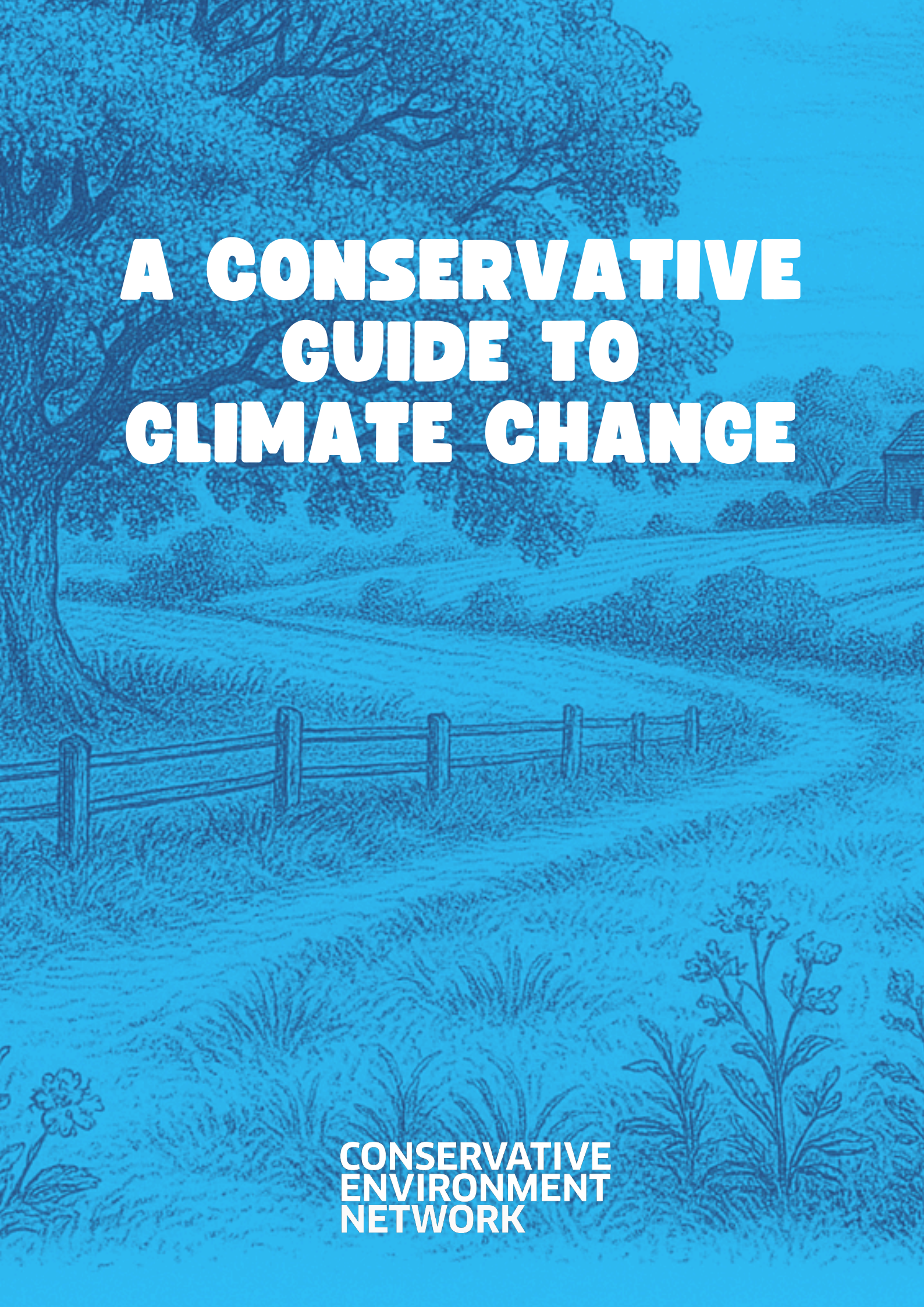

A CONSERVATIVE GUIDE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

CONSERVATIVE ENVIRONMENT NETWORK

CONSERVATIVE PRINCIPLES OF CLIMATE ACTION

Acknowledge the reality of climate change and take practical steps to preserve our natural environment for future generations

Protect our homes, communities, and critical national infrastructure by stepping up efforts to adapt to worsening impacts of climate change

Cut regulations to unleash competition, consumer choice, and innovation in clean technology

Shun central planning and take a market-led approach to the clean energy transition

Reduce emissions where it is compatible with delivering economic growth, rising living standards, and cheap energy

Focus on global decarbonisation by avoiding offshoring emissions and prioritising cheap, exportable clean technologies

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WHY WE NEED CLIMATE ACTION

"What we are now doing to the world, by degrading the land surfaces, by polluting the waters and by adding greenhouse gases to the air at an unprecedented rate - all this is new in the experience of the earth. It is mankind and his activities that are changing the environment of our planet in damaging and dangerous ways. The result is that change in future is likely to be more fundamental and more widespread than anything we have known hitherto."

Margaret Thatcher,
speaking at the UN General Assembly 1989

The UK's natural environment is under threat from the impacts of man-made climate change, such as floods and droughts. To protect our natural environment for future generations which is an inherently conservative cause, pragmatic and effective climate action is required. The Conservative Party has a long tradition of environmental protection, which has been championed by many political leaders and thinkers, including Margaret Thatcher, Roger Scruton, and Edmund Burke. As Burke articulated, conservatives believe we have a moral duty to be good stewards of our natural world for our children and grandchildren, and this means taking action against climate change.

Tackling climate change is essential to protect our food security, water security, and our prosperity in the short term and long term. Unchecked, climate change will lead to treasured native species pushed to extinction, higher food prices, damaged property and infrastructure, and greater security threats abroad. Building more clean energy and electrifying more energy demand will reduce emissions, which will help slow down the rate of climate change. Diversification will also give us energy security, as we will no longer be reliant on imported fossil fuels.

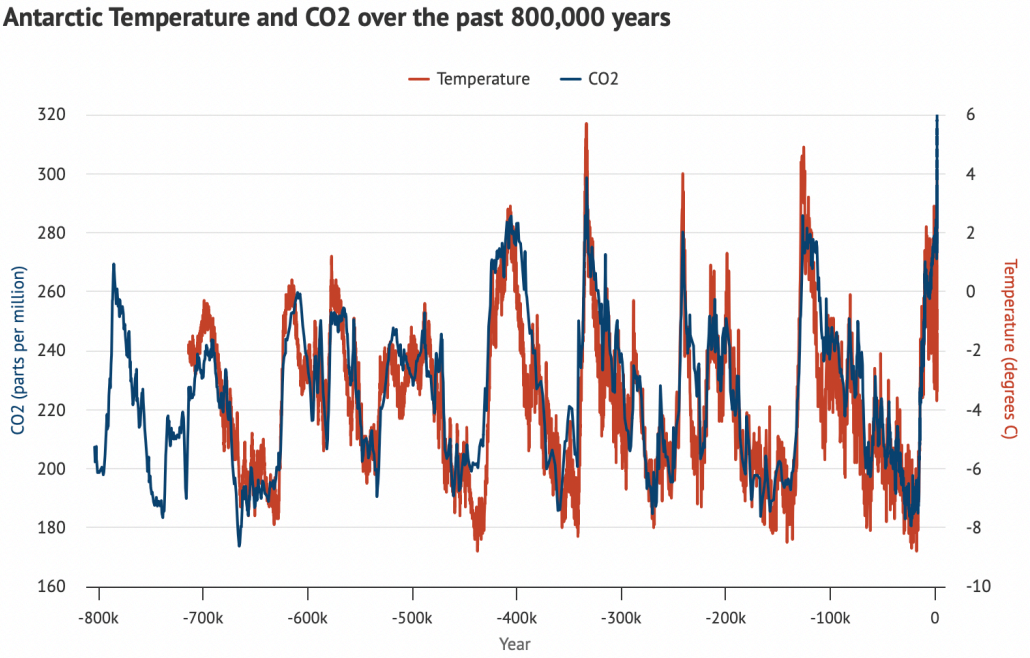
However, if done ineffectively, climate action will have little to no impact on global climate change and wreck the UK's economy. Expensive and impractical targets, such as Labour's Clean Power 2030 mission, will burden households and businesses with unnecessarily high electricity prices. High electricity prices will hit households and undermine wider support for climate action, and drive businesses overseas where electricity costs are lower, which will lead to British jobs disappearing. It is also self-defeating as it makes running clean technologies like heat pumps and electric cars more expensive, slowing their uptake.

A principled, conservative approach to climate action will ensure we take appropriate action in a sensible, rational manner that will benefit the UK in the short term and long term.

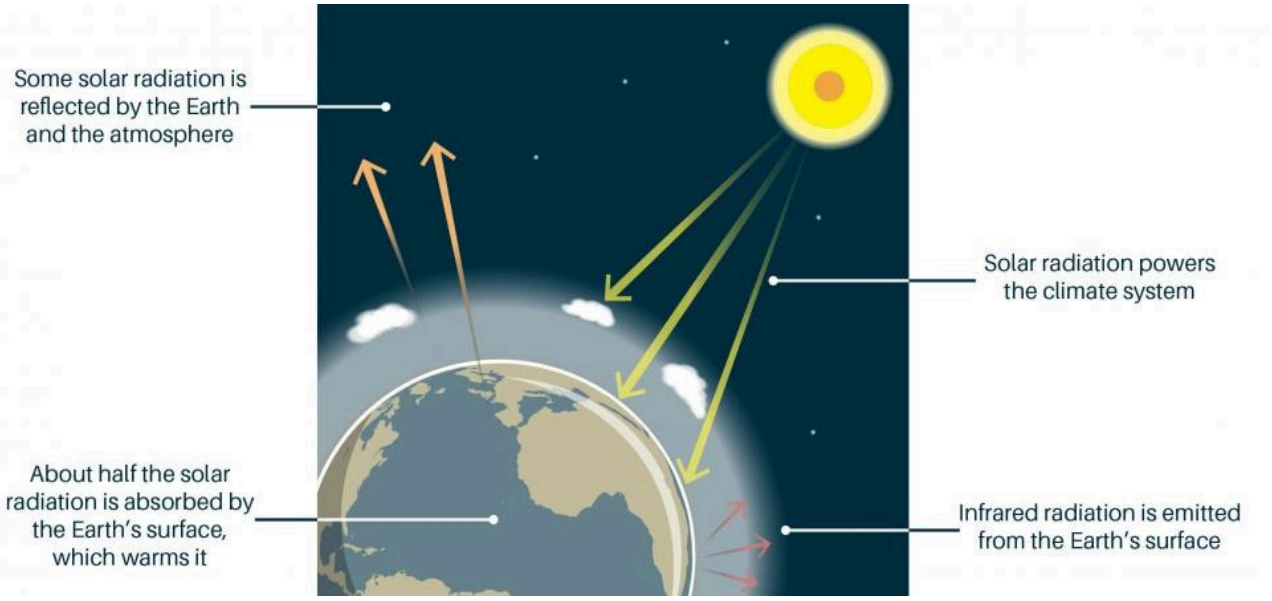
THE SCIENCE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is real and human activity is responsible[1] for its rapid pace, which threatens our natural environment, infrastructure, and food security. The climate has always changed. Natural fluctuations[2] in the energy from the sun, patterns in the Earth's orbit, and sustained volcanic eruptions have all driven long periods of warming or cooling in the history of our planet. But the rising temperatures that we have experienced in the last two hundred years cannot be explained by nature alone. In fact, we would expect the world to be gradually cooling if only natural factors were taken into account; instead, the Earth is rapidly warming.

Since the industrial revolution in the late 1700s, humans have burned huge amounts of fossil fuels, releasing emissions of greenhouse gases. This has driven a sustained and damaging increase in global temperatures of 1.4 degrees[3] Celsius. The Earth is the warmest it has been for over 12,000 years[4], with each of the last five decades being warmer than the previous one and each year between 2015-2024[5] setting a new record for the warmest year on record. Naturally occurring greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide and methane, form a protective layer around the Earth, keeping it warm enough to sustain life by trapping heat from the sun. As fossil fuels are burned for energy and natural carbon sinks like forests are destroyed for agriculture and other forms of economic activity, very large amounts of carbon dioxide are produced, which traps more heat, enhances the greenhouse effect, and warms up the planet rapidly.



Source: Carbon Brief[6]



Source: British Geological Survey[7]

International treaties have established two thresholds of 1.5 and 2 degrees that countries across the globe must aim to limit the global temperature rise to. We are already seeing damaging impacts of climate change at less than 1.5 degrees of warming. But if we hit or go beyond these temperature thresholds, we run a much greater risk of irreversible impacts from triggering tipping points. Tipping points are irreversible climatic events that accelerate warming, such as the thawing of permafrost and the melting of the Arctic ice sheet.

The consequences of breaching these two temperature thresholds differ significantly. They include: having an ice-free Arctic Ocean[8] once every 100 years (at 1.5 degrees) or once every 10 years (at 2 degrees); exposing 271 million people to water scarcity[9] (1.5 degrees) versus 288 million (2 degrees); and losing 70% of global coral reefs[10] (1.5 degrees) or 99% of coral reefs (2 degrees).

The rising global temperature is a result of cumulative emissions across the globe, which is why each country, even relatively small emitters like the UK, must work to lower emissions. Each tiny temperature increment increases the risk of these tipping points being breached. And the higher the temperature increase, the more severe the impacts, such as floods, droughts, and wildfires, of climate change will be.

THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE UK

The impacts of climate change are far reaching, including here in the UK. Our natural world will be battered by the impacts. The UK is already one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world, but worsening floods, droughts, heatwaves, and other extreme weather events that climate change brings will further deplete our nature.

Climate change will also negatively impact the UK's economy, threaten its food security, worsen our health, and increase immigration. As the global temperature rises, summers will become hotter and drier, and sea levels will rise due to the melting of glaciers and ice sheets. Extreme weather events, from flash flooding to wildfires, will become more regular and more severe. Some of the main impacts of climate change we will experience in the UK are:

- **Economic damage.** Ignoring the threat of climate change could shrink the UK economy by an estimated 3.3%[11] by 2050. Today, direct economic damages from coastal flooding and erosion alone are estimated to exceed £260 million[12]. The 2015-16 English winter floods caused £1.6 billion[13] of damage. Flooding impacts are set to cost £3.6 billion annually by 2050[14], causing devastation to people's homes and livelihoods and leading to higher insurance premiums or properties becoming uninsurable altogether. The number of English homes at risk of flooding is set to increase from 6.3 million to 8 million[15] by 2050, while more than 80%[16] of properties are already at risk in Scotland and 88%[17] in Wales.
- **Food insecurity.** Climate change is the biggest medium- to long-term threat to the UK's food security. Climate change is fuelling a decline in farmland nature and damaging our soils, which food production depends on. Simultaneously, climate change will make extremes of weather both more regular and severe, with farmland increasingly ill-prepared to manage due to the loss of natural resilience. Today, more than half[18] of the UK's top quality agricultural land is at risk of flooding, and this is expected to rise. Climate change will reduce the amount of food produced in the UK and overseas, which will lead to food scarcity and rising food prices. As a result of the wet winter in 2023, there was a shortage[19] of potatoes grown in the UK before Christmas, and between 2022 to 2024 the price rose by 54%[20]. Similarly, extreme heatwaves in the Mediterranean caused the price of olive oil we import to increase in May 2024 by 100%[21] from two years prior.
- **Water shortages.** With climate change bringing hotter and drier summers, and with less predictable rainfall and higher drought risk, the UK could be left without adequate supplies of water to irrigate our crops and meet household demand. The UK experienced a dry spell throughout summer 2025, which led to multiple hosepipe bans. It's expected to get worse by 2050, as the UK's water availability could reduce by 10-15%[22]. Due to a combination of climate change and increasing demand due to

immigration, a shortfall of 5 billion litres[23] per day in England's public water supply is anticipated by 2055.

- **Biodiversity loss.** Climate change is damaging our natural environment and causing biodiversity loss across a variety of treasured habitats and species. It is estimated that 1,781[24] species in the UK are at risk of going extinct, with climate change being a contributing factor. Species such as the turtle dove, water vole, and puffin are at risk. The number and size of peatlands, wetlands, and saltmarshes, that would naturally protect against coastal erosion, are in decline in the UK due to rising temperatures, sea levels, increased flooding, and more. Climate change will also lead to a rise in disease and pests[25] that will destroy crops, as warmer temperatures can boost pest populations.
- **Human health.** Increased heatwaves and rising temperatures will negatively impact productivity in the workplace[26] and attainment at school[27]. Rising temperatures will also lead[28] to to cases of heatstroke and cardiovascular issues. The impacts are especially stark among pensioners, who made up 92% of all heat-related deaths[29] during the 2023 heatwave.
- **Higher immigration.** Climate change will lead to more migratory pressures on the UK, as people from countries most impacted by extreme weather events will seek to migrate to less impacted countries such as the UK. The climate is set to become a significant 'push factor' for migration or a contributing factor to other push factors like conflicts or famines. Migration caused by climate change is already happening[30] on a small scale, but as the impacts of climate change worsen, this number will rise. Predictions for the number of people who may be affected by climate migration vary from one billion to 44 million by 2050. The reason for the variation depends on how climate migration is defined and assumptions about the level of natural disasters.

STEPS TAKEN TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE

The Conservative Party can lay claim to a proud legacy of climate action both at home and abroad. Successive Conservative governments have understood that the UK decarbonising alone cannot tackle the threat of climate change, however. Other nations, such as China and India, must play their part too. The reality is that emissions are still rising[31] and energy demand is growing. However, experts widely predict we are nearing the peak[32] of global emissions. The power sector, which is the highest emitting sector of the global economy, is anticipated to peak[33] imminently, with investment in clean energy outpacing fossil fuels in 2024 by 2:1. Half of the world's economies[34] have already hit peak emissions, while India, one country yet to peak, is anticipated to have two-thirds[35] of its electricity produced through solar and wind in 2032, a significant shift, as for the last decade coal has been responsible for over 80%[36].

Some of the most significant steps globally to tackle climate change include:

- **UN climate summits.** Margaret Thatcher, as Prime Minister, gave the seminal speech to the UN about the threat of climate change in 1989, paving the way for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to be agreed a few years later. The UNFCCC's decision-making body on climate change has gathered each year since 1995 to discuss global climate targets that are then implemented nationally. Each annual meeting is called the 'Conference of the Parties' (COP). At COP15, the Paris Agreement was signed - a commitment to limit the global average temperature increase to below 2 degrees and attempt to limit the rise to 1.5 degrees. The agreement commits to achieve a balance of emission sources, such as fossil fuels, and carbon sinks, such as mangroves, in the second half of this century, to keep global warming below 2 degrees. The agreement includes a requirement on signatories to produce non-binding country-level emissions targets, updated every five years. The Boris Johnson government secured the Glasgow Pact at COP26, which committed signatories to phasing down coal and saw agreements signed to halt deforestation by 2030 and reduce methane emissions.
- **Clean technology cost reduction.** As we build more clean energy, the technology matures[37] and falls in cost by unlocking 'learning effects' and economies of scale. From 2014 to 2024 globally, the levelised cost of electricity megawatt per hour of offshore wind fell by 58% and solar fell by 77%, and the kilowatt per hour cost of batteries fell by 84%. Unfortunately, in the past couple of years, due to higher interest rates and global supply chain pressures, renewables prices have risen, but the general long-term downwards trend remains, and it is widely expected that renewables costs will begin to fall again as global inflation subsides.

- **Geopolitical concerns.** Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in particular, energy security has become a growing concern across the globe and is now a major driving force behind countries deciding to build clean energy infrastructure and switch to electrotech. Over 50% of countries[38] are reliant on imports of fossil fuels as their primary energy source. Countries are no longer willing to be beholden to petrostates that can simply turn off the tap on their energy supply. With clean energy, countries can generate more of their own energy domestically and end their dependence on imported fossil fuels, and over 92%[39] of countries could become renewables producers at over 10 times their current domestic demand.

WHAT CAN WE MEANINGFULLY DO TO PROTECT OUR COUNTRY FROM CLIMATE CHANGE

"By the end of my time as Prime Minister I was also becoming seriously concerned about the anti-capitalist arguments which the campaigners against global warming were deploying. So in a speech to scientists in 1990 I observed: whatever international action we agree upon to deal with environmental problems, we must enable all our economies to grow and develop because without growth you cannot generate the wealth required to pay for the protection of the environment."

Margaret Thatcher,
Excerpt from Statecraft 2002

Although the UK accounts for only 1%[40] of global emissions, we still have a role to play on climate action. Climate action should not come at the expense of the UK's economic prosperity, however. We must lower our electricity prices, which are some of the highest in the developed world[41], but this can be done while also making a market-led approach to the clean energy transition. Labour's approach to decarbonising our energy system, which is based on statism, unrealistic targets, and central planning, will raise bills across the UK.

Under the Conservatives, the UK decarbonised faster than any major economy, reducing emissions by 54%[42] between 1990 and 2024, whilst also growing the economy by 84%[43]. However, the Conservatives did not always follow a truly market-led approach. They relied too much on bans and mandates, which limit consumer choice and increase costs, while they subsidised some ineffective technologies, most notably woody biomass power. In 2022 alone, for example, £617 million[44] in government subsidies were awarded to Drax, a biomass power generator, despite significant question marks over its financial viability and sustainability at the time.

The UK needs a reset in its approach to climate action. The UK's energy prices are too high, and households and businesses are suffering. These high prices are driving companies overseas and offshoring emissions. Alongside this, much of the technology we rely on to lower our emissions is imported, since we have failed to attract clean energy supply chain firms to the UK. This reliance on imported technology has led to security concerns, as we are making ourselves vulnerable to the whims of hostile states like China, who currently dominate supply chains.

But with a truly market-led approach to energy policy, the Conservatives could turn this around. Below are some measures to help achieve this, including steps that councils can take.

- **Building more clean energy, from nuclear to renewables, will lower emissions and can also help boost our energy security.** This cannot come at the expense of cheap power, however. Decarbonising our grid needs to go hand in hand with ensuring energy prices are lowered. Otherwise, we will fail to drive forward the second key action for reducing emissions - electrification. Councils have a key role to play in identifying sites for new clean energy generation and promptly assessing planning applications. Community benefits can also become a condition of planning consent. Ensuring communities receive direct benefits like energy bill discounts from projects can boost support for projects. Local opposition to renewable energy projects is heavily linked[45] to the extent communities feel they will directly benefit from developments.
- **Demand for fossil fuels can be replaced in home heating, transport, and industry by electrification.** Electrifying home heating can lower emissions in homes, which accounts for around 14% of UK emissions, but electricity needs to be cheaper to incentivise the switch[46]. Councils can help boost heat pump uptake through retrofitting their social housing stock, simplifying local planning rules on energy efficiency measures (especially in conservation areas), and developing low carbon heating networks. Boosting the uptake of electric vehicles (EVs) is key to lowering emissions in the transport sector, the largest-emitting sector of the UK economy, which in 2023 accounted for 29% of emissions[47]. Councils can encourage the uptake of EV by increasing the level of charging infrastructure throughout their communities, for instance by amending local planning byelaws that prohibit the rollout of charge points on residential streets.
- **Residual emissions from sectors which cannot be completely decarbonised can be captured by nature-based or technological solutions.** Nature-based solutions can help capture remaining emissions and provide additional benefits to the environment, such as restoring our peatlands and tree planting. Tree planting is a vital nature-based solution that councils can champion through planting on council land, requiring new developments to have street trees, and directing biodiversity net gain funding towards woodland creation schemes.

Adaptation is vital to protect communities and wildlife, and build resilience to the effects of climate change, however much more warming we experience. But adaptation measures will not reverse the damage already done by climate change, nor is it the silver bullet for avoiding any consequences of climate change, as some impacts are too severe or expensive to adapt to.

It is essential that the UK steps up adaptation planning, as we are anticipated to breach the 1.5 degrees threshold soon, and because many countries are not doing enough to reduce emissions. While we cannot force other countries to decarbonise faster, we can manage

our own response to rising temperatures by implementing nature-based and hard engineered solutions. Below are the key steps we need to take to adapt to climate change in the UK.

- **The UK's coastline is fast eroding and requires stronger engineered and natural defences.** The government has overwhelmingly favoured traditional, concrete-based sea defences to address coastal erosion, with over 263,000 assets[48], like sea walls and groynes, now lining England's coast. Due to the dangers posed by our eroding coastline, we must continue to build these critical assets. However, sea walls can be counterproductive, as they reflect wave energy onto other vulnerable areas, worsening coastal erosion elsewhere. With rising sea levels projected to impact around 20% of England's coastal defences by 2100[49], councils can also champion and seek to implement additional nature-based solutions, such as saltmarsh restoration, to soften the impact of the waves before they reach the shoreline.
- **We must make the agricultural sector more resilient to extreme weather.** The loss of nature has made farmland more vulnerable to flooding and drought, which are becoming more extreme and regular due to climate change. The risks faced by agricultural land and farm businesses will grow as these extreme weather events increase. To tackle changing conditions, farmers need to adapt by planting more drought-resistant crops and introducing nature-based solutions to the impacts of climate change to help restore the soil and protect crops. Councils can help by granting planning permission for critical natural infrastructure such as ponds, wetlands, and on-farm reservoirs to enable farmers to build resilience.
- **New housing developments and infrastructure must be built for a warmer, wetter climate.** The impact of more extreme rainfall is compounded by increased urbanisation. Impermeable surfaces, like car parks, roads, and buildings, reduce the ability of the land to absorb water during periods of heavy rainfall, causing surface water flooding. This also increases the pressure on the sewerage system by forcing this excess rainwater into the drain. Having councils mandate sustainable drainage schemes (SUDS), such as tree pits, rain gardens, and permeable paving, as a condition of planning consent, is one way to filter water in urban environments, while boosting resilience and tackling surface water flooding.

TOP CONSERVATIVE CLIMATE ACHIEVEMENTS

Successive Conservative governments have recognised the need to tackle climate change as part of each generation's responsibility to hand on a healthy environment to our children and grandchildren. Taxes were lowered on a series of clean, energy efficient technologies, such as solar panels in 2022, and capital costs of cleaner, more efficient machinery for firms became deductible from their corporate tax liability. However, the last Conservative governments relied too heavily on statist measures to deliver some of their record on decarbonisation. This Labour government's approach relies even more on statism and central planning, and is driving energy bills higher for households and businesses.

For the Conservatives to champion a more credible approach, the party must go back to first principles, reflect on its failings, and develop a truly market-led approach to tackling climate change. The party should also celebrate its achievements in climate action. Below are three achievements from the efforts of previous Conservative governments to combat climate change.

The phasing out of coal power

- The UK's last coal plant closed in September 2024, nine years after a Conservative Energy Secretary announced the phaseout of coal power in Britain. Over that time, due to a combination of taxes and incentives, coal power was displaced in the UK's energy supply, as the share of gas and renewables increased. The deployment of renewables began in earnest under Labour; however, their Renewables Obligation scheme was a flawed, inefficient subsidy scheme and is still inflating consumer bills today. In 2014, the Conservatives replaced it with a market mechanism, Contracts for Difference (CfDs), which have since mobilised £54 billion[50] of private investment and used competition to drive down new project costs. A top-up carbon price, the Carbon Price Support, introduced under the Coalition government, helped to make gas more economic than coal, further driving legacy coal plants to retire.

The electric vehicle (EV) transition

- The Conservatives drove forward the EV transition with tax breaks and infrastructure support. In 2010, the year the Conservatives entered office, only 138 EVs were registered in the UK[51]. By July 2024, when they left office, there were 1.2 million on UK roads[52]. Their surge in popularity can partly be explained by technological advances, but the Conservatives also helped lower the cost of purchasing and driving an EV by reducing the benefit-in-kind company car tax rate[53], exempting EVs from vehicle excise duty, and offering grants to install home chargers[54]. Alongside this, access to public EV charging infrastructure was expanded. Several initiatives to boost infrastructure were established, including the On-street Residential Chargepoint Scheme[55] (ORCS) and

Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure[56] (LEVI). ORCS provided funding to local authorities between 2017 to 2024 and resulted in the installation of 9,972[57] public charging points.

Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs)

- Following the vote to leave the EU, the Conservative-led Government introduced ELMs to reform farming incentives. ELMs improve the natural environment while enhancing food security, and they replaced the wasteful EU Common Agricultural Policy, which paid farmers based on the size of their land rather than how they managed it. As farmers manage over 70%[58] of our land area, there is no way to hit our environmental goals without them. ELMs support farmers to improve the foundations of food production, such as healthy soils, clean water, and habitat for pollinators, while tackling two of the biggest threats to food security, namely climate change and biodiversity loss. They also deliver a good return for taxpayers' money. By July 2024, there were 55,000 agri-environmental[59] agreements in place across England.

Environmental action is often best taken at the local level by those who know their communities the best. Many Conservative councils have led the way on tackling climate change, and their successes should be celebrated as case studies of pragmatic, conservative action to safeguard the environment. Below are three climate achievements from Conservative-run councils.

Nature reserves

- The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world with one in six species[60] now threatened with extinction. Councils can protect and restore our nature by designating new nature reserves. New nature reserves can boost biodiversity by creating a dedicated space for nature and wildlife to thrive, while also building resilience to climate change and sequestering carbon. Nottinghamshire County Council designated new nature reserves in five locations[61] on council-owned land. The council worked with Natural England on the designation of the reserves, setting out plans for how they can best benefit biodiversity and the local community.

EV charging infrastructure

- Increasing EV infrastructure will boost the transition to EVs as range anxiety, one of the biggest perceived barriers to EV uptake, will be reduced. The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Council (RBKC) ramped up the deployment of charging infrastructure so nearly all residents are within 200 metres[62] of one charging point. To increase the number of public EV charging points within lampposts, which have minimal visual impact, RBKC partnered with OVO Energy and Ubitricity in 2017. Lamp posts were retrofitted into EV charging points and today there are almost 700 lamp post chargers[63] in RBKC. The equipment needed for the scheme was funded by residents buying either a cable and a monthly subscription scheme to Ubitricity to access the charging points or by buying a cable with electricity charged for by the kWh.

Community energy

- Building more clean energy is vital to lowering emissions and reducing our reliance on oil and gas in our energy supply, however, communities need to see direct benefits. North Lincolnshire Council recognised this and in 2023 launched North Lincolnshire Community Energy (NLCE)[64], using some of the funding it received from the Towns Fund. NLCE is a community benefit society that operates on the basis of community ownership. It was established to enable businesses and residents to invest in renewable energy by purchasing community shares, with profits reinvested into new projects. The projects directly benefit the community by lowering energy bills and decarbonising their energy to help tackle climate change. Twenty-two buildings[65] including schools, colleges, and a football club have had solar panels installed via the scheme.

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