November 2023

Friends of the Earth’s demands for the general election

We're demanding urgent climate and nature action from all political parties. Find out what we're calling for them to commit to in their election manifestos.

Political parties have kicked off the long process of developing their manifestos for the general election expected in 2024. Friends of the Earth has identified what these manifestos should include.[1] We intend to use these to score the manifestos of the main political parties during the general election campaign.[2]

The climate and energy crises

1. Deliver on the UK's domestic and international greenhouse gas reduction commitment

- The UK government committed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 68% by 2030 (compared to 1990) and the prime minister has repeatedly reaffirmed this pledge. However, the government’s climate strategy – the Carbon Budget Delivery Plan – would fail to meet the 2030 target. **A new comprehensive and fair climate plan** is needed to ensure international and domestic greenhouse gas reduction targets are met.3

- **Deliver at least a £50 billion per year capital investment and revenue programme** to develop the green industries of the future, grow renewable energy, retrofit homes, deliver a renaissance in public transport, restore nature and create the jobs of the future.4 This is approximately equal to 2% of GDP and a similar amount to defence spending. It's also the same amount the government raised in environmental taxes in 2023. It'll deliver significant co-benefits, including economic growth and reductions in costs to the NHS.

- **Invest a minimum of £4 billion a year in skills development, retraining and jobs creation** in areas most in need of just transition investment. Alongside this, require growth industries such as renewables, heat pumps, electric vehicles and timber to grow UK supply chains and guarantee good quality, secure UK jobs.

2. Fix the UK's heat-leaking homes

- Over 10 years **invest at least £6 billion a year on average in the biggest ever home retrofit programme.** This should include a council co-ordinated, street-by-street programme of basic insulation measures in the neighbourhoods most in need, as well as a programme of supporting deeper energy efficiency measures such as new windows and doors. These measures will also support climate adaptation goals.

- Support this by **introducing regulations to increase the energy efficiency of homes** in the private-rented sector and social housing to EPC C by 2028. A compulsory register of landlords is needed to make this effective, as is funding for councils to carry out their regulatory functions. No-fault evictions should also be abolished to remove the chilling effect of these on tenants reporting poor quality homes.

- **Commit to electricity replacing gas as the future energy source for home-heating** including a ban on fitting new fossil fuel boilers after 2033 and by providing sufficient financial support for those switching from fossil fuel heating to ensure going electric costs no more than fitting a new gas boiler. At least 800,000 heat pumps a year need to be fitted by 2028, according to the Climate Change Committee, with at least 12 million fitted in total by 2035. The National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) Assessment recommends that low-income homes are fully funded for the switch and £7,000 grants plus zero-interest loans are available for others (including landlords). The NIC says hydrogen use should be ruled out for home heating.

- **Ensure energy is affordable now and in the future** through the immediate introduction of a social tariff for low-income families and decoupling the price of renewable electricity from the price of electricity produced from expensive gas.

3. Power Britain using clean, green, home-grown energy

- **Commit to achieving electricity grid decarbonisation before 2035** by backing the rapid growth of onshore and offshore renewables, including through removing unfair barriers to onshore wind in England, so that there's at least 10-14 GW of new capacity every year. Electricity grid capacity is a barrier to new renewable energy deployment and the transition to electric cars and heating, and must be resolved.

- **Support the development and route to market for a green electricity storage industry,** including green hydrogen made by using renewable energy and other new technologies.

- Legislate to **prevent the granting of all new oil and gas licences and developments for onshore or offshore fossil fuel extraction,** including the Rosebank field. Policies are also needed to rapidly cease coal mining in the UK and phase out the extraction of oil and gas. This should be accompanied by a just transition plan for workers in the fossil fuel industry.

4. Reduce carbon emissions from transport

- **Scrap multi-billion-pound new road building plans** and carry out a review of road building in England, as the Welsh Government has done for Wales, to ensure spending on transport is aligned to climate change goals and meets the mobility needs of all people, including those without cars.

- **Pledge a public transport renaissance** with a commitment to more than double bus passenger kilometres by 2030 (from pre-Covid levels) and achieve an 80% increase in rail passenger kilometres. This will require an increase in operational expenditure of £10 billion a year and £10 billion a year in capital investment. Fares should be cost competitive with car driving through reducing fares and/ or increasing the cost of driving.

- **Nationalise the failing railway industry and regulate bus services** through franchising. London benefits from a well-regulated public transport system, but across the rest of Britain bus services have plummeted. Bus franchising accompanied by increased investment can reverse this. For railways, the NIC has called for the development of a comprehensive and long-term plan for rail enhancements. This should include halting works on phase 1 of HS2 while a comprehensive review is carried out. Public transport should be seen and managed as a public service.

- **Increase expenditure on cycling and walking to £2 billion a year** so that it's safe and easy for people to cycle as part of active travel, wherever they live.

- **Set a demand reduction target to cut vehicle miles by 25% by 2030** and use measures such as more affordable public transport and better cycling and walking facilities to achieve this. Total car and taxi mileage is roughly the same as 20 years ago, although per person miles travelled has reduced by 25%. Van traffic has almost doubled over the same period.

- **Introduce a frequent flier levy** to curb excess use of plane travel by a few while not penalising the once-a-year family holiday. A kerosene tax and private jet tax should also be introduced and a commitment made to no expansion of airports.

5. Meet the UK’s commitments for a global energy transition and a safe climate future

- **Actively advocate for global agreement under the UNFCCC to end all fossil fuel expansion, phase out all fossil fuel use (abated and unabated) and support a just transition to renewables**, with the richest, most historically polluting countries moving fastest.
- **Commit to new and additional climate finance** to support global emissions reductions from countries which are still developing and have done the least to cause the climate crisis. The scale of this finance should be upwards of £10 billion a year whereas current commitments are just £2 billion a year. All funds must be provided from genuinely new and additional sources, and not derived from the international aid or development budgets.
- **Support the long-term success of the new Loss & Damage Funding Facility** and commit to the UK paying its fair share of new finance into it based on an assessment of need and considering the UK’s historical contribution to climate change.
- **Withdraw from the Energy Charter Treaty,** as countries such as Germany, France, Spain and the Netherlands have committed to do, as it allows fossil fuel companies to sue governments for taking necessary decisions on climate change. Review participation in other Investor State Dispute Settlement mechanisms. [Achieved, read our press release on the withdrawal.]

A healthy and nature-rich environment

6. Ensure a heathy environment for all

- **Introduce into UK law a new human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment,** as recognised by the UN General Assembly. Incorporated into this should be the environmental rights set out in the UN Aarhus Convention on the right to know, public participation and access to justice. The new law will protect public health, reduce costs on the NHS, and in time will eradicate environmental inequalities.

- **Pass legislation to update air quality limits** and bring them in line with World Health Organization levels as soon as possible. Action should be prioritised in areas where there's a higher concentration of vulnerable people (eg schools and hospitals). This will require new Clean Air Zones and Low Traffic Neighbourhoods in more of our towns and cities to restrict the dirtiest vehicles from the most polluted places, accompanied by a £1.5 billion per year scrappage scheme to enable drivers to switch to cleaner vehicles.

- **Require the upgrading of sewer overflows and other measures so that there are zero spills in ecological priority areas by 2030,** and no more than 10 exceptional overflows a year in England by 2040. Ensure water companies and their shareholders pay their fair share of the costs and that low-income households are protected from water bill rises by introducing a social tariff for water.

- **Restore funding of environmental regulatory and delivery bodies to at least 2010 levels** (in real terms) so that they have the resources and skills to enforce standards.

7. Look after nature at home and abroad

- **Ensure the UK is reversing the decline of wild species by 2030 and protects at least 30% of UK land and seas** for nature by the same date so that it's on course to restore species abundance by 2042.

- **Double the annual budget for nature-friendly farming and land management** to at least £6 billion a year. Investment in farming and woodland management can deliver the single biggest contribution to meeting the government’s target to halt the decline of wildlife by 2030, as well as bringing substantial benefits for water and air quality, protection from natural hazards like flooding, and improving people’s access to nature.

- **Commit to ensuring that planning reforms don't weaken the level of environmental protections** currently provided by nature and water laws and requirements for assessments of environmental impacts for developments. Commit to strengthening protections where necessary to safeguard nature and water quality.

- **Set a statutory target to reduce pesticide use and risk by at least 50% by 2030,** targeting the most harmful first, with an action plan to help farmers meet it, so that bees and other wildlife can thrive again.

- **Introduce a new UK Business, Human Rights and Environment Act** to require UK companies to carry out due diligence to prevent environmental damage and human rights abuses in their supply chains and to eliminate the UK’s role in global deforestation.

- **Agree a plan with the forestry industry, conservationists and farmers to significantly increase woodland,** including for domestic timber production, to offset harmful imports, and put the UK on the path to doubling tree cover by 2050, including more trees in our cities for heat resilience and wellbeing.

- **Ensure all new trade deals are negotiated transparently, with public and parliamentary scrutiny, and include strong, enforceable climate change and nature protection safeguards** so that food standards and nature-friendly farming aren't undermined by imports produced to lower environmental standards.

Protect and enhance democracy

8. Defend democracy

- **Reverse draconian restrictions on protest** in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act and the Public Order Act and Serious Disruption regulations. These constrain people’s freedom to protest, which has been a vital part of UK democracy for centuries.

- **Guarantee the independence of the Electoral Commission and reform electoral law** to ensure civil society can participate transparently without facing complex regulatory barriers. Bringing this under the control of government risks undue influence.

- **Scrap voter ID.** There's no compelling evidence of need and it may reduce voting in more marginalised communities.

- **Safeguard the Human Rights Act and the UK’s membership of the European Convention on Human Rights.**

9. Enhance democracy

- **Give 16–17-year-olds the vote in Westminster general elections and introduce proportional representation** for Westminster elections. Younger people are among the most significantly affected by environmental degradation and their voices aren't properly heard in decision-making. Also, to enhance democracy further, introduce proportional representation for Westminster.

- Speedily and significantly **devolve more powers to devolved nations and local authorities** in England so that they can deliver improvements in areas such as homes, energy and transport. For English local authorities, this also requires providing long-term, multi-year, stable funding and making delivery on climate goals a statutory requirement. Ensure local people are consulted on the content of devolution deals, and that the voice of marginalised communities is heard.

10. Improve planning policy

- **Maintain, properly implement and strengthen the Habitats Regulations** that have protected our most important wildlife sites and species for the last 30 years.

- **Ensure the planning system in England is fully in-line with climate targets** and budgets, adaptation plans and nature goals. This includes National Development Management Policies, the National Planning Policy Framework and planning powers within investment zones or handed to bodies such as New Town Development Corporations. This requirement needs to be enshrined in legislation and backed with clear policy and guidance. Currently most local plans pay lip service to the climate crisis and too many high-carbon developments get planning permission.

- **Improve planning outcomes,** while speeding up decision-making, by providing additional funding and capacity for decision-making and plan-making teams and bodies. This includes more resources for in-house specialists such as ecologists, transport and landscape officers. It

will also require statutory consultees, such as environmental regulators, to be properly resourced.

Notes

1.Responsibility in many of these areas is devolved from the Westminster government to devolved nations and local authorities. Where spending commitments are included, the appropriate additional funding will need to be provided to devolved nations.

2.We’ll score the manifestos of parties that stand in more than one UK country and currently have a sitting MP. We’ll therefore be scoring the Conservative, Green, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties.

3.Reductions in emissions to meet carbon budgets or the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) shouldn’t use international offsetting. This is current government policy. Nor should emission reduction plans rely on unrealistic estimates of carbon removals (eg through tree planting or bioenergy with carbon capture and storage). And the overachievement of earlier carbon budgets shouldn’t be used as a means for meeting future carbon budgets.

4.The National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) 2023 "Second National Infrastructure Assessment" identifies £35 billion a year on infrastructure, not all of which is low carbon (around £5 billion a year is road spending). This is equal to around 1.3% of GDP. The NIC figures excluded revenue spend (for example, the cost of subsidising public transport) and the spend needed to restore nature, such as financial support for environmental farming or restoring peatlands and salt marshes. The NIC recommendations are in line with meeting national carbon budgets but didn’t identify the spending needed to meet our international obligation to cut emissions by 68% by 2030, which would require more upfront spending. The Green Finance Institute identified a £56 billion gap in public spending over ten years to meet nature goals. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) report "Investing in our future" identifies capital infrastructure expenditure of £27-32 billion a year (and, as with the NIC assessment, didn’t include revenue or nature spending). Transport for Quality of Life, in its report for the TUC called "Public transport fit for the climate emergency", has identified the need for £10 billion per year additional revenue spending on public transport and £10 billion per year for capital expenditure. The Grantham Institute at the LSE called for at least an additional 1% of GDP to be spent on climate and nature to boost the UK’s competitiveness. In 2019 Friends of the Earth and other green groups identified a £42 billion per year spending requirement (equal to 2% of GDP at that time). All these point to a need for public spending on climate & energy to be increased by at least 1% of GDP. In Friends of the Earth’s view the climate & nature emergencies warrent more upfront investment and therefore call for 2% of GDP to be invested.