

March 2010



**Friends of
the Earth**

Election 2010

Manifesto Recommendations

Three or four years ago it seemed that the perception of action on the environment as “bad politics” might finally have been killed off. For too long, tackling climate change and pollution had been seen as bad for business, bad for the economy and bad for people. But with a growing realisation that it was cheaper to tackle climate change than deal with its consequences, and with new solutions to embrace – from micro-wind turbines to the Toyota Prius – a new positive approach to the problem emerged.

Then came the chill winds of a downturn, setting the context for the coming General Election. And with them, the danger that these issues will slide back down the agenda.

This would be a profound mistake. For a start, the environmental problems we face will be more difficult to tackle if we delay. But perhaps even more important, the solutions offer positive benefits we need even more during a downturn. Environmental policies can generate jobs, save money and reduce waste. Many will also help the least well off most – by helping them keep homes warm for example. So the question is not can we afford to tackle environmental problems? It is can we afford not to?

This document sets out the key policies Friends of the Earth recommends at this election.

Friends of the Earth makes life better for people by inspiring solutions to environmental problems.

We are:

- the UK's most influential national environmental campaigning organisation
- the world's most extensive environmental network, with around 2 million supporters across five continents and 77 national organisations worldwide
- a unique network of campaigning local groups, working in more than 230 communities throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland
- dependent on individuals for over 90 per cent of our income.

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Cutting carbon – creating jobs

Tackling climate change is of course a global challenge – but over a quarter of the emissions we emit come from our homes. UK homes are notoriously draughty, badly insulated and inefficient. As well as being wasteful, this leaves around 5 million households unable to afford to properly heat their home – one reason the death rate rises during cold spells to an extent unknown in colder regions like Scandinavia. Not only that but improving homes would create jobs.

But tackling our homes will take a kick-start from the new Government. So the next Government must develop an ambitious new energy efficiency programme providing super-insulation and renewable energy to all households. The work can be funded by loans where they will be paid back through savings on Bills – but those houses that are most expensive to treat, the fuel poor, and those in rented accommodation will need more help.

Our energy system too needs high levels of new investment. The next Government will play a crucial role in meeting EU targets for renewable energy – 15 per cent of energy must be from renewable sources by 2020. Again this is an opportunity – the next Government must develop a green industrial strategy to establish skills, expertises and manufacturing capacity. This will require work with employers and unions to help skilled workers transition from marine, oil, gas and defence industries into the low carbon economy.

Both policies of course need investment – which should be provided by a new Climate Bank, funded by an issue of ‘climate bonds’ which can be paid back as the investments reap economic benefits.

Sustainable Communities

Local Government has a key role to play in cutting carbon emissions. Councils influence our use of energy through planning and their transport policies, through the large number of buildings they control (schools, council offices) and they can greatly influence renewable energy uptake and progress made improving homes. The best councils are already acting – but all must do so.

So the next Government must build on existing pilot schemes and ensure all councils have a Local Carbon Budget covering emissions in the whole council area, set in line with the scientific evidence of the scale of action needed. They must also ensure councils have the powers and resources they need to meet the budgets.

The accounting rules that make it easier for councils to build a new road than support public transport services should be changed. Cutting carbon emissions should be a top priority of transport policies – and money should be reallocated from existing programmes to fund schemes that cut carbon. Pilots of ‘Smarter Travel Choices’ schemes – providing much more information to people on how to get around without cars have also proved popular and effective – the next Government must roll them out nationally.

Councils are also responsible for dealing with our rubbish. In recent years we have at last seen a big expansion in recycling from near nothing to around 35 per cent. But we are still catching up with places like Flanders – and a 70 per cent target should be set by the next

Government. Collecting and recycling materials again creates jobs – especially with separation at the kerbside which maximise the value of what is collected – crucial during a recession in which we are paying to import expensive materials like aluminium and then dumping it in the ground.

Landfill or incineration of recyclable and compostable materials should be banned, and the next Government should support councils to expand anaerobic digestion – a technology that also could produce a new and renewable source of energy. The Government should not offer support for technologies like incineration, which are not the most efficient way to recover materials and energy, and should stop councils signing long contracts that lock councils into high charges long after those councillors have left office.

Better food, better farming

While illegal logging and protecting the rainforest may seem like environmental campaigns of yesteryear, the problems have not gone away – even if they have changed subtly. Much of the pressure on rainforests now is through the expansion of plantation farming – often to produce crops like soy and palm oil which become almost invisible, but hugely damaging, ingredients in our food. The problem is particularly acute in the livestock sector – where animal feeds place a huge burden on our forests.

The huge loss of species of animals and plants lost through deforestation is a recognised crisis – 2010 is named by the UN as the Year of Biodiversity. And loss of rainforest has climate impacts too – huge quantities of carbon previously locked up in the soil and plants of the rainforest can be released as the land is changed to agriculture.

It is only comparatively recently that the full extent of the problems of the livestock industry have been widely understood. The many years of environmental campaigns on transport projects perhaps concealed the fact that 18% of global emissions of greenhouse gas emissions come from the livestock sector – a greater proportion than all global transport.

The next Government will need to act in many areas to fix the food chain – but could make a good start by ensuring food procured for the public sector (hospitals, schools, the armed forces, prisons etc) is not produced with damaging practices. The Government should also review the many farming subsidies we have and negotiate changes – it is unacceptable that so much of taxpayers' money is subsidising practices that exacerbate the problems. Instead of using the money to subsidise farming systems that rely on food produced from former rainforest areas, we should be supporting more sustainable methods of meat production – upland farms and the production of home grown feeds. The next Government should therefore publish and implement a strategy bringing all these matters together, and commit to measuring and reporting on progress in reducing the impacts of livestock food and farming.

Government could also protect rainforest regions by putting on hold planned increases in the biofuel targets. Biofuels have been marketed as a solution to climate change, but research increasingly shows the deforestation, biodiversity loss and food insecurity impacts they have had bring this into question. Before any increase in targets, the next government should await the results of a thorough review of the fuels in 2014.

Bringing it all together

Many of the specific policy proposals above will be more effective if key overarching policies are got right. While no single Government can ever guarantee a global deal on climate change– all parties must commit to working with renewed effort to deliver one. This will take a commitment to act domestically, recognition of the developed world’s historic responsibility for largely creating the problem of climate change, and commitment to a global fund of at least £100 billion a year to help the developing world realise low carbon development and cope with the change in climate we have already forced upon them.

Domestically, the next Government will need to be clear to business and investors that it is determined to do the right thing. An unequivocal commitment that the UK will deliver the emissions cuts that the Committee on Climate Change says are needed, of 42 per cent by 2020, is crucial. We can meet the target but it is challenging and we need to get on with it – we cannot dither with lesser targets worrying what other countries will do. The use of loopholes with regard to carbon trading and offsetting should also be stopped.

Planning policy too will help or hinder many specific policies, from public transport to housing to renewable energy. Planning policy has recently been reformed, yet no one is required to take account of cumulative emissions from projects that are approved. This must be brought into line with carbon budgets and the Climate Change Act. Other changes, such as a presumption against out of town development, and robust means tests on retail space, will reduce the need to travel to shop.

It is also now widely recognised the energy market set up post privatisation will not deliver the low carbon energy system we require. The next Government must reform this market to deliver the decarbonisation of the sector the Committee on Climate Change have said is essential to meeting climate targets.

Other sectors have also seen too little regulation –calls for a supermarket ombudsman have come from groups as wide as the Competition Commission to Action Aid to the NFU. The next Government should heed them – and indeed look more widely at ensuring large corporations act in the wider interest of society by establishing a Commission for Business, Human Rights and the Environment. This would provide a more level playing field for companies, help people to invest in companies they consider the most ethical, and provide business with greater clarity on what is expected of them.

Summary

There is no doubt we face formidable challenges, but we must also recognise the formidable opportunities presented. The early introduction of the policies outlined above would show the next Government is prepared to move environmental politics to the next stage. We have done the worrying about the problems mankind has caused – now it is time to start implementing the solutions and reaping the rewards.

Summary of Recommendations

Cutting Carbon – creating jobs

- A major energy efficiency programme for all homes, funded by a mix of grants and loans.
- A Green industrial Strategy, creating jobs producing the environmental solutions we need.
- A Green Bank funded by “Green Bonds” that generates the investment needed – bonds will be paid back as the savings from preventing climate change are realised.

Sustainable Communities

- All local councils to produce local carbon budgets for greenhouse gas emissions in their area.
- Change accounting rules for transport projects to allow money to be used on revenue projects (like public transport schemes) rather than just capital projects (like new roads).
- ‘Smarter Travel Choices’ schemes rolled out nationwide.
- Tougher recycling targets reaching 70% (like Flanders).
- New rules on waste that ban landfill or incineration of recyclable materials, and stop councils signing long-term contracts that lock them into incineration.

Better food, better farming

- Publish and implement a strategy that measures and reduces the impact of meat and dairy production and consumption.
- Ensure that food bought with public money (in schools, hospitals etc) is produced by the most sustainable practices, and is not leading to deforestation.
- Shift incentives and subsidies from intensive livestock farming practices that lead to deforestation, to more sustainable methods, like upland farming and home grown feeds.
- Put increases in the biofuel targets on hold, pending thorough review of impacts.

Bringing it all together

- Work with renewed vigour for an international climate deal.
- Commit unequivocally to meeting the 42 per cent cuts in greenhouse gases the Committee on Climate Change say are required by 2020.
- Link planning policy to the carbon budgets arising from the Climate Change Act, by making emissions a key factor in determining whether developments should go ahead.
- Reform OFGEM and the energy markets so they deliver a low carbon energy supply.
- Establish a Supermarket Ombudsman, and a Commission for Business, Human Rights and the Environment.