

Deputy leader speech to Spring conference 2022



Green Party

5 March 2022

This is Amelia Womack's speech to Spring conference on 4th March 2022. View the speech [here](#).

If you can believe it this is my sixteenth speech to our Green Party conference. The first was in Birmingham in 2014, and was the first time I had given a speech to such a large audience. I was so overwhelmed by the standing ovation I received, I had to hold back on the tears a little.

Since that moment we have had three general elections, seven sets of council elections, two Senedd elections, a European election and an EU referendum. If you'd told me back then that during my time as deputy leader I would see Donald Trump elected president and Boris Johnson Prime Minister and that we'd leave the EU then I wouldn't have believed such things were possible.

Over those eight years, we have experienced some highs for the party and some real lows for the country. Throughout it all, the Greens have constantly been setting the agenda and from being the party of 16,000 members that we were when I was first elected, we are now 51,000 strong and a growing force across the country.

While oceans and global temperatures have risen, we have raised the alarm bell – and people have heard our call. Not just because of the almost daily climate catastrophes – floods, wildfires, extreme weather – but because people are seeing that the whole system is rigged – against ordinary people and against the natural world.

Since I was first elected, politics itself has evolved. It's changed as a whole new generation of young people work to save our futures through the School Strikes. Capitalism has been challenged by the people. The free market has failed. Powerful greens such as Anne Power and Tina Rothery have stood by roadsides to beat fracking companies and they have won.

All generations have been coming together to expose how the deep inequality scarring our country is blighting people's lives.

We have come so far at exposing what's broken, what needs to change and how we can change it, and how we can work towards a vision for the future to be proud of. But we still have a long way to go.

When people look back across the eight years that I have worked as your deputy leader, I hope they'll say it was a time defined by hard work, tens of thousands of train miles, winning elections and kindness.

On women's rights, I feel so proud that I've fought to make misogyny a hate crime, to ensure that we're tackling the root causes of the inequalities that women face; worked to counter the cruel cuts delivered by a coalition government and cemented by Conservative Prime Minister after Conservative Prime Minister.

I have worked to connect the links of how nature not only protects us through wellbeing and connection to green spaces, but also through the ecological services it provides to protect us from flooding and other risks to our communities. Whether that was working with the Environment Agency to institutionalise natural flood management into their strategies, or lobbying Micheal Gove on beaver reintroduction, which he finally did after my letter to him.

I teamed up with musicians, artists and unions during the Covid lockdown to call for a universal basic income for everyone, by showing why it would make a difference to the arts, and to music venues such as this one!

I have been so proud to be part of a surging Green Party and to stand shoulder to shoulder with each and every one of you who are working to prove that we need something different, and that only the Greens have the vision to deliver the change we so desperately need.

It is however, with a real mix of emotions, that today I announce that I won't be taking these next steps on that journey with you as your deputy leader. I won't be restanding for this post in this summer's elections. I look forward to passing on the baton to someone who equally has a passion in their heart, and a fire in their belly to fight for a better future, and to continue to build the party from strength to strength.

I've always said that my ultimate ambition for the party is to be in government, and I won't be moving away and will be ensuring that I do my bit to help us towards that goal.

I must confess that I wish that I had kept a tally of every action day that I have been to, every door that I have knocked on, every mile I have travelled. I feel like it would be one way to quantify how much I care about all of you and how much I care about winning Green councillors in your communities. One thing I could never quantify though is the enormous privilege it's been to have spent time with you on doorsteps – the place where all politicians should prioritise being.

It's on doorsteps that you genuinely find out what is important to your communities, but also discover some less expected things. I will never forget

how great I was at keeping eye contact when a naked man answered the door on a snowy day in Richmond; a very acrobatic St Bernard throwing itself at the glass of the door repeatedly while canvassing in Norwich; or David Francis attending his first ever action day with me in 2014 before going on to become the Green Party's first ever councillor in South Tyneside a few years later.

However, I am not leaving just yet, and I'm keen to ensure that the next 6 months are the ones that have the biggest impact, because, my gosh, politics needs shaking up right now.

The last eight years have seen so much change, and so much has changed in the last six months.

It seems like such a long time ago we were free from the pandemic restrictions and finally able to see each other face to face in Birmingham last Autumn.

So much has happened since then, it almost feels like a distant memory.

Just over 100 days ago the UK hosted the UN Climate talks. I was there. I saw the grandstanding from governments, the denial, the time wasting and the bare faced lying.

But away from the closed doors and panels of politicians I found what I was looking for at COP: hope."

I will always remember an indigenous woman from Ecuador called Veronica Inmunda catching up with her President outside the venue. Her ask to him was simple: "Will you commit to ending oil extraction in my home?" Her home was of course the Amazon rainforest. The oil they were extracting was from one of the most pristine habitats in the world. That oil was going to last the planet just two weeks, but we would lose an ecosystem that took thousands of years to create.

It feels like his answer should be obvious! At this COP where the priorities were carbon reduction and protecting the rainforest, ending work on this site seems like such an easy win. But we all know that wasn't what happened. He was unable to commit, and when I heard from her she believed that the project would still go ahead.

A few days later at the Youth Strike for climate, young indigenous people sang about their futures after describing how generations of their families fought for the forest, how many of them have been murdered and how it is now falling on their shoulders to protect their communities.

This is a stark reminder that climate justice IS social justice and that social justice IS climate justice.

Policies – globally and here in Wales and England – must be integrated to benefit both people and the natural world because if they don't they just aren't sustainable for our future.

And the rights of the oppressed must be prioritised and heard to ensure that

our future works for everyone.

Another situation that we long feared has become a reality – an invasion of Ukraine by Russia has now happened. The images we have seen on our TV screens are simply the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the tragedy of war. I want to send my solidarity to everyone in and fleeing Ukraine right now.

In an emergency meeting with our European Green leaders to discuss our collective response to the invasion, I heard the reality of war from our elected representatives across Europe. From Germany we heard that “peace has no price tag” from our Greens in Government. From Poland our elected Green MP’s had to rush off as they met refugees from the train and ensured they had food and shelter. Elected councillors in Ukraine did not attend the meeting, but sent a statement saying that they feared they may not be alive tomorrow.

It’s days like this when we know that our mission, to ensure that nuclear weapons are consigned to the history books, needs to become reality. That international cooperation is the foundation for peace and that as a country we must allow refugees to enter the UK and to safety.

It’s during times like these that our policies are so important. It is The Green Party that provides the alternative and the principles needed for a better tomorrow.

This government and the opposition has failed at every hurdle. So today I am calling on them both. And to you Boris Johnson and to you Keir Starmer: open the doors and waive the visas, open safe and authorised routes to those fleeing war. Deliver a joined up resettlement program for refugees, with funding for councils and support services that match the generosity of our European neighbours.

It feels like a distant memory hearing Boris Johnson promise that the words “build back better” would shape his response to the pandemic. The phrase put a frame to the popular outpouring of hope that the failures and inequalities of our rigged system could be replaced with something new; something that works for us all. But of course, those were empty promises.

Because with Boris Johnson and his government, the priority has always been their tried and failed business as usual. We now know that while we stayed home to protect the NHS and defeat the virus, 10 Downing Street was host to a busy calendar of drinks parties – because for Boris and his cabinet, the idea that the rules might actually apply to them – simply didn’t occur.

Time and time again, we’ve seen that business as usual is what matters to this government – whether that’s wine time Fridays at number 10 or continuing profits for the cabinet’s billionaire mates.

But the party’s over. People across the country are crying out for change.

For me, the best way to make that change – to genuinely build back better – is through a Green New Deal. Anything short of that is a failure for people who are desperate for secure and future proofed work, for people whose energy bills are forcing them into fuel poverty, those homes disappearing into flood

water, the homes leaking heat, the energy crisis caused by geopolitics, for jobs, for nature, for trans people, for people of colour, disabled people, women, LGBTIQ people, younger people, older people... for a future that we'd all be safe to live in where our needs are met.

A fundamental part of any Green New Deal must be that the greenest option is, simply put, the cheapest and easiest option.

Far too often the most damaging and polluting is the default option as a result of cost or convenience. From plastic bottles to the obsolescence of mobile phones, we are constantly working in a broken system.

So, how do we help people get over our throwaway culture that we've all got so used to?

We need a fundamental shift in policy to enact this Green New Deal, piece by piece. Let's start by banning all non-essential single use plastics. We can't just rely on taxing consumer behaviour. Ending VAT on all home repairs – there's no VAT on new builds, so why do we demand it on repairs? Or a frequent flyer levy to tax those polluting our skies the most.

Change is inevitable, but to secure the positive change we so desperately need, it needs to be fought for.

So let's keep going, let's keep making change on doorsteps, in ballot boxes, through petitioning and campaigning, through holding the government and the opposition to account, as well as those elected at the local level.

We have achieved so much in the last eight years, and it's the wins that we've celebrated together as a party will inspire me for a lifetime.

Greens, we are changing the world – and we are **just* *getting* *started**.

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