

Briefing

Four tests for the 2024 King's Speech: will it deliver for the environment?



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We are in the middle of a critical decade for action on the climate and nature crises, yet action is not progressing at the scale and speed necessary. This government has been elected with a clear mandate to turn the UK into a clean energy superpower and has an opportunity to set the course for a future which prioritises climate and nature. Ramping up action will not only help to cut greenhouse gas emissions and demonstrate international leadership, but it will also create jobs, clean our air and tackle the cost-of-living crisis.

1. Make the climate and nature crises the centre of new legislation

The King's Speech will set the tone for this parliamentary term and has the potential to shape the climate debate for years to come. Legislation must go beyond climate compatibility, ensuring climate and nature are at the heart of policy development.

Whilst the UK has made huge progress in tackling emissions, Green Alliance analysis has exposed major policy gaps in decarbonisation plans for key sectors where leadership is needed. The Labour manifesto made bold promises on energy, transport and warm homes which must now be implemented. The announcement of a rail reform bill is a welcome first step and a key example of how policies on climate change can drive a multitude of benefits

2. Move the planning debate from slogans to nuance

Planning is a cornerstone of both the 2030 clean power mission and tackling the housing crisis. Labour has rightly promised to get Britain building again but – as was made clear in the case of nutrient neutrality – this need not come at the expense of nature. The government must demonstrate its understanding of the nuance needed to strategically and effectively tackle the planning agenda, and ensure reform supports the restoration of the country's natural environment.

Forcing through development at the expense of nature and against local opposition will undermine local democracy and damage vital landscapes. The government must demonstrate a clear intention to work alongside civil society to tackle the housing crisis and update the country's infrastructure to ensure long term sustainability.

3. Empower local authorities to act on climate change

Local authorities will play an important role in delivering climate action, including rolling out home improvements and more accessible public transport. The Take Back Control bill must give local authorities essential new powers and provide sufficient resources to enable and encourage more action on the climate and nature crises.

4. Long term certainty for the energy sector

The Energy Independence Bill and GB Energy could transform the UK's energy system, offering the potential for a faster and lower cost transition to a renewable centred system. But the sector needs clarity to attract investment. The government must lay out a detailed plan of action and confirm in legislation that there will be no new oil and gas licences. This will ensure the UK is no longer dependent on volatile energy sources, protecting households from future price shocks.

Whilst energy generation is rightly at the centre of Labour's clean power vision, there must also be a focus on the overall power system, including a need for a rapid roll-out of clean flexible power technologies. This work has already begun under the Clean Power Taskforce but should be at the heart of Labour's vision.

Long term energy independence will require a careful plan for critical raw materials (CRMs). The best way to limit exposure to volatile international supply chains is to reduce energy demand, which will make it easier to meet remaining demand from sustainably sourced or recycled materials.

For more information, contact:

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