

Green councillors call on local Tories to join them in disowning government attack on nature



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Hundreds of Green Party councillors have sent an open letter to local Conservative councillors in their area, calling on them to disown the government's 'attack on nature.' Greens have decried Kwasi Kwarteng's recent 'mini-budget' as a 'three-pronged assault'.

As the Conservative Party begins its conference in Birmingham, Green councillors are urging local Conservative councillors to say 'no' to their new leaders and stand up for their community and local environment.

Government plans include 'investment zones' which would make it easier to get planning permission; a 'sunset clause' on EU environmental protections; and scrapping the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS), which would have paid farmers to improve nature on their land, with plans to replace this with a payment-by acre not linked to any environmental measures.

Councillor Ellie Chowns, a cabinet member on Herefordshire Council, said:

"Conservative councillors represent many rural voters who will be up in arms about the government proposals. They should show courage and do the right thing by opposing these hugely damaging plans, which are almost the direct opposite of Conservative manifesto promises and have never been put to the British people.

"We need all our local politicians, whichever party they come from, to stand up for nature. We can have robust local economies whilst also helping nature to recover and thrive. Local Tories have a special responsibility to say no to their new leaders and defend the natural environment on behalf of our communities."

The full letter reads as follows:

Dear Conservative councillors,

"This Government has today launched an attack on nature" ~ RSPB England

There is widespread anger in response to government plans to remove fundamental legal protections for our environment. Opposition has come from many organisations ranging from the RSPB and National Trust through to the Wildlife Trusts and Friends of the Earth.

Alongside the reckless approach to the nation's finances, the government seems intent on tearing up protection for nature. In a three-pronged assault

on nature Ms Truss and Mr Kwarteng plan to;

- Scrap planning rules that protect nature in new 'investment zones' covering huge areas of the country.[1] [2]
- Rip up environmental protections introduced by the EU, without plans for replacement.[3]
- Withdraw plans to help farmers to protect nature [4], with reports suggesting the 'Environmental Land Management Scheme' (ELMS) has been 'put on hold' whilst a return to a Common Agricultural Policy type per acre payment is expected, which will break a specific manifesto pledge [5].

Of course, just before these announcements we also saw Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg open the door to environmentally damaging fracking, a policy that is widely opposed, will do nothing to reduce energy bills and which the founder of Cuadrilla himself says is unviable [6].

The responses from those who care for nature have been overwhelming.

Joan Edwards, director of policy for The Wildlife Trusts, says these policies will mean "polluters can get away with poisoning our rivers and countryside – even more than they are doing already" [7/8].

Hilary McGrady of the National Trust says, "environmental protections are dismissed as 'burdens', while investment and growth are pitted against nature and climate action."

These proposals come as part of a 'dash for growth' package which is also spooking markets and ruining government finances. There is no mandate for these measures: they actually reverse the direction of travel on the environment in your 2019 manifesto and have never been put to the British people.

Yet we know people's livelihoods and local economies can be put on a sound footing with a three pronged approach to investment: in nature recovery, in renewable energy and in home insulation to reduce energy bills. Research has shown that "Protection and use of environmental assets is key to evening out economic imbalances between metropolitan and rural areas"[8]. In other words, the recovery of nature and the revival of local living standards should and can go hand-in hand.

We call on you to make plain to your party leaders that these policies must be reversed. We ask for a public statement from your group leader on your group's views about these policies.

There is no case for staying silent, and every reason to stand up for your communities and for your local environment by making it plain that you will

not support the tearing up of environmental protection and the reversal of attempts to help nature thrive.

[1]

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-growth-plan-2022-factsheet-on-investment-zones/the-growth-plan-2022-investment-zones-factsheet>

[2] Map of investment zones:

<https://twitter.com/RSPBEngland/status/1573366828222808064>

[3]

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/sep/23/uk-environment-laws-under-threat-in-deregulatory-free-for-all>

[4]

<https://www.edie.net/reports-defra-set-to-scrap-plans-to-pay-farmers-for-nature-restoration-and-creation/>

[5] “in return for funding, [farmers] must farm in a way that protects and enhances our natural environment”

<https://www.conservatives.com/our-plan/conservative-party-manifesto-2019>

[6]

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/sep/21/fracking-wont-work-uk-founder-chris-cornelius-cuadrilla>

[7] https://www.exeter.ac.uk/news/research/title_918714_en.html

[8]

<https://envirotecmagazine.com/2022/09/26/the-uk-governments-deregulation-agenda-is-dangerous/>

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