

NI to be included in new laws to tackle youth smoking and vaping

Health Minister Robin Swann has confirmed that NI will be included in Westminster's Tobacco and Vapes bill subject to approval by the NI Assembly.

Five steps to a fairer, greener country



Green Party

3 March 2024

- * **Raise over £50 billion through taxing wealth fairly**
- * **A large-scale green investment programme to transform our economy**
- * **Billions more for health and social care;**
- * **Funds for local authorities to invest in warm, affordable to heat homes**
- * **VAT exemption for hospitality and cultural businesses**

The Green Party is proposing to raise over £50bn annually by the end of the next parliament through taxing wealth fairly.

The proposal is part of the Green Party's five-point plan to counter the cost-of-living crisis and deliver a fairer and more caring country in next week's Budget. [1]

Green Party co-leader Carla Denyer said:

"There is wealth in the UK. It is distributed unfairly. Our economy is failing because our wealth, rather than circulating and benefiting everybody, is held in the stagnant assets of the super-rich.

"The Budget this year should focus on recirculating that wealth and making it

work for everybody.

“Our wealth tax and wider tax proposals would also begin to tackle the desperate inequality that is a source of so many of our problems as a country.

“Taken together, we estimate that changes to Capital Gains Tax and National Insurance, alongside a new wealth tax, would raise over £50bn per year that would be available for the vital public investment our country is crying out for.

“We need to face up to the long-term threats to our economy, and the immediate costs which are currently being carried by those who can least bear them.

“We need a large-scale green investment programme to transform our economy from one reliant on cheap labour and fossil fuels to one that puts people and planet first.

“We need to deliver a housing programme that offers people warm, affordable-to-heat homes and helps councils cut people’s energy bills by upgrading home insulation.

“We need to invest in a health and social care system that guarantees dignity for all and to end the blight of long-term sickness. The rising cost of social care is hitting councils hard. Our reforms could help them too.

“We need to give a hand to hard-pressed small businesses in the hospitality sector which have been hit by Covid and the cost-of-living crisis. The temporary 5% VAT rate should continue and extend to all activities in the cultural and sports sectors, and leisure activities. Indeed, we would be more ambitious, zero-rating all these activities for the life of the next Parliament.

“The Conservatives have broken Britain and Labour seems to be shredding any policy that might fix it. Our five-point Green Budget alternative would create a fairer and more caring country.

“Of course, this ambitious programme of rebalancing our economy toward planet and people and away from profiteers and speculators must be paid for. That’s why we are proposing an immediate wealth tax and other tax reforms, while recognising that much of the investment would generate revenue in the medium- and long-term.

“Our wealth tax on the super-rich and wider tax reforms would be the fair way to fund the things we need to create a healthier society – high quality housing, social care and good jobs in a green economy.

“The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) has warned the Chancellor: “the economic case for tax cuts before the next Spending Review is completed is weak” and reliant on severe cuts to local government, disability benefits and other key public services. The IFS is also correct to note that “the UK’s tax system is in dire need of reform.” [2]

“Our approach offers a fairer, greener alternative – it doesn’t pay for election tax bribes by slashing spending on public services.

“Instead, it argues the case for real reforms and investment that put people and planet first.

“That is why we are proposing a wealth tax that will begin to shift the cost of dealing with the long-term crises we face away from those who can least afford to pay it to the super-rich.”

NOTES TO EDITORS

[1] [budget-background-v3.pdf \(greenparty.org.uk\)](#)

[2] <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/context-march-2024-budget>

[Adblock test \(Why?\)](#)

First Minister attends official opening of Powerscreen Headquarters

First Minister Michelle O’Neill visited Dungannon to attend the official opening of the new headquarters for Powerscreen.

First Minister visits former primary school in Coalisland

Pupils from Primate Dixon primary school in Coalisland had a surprise visit from former pupil and now First Minister, Michelle O’Neill yesterday.

My visit to Israel and Palestine

We’ve all been appalled by the shocking and tragic events in the Middle East over the past few months.

There is a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, and it is only growing. Thousands of innocent Palestinians have been killed and around 1.5 million have been displaced to Rafah where they are fearing for their lives, as the prospect of an IDF offensive looms.

The appalling hostage situation continues – with more than 100 people still held by Hamas following the utterly deplorable terrorist attacks carried out by the group on 7 October.

Liberal Democrats have been calling for an immediate bilateral ceasefire for months – to put an end to the humanitarian tragedy in Gaza, get the hostages home, and finally deliver a path to the two state solution.

The impact of this conflict has been felt deeply not just across the region, but in the UK too, in particular the Jewish, Palestinian and Muslim communities.

Since 7 October, I, [Layla Moran](#) and [Christine Jardine](#) have met with many impacted groups – such as those working to combat soaring antisemitism and Islamophobia, NGOs working in Gaza, and families whose loved ones are being held hostage by Hamas.

But as the devastation from the conflict only continues to mount, I felt that it was necessary to visit the region myself – to meet people in Israel and Palestine whose lives have been turned upside down by the conflict, and speak to politicians and civil society about how to secure two states and a lasting peace.

I have just returned from my visit to Israel and Palestine. Here's what I saw, heard and learnt on the trip:



I saw the bullet hole-ridden, blown-out houses of the Kfar Aza kibbutz, one of the many places attacked by Hamas on 7 October, and a place where many peace activists had lived.

I also travelled to the site of the music festival at Re'im where over 300 people were tragically murdered, and where many are now paying their respects to friends and relatives.



At the Makassed Hospital in East Jerusalem, I met six-month old triplets whose mother is stuck in Gaza and cannot get a permit to travel to Jerusalem to be with her children.

I spoke with hospital administrators who told me that the hospital is struggling financially after Israel withheld funding from the Palestinian Authority last year.



Itzik Horn's sons Eitan and Yair were taken hostage by Hamas on 7 October.

He described to me the anguish he is living with, not being able to know exactly where his sons are and in what condition they're in.

Meeting with Palestinian NGOs working on the ground in Gaza, they explained how what was already a humanitarian crisis in the Strip before October has now become catastrophic. They also spoke about how the West Bank now faces an unprecedented situation, with settler violence spiking.

At the Knesset – the Israeli Parliament – I held a constructive meeting with Yair Lapid, leader of our liberal sister party in Israel as well as Leader of the Opposition to Netanyahu's government, and discussed the importance of removing Netanyahu from power – both for Israelis and Palestinians.



Visiting Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial, I laid a wreath on behalf of our party in memory of the millions of Jews murdered during the Holocaust.



I learned about the impact of illegal settlement expansion on Palestinians in East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank, which is making two-states ever harder to achieve.



The United Nations Humanitarian Agency, UNOCHA, explained to me their assessment of the dire crisis facing Palestinians if the IDF commences an offensive in Rafah.

It's very clear that both Israelis and Palestinians are suffering deep and ongoing trauma from the 7 October attacks and the humanitarian situation in Gaza. In an environment of such grief and loss, it would be easy to write off the prospects of a future peace. But my belief that we cannot go back to the way things were before – that a two-state solution is the only way to ensure nothing like this happens again – has only been strengthened.

It's also apparent that the illegal Israeli settler movement is having a very negative impact on the ground in the West Bank, actively working to prevent a future two state solution. Settler violence against Palestinians has spiked since October 7 and is having a destabilising effect right now in the West Bank – which is a tinderbox. The settlements are a breach of international law.

Since my return, I have called for the far-right Israeli ministers and extremist leaders of the illegal settlement movement, [Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, to be sanctioned by the UK.](#)



Our Foreign Affairs spokespersons Layla Moran and Lord Purvis also both recently visited the region. You can learn more about their visit [here](#) and [here](#).

Liberal Democrats will continue to stand up for international law and for a lasting peace. It is the only way to secure the dignity and security that Israelis and Palestinians deserve, ensuring that the events we have seen these past few months never happen again.

[Go to Source](#)

Author: