

INTRODUCTION

Conservatives have a long political tradition of environmental action. Whether it was Margaret Thatcher warning the UN General Assembly about the dangers of climate change or Edmund Burke's articulation of each generation's responsibility to hand on a healthy environment to the next, conservative thinkers and leaders have championed our moral duty to be good stewards of our natural world for our children and grandchildren. This manifesto seeks to follow in that tradition.

There was substantial progress on the environment in the last parliament, delivered under a Conservative government and championed by CEN MPs and peers. This manifesto highlights some of the new policies, legislation, and fiscal measures on the environment that were put in place by conservative environmentalists. We reached the milestone of halving greenhouse gas emissions, relative to a 1990 baseline, while growing the economy by over 80% in the same period.¹ The most polluting fossil fuel, coal, is being banished from the electricity grid this year. Around 4.3 million square kilometres of marine environment are protected by the Blue Belt around the UK's Overseas Territories.² And developers must now ensure new homes leave nature in a better state. Conservatives should celebrate these achievements, lay claim to their legacy, and feel pride.

But there remains much more to do if we are to stop climate change and restore nature. Just under half of our emissions, from a 1990 baseline, still need to be eliminated to reach net zero. Most rivers

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are not in a good ecological condition. Outcomes for nature inside protected areas are not improving fast enough. And air pollution limits continue to be exceeded in some towns and cities. Conservatives therefore need to set out a bold plan to tackle these environmental challenges in this parliament, building on our successes to date.

The environment is the quintessential conservative cause. Not only do we instinctively support environmental action because of our commitment to intergenerational responsibility, but we also believe that action on the environment is essential for economic prosperity and national security. Unchecked, climate change and biodiversity loss would cause a severe hit to our economy, such as damage to property and infrastructure from extreme weather or food shortages caused by poor quality soil and declining pollinators. They would also pose security risks, magnifying existing threats of global instability, conflict, and migration.³ The cost of dealing with the long-term impacts of these threats will dwarf those of taking action to prevent them.

We also recognise it is a political imperative. Even in a tumultuous period for the economy and geopolitics, the environment consistently remained one of voters' top five concerns during the last parliament and reaching net zero and halting biodiversity loss have enjoyed large majorities of public support.⁴ If conservatives are to avoid continuing to lose voters to the left, including younger voters who are especially environmentally conscious, an ambitious set of policies on the environment is a must. Conversely there is little evidence to suggest a platform of weakening environmental commitments would be capable of uniting traditional right-wing voters.

Polling carried out by the CT Group before the 2024 general election found the Conservative Party had lost nearly half of its 2019 voters to Reform UK and the Labour Party.⁵ The research found that, among Conservative to Labour switchers, net zero was both popular

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and salient, with 72% saying net zero would affect how they planned to vote. And while it found that attitudes to net zero were less favourable among Conservative to Reform switchers, immigration was by far the most salient issue (61% named immigration as the top issue that was determining their vote). This suggests a platform of reducing immigration and tackling climate change is likely to be the best strategy for winning back as many of the 2019 voter coalition as possible, rather than adopting Reform UK's position of scrapping net zero.

The recent general election showed that it is not sufficient to have a good record or even a list of good policies inside a manifesto. The centre-right must put forward a positive vision for the environment too. Some of the Conservative Party's greatest electoral triumphs in recent years, such as David Cameron's victory in 2010 and Boris Johnson's in 2019, came when the party offered voters a bold and ambitious environmental agenda. Conversely, 2024 shows the electoral limits of negative campaigning against environmental policies, focused solely on minimising the costs of action rather than seizing the opportunities of clean growth and avoiding costly environmental impacts. Conservatives must learn the lessons from these election results and provide a constructive opposition to Labour's more statist approach to the environment.

We firmly reject the idea that conservatives must sacrifice their support for free markets and limited government in order to tackle environmental threats. On the contrary, failing to act now would carry even greater costs, entailing greater state intervention and spending down the line. With a Labour government coming into power promising to create a state-owned energy company and increase public spending, it will not be enough for conservatives simply to oppose or to back similar policies on a slower timescale. The centre-right needs to

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put forward a distinctive, ambitious, pro-environment alternative. That is what this manifesto seeks to achieve.

In developing the policies in this manifesto, we have sought to apply conservative principles and insights to environmental challenges. This means that policies should go with the grain of individual preferences and free markets and seek to empower communities, rather than forcing lifestyle choices on people or imposing top-down solutions. Environmental action should support economic growth, rather than aim at degrowth. Policy should focus on unlocking private investment in environmental solutions and new green industries, while letting the market innovate and scale technologies, rather than promoting state ownership and picking winners. While there is a role for public spending in this vision, it is necessarily limited to avoid crowding out private finance. While there were many examples of bold environmental policies from this recent period of Conservative government that took clear inspiration from these conservative principles, we have sought to show how an even more distinctly conservative approach to the environment could be developed over this parliament.

We have enormous opportunities post-Brexit to redesign environmental policies that drive better environmental outcomes and are tailored to our own national circumstances. The last government made a good start seizing these opportunities, especially with the rollout of Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs), but there is more work to do. In the last parliament, ministers set strong long-term targets, which were vital for giving businesses the confidence to invest. However, the focus for this parliament must be on delivery, practicalities, and implementation. A Conservative opposition can play a critical role in holding a Labour government's feet to the fire on their environmental promises.

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This manifesto was developed over nearly 12 months with input from across our network of parliamentarians, councillors, and grassroots supporters, as well as from businesses and campaigning organisations. Its length reflects both the range of interests of conservative environmentalists and the array of pressing environmental challenges that we face. We hope it provides a blueprint for how the next generation of conservative leaders can put the environment at the heart of our movement's agenda and offer to voters as they rebuild after the election defeat and plot a path back to power.

This manifesto proposes 91 different policies to create a brighter future for this and the next generation. Taken together, the policies will lower the cost of living, increase investment and growth, improve people's communities and quality of life, restore British nature, make the country safer, and boost our standing on the world stage. It is split into six chapters:

Chapter one proposes policies to save households money by: implementing pro-market reforms to accelerate the move away from expensive fossil fuels to clean energy; lowering the cost of electric vehicles (EVs) and EV charging; and incentivising improvements to home energy efficiency.

Chapter two proposes policies to increase private investment in clean industries and infrastructure by: speeding up the planning process for new infrastructure; improving the quality and affordability of public transport; attracting more green supply chain investment to the UK; and encouraging more private capital to flow into clean projects.

Chapter three proposes policies to improve local communities by: enhancing water quality and security; tackling littering and fly-tipping; helping more people access nature by making our gardens, homes,

and communities places where wildlife is thriving; and improving air quality.

Chapter four proposes policies to safeguard British nature by: tackling invasive species and wildlife crime, and reintroducing beavers and pine martens; creating private nature markets; and harnessing our Brexit freedoms to reform environmental regulations.

Chapter five proposes policies to make the UK more resource secure by: growing tree cover; increasing the diversity and capacity of our energy supply; strengthening our food security; and consuming and managing our resources more responsibly in order to build a more circular economy.

Finally, chapter six proposes policies to boost the UK's international standing on the environment by: extending our leadership position on global ocean conservation; removing trade barriers for clean goods and services; and supporting developing countries and UK Overseas Territories to finance action on climate change and biodiversity loss.