

ELECTION 2019 | BEHIND THE MANIFESTOS

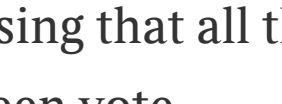
Behind the manifestos: How green is my party?

With surveys showing that voters are increasingly worried about the environment, Ben Webster assesses the policies the parties are offering — from solar panels to single-use plastics — to woo the green vote



Ben Webster, Environment Editor | Wednesday December 11 2019, 12.01am, The Times

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In a year when Extinction Rebellion and [Greta Thunberg](#) became household names and [Sir David Attenborough](#) delivered apocalyptic warnings about climate change, it is hardly surprising that all the main parties are engaged in a bidding war for the green vote.

More people say they are concerned about the environment now than at any time over the past 30 years. It was mentioned as one of the most important issues for Britain by 21 per cent of people surveyed last month by Ipsos Mori, up from just 2 per cent in 2012.

Young people are the most worried, with 29 per cent of 18-24 year olds listing the environment and pollution as a major concern.

The Conservatives moved swiftly to neutralise two toxic green issues for them, announcing a moratorium on fracking and promising not to try to reverse the fox hunting ban.

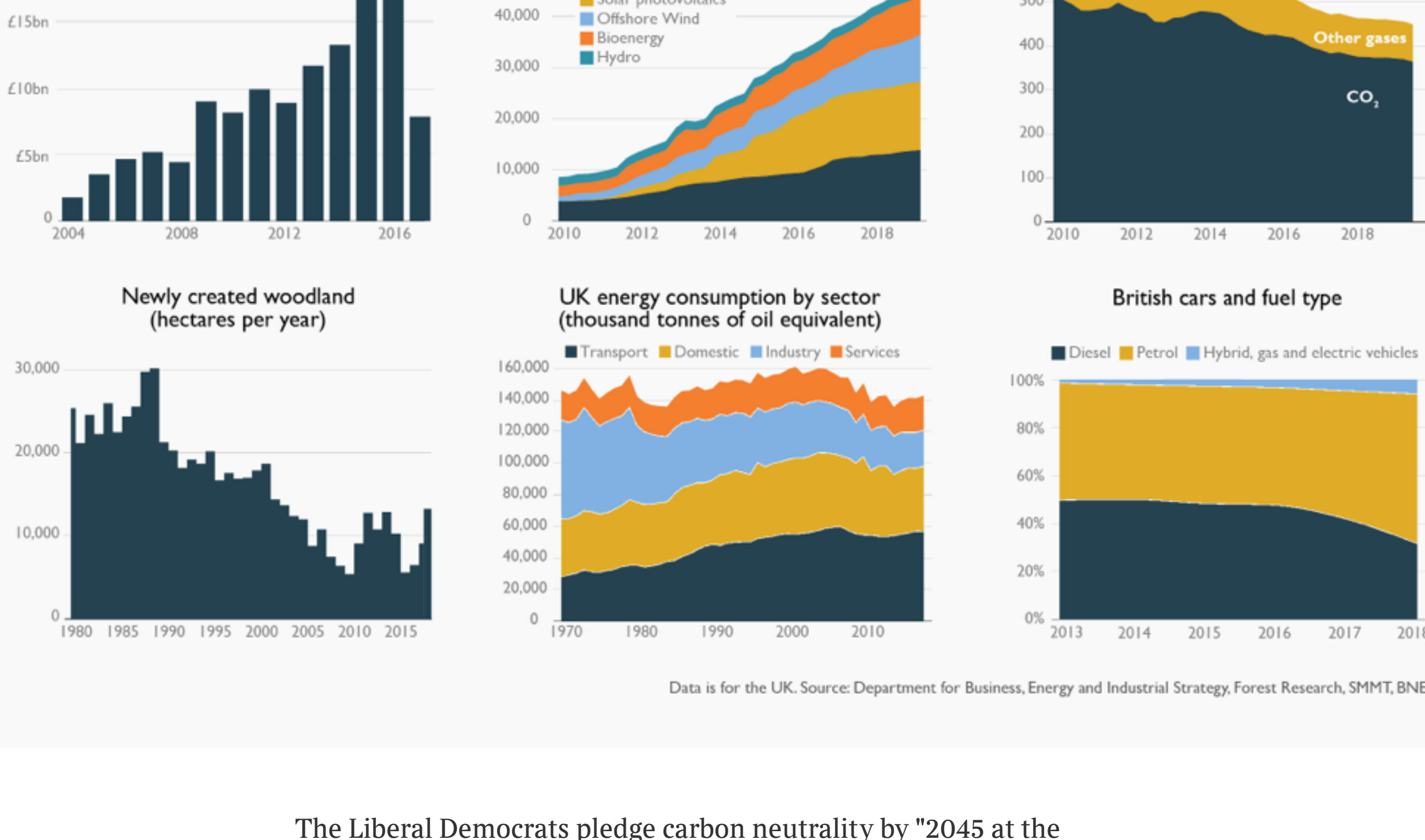
The biggest difference between the parties on the environment is the date by which they say they will make Britain carbon neutral, or achieve “net zero” emissions to use the new term for this old concept.

Six months ago, Theresa May's pledge that Britain would reach [net zero by 2050](#) seemed revolutionary. Now dozens of other countries have made similar pledges and Boris Johnson is at risk of seeming laggardly by repeating that deadline in his six “guarantees” on the first page of the Conservative manifesto.

The Green Party, as expected, makes the boldest promise, to achieve net zero by 2030, although it does not spell out the massive and rapid changes this would require in our daily lives, including getting rid of 26 million gas boilers and 38 million petrol and diesel vehicles.

Labour makes a vague but still extremely ambitious promise to put Britain “on track for a net-zero carbon energy system within the 2030s”. It backs this with a plan to spend an average of £25 billion a year over the next decade on a “green transformation”.

Environment in six charts



Data is for the UK. Source: Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Forest Research, SMP, BNEF

The Liberal Democrats pledge carbon neutrality by “2045 at the latest” and have a dig at Labour and the Greens for engaging in a “Dutch auction of fantasy dates for Britain to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions”.

The Lib Dem manifesto contains more detail on many of the key green issues than those of its rivals, indicating the party has made a big effort to back up its promises with clear and costed delivery plans.

Labour makes a sweeping promise that almost all homes will be upgraded to the “highest energy efficiency standards” by 2030. The Lib Dems have a specific commitment to increase spending on home insulation and zero-carbon heating to over £6 billion a year by 2024.

The scramble to attract green-minded voters is at its most desperate when it comes to tree planting.

The Committee on Climate Change, which advises the government on its climate targets, said in May that almost three billion trees must be planted by 2050 to help Britain reach net zero.

The Conservatives promise to plant 30 million a year by 2024, the Lib Dems 60 million and the Greens 70 million. Labour, in a post-manifesto commitment, promises 300 million trees over the next parliament, or an average of 60 million a year.

No party makes clear how it would deliver these pledges, which will require the co-operation of landowners.

On electric cars, the parties all acknowledge that the government's existing commitment to end the sale of petrol and diesel ones by 2040 is too late. The Conservatives promise “to consult on the earliest date” for all new cars to be hybrid or fully electric while promising £1 billion for fast chargers to ensure that no one lives more than 30 miles from one.

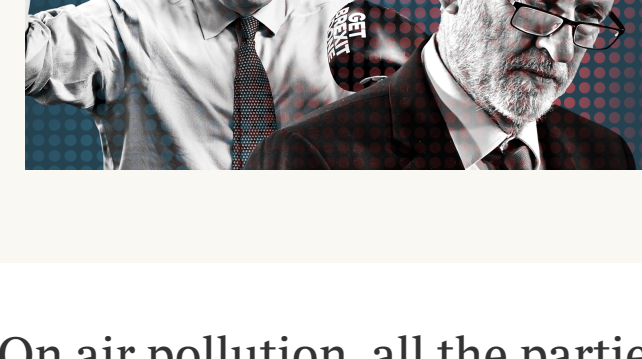
Labour says it will “aim” to end sales of combustion engine cars by 2030 while the Lib Dems and Greens are unequivocal in committing to do so by that year.

The Lib Dems again offer more detail in their manifesto than other parties, saying they will deliver on their pledge by cutting VAT on electric cars to 5 per cent.

All the parties promise big increases in renewable power but the Conservatives only mention offshore wind, albeit promising a huge increase in capacity from 8.5 gigawatts now to 40 gigawatts by 2030. The party is silent on solar and much cheaper onshore wind, which the Conservatives previously constrained by changing planning rules and removing subsidies.

Labour promises that “nearly 90 per cent” of electricity will be renewable by 2030 by building 7,000 new offshore wind turbines, 2,000 onshore ones and enough solar panels to cover 22,000 football pitches.

The Lib Dems “aim” for 80 per cent of power being renewable by 2030, backed by a specific pledge to spend an additional £12 billion over five years.



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On air pollution, all the parties promise new legally binding targets, with Labour and the Lib Dems saying theirs will be based on World Health Organisation standards but without setting a deadline. The Conservatives are vaguer, committing only to “strict new laws on air quality”.

Both Conservatives and Labour pledge to create new national parks, with Labour giving much more detail, identifying as possible candidates the Cotswolds, the Chiltern Hills, the north and south Pennines, coastal Suffolk, coastal Dorset, Wessex and the Lincolnshire Wolds. Labour would also increase funding for existing national parks by 50 per cent.

All the main parties promise to improve animal welfare and agree on banning the keeping of primates as pets and imports of hunting trophies of endangered animals. The Conservatives would use Brexit to ban the practice permitted under EU rules of sending farm animals on “excessively long journeys” for fattening and slaughter.

Labour would end the badger cull despite recent evidence that it is helping to reduce tuberculosis infection in cattle in Gloucestershire and Somerset.

A deposit scheme on drinks containers seems inevitable, with all the main parties committing to introduce one. The Lib Dems pledged to ban non-recyclable single-use plastics while the Conservatives would ban the export of plastic waste to non-OECD countries such as Thailand, Vietnam and Malaysia, where it can end up being dumped.

Greenpeace has criticised the Conservative plan as it would still allow exports to Turkey, which is an OECD member, has a poor record on recycling and is the biggest buyer of plastic waste from the UK.

Shaun Spiers, executive director of Green Alliance, a think tank, said: “The prominence of environmental issues in the manifestos and campaign is unprecedented and extremely welcome. But promises are not enough.

“The test for the new government will be whether it acts fast to tackle climate change and recognises that we face a twin crisis – climate and nature – and that you can't tackle one without also tackling the other.”

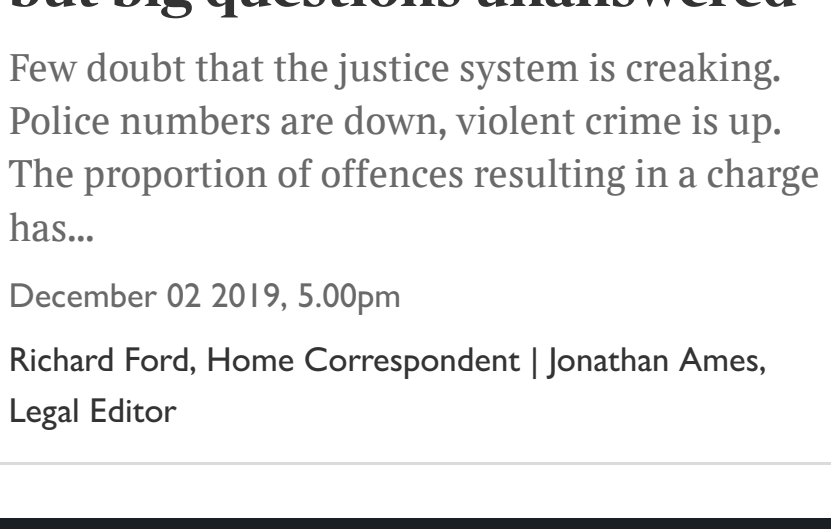
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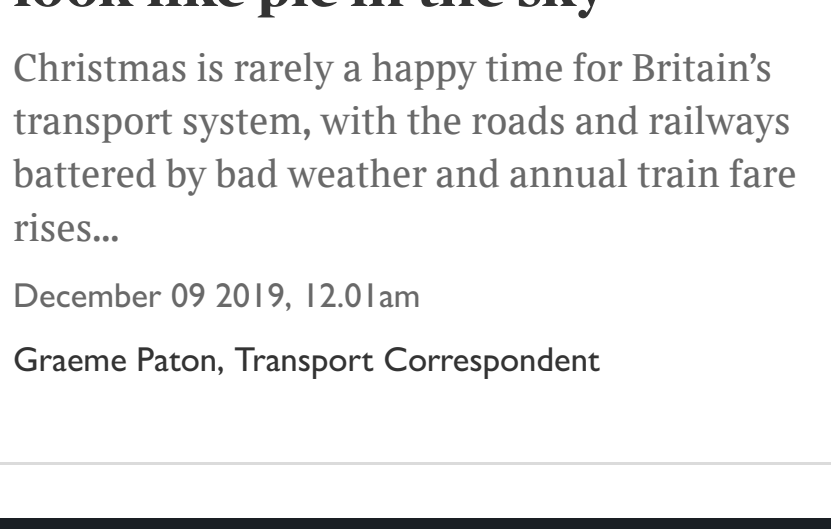
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