

May 2025

# Green Foundations

## Liberal Democrats and the environment

Chris Annous



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## About More in Common

More in Common is a think tank and research agency working to bridge the gap between policy makers and the public and helping people in Westminster to understand those voters who feel ignored or overlooked by those in power. Our British Seven segmentation provides a unique lens at understanding what the public think and why. We've published groundbreaking reports on a range of issues from climate and refugees to culture wars to crime. We are a full-service research agency offering polling and focus group research and are members of the British Polling Council.

This research was conducted in spring 2025. Full methodological information can be found at the end of the report.

## Foreword

Provided by Pippa Heylings MP – Board member of Liberals and Democrats for Nature and Climate (LDNC) and Liberal Democrat Energy Security and Net Zero Spokesperson

*“We believe that each generation is responsible for the fate of our planet and, by safeguarding the balance of nature and the environment, for the long term continuity of life in all its forms”.*

Enshrined in the opening paragraph of our Constitution’s preamble, nature and the environment has always been part of our DNA and at the heart of what Liberal Democrats stand for.

What’s more, the 2024 General Election showed that the environment is not just central to our values – it’s an issue the Liberal Democrats can win big on, too. Across the country, voters were appalled by the scale of sewage spills polluting local rivers and coastlines and turned to the Liberal Democrats in the hope of something better.

This research by More in Common shows that from seats in the Blue Wall to the South West the environment is an issue that Liberal Democrat voters are deeply concerned about. In fact it’s in the top three of Liberal Democrat voters’ concerns. It shows that with a strong and distinctive environmental voice, the Liberal Democrats can build a winning coalition by confidently championing action for climate and nature.

Despite the new government promising change, More in Common’s research highlights that the public have noticed little difference in environmental action. People are concerned about both rhetoric and policy that appears to pit economic growth against conserving nature. Confidence is low. Few believe the current government is doing a good job on climate change, protecting nature, or tackling sewage pollution. They fear the government will row back further in the face of new political attacks on renewables and climate action.

The Liberal Democrats have the chance to offer a serious, constructive and hopeful opposition to the government on an issue our voters care deeply about.

As the ‘nature and climate’ opposition, we can use this Parliament to push for fines levied on polluting water companies to be ringfenced to fund local restoration of waterways – rather than being swallowed by the Treasury. We can defend farmers from further cuts to farm payments and champion the case for an extra £1 billion more each year in nature-friendly farming.

Through the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, we can demand the protection of local green spaces and nature against the rollback of environmental protections, while pushing for higher housing standards: putting solar panels on every roof and heat pumps in all new homes, together with swift bricks and bat boxes. And we must amplify the powerful and

positive case that the UK can be a global leader in the green industries of the future—delivering jobs, warmer homes, lower energy bills, real benefits for local communities, and greater energy security in an unstable world.

So many people are now looking to the Liberal Democrats to be the hopeful, credible voice on the environment and climate change. Whether it's the need for clean water, local green spaces, warm homes, or clean, community-driven energy; or whether it's dealing with flooding, heat waves and wildfires, we can offer real solutions to the national challenges people are concerned about and show that we care for local communities.

## Executive Summary

As part of the launch of Liberals and Democrats for Nature and Climate, More in Common was commissioned to undertake extensive quantitative and qualitative research with Liberal Democrat voters to understand their attitudes on environmental issues and explore the role that environmental campaigning could play for the Liberal Democrats as they aim to retain and grow their support on the back of their historic 2024 General Election result.

This report draws on nationally representative polling of 2,146 Britons, more than 200 of whom voted Lib Dem and further polling of more than 500 Lib Dem voters, creating a cumulative sample of 775 people who voted Liberal Democrat last July. We also held two focus groups in constituencies emblematic of the Liberal Democrats' voter coalition, digging more deeply into the environmental attitudes of Lib Dem voters in Wokingham (the most affluent constituency in England and an archetypal Blue Wall constituency) and North Cornwall (the third most deprived constituency held by the Liberal Democrats and a constituency symbolic of the party's traditional heartlands). The research tested the extent to which Liberal Democrats care about the environment, the issues that are driving their environmental concerns and priorities as well as their perception of the Liberal Democrats' performance on environmental issues.

Several key insights emerged from the research:

Liberal Democrat voters are significantly more concerned about environmental issues than the British public as a whole - the proportion of Liberal Democrat voters selecting climate change and the environment as one of the top three issues facing Britain is nearly double the overall public.

Concerns about challenges to the environment and nature at the local level play a particularly important role in shaping the environmental attitudes of Liberal Democrat voters.

A desire for strong action on climate and the environment is a key reason why many Liberal Democrats voted for the party at the last election.

Liberal Democrat voters want and expect strong action both from the government and their local MP to protect the environment.

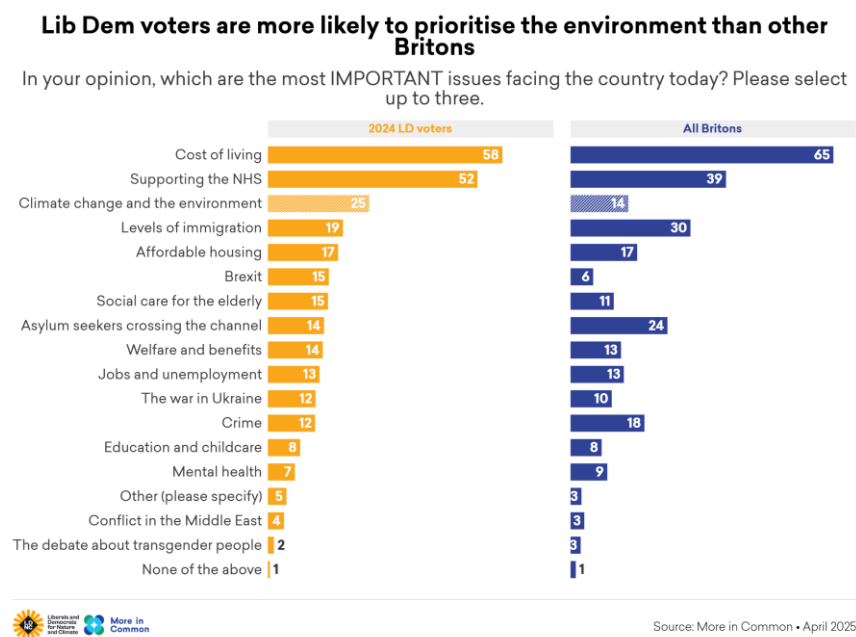
Public perceptions of the Conservative and Labour Governments' record on the environment are poor but awareness of the Liberal Democrat environmental offer is also low, even among Liberal Democrat voters, restricting the party's ability to benefit from the negative perception of the current and previous government.

To address this, the Liberal Democrats will need to build a more distinctive offer on nature and climate issues by creating clear points of differences between themselves and

the Labour Government. Of the Liberal Democrats' current environmental policies, the ring-fencing of water company fines for nature improvements and the tightening of energy efficiency standards on new build homes through the mandatory installation of solar panels and heat pumps command the greatest public support, indicating they could be effective points of differentiation for the party.

## Liberal Democrat voters' approach to the environment

Liberal Democrat voters care deeply about climate and the environment and this is a key distinguishing characteristic of the coalition of voters the party built at the General Election. A quarter (25 percent) of Liberal Democrat voters say climate change and the environment is one of the top issues facing the country - almost twice the proportion of the public as a whole. This makes the environment the third most important issue for Liberal Democrat voters, behind only the cost of living and the NHS.



This concern for the environment in the polling was also reflected more broadly in our focus group conversations. Pride in their local environment and concern that it is not being sufficiently protected ran through both our discussions in Wokingham and North Cornwall. Participants talked of the importance of local green spaces and rivers and seas (in Cornwall), as a source of both immense pride and current concern. Indeed, it was clear that while they held concerns about climate change and the environment at a more global level, their environmental concerns were first and foremost being driven by worries over local green spaces, wildlife and water sources.

Our participants also spoke about their disappointment that while they were trying to do their bit to look after the environment in their local areas, major polluters had not. They had grown frustrated at the lack of action from the major polluters that threaten the beauty and safety of their local nature and environment. They were also frustrated with the government who they perceived as failing to adequately regulate and penalise these polluters.

*I think the environment needs protecting at all costs, particularly in our area because we've had such a sewage problem.*

Claire, Bookkeeper, North Cornwall

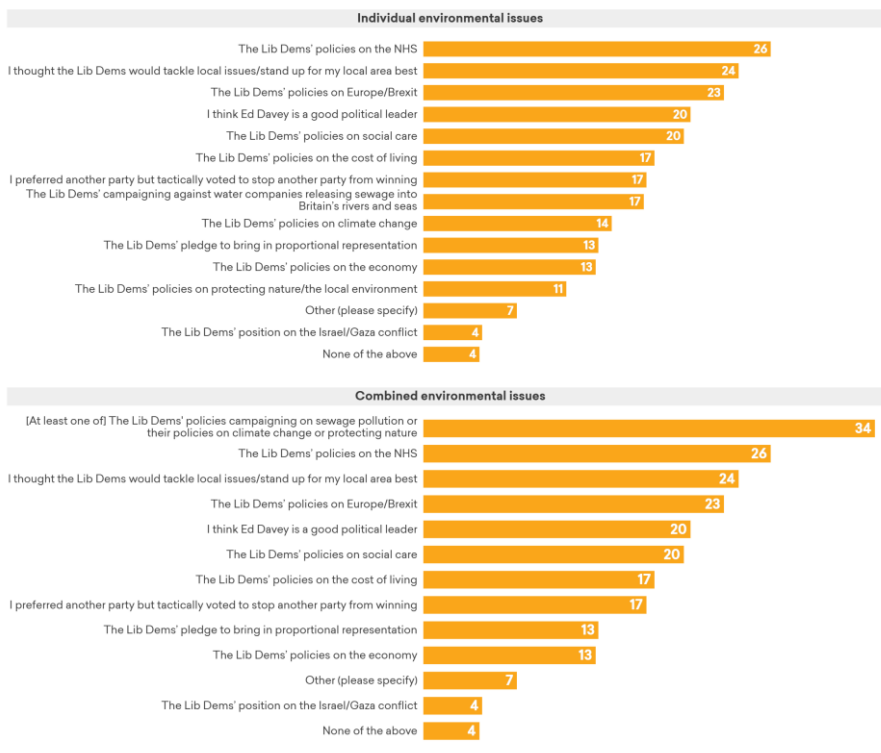
*I love all the green. I like the fact that you literally step out your front door and there's woods and there's lots of little areas you can wander with the dogs and the kids.*

Holly, Business Manager, Wokingham

The environment played an important role in determining the vote choice of Liberal Democrat supporters at the last General Election. Asked to select the top reasons why they opted to vote for the party last July, more than one third (34 percent) of Liberal Democrat voters chose at least one environmental reason. Looking at the environmental reasons individually, the most popular was the party's campaigning against sewage pollution, with 17 percent of Lib Dem voters selecting this, 14 percent opting for the party's policies on climate change and 11 percent choosing the party's policies on nature and the local environment.

### Environmental issues were a key motivation for voting Lib Dem

Thinking about why you voted for the Liberal Democrats at the last General Election, which, if any, of the below were the top reasons for voting for the party? [Select up to three.]



This relative importance of environmental issues during the election campaign was also reflected in our focus group conversations in North Cornwall and Wokingham. Our

participants said their concern for the environment was an important factor in their vote choice with several participants, across both groups, recalling the party's leaflets on sewage which reassured them of their local candidate's commitment on the issue and in turn played an important role in deciding their support for the party.

*I think for me it's [the environment] always been a consistent thread in both campaigns. The manifesto for a national level, but also a local level as well. And I think there's lots of hot topics within the manifesto that mattered to us. Water quality, legislation around sustainable farming, food strategy. There was a lot in there that really ticked all the boxes for a community like ours, as we said, that is very strong and very passionate about the climate and sustainability.*

Reece, Recruitment Consultant, North Cornwall

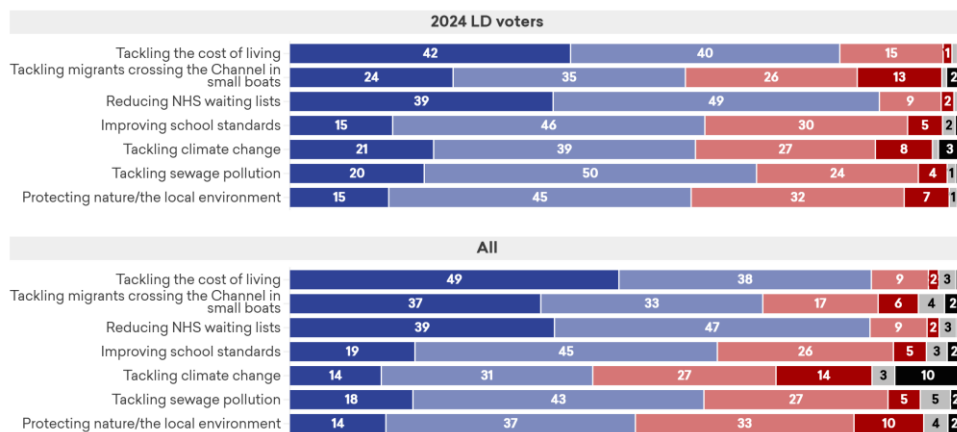
When asked to prioritise a series of government policies, Liberal Democrats (along with other groups) put tackling the cost of living and NHS waiting lists as top priorities. Liberal Democrat voters are equally likely to say that protecting nature and the environment or tackling climate change is as much a priority as tackling channel crossings or improving school standards.

What is striking however is how much tackling sewage pollution is prioritised by Liberal Democrat voters. Seven in ten 2024 Liberal Democrat voters say tackling sewage pollution should be a high priority for the government - almost ten points more than the public at large. In our North Cornwall focus group, when asked to talk about the challenges affecting their area more broadly, our participants immediately spoke of their anger at sewage pollution - reinforcing the Liberal Democrats' continued emphasis on the issue.

### Lib Dem voters are more likely to think environmental issues, particularly sewage pollution, should be top government priorities

To what extent do you think the UK government should or should not prioritise the following?

- It should be the highest priority ● It should be a high priority, alongside other important issues
- It should be a medium priority, among many other government concerns ● It should be addressed, but only as a low priority
- Don't know ● It should not be a government priority at all



*Clive in his election manifesto thing said he was going to fight to clean up our rivers, which is something that I think is important and that's why I voted for him. I was a little bit disillusioned. I was maybe not even going to bother voting or spoil my ballot possibly as a sort of protest, but then I kind of thought, well that is important and I didn't want to waste my vote so I based it on that.*

Emma, Shop Manager, Wokingham

## A both local and global approach

While concern for the local environment was top of mind in the focus groups, when asked about whether the government should prioritise action at the global level or the local level - Liberal Democrat voters are more likely than others to see local and global action as complimentary rather than competing priorities. Almost half (47 percent) of Liberal Democrat voters think the government should prioritise tackling climate change at the national and global level and protecting local natural environments equally. The Liberal Democrat voters 'both-and' approach is held significantly more strongly than the public at large where only a third (32 percent) back such an approach. This was reflected in focus groups where Liberal Democrat voters shared their belief that local improvements (creating green spaces or improving biodiversity) would help tackle climate change at the global level and vice versa.

*I think the local and global environment do relate. The seas are changing. We get more jellyfish than we used to and things like that because there's not many fish anymore and the temperature of the sea has changed as well.*

Libby, Call Handler, North Cornwall

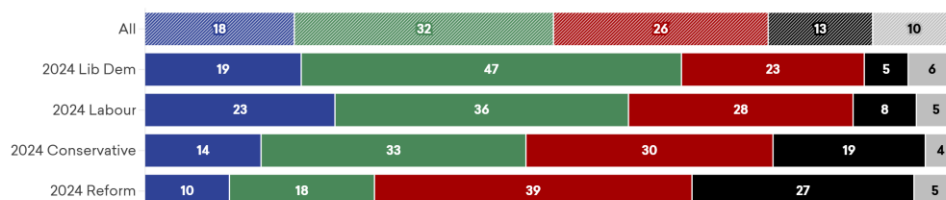
*I don't think this is actually a choice [between the local and global environment.] There's very rarely a choice where we can do the right thing for the planet by allowing something bad to happen here in Wokingham.*

Sam, Financial Services, Wokingham

## Lib Dem voters are most likely to think climate and local nature should be equal priorities

What do you think the UK government should prioritise when it comes to protecting the environment?

- The government should prioritise tackling global warming/climate change e.g. reducing carbon emissions
- The government should prioritise tackling global warming and protecting local natural environments equally
- The government should prioritise protecting our local natural environments e.g. protecting local wildlife
- Not applicable - I don't think either tackling global warming or protecting local natural environments should be a government priority
- Don't know

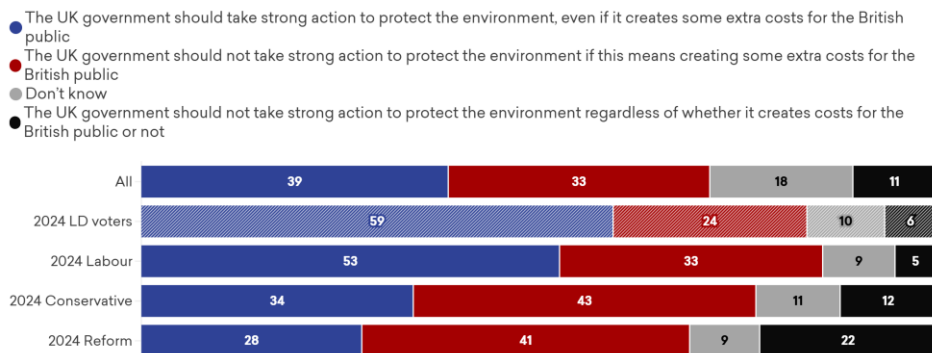


## Costs of transition

Liberal Democrat voters are more willing than other voter groups to bear some of the extra costs associated with the climate transition. Three in five (59 percent) Liberal Democrat voters say that the UK government should take strong action to protect the environment even if this creates some extra costs for the British public – compared to less than two in five (39 percent) of Britons overall.

### Lib Dem voters are more willing to bear costs to protect the environment

Which of the following comes closest to your view?



Source: More in Common, April 2025

However, while there may be willingness in the abstract to incur the costs of the climate transition, our focus group conversation suggested that these voters also have clear limits. Focus group participants were concerned about the prospect of having to pay significantly higher bills or taxes to fund the climate transition, particularly amid cost of living pressures in recent years. These concerns were more pronounced in North Cornwall than Wokingham.

*I think the cost of living is way too high at the moment, so I wouldn't want to be paying out more money for the climate.*

**Tamsin, Social Worker, North Cornwall**

Though less acute than it may be for other parties and their electoral coalitions, squaring these voters' desire for strong climate action with their inability or reluctance to pay significantly higher taxes or bills to fund it will be a challenge for the Liberal Democrats. Our focus group participants in both Wokingham and North Cornwall argued that companies polluting the environment were not being adequately held to account, indicating that one potential solution to this challenge could lie in corporate responsibility through the polluter pays principle, including strong action against water and energy companies who were singled out for making large profits while consumers bills increased and the quality of the environment worsened.

*I'm not willing to shoulder any of the cost for it. I can't afford it. I think there should be corporate responsibility, it [the climate transition costs] should be born by the people that can afford it... I might be willing to pay a bit more if I could see where it was going. But I myself personally am not willing to pay more when these fat cats [utility bosses] are taking so much money.*

**Claire, Bookkeeper, North Cornwall**

*The cost of living is about these energy companies taking the mick really.*

**Laura, Digital Software, Wokingham**

*The water companies are ripping us off, the energy companies are ripping us off.*

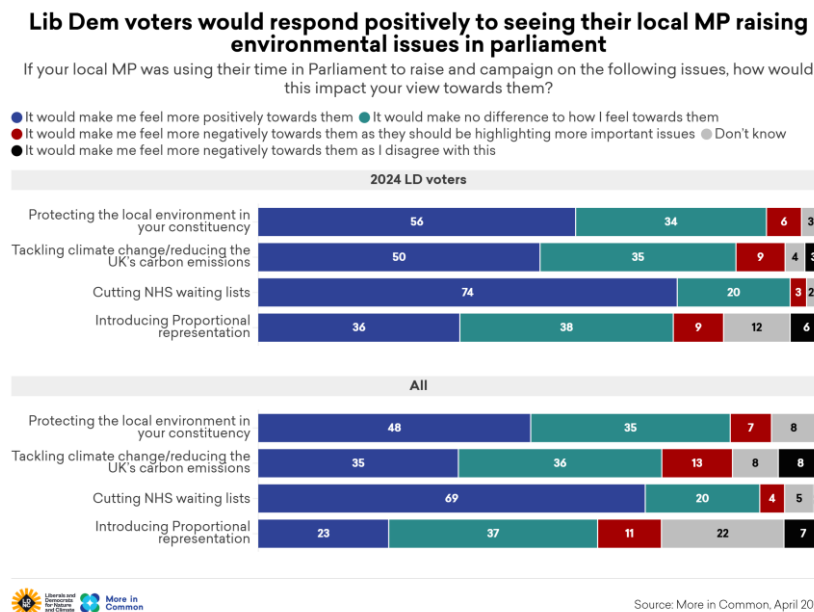
**Andrew, Business Owner, Wokingham**

## Voters expectations for Liberal Democrat MPs on the environment

The environment is an issue that is not only important for Liberal Democrat voters but also one which they believe government, and by consequence their local MPs, must act on at the local, national and international levels.

### Scope for more vocal opposition on environment issues

More than half of Liberal Democrat voters (56 percent and 50 percent respectively) say they would feel more positively towards their local MP if they were raising the protection of the local environment or the need to reduce the UK's carbon emissions in Parliament. Less than one in ten Liberal Democrat voters say highlighting these issues would make them feel more negatively towards their local MP. Such findings should allay concerns that the public want their MPs to be exclusively focused on core bread-and-butter issues such as the cost of living and the NHS. This research suggests there is scope for championing environmental action as individual Liberal Democrat parliamentarians.



Such an approach was also reflected in our focus group discussions where participants argued that the government could both address NHS waiting lists and the cost of living and take strong environmental action. Indeed, participants shared that rather than seeing climate and the environment as a standalone issue, environmental action could and should be embedded across many aspects of the government's work - for example, they argued that new homes being built with solar panels and the expansion of renewable energy generation would help to bring down energy bills, helping to tackle the cost of living while cleaner air could tackle some health problems too, helping ease the pressure on the NHS.

*If you take environmental action, there's lots of knock on effects as well. If your air is cleaner, you're healthier, that helps a little bit with fewer people visiting the doctors. I know that's not going to solve the problem completely, but it's something that will impact on it.*

*Holly, Business Manager, Wokingham*

*I think the environment has a huge impact on all our livelihoods and the future of our generations to come. So I think that everything we need to be doing needs to be considering the environment as we go. If we're making groundbreaking evolutionary steps, then great. But I think if it's at the detriment of the environment, that's not the way that we need to be going really*

**Reece, Recruitment Consultant, North Cornwall**

While voters in Liberal Democrat constituencies were realistic about what their MP might be able to achieve given the size of the government's majority, they expected their local MP to do their bit as an effective opposition MP by raising issues, asking questions and keeping the environment on the government's agenda. In particular, they saw the role of their local MP to fight for environmental action within their own constituency, suggesting that linking back and rooting the environmental action they are calling for to their own constituencies could be a successful strategy for individual Liberal Democrat MPs.

*They [the local MP] need to be able to manage upwards and influence what's happening in parliament as well as protecting their local environment and their locality for the benefit of their local constituency.*

**Richard, Pharmaceuticals Industry, Wokingham**

### **Navigating environmental NIMBYism**

One key tension in the Liberal Democrats' approach to environmental issues is how they navigate the trade-offs between useful or helpful environmental interventions at the national and international level, and the impact of some of those interventions at the local or constituency level. This is a challenge faced by all political parties but given the strong, and successful, emphasis Liberal Democrats place on localism in their election campaigns it is a particular challenge for them.

As part of this research, we tested how voters might respond to a hypothetical scenario where their local MP was supportive of renewable energy generation on the national level, but opposed a proposed solar farm or pylons in their constituency on the grounds it might harm local green spaces.

Liberal Democrat voters were more likely to say this would make them feel more negatively (41 percent) towards their local MP than say it would make them feel more positively (32 percent). This suggests there may be some electoral risk in Liberal Democrat MPs engaging in environmental NIMBYism as it undermines their broader credibility on environment and climate issues.

### Lib Dem voters are likely to respond negatively to environmental 'NIMBYISM'

Imagine your local MP promised to support the generation of renewable energy but also opposed a renewable energy infrastructure project, such as a solar farm or pylons, in your constituency on the grounds it might harm local green spaces.

How would this impact your perception of your local MP?

- It would make me feel much more negative towards them
- It would make me feel slightly more negative towards them
- It would make no real difference to how I feel towards them
- Don't know
- It would make me feel slightly more positive towards them
- It would make me feel much more positive towards them



Source: More in Common, April 2025

Ultimately, Britons hold more nuanced views on the role of MPs than many parliamentarians and commentators often give them credit for. Asked whether MPs should prioritise the interests of their local area even if this goes against the national interest or vice versa, three in five (59 percent) Liberal Democrat voters place themselves in the middle point believing that the job of a local MP is to equally balance the interests of their constituency and the UK. This is a view held more strongly than the average Briton (53 percent).

### Voters, particularly Lib Dem voters, want their local MPs to balance local interests with the national interest

Thinking about policies that may benefit the UK broadly but negatively impact your local area, use the scale to indicate which best describes what you like from your local MP?

- 1- My local MP should always prioritise what's best for our local area, even if this could be against the national interest
- 2- The job of a local MP is to equally balance the interests of their constituency and the UK
- 3- The job of a local MP is to equally balance the interests of their constituency and the UK
- 4- My local MP should always prioritise the national interest, even if this could go against what's best for our local area
- 5- My local MP should always prioritise the national interest, even if this could go against what's best for our local area



Source: More in Common, April 2025

Given the development of large scale solar farms near Wokingham, we tested this specific example there. While participants were concerned about the erosion of green spaces by new housing developments in the area, they offered tentative support for the development of these solar farms. When asked how they would respond if their local MP, hypothetically, opposed these solar farms, they suggested they would be slightly confused and disappointed that their MP would be in opposition to the development of renewable energy.

*I've seen the big solar farm as you drive past on the M4... I think I might be disappointed because our local MP campaigned on the environment and I think the environment's important, it's important to me. But I guess I would need to find out, dig deeper, and find out why?*

**Emma, Shop Manager, Wokingham**

While MPs will often feel intense pressure to prioritise the interests of their constituency over the national interest from local or national campaign groups, particularly via their inbox, previous More in Common research indicates that those who are against or in opposition to a particular development are significantly more likely to write to their local MP to voice their objections than those who are supportive. The correspondence MPs receive on local developments may not be truly representative of their broader constituents' views.

## The opportunity to develop a distinctive Liberal Democrat approach to the environment

The importance Liberal Democrat voters place on the environment, both last July and today, means there is a significant opportunity for the party to develop a clear and distinctive record and environmental platform as it sets out to retain its voters and seats towards the next General Election. Several key factors shape both the opportunity and expectation from Liberal Democrat voters on the environment.

### Space to develop a distinctive environmental policy

Liberal Democrat voters, and the broader public, have a very negative view of the Conservative Government's record on climate and nature, with this criticism being particularly acute on their handling of sewage pollution. Liberal Democrat voters give the previous government a net negative score of -53 percent on this issue. The Labour government is faring little better on these issues with net negative scores, although not as negative figures as the equivalent figures for the cost of living, among both the general public and Liberal Democrat voters on all three environmental issues tested (see graph below). Like the Conservatives, the current government suffers from particularly negative scores (-29 percent) on tackling sewage pollution. These negative perceptions of the Conservatives and Labour's record on the environment present an opportunity for the Liberal Democrats to develop a distinctive position as the strongest major party on environmental issues.

*Southwest Water are getting away with murder in what they're doing and how they treat our coastlines. It's disgusting. There's no comeuppance from them from the government, which is something that I feel the MPs aren't doing enough on, they're not pushing the water companies enough at all.*

*Libby, Call Handler, North Cornwall*

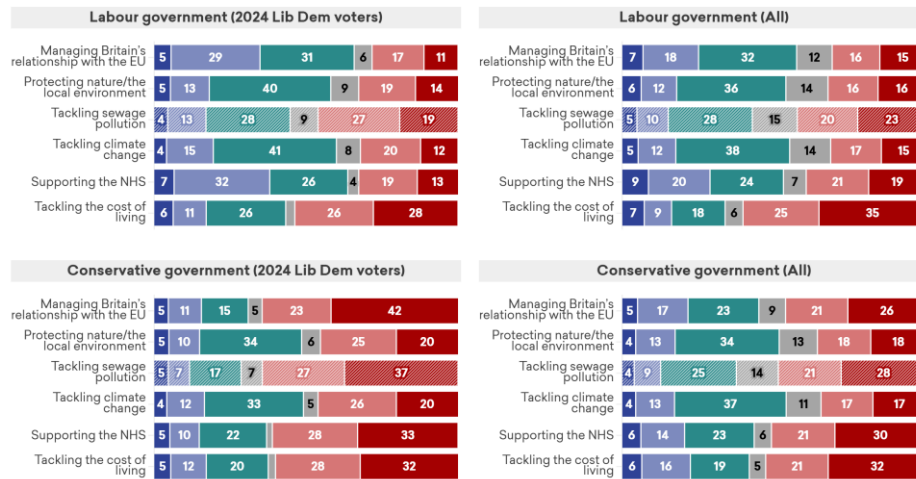
*We can just do our best to do the little things ourselves, but in the bigger picture, what can we really do when it needs government to legislate and to actually mean it and for it not just to be a political kind of football.*

*Emma, Shop Manager, Wokingham*

### Lib Dem voters, and Britons, are particularly negative about both the Conservative and Labour Government's records on tackling sewage pollution

To what extent do you think the current Labour [previous Conservative government] is doing [did] a good or bad job at the following?

● Very good ● Somewhat good ● Neither good nor bad ● Not sure ● Somewhat bad ● Very bad



Source: More in Common, April 2025

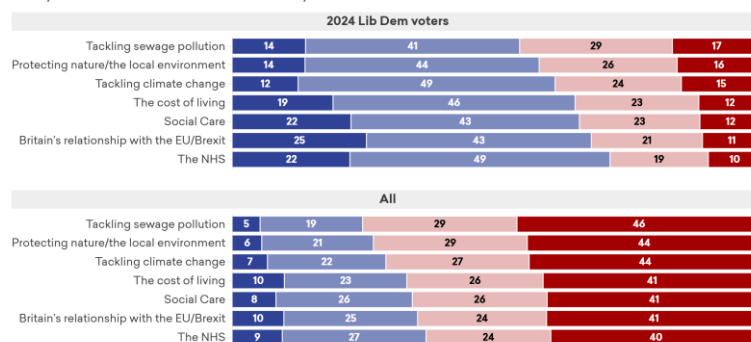
### Low awareness of the Liberal Democrats' environmental platform

However, the Liberal Democrats' ability to capitalise on this poor perception of the current and previous government's records on environmental issues appears to be held back by a poor awareness of the party's environmental policies. Though they are unfamiliar with the Liberal Democrats policies on all these issues, Britons and Liberal Democrat voters specifically, are significantly less familiar with the party's policies and positions on environmental issues than they are with their positions on the NHS and social care, Brexit and the cost of living. Despite their active campaigning on tackling sewage pollution, this is the area where both the public generally and Liberal Democrat voters are most unfamiliar with the party's policies, suggesting an opportunity for the Liberal Democrats to communicate their policy solutions on sewage pollution more prominently with voters.

### Britons, including Lib Dem voters, have particularly poor awareness of the party's environmental policies

How familiar are you with the Liberal Democrats' positions/policies on the following issues?

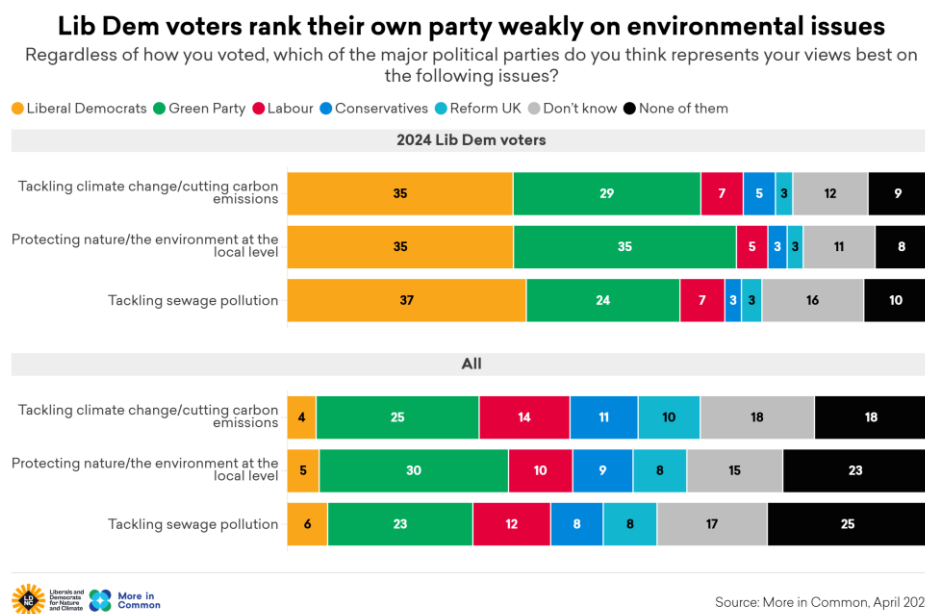
● Very familiar ● Somewhat familiar ● Not very familiar ● Not familiar at all



Source: More in Common, April 2025

## Poor perceptions of the Liberal Democrats' priorities

This lack of awareness of the Liberal Democrats' policies appears to be impacting voters' perception of them on environmental issues. Strikingly, Liberal Democrat voters are equally likely to opt for the Green Party as the Liberal Democrats when asked who best represents their views on protecting nature and the local environment. Although Liberal Democrat voters are most likely to say their own party best represents their views on tackling climate change and tackling sewage pollution - the proportion doing so doesn't reach two fifths for either of these issues.

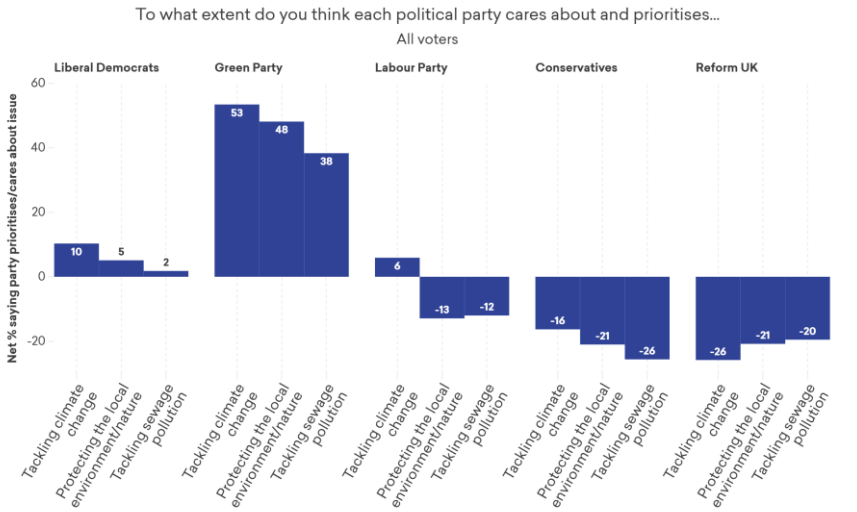


While few would expect many voters to have deep awareness of the Liberal Democrats' environmental policy platform, the low awareness of their policies in this area risks fuelling a broader perception that the Liberal Democrats do not prioritise environmental action. Less than two in five Britons think that the Liberal Democrats care either a great deal or somewhat about climate change, sewage pollution or local nature. Unsurprisingly, the Green Party holds clear leads on the prioritisation of all three issues but strikingly more Britons say that Labour cares either a great deal or somewhat about tackling climate change than say the same for the Liberal Democrats. Though the Liberal Democrats voters do perceive their party's prioritisation to be much higher, they are still more likely to say the Greens care either a great deal or somewhat about climate, sewage and local nature.

*Well they're not as strong [on the environment] as the Greens, that's what the Greens are pretty much about, but the Greens would never get in.*

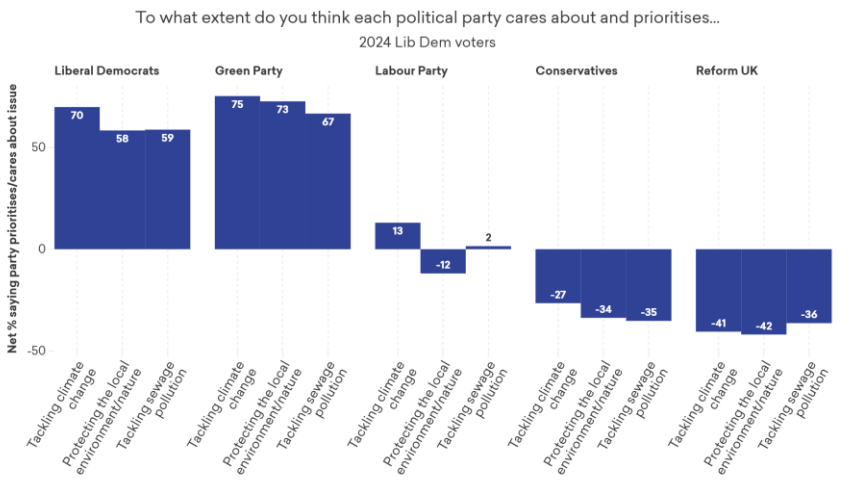
Derek, IT worker, North Cornwall

**Britons are split on whether the Liberal Democrats care about and prioritise environmental issues**



Source: More in Common, April 2025 • Net % = (Total proportion saying party either cares about issue a great deal or somewhat) - (Total proportion saying party either doesn't care very much or at all about issue)

**Lib Dem voters think the Green Party cares more about environmental issues than the Liberal Democrats**



Source: More in Common, April 2025 • Net % = (Total proportion saying party either cares about issue a great deal or somewhat) - (Total proportion saying party either doesn't care very much or at all about issue)

**The electoral implications of a more distinctive environmental approach**

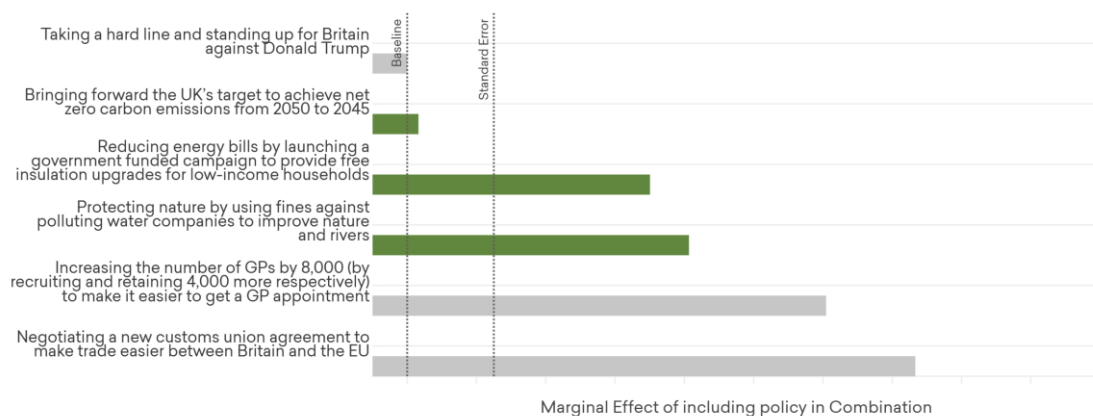
Given the strong emphasis Liberal Democrat voters, and Liberal Democrat considerers, place on the environment, it would seem a reasonable hypothesis that speaking more about environmental policy might help the Liberal Democrats retain their existing

supporters and recruit those voters who didn't back the party in July but would now consider doing so.<sup>1</sup>

To test this hypothesis more robustly, More in Common undertook a policy conjoint experiment. A policy conjoint experiment involves asking respondents to pick between two lists of policies. The policies in each combination are pulled from a central list, in this case different Liberal Democrats policies, and randomised in every iteration of the experiment with each respondent asked to pick between several different, randomised, versions of these two lists. Respondents were asked to pick which combination of policies they would be more likely to vote for at a General Election, allowing us to develop a ranking of the electoral attractiveness of each policy, relative to each other.

As the graph below shows, the Liberal Democrats commitment to negotiating a UK-EU customs union agreement is the policy that is most likely to make Liberal Democrat voters vote for a party with the party's commitment to increase GP numbers a close second. However, the relatively strong effect of the party's policies to retain the Water Restoration Fund and roll out a national insulation scheme is worth noting. Liberal Democrat voters are significantly more likely to back a party with these policies in their manifesto than they are to back a party that has committed to taking a hard line and standing up for Britain against President Trump.

Lib Dem 2024 voters



Text shown: Suppose that two parties with the following policy priorities were campaigning in the next general election. Which of these two parties would you be more likely to vote for?

Source: More in Common, April 2025

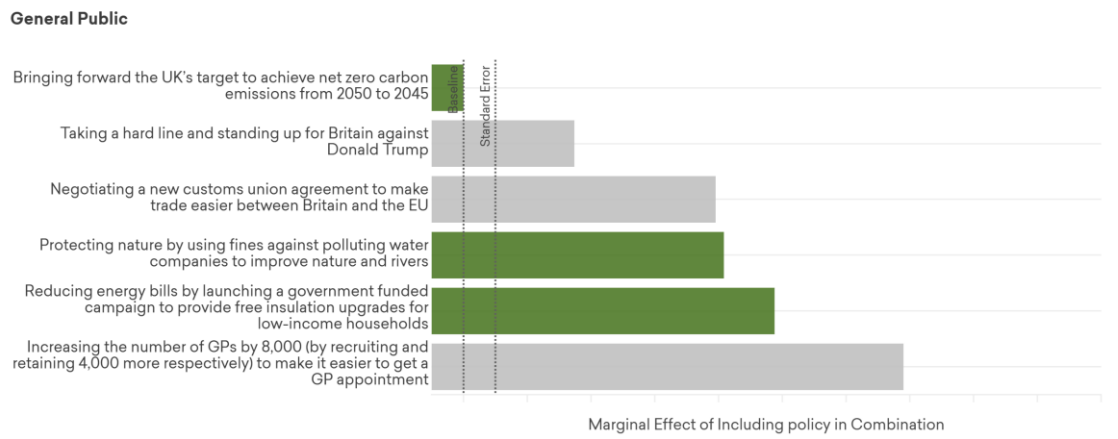
<sup>1</sup> More in Common's research for this report as well as our post-election research for our *What next for the Liberal Democrats* report suggests that these Liberal Democrat voters are even stronger environmentalists than the Lib Dems' 2024 voters.

*Yeah, I think in Cornwall the environment is definitely important for our vote. I can't speak obviously for the rest of the country, but yeah, if they want our vote then they've got to be quite strong and share opinions on environmental issues because it is really important to us as a county. We want to protect this beautiful environment that we live in. That's why we live here*

Claire, Bookkeeper, North Cornwall

A similar story emerges when the conjoint experiment is shown to a nationally representative sample of Britons. Again, the more bread and butter issue of increasing GP numbers has the most significant effect, however the Water Restoration Fund and national insulation scheme policies are more effective at winning over voters than strong opposition to Donald Trump.

This policy conjoint experiment shows that working to increase awareness of the Liberal Democrats existing environmental policies could be a more electorally effective way of creating a values-based dividing line between the party and the Labour Government than the anti-Donald Trump positioning the party has adopted over recent months. This applies both from the perspective of retaining 2024 Liberal Democrat voters and winning over new voters to the party.



## Building a more distinctive approach on the environment

While the Liberal Democrats now have 72 MPs, in an increasingly fragmented five party system, generating media coverage and popular awareness of their policies, including on the environment is likely to remain a challenge. Emphasising clear points of policy difference between the other major parties, providing the party with something unique to say, is likely to be important for overcoming awareness challenges.

Across the polling and focus groups, two existing Liberal Democrat policy ideas emerge as the most popular ideas to form the basis of a more distinctive approach to the environment and climate. Firstly, protecting the Water Restoration Fund so that fines collected from water companies are ringfenced to fund nature improvements. Secondly, progressing with the stricter set of rules from the previous Government's consultation on the Future Homes Standard, so that all new homes are built with solar panels and heat pumps.

These policies not only gained near unanimous support among both 2024 Liberal Democrat voters and the public as a whole, with net support among the general public +74 percent for the Water Restoration Fund policy and +46 percent for the Future Homes Standard policy, they also stood up to scrutiny in longer form conversations with voters in focus groups.

Ensuring that action was taken to fine water companies and invest these proceeds into nature improvements taps into voters' anger in our Wokingham and North Cornwall groups at perceived water company profiteering. The failure to install solar panels on people's homes and car parks was consistently brought up organically as a no-brainer and win-win environmental policy. Indeed, across many of More in Common's focus groups on the environment, installing more solar panels on homes regularly comes up without prompting, from voters of all backgrounds, as an environmental policy they would like to be introduced. No political party has yet seized the mantle on widespread domestic solar panel installations, with a strong appetite for this to take place on both existing and new build homes, leaving an open goal and a potentially large political prize for the party who owns this as a policy.

*They [the water companies] are all private companies. They've all got CEOs, they've all got bonuses, they've all got dividends that they're raising. But I don't see any new pipes going in or them making any changes in my local area.*

**Libby, Call Handler, North Cornwall**

*I don't understand why we aren't utilising dead space. Everybody's got a roof, every building has a roof. Why have we stopped incentivising people to put solar panels in... if everybody's house had a solar panel on it, I'm sure we could probably reduce the demand on the National Grid by about 50% at least.*

**Richard, Pharmaceuticals Industry, Wokingham**

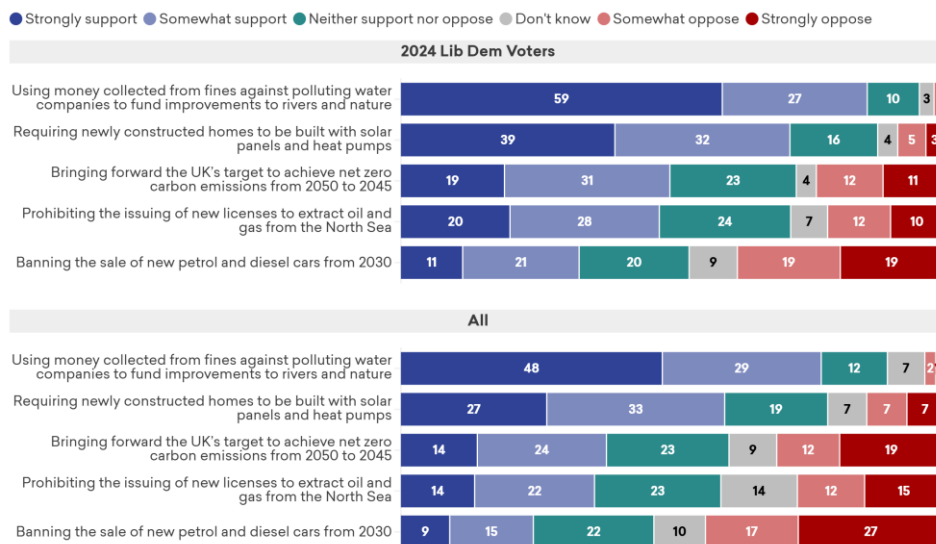
While prohibiting the issuing of new oil and gas licenses in the North Sea and bringing forward the net zero target to 2045 are both net popular with Liberal Democrat voters and Britons as a whole and so would be unlikely to generate any meaningful backlash, they are unlikely to generate the same strength of support. On the bringing forward of the net zero target to 2045, participants in focus groups were mainly indifferent or softly supportive but the overriding impression was one of scepticism of politicians' ability to deliver on any promises of timelines and targets they make.

*It's a good idea [aiming to reach net zero by 2045] but I don't think it will happen*

Helen, Jewellery Designer, North Cornwall

### Mandating the use of solar panels on new build homes and the ringfencing of water company fines for nature improvements are the most popular potential Lib Dem environment points of difference

To what extent would you support or oppose the following policies?



Source: More in Common, April 2025

### Farming deepdive: the environmental challenges the Liberal Democrats face

One area where the Liberal Democrats are likely to have to tread a more challenging path is on how they deal with the farming transition. Farmers are well liked and trusted by Britons and they have an important role to play in both protecting the environment and climate transition. This is particularly the case for Britain's rivers and seas with the Environment Agency estimating that agriculture contributes as much to the pollution of Britain's waterways as water companies, potentially bringing them into conflict with the Liberal Democrats' commitment to clean water.

This challenge was explored in depth in our North Cornwall focus group - one of the Liberal Democrats' more rural constituencies where several of the participants held either personal or familial connection to farming. Our participants saw farmers as having a key role to play as guardians of nature and the countryside but also acknowledged and were aware that pollution from farming needed to be addressed.

However, these voters didn't see farmers, in particular smaller family farmers, in the same group as other polluters such as water companies or energy companies who they saw as profiteers and more culpable for their pollution. Instead, they wanted farmers to be supported to help reduce their environmental impact rather than punished. This aversion to politicians picking a side between supporting farmers and protecting nature resonates with the conversations that More in Common has consistently had in focus groups with different types of voters who want politicians to support farmers to ensure they are aligned and working together with nature.

*I think the farmers should be responsible for what they do. They are running the business and they should be responsible for their waste and keeping the environment safe and clean. And of course that includes rivers as well. I know a lot of farmers have great big slurry pits and they try and do the best they can, but yeah they definitely should be held to account if they do pollute the river, though I think most farmers behave responsibly anyway.*

**Jeff, Car Park Attendant, North Cornwall**

*I mean a lot of farmers, we'll plant wildflower fields and do crop rotation and things like which are really good for the soil. I think we need farming, especially here in Cornwall. It's a real backbone of our community.*

**Claire, Bookkeeper, North Cornwall**

*I feel that farmers would probably need the money [they might have to pay in fines] more than South West Water.*

**Sophie, Finance Assistant, North Cornwall**

## Conclusion

Since the 2024 General Election, on both the European Union and President Trump, the Liberal Democrats have positioned themselves to the 'Liberal Left' of the Labour Government. While these positions are popular in themselves, our research has indicated that there is also a political opportunity for them to adopt a more distinctive position on the environment.

Pursuing a stronger emphasis on the environment should be based on a clear focus on local environmental issues. This would not only align well with the Liberal Democrats' emphasis on localism in their campaigning, but also tap into the appreciation of local nature that plays a greater role than climate in driving Liberal Democrats voters' heightened concerns over the environment.

The Liberal Democrats will struggle to replace the Green Party as the leading party on the climate and environment given the strength of the Greens' brand on this issue. However, there is an opportunity for the Liberal Democrats to better establish themselves as stronger than Labour, Reform UK and the Conservatives on the environment.

This research indicates that a more distinctive approach on the environment is something that all parts of the Liberal Democrats' existing and potential voting coalition would respond positively to whether that be with South West, Blue Wall or tactical Liberal Democrat voters or those who didn't back the party at the last election but are open to doing so next time around.

Provided it is delivered alongside a strong focus on tackling NHS waiting lists and the cost of living, and in a way that is conscious of some of the concerns Britons and Liberal Democrat voters have about climate transition costs, then the Liberal Democrats should consider themselves as having a green light from their voters to campaign for strong action on the environment.

## Methodological detail

This report leverages the following research:

- One poll, with fieldwork taking place in April, with a sample of 2,146, weighted to be representative of the British public.
- An additional booster survey of 500 2024 Liberal Democrat voters in April, allocated, but not weighted, to be representative of Liberal Democrats. This creates an overall sample of 775 Liberal Democrat voters.
- Two online focus groups with Liberal Democrats were also held across late March and April as part of this project with recruitment criteria outlined below:

### Wokingham

- Eight participants
- All live in constituency of Wokingham
- All voted Liberal Democrat in 2024
- Four voted Liberal Democrat, three voted Conservative and one voted Labour in 2019
- Six voted Remain and two voted Leave in 2016
- Six university graduates, two non-graduates

### North Cornwall

- Eight participants
- All live in constituency of North Cornwall
- All voted Liberal Democrat in 2024
- Five voted Liberal Democrat, three voted Conservative in 2019
- Six voted Leave and two voted Remain in 2016
- All non-university educated



Chris Annous  
[Chris@moreincommon.com](mailto:Chris@moreincommon.com)