

CONSERVATIVE  
ENVIRONMENT  
NETWORK



# Campaigning on the environment

*Your guide to environmental leadership as a councillor*



# About

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

The CEN councillor network is a community of like-minded, environmentalist Conservative councillors, who participate in events, collaborate on campaigns, and learn new ways of delivering on the environment for their residents.

As a CEN councillor you will receive the following benefits:

- A monthly newsletter full of councillor-specific content
- Regular policy briefings
- Three additions per year of the CEN Magazine
- Invitations to exclusive councillor roundtables and events
- Access to useful case studies
- The opportunity to pitch articles for the CEN blog
- Access to the dedicated CEN councillor private Facebook forum
- Suggested campaign pledges for local elections
- Social media graphics and local press templates



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You can sign up to be a CEN councillor: [www.cen.uk.com/cencouncillor](http://www.cen.uk.com/cencouncillor)

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This is not intended to be an exhaustive briefing, but an overview of environmental campaigns and pledges which we encourage those standing for local government to take up.

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# Practical, community-based initiatives

Here is a list of environmental projects that could help you to demonstrate your commitment to the environment in your community.

## Run local planting sessions

Nature in Britain is in decline: we've lost 97% of wildflower meadows in the last century and we have some of the lowest tree coverage in Europe. You could organise a tree, hedgerow, or wildflower planting session in your ward, to give back to your community and make yourself better known amongst residents. You can forge a relationship with organisations like the Wildlife Trust or Woodland Trust to make sure you're planting things in the right place.



## Flag opportunities for the council to support residents to go green

Most people are concerned about our impact on the environment, but they worry that going green is too expensive or inconvenient. You can highlight opportunities to make action less challenging for residents and lobby the council. For instance, campaigning for a lamppost EV charging point, an upgrade to the local bus shelter, fixing potholes, or protecting a local bus route.



## Organise local litterpicks

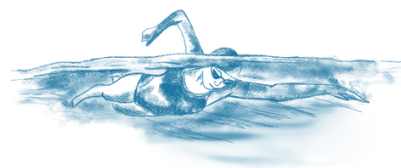
Litter is a blight on any local community — and it's been on the rise for the last 50 years, increasing by 500%. Organising a litter pick is an obvious way to make sure that your community is as pleasant as possible, whilst building your reputation amongst residents.

## Set up a 'Friends of' group for local residents

'Friends of' groups bring residents together to work towards a shared aim. This could be for a local park, green space, or public area. You can officially link the group to the council so you and other volunteers can benefit from resources, support, training, and equipment.

## Lead a local bathing water campaign

The poor ecological condition of the UK's rivers is well documented and an increasing concern for the public. You could organise a group to apply for bathing status for your local river — this will ensure that the Environment Agency will regularly monitor the water quality and inform swimmers when it's too polluted to swim in.





# Why lead on the environment?



*“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 at the United Nations General Assembly, 1989**

Conservatives have a long history of action on the environment stretching back nearly seventy years. Some of the UK’s critical environmental legislation, targets, and frameworks have been delivered under centre-right governments. From the 1956 Clean Air Act and the creation of the Department for Environment in 1970, to Margaret Thatcher’s seminal speech to the United Nations in 1989 about climate change and John Major’s signing of the first UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, conservatives have a record of environmental leadership.

And in the last thirteen years, when the consequences of our changing climate and nature loss have become most apparent

— conservatives have delivered numerous ambitious policies. The landmark Environment Act, signing net zero into law — making the UK the first major economy to do so — and creating the Blue Belt of protection for marine areas in our overseas territories are amongst the most significant.

Conservatives have been able to defend and deliver on the environment because many centre-right values, such as stewardship, intergenerational responsibility, pride of place, and pursuit of prosperity and opportunity, align naturally with the case for conservation.

**We have listed a number of reasons that it is imperative that the centre-right and the UK continues to care about the environment:**

### **Intergenerational fairness**

Conservatives believe it is wrong to saddle future generations with insurmountable debts or falling living standards — the same principle drives us to want to hand on the planet itself in a better state than we inherited it. **As conservatives, we see it as our duty to tackle climate change, air pollution, and biodiversity loss now, or risk confining the next generation to a poorer future.**

### **Economic opportunity**

The importance of strong economic growth is a fundamental belief for conservatives. But with climate change-related extreme weather damaging our infrastructure and property, air pollution contributing to health-related work absences, and biodiversity loss undermining our agricultural sector and our food security, our economic prospects are undermined by damage to the environment. **The longer we delay action, the more costly it will become to deal with the consequences of environmental problems — so we need a long-term pragmatic plan to ensure that we reach our targets.** But there is an opportunity — in tackling climate change, air pollution, and nature loss – to grow the economy, create new pioneering industries and high quality skilled jobs, improve living standards, and tackle long-standing regional inequalities.



### Strong national security:

The defence of the realm is the first duty of the government, and that duty is made more important by the threat posed by climate change, which is intensifying competition for finite resources, driving greater water and food insecurity, and multiplying the risk of mass migration. **Conservatives cannot ignore the consequences of environmental destruction if we care about national security.**

### Love of home

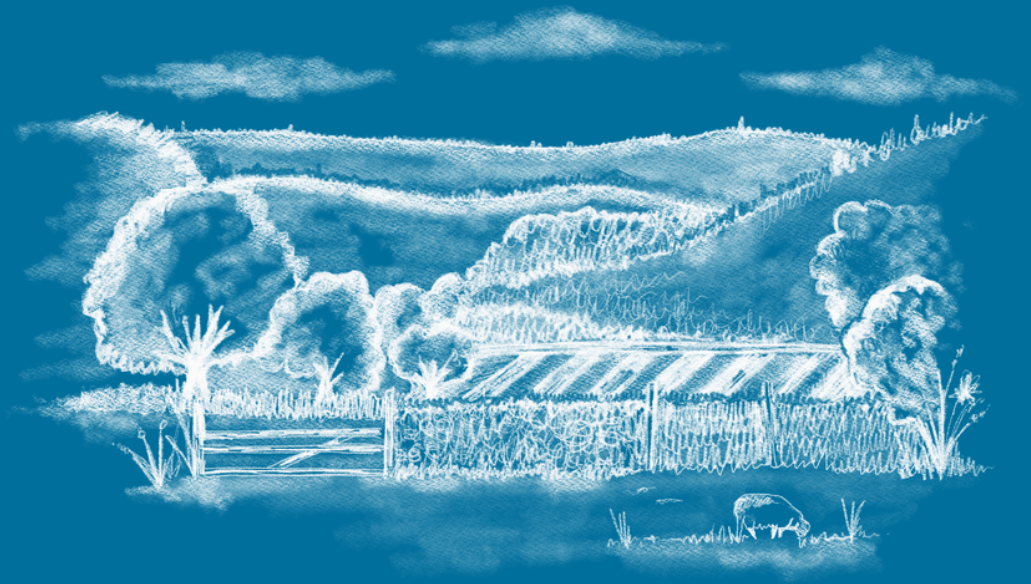
Conservatives have a love of home and community that motivates us to care for our local environment. Responsible stewardship of the natural world is a vital component of conservatism. It is our duty to protect many of the habitats and features that have become icons of the British landscape like our local rivers, ancient woodlands, and other biodiverse habitats. **Communities that are designed to be walkable enjoy better air quality and improve people's pride in place.**

### Global Britain

The UK has significant influence in trade, international development, and foreign relations, in part, because we have used our role as an environmental leader as a significant source of soft power. Through working with our allies to support lower income countries facing acute environmental threats and **push back against the malign actions of nations like Russia and China.**

### Political imperative

Concern for the environment is growing in political importance for the centre-right — and we need to respond to voters' desire for action. Policies that protect the environment — like action on water pollution or building more renewable energy projects - are popular. Action on the environment is deeply embedded within conservative philosophy, despite the fact that the left has typically felt it has more ownership over the issue. **The centre-right has an optimistic agenda to promote, particularly amongst the next generation of voters, as many of the policies it advocates for are not only ambitious but work with the grain of public opinion.**



# Environmental action can help to cut the cost of living



Sky high energy and fuel bills have exposed the economic danger of relying on fossil fuels for electricity, heating, and transport.

Oil and gas prices are set by international markets, which can be easily manipulated by large fossil-fuel producers like Russia. The recent spike in energy bills was triggered by Vladimir Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine — where he exploited his control over large swathes of Europe's gas supply to drive up prices. The government had to pay half of our energy bills as a result of our dependence on gas and exposure to these volatile international markets.

New renewable energy projects — like solar power and offshore and onshore wind - can lower the cost of living as they are able to displace gas and generate power below the wholesale electricity price, effectively subsidy free. Similarly, installing measures to improve a household's energy efficiency, such as insulation, helps to reduce fossil fuel demand without compromising on comfort — all whilst lowering people's bills.

As a councillor you can work to expand the choice that residents have in getting around. Looking at upgrading and improving active travel infrastructure and the convenience of local bus routes can help ease the financial pressure compared to solely relying on a private vehicle to get around.



# Protecting the environment is a priority for voters

The public has consistently ranked **the environment** as **one of the top priorities** facing the country since 2019. Eighty two percent of the public report being concerned about climate change.

## Action on the environment is a priority for conservatives

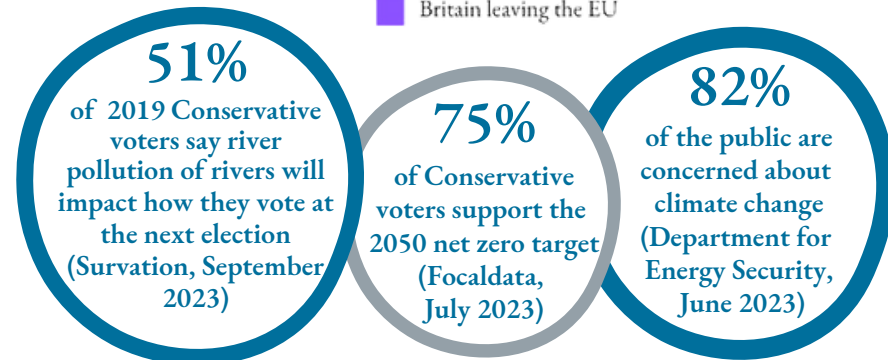
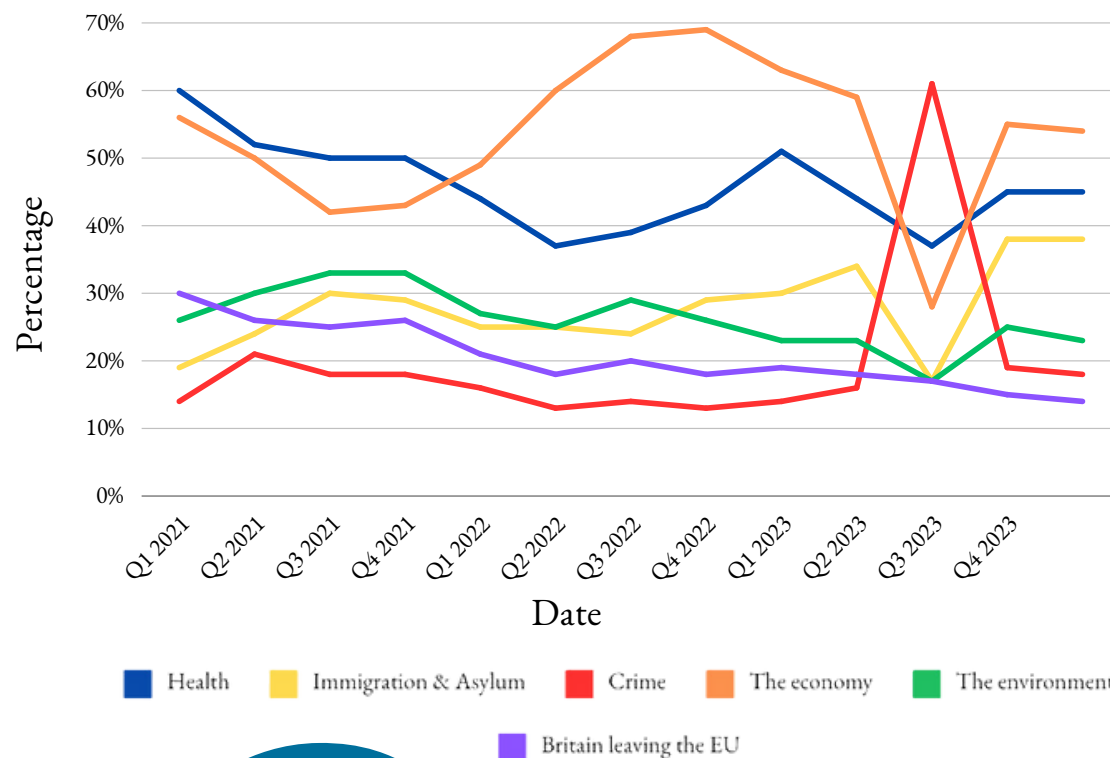
Action on the environment is not just a centre-left issue. A poll conducted by Folcadata in August 2023 found **three quarters of Conservative voters support the 2050 net zero target** — and over half of voters say that a political party dropping the target would make it out of touch with the public.

Polls consistently show there is strong support for the economic, industrial, and security opportunities from halting our contribution to climate change.

- A poll conducted by Opinium in July 2023 showed the **majority of swing voters believe that the renewable energy sector will be beneficial** to the overall UK economy.
- Another Opinium poll in June 2023 found nearly half of adults think that **renewable energy and clean technology are the sectors most likely to create long-term growth for the UK economy**.
- Polling conducted by Public First in September 2023 showed there is **still a strong belief among voters that moving to renewables will save costs in the long run**, and make the UK energy supply more secure.

Below is an overview of the YouGov weekly tracker poll of the most important issues for UK adults from January 2021 to January 2024.

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



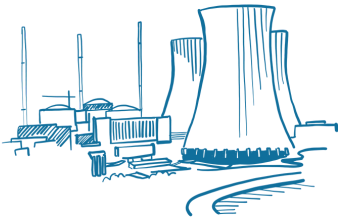
# Top 10 recent conservative environmental achievements



*“The achievements of the last 14 years are all the more impressive... The fastest decarbonisation of any major economy, world leaders in offshore wind, farm subsidies reformed to increase production and enhance the environment”.*

**Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities**

These are the best environmental policies that were campaigned for CEN supporters and adopted by a Conservative government.



## 1. 2050 net zero target

Following a backbench letter led by CEN MP Simon Clarke, **the Conservatives enshrined the UK's 2050 net zero target into law in 2019, making us the first major economy to do so.** The target has been followed by the comprehensive Net Zero Strategy which outlined how the UK will end its contribution to climate change and reap the benefits to business, industry, and households from an ambitious transition.



## 2. Glasgow Climate Pact and COP26

In 2021, 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.** Thanks to the leadership of Boris Johnson and Alok Sharma, the share of the global economy covered by national net zero targets rose from 30% to over 90% during the UK's presidency and CEN launched a world-first centre-right climate action declaration, signed by over 300 centre-right legislators from over 40 countries.



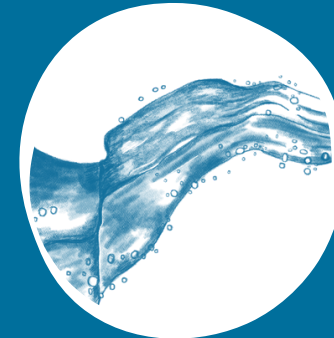
### 3. Post-Brexit farm subsidy reform (Environmental Land Management Schemes)

Following the UK's exit from the European Union, the government has replaced the EU's environmentally disastrous Common Agricultural Policy with the world-leading Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs). These new farm payments will reward farmers for improving the environment alongside food production and help us protect a wide range of precious native species and habitats, as advocated for in a CEN essay collection, Green Albion.



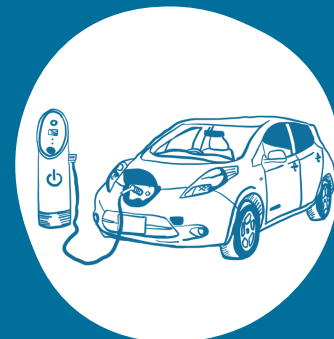
### 4. Environment Act

The first environmental legislation in twenty years, parliament passed the landmark Environment Act in 2021. After a letter led by CEN Peer, Lord Randall, the act included a legal deadline to halt the decline of nature by 2030. **The act also includes legally-binding targets to improve water quality, tackle the most harmful air pollutants, and reduce waste.** It also includes measures to establish a nature recovery network, reduce river pollution from storm overflows, ensure all new development improves nature, and an end to illegal deforestation in international supply chains.



### 5. Blue Belt

Originally championed by CEN alumni Richard Benyon, Zac Goldsmith, and Oliver Letwin, the government established in 2015 a **network of marine protected areas around our Overseas Territories, which now covers an area of ocean larger than India.** This area is home to around 90 per cent of the UK's biodiversity.



### 6. Introduction of the 'Zero Emission Vehicle' (ZEV) mandate

Following campaigns by a group of CEN MPs, the government introduced the ZEV mandate to require 80% of new car sales to be zero emission by 2030 and 100% by 2035. **The mandate will give car manufacturers the certainty to expand their range of models and make more affordable EVs available for sale,** which will in turn incentivise them to offer discounts to reach their targets.



## 7. Electricity sector decarbonisation

Following pressure from CEN MPs in 2015, the then government committed to phase out coal-fired power stations by 2025. **Coal power has now nearly disappeared from the grid, having made up 39% of our power mix in 2012. At the same time, renewables have expanded to provide over 40% of our electricity.** This has been driven by a market mechanism, the Contracts for Difference scheme, which has reduced the cost of capital for investors and spurred



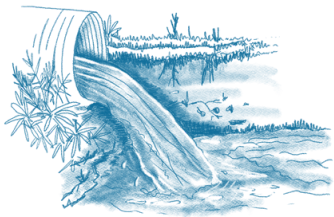
## 8. Scrapping VAT on energy efficiency products

Following a campaign led by CEN MPs, the Chancellor scrapped VAT on energy-saving products and installation costs between May 2023 and March 2027. **This has reduced the cost of decarbonisation measures, like heat pumps, insulation, and solar panels** — helping more households reduce their energy bills.



## 9. Deforestation due diligence obligation

Following a campaign by CEN MP Cheryl Mackrory and CEN Alumna Ruth Edwards the government announced measures to tackle illegal deforestation. Through an amendment to the Environment Act, **the government made it illegal for large companies operating in the UK to use commodities or derive products from land that has been illegally deforested.**



## 10. Water companies fines

Over 40 Conservative Parliamentarians produced a water manifesto in 2022 calling on the government to lift the cap on civil fines for polluting water firms and reinvest the money in river restoration schemes. The government adopted these recommendations and has now committed to **reinvesting future revenue from fines back into projects that improve the natural environment.**



# Campaigning



*“Whether it’s retrofitting our housing stock, building a clean public transport network or driving investment in green infrastructure, local leaders can be visible and accountable drivers of change across the country, making the case for the right powers and resources to deliver on behalf of their constituents”.*

**Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands**

If elected as a local councillor, you can deliver a wide range of services to your local community, including improving recycling and waste services, widening access to good quality green spaces, and supporting more residents to choose how they get about their community — all to the benefit of the environment.

Voters expect their councillors to take action to create healthier, greener, and more pleasant communities. This starts with making specific pledges addressing local environmental challenges.



# Pledges and social media

Below, there is a list of promises that you could make in your campaign, depending on your local circumstances.

You can download the suggested tweets and graphics by using the QR code or by visiting: [www.cen.uk.com/campaign-toolkit](http://www.cen.uk.com/campaign-toolkit)



## Protecting the natural environment:



### 1. Wildlife

I'm pledging to help revive our local hedgehog and bird population by installing more hedgehog homes and bird boxes in [name of local park].



## 2. Tree planting

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.

## 3. Wildflowers and roadside verges

I'm pledging to reduce how often we mow our verges and allow our local biodiversity and habitats to flourish.



## 4. Water quality

I will 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.







## 5. Green spaces

I will work with local wildlife groups to identify opportunities to restore nature in [area name] by creating new public green spaces and improving the management of existing ones.

## 6. Litter

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.



## 4. Fly tipping

Fly tipping incidents are on the rise. As your local councillor, I would lead a community reporting campaign to report incidents of fly-tipping.

## Cleaning up the air:

### 1. Pedestrianisation

I'm pledging to support local businesses by pedestrianising [names of local high streets] to create a more pleasant place for the community and fill empty units on our high streets.



### 2. School streets

I'm pledging to support local schools by introducing school streets so children get their recommended 60 minutes of exercise per day to keep fit and healthy.



### 3. School buses

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.



## Taking action on climate change:

### 1. 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.



### 2. Renewable energy

I'm pledging to campaign to designate areas for small-scale renewable energy projects in our local plan to keep energy costs down.



# Fact checking

While all voters want to see improvements to their local community and environment, there are sceptical voices in every community. It's important to take a balanced approach and build up support within a local community for environmental action.

Below we've listed some frequently made arguments about environmental action and how you could respond:

## Nature recovery:

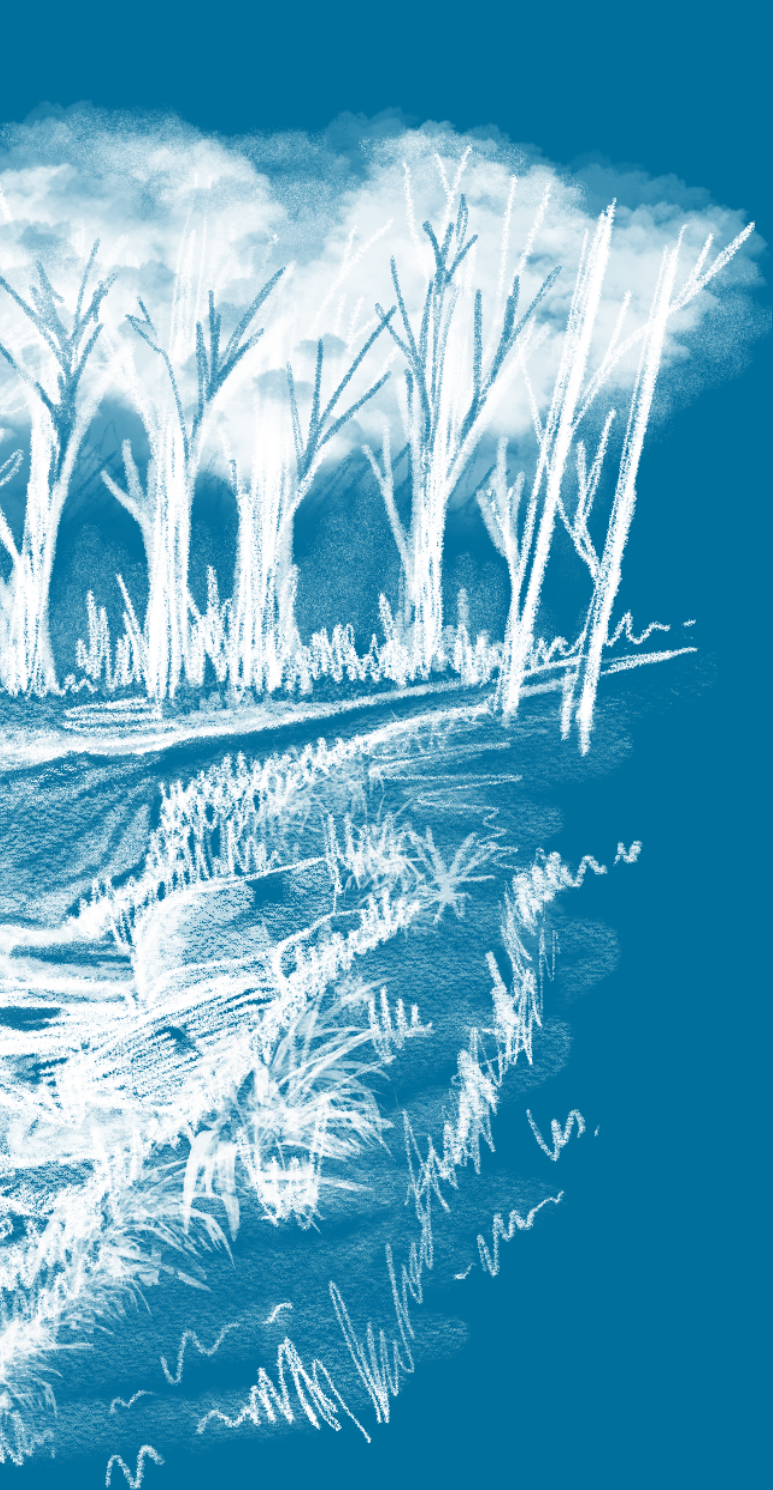
### **"Environmental policies are undermining our food security"**

The precise opposite is the case. The government's recent food security review found that we have 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. These threats can be mitigated by making our farming sector more sustainable.

### **"Nature restoration will reduce domestic food production"**

We can afford to restore natural habitats on some unproductive farmland without significantly reducing food production levels. There is no linear correlation between the amount of land we farm and agricultural output. Around 60 percent of our agricultural output comes from just 30 per cent of land, while only 3 percent of our food is produced on the least productive 20 per cent of land.





## Clean air:

**“Cutting car use outside urban areas just isn’t possible”**

While travel by foot or bike is better suited to shorter trips, there are other options. 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 percent satisfaction rating. Other **modal shift solutions include park and rides, car shares and car clubs** — all suited to longer journeys.

**“Traffic calming measures do not reduce pollution, they only shift it”**

Of course, poorly planned schemes can push rat runners onto adjoining streets rather than minimising congestion. But measures that have been **properly consulted on to reduce the flow of traffic have been shown to encourage residents to walk and cycle** more for shorter distances.

**“The cost of living is rising, so reducing pollution just isn’t a priority now”**

Many of the **solutions to cut air pollution from our transport and homes are more efficient and cost-effective than their polluting alternatives**. Electric vehicles are falling in price and have lower lifetime costs, and reliable public transport provides a cheaper travel option than travelling using a private vehicle.

**“Air pollution is only a problem in our towns and cities”**

Whilst exposure to the most harmful pollutants is higher in our towns and cities, **residents in rural communities can still be exposed to air pollution** - whether that’s indoors through wood burning, from agriculture, or from busy roads running adjacent to the community.



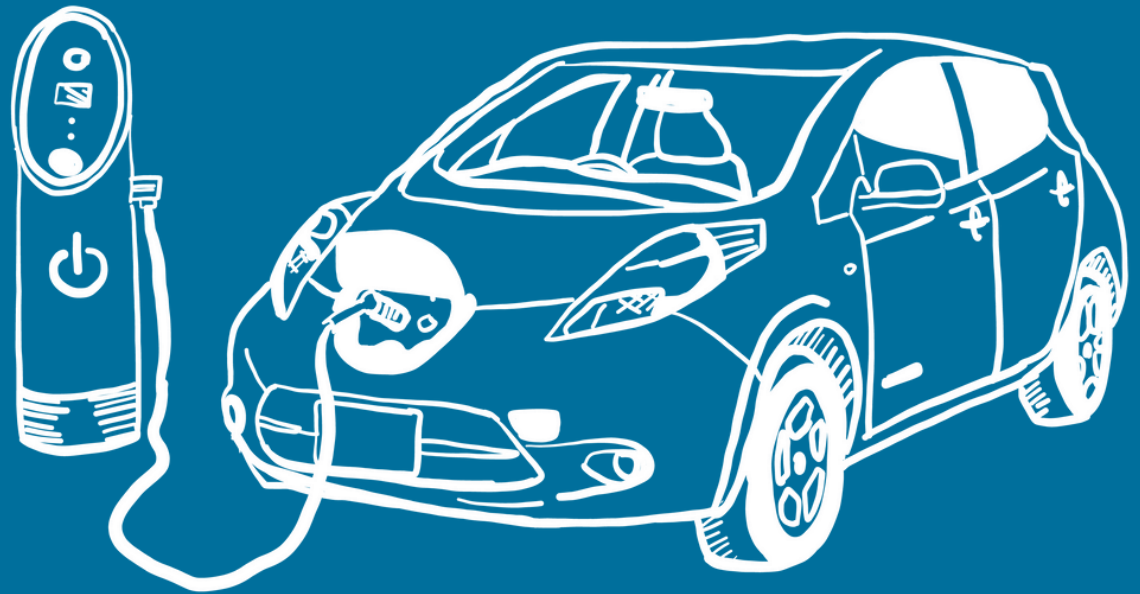
## Climate change:

### “Net zero is too expensive”

The costs of inaction on climate change will be far higher than action — with costs causing public debt to spiral to 289% of GDP by the end of the century according to the Office for Budget Responsibility, if no action is taken. What is more, **the transition to net zero is unlocking more economic opportunities** and upfront investment costs are falling due to technological innovation. Inaction risks the UK missing out on growth and export opportunities in major new global markets for renewables, clean hydrogen, and carbon capture and storage.

### “Reducing fuel poverty is more important than emissions”

Cutting bills and cutting carbon go hand in hand. **New renewable energy projects like solar and wind are cheaper than fossil fuels** – with costs still falling. Moreover, renewable energy prices are less volatile and reduce our reliance on despots like Vladimir Putin for our energy supply.



**“There is no point in the UK acting because China is a far bigger emitter”**

Britain is a science superpower, and we have a role in developing and commercialising new technologies to export to the rest of the world. We have an opportunity to lead by example and use our extensive diplomatic reach to raise ambition. We have already demonstrated it is possible through COP26, when the UK got China to stop financing new coal power stations abroad and commit to a 2060 net zero target.

**“Net zero costs will fall on the poorest”**

Through innovation and the private sector, the cost of clean technologies like heat pumps is falling. Electric vehicles are expected to reach cost parity with their petrol and diesel alternatives this decade. And in the meantime, the government is shielding those who can least afford upgrades — nobody is being forced to rip out their gas boiler or switch to an EV. Plus, measures like energy efficiency improvements will help to cut bills for households.

**“We don’t have the grid capacity for EVs”**

The National Grid, which has a legal requirement to ensure security of the supply of power, has said **EV uptake will not be a problem for grid capacity**. EVs have smart charging capabilities and will offer greater grid flexibility — meaning households can feed back electricity at times of low demand.



# Additional resources

For councillors we provide policy support through our quarterly briefings and case study map.

We publish a new briefing on an environmental topic roughly each quarter. Each briefing includes key facts and figures and information to respond to climate change and nature loss in your local community. We have covered a range of topics including buses, waste management, active travel, green infrastructure, electric vehicles, clean air, community energy and more.



You can read our briefings on our website at: [www.cen.uk.com/resources-for-councillors](http://www.cen.uk.com/resources-for-councillors) or using the QR code below:



As part of our work to share best practice we've compiled a series of case studies on a map to highlight where and how tangible progress has been made by conservatives across the country to share pragmatic and creative environmental policy.

We add new case studies throughout the year, if you would like to contribute a project from your local area, please email: [local@cen.uk.com](mailto:local@cen.uk.com).

You can access the map using the QR code below:



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