

my job as leader of the council

COUNCILLOR DAVID SUTTON

Councillor David Sutton is the leader of Reading Borough Council and has been for the last eleven years. We decided to ask him a few questions about his career and how it all began.

your job

I regard myself as the spokesperson for a team, rather than a sole leader, but nonetheless I am the person who is ultimately responsible for the Council's political strategy and direction, all of its financial decisions and all of its services. The Leader of the Council is appointed and re-appointed by the full Council in May of each year. In reality this means that the Leader is elected by members of the majority group.

how did your career get going?

I've been a political activist since I was a teenager. My earliest commitments were to Anti-Apartheid and Campaign For Nuclear Disarmament in the 1960s and I joined the Labour Party Young Socialists at that time. In the 1970s, I lived abroad (in Ireland and France) and disengaged from Labour Party politics. I came back to the UK in 1980, and have been a Labour Party activist ever since. I've done nearly all the jobs, from branch secretary to constituency treasurer, and I finally became a Councillor in Reading Borough Council in 1988. In 1995 I became Leader of the Council and I have now been in the post for eleven years. As far as I can work out, no-one else in the history of Reading has ever served that long!

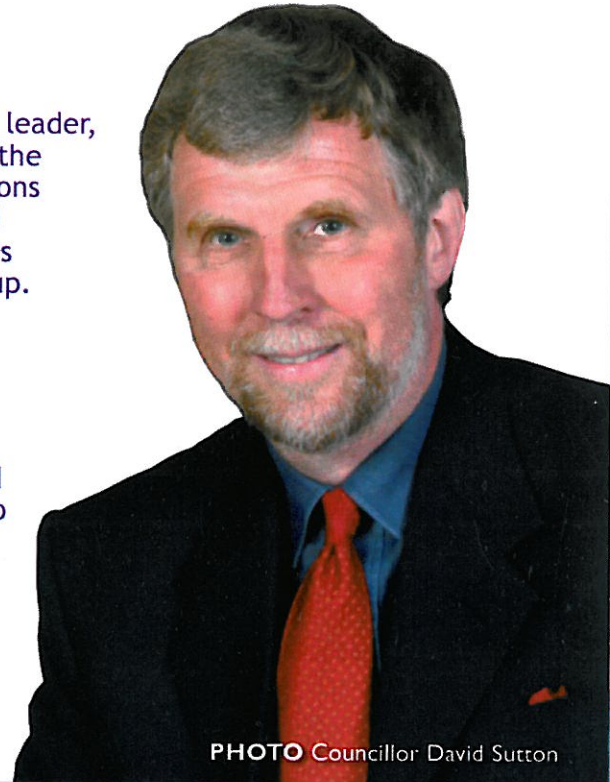


PHOTO Councillor David Sutton

so far, what highlights have there been in your job?

Over the years, the two aspects of my job that have given the greatest pleasure have been electoral victories and "grand openings". Electoral victories are particularly sweet when (as in 2004 in Reading) they occur against the national trend. As for openings, I have been privileged to take part in many in the past eleven years - ranging from the Madejski Stadium and The Oracle, including Reading Museum, The Town Hall and the new Berkshire Record Office, through to the new sewage treatment works in South Reading. And there are plenty more to come.

what has been the low of your job?

Funerals. We have been very unlucky in recent years in losing good comrades far too young. I am not very good at coming to terms with death, and I still hold conversations in my head with dead friends and former Councillors like John Cook and Wilf Wild.

what do you dislike the most about your job?

The most difficult parts of the job are the personal and disciplinary ones: calling colleagues to account; discussing possible resignations; resolving disputes between two colleagues.

advice for anyone who would like to follow in your footsteps?

I have two favourite quotations: "Don't be afraid to take a big step when one is indicated. You can't cross a chasm in two small steps." - David Lloyd George. And "Leadership has a harder job to do than just choose sides. It must bring sides together." - Reverend Jesse Jackson.

and, what did you want to be when you were younger?

A professional cricketer!

Reading Borough Council employes over 5,500 members of staff in a large number of roles. If you are interested in working for Reading Borough Council visit www.reading.gov.uk.