

Deputy leader speech to Spring conference 2022



5 March 2022

This is Amelia Womack's speech to Spring conference on 4th March 2022. View the speech [here](#).

If you can believe it this is my sixteenth speech to our Green Party conference. The first was in Birmingham in 2014, and was the first time I had given a speech to such a large audience. I was so overwhelmed by the standing ovation I received, I had to hold back on the tears a little.

Since that moment we have had three general elections, seven sets of council elections, two Senedd elections, a European election and an EU referendum. If you'd told me back then that during my time as deputy leader I would see Donald Trump elected president and Boris Johnson Prime Minister and that we'd leave the EU then I wouldn't have believed such things were possible.

Over those eight years, we have experienced some highs for the party and some real lows for the country. Throughout it all, the Greens have constantly been setting the agenda and from being the party of 16,000 members that we were when I was first elected, we are now 51,000 strong and a growing force across the country.

While oceans and global temperatures have risen, we have raised the alarm bell – and people have heard our call. Not just because of the almost daily climate catastrophes – floods, wildfires, extreme weather – but because people are seeing that the whole system is rigged – against ordinary people and against the natural world.

Since I was first elected, politics itself has evolved. It's changed as a whole new generation of young people work to save our futures through the School Strikes. Capitalism has been challenged by the people. The free market has failed. Powerful greens such as Anne Power and Tina Rothery have stood by roadsides to beat fracking companies and they have won.

All generations have been coming together to expose how the deep inequality scarring our country is blighting people's lives.

We have come so far at exposing what's broken, what needs to change and how we can change it, and how we can work towards a vision for the future to be proud of. But we still have a long way to go.

When people look back across the eight years that I have worked as your deputy leader, I hope they'll say it was a time defined by hard work, tens of thousands of train miles, winning elections and kindness.

On women's rights, I feel so proud that I've fought to make misogyny a hate crime, to ensure that we're tackling the root causes of the inequalities that women face; worked to counter the cruel cuts delivered by a coalition government and cemented by Conservative Prime Minister after Conservative Prime Minister.

I have worked to connect the links of how nature not only protects us through wellbeing and connection to green spaces, but also through the ecological services it provides to protect us from flooding and other risks to our communities. Whether that was working with the Environment Agency to institutionalise natural flood management into their strategies, or lobbying Micheal Gove on beaver reintroduction, which he finally did after my letter to him.

I teamed up with musicians, artists and unions during the Covid lockdown to call for a universal basic income for everyone, by showing why it would make a difference to the arts, and to music venues such as this one!

I have been so proud to be part of a surging Green Party and to stand shoulder to shoulder with each and every one of you who are working to prove that we need something different, and that only the Greens have the vision to deliver the change we so desperately need.

It is however, with a real mix of emotions, that today I announce that I won't be taking these next steps on that journey with you as your deputy leader. I won't be restanding for this post in this summer's elections. I look forward to passing on the baton to someone who equally has a passion in their heart, and a fire in their belly to fight for a better future, and to continue to build the party from strength to strength.

I've always said that my ultimate ambition for the party is to be in government, and I won't be moving away and will be ensuring that I do my bit to help us towards that goal.

I must confess that I wish that I had kept a tally of every action day that I have been to, every door that I have knocked on, every mile I have travelled. I feel like it would be one way to quantify how much I care about all of you and how much I care about winning Green councillors in your communities. One thing I could never quantify though is the enormous privilege it's been to have spent time with you on doorsteps – the place where all politicians should prioritise being.

It's on doorsteps that you genuinely find out what is important to your communities, but also discover some less expected things. I will never forget how great I was at keeping eye contact when a naked man answered the door on a snowy day in Richmond; a very acrobatic St Bernard throwing itself at the glass of the door repeatedly while canvassing in Norwich; or David Francis attending his first ever action day with me in 2014 before going on to become the Green Party's first ever councillor in South Tyneside a few years later.

However, I am not leaving just yet, and I'm keen to ensure that the next 6 months are the ones that have the biggest impact, because, my gosh, politics

needs shaking up right now.

The last eight years have seen so much change, and so much has changed in the last six months.

It seems like such a long time ago we were free from the pandemic restrictions and finally able to see each other face to face in Birmingham last Autumn.

So much has happened since then, it almost feels like a distant memory.

Just over 100 days ago the UK hosted the UN Climate talks. I was there. I saw the grandstanding from governments, the denial, the time wasting and the bare faced lying.

But away from the closed doors and panels of politicians I found what I was looking for at COP: hope."

I will always remember an indigenous woman from Ecuador called Veronica Inmunda catching up with her President outside the venue. Her ask to him was simple: "Will you commit to ending oil extraction in my home?" Her home was of course the Amazon rainforest. The oil they were extracting was from one of the most pristine habitats in the world. That oil was going to last the planet just two weeks, but we would lose an ecosystem that took thousands of years to create.

It feels like his answer should be obvious! At this COP where the priorities were carbon reduction and protecting the rainforest, ending work on this site seems like such an easy win. But we all know that wasn't what happened. He was unable to commit, and when I heard from her she believed that the project would still go ahead.

A few days later at the Youth Strike for climate, young indigenous people sang about their futures after describing how generations of their families fought for the forest, how many of them have been murdered and how it is now falling on their shoulders to protect their communities.

This is a stark reminder that climate justice IS social justice and that social justice IS climate justice.

Policies – globally and here in Wales and England – must be integrated to benefit both people and the natural world because if they don't they just aren't sustainable for our future.

And the rights of the oppressed must be prioritised and heard to ensure that our future works for everyone.

Another situation that we long feared has become a reality – an invasion of Ukraine by Russia has now happened. The images we have seen on our TV screens are simply the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the tragedy of war. I want to send my solidarity to everyone in and fleeing Ukraine right now.

In an emergency meeting with our European Green leaders to discuss our

collective response to the invasion, I heard the reality of war from our elected representatives across Europe. From Germany we heard that “peace has no price tag” from our Greens in Government. From Poland our elected Green MP’s had to rush off as they met refugees from the train and ensured they had food and shelter. Elected councillors in Ukraine did not attend the meeting, but sent a statement saying that they feared they may not be alive tomorrow.

It’s days like this when we know that our mission, to ensure that nuclear weapons are consigned to the history books, needs to become reality. That international cooperation is the foundation for peace and that as a country we must allow refugees to enter the UK and to safety.

It’s during times like these that our policies are so important. It is The Green Party that provides the alternative and the principles needed for a better tomorrow.

This government and the opposition has failed at every hurdle. So today I am calling on them both. And to you Boris Johnson and to you Keir Starmer: open the doors and waive the visas, open safe and authorised routes to those fleeing war. Deliver a joined up resettlement program for refugees, with funding for councils and support services that match the generosity of our European neighbours.

It feels like a distant memory hearing Boris Johnson promise that the words “build back better” would shape his response to the pandemic. The phrase put a frame to the popular outpouring of hope that the failures and inequalities of our rigged system could be replaced with something new; something that works for us all. But of course, those were empty promises.

Because with Boris Johnson and his government, the priority has always been their tried and failed business as usual. We now know that while we stayed home to protect the NHS and defeat the virus, 10 Downing Street was host to a busy calendar of drinks parties – because for Boris and his cabinet, the idea that the rules might actually apply to them – simply didn’t occur.

Time and time again, we’ve seen that business as usual is what matters to this government – whether that’s wine time Fridays at number 10 or continuing profits for the cabinet’s billionaire mates.

But the party’s over. People across the country are crying out for change.

For me, the best way to make that change – to genuinely build back better – is through a Green New Deal. Anything short of that is a failure for people who are desperate for secure and future proofed work, for people whose energy bills are forcing them into fuel poverty, those homes disappearing into flood water, the homes leaking heat, the energy crisis caused by geopolitics, for jobs, for nature, for trans people, for people of colour, disabled people, women, LGBTIQ people, younger people, older people... for a future that we’d all be safe to live in where our needs are met.

A fundamental part of any Green New Deal must be that the greenest option is, simply put, the cheapest and easiest option.

Far too often the most damaging and polluting is the default option as a result of cost or convenience. From plastic bottles to the obsolescence of mobile phones, we are constantly working in a broken system.

So, how do we help people get over our throwaway culture that we've all got so used to?

We need a fundamental shift in policy to enact this Green New Deal, piece by piece. Let's start by banning all non-essential single use plastics. We can't just rely on taxing consumer behaviour. Ending VAT on all home repairs – there's no VAT on new builds, so why do we demand it on repairs? Or a frequent flyer levy to tax those polluting our skies the most.

Change is inevitable, but to secure the positive change we so desperately need, it needs to be fought for.

So let's keep going, let's keep making change on doorsteps, in ballot boxes, through petitioning and campaigning, through holding the government and the opposition to account, as well as those elected at the local level.

We have achieved so much in the last eight years, and it's the wins that we've celebrated together as a party will inspire me for a lifetime.

Greens, we are changing the world – and we are **just* *getting* *started**.

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[Amelia Womack demands waiving of visas for Ukrainian refugees in final conference speech as deputy leader](#)



5 March 2022

- **Amelia Womack calls for a joined-up resettlement program for refugees, with funding for councils and support services**
- **Final speech to Green Party Conference as deputy leader will reiterate that the Green Party provides alternatives to the main parties.**

- **Womack: “This government and opposition has failed at every hurdle, so today I am calling on them both to open the doors and waive the visas”.**

Green Party Deputy Leader Amelia Womack will use her last speech in the role to her party’s conference today to call for the government to ensure that Ukrainian refugees are able to find safety in the UK.

Addressing party members, Womack will call for the UK to match the generosity of European neighbours by waiving visa requirements for refugees fleeing Ukraine.

Womack will support the calls from Green council leaders such as in Brighton and Hove and Lewes to properly fund local councils to facilitate refugee resettlement and support programmes. Earlier this week, Deputy Leader of Brighton and Hove council Hannah Clare warned that unless more funding is forthcoming from the Government, support services, including those provided by voluntary sector organisations, will not be able to cope. [1]

Amelia Womack will highlight the dangerous gaps in policy that are not being addressed by either of the main parties, after the Labour Party refused to support open routes for refugees to reach the UK. [2]

Womack will say: “As a country we must allow refugees to enter the UK and to safety. This government and opposition has failed at every hurdle, so today I am calling on them both – to you Boris Johnson and to you Keir Starmer – open the doors and waive the visas, open safe and authorised routes to those fleeing war.”

Womack will urge the government to “deliver a joined up resettlement program for refugees, with funding for councils and support services that matches the generosity of our European neighbours.”

Having served for 8 years as the party’s deputy leader, Womack will not stand for re-election as the party’s rules do not allow an individual to serve more than that time in a leadership role. Womack will use her speech to celebrate the successes the party has achieved in her time, including winning council seats and European elections across the country.

She will say: “Over those eight years, we have experienced some highs for the party and for the country, and some real lows. Throughout it all, the Greens have constantly been setting the agenda and from being the party of 16,000 members that we were when I was first elected we are now 51,000 strong and a growing force across the country.

“While oceans and global temperatures have risen, we have raised the alarm – and people have heard our call. Not just because of the almost daily climate catastrophes – floods, wildfires, extreme weather – but because people are seeing that the whole system is rigged against ordinary people and against the natural world. All generations have been coming together to expose how the deep inequality scarring our country is blighting people’s lives.”

Notes

1. <https://www.greenparty.org.uk/news/2022/03/02/local-councils-prevented-by-government-from-helping-ukrainian-refugees,-warn-greens/>
2. <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/labour-ukraine-refugees-welcome-stammer-b2026527.html>

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[Green Party conference condemns invasion of Ukraine and calls for tougher sanctions](#)



4 March 2022

- **Members at Spring Conference vote overwhelmingly to support emergency motion deploring Putin's invasion of Ukraine**
- **Motion wants to see extension of sanctions to include oil and gas**
- **Leader: "People across the world have been shocked to see such horrific images emerge from a country where millions of innocent civilians are now having to flee or risk their lives being put in danger"**

The Green Party has condemned Putin's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and called for sanctions to include a comprehensive export and import ban, including oil and gas, after an emergency motion was overwhelmingly passed at its Spring Conference today.

The motion, which was passed during the opening plenary of the party's conference, calls on the UK government to waive visa requirements for refugees of all nationalities fleeing Ukraine and to provide them with safe routes to sanctuary.

Green Party co-leader Carla Denyer said:

"The abhorrent and unprovoked attacks we have seen in Ukraine must be condemned in the strongest possible terms. People across the world have been shocked to see such horrific images emerge from a country where millions of innocent civilians are now having to flee or risk their lives being put in

danger.

“The least we can do is open our doors to all those who are seeking refuge from this horrific invasion.

“At the same time, the UK government must recognise that it is Europe’s addiction to fossil fuels that has been one of the key drivers of our reluctance to challenge the abuses of the Putin regime. We must do everything we can to reduce our reliance on this energy and massively ramp up our installation of renewable energy sources before next winter.”

The motion proposer, Michal Chantkowski, Deputy Convenor of the Green Party’s International Committee, who is of Polish heritage, said:

“In the face of Vladimir Putin’s aggressive behaviour on the international stage, the UK Government must put an end to Kremlin-linked interference in British politics and must, as a matter of priority, release the full Russia Report and carefully consider its findings, including the impact of Russian interference on the 2016 referendum on EU membership.”

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[Government energy loans will increase household fuel debt to £7.2bn, Green co-leaders warn](#)



4 March 2022

- Co-leaders Carla Denyer and Adrian Ramsay reveal cost of government scheme to households as part of keynote speech to Spring Conference 2022
- Green Party would use fossil fuel profits to ease energy crisis for all by restoring £20 uplift and doubling it £40, as well as Winter Fuel Payment for all
- Ramsay: “As millions of people are left not knowing how they’re going to afford to get through the year, the government’s response is to simply burden them with more debt”
- Denyer: “It is time the government implements a ‘Dirty Profits Tax’ on the excessive profits from UK oil and gas extraction, and uses this money to provide proper support for every household, and particularly those who need it most”

The Green Party co-leaders will today [Friday 4 April] urge the government to

cancel its proposed energy loan scheme which will burden households with £7.2 billion debt to energy companies, in a keynote speech to the party's 2022 Spring Conference.

Using new figures, Carla Denyer and Adrian Ramsay will reveal that the government's loan scheme to help people through the energy crisis will increase fuel debt by 338% across households in Great Britain [1]. They will call on the government to use a tax on the profits of fossil fuel companies to restore the £20 Universal Credit uplift and double it to £40, as well as reiterating their call for a £320 winter fuel payment for all.

Adrian Ramsay will say:

"As millions of people are left not knowing how they're going to afford to get through the year, the government's response is to simply burden them with more debt. All in a bid to protect the interests of the fossil fuel industry.

"This is not just reckless, it is a cruel and dangerous approach which puts the interests of polluting big business ahead of the basic needs of households up and down the country."

Carla Denyer will say:

"That's why today the Green party is calling for this energy loan scheme to be cancelled – and instead for the government to provide households with true support – grants, not loans – in line with our own five point plan. All of this funded by a tax on dirty fossil fuel profits.

"This would include a raft of measures such restoring the £20 Universal Credit uplift and doubling it to £40, extending a Winter Fuel Payment of £320 to all, and providing an emergency grant to homeowners, landlords and councils to fund immediate insulation improvements to those at risk of fuel poverty.

"It is time the government implements a 'Dirty Profits Tax' on the excessive profits from UK oil and gas extraction, and uses this money to provide proper support for every household, and particularly those who need it most."

Latest Ofgem figures suggest total current household debt to energy companies is £1.6bn. The Conservative government's plan to offer £200 to households, to be paid back in subsequent years, will create £5.6bn new fuel debt, making a total of £7.2bn debt.

In the midst of a cost of living crisis, the Green leaders have said it is unacceptable for government policy to be adding to people's burden of debt, particularly for those that are least able to pay it back.

They have now urged the government to implement the Green Party's five point plan to tackle the rising energy costs crisis, which would:

1 – Restore the £20 uplift to Universal Credit and double it to £40

2 – Extend winter fuel payments to all by providing each household with an

additional £320 to help them pay for spiralling energy costs and avoid fuel poverty

3 – Make the polluters pay by introducing an emergency Dirty Profits Tax on North Sea oil and gas company profits [2] and a longer-term policy of a carbon tax

4 – Provide an emergency grant to homeowners, landlords and councils to fund immediate insulation improvements to those at risk of fuel poverty

5 – Invest in domestic energy security by massively ramping up onshore and offshore wind and solar and move the green levies from electricity to gas bills

Adrian Ramsay will say:

“Our proposal is an emergency measure made necessary because of decades of delay in getting to grips with the climate crisis. People need the money now.

“But this is also a moment to say ‘enough is enough’. We do not have to live this way. A truly Green society would not be facing this crisis – and with action now we can make sure we don’t have to face it again.

“Building and upgrading to the kind of homes that people really want to live in isn’t a priority for our government because while people freeze in their homes, this government is warm and cosy in bed with dirty energy companies who are making record profits from the misery of millions.

“We say – let’s put people first. Let’s aspire to a future where energy bills are virtually non-existent.”

ENDS

Notes

1

Using [latest Ofgem figures](#), the Green Party calculates that the total current household debt to energy companies is £1.659 billion.

Total number of households in debt

Electricity – 1.6m

Gas – 1.3m

Average debt where there is a repayment arrangement

Elec (847k households): £430

Gas (662k households): £352

Average debt where there is no repayment arrangement

Elec (778k households): £834

Gas (628k households): £660

Total current debt: £1.659bn

Electricity: £1.012bn (£364m with repayment plan + £648m with no plan)

Gas: £647m (£233m with plan + £414m with no plan)

[The Conservative government's plan to offer £200 to every household](#), to be paid back in subsequent years, will create a total of £5.6bn new fuel debt. This combined with the £1.6bn of current debt will create a total of £7.2bn – a 338% increase in fuel debt across all households.

2

This will be via change to [Supplementary Charge](#) or rates for [Ring Fence Corporation Tax](#) which covers only domestic oil and gas profits, however estimates of yield are conservative since the corporation tax yield from oil and gas companies general profits will also be higher due to their higher profits

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[Local councils prevented by government from helping Ukrainian refugees, warn Greens](#)



2 March 2022

Local councils who want to help Ukrainian refugees are being prevented from doing so by the Government's failure to adequately fund support services, the Green Party has warned.

Green Party councillors in Brighton and Hove and in Lewes District Council say they are desperate to provide refuge for Ukrainians fleeing the Russian invasion but unless the Government provides funding for affordable housing and resettlement of refugees then those seeking asylum will be forced to live in unacceptable conditions.

The Government is offering to take in 200,000 people fleeing Ukraine [1], but the Greens warn that there could be a repeat of the catastrophic handling of

the Afghan refugee crisis last year. [2]

The Greens have repeatedly warned over the last year that refugees and asylum seekers, including children, are being accommodated in overcrowded and unsuitable hotels due to the lack of appropriate housing. [3] They have also warned that the lack of funding for fostering and children's services is leaving children without the support they need to recover from trauma.

The Green Party is calling on the Government to provide the funding that is needed for local councils to resettle refugees in secure accommodation where they can restart their lives.

Green Party Migration and Refugee Support Spokesperson Benali Hamdache said, "Councils all over the country are ready to step up for Ukrainian refugees, just like they were for Afghan refugees. But the biggest barrier is this Conservative government.

"We need to match the generosity of our European neighbours by waiving visa requirements for refugees fleeing war and we need money unlocked to provide decent accommodation and adequately fund support services. Councils with support can provide housing by repurposing empty homes, partnering with private landlords and building affordable new homes."

Green Deputy Leader of Brighton and Hove Council and lead member for children's services Hannah Clare said, "The Conservative government seems to have no conception of the urgency or the scale of what is needed to save lives now. Councils are doing all they can to support the most vulnerable, including those who are now fleeing the horrific events in Ukraine.

"But we are stretched to breaking point and unless the Government steps up its funding, support services including those provided by voluntary sector organisations will not be able to cope.

"As a City of Sanctuary, we proudly welcome refugees and continue to commit to doing all we can to help those fleeing conflict and persecution. The Government's chaotic response is insufficient."

Green Leader of Lewes District Council Zoe Nicholson said, "Councils are giving all they can to help people in desperate situations, but unless the government ensures that councils have the resources to help then refugees will be left stranded and without support. Commitments to take in more refugees have to be backed with the support services that these people need."

Notes

1

<https://uk.news.yahoo.com/uk-could-over-200-000-130221772.html>

2

<https://www.greenparty.org.uk/news/2021/08/18/green-party-warns-government%E2%80%99s-pledge-to-resettle-afghan-refugees-is-%E2%80%9Cempty-pr%E2%80%9D/>

<https://www.greenparty.org.uk/news/2021/08/17/green-party-urges-local-authorities-to-take-in-fair-share-of-child-refugees/>

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