local Pride is easy. Except for the larger Prides such as London, Manchester and Brighton, most parades don't charge to allow groups to march although registration is often required. Prides which have festivals may charge to have a stall or stand, but such presence at a Pride offers an excellent occasion to meet with local residents both gay and straight. Conservative MPs and Associations should look on Pride in the same light as they do a village fête or local carnival: as a community event which provides an opportunity to connect with constituents.

HOW CAN LGBT+ CONSERVATIVES SUPPORT YOU?

LGBT+ Conservatives can help you identify your local Pride. We can provide contacts and details of how to register. We can also provide LGBT+ Conservatives branded t-shirts and loan out LGBT+ Conservatives banners, flags and stickers to groups which wish to march in their local Pride parade.

Contact: prides@lgbtconservatives.org.uk



CHLOE SMITH MP: WHY I TAKE PART IN NORWICH PRIDE



“I’m a straight and proud supporter of LGBT+ Conservatives. Many towns and cities will hold Pride events which celebrate these values. LGBT+ Conservatives members enjoy these events – and so do I! I’m straight but I help lead Norwich Pride as an ally of all my constituents who want to know that I share their values.”

As a fellow Conservative, I urge you to get involved for three reasons.

- People in your area will appreciate you showing your support. Just as you would go to any other local event which conveys people’s views, needs, lifestyles and interests, it’s simply part of what we do when we aspire to represent the whole community.
- The rest of your community enjoys Pride events too. Often held in the summer, they are celebrations for everyone in your town or your city, gay or straight. As Conservatives, we believe in community and Pride events are a great way to have fun and show your civic spirit.
- The Labour Party and the left are good at exploiting these events politically, and we should never let them win. MPs, councillors, candidates and campaigners in marginal seats know that voters can be pleasantly surprised when they meet their first Conservative – so let’s get out there and show that our Party is for everyone!

It’s really easy to do this. LGBT+ Conservatives can provide all the advice and help you need to get started, and can even help you recruit new activists locally who may not yet have found the Conservative Party through your own work.

Check out the calendar of Pride events in your area for 2017, and prepare to have a good time!”



Reading East Conservatives on why they take part in their local Pride

Cllr Alison Swaddle, President of Reading East Conservatives writes:

Reading East has supported the Reading Pride for over ten years. We were the first local political party to join the march through the town centre. It's a really friendly occasion offering a way to different way to engage with voters and challenge perceptions about Conservatives. Being part of Pride is very straightforward. We book and pay for our stall at commercial rate as we are not given charity rate and this contributes to the festival giving free entry to the thousands of visitors from across our region. The Association sends emails to members and supporters reminding of the date and encouraging involvement and we invite all associations in our Area to join us.

We consider that having a Conservative presence in the parade and a stall at the festival demonstrates that we are the party for all. The Conservative stall in a garden gazebo has a covered table, posters, bunting and leaflets in exactly the same way we attend other local carnivals. One year we gave visitors free cupcakes iced with a Tory tree, another we handed out balloons to children as it's well attended by families.

It's about being there to meet local people, chat and listen and show we understand their issues and their aspirations. LGBT+ Conservatives provide flags, banners, literature and t-shirts and several members of the committee have travelled to join us in the day.

Petitions on our stall have attracted great support from visitors and enabled our minority group on Reading Council to win support for action to help the LGBT community, such as having the Stonewall Champions programme in Reading Schools and setting up an LGBT+ support centre in Reading.

Flying the Rainbow Flag

Some Prides may make requests to council to have the local Town Hall fly the Rainbow Flag on the day or week in which a local or nearby Pride is taking place. The Rainbow Flag is an important symbol of tolerance and a refusal to fly the Rainbow Flag, even if based on rules preventing flying "non-official" flags, may be misinterpreted as intolerance and used against us by political opponents. The Cabinet Office in London flies the Rainbow Flag for London Pride and Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson has recently allowed British Embassies to fly the Rainbow Flag on the occasion of local Prides. The Rainbow Flag is a symbol of equality, so councillors should consider any requests to fly it carefully.