

Carla Denyer and Adrian Ramsay Co-Leaders Autumn Conference speech 2021



22 October 2021

CARLA: Adrian and I are delighted to be here as your new co-leaders.

ADRIAN: It is truly a privilege to be chosen to represent you.

CARLA: Thank you to Sian for your kind words, and thank you Sian and Jonathan for your leadership of the party.

ADRIAN: Thank you both for leading us as we broke into new areas all across the country, helping us achieve record election results in the European Elections and in the local elections.

CARLA: Thank you for the many many hours of zoom calls, media interviews in your living rooms and all your other work standing up to the Tory government when there was near-silence from others.

ADRIAN: From us, and from all our party members and supporters, a heartfelt thank you.

CARLA: And thank you to Amelia, our continuing deputy leader, for the brilliant work you're doing for the party, both in the spotlight and behind the scenes. We are so pleased to be working with you – and so looking forward to hearing your speech tomorrow ... 10:30am – don't miss it!

ADRIAN: Coming together again, this is a special moment. With so many of us able to meet in person again it really does feel like there is change in the air – for the Green Party, for the country and hopefully for the planet and all who live on it.

CARLA: We are so proud and so excited to have this opportunity, to be taking up the baton at this critical point, and we are grateful that the party membership is trusting us with this role. We'd like to kick off this conference with a few words of introduction on why this is such an important time for each of us.

So, let me take a moment to introduce Adrian. As many of you will know, he was deputy leader of the party some ten years ago, leader of the councillor group in Norwich which delivered unprecedented electoral success for the city.

He co-wrote our internal Target to Win campaign handbook and was part of the national leadership team that supported Caroline Lucas to become our first MP. I'm delighted to be working with him and so happy that the party gets to benefit from his experience.

ADRIAN: As a sixteen year old, I joined the Green Party because I cared about the challenges facing us even then. I found myself standing to be a councillor at the age of 21, the youngest age then allowed. Thanks to the work of the team we built and the campaign we ran, I was elected first time. Nationally we had a handful of councillors and no MPs. By the time I finished my term as deputy leader, we had 12,000 members and 132 councillors. And of course the party has grown much further since then. Now, I am delighted to be returning to frontline politics at a time when the need for Green policies has never been greater. We know that this decade is the crucial time for bold action on the climate emergency, and for creating a fairer society.

So this time, as co-leader, I have a different role but the same goal – positive change. I want to see more Greens elected at every level of government: Green Mayors, council leaders, Members of the Senedd, and – yes – more Green MPs.

I intend to be part of a team that helps get our second MP elected, and our third and our fourth. And I don't want us to stop until we achieve the representation in Parliament, which opinion polls demonstrate time and time again that people want to see and which we all know this country desperately needs.

We need principled change and the energy to make it happen, which is why I am so pleased to be co-leading with Carla.

Carla is now one of 24 councillors in the largest Green councillor group in the UK.

Proposer of the first Climate Emergency declaration in Europe, she helped commit Bristol to go carbon neutral by 2030, and hundreds of organisations and cities have followed that lead.

Her work as a councillor has helped prevent homelessness and protected some of the poorest households in Bristol from unaffordable council tax rises. She has stood up for everyone – campaigning for renters' and workers' rights as well as using her profile as a prominent LGBTIQ+ councillor to lobby for improved trans healthcare services in the South West.

She cares about people and planet.

I give you Carla, your co-leader, our constituency candidate for Bristol West, and this country's next Green MP

CARLA: I didn't expect to become a politician. It wasn't in my game plan.

I'm an engineer. I came to Bristol 12 years ago to work in the renewable energy industry, and I did so for 6 years, working on the plans for many of the awe-inspiringly massive offshore wind farms that now stand around the UK coastline generating ever more of our electricity.

But it felt like I was only changing the world *one wind turbine at a time*, and I knew the science demanded we go faster. I could see the way the wind was blowing – no pun intended – that the barriers weren't in technology but

in the lack of *political will* from the tired, old political parties.

So I joined the Green Party – the only people in politics who understood what we needed to do. Still with no intention of becoming a politician. I just wanted to help, to donate a bit, deliver a few leaflets, and provide some support behind the scenes. But gradually I got more and more involved, and found more ways I could contribute and, well, one thing led to another.

Why am I telling you this? Because I keep meeting more and more new members who come from all walks of life and want to make a difference. I am here to show you CAN make a difference. And that's vital because we are at a critical moment in our politics. We're at a crossroads.

People have grown tired of choosing the 'least worst' option.

Of being patronised, ignored and told what to think.

We are tired of a Tory government playing divide and rule... Tired of out of touch policies that ride roughshod over people.

Tired of politics which amount to little more than an old boys club serving the interests of its pals.

We're sick and we are tired of this country's leaders looking at covid rates ticking up day after day, yet refusing to mandate masks – or even wear them themselves in Parliament. Leaders who urge people into workplaces they don't need to be in, and leaders who fail to provide proper sick pay for people who need to isolate. This country is sick, and it is tired.

We need better – we demand better.

We see none of it from an official opposition that fails the public, ignores the votes of its own members, and can't take a stand on the biggest issues of the day.

Conference, there has never been a bigger need for the Green Party.

ADRIAN: Conference, in the Green Party we know that doing politics differently is the way to make real change happen.

We know that compassion, listening to others and dialogue is the way forwards. We know it's an essential part of our democracy that politicians are able to meet with the public and we must find a way to make sure they can do so safely. It wouldn't be right to talk about that without acknowledging that it was only a week ago that MP Sir David Amess was brutally attacked and killed while doing his job meeting constituents.

Conference, let's pause a moment;

let's send our love to his family and friends;

let's think about the many people who take on elected roles, and those who support them

Let's think about what we each can do to ensure politics is a space which is respectful and compassionate , a space where people look across the divides for common ground, a space which is accessible to everyone.

Conference, diversity and inclusion are at the core of our principles as Greens. Our party is made up of a diverse group of people – all of whom are genuinely trying to change the world for the better.

We value democracy. We value our members. The people in this room and joining us from their homes – are our most valuable asset.

You are the foundation of this party. We're proud to have been elected by you.

And we're proud to say to everyone out there who isn't a member, that if you share our principles our party can be a home for you too. Many thousands of you have become members in recent months, but if you're still thinking about joining us – do! You too can help shape the party and we can work together, for change, for the common good. You too are welcome.

CARLA: The Green Party is your home as it is ours, and more and more people are joining us every day – we now have over 53,000 members.

Why? because the Green Party is home to the kind of changes that people want – common sense policies that can transform lives for the better.

Green party members – elected and activists alike – are interested in what will benefit people in their day to day lives as well as give us all hope for a better future. We're in touch with what matters.

By contrast the current government is out of touch with what people are experiencing and lags way behind a country crying out for change.

As we struggle to get through this health crisis, the vast majority of us know we can't just go back to "business as usual". The pandemic has exposed the shaky foundations of our economy, the cracks in society and the precarious situation so many find themselves in.

We know that this country is ready for change.

When they are asked, the public is clear that they – like us – want something different.

Just last week a poll showed that there is strong support for the bold measures to tackle the climate emergency.

People want a carbon tax on the most polluting industries.

They want those who fly frequently to pay more for it.

They want proper funding for greening our homes.

They want to ways to eat less meat and dairy day to day.

Only the Green Party has the policies the public is looking for – not only on climate but also on creating a fairer society.

Like public ownership of public services.

A pay rise for key workers.

And a universal basic income to ensure no one is left behind.

We do not accept that inequality is inevitable.

We say that those with the most should pay the most.

It's time to straighten out the tax system once and for all. That means that the richest people, the covid-billionaires and the biggest corporations pay their fair share. That income from wealth is taxed properly

We have a plan – and the public is with us.

We have ambition – and with your support we can fulfil that ambition.

ADRIAN: As Carla was saying, it's clear the government is out of touch with voters.

In Norwich this week I spoke to Alex. She's a mum of three, was furloughed during covid and has since been made redundant. She's lost her universal credit uplift and this week she's heard the news that her heating bill could go up by 30%. She is terrified of what lies ahead this winter for her and her children.

This is the reality for a lot of people. They are frightened. They are struggling with the current situation and they are scared of what's coming. They are desperate for someone to listen and to stand with them.

We listen. We stand with you Alex. So here's a common sense policy aimed directly at supporting people like you.

In the face of hikes to energy bills and rising fuel prices and to ease the burden on household budgets we're calling on Government to extend winter fuel payments with a one-off payment of £320 to every household to get us all through this winter. It's a costed proposal to be funded from a one-off 1% land-value tax on residential landlord properties. This proposal is about keeping households from falling into fuel poverty, it's about keeping people safe. It's about the state responding to market failure. It's about human dignity.

Of course, as Caroline said this week, our drafty housing stock is like a leaky teapot we keep pouring more into. This measure is crucial but not the long term solution. As a country we should have been investing to insulate every home and install renewable energy, to cut carbon emissions and cut energy bills. Our building standards should have been stringent, not penny pinching – set for the people who live in the homes, not the developers who build them for profit and walk away.

Our proposal is what government should be doing to show leadership. It's an issue which shows how climate justice and social justice go hand in hand – something they just don't get. Our plan is a bridge to get us to the real solution of a Green New Deal.

CARLA: And that's part of our challenge.

Talk of a Green New Deal feels irrelevant to a great many people, it just doesn't feel tangible.

It is our job as the Green Party to make it relevant, to make it tangible.

We need to explain what it really means to have a Green future, to people fearful of what the future holds..

We need to explain what a real Green New Deal means.

Not just restoring £20 per week to universal credit, but scrapping the heartless universal credit system with its cruel sanctions, and replacing it with a Universal Basic Income – an unconditional payment, enough for everyone to live with dignity.

It means creating a 'wellbeing economy' – or put another way, it's about saying 'There must be a better way to value people and measure our society than by how much money we make'.

It means less reliance on cars because the public transport system where you live is reliable and cheap.

It means taking climate action in a way that benefits people.

It means win-win.

ADRIAN: Our conference comes at a momentous time: the Glasgow Climate Talks – COP26. Starting in just 9 days time – with the eyes of the world on them. After decades of putting climate at the heart of our politics, finally the whole world is moving towards us.

This is a crucial moment for climate action with leaders from every major polluter on earth together in one place with the chance to change things for the better – forever.

But, we have been here before, of course. All of the hype. The photo-calls. The smiling politicians shaking hands as the chances of a decent deal slip away. This must be the politics of the past.

That can't happen this time – and Britain has a unique chance to show global leadership.

Our government must take climate action out of its box and acknowledge that 10 point plans and grand announcements are pointless while they continue to champion fossil fuels, back airport expansion and pump investment into road building projects.

We think this great country of ours, this great planet of ours – deserves politicians who do what they say. Who listen with care and act with integrity. Politicians who don't try to pull the wool over your eyes.

The Green Party has those politicians – many of them are in this room and many of them will be catching the train to Glasgow next weekend to do everything we can to fight for a successful climate conference. This COP can be a success. It must be.

Keeping the world to that 1.5 degree target is not a nice to have. Every fraction of a degree matters – and every day matters.

One of our key asks from COP26 is for climate accountability. Countries need to be held to account for on and off-shore emissions and they need to be held to account for what they've already emitted with suitable reparations. Rich countries, like us here in the UK, who have contributed hugely to emissions globally, must commit to paying back those countries who emitted less, both for the impact of our emissions and to help build resilience for the future and show compassion for people already facing loss of their homes and livelihoods.

CARLA: Adrian and I spoke a lot during our leadership campaign about compassion. About what it really means, what it looks like to be compassionate.

And to us, the Green Party must represent and model what compassion is in politics.

Outwardly it means things like rethinking Britain's place in the world – and looking very seriously at our approach to foreign policy.

To be compassionate to others means ending, yes ending, the sale of arms to repressive regimes. No ifs, no buts.

It means treating all people as valued human beings – not statistics or inconveniences – treated like unwanted baggage thrown in vans, locked in storage and dumped on planes by Home Office handlers.

Compassion is formed of respect and understanding, of listening and acting; it needs us to value others – and challenges us to do so by understanding others. It drives us to seek best interests, not just our own. It moves us. And for us, compassion must also extend to the natural world and to every living, feeling creature.

ADRIAN: Compassion is also about how we interact with each other within our party.

Our local parties, at their best, are welcoming and inclusive, driven to deliver change, making the most of everyone's talents, respecting the different lived experiences of our members and being stronger for it.

We want to make sure every level of the Green Party looks like that.

We are at our best when we stand together across our differences. And we build that togetherness on the foundation of respecting the diversity of others, no matter race, sex, gender, orientation, age, ability, spiritual belief or background.

We must create spaces where we can engage with one another, learn from each other, listen to each other – from a place of mutual respect, solidarity and community.

We can do that by centering compassion in Green Politics.

CARLA: Leadership of this party is like no other.

We are uniquely democratic – with you, the members, setting our direction, deciding our policy and choosing our leadership.

One member, one vote.

During our campaign and since, we have been asked many times why we wanted to be leaders of this party. So here it is in a nutshell.

We will support the party to get more great greens elected. Our strategy is simple, it is clear. Win elections in every corner of Wales and England, and change our communities and our country forever.

There is nowhere we can't win. From Bristol to Burnley, Sheffield to Suffolk. The communities we serve are rich in their diversity, beautiful in their differences.

We will stand up against this government, provide a real alternative. We won't falter in opposition to the Tories when they push through regressive legislation, shift blame onto migrants and throw already marginalised people under the bus for their own political ends.

We will use COP26 as an opportunity to put the Green New Deal centre stage in debate and push for more from this lacklustre government. Build focus on opposing road building and airport expansion, and call out the lack of a clear plan for greening homes.

We will make sure that the green message is heard in every town, village and city.

In short, we are committed to transforming society to create a brighter future for everyone.

ADRIAN: And making a difference is something Greens do everywhere.

Like Caroline Lucas in Parliament speaking out about the deeply undemocratic elections bill, holding the government to account over their lack of leadership on climate action and championing a wellbeing economy.

Like Jenny Jones and Natalie Bennett pushing for amendments to the Environment Bill in the House of Lords so that the measures it contains are

enforceable and will actually help to protect our health and the natural world around us.

In Green-led Brighton and Hove – revolutionising the way homelessness is tackled.

In Herefordshire – scrapping a 200 million pound bypass in favour of investment in walking and cycling routes and a new bus strategy.

In the City of York – bringing partners together to form a climate commission.

In Solihull, successfully campaigning to get more money in the pockets of the least well off by keeping council tax benefit as high as possible.

In London – our three Assembly members securing millions in funding for youth services.

Greens in the room are making change happen and there are more and more of us.

We're frequently third in the opinion polls across England.

And our sister parties in Finland, Ireland, New Zealand and hopefully soon Germany, are *in Government!*

And even closer to home we're so proud to see our colleagues in the Scottish Greens taking up posts in government and delivering on bold Green policies.

We – and they – are showing what it means to have Greens in the room – at the table – changing things for the better.

We must keep building on this.

Be bolder and clearer and more ambitious.

The chance is there for the taking and with your help conference, we will take it.

CARLA: Conference – this is it.

ADRIAN: The run up to the next general election – and every set of local elections between now and then – are absolutely crucial.

CARLA: The stakes could not be higher.

ADRIAN: A chance, a last chance, for serious climate action.

CARLA: A chance post-pandemic to remake our country as a place where no-one struggles to keep warm or put food on the table

ADRIAN: A chance to guarantee dignity.

We have the answers.

We have the policies.

We can make our politics compassionate.

CARLA: Conference, together as a party we – and only we – have what it takes.

Thank you, and enjoy the next days together.

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