

CLIMATE CHANGE

The climate is the ultimate common good. The effects of a rapidly warming climate will affect everyone, but poorer people, in the UK and worldwide, will be the hardest hit. Many are already struggling to cope with rising sea levels, flooding, drought and extreme weather. Climate change threatens to make parts of the world uninhabitable. Climate refugee numbers will increase. More intense weather events will further affect health and food production and make global conflict more likely.

The science makes it clear that, to avoid the risk of runaway climate change, we must leave around four-fifths of all existing fossil fuel reserves in the ground. So the problem now is not too little fossil fuel but too much. Exploiting new sources of unconventional fossil fuels such as shale gas and oil and tar sands is incompatible with tackling climate change. We must reduce our dependency on oil, coal and gas as quickly as possible while developing a society that can thrive on renewable energy.

And there's not much time. To have a reasonable chance of avoiding catastrophic climate change, we need a 90% reduction in greenhouse gases in the UK in the next 15–20 years and a zero-carbon economy by 2050 (see the box for how we derive these targets). This is much more challenging than the 80% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2050 in the Climate Change Act 2008. Although we celebrate, defend and uphold the Climate Change Act, it must also be strengthened.

A Green transformation would have huge benefits: more comfortable homes, better health, less pollution, lots of jobs, and far less dependency on foreign fuel imports.

The UK can and must do better:

- The government's climate change advisers say we are on track to miss even the government's unsatisfactory carbon targets.
- Progress on energy efficiency has plummeted. The government's Green Deal to save energy in our homes has been a disappointing failure.
- The UK is 25th out of 27 in the European renewable energy league table, despite having some of the best resources for renewable energy in Europe.
- We have the highest level of fuel poverty in Western Europe.

Why we need to do better than the Climate Change Act

If the global average temperature rise can be kept below 2 degrees C, runaway or disastrous climate change can be avoided, though severe damage will occur in some parts of the world. Many countries and civil society organisations argue that the international goal should be to keep to 1.5 degrees C of warming, highlighting the severity of the climate impacts we are already seeing. All countries including the UK agreed at Copenhagen in 2009 to recognise the need to limit the average temperature rise to below 2 degrees C, despite the fact that the UK's climate change target means that there is an almost two-thirds (63%) chance of exceeding this 2 degrees C.

To meet the 2 degree C target, the world needs to limit total global emissions over the rest of the century to about 1,000 gigatonnes (Gt) CO₂. Current projections have us exceeding that figure by 2040, leading to devastating average warming of around 4 degrees C by the end of this century.

As the UK has about 1% of the world's population, its allowable budget would amount to 10 Gt CO₂. But the UK is a relatively rich country that has benefited from the world's highest cumulative historical emissions per person. The Green Party therefore believes that the UK should plan to emit only half this amount by 2030 (which amounts to around 80 million tonnes CO₂ a year by 2030), and have negligible emissions thereafter. This translates into our target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 10% of their 1990 levels by 2030. This goes much further than the 80% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2050 mandated by the Climate Change Act.