

Green Party co-leader Sian Berry's speech to Spring Conference 2021



5 March 2021

Introduction by Green Party co-leader Jonathan Bartley

Welcome to conference.

Whether this is the latest of many Green Party events you've been to or you're one of the new members joining us for the very first time, we're delighted to have you here.

The Green Party is unique. It's our members that truly shape the party, going through the democratic process here at conference to vote on policy, and then through our network of dedicated elected volunteers forging our path ahead.

Out in the field it is our Councillors, our local leaders who are building networks, making the tough decisions and standing with their communities in these most difficult of times.

In Brighton and Hove we have Greens leading their council, setting the national agenda over issues like school closures during the pandemic, and putting in place ambitious plans to transform homes across the area for the benefit of people and planet.

In Sheffield and Hereford Greens are leading the way on shaping the transport of the future – schemes to reduce traffic, encourage public transport use and make cycling safer.

Successful pushes for UBI trials have been made by Greens in Norwich, Islington and more.

Greens are making an impact, making change, doing politics differently.

This is a big year for the party, for the country. COP is on the horizon, the Green Recovery is being talked about in homes and TV studios across the

world, and a universal basic income is no longer considered a “radical” concept.

We are on the cusp of a Green Future as we approach local, Senedd and numerous Mayoral elections this Spring.

And nowhere is this more true than in London.

So I’m proud to hand over now to your candidate for Green Mayor of London – my co-leader and friend, Sian Berry.

Sian Berry, Green Party co-leader and Mayor of London candidate, keynote speech

Good afternoon Conference.

Next time, I hope we will all be back together in person. And thank you, members, for continuing to inspire me every day.

Doing what I want to talk to you about today, which is building a better world from the ground up and getting closer to power.

But first, some advice for our current Government:

Boris Johnson: you don’t protect the future by dodging the truth, ignoring the warnings and leaving every important public health decision until it’s too late to have its full effect.

Matt Hancock: you don’t protect the future by leaving our most exposed key workers – teachers, bus drivers, police officers and shop workers – at work without vaccines.

And Rishi Sunak: you don’t build a better future by forgetting those who have kept the country going this past year.

By ignoring nurses who need a pay rise.

By leaving councils in debt, unable to pay for the step change in social care that we all need in place.

By leaving renters with no new help, in arrears debt and fearing for their homes.

And the country can’t hold its head up – and host the world’s climate summit if we don’t put our own house in order now.

You should be ashamed of freezing fuel duty – our only real carbon tax – while putting up rail fares again.

Ashamed of ignoring the huge campaign to cut VAT on refurbishment for warmer, greener homes.

Chancellor, you had a chance to show global leadership this week, and build the green recovery everyone is crying out for, but you failed that test.

Now...

This is Spring Conference, and it feels like Spring is coming – in more ways than one. Because Spring is the time for new beginnings.

Around the world, after such a long period of darkness, we can see the gathering light of a new dawn. We can feel – after such a long time – some hope.

Vaccines offer hope we could be starting to put the worst of the pandemic behind us.

There is hope in the victory of Biden over Trump in the United States.

And hope in the momentum building on the ground towards the vital COP this year – the UN climate change conference of the parties – to plan bigger and better international action.

But let us not forget – as Greens, we know that real change doesn't get handed down simply from new lofty leaders.

Real change comes from the bottom up.

Real change is delivered by... people.

It happens where we live.

Over the last long twelve months, we've seen what's possible when we work together from the ground up.

During the worst of the emergency, local communities came together to fill the gaps, work with their neighbours and stand by the people who were struggling in isolation.

Finding food for children. Things that the Government should have been doing but was failing at. The people stepped up.

And it's our job as Greens to take that spirit, that strength on the ground and make sure the people gain real power.

We need a new start this spring.

We need new plans.

Plans made by the right people.

And decisions made by the people those decisions affect, at the most local level possible.

We are heading towards one of the biggest sets of elections in our party's history.

Local elections which can put power back into the hands of local people, when Greens take their seats as councillors, running more councils, and as Green Mayors.

Think about what that could mean.

And I am so proud of all my fellow Mayor candidates, ready to remake our cities, and show the world the way forward,

From Melanie Horrocks in Manchester, to Steve Caudwell in the West Midlands, the incredible Andrew Cooper in West Yorkshire, and Sandy Hore-Ruthven in Bristol, we're ready – as candidates for Mayor to continue the Green wave.

And we know it can happen. Look across the sea to elsewhere in Europe.

In France alone, there are fifty Green Mayors in towns and cities of all shapes and sizes.

There's over a dozen different major European cities with Green Mayors.

And there's even more than that around the world, from Australia to Japan.

I sat down to talk with three of these Green Mayors earlier this year – the German Green Mayor of Wuppertal, the Dutch Green Mayor of Winterswijk, the Australian Green Mayor of Yarra.

We discussed what they've achieved in office, and what makes them proud to be Green.

And I came away from that conversation with more hope that we can win, that we can elect Green Mayors here too.

Our London campaign for Mayor and Assembly has been making me so happy.

We have had an incredible response to the policies and ideas our brilliant team has launched so far – not just from Londoners but from people right across the country.

It shows how a spark of an idea in London can light up the grey cells anywhere – people are saying “we can have these ideas too”

We started with our plans to deprioritise the policing of cannabis, to build an anti-racist city, and make London an exemplary trans-inclusive city.

We have put forward designs for the best ever bus stops, announced an Elders Champion, set a target for zero road deaths, promised a London Living Wage of £14 an hour, so that people earn what they need to get by.

And we set out our plans for People's Land Commission, and found immediate new funding for 2,000 key worker homes in the amendment Caroline Russell and I put to the Mayor's budget.

And, just this week, Caroline and I worked together again – in the Assembly and the Economy Committee, and cross-party – to push the Assembly to back

trials of a Universal Basic Income.

Making London the biggest city in the world to do this yet.

And there's more.

Coming up, every week until May we'll have more and more of these good ideas to show you.

Ideas that have come from Londoners, campaigners and Greens who are thinking practically and planning for the new start we need.

We've got fresh thinking for housing, a clear plan to keep London moving, a mission to transform our economy, action for a safe and healthy city, plans to create the greenest city in the world, with no third runway, and no Silvertown tunnel to make things worse.

And our Green values will shine through all of this.

I know, as Mayor, I have a duty to respect everyone's rights, and I promise to share my power with every Londoner. So that we can all play our part in the recovery.

And this is even more important for young Londoners who, unlike in Scotland and Wales, cannot vote at 16 for a Green Mayor.

But a Green Mayor will respect their rights and their power too. Together, we will put a spirit of youth in everything we do.

Because, London is ready for a new chapter.

A bright new day, a real spring clean.

A clean slate, and a clean sheet

A new start, a new leaf, new life.

Bright Green ideas for our new city.

And today, conference, I've also got a simple message for you to pass on to anyone who isn't already a member of the Green Party:

Join us today!

We stand for the principle of freedom of movement, peace, and the European ideals.

We stand for a just transition in acting on the climate.

We stand with every key worker, every teacher, every vital worker who has put themselves at risk in the pandemic, many on poverty pay.

We stand with every migrant, everyone who has lost their job.

And every young person who wants to be part of fixing their future with us.

Conference, across all our towns and cities, we are in the strongest position in Green Party history.

We are growing our membership month on month. We are taking seats off all parties, and we are winning support from across the political spectrum.

We are surging in the polls. Power is closer to us than we think.

Thank you.

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