

Greens Launch Charter for Small Business

Green Party Communities spokesperson Ellie Chowns today launched a Green Charter for Small Business designed to help them and our High Streets thrive in the green economy of the future.

Chowns, who is the party's parliamentary candidate in North Herefordshire, said:

"Small and medium-sized businesses are the lifeblood of our economy and our communities.

"There are around 5.6 million small businesses that employ between them over 13 million people. (1)

"This is a vital part of the economy too often overlooked by government. The best and most successful small businesses are embedded in their local economies and support their local communities.

"Our new charter will support them to survive and prosper with VAT breaks in key sectors."

Green MPs elected on 4 July will push in Parliament for:

- Regional mutual banks to drive investment in decarbonisation and local economic sustainability
- £2bn per year in grant funding for local authorities to help businesses decarbonise
- Encouraging community ownership through greater access to government funding in the transition to a zero-carbon economy.
- Supporting the high street and local businesses through VAT and rates exemptions, with a particular focus on supporting local pubs, clubs, theatres and community arts venues.
- Backing farmers to produce and sell more food locally.
- increasing annual public subsidies for rail and bus travel to £10bn by the end of the next parliament to make public transport reliable, frequent, accessible and affordable, including free bus travel for under-18s
- Building social housing to support workers in small towns and the countryside
- Rejoining the Customs Union to enable small business to trade with Europe.

Chowns said:

"This is a comprehensive package offering direct support to small businesses that also introduces measures to encourage customers to get to and use small, local businesses.

“These innovations will set the framework for small enterprises to succeed and our High Streets to once again become vital community hubs.

“These new regional banks would be capitalised through a Co-operative Development Fund using some of the funds made available through the United Kingdom Infrastructure Bank (UKIB), along with an additional £10bn of public money.

“Local authorities would be funded nationally to channel grants worth £2bn per year to local businesses which want to decarbonise faster.

“Our new generation of Green MPs will press in Parliament to remove any legal blocks to companies wanting to transform into mutual organisations, especially at the point of succession from one owner to another.

“We know the current approach to protecting our High Streets and supporting local businesses is failing. Across the country, too many people are totally out of reach of vital resources like a local bank or pharmacy.

“We want to change the existing market structures that leave customers, suppliers and workers open to exploitation through market dominance. Markets must work to support a fair transition to a zero-carbon economy.

“Some small local businesses struggle to get their payments on time which can leave them financially exposed and unable to thrive on our High Streets.

“Elected Greens will campaign to bring the Prompt Payment Code into law and bar late payers from public-procurement contracts. We also want to mandate the Small Business Commissioner to investigate potential instances of poor payment proactively, instead of only when a complaint has been made.

“We are offering a win-win-win package for our small businesses, our High Streets and our communities.

“For instance, we want all children to have a daily free school meal, made from nutritious ingredients. That would offer farmers a sustainable local market for their produce.

“We would invest in public transport, including buses, cycleways and walking routes to make it easier for people to get around and to use their High Street local small businesses.

“Taken as a whole, our evidence-based, practical charter gives hard-pressed local small businesses the chance to join the green revolution today.

“It offers real hope and real change to our High Streets and communities for the future. In Parliament, Green MPs will work hard to get these practical steps for a thriving local economy implemented as fast as possible.”

NOTES TO EDITORS

For more information or to arrange interviews, please email: press@greenpartry.org.uk, tel: 020 0203 691 9401 or 07826 529 013.

1. FSB | UK Small Business Statistics – <https://www.fsb.org.uk/uk-small-business-statistics.html>

Background briefing

Small businesses matter

- At the start of 2023 there were 5.6 million small businesses (with 0 to 49 employees), 99.2% of the total business population. SMEs account for 99.9% of the business population (5.6 million businesses). (Federation of Small Businesses, FSB)
- Employment in small businesses (with 0 to 49 employees) was 13.1 million (48% of the total) (FSB)

SME and community sector support offers

- Regional mutual banks to drive investment in decarbonisation and local economic sustainability
- £2bn per year in grant funding for local authorities to help businesses decarbonise
- Encouraging community ownership through greater access to government funding in the transition to a zero-carbon economy.
- Supporting the high street and local businesses through VAT and rates exemptions, with a particular focus on supporting local pubs, clubs, theatres and community arts venues.
- Putting more money into local economies by paying a £15 an hour minimum wage, with the costs to small businesses offset by increasing the Employment Allowance to £10,000.
- Backing farmers to produce and sell more food locally.
- increasing annual public subsidies for rail and bus travel to £10bn by the end of the next parliament to make public transport reliable, frequent, accessible and affordable, including free bus travel for under-18s
- Building social housing to support workers in small towns and the countryside
- Rejoining the single market to enable small business to trade with Europe.

Our charter in more detail

Funding

Green MPs will back the setting up of regional mutual banks to drive investment in decarbonisation and local economic sustainability by supporting investment in SMEs and community-owned enterprises and cooperatives. These banks will be capitalised through a Cooperative Development Fund using some of the funds made available through the United Kingdom Infrastructure Bank (UKIB), along with an additional £10bn of public money.

Decarbonisation

We will give local authorities £2bn per year to provide grants to help

businesses decarbonise. We will explore legal ways for companies to be transformed into mutual organisations, especially at the point of succession from one owner to another.

Community ownership can be encouraged through greater access to government funding in the transition to a zero-carbon economy. We want to change markets where customers, suppliers and workers are open to exploitation through market dominance.

We also want to ensure that structures exist in markets that allow for a competitively fair transition to a zero-carbon economy.

More government support for ordinary car users and small businesses to replace their vehicles as diesel and petrol engines are phased out.

Late payment

Late payment remains a problem for many businesses and sole traders.

Elected Greens will campaign to bring the Prompt Payment Code into law and bar late payers from public-procurement contracts. We would mandate the Small Business Commissioner to investigate potential instances of poor payment proactively, instead of only when a complaint has been made.

VAT reduction

We would also propose a range of changes to VAT, reducing it on hard-pressed areas such as hospitality and the arts and increasing it on financial services and private education.

Exempt cultural events, including everything from theatre and museum tickets to gigs in local pubs, from paying VAT

Business rates reduction

We want to see local authorities given discretionary powers to exempt socially and economically essential local enterprises from business rates.

Food and farming

Increasing domestic food production and expanding local horticulture.

- Incentivizing growing a much greater variety of plant food types to protect sourcing and enhanced nutrition.
- Rebalancing the power dynamic between big food manufactures and local alternatives such as local food networks, community-supported agriculture and other co-operatives

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Reducing the vulnerability of the small-scale farming suppliers relative to

the oligopolies in retail and food manufacture, by regulating for fairness in negotiation and new legally binding codes of practice.

Putting farmers, including smaller and family farms, back in the room so they are part of developing new farming policy, including a new Fairer Farming Charter.

Elected Greens will fight to ensure that all new trade agreements:

- Respect workers' and consumers' rights.
- Meet UK animal protection and environmental standards

Creating markets for local goods

All children should have a daily free school meal, made from nutritious ingredients and based on local and organic or sustainable produce and free breakfast clubs for children to Year 6

Rejoin EU and Customs Union

SMEs have been really hammered by the end of access to the single market and increased costs of doing business with our neighbours.

We would re-join the EU as soon as the domestic political situation is favourable and EU member states are willing.

We would join the Customs Union as a first step towards full EU membership, and a way of resolving many of the worst problems resulting from Brexit.

We want to see a speedy return to the free movement of people between the UK and the EU, including reciprocal rights to work for both UK and European citizens

Local social housing

Rural businesses really struggle with recruitment due the lack of affordable housing

We will build 150,000 social homes a year.

Transport

We would increase annual public subsidies for rail and bus travel to £10bn by the end of the next parliament to make public transport reliable, frequent, accessible and affordable, including free bus travel for under-18s.

We would invest an additional £19bn over five years to improve public transport, support electrification and invest in new cycleways and footpaths; this includes the reallocation of funding earmarked for road building.

Urban bus services have dropped by 48% and rural buses by 52% since 2008. Yet they are vital to our High Streets. Every £1 invested in bus services is estimated to bring an economic return of £4.50.

Elected Greens would push for local authority control and proper funding for bus services, to increase these in urban areas, and in rural areas ensure that there is a bus service to every village.

We will empower local authorities to run bus services themselves if they see fit and provide a service that meets their community's needs. Cities and sparsely populated rural areas will need different solutions; we need to give them flexibility and funding.

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