

A Better Environment, A Better Life

Liberal Democrat Policies for the Environment

Labour and Tory Governments in Britain have paid lip service to the environment, but their actions have not matched their rhetoric. Our communities still suffer from dirt, litter and traffic noise, parents are afraid to let their children walk to school for fear of being run down, millions of householders including many pensioners suffer fuel poverty and ill-health due to poor home insulation, air and water pollution threaten human health, and global warming threatens the future of the planet.

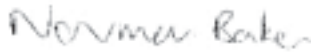
Liberal Democrats understand that caring about the environment is not about wearing hair shirts or throwing away the benefits of modern technology. In fact it is vital to solving the problems people face in their daily lives. Promoting sustainability can improve our quality of life by promoting warm homes and lower fuel bills, clean air and rivers, safer streets, and affordable public transport.

That is why Liberal Democrats have always integrated environmental concerns into all our policy-making, at local, national and international level. While action at the global level is vital, and we have a strong policy platform to address the international dimension, we want to promote environmental improvement from the grassroots up. Liberal Democrats acting locally have a strong record on working with communities on issues like recycling. Sustainability often means giving local people greater control over the things that affect their lives, for example by allowing them to set their own speed limits in local streets, or establishing community trusts to protect green spaces or to develop local renewable energy sources for the benefit of the community.

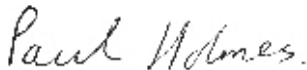
Liberal Democrats believe that by helping the environment, we can help our own pockets, our families, our communities and our world. This document sets out how we plan to achieve this.

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Signed by the Liberal Democrat Green Ministers



Norman Baker MP



Paul Holmes MP



Edward Davey MP



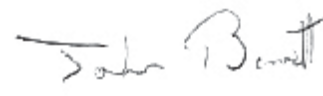
Sir Robert Smith MP



Sue Doughty MP



Baroness Joan Walmsley



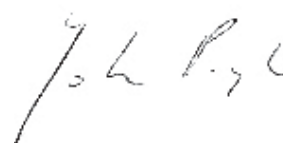
John Barrett MP



Don Foster MP



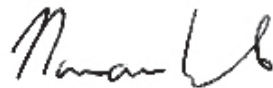
Baroness Sue Miller



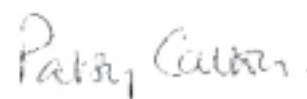
John Pugh MP



Roger Williams MP



Norman Lamb MP



Patsy Calton MP



Colin Breed MP



John Thurso MP

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Health, Housing and the Environment

Eradicating Fuel Poverty with Healthier Homes

Decent levels of home insulation will simultaneously reduce CO₂ emissions, improve health and cut fuel bills. We will:

- better target and better resource government programmes to promote insulation of existing properties on those in greatest fuel poverty.
- give pensioners the option of receiving a package of energy saving materials instead of the Winter Fuel Allowance, to a greater retail value than the Allowance, as part of a wider Energy Efficiency Improvement Initiative.
- work with colleagues in Europe to agree zero-rating of VAT on all energy conservation materials within the EU.
- cut fuel bills and reduce pollution by requiring all new housing to meet improved energy and water efficiency standards through the use of environmentally friendly building materials and techniques.

Clean Air

We will:

- tackle the air pollution responsible for respiratory problems like asthma by introducing incentives for people to switch to less polluting vehicles, reducing reliance on cars by increasing the use of public transport, and tackling industrial pollution.
- provide better quality information, increasing the number of air monitoring sites for key pollutants in all areas.

Education and the Environment

Healthy and Safe Journeys to School

We will:

- promote the development of a national programme of Safe Routes to School, to encourage parents to allow their children to walk or cycle to school in safety rather than driving them. Children will gain positive benefits for their physical health from the increased exercise. At the same time, this programme will assist in reducing congestion and pollution during peak times of the day by reducing car use.

Learning for a Green Future

We will:

- increase environmental awareness amongst young people, by encouraging involvement in local environmental projects and by teaching sustainability in schools as part of the citizenship curriculum. Children have a big influence on their parents' involvement in 'green' activities, and this will relate directly to the aims of our Zero Waste strategy.

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Pollution and the Environment

Preventing Pollution

We will:

- improve enforcement of pollution controls through an expanded inspectorate for the Environment Agency, to support full implementation of the statutory pollution control regime. This will be reinforced by increasing the level of penalties which polluters have to pay and the introduction of legislation on corporate environmental liability.
- use these same powers to ensure that biotech companies are liable for any harm caused by GM crops and food.

Guard Against Possible Dangers of GM Crops

We support the continuation of the current moratorium on commercial growing of all GM Crops that have the potential to contaminate non-GM and organic crops. We will press for EU regulations on labelling of GM content of foods to be set at the lowest practicable thresholds.

Reduce Pollution from Chemicals

We will end UK production and use of POPs (persistent bio-accumulative chemicals). We will completely ban the use of some toxic chemicals. We also want to support green technology and environmental sunrise industries.

Road Transport and the Environment

Cleaner and More Efficient Vehicles

We will:

- promote technologies which improve vehicle efficiency and the use of alternative fuel systems such as Liquefied Petroleum Gas, and, in the longer term, biofuels and zero emission vehicles.
- improve testing of vehicle emissions and strictly enforce freight vehicle weight limits and other safety standards by increasing resources devoted to roadside testing as well as strengthening the MOT test. We will oppose further increases in weight limits for freight vehicles.
- reward motorists who drive less-polluting vehicles by reducing car tax (Vehicle Excise Duty) on more environmentally friendly cars and motorcycles – abolishing it altogether for the greenest vehicles. We will fund this by increasing the amount of VED charged on the most polluting vehicles.
- reduce car traffic. As part of our policies for reducing pollution and congestion we will introduce legislation to ensure that there are stronger targets for local authorities to reduce road traffic.
- enable local authorities to raise bonds and establish congestion charging and private non-residential parking taxes to promote use of public transport. Our policies for improving public transport and encouraging less polluting vehicles means that we do not need to increase petrol taxes further above inflation in order to meet our environmental objectives.

Less Road Building

We will reverse the government's decision to go back to the discredited 'predict and provide' approach to road building.

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Public Transport and the Environment

Planning for Public Transport

Transport has a huge impact on the environment because of the greenhouse gases and local air pollutants which it generates, and the effects of transport infrastructure on the landscape. Our policies are designed to reduce the need to travel through better use of the planning system, and investment in improving public transport so that people are no longer forced to use their car unnecessarily. We will:

- introduce Regional Transport Plans and strengthen Local Transport Plans to set effective strategies for reducing congestion, pollution and traffic growth.

Increase Investment in Public Transport

We will:

- enable local authorities to raise bonds and establish congestion charging and private non-residential parking taxes (including out-of-town retail and workplace parking) to fund improved public transport. Priorities for investment include: reopening disused railway lines and stations; developing bus routes, cycle paths, trams, light rail systems, and walkways; better information for passengers through a National Public Transport Information System; Local Authority sponsored car-pooling schemes; and improving the ease with which passengers are able to transfer between different modes of transport.

Reduce Freight on the Roads Through Increased Use of Railways and Waterways.

We will:

- explore partnership options for developing Britain's waterways (which are vastly under-utilised at present).
- aim to double the amount of freight carried on Britain's railways by 2010.

Introduce Environmental Incentives for Bus Operators.

We will:

- reform fuel duty rebates for bus operators so that these are tied more closely to those running more efficient vehicles, particularly those using alternative fuels.

Aviation

We support in principle the introduction of taxation on aviation fuel by working at the European level, to ensure air transport carries the full burden of its environmental costs in line with the 'polluter-pays' principle, and to give incentives for the development of more fuel efficient aircraft. The revenues would be used for offsetting tax cuts.

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Conserving Resources and the Environment

Reducing Waste and Promoting Recycling

We will:

- ensure a doorstep recycling collection for every household. We will set a Zero Waste target for all Municipal Waste in England by 2020, and aim to achieve recycling of 60% of household waste within 10 years.
- Reform the Landfill Tax on a revenue neutral basis into a broader Waste Tax to remove the incentives for incineration and other unsustainable waste disposal options.
- not permit building of incinerators unless results of research on their impact shows that they are safe and the best environmental option.

Protect Green Spaces

We will:

- create a new designation of Protected Site, with equivalent protection to Sites of Specific Scientific Interest, for green areas of particular importance or value to the community.
- Manage SSSIs to enhance their environmental value and impose a binding 'duty of care' on owners and tenants to avoid further significant damage or fragmentation.

Preserve Scarce Water Resources

We will:

- set tough requirements for water companies to reduce leaks.
- encourage the use of water meters for domestic households in areas with scarce supplies, with effective measures to provide security for disadvantaged people.

Protect our Seas

We will:

- develop a national oceans and coasts policy in consultation with scientists and the fishing industry to provide sustainable livelihoods and prosperity for coastal communities, improved health of the seas for wildlife and a safer environment for marine activities. This will include a network of Marine Protected Areas covering 10 per cent of our seas and pilot Fishing-Free Zones to help the recovery of fish stocks. We will underpin this by introducing consolidated marine legislation in collaboration with the devolved institutions of the UK.
- implement pollution reduction and prevention programmes to meet targets under the OSPAR convention by 2020.

Protect the World's Forests

We will:

- take measures at international, European and national level to reduce and eventually ban imports of illegally harvested timber, and to use government procurement policies and company reporting requirements to promote sustainable timber.

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Energy and the Environment

Cutting Pollution from Energy Use

The burning of fossil fuels – coal, oil and gas – is a major contributor to climate change, and also causes acid rain and local air pollution. Our top priorities are to reduce energy consumption overall, by improving the efficiency with which it is used, and to switch from polluting forms to clean energy sources.

Reducing the Demand for Energy

Half the energy currently used in the UK is wasted, and could be saved by using it more efficiently, in homes, businesses and transport. Mandatory standards and labels for buildings, machinery, vehicles and appliances, together with lower VAT on energy conservation materials, will encourage householders and businesses to cut energy use. We will:

- encourage Combined Heat and Power schemes to reduce the energy wasted in power generation, and set a target for 30% of electricity used in the public sector to be generated from Combined Heat and Power by 2015.

Giving Incentives To Reduce Carbon Emissions

We will:

- make urgent preparations for participation by UK firms in the European Union Emissions Trading scheme which will become mandatory by 2008, particularly by drawing up a fair National Allocation Plan which will achieve real emission reductions, promote more efficient technologies and industries and maintain British industries' competitiveness.

The Government's Climate Change Levy is overcomplicated and bureaucratic. We will:

- reform the Climate Change Levy into a Carbon Tax payable by all energy users not involved in the Emissions Trading Scheme, initially set at the same overall level as the CCL but with the level in future to be set on the advice of our proposed Green Tax Commission. Any additional revenues from the Carbon Tax would be recycled into offsetting tax cuts, including for example cutting VAT on energy saving materials.

Boosting Renewable Energy

We will:

- go beyond the existing government target of 10% of UK electricity to be generated from renewable sources by 2010 by setting targets of 20% for 2020 and 50% by 2050.
- extend the existing Renewables Obligation on electricity suppliers so that 20% of electricity must be sourced from renewables by 2020. As well as benefiting the environment, this will create thousands of new jobs in the green energy sector. Waste incineration will no longer be classed as renewable energy.

Phasing out Nuclear Power

We will phase out existing nuclear power stations at the end of their safe operating lives, and wind up the THORP and MOX plants as soon as it is practical to do so.

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Putting the Environment at the Heart of Government

Greening the Budget

We will:

- publish a full 'Green Budget' assessment of every budget. This will ensure that environmental priorities are at the heart of government spending plans, and that the Chancellor is held to account for making economic policy more sustainable.

Improving Environmental Accountability

An Environmental Responsibility Act will set out reporting requirements and environmental standards for government and businesses, and introduce environmental audits across all government departments and local authorities where this is not already done.

Strengthening National Environment Policy

We will:

- strengthen government environment policy by creating a new Department of the Environment, Energy and Transport. This would take on DEFRA's environment responsibilities and the DTI's water and energy roles in addition to the whole Department of Transport function.

Making the Polluter Pay

We regard it as essential to make a major shift in taxation from 'goods' like wealth creation which benefit Britain to 'bads' which are harmful like pollution. We will:

- establish a Green Tax Commission to make clear recommendations on reforming the tax system, observing the principle that increases in environmental taxes should be offset by tax cuts elsewhere. Green taxation will involve taxing differently, not taxing more.

Improving Environmental Knowledge

A 'Right to Environmental Information', as part of Freedom of Information legislation, will cover issues such as local air quality, and the emissions from local factories. We will also introduce a duty to ensure electronic publication of environmental information.

Reform Planning

We will:

- ensure that local authority development plans incorporate targets for CO₂ emission reductions to encourage the development of renewable energy facilities and account for the climate change consequences of their policies, including transport.

Protecting Protest

We will:

- protect the right to legal and peaceful protest on all issues, including environmental matters.

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The International Scene and the Environment

Global Climate Change

We will:

- place Britain at the forefront of climate change negotiations, pressing other nations to ratify and implement the 1997 Kyoto Protocol.
- ensure that Britain achieves its own target well before the deadline, and establishes a new target of a 20% reduction in CO₂ emissions by 2010, setting an example to the world. Our long-term target is for a 60% reduction by 2050.
- Promote a new Europe-South initiative for a long-term global framework to cap CO₂ emissions through contraction of greenhouse gases emissions to the level needed to stabilise the climate, and convergence to equal emission quotas, with common institutions to ensure and support compliance under democratic control ('contraction and convergence').

Integrate Environmental Objectives

We will:

- campaign to introduce stronger environmental objectives into the lending and investment policies of the IMF, World Bank and regional development banks. World Trade Organisation rules should respect environmental principles, removing the threat of a WTO challenge to international environmental agreements and other environmental policies such as eco-labelling schemes and government procurement policies based on environmental criteria, as long as these are applied in a non-protectionist way.

Promote Sustainable Development

We will:

- ensure that environmental and social sustainability is a prime objective of aid and technology transfer policies, concentrating in particular on renewable energy and sustainable agriculture technologies.

Improve Environmental Governance

We need to improve the international community's ability to tackle environmental threats. We want to see a substantial increase in resources for the UN Environment Programme and for the implementation of environmental agreements, including greater monitoring of the growing problems of non-compliance with treaty obligations, and international environmental crime. We also advocate a UN Economic and Environmental Security Council for Sustainability.

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Europe and the Environment

Putting the Environment at the Heart of Europe

All EU policies should be analysed for their likely environmental impact, with results reported to the European Parliament. This is particularly important for EU overseas aid, where we will support the establishment of a specialised European aid agency. All member states must comply fully with EU environmental standards, and the European Court of Justice should apply higher fines to those failing to comply. We will:

- campaign to introduce stronger environmental objectives into the Common Agricultural Policy. We will support the initiative started at the Cardiff summit to integrate environmental objectives into all EU activities – particularly in the area of trade policy, where the Commission has sole competence to negotiate on the EU's behalf.

Strengthening Europe's Voice on the Global Environment

We will:

- argue for the EU to play a greater role in raising environmental standards world-wide, through providing support for the UN Environment Programme and for the enforcement of environmental conventions, such as those protecting endangered species, combating climate change, and controlling the trade in GM products.

Note: This document states Federal Liberal Democrat policy, except in areas where the policy of the Scottish and Welsh Liberal Democrats applies. We will publish a full costings programme, setting out our priorities across all policy areas, closer to the next General Election.