

Minister welcomes passage of Defective Premises Bill

Communities Minister Gordon Lyons has welcomed the Defective Premises Bill passing its final stage in the Assembly.

Murphy provides update on Skills Agenda

Economy Minister Conor Murphy today updated the Assembly on new skills interventions that will underpin his Economic Vision.

Greens pledge A* education offer

***Investment:**

- **£8bn for schools including a £2bn pay uplift for teachers**
- **£2.5bn a year to tackle RAAC concrete scandal**
- **£5bn for special needs (SEND)**
- **£3bn for sixth-form education**
- **£12bn investment in skills and lifelong learning for further education.**

*** Abolish Ofsted and replace high-stakes formal SATs testing with system of continuous assessment**

*** Free daily school meal for all children**

*** Scrap tuition fees and restore maintenance grants for undergraduates**

*** Provide students at all state-funded schools and colleges access to a qualified counsellor.**

The Green Party has announced a package of measures to improve the learning environment for both students and teachers.

Co-leader Carla Denyer said:

“For Greens, education is a public good that benefits society, so it should be publicly funded and available to everybody, free of charge, at every stage of life.

“Schools play an essential role in ensuring the wellbeing of all students and helping them to thrive.

“To help relieve the stresses in our education system and improve wellbeing, for both teachers and pupils, Greens want to replace high-stakes formal SATs testing in primary and secondary schools with a system of continuous assessment, and abolish OFSTED. We also want to see a massive boost in funding for special needs provision in mainstream schools, and for a qualified counsellor in every state school and college.

“No child must be left behind by poverty. Opportunities must be available to all. Alongside scrapping the two-child benefit cap and uplifting Universal Credit by £40 a week, Green MPs will push for all children to be provided with a healthy school meal every day – free of charge.

“Greens also believe that a more holistic education, where arts and vocational subjects are treated equally within the curriculum, will help more students thrive. We also want children to learn about the climate and nature crises to equip them for the challenges ahead and so they can be part of the solution.

“Post-16 education and training opportunities must be better designed to support lifelong learning. Greens will seek to restore the Education Maintenance Allowance to financially support young people to extend their studies.

“Marketisation has been disastrous for Higher Education, pushing universities into financial crisis and burdening a whole generation of students with debts. So elected Green MPs will push to end tuition fees and restore maintenance grants.

Co-leader Carla Denyer concluded:

“We don't pretend there's a magic money tree lurking in the playground. We are being honest. Generating the billions needed to invest in our education system – including giving hard working teachers a much-needed pay uplift – requires reforming our tax system to make it fairer and greener.

“Our A* offering is fully inclusive and costed. We know it gets top marks. Green MPs will push a Labour government to take some lessons from our manifesto and offer better funded support for both students and teachers.”

ENDS

Notes

For full Green Party manifesto see:

[Greens pledge £22bn to rebuild crumbling NHS buildings](#)

- “Leaking ceilings”, “staff working out of portacabins”, and wards in “desperate need of improvements” – NHS intensive care nurse speaks out.
- Greens pledge £22bn capital investment to bring crumbling NHS hospitals, primary care buildings and outdated equipment up to modern standards
- Greens accuse Labour of “holding the door open” to the private sector and offer cast iron guarantee to oppose privatisation of the NHS

The Green Party is today calling for an additional £22bn capital investment to bring crumbling NHS hospitals, primary care buildings and outdated equipment up to modern standards. This comes as the [King’s Fund warns](#) that without action, we will inevitably continue to have a ‘deteriorating NHS estate increasingly unfit for purpose’.

Green Party co-leader, Carla Denyer, said: “No other political party is being honest enough with voters – the very fabric of our NHS is crumbling and must be repaired and rebuilt.

“The NHS is stretched to breaking point and so we are offering a package to train and retain staff and cut waiting lists, but we also need to recognise that we are asking over-worked staff to cope with outdated equipment and poor buildings.”

Rachel Birch, an intensive care nurse with 12 years’ experience in the NHS, added, “I’ve seen leaking ceilings in our intensive care unit, staff having to work out of portacabins, and wards in desperate need of improvements and modernisation.

“The buildings that we use treating patients are old and inadequate for use.

“Our department cares for critically ill patients needing maximum support that deserve the best facilities and treatment.”

Green MPs elected on Thursday would press for:

- £22bn in capital investment over the next five years to bring our crumbling hospitals and old equipment up to standard
- Including, a one off £2bn capital investment in primary care buildings, £1.1bn annually assigned to clear the maintenance backlog and £3bn a year to be spent on hospitals.

- This £22bn capital investment fund will sit alongside a £30bn revenue expenditure that will see people accessing an NHS dentist, working towards GP appointments on the day of need for those in high need and significant uplift in pay for frontline staff.

Denyer added: “We know the importance of the NHS.

“The Conservatives [promised 40 new hospitals and failed to deliver](#).

“Labour promises to [hold the door open to the private sector](#).

“It is only the Greens who are offering a cast-iron guarantee to push back against the creeping privatisation of the NHS and rebuild it, so it is fit for the future.

“Our Green guarantee to protect the NHS from privatisation, combined with today’s announcement, represents the real hope for our crumbling NHS.”

END

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[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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