

The Conservatives set up shop in Manchester

With the Tories signing up for another two years at Manchester Central in 2013 and 2015, it seems their 2011 Annual Conference was a resounding success. **Sarah O'Donnell** speaks to the host venue about its role in big-time politics

From 2 to 5 October, 13,000 Conservative Party delegates took over Manchester Central, and most of the city, for their 2011 Annual Conference.

Over the four days the media focused its attention on the city, covering party announcements, keynote speeches and a major demonstration on the Sunday.

The 35,000 TUC protest march culminated in a rally at Number One First Street close to the conference centre. Luckily, it went smoothly with no arrests.

The Chancellor George Osborne, speaking from the centre, said marching would not help the economy. "It's your democratic right to march. But, in the end marching is not going to move on this economy."

Inside the convention centre there was clearly a different world, with *The Times* newspaper's Conference Sketch

commenting, 3 October: "Cocooned and carpeted in the venue, the Tories drank fruit smoothies and ate cottage pie, happy smiling shiny people in a completely different sort of world." Five massage therapists engaged on the Cloud 9 stand were certainly busy, dishing out manicures for £14.

Manchester Central had also recently invested £350,000 in digital technology and the internal digital signage. The 2011 Conservative Party Conference put it to the test for the first time. The screens throughout the venue carried the party's branding and

the free standing units showed scrolling the programme of events.

The venue has also invested in a new fibre network that was installed over the summer to provide high quality feeds to screens throughout the complex. In total, 8.5km of fibre cable has been installed to improve the reliability of the feed for events like the political conferences.

Right: Manchester Central,
Below: PM Cameron met with
the GM of Tory HQ hotel, The
Midland and his staff

