

Andy Street speech at Conservative Party Conference 2018

Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands, speaking today at Conservative Party Conference at The ICC, Birmingham, said:

(Check against delivery)

Introduction: Welcome to the West Midlands, My Home

We have a big week ahead of us. We face historic challenges, and the country is looking to us for leadership. On some questions, we need to hold our nerve, on others we need bold new ideas.

And I believe there's nowhere better than the West Midlands to find the answers. We have led the world before. The Industrial Revolution was born here.

During the Napoleonic Wars, Birmingham manufactured nearly two million guns for the Duke of Wellington. The Spitfires which won the Battle of Britain were built at Castle Bromwich. Today in Wolverhampton, weapons systems for the F-35 Fighter are coming off the production line.

Perhaps Donald Tusk and Emmanuel Macron should remember that, the next time they pick a fight with our Prime Minister.

So in the spirit of great Brummies of the past, let us make this week a great exchange of ideas, inspiration and energy. I'm delighted to welcome you to Birmingham: my home.

We will show you what Conservatives can do when we win in urban Britain.

And we've even stocked the pubs and bars for you.

Decline and Renaissance

I was brought up here. As a kid, I was often around this part of town. Back then, there was no Symphony Hall.

Instead you'd see trolleys dumped in the canals, derelict buildings and closed factories. A decay that looked like it couldn't be fixed. Most of all, the pride of this great place had been dented.

Seeing this happen to my home led me to two decisions which have shaped me:

First, I could see what happens when people couldn't find meaningful paid work – Seeing the importance of thriving businesses to a place like the West Midlands.

That's what made me a Conservative.

And second, I saw the tough times people were going through, and that was why I wanted to be a social worker with Birmingham City Council. But I didn't get the job, so I started with a special company called John Lewis. It was a career I loved, until this dream job came up.

And now, we have started to turn things around. In the last year, the West Midlands has:

- Had the biggest increase in jobs and more startups, than anywhere else outside London
- Been the only region of the country with a trade surplus with China
- Won the City of Culture in Coventry and the Commonwealth Games here in Birmingham

Together we are starting to restore pride in our region.

Supporting Our Businesses

So how are we doing it? Firstly we focused on our strengths. Those industries where we really are the best in the world.

- Autonomous vehicles being tested in Birmingham
- Electric taxis manufactured in Coventry
- and Solihull Land Rovers sold around the globe.

Engineers are heroes in the West Midlands, and not just with cars. In Aston, Fracino makes high-tech coffee machines which are exported around the world, including Italy. I am told there is even one in Downing Street.

A perfect solution after a long Brexit Cabinet meeting at No. 10.

Beyond engineering, our doctors and scientists are focused on the race against diseases such as cancer and Alzheimer's. We have a thriving creative and media scene, led by the youngest, most diverse population in Europe. Indeed, we're hoping that Channel 4 will see our talent, and join us in Birmingham to shape the future of broadcasting.

In all of these sectors, digital is the golden thread, disrupting every business. So we must stay ahead. That's why it is great news that this will be the first region to build out 5G technology;

Making autonomous vehicles safer, connecting ambulances to hospitals in real-time,

and even allowing Jeremy Corbyn to watch "Press TV" on his allotment.

Bringing People Together

I've now been Mayor of the West Midlands for nearly 18 months, and what I see

every day inspires me...

From the 50,000 entrepreneurs who have set up their own business since I last stood on this stage.

To the young apprentice at Cadburys who started just three years ago and told me he is now a Manager and has picked up the keys to his first home.

To the Jewellery Quarter café owner who proudly told me that she had taken on a rough sleeper to give them a chance in life.

That is what is going on here.

It means having a positive vision for the future, and acting upon it.

Our United Conservative Team

But we wouldn't be in this position if it weren't for our united Conservative Team.

And that starts with this Government investing in the people of the West Midlands.

- Sajid Javid and James Brokenshire providing the funds to clean up sites that have lain derelict for decades
- Greg Clark supporting our industrial future, like through the UK Battery Centre in Coventry
- Chris Grayling working with us to reverse the Beeching railway cuts

And today I am pleased to announce, with Chris, that the West Midlands will be the first 'Future Mobility Area' in the UK. The Government will invest £20 million in new mobility services, to research and design, new modes of transport, and use data to bust congestion on our roads.

And it has been good to work with our Conservative Mayors across the country: Ben, James, Tim. And I look forward to welcoming Shaun Bailey to the Mayor's club in 2020.

And, thank you to our brilliant volunteers, our excellent Councillors, and our hardworking local MPs. Without this team, so many of the great things going on here simply wouldn't be happening.

But I want to thank two people in particular:

Phillip Hammond, who has shown the confidence to invest in the West Midlands. I thought after many years in the boardroom I knew my way around a spreadsheet, but there's nothing quite like being grilled by the Chancellor!

And of course. To someone I refer to as an Honorary West Midlander, indeed she even has her own seat at the Sedgley Conservative Club, so often has she visited. Somebody who embodies the spirit of hard work, getting on with the job and delivering.

Ladies and Gentlemen, our Prime Minister, Theresa May.

Challenges Ahead

Sharing Success with Everyone

But I cannot stand here and say that these successes are felt everywhere. There are still too many communities not sharing in our progress, and that's not good enough. Our growth must be inclusive – providing opportunity for everyone – no matter what their background.

And, tackling the big issues: youth unemployment, rough sleeping and mental health. These are challenges we must deal with, to truly be a party for everybody.

I said I would be a Mayor for all communities because for years some were left behind, if not simply forgotten.

Under my watch I will never allow that to happen again, because the lesson of history is very clear; when we succeed here in the heart of the country the UK succeeds.

Rebalancing the UK

That's why I'm pleased that it's this government that gets it. We were the ones who devolved power to the cities.

And as this Government's continued support for HS2 shows, our commitment to the whole nation is genuine. This morning Chris Grayling and I kicked off the construction work for HS2, which is already having a real impact creating new jobs, building new homes, and improving local transport. We need to stand strong for what is in the national interest.

Making a Success of Brexit

And as we look ahead to rebalancing our relationship with Europe, in the export capital of the UK we stand squarely behind our businesses. We will seize the new opportunities Brexit brings, selling our products around the world. That's why I am travelling to India on Wednesday with James Brokenshire, Midlands Engine Minister, to deepen commercial relationships.

And the next opportunity is to bring power over European regional spending back to Wolverhampton and Walsall, not just to Whitehall. So that local people can decide how that money is invested.

Our Ambition: A Party for Urban Britain

When I stood to be Mayor, I was often called the 'man with a plan'. We were given a chance, against the odds, to show what Conservative leadership in urban Britain could do. And now we're getting on with the job. And that is what people want and expect, here, and everywhere else. And let's be clear it is a job, rather like being a CEO, where you are accountable, but this time it is to two million voters. Success demands teamwork across politics, business, academia and communities. So it is a new type of job, a new type of politics.

Conference, the West Midlands is on the cusp of great things.

As you walk out of this conference centre you will see the foundations being laid before you – HSBC's new headquarters and a new square which even Joe Chamberlain would be proud of.

Urban Conservatism is delivering economic success, it's driven by the diversity which will define modern Britain.

So conference thank you, the stakes here are high, you have brought us a very long way but we have so much further to go to deliver opportunity for everybody.

And this matters more here than anywhere else, in a region where you can see the whole world in seven boroughs.

Thank you for your support."

ENDS

For further information, please contact the Press Office on 020 7984 8121.