

Greens call for contingency plan to ensure free and fair elections amid pandemic



Green Party

5 February 2021

- **Local elections should be delayed if there's any risk to democracy or public health say Greens**

This year's local elections must be postponed unless the whole country is back in the equivalent to tier 3 or below by the end of March in order to ensure a free, fair and safe election, the Green Party has warned.

Despite guidance from Cabinet Office minister Chloe Smith that the government will work with political parties to ensure the elections can take place [1], the Greens have not had any reassurances from government over how the elections can go ahead if parties are not allowed to campaign.

This follows previous government guidance that leafleting by political parties was not exempt from the current coronavirus restrictions. [2]

Now, amid increasing uncertainty over councils' ability to hold the May elections safely [3] and the ability for candidates to campaign, the Green Party has called on the Government to set out contingency plans to make sure we can hold free, fair and safe elections.

Green co-leader Jonathan Bartley has said in the interests of both people's health and the integrity of the UK's democratic values, the Government must prepare to move the elections to a new date if the current time frame is not safe or fair.

Bartley said:

"We expect elections in this country to be both free and fair. People have a right to vote in safety and candidates have a right to engage with their communities in order to put their case forward in calling for votes.

"The Government's dithering on the election date and their direct instruction on campaigning means serious questions have been raised over who is making such decisions when there is clearly a conflict of interest.

“Our democracy is too precious for the rules governing it to be determined by one political party. Any decision on campaigning should be decided by a body such as the Electoral Commission, in consultation with Public Health England, not a party that may stand to gain from such a decision.”

The official election period starts on 29th March [4]. The Greens have said the government must now look at whether any part of the country is likely to remain above tier 3 by the end of March, and if so the election has to be postponed. If the current restrictions continue beyond this time, then major concerns will be raised over how fair the election will be.

Bartley said:

“Unless the whole ‘official election period’ from late March can be conducted under open conditions, allowing free campaigning, and voters can vote in safety, then the elections should be delayed. And that decision should be taken as soon as possible to avoid any further damage to the integrity of the UK’s democratic system.”

ENDS

Notes

1

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/uknews/local-elections-in-england-and-wales-are-given-green-light-for-may-6/ar-BB1dpD23>

2

<https://inews.co.uk/news/politics/local-elections-2021-campaigning-coronaviruses-criticised-liberal-democrats-green-party-844145>

3

Report of Council CEOs and electoral returning officers: <https://lgiu.org/publication/free-fair-and-safe/>

4

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-11/Election-timetable-LGE%20election.doc>

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Green Party calls for return to customs union



Green Party

5 February 2021

- **Jonathan Bartley: “The decision to leave the customs union was an ideological mistake by the Conservatives”**

The Green Party has called on the government to seek to negotiate readmission to the EU customs union to reduce pressure on business and ease tensions in Northern Ireland.

Green Party co-leader Jonathan Bartley said:

“Although being outside the single market will still mean health checks, rejoining the customs union would greatly reduce the paperwork required by exporters. It could also enable us to join the EU VAT area, thus removing the charges now facing consumers buying goods from EU suppliers.

“The decision to leave the customs union was an ideological mistake by the Conservatives, who always downplayed the impacts it would have on business. Now we see the chaotic reality unfolding. It is not too late to say we made a mistake and to explore options for rejoining the customs union without rejoining the EU’s political institutions.

“The country was divided down the middle during the referendum, and most people thought we would stay in the single market and customs union. A decision to leave the political institutions was not a mandate to choose the hardest possible Brexit.

“The Green Party maintains that Brexit was a mistake of historic proportions and that the government must do what it can to mitigate against the impacts that are already becoming clear. We also maintain our belief that our best long term future lies at the heart of Europe.”

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[European Greens call for vaccine solidarity not vaccine nationalism](#)



Green Party

5 February 2021

As Greens in the UK and in the European Parliament we are clear that we need to be struggling together against Covid, not battling each other for vaccine supplies.

We welcome the fact that the UK has invested heavily in the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine and that its rollout programme is proceeding so well, protecting millions of citizens a week. We also welcome the EU investments in vaccine development and the bloc's commitment to solidarity across EU member states so that none will be left behind.

We need politicians to work together so that they are not subject to profiteering by pharmaceutical companies. To do this we need full transparency of negotiations and contracts for vaccine supplies. European citizens have invested in these vaccines and they have a right to know how their money has been used and the scale of profits made by drug companies. We must avoid a situation where those paying higher prices receive better treatment: the market can have no place in healthcare.

We would also argue for all Covid vaccines to be sold on the basis of open patents so that production can be rolled out at speed across the world. This is the sort of solidarity that a global pandemic demands and we call on the Commission and the UK government to cooperatively negotiate with pharmaceutical companies and the WHO to ensure IP restrictions do not limit availability of vaccines. Therefore we again call on the Commission to support the TRIPS waiver.

European healthcare is based on a European market for pharmaceutical products: we depend on each other for supplies of life-saving drugs. We

deplore recent aggressive behaviour since a trade war over vaccines can only lead to some of the most vulnerable in our communities suffering.

Political leaders have been proud to say that until everybody is safe, nobody is safe, but they need to turn those words into practical action now by allocating European vaccine supplies based on need.

Signatories:

Amelia Womack, EWGP, Deputy Leader

Molly Scott Cato, EWGP, Brexit speaker

Larry Sanders, EWGP, Health speaker

Jutta Paulus, Greens/EFA, Member of Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

Tilly Metz, Greens/EFA, Member of Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

Rasmus Andresen, Greens/EFA, Spokesperson for Budgetary Affairs

Notes

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[Shell's losses are clear sign that transition away from fossil fuels is underway, say Greens](#)



Green Party

4 February 2021

- **Jonathan Bartley: “This is a clear signal that the transition to net zero is underway and that big oil companies will not play a role in our economy in the future”**

Green Party co-leader Jonathan Bartley has said the news that Shell has seen an 87% fall in earnings [1] is an indication that the transition away from fossil fuels is now fully underway.

Bartley has now urged the government to step in to help those workers who are being made redundant at Shell and other fossil fuel companies by providing training for the Green jobs of the future.

Green Party co-leader Jonathan Bartley:

“While some of these record losses are the result of Covid, it is clear that policies to transition beyond fossil fuels are impacting the balance sheets of big oil companies as they downgrade some of their reserves as stranded assets. [2]

“This is a clear signal that the transition to net zero is underway and that big oil companies will not play a role in our economy in the future.”

The results come a week after credit ratings agency S&P Global Ratings said it is [considering](#) [3] downgrading a number of major oil and gas producers, including Shell, “to reflect a growing risk to their businesses from the energy transition, price volatility, and future profitability.”

The Green Party will be watching closely as Shell prepares to launch its strategy for a net zero emissions future next week.

Bartley continued:

“As big oil companies go through essential restructuring in the face of the climate emergency, we need the government to step in and retrain their workers for the new opportunities in the green economy. Such restructuring needs to be at the heart of investment for the post-Covid recovery.

“For decades we have been told that we must support fossil fuel companies because they pay pensions but now we see it is pension funds themselves that are driving the move away from big oil.

“Setting a net zero target means that all those who will be receiving pensions beyond that date must have fossil assets excluded from their funds. Insurance companies, who are bearing the brunt of climate-related loss and damage, are also turning their backs on fossil fuels.”

ENDS

Notes

1

<https://news.sky.com/story/shell-tumbles-to-19-9bn-loss-as-pandemic-hits-energy-demand-12208176>

2

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/aug/14/seven-top-oil-firms-downgrade-assets-by-87bn-in-nine-months>

3

<https://www.spglobal.com/platts/en/market-insights/latest-news/oil/012621-oil-majors-credit-ratings-under-threat-from-growing-climate-risks-sampg-global>

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[Greens call for justice for students and an end to a working life of debt](#)



Green Party

2 February 2021

The Green Party has said all student debt should be wiped off following the call from vice chancellors to suspend interest payments on student loans for 15 months. [1].

Green Party finance speaker Molly Scott Cato responded to the call from vice chancellors in withering terms:

“The idea that students should be charged a slightly lower rate of interest on their loans is wildly inadequate at a time when they are bearing the brunt of the Covid lockdowns. Most people will be astonished to learn that the current interest rate is as high as 5.6% when market interest rates are close to zero.

“We are condemning many young people to a working life of debt bondage, since they will never be able to repay their loans but rather act as cash cows for wealthier and older people who hold investment portfolios. [2]

“Education is and always has been a public good and should be funded by public investment. The desperately misguided policy to privatise universities, begun under a Labour government, needs to be reversed and the government must step in to ensure students can receive a world-class education without the burden of debt. [3]

“The Green Party is committed to abolishing student fees and adding the debts accrued to the national debt to be paid back over the long term.”

Co-chair of the Young Greens, Rosie Rawle, added:

“The suggestion from vice chancellors to suspend interest accruing on student loans for just 15 months is well-meaning but frankly insulting. Many other countries in Europe offer free higher education, as does Scotland, and students in England and Wales should not be unfairly penalised by carrying a lifetime debt burden. The three parties that dominate at Westminster have all betrayed young people. Now is the time for them to make amends.”

Molly Scott Cato concluded:

“Our young people have stood by older generations through this pandemic, putting their lives on hold and sacrificing their educational opportunities. The least we can do in return is to remove this dreadful lifetime burden of debt from them.”

ENDS

Notes

1

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-55895334>

2

House of Commons Library estimates the value of outstanding loans at the end of March 2020 at £140 billion:

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn01079/>

3

Timeline of betrayal of young people:

<https://www.channel4.com/news/factcheck/factcheck-how-students-have-been-misled-and-lied-to-for-20-years>

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