

CEN's Councillor magazine

Summer edition

CONSERVATIVE
ENVIRONMENT
NETWORK

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CONSERVATIVE
ENVIRONMENT
NETWORK

Lord Hague | Cllr Ian Courts | Cllr Jane MacBean

Policy briefings | CEN campaigns | Councillor success stories

Conservative Environment Network

We are the independent forum for conservatives in the UK and around the world who support net zero, nature restoration, and resource security.



“ CEN has been at the forefront of the progress the UK has made on net zero and nature in the past decade. You have brought together a network of 150 MPs and peers and more than 500 councillors to push for more ambition on the environment. And most of our groundbreaking environmental policies all the results of CEN campaigns. ”

Former Conservative leader William Hague



“ We as conservatives understand the importance of conservation. We understand the importance of preserving our planet. We can lead it to a greener form of growth. That's what we're about and what the CEN is about. ”

Former Prime Minister Theresa May

Join the Conservative Environment Network

If you or your friends and family want to get involved and learn more about conservative environmentalism, join our growing networks.

Supporter Network - Benefits include exclusive events and newsletters on key environmental debates.

Councillor Network - Benefits include exclusive briefings, case studies, discussions and newsletters for councillors leading on the environment locally.

Join us now using the QR codes.



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Become a CEN Councillor

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Our work

We bring conservatives together to debate environmental issues, find consensus, and champion conservative solutions.

As conservative environmentalists, we believe that man-made climate change and the decline of nature are a threat to our national prosperity and security.

We believe only a conservative approach can unite people, grow our economy, and protect our environment.

We support science-based environmental action, which empowers individuals and harnesses the power of the free market.

Our network

We work with like-minded conservative parliamentarians, councillors, and supporters from the UK and overseas.

- Over 500 councillors are members of CEN's Councillor Network.
- Over 1000 conservatives have joined CEN's Supporter Network.
- More than 300 legislators from over 45 countries have signed our Centre-Right Climate Action Declaration.
- Our Caucus and Scottish Parliamentary Group comprise dozens of parliamentarians across the UK and will be relaunched in the autumn following the election.

Join our growing network today.

www.cen.uk.com

[@CEN_HQ](https://twitter.com/CEN_HQ)

Director's note

We cannot forget that the environment is an electoral asset



The election results were painful and devastating for Conservatives, with many hardworking and committed candidates losing their seats. During the leadership contest, we must take time to analyse what went wrong and have an honest and realistic conversation about the future of conservatism.

To rebuild, we need to win back both Reform voters and those who switched to left-of-centre parties. We need to change, but should not throw the baby out with the bathwater. The environment in particular offers a unique opportunity to win back Labour, Lib Dem, and Green voters without costing us Reform switchers.

The starting point for our post-election debate must be the evidence about what voters actually think. Above all, the Conservative Party lost because they lost their reputation for competence and the trust of voters to deliver. In particular for Reform voters, Conservatives were punished for their failure to reduce immigration.

Some have sought to blame green policies for Reform's strong showing. But polling we commissioned prior to the election showed that over 60% of Conservative to Reform switchers named immigration as the top issue deciding their vote, compared to only 2% who named climate policies and net zero. The truth is that net zero is not a salient issue for Reform voters and rowing back further on green policies would not have won them back.

Conversely, it is the case that, for other groups of voters, a positive environmental message can be an electoral asset for the Conservatives. Among the public as a whole, the environment remained a top five issue throughout the last parliament. It is popular with many 2019 Conservative voters who decided to vote Lib Dem, Green, or Labour this time. Some other pre-election polling found there were two million Conservative 2019 voters who prioritised climate action and planned to vote for other parties.

Yet, the Tory campaign did not mention the environment very much and, when it did, opted for a negative message, positioning net zero as a burden to be minimised. The origin of this strategy was the surprise Uxbridge by-election victory last summer, which was followed by Rishi Sunak's net zero rowback speech a couple of months later. The party tried to replicate this success in the general election, but self-evidently didn't succeed.

The negative messaging meant that the party's green achievements were undersold. The party's proud environmental legacy - which includes phasing out coal-fired power stations and creating a marine protected area around our Overseas Territories bigger than India, Spain, and France combined - barely featured. The rhetoric made it nearly impossible for the party to get any credit from pro-environment voters.

After these results, the Conservatives have a mountain to climb to rebuild trust with voters and get back to a winning position by the time of the next election in 2029. CEN is calling on leadership candidates to put forward a positive, conservative plan for the environment.

To guide the future of conservatism debates, CEN has been busy in recent months publishing new reports. Our plan for trees sets out bold and pragmatic policies to revive trees, woodland, and forests across the UK, boosting nature, carbon storage, and timber security. And the new CEN manifesto includes over 90 policy ideas showing how tackling climate change and nature loss can drive investment across the UK, safeguard the UK's energy and food security, amplify our standing on the global stage, and improve local communities. We hope you enjoy reading them and would welcome your comments and feedback.

Sam Hall is Director of the Conservative Environment Network

Peer's letter

The former Conservative leader explains why the Tories need to be bold on the environment



CEN has been at the forefront of the progress the UK has made on net zero and nature in the past decade.

Most of our groundbreaking environmental policies, from the commitment to phase out coal, to the introduction of subsidies for sustainable farming, to the ringfencing of water company fines for environmental improvement schemes are all the results of CEN campaigns.

Environmentalism and conservatism come from the same roots - the idea that there are some things worth



preserving and handing down to the next generation. After all, it was Margaret

Thatcher who said "no generation has freehold on this earth. All we have is a life tenancy—with a full repairing lease".

But for decades after this remark, some people struggled with the idea that conservatives had a responsibility to support nature. As leader of the party, I called for a "Blue-Green" approach to the environment. One which recognised that only global cooperation could deliver meaningful change. That crises in developing countries and environmental destruction were often interlinked. That harnessing the power of the market to deliver the technological breakthroughs was essential for meeting our climate obligations. And that voluntary groups and charities were critical for maintaining and improving our local environment.

Today, our environment is inextricably linked to three of the other great issues that matter most to both our country and our party: our security, our

prosperity, and our society. That is why a conservative "Blue-Green" approach is so necessary.

If you're a liberal conservative, who prioritises issues like mental health, volunteering, and international development, know that progress on the environment is critical to unlocking progress on each of these issues.

If you're a security hawk, know that we will only be able to reduce our dependence on China by cultivating our own climate tech industries. If you want to cut migration, know this will only be possible if you support fragile developing countries in Sub Saharan Africa to cope with climate change.

And if you're a libertarian free marketeer, know that there is no more significant anti-growth coalition than those who fail to recognise the gold mine of prosperity that leading on green technology would be for our country.

So it's up to us, the Conservative Party, to deliver on net zero and nature. That the environment is now a factor in so many of the other fundamental issues facing our country means that every conservative, no matter their political priorities, must support ambitious action upon it.

Let us make that case for a UK that meets its climate and nature obligations, that places energy resilience over dependence on autocrats, that embraces the benefits of science and technology, and that promotes the value of our social fabric.

Armed with policies proposed by CEN, from stamp duty rebates for home energy efficiency improvements to new Forestry Creation Zones to support tree planting, let's push forward a conservative agenda for the environment and leave our world a better place for the next generation.

Lord Hague of Richmond is the former Leader of the Conservative Party.

Hear from CEN councillors

Using your incumbency to champion environmental issues



For the second year, Solihull bucked the trend in the May local elections, increasing our majority to nine and seeing the numbers of the Green Party opposition reduced again by another two seats. This is a far cry from my early days as leader in 2019, when the Green Party hoped to overturn my wafer-thin majority and take control of the council. Since May, our majority has increased again to eleven, with the defection to us of a Green Party member keen on delivery not criticism, and retaining two excellent and experienced Conservative MPs in the general election: Saqib Bhatti (Meriden & Solihull East) and Neil Shastri-Hurst (Solihull West & Shirley). Talent like this will be the foundation stones for Conservative recovery in the future.

Sadly, despite the large Solihull turnout, Andy Street was not able to retain the West Midlands mayoralty and the region has lost an incredible ambassador and leader. For four years, I led his regional climate change plan for net zero by 2041 based on science. I am intrigued that one of the new mayor's plans is to bring this date forward.



For over 30 years, climate change has been an important issue for me, but I am against the gesture politics that we constantly see. I developed our Solihull "climate change prospectus" about 8 years ago, planning holistic action on six themes: growing the economy; energy and resources; buildings; transport; natural capital; and communication and education.

Our approach is clear. We need strong economic growth to support delivery of services and integral to this is the need for climate change action at scale: but there must be value for money in the action we take, and we must take our residents with us.

The benefits of climate action are enormous.

Retrofit means warmer homes and reducing fuel poverty. The more stable funding secured by Andy will enable supply chains and skills to be developed.

Our transport system is still Birmingham-centric. Solihull is a car-based economy, but we have the highest proportion of electric vehicle ownership in the West Midlands and a strong EV charging point installation programme.

Our work with local schools has been most rewarding. We recognise their green initiatives and have hosted an annual model COP conference run by students, negotiating with each other in teams. On the business front, Solihull Sustainability Visioning Group has been active for many years, with over 40 local businesses leading the way and putting sustainability at the heart of decision making.

Solihull is perhaps best known for its natural environment, with 1500 acres of open space and 16 Green Flag parks. At the end of the year, we will be halfway through our target of planting 250,000 trees this decade. Hope Coppice (designated for housing before we stopped it) is one of our initiatives with acres of green space, walkways and trees.

Shortly, we will be opening our Frog Lane Country Trail, sporting "Horace the Hedgehog", new trees and hedgerows, footpaths, new ponds and a welly walk.

Our action to tackle climate change has proven popular with our residents, as is demonstrated by the local election results.

To find out more about our environmental projects, get in touch with me at icourts@solihull.gov.uk.

Cllr Ian Courts is the Leader of Solihull Borough Council. He also sits on the CEN Advisory Council.

Local success story

How my council are protecting our precious peatlands



One of my very first acts as a newly elected councillor in 2019 was to be part of Cheshire West and Chester's cross-party declaration of a climate emergency. A focus on the environment has been a key element of my campaigning activity both before election and ever since. I've found it to be both electorally helpful and, of course, an imperative focus for the future viability of both our country and the world. I've often turned to CEN for their support and expertise to help me in this prioritisation of 'green issues' at both a ward and borough level.

That's why I was delighted to lend some local support recently to CEN's 'Greener gardening for peat's sake' campaign and to help amplify Theresa Villiers' Ten Minute Rule Bill introduced into the House of Commons in April 2024 - the Horticultural Peat (Prohibition of Sale) Bill. This took the form of a 'Notice of Motion' to Council in May, a fairly common method for councillors to raise awareness of an issue and to seek support, but also action, from council colleagues on a topical campaign. I'm pleased to report that the motion was unanimously carried.

Peatlands are one of the powerhouse ways in which we can capture carbon and store it in a natural way. The UK is fortunate to possess great amounts of peatland (some 12% of our land), including within the Cheshire West and Chester area in places such as Hatchmere near Delamere Forest, part of the Northwest Midlands Meres and Mosses Ramsar site, a wetland of international importance. Interestingly it takes 10 years for one centimetre of peat to form, so those we see today were formed thousands of years ago – an excellent reason for a Conservative to be passionate about them. Sadly, only 20% of our peatlands are in a near natural state and 87% of them are degraded, damaged or dried out – and as a consequence they emit tonnes of carbon dioxide each year.

One of the original intentions of the proposed motion was to ask the council to

carry out an audit of its use of peat across its operations, particularly environmental services such as gardening activities, including – crucially – associated procurement in the support of the delivery of such services across the borough. Following categorical assurances that we had already robustly and comprehensively ceased the use of peat, this was modified to a reaffirmation of its commitment to not use peat and to promote the use of non-peat products to its wider stakeholders, such as users of council-owned allotments.

In short, the motion's purpose was simple:

- To highlight the importance of peat to our environment.
- To underline the necessity of the council 'leading by example' in its non-use of peat.
- To raise the profile amongst the borough of how residents can garden responsibly, without the fear of destroying these precious habitats.
- To encourage collaboration with organisations like Cheshire Wildlife Trust and Chester Zoo who are already working to support the protection and revegetation of degraded peatland.
- And finally, to help hold the new government's feet to the fire (forgive the phrase!) to deliver on Defra's longstanding commitment to ban the sale of peat and peat-containing products in the retail horticultural sector by 2024 – there's some urgency to that!

Cllr Simon Eardley is the Shadow Cabinet Member for the Environment on Cheshire West and Chester Council.

An update from CEN councillors across the country.

Cllr Graham McAndrew, Hertfordshire Council

The Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) was established to coordinate action on the environment between the ten district and borough councils, the county council, and the Local Enterprise Partnership.

The HCCSP meets every six weeks to monitor progress against their strategic action plans and to coordinate next steps. Through combining the in-house expertise the HSSCP has sped up processes, saved the council time and money in reaching their environmental targets. Some of the HSSCP's successes include saving £8,000 in training fees for each local authority and supporting a successful £5 million low emission infrastructure bid.

To learn more, contact Graham on graham.mcandrew@hertfordshire.gov.uk

Cllr Martyn Alvey, Cornwall Council

Cornwall Council has implemented the Development and Decision Wheel to help officers and councillors assess their decisions' environmental impact. It takes them through a series of questions to better understand how a decision will affect Cornwall, its residents and the workforce through environmental and social lenses. Topics include air quality, ocean health, biodiversity, education, prosperity and fuel poverty. The tool relies on answers to assign scores to each of the separate segments. These scores are combined into one graphic that shows the environmental and social impact of council decisions in a simple, digestible way.

To learn more, contact Martyn on cllr.martyn.alvey@cornwall.gov.uk





Cllr Joe Porter, Staffordshire Moorlands Council

UK peatlands contain more carbon than the forests of the UK, France and Germany combined, acting as a vital carbon sink. But we continue to extract peat for gardening and other uses from these peatlands. Now, 87% of England's peatlands are degraded, damaged, and dried out, emitting tonnes of carbon dioxide each year as a result.

We at Staffordshire Moorlands District Council have been phasing out peat-containing products from our local green spaces. For over a decade, we have been working with our grounds maintenance partner to remove peat and to try to source nursery stock from growers that use peat-free compost. We will continue to work with them to further reduce the use of peat entirely.

To learn more, contact Joe on joe.porter@staffsmoorlands.gov.uk

Cllr Holly Whitbread, Essex Council

Solar Together is a group buying scheme administered by councils for rooftop solar panels and batteries. Residents and businesses register interest and answer questions about their house, and electricity usage; they are then grouped with other registrants in the local area. Pre-approved suppliers then bid in an auction to install panels for the lowest price, cutting the cost by up to 35%.

Essex County Council saw a record number of solar panel installations after joining Solar Together, extending the closing date due to its popularity. 6,600 Essex residents installed solar panels at a 32% discount; with some residents saving nearly one thousand pounds on their annual energy bill.

To learn more, contact Holly on cllr.holly.whitbread@essex.gov.uk

Water webinar recap

Cllr Jane MacBean discusses our recent webinar for CEN councillors on water pollution and sewage



I was delighted to take part in CEN's webinar about how we, as councillors, can lead locally to improve water quality.

The event started with a debrief from Philip Dunne, who was Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee and MP for Ludlow at the time of the webinar. He spoke about the Conservatives's record on tackling water pollution and sewage, including setting legally-binding targets to reduce certain water pollutants, uncapping civil fines for water companies, and a Storm Overflow Discharge Reduction Plan to reduce our use of these outlets. There has been a lot of work done over the last few years, but there is also plenty more still to be done, like mandating sustainable urban drainage systems in all new developments and deciding whether to make water companies statutory consultees on planning applications.

After the debrief, I talked about my local efforts to increase the amount of greenery there is in our urban and suburban areas. When we pave over otherwise natural areas, we lose a piece of land able to retain rainwater.

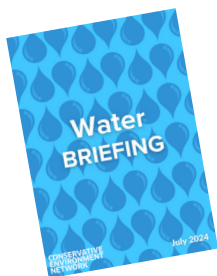
Keeping rainwater out of the sewage system can help to reduce our use of storm overflows. Planting trees, establishing wilder roadside verges, rain gardens, and planter boxes along the high street can all help to absorb rainwater, keeping it out of the sewer.

This can be joined by information campaigns to communicate to residents what should and should not be flushed down the toilet. When wet wipes and other bathroom products are flushed rather than put in the bin, they can cause blockages in the pipes. These blockages mean that the sewage system is unable to operate at full capacity during heavy rainfall. You could, for example, run a social media campaign calling on residents to "bin the wipe" or to only flush the "4Ps" down the toilet (pee, poo, paper, and puke). Oh the glamorous life of a councillor!

In the webinar, we also heard from the Pesticide Action Network. Their "Pesticide-Free Towns" scheme has supported 100 local authorities to either reduce or eliminate the use of pesticides in local green spaces. Cutting out chemicals where we can is good for water quality and also can save councils some money, as when we apply them to plants sensibly, we use less of them.

This is only scratching the surface of the topics we covered in the webinar. The full recording is available to watch on CEN's YouTube channel and I encourage you all to check it out: <https://youtu.be/jZ9EZWxdFe4>.

Cllr Jane MacBean is a Buckinghamshire councillor and sits on CEN's Board.



CEN has recently published two new resources for councillors. The first is a briefing about the topic of water quality and security. The second is a toolkit for running your own water butt campaign locally. Both briefings contain resources, ideas, and case studies from councils across England. Find them on our website: www.cen.uk.com/resources-for-councillors.



Cleaner communities conference



We are delighted to announce that we will be hosting a cleaner communities conference for councillors, candidates, and local leaders on 25th October in London. It is free to attend, and lunch will be provided.

For many people, waste collection is the defining interaction they have with their local council. A good service can make or break our opinion of an entire council, and with that comes both the need for councils to deliver and the opportunity to excel. Councils are a vital source of information about the issue of waste and what to do with it, as well as a lynchpin for individual and community projects to reduce waste and increase rates of reuse and recycling. Alongside adhering to the new national regulations and rules for waste management that are being introduced, there are many opportunities for councils and local leaders to go beyond the national ambition on waste and resources with their own projects.

For those who will be travelling from further afield, we have reserved a limited number of bedrooms in the venue the night before the conference. These will be allocated after registration closes.

We will be discussing new waste and resources regulations like Simpler Recycling and extended producer responsibility for electronics and packaging, learning from industry leaders about how you can lead locally on projects and campaigns, and networking with like-minded conservative councillors and local leaders to discuss waste and resources.

We will be joined by representatives from:

- The **Environmental Services Association** to discuss the policy reforms that will directly impact councils in England.
- The **Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP)** to discuss how to deliver a successful weekly food waste collection.
- **Suez**, the waste management firm, to discuss how to introduce reuse to your Household Waste and Recycling Centre.
- **Hubbub**, the environmental behaviour change charity, to discuss how to reduce litter through changes to your on-street waste infrastructure.

You can register to attend by scanning the barcode or by visiting: www.cen.uk.com/events. There is a website page with more details about the event and a simple form to register for the event.

Kitty Thompson is CEN's Senior Nature Programme Manager.



Scan the barcode to register

With thanks to:



environmental
services
association



Charity Retail Association®
The voice of charity retail



Clean air corner

Upcoming councillor event

Will 20 mph zones worsen air quality as journeys take longer? Can we just plant trees along roadsides to absorb pollution produced by traffic? Will charging zones like ULEZ need to be introduced to get our air quality back to safer levels?

When it comes to air pollution, local authorities have a lot of powers and duties. But it has become abundantly clear that action on air pollution cannot be taken using a one-size-fits-all approach. Local authorities report that residents are concerned that changes to improve air quality can impact quality of life, ease and convenience of getting around, and question whether measures are actually cutting pollution at a time when council budgets are stretched.

Scan the barcode to hear our panel of experts cut through the jargon, answer your queries, and discuss how conservatives can improve air quality.

Scan the barcode to register for the event



Briefing on tackling air pollution

Over the last fourteen years, our air quality has significantly improved. Nitrogen oxide (NO₂) has fallen by 44% since 2010, we've eliminated coal from our energy sector - slashing NO₂ and sulphur dioxide (SO₂) pollution - and we've strengthened our legally binding air quality targets upon our departure from the European Union.

With this in mind we've updated our clean air briefing for our councillor network. It includes an overview of the conservative case for tackling air pollution, details on the nature of the UK's air pollution problem, what councils can do, case studies, and, for the first time, a fact checking section answering commonly asked questions.



Scan the barcode to read the briefing

Sign our letter

Show your support for protecting the environment



Do you believe that, as conservatives, we have a moral responsibility to build a brighter future for current generations and those to come? And, therefore, that conserving our natural environment is instinctively conservative?

Would you like to see the Conservative Party leadership contenders lay claim to the Conservatives' proud environmental legacy, champion this core conservative value, and set out their vision for positive, practical environmental action?

If so, then sign our letter and show your support for an ambitious, conservative approach to protect the environment.

We know the environment matters to the majority of potential Conservative voters. Having a positive, practical plan for the environment would help convince people that a refreshed Conservative Party aligns with their values and win back their trust.

Where Conservatives

set out a positive environmental vision, they are rewarded with electoral success. You only have to look at Ben Houchen in Teesside bucking the national trend at the recent mayoral elections and his tangible action to kickstart a green industrial revolution in the area to see how popular environmental action can be with voters. Whatever coalition of voters the party seeks to build ahead of the next general election, there can be no doubt that a strong environmental platform will be a net electoral asset.

If you agree that the next Conservative Party leader must have a positive plan for the environment, then sign our letter today and show your support. Please feel free to share it with your friends and family too.

Scan the barcode at the top of the page to sign our letter to the Conservative Party leadership contenders.

Join us at Conference

Join us at Conservative Party Conference where we'll be hosting an extensive programme of fringe events to debate environmental issues and conservative solutions.

All of our events will be held in Hall 7 in the ICC in Birmingham. There will be refreshments and lots of healthy debate!

You can find us at our stand in the main hall where we will be discussing a new campaign each day with themed merchandise on offer.



Scan the barcode to view our programme of events. We will be regularly updating the page.

Green Shoots

A conservative manifesto for a greener, more prosperous future



Scan the barcode to read our manifesto for conservative environmentalism

As conservatives, we believe have a responsibility to future generations to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss, which pose a grave threat to our prosperity and security. That is why the Conservative Party should remain steadfast on the fundamental conservative principle of environmental stewardship, embrace the party's green record, and set out a conservative plan to protect and enhance the environment.

To inform the debate on the future of conservatism, CEN published a new manifesto in July, putting forward over 90 conservative environmentalist policies. 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.

Below are 10 key policies from the manifesto:



1. Create new energy efficiency tax incentives, such as a stamp duty rebate

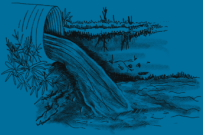
2. Require solar panels on new homes and commercial buildings



3. Increase competition between train operators with more open access routes

4. Strengthen tax breaks inside freeports for green businesses





5. Use water company fines to restore natural river systems

6. Create local nature recovery zones around towns and cities



7. Ban damaging fishing practices like bottom-trawling in marine protected areas

8. Cut red tape to make it easier to plant street trees



9. Maintain the nature-friendly farming budget in real terms

10. Work with the Overseas Territories to designate more marine protected areas in their waters



*Scan the barcode to
read our manifesto for
conservative
environmentalism*



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