



Campaigning on the environment

Your guide to environmental
leadership as a councillor

**CONSERVATIVE
ENVIRONMENT
NETWORK**

About

The Conservative Environment Network is the independent forum for conservatives who support net zero, nature restoration and resource security.

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Why lead on the environment

The UK's conservative movement has a proud history of environmental leadership at home and abroad.

Conservatives established the Department for the Environment in 1970, with its first Secretary of State attending cabinet that year. Margaret Thatcher was the first world leader to warn about the danger of climate change at the UN's General Assembly in 1989. Three decades later, under Theresa May, the United Kingdom became the first major economy in the world to enshrine its net zero by 2050 target in law.

With the clock ticking to tackle climate change and halt the decline of nature, there has never been a more critical time for conservatives to lead on the environment.

This section explores the conservative case for protecting the environment and the Conservative Party's top ten environmental achievements.

The conservative case for protecting the environment

There are three core reasons why conservatives believe that we should protect the environment.

Environment

As conservatives, we recognise the duty we have to the next generation. This is why we believe in balancing the nation's finances, so we don't saddle our children and grandchildren with debt. It is also why we believe in spreading opportunity and encouraging aspiration to raise living standards for future generations.

This also means that it is our duty to tackle challenges like climate change and biodiversity loss. This will protect our natural inheritance for future generations, so they can enjoy a plethora of wildlife and nature-filled landscapes while living in a more secure and prosperous world.

But we will also feel the consequences of climate change and the decline of nature in our lifetimes. Unless we act with urgency, we will see more intense and frequent extreme weather events, droughts, flooding, and heat waves. With less biodiversity, our food security will also diminish.

Economic

As conservatives, we seek opportunities to make our society more prosperous.

With over 90 per cent of the world's economy covered by net zero targets, the race to lead the next green industrial revolution is underway. The UK could create skilled jobs, attract new industries, and drive investment by leading efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions. With bold action, we could be a world leader in renewable energy, carbon capture and storage, and other emerging technologies.

Similarly, reversing biodiversity loss through habitat creation and sustainable farming offers an opportunity to grow rural economies, secure the future of agriculture, and create jobs across the country. However, if we fail to act, we will have a less resilient economy and will be reliant on importing clean technologies and more food in the future.

“It is mankind and his activities which are changing the environment of our planet in damaging and dangerous ways.

The environmental challenge which confronts the whole world demands an equivalent response from the whole world. Every country will be affected and no one can opt out.”

- Margaret Thatcher, 1989



International

The defence of the realm is the government's first duty, and unchecked climate change and biodiversity loss are a threat to the UK's national security and international interests.

These twin environmental challenges threaten to lead to intense international competition for finite resources, exacerbate food and water insecurity, and stimulate mass migration, leading to global instability or, at worst, conflict. By embracing environmental leadership, we can avoid the worst consequences.

China is seeking to dominate the supply chains for clean technologies and to grow its global reach by financing climate projects in the developing world. By working with our allies to support developing countries with reducing their emissions and ourselves leading on developing clean technologies and trading them freely with our allies, we can push back against these malign aims. We can also tackle the dependency of Europe and the developing world on Russian fossil fuels, which is funding Putin's illegal war in Ukraine.

Environmental action can lower the cost of living

The energy crisis has exposed the economic danger of relying on fossil fuels for electricity, home heating, and transport.

Oil and gas prices are set by volatile international markets, which can be easily manipulated by large fossil fuel-producing countries like Russia. This is why energy costs for UK households and businesses spiked following Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

Net zero technologies can lower the cost of living. Even before the energy crisis, new offshore wind projects were able to generate power below the wholesale gas price, effectively subsidy-free. New renewables are now on average nine times cheaper than the current price of gas generation. Similarly, improving a household's energy efficiency can lower people's bills.

On average car-owning households spend over £3000 on their vehicles every year. Expanding transport options, including bus routes and active travel, can help ease the financial pressure compared to relying solely on private vehicles.

While electric vehicles are not yet as affordable to purchase, they are three times cheaper to run than petrol cars, saving households charging at home £690 a year.

Protecting the environment is a priority for voters

Opinion polls consistently find that the environment and climate change are among the top five issues voters are most concerned about.

YouGov's tracker opinion poll, which asks what the most important issues facing the country are at regular intervals throughout the year, shows the growing importance of the environment to voters. The tracker poll shows that the number of voters saying the environment is one of the three issues facing the country has increased from 11 per cent in July 2011 to 31 per cent in July 2021. Since 2019, the environment has regularly been the third issue in the pollster's tracker.

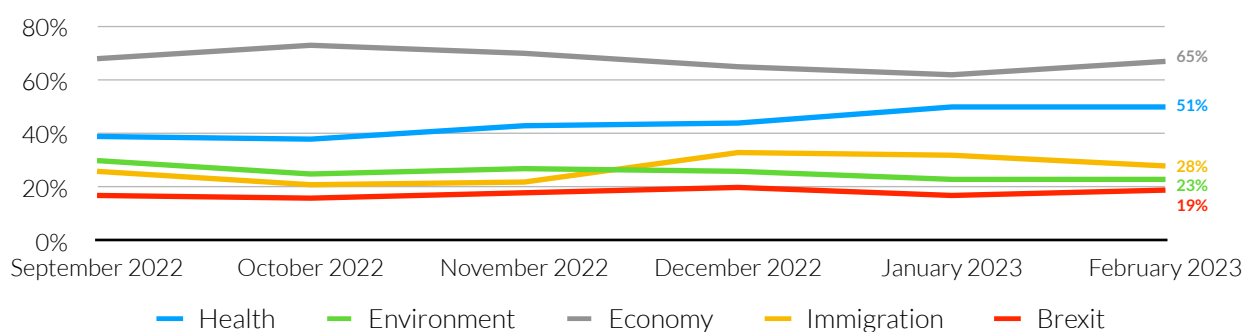
Conservative voters are also concerned about the environment. Sixty per cent said climate change would be an important consideration in deciding how they vote in the next election. Even more (67 per cent) are proud that the UK is taking a leading role in tackling climate change, 3 percentage points more than the national average.

When it comes to net zero, Conservative voters are equally supportive. Seventy-six per cent think "the UK should try as hard as possible to be a global leader in getting to net zero and develop new green industries and jobs, even if it is more expensive".

Fifty-seven per cent of Conservative voters think achieving net zero will be good for jobs and the economy, while 14 per disagree.

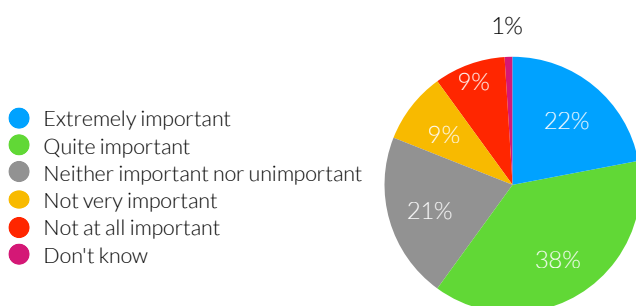
Which of the following do you think are the most important issues facing the country at this time? Please tick up to three.

YouGov Tracker Poll



Thinking about the next election, how important a consideration will climate change be for you when you vote?

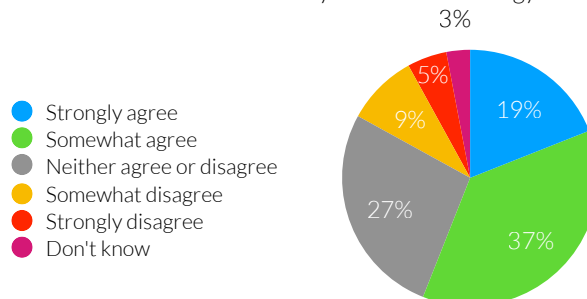
Poll of Conservative 2019 voters by Stack Data Strategy



To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

"The UK moving towards net zero will be good for jobs and the economy"

Poll of Conservative 2019 voters by Stack Data Strategy



Top 10 recent Conservative environmental achievements

- 1. Net zero by 2050**

The Conservatives passed world-leading legislation to enshrine the UK's net zero by 2050 target in law. This was followed up by the comprehensive Net Zero Strategy outlining how the UK will start to achieve this goal, ending the country's contribution to climate change.
- 2. Glasgow Climate Pact**

Under the Conservatives, the UK hosted the UN's climate summit, COP26, in Glasgow and secured a climate pact with a global commitment to phase down unabated coal power and reverse deforestation by 2030.
- 3. Post-Brexit farm subsidy reform**

Following the UK's exit from the European Union, the Conservatives have introduced plans to replace the disastrous Common Agricultural Policy with world-leading Environmental Land Management schemes. This new farm subsidy system will incentivise and pay farmers for improving the environment alongside food production, instead of the EU's approach of paying farmers based on the size of land they own.
- 4. Environment Act**

The Conservatives passed the landmark Environment Act, which made us the first country in the world to set a legal deadline to halt the decline of nature by 2030. The Act sets legally-binding targets to improve water quality, tackle air pollution and reduce waste. It also includes measures to establish a national Nature Recovery Network, reduce river pollution from storm overflows, ensure all new development improves nature, and end illegal deforestation in international supply chains.
- 5. Blue Belt**

The Conservatives have established marine protected areas covering an area of ocean larger than India around our Overseas Territories. This area is home to around 90 per cent of the UK's biodiversity.
- 6. Fossil fuel car phase out**

The Conservatives made a historic commitment to phase out the sale of new petrol and diesel cars by 2030, alongside a £1.3 billion package to accelerate the rollout of a comprehensive charging network.
- 7. Contracts for Difference for renewables**

Since 2010, new wind and solar power have reached record-low prices and expanded to provide over 40 per cent of our electricity. This has been driven by a Conservative government policy mechanism, the Contract for Difference, which has reduced the cost of capital for investors and spurred competition by auctioning long-term price guarantees to renewables developers.
- 8. Scrapping VAT on energy saving products**

Thanks to a campaign by CEN MPs, the Conservatives have temporarily scrapped VAT on energy-saving products and installation costs. This Brexit dividend has reduced the costs of decarbonisation measures such as heat pumps, insulation, and solar panels, helping more people afford to take back control of their energy supply and reduce their bills.
- 9. Nature for Climate Fund**

In 2019, the Conservatives created a £640 million fund to incentivise landowners and farmers to plant and manage trees, contributing to the government's target to treble tree planting by the end of the current Parliament, and to restore peatland.
- 10. Reinvesting water company fines into river restoration**

Since 2015, record fines have been imposed on illegally polluting water companies, raising over £141 million since 2015. The government has now committed to reinvesting future revenue from fines back into projects that improve the natural environment.

Campaigning on the environment

Protecting the environment is a top priority for many voters across the country.

If elected as a local councillor, you can deliver a wide range of environmental actions, including improving recycling and waste services, access to good quality green spaces, and enabling more people to walk or cycle.

That's why voters expect you to include ambitious commitments to deliver on environmental improvements in your local plan or council group's manifesto.

To win voters' trust on the environment, you will want to include specific pledges addressing your area's environmental challenges. This section outlines some of the promises you could make in your campaign, depending on your area's local circumstances.

Environmental pledges

Nature

- **Hedgehogs and wildlife:** Our hedgehog population has declined by over 8 per cent every year for the last 20 years, while bird populations are down by 55 per cent. I'm pledging to help bring back these treasured species by installing more hedgehog homes and bird boxes in [name of local park].
- **Tree planting:** The UK has some of the lowest tree coverage in Europe. I'm pledging to plant more trees in [location] so that we can combat climate change, improve access to local green spaces, and create new wildlife habitats.
- **Wildflowers and roadside verges:** With 97 per cent of wildflower meadows lost in the last century, Britain's 300,000 miles of roadside verges are a crucial step in restoring these habitats. That's why I'm pledging to reduce how often we mow our verges and allow our local biodiversity and habitats to flourish.
- **Bathing water status:** Only 14 per cent of English rivers are in good ecological condition. As your councillor, I would apply for bathing water status for [name of river]. This will ensure that the Environment Agency will regularly monitor the water quality and inform swimmers.
- **Green spaces:** £2.1 billion per year could be saved in health costs if everyone in England had good access to good green space. To help enhance [area name]'s green spaces as your councillor, I will work with local wildlife groups to identify opportunities to restore nature by creating new public green spaces or improving the management of existing ones.
- **Flytipping:** In 2020/2021, local authorities across the country dealt with 1.13 million fly-tipping incidents – a 16 per cent increase compared to the year before. As your local councillor, I would lead a community reporting campaign to report incidents of fly-tipping.
- **Litter:** Littering has increased by over 500 per cent over the last 50 years, with over two million pieces of litter dropped in the UK per day. As your local councillor, I would work to improve enforcement of littering offences and install smart bins across [area name] so the council can empty bins before it overflows.

Clean air

- **Pedestrianisation:** On average, one in twenty units sit empty on Britain's high streets. I'm pledging to support local businesses by pedestrianising [name of local high street] to help create a pleasant place for the community to enjoy and increase footfall in shops.
- **School streets:** Children should be averaging 60 minutes of exercise per day to keep fit and healthy. I'm pledging to support local schools by introducing school streets so children can walk and cycle to school safely and incorporate exercise into their daily routines.
- **School buses:** Over fifty per cent of parents report traffic chaos on the school run. I'm pledging to support local schools to get a school bus route. This will help children get to school safely and save parents time without gridlocking our roads.
- **Public transport:** For many, bus travel is the easiest and cheapest way to get around. As your councillor, I would work to make it easier to get around by asking [name of local bus companies] to simplify routes by setting a universal route number.
- **Twenty-minute neighbourhoods:** Having local amenities within twenty minutes of people's homes is an effective way to clean the air while making travel cheaper, life more convenient, and our communities more cohesive. I'm pledging to ensure new homes in [name of local town] have [bank/ food shop/ doctors/ dentist] close by.

Climate change

- **Electric vehicles:** The lack of charging infrastructure is stopping local people from switching to electric vehicles. I'm pledging to work with businesses to provide new charge points in [name a specific location] to help residents have the confidence to switch and work to speed up planning decisions to install them.
- **Renewable energy:** Soaring energy prices are making it more expensive to keep the lights and heating on in local schools, council housing, and libraries. I'm pledging to campaign to designate areas for small-scale renewable energy projects in our local plan to keep costs down and keep your council tax down.
- **Insulation:** Better insulation helps to waste less energy. Upgrading a home from EPC D to EPC C could cut consumption by 20 per cent. As your councillor, I will support [council name] in partnering with community energy organisations to survey streets and help residents band together to finance and install efficiency measures to keep their bills low. I will also call on the Council to bid for government funding to help insulate fuel poor homes in our area.

Responding to sceptics

While most voters want to see environmental improvements locally to help restore nature and tackle climate change, there can be some loud sceptical voices. It's important to respond to address people's concerns to build local support behind environmental action.

Clean air

1. **Traffic calming measures do not reduce pollution, they only shift it:** Well-consulted and integrated low traffic neighbourhoods have been shown to encourage residents to walk and cycle more. Successfully schemes have seen traffic reduce by as much as 56 per cent. Poorly planned and integrated schemes are much less effective in reducing car usage, which can push rat runners onto adjoining streets. Evidence also shows that greater road space increases the volume of traffic rather than easing congestion.
2. **Low traffic neighbourhoods and school streets limit access to local streets:** It is important to consider access for emergency vehicles and disabled people when designing a low traffic neighbourhood. Some councils have used camera-operated bollards instead of planters where access may be a problem. However, both London Ambulance Trust and London Fire Brigade have said that quieter and less congested streets are important to get around and reduce response delays.
3. **Modal shift outside urban areas just isn't possible:** While travel by foot or bike is better suited to shorter trips there are other options to reduce the number of journeys completed in private cars. On-demand bus services have been trialled with positive results by rural authorities such as Tees Valley Flex which serves 1,000 customers per week with a 98 per cent satisfaction rating. Other modal shift solutions include park and rides, car shared and car clubs - all suited to longer journeys.
4. **The cost of living is rising, reducing pollution just isn't a priority now:** Many of the solutions to cut air pollution from our transport, buildings and homes are more efficient and cost effective than their combusting alternatives. Electric vehicles are falling in price and have lower lifetime costs, reliable public transport provides a cheaper travel option than travelling using a private vehicle, and clean heat solutions require less energy consumption.
5. **Air pollution is only a problem in our towns and cities:** The largest source (43 per cent) of particulate matter pollution (PM2.5) in the UK is domestic burning of coal and wet wood. Therefore the highest concentrations of particulate pollution can be found in rural areas where homes are often not connected to the gas grid, and solid fuels are used for heating. In addition, once produced, particulate matter can travel long distances.

Net zero by 2050

6. **Reducing fuel poverty is more important than reducing emissions:** Cutting bills and carbon go together. Greater energy efficiency helps those who are fuel poor while renewable electricity from wind and solar is cheaper than fossil fuels like gas, with costs still falling. Consumers can never be protected from volatile global gas prices as long as we're dependent upon gas. Rocketing gas prices are the cause of the current energy bill crunch, with wholesale gas costs quadrupling at the height of the crisis. We need to continue our transition to homegrown renewables.
7. **Net zero is too expensive:** The Office for Budget Responsibility confirmed that net zero will cost less to the taxpayer than the 2008 crash or pandemic responses overall, with the costs spread over three decades and far less than inaction, which would cause public debt to spiral by 289 per cent of GDP by the end of the century. The costs are also being revised down each year

due to technological innovation. Further, net zero will unlock new economic opportunities to offset most of these costs. Missing out on gaining a portion of the global market in industries like renewables, clean hydrogen, and carbon storage would mean huge opportunity costs for the UK.

8. **There's no point in doing net zero because of China's coal power stations:** Everyone knows China is a key state when it comes to tackling climate change, alongside other countries like India, the US and Australia. Britain's role is to lead by example, demonstrating that decarbonisation and economic growth go hand in hand and use diplomacy to raise ambition. As a science superpower, we also have a role in developing and commercialising clean technologies and an opportunity to export them globally and bring down the costs of net zero for the world. Thanks to UK diplomacy ahead of COP26, we got China to stop financing new coal power stations abroad and commit to net zero by 2060.
9. **The costs of net zero will fall on the poorest:** The Government should and is shielding those who can least afford upgrades to clean technologies like heat pumps, but innovation and the private sector are ensuring that the costs are falling all the time. No one is being forced to buy a heat pump, and grants are available to help people access clean technologies. EVs are expected to reach cost parity with petrol and diesel cars after batteries have fallen in cost by 97 per cent in the last decade. Greater energy efficiency also delivers cuts to household bills for consumers.
10. **There isn't enough grid capacity for electric vehicles:** National Grid, who have a legal requirement to ensure security of the supply of power, have said this will not be a problem. EVs themselves offer an opportunity for increased grid flexibility, particularly with smart charging. This could make electricity cheaper by feeding back unused electricity into the grid at times of low demand. Smart charging will also help push charging to times of the day when there is a surplus of electricity, minimising the need for new generation.

Food security

11. **Our environmental goals are undermining our food security:** The precise opposite is the case. The government's recent food security review found that we have good self-sufficiency in many sectors at the moment and that the biggest medium to long-term risk to domestic food production comes from climate change and other environmental pressures like soil degradation, water quality and biodiversity loss. But this can be mitigated by making our farming sector more sustainable
12. **Restoring nature will reduce domestic food production:** It is possible to restore nature on unproductive land while sustaining food security. This is because there is no direct correlation between the amount of land we farm and agricultural output. Around 60 per cent of our agricultural output comes from just 30 per cent of land, while only 3 per cent of our food is produced on the least productive 20 per cent of land.

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