

GREEN
STANDARD
2014

Greener Britain

Practical proposals for party manifestos from
the environment and conservation sector



Campaign for
Better Transport 

 Campaign to Protect
Rural England
Standing up for your countryside

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 giving
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GREENER BRITAIN

Practical proposals for party manifestos from the environment and conservation sector

A report by Campaign for Better Transport, CPRE, Friends of the Earth, Green Alliance, Greenpeace, IEEP, National Trust, RSPB, The Wildlife Trusts and WWF

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Green Alliance
36 Buckingham Palace Road
London SW1W 0RE
T 020 7233 7433
ga@green-alliance.org.uk
www.green-alliance.org.uk

blog: greenallianceblog.org.uk
twitter: @GreenAllianceUK

The Green Alliance Trust
Registered charity no. 1045395
Company limited by guarantee
(England and Wales) no. 3037633
Registered at the above address

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Introduction

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To us, the biggest current challenge to achieving a greener Britain is the hesitant approach of political leaders”

Environmental policy making has been challenging in the last few years. As a country, we have made significant gains in some important areas, most notably in our carbon emissions reduction commitments, but a prolonged recession and narrowly focused national debate have slowed progress towards a greener Britain.

The reaction to a difficult political environment could be to think that the government can no longer tackle our biggest environmental problems; that Britain’s place in the world is smaller than it was, and our allies are less interested in what we have to say; that our communities, whether urban or rural, are destined to be less vibrant, more similar, and have less to say about what’s done to them. Whether it’s the bill on our doormat or the view from our window, it seems harder to influence the world around us.

We disagree. We know that individuals and organisations with ambition and purpose have changed the world for the better, and that it will happen again. It’s not certain that we will secure a global agreement to slow climate change next year at the UN negotiations in Paris. But Britain and the EU have consistently punched above their weight on the international stage, and encouraging signs from the US and China mean that a good agreement is more likely in 2015 than it has been for over a decade. It’s not certain that we will reverse the decline in British wildlife, but it’s eminently possible.

The British public’s love for nature is on the rise, many millions of people are members and supporters of our organisations, and there is no shortage of ideas about how to ensure nature’s recovery.

To us, the biggest current challenge to achieving a greener Britain is the hesitant approach of political leaders. Our response is to identify the priorities and practical proposals which the next government could implement to overcome this hesitancy, and set a confident and clear approach that reflects the desires of the British public.

As the biggest organisations from the environment and conservation sector, we have worked together to develop proposals that would have a profoundly positive impact on the way we live. This is the fifth Green Standard report to be published since 2007. It is our challenge to all parties to strengthen environmental policy in their manifestos.

The policies we propose would make Britain greener, and have other significant benefits:

A greener Britain would be more influential internationally It would reassert its place in the world with strong leadership on climate and biodiversity, an increase in green exports and leverage on other countries and international institutions. This would be led by a strong example at home.

A greener Britain would support our natural world to recover Wherever or however we live, our country would be rich in accessible natural places to exercise, socialise, study or relax, making British people healthier and happier.

A greener Britain would have stronger communities This would include better homes which cost less to heat, and more power for people to shape their local environment.

A greener Britain would have a more resilient economy Better natural resource management

would mean lower energy costs, greater energy security, better protection against resource price increases and growing natural capital. Healthy ecosystems would deliver economic as well as environmental benefits.

Not only are these policies achievable, but they would also be popular, helping to rebuild public confidence in government.

We want to see better government policy in the areas we set out in this report for a greener, fairer, stronger and more influential Britain.



Stephen Joseph
Executive director
Campaign for Better Transport



David Baldock
Executive director
IEEP



Shaun Spiers
Chief executive
CPRE



Helen Ghosh
Director general
National Trust



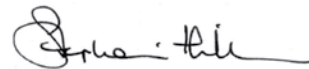
Andy Atkins
Executive director
Friends of the Earth



Mike Clarke
Chief executive
RSPB




Matthew Spencer
Director
Green Alliance



Stephanie Hilborne
Chief executive
The Wildlife Trusts



John Sauven
Executive director
Greenpeace UK



David Nussbaum
Chief executive
WWF UK



Greener Britain international influence

While some believe that the UK should now play a smaller role on the global stage, we think Britain is at its best when it is outward facing. In this way, we can fulfil our responsibilities to create a safer, fairer, more sustainable world, and we can protect our own interests, which are bound up with the behaviour of other nations. We need to show leadership but, given the global nature of climate change and biodiversity loss, our success will be determined by how effectively that leadership influences others to commit to substantive obligations. It requires Britain to engage at all levels with our trading and diplomatic partners, and to ensure that none of them doubt our seriousness about creating a greener Britain and a greener world.

Priority **Lead the low carbon transition**

Britain is already benefiting from huge inward investment in low carbon technology as a result of the leadership it has shown in tackling climate change. At the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties 21 (COP21) in Paris next year, countries will try to reach a new agreement on a global deal, with unprecedented involvement from both the US and China. This will be influenced by the ongoing work Britain does to ensure that the EU develops an ambitious energy and climate package for 2030. It also links into the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goal process which will conclude shortly before COP21. Such a concerted diplomatic push to tackle climate change at a global level has not been seen for many years. The government can be pivotal in these negotiations, if it is proactive and communicates commitment and ambition for a low carbon transition. It should do this while setting its own example through national action with clear plans and ambitious policies to make carbon budgets.

“
Decarbonising the power sector would be £23 billion cheaper for consumers, compared to increased dependency on gas generation”

How?

Make a fair, binding global climate deal, keeping within two degrees of global warming, a British foreign policy priority for 2015

The US, China, Germany, France and India have been ensuring climate change is on the agenda for their most important international meetings. We must do the same if we are to shape the outcomes we want, by ensuring the prime minister, foreign secretary and secretary of state for international development, as well as the secretary of state for energy and climate change, refer to climate and development priorities in all international speeches. Ambitious EU climate and energy policy should be central to our vision for a reformed Europe. Finally, we can work with other countries to ensure that our shared understanding of the risks from climate change is informing our approach to the global economy.

Set a 2030 power decarbonisation target at 50g CO₂/kWh

To ‘walk the walk’ on a global deal, and ensure the UK attracts sufficient investment to support a low carbon manufacturing supply chain, we should enshrine in law a carbon intensity target for the electricity sector of 50g CO₂/kWh by 2030. Policies to deliver it should be put in place to phase out unabated fossil fuel use. According to analysis by the government’s statutory adviser, the Committee on Climate Change, decarbonising the power sector would be £23 billion cheaper for consumers, compared to increased dependency on gas generation. It will also ensure we avoid a long term lock-in to burning unnecessary fossil fuels.

Expand the Green Investment Bank’s role

The UK can ensure it is at the centre of global climate policy by proposing ambitious international policy ideas while simultaneously setting out an innovative domestic program in parallel. These ideas include the Green Investment Bank’s existing involvement in international climate finance, which shows how a successful finance package can combine public and private funds. Finally,

leadership on domestic decarbonisation can also be used as an opportunity for citizens to invest in the UK's green infrastructure, through a green ISA offered through the Green Investment Bank.

Priority

Lead the protection of our oceans

With the world's oceans coming under increasing pressure from overfishing, pollution, climate change and acidification, the unique ecosystems and iconic wildlife they support are threatened. Once these ecosystems are lost, they will be lost forever, with terrible consequences for those now and in the future who depend upon them for food.

But there is also an opportunity to change this. Britain is uniquely placed to play a global leadership role in safeguarding the world's oceans – in the South Atlantic, Antarctica and the Arctic – as well as securing the health of our domestic seas by putting in place comprehensive and enforceable protection.

How?

Create a million square kilometre South Atlantic reserve

We are responsible for 14 Overseas Territories, which are astonishingly rich in wildlife. The government can establish an additional million square kilometres of protected ocean in the South Atlantic by creating a new protected area around Ascension to complement the one already in place around South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. This would form two mega protected areas in the South Atlantic, ranging from the tropics to the Southern Ocean. Britain can also influence the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources to establish a representative system of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) across the Southern Ocean.

In the Antarctic, the government should continue to enhance marine protection by helping to ensure that all fisheries are sustainable and illegal fishing is eliminated from the region.



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Champion a network of protected areas across the Arctic Ocean

The government should call for the international community, together with Arctic states, to establish a network of protected areas across the Arctic Ocean, including the international waters around the North Pole, as a global marine sanctuary. The government should also promote the highest possible environmental standards for British companies operating in the region.

Create an ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas in UK seas

Such international leadership should be matched by action at home with progress on designating MPAs in our own waters. The government should continue to make progress towards a representative and well managed, ecologically coherent network of MPAs in UK seas by 2016. The full network should include ambitious proposals for two further tranches of Marine Conservation Zones in English seas in 2015-16, implementing the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, which had cross party support, alongside wider marine protected areas. These sites must be well managed to maintain them in good condition, with recovery of those that are damaged. This should be delivered in the context of the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy.



Greener Britain nature's recovery

“
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happier”

The Natural Environment White Paper, published in 2011, recognised that our collective ambition for lasting prosperity and well-being relies on a healthy, restored natural environment, the benefits of which are accessible to all. Over the past 50 years we have seen a significant decline in the extent and variety of habitats and species, leaving both our economy and our society poorer. We need to reverse these declines, by planning now for nature's recovery.

A country rich in accessible natural places to exercise, socialise, study or relax makes us healthier and happier. Manifestos that commit to restore nature will help to address the decline in wildlife, improve the quality of people's lives and support a more resilient economy in the future. In England, all parties should commit to a Nature and Well-being Act, setting out the long term plan for nature's recovery and recognising its fundamental importance to our economy, sense of place and well-being.

Priority

Plan for nature's recovery

Creating a more wildlife-rich future, in which the degraded natural environment can be recovered, will require fundamental changes in how we value, use and invest in nature. There should be a strong, long term commitment to increase biodiversity and look after precious habitats, to guide the prioritisation of effort and investment in the recovery of nature across England. This will require targets from the top, and ecological plans created from the bottom up, supported by councils and local communities.

These plans will become 'blueprints' for where nature currently exists and is needed in the future, and will be an important strategic tool for identifying where investment in nature can fulfil many wider objectives, such as flood resilience and access to green space. These plans will also play an important role in helping local people to develop their area, by informing the design and location of development that will work with, and where possible enhance, the natural wealth of their local environment.

How?

Make a 25 year national plan for nature's recovery

The government should create a 25 year plan for nature's recovery, as recommended in the Natural Capital Committee's second report, which pulls together local plans into a national framework. The government and its agencies would have to redirect existing payments for land management to enhance local ecological networks, and remove barriers to payments for looking after the natural environment, by changing, for instance, aspects of water industry regulation.

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The government should create a 25 year plan for nature's recovery which pulls together local plans into a national framework”

Map local ecological networks

Local authorities should have a duty to work together, building on the duty to co-operate introduced in the Localism Act, and map the ecological networks of the future. This would ensure that planning decisions and conditions contribute to the recovery of landscape scale natural systems. Network maps would sharpen decisions on nature restoration and the siting of development.

Set up a permanent arm's length body to ensure the sustainable use and restoration of natural resources

This could be a new Office of Environmental Responsibility, or a strengthened Natural Capital Committee placed on a statutory footing. Either would be independent, and have a responsibility to guide government on its environmental ambitions, advising on environmental science and natural capital growth. This body would scrutinise all new government and regulatory and policy proposals for their impact on natural systems and would help to create a framework for the reporting and valuing of natural capital by private sector companies.

In England, the package outlined above is best delivered through a Nature and Well-being Act, setting out a long term plan for nature's recovery.

Priority

Improve public access to nature

Britain's urban parks and green spaces are widely used and well loved. There is compelling evidence of the significant contribution that accessible, high quality green space makes to people's health and well-being. These 'green lungs' are essential to encourage and enable a more active and cohesive society, particularly in providing stimulating, safe places for children to play that are rich in wildlife.

Unfortunately, funding for public parks and green spaces is in crisis. Local authorities are facing reductions in revenue spending of around 40 per cent by May 2015 compared to 2010 budgets. It is predicted that these funding reductions and the rising demand for adult social care will result in discretionary spending on parks falling by about 60 per cent by 2020. In the largest cities, where the greatest social care needs are found, the impact is likely to be even more severe, with the probability that there will be little or no money left for parks by 2020.

Funding for maintaining public parks is about to fall sharply, and we need a rescue plan. This crisis could be turned into an opportunity if the government is proactive and positive in enabling local government, civil society and businesses to rethink how society cares for these essential green spaces for the long term, in a way that increases the benefits they provide to people.

How?

Incentivise natural infrastructure through the local growth fund

Our parks, green corridors and waterways are critical to the attractiveness of our towns and cities, and to the well-being of the millions who live in them. Given that strategic funding is now being channelled through local growth funds, and the critical role natural infrastructure plays in people's lives, it should qualify for funding just as local transport schemes do.



A 'future parks' national innovation project would attract, test, and roll out the best ideas from Britain and around the world"

Address the park funding crisis with a 'future parks' innovation process

There are currently no models for funding and managing public parks and green spaces at the scale required. These will need to be created during the next period of government given the crisis in public funding for parks. To focus ideas and effort, a 'future parks' national innovation project would attract, test, and roll-out the best ideas from Britain and around the world. Local authorities will also need transition support from central government to 'rewire' how they look after the public realm in a managed and sustainable way.



Greener Britain
stronger communities

Bold responses are needed from government to the pressing challenge of providing more housing of high environmental quality while also maintaining the special character of places. But we also need the power to come up with our own answers. While many environmental challenges need a national or international approach, others benefit from the solutions created by local communities. For many of us, the things we care about most and have the capacity to change are on our own doorsteps. There will always be a role for national government to deal with national priorities, and for local government to provide services and help communities to work together. But many environmental challenges can be met most effectively when problems are addressed locally, at a neighbourhood level, from a more exciting and equitable way of producing and owning energy through to how we grow food.

England is currently seeing a quiet revolution in neighbourhood plan-making, with over 1,000 communities starting to make use of new powers under the Localism Act. A large part of this involves deciding where development should and should not go, but plans can also focus on how local green space is looked after, creating better walking and cycling routes and helping to meet food and energy needs. More should be done to support communities, helping them to go further in shaping local places, and ensuring that deprived communities can also get involved.

Priority **Accelerate household energy saving**

Home energy bills are rising and, with the unpredictable cost of fossil fuels and the expense of modernising our energy system, they are only likely to increase over the next parliament. Yet this country has huge potential for energy saving, and it is clear that the energy efficiency industry is capable of scaling up to deliver. In 2012 alone, 2.13 million energy efficiency measures were installed. But this rate of installation fell by over 80 per cent in 2013, underlining the importance of having a good, stable

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More needs to be done to support communities, helping them to go further in shaping local places, and ensuring that deprived communities can also get involved”

market framework. A national housing retrofit programme would cut an average of £300 from fuel bills nationwide. This should be a national infrastructure priority, on a par with the commitment to increase low carbon energy generation.

How?

Set a stretch target for improving home energy performance

The government should have a national infrastructure goal to bring four million more homes up to at least Energy Performance Certificates band C by 2020, 11 million by 2025 and all suitable homes by 2035.

Put local authorities at the heart of energy saving delivery

The government should support local authorities in rolling out high quality street by street programmes, which have been shown to drive take-up by creating new social norms, and to reduce costs by around 20 per cent through efficiency savings.

Improve incentives for energy saving

Low income households should be offered full grants on energy efficiency schemes, while able-to-pay households should be offered long term zero per cent loans. Revenue neutral stamp duty incentives can capitalise on the huge investment that households make in home improvements before and after a move. For the 2015-20 parliament, energy consultancy Verco has estimated that a programme of this scale for low income homes would cost on average £2.2 billion a year. This could be funded by recycling carbon taxes and re-prioritising infrastructure spending.

Priority **Give communities more control**

Empowering communities to deal with housing and transport problems would be a new approach, but one that Britain is undoubtedly ready for. Ways should be found to reward communities that put the natural environment at the heart of their planning.

The building of new homes is at its lowest peace time rate since 1924. Successive governments have argued that if high housing targets are set in local plans, more homes will be built and prices will become more affordable. But this approach has not delivered the homes needed, and housing is becoming increasingly unaffordable.

Meanwhile, transport policy heavily favours car-based development at the cost of sustainable transport schemes which would be better for the environment, the economy and communities. Up to 500 times more is invested in local transport in London than in some other parts of the country. Local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships operating around the country are not currently able to realise the same kind of benefits for people in other places, because they have much less influence over transport contracts and investment.

We believe that these two challenges can be met via the same strategy. Communities can take on the responsibility of drawing up plans for their area to promote locally appropriate sustainable development and, in return, they should be rewarded with a new neighbourhood deal, including new rights, incentives and access to funding that could lead to a more exciting approach to energy production and ownership. This would be accompanied by clearer rules on house building and more localised powers on transport.

How?

Introduce a new Sustainable Neighbourhoods Deal

This would increase the capacity of local authorities and civic society to support neighbourhoods in developing plans, with experts on hand to advise and facilitate, particularly in urban areas. Building on the Local Enterprise Partnership model, funding pools from central government should be made available directly to neighbourhoods in areas such as local transport, community energy and local food production. Finally, where planning permission is granted for developments that go against an agreed neighbourhood plan, a community right of appeal would allow the neighbourhood to challenge decisions and have them looked at again.

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Give all major cities and county regions the same transport powers and funding as London

Combined authorities need stronger strategic transport powers and duties over local public transport and roads. Strategic planning and economic development powers should go with this, as in London. This would also mean combined authority control over local rail services and strategic roads, as well as national strategies for rolling out smartcards and increasing cycling, with funding delegated from national budgets.

Ensure new housing policy allows local needs to be met within natural constraints

If the government intends to get the whole country behind tackling the housing crisis, it should recognise that more support will come if diverse and locally relevant approaches are taken. This could include local targets for the delivery of affordable new housing, for a range of types, tenures and sizes. Land banking could be regulated instead of focusing on selling more greenfield sites. Local authorities should be required to work together across city regions or counties to plan for new housing in the least environmentally-damaging locations, prioritising the reuse of brownfield land where it is not of high biodiversity value. A proportion of new housing sites should be reserved for custom built housing, developed in line with planning and building regulations that deliver environmentally sustainable development.



Greener Britain a more resilient economy

The UK, along with the rest of the developed world, is using more than its share of global resources, many of which are also becoming more costly and are environmentally damaging to extract.

As a result, Britain is experiencing resource price shocks that are raising our cost of living, threatening our economic stability and creating environmental harm around the world, and incentivising new resource extraction in fragile habitats. Over the past decade, world resource prices have risen sharply. As Britain becomes more dependent on resource imports, inflation rises, hitting the poor hardest. But the government has no strategy to respond to this price volatility and its impact on the UK economy.

Priority

Act on the resource price shock

Since 2003, rising food and energy bills have pushed up the overall inflation rate by around 0.5 per cent per year, making the task of controlling inflation more difficult for the Bank of England. Higher bills have made a significant contribution to declining living standards in the UK, with poorer households particularly affected. If food and energy prices had kept pace with other consumer prices since 2003, the average household could have saved over £1,000 on its bills in 2012.

The only reliable way to protect ourselves against resource price shocks is to address the risks from climate change whilst reducing natural resource use and increasing the reuse of products and materials already in the economy.

Rising global temperatures are likely to have a serious impact on both our domestic infrastructure and the global macroeconomics of resources on which we rely heavily. Resource security has risen as a national issue following events in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, but there has been no coherent response from the government to this risk. Britain should be at the cutting edge of understanding the implications of these risks and leading

“An Office for Resource Risk should be created to provide independent assessments to government and business on how to respond to risks in specific resource markets and to outline the market risks from climate change”

international efforts to encourage resource stewardship and greater circularity of resource use.

How?

Commit to reducing Britain's resource use

A clear plan is needed, with targets to reduce the country's consumption of finite natural resources and increase resource efficiency. Delivering on these targets will require significant new action. Examples are: requiring online retailers to take back waste electrical and electronic equipment when delivering new products; setting up a local authority challenge fund to develop new infrastructure for recovering resources from the waste stream; and enforcing a landfill ban for food waste, with policies to incentivise its collection and reuse as compost or fuel for anaerobic digestion.

Create new resource risk capability in government

The government needs better data to assess and manage resource risks to the economy. An Office for Resource Risk should be created to provide independent assessments to government and business on how to respond to risks in specific resource markets and to outline the market risks of climate change. These assessments should be synchronised with the recommendations of the Committee on Climate Change.

Create a market framework for negawatts

Parts of the US have avoided building new power stations by incentivising lower electricity demand through a market for 'negawatts' ie power saved through energy efficiency. The UK could avoid building eight 800MW power stations if it supported a similar market effectively. Building new power stations is expensive; negawatt measures are cheaper, as shown in the US. The next government should expand its current negawatts pilot scheme to create a permanent market, and remove the red tape and regulation that could hold it back.

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