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FA must do more to tackle homophobia, says gay Tory

- Football Association dragging its heels, says shadow minister
- Nick Herbert to champion new Conservative approach

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Still from the FA video targeting homophobia in football. The FA decided to drop a TV and cinema advert highlighting the behaviour.

The Football Association has been accused by the Tories of failing to do enough to confront homophobic abuse of gay players and supporters after it dropped a television and cinema advertisement highlighting the behaviour.

As [gay rights](#) come to the fore in the election campaign, with Labour launching anti-Tory advertisements on the issue this week, the only out gay member of the shadow cabinet has demanded greater action to tackle homophobia.

The shadow environment secretary, Nick Herbert, said: "[The FA](#) needs to do more and step up to the plate and show some leadership. It has been dragging its heels on a campaign to tackle homophobia in football and it needs to get on with it. Some of the worst examples of homophobia in our society are found on the football terraces." The FA, which has won widespread praise for supporting the Kick it Out anti-racism campaign, helped to make a viral anti-homophobic video. But a launch for the video, which would have run on television and in cinemas, was postponed last week.

Herbert said the FA should take homophobia seriously because the game has such a poor record of tolerating openly gay members. Justin Fashanu, who killed himself in 1998, is the only prominent footballer to have come out.

"We have a problem of the attitude to gay people in football where we don't have any really significant players who are out and where people still think it is OK to have this kind of chanting," Herbert said. "There is a cultural problem in [some] sports. They have not caught up and they need to because there are hundreds of thousands of young players who feel that they are excluded from these sports."

"These sports are having an influence on the attitudes of others. If you can go to a football match and hear those chants and think it is OK, that is going to shape your view about how you can treat gay people."

The FA denied that its video had been dropped. A spokesman said: "It is on YouTube. This is the first step of our long-term campaign to fight homophobia in football. The original idea was to have a launch event at Wembley. It was decided last week that we'd postpone that because we didn't want it to be a flash in the pan."

But Herbert regarded the handling of the video as highly significant because he said it highlighted the approach a Tory government would adopt on gay rights - showing leadership rather than automatically resorting to legislation.

"This isn't just about law. It is about what we are tolerating in our own institutions," he said.

The Tories' record has been criticised by the gay Europe minister, Chris Bryant, who has warned that gay people will regret voting Tory. Labour made clear this week it was prepared to make gay rights a campaign issue when it ran an advertisement accusing Cameron, who voted for the retention of Section 28 in 2003, of double standards. The Tory leader recently told the gay magazine *Attitude* that he abstained in a vote in 2002 permitting gay couples to adopt, when in fact he voted no. Herbert said Labour should accept the Tories have moved on. "What is really significant about Cameron's leadership is not just that he has apologised for Section 28 but he actually said, Look, I got things wrong," he said.

"There has been a real change and it has been quite rapid. There are political activists who can't accept this and don't want to accept it. Worse than that, they think they own gay people. Gay people are not the property of any political party and they are certainly not the property of the left."

Herbert, 46, who entered into a civil partnership with his long-term partner Jason Eades last year, will play a key role in championing the Tories' new, gay-friendly face during the election campaign. He will take part in a seminar on conservatism at the Cato Institute in Washington with the gay blogger Andrew Sullivan.

A high profile figure in Tory circles for more than a decade after establishing the Reform think tank, Herbert acknowledged the Conservatives underwent a painful journey on gay rights. "We were making it hard for ourselves to appeal to a broad cross-section of society. There is very little you can give this government credit for. But the one area I have always publicly been willing to credit them for – and Tony Blair – was showing leadership in relation to gay issues and equality. We need to show the same leadership."

Herbert, MP for Arundel and South Downs, initially regarded himself as an MP who happened to be gay and was annoyed to be described as "gay Eurosceptic" by the *Times*. But his view changed. "What I have discovered is it is incredibly important for others that they see gay people succeeding in politics without impediment. I have realised it matters to people, I have realised from the emails I get not just from people who are interested in politics but to others – to young people who email me and say thank you for taking out a civil partnership, thank you for taking a stand."

