# UK political parties diverge sharply on climate policies at 2025 conferences



The 2025 UK party conference season was marked by fervent discussions on infrastructure and climate policies, with the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) actively engaging across the three largest political parties to glean insight into their strategic visions. Known for its role as an independent charity providing trusted advice on infrastructure development, the ICE's participation highlighted key policy proposals and ideological shifts that could shape the nation's future.

At the Liberal Democrats conference in Bournemouth, a standout commitment was the ambition to halve energy prices by 2035. This agenda came alongside a broader focus on skills development and transport infrastructure, with the party signalling broad support for the existing Labour government’s net zero carbon policies. However, there was noted criticism regarding the government's direction on planning reforms, hinting at ongoing debates about the balance between development and environmental stewardship.

Labour’s conference underscored a continuation and expansion of its infrastructure agenda, emphasising new towns and the Northern Powerhouse Rail project—a vital scheme aimed at boosting connectivity and economic growth in Northern England. Delivery mechanisms, devolving powers to local authorities, and skills advancement were recurrent themes, underscoring the party’s commitment to regional development alongside its support for net zero. Additionally, the future of artificial intelligence (AI) remained a vibrant topic at related fringe events, reflecting wider societal uncertainties and excitement about technological progress.

In stark contrast, the Conservative Party, led by Kemi Badenoch, made a dramatic policy shift by pledging to repeal the Climate Change Act 2008, a landmark law originally enacted to reduce carbon emissions substantially by 2050. Instead, the party proposed a new strategy prioritising "cheap and reliable" energy, coupled with a £47 billion reduction in public spending focused primarily on welfare and foreign aid. Badenoch characterised the net zero target as "impossible" to achieve without significant economic harm, a stance that aligns the Conservatives more closely with climate-sceptic elements, including the emergent Reform UK party. This position has drawn widespread criticism from environmentalists, former Conservative leaders such as Theresa May, and many within the party itself, where recent surveys reveal a majority of members still support the net zero goal.

This Conservative pivot highlights deep divisions within the UK's political landscape regarding climate policy, with concerns that scrapping statutory emissions targets could unravel nearly two decades of bipartisan consensus on climate action. Critics warn that abandoning net zero commitments risks jeopardising environmental progress and economic sustainability.

Overall, the ICE’s engagement with these political streams illustrates the complexities underpinning the UK's infrastructure and environmental future. The institution remains committed to offering impartial analysis and guidance amid evolving political priorities, aiming to ensure infrastructure development supports sustainable growth and societal wellbeing.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.ice.org.uk/news-views-insights/latest-news/ice-attends-uk-political-party-conferences), [[2]](https://www.ice.org.uk/news-views-insights/latest-news/ice-attends-uk-political-party-conferences)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.ice.org.uk/news-views-insights/latest-news/ice-attends-uk-political-party-conferences), [[2]](https://www.ice.org.uk/news-views-insights/latest-news/ice-attends-uk-political-party-conferences)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.ice.org.uk/news-views-insights/latest-news/ice-attends-uk-political-party-conferences), [[2]](https://www.ice.org.uk/news-views-insights/latest-news/ice-attends-uk-political-party-conferences), [[3]](https://www.itv.com/news/2025-10-02/kemi-badenoch-pledges-to-scrap-climate-change-act-in-favour-of-cheap-energy), [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cly3pnjyzp4o), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/uk-opposition-leader-drops-support-2050-net-zero-climate-target-2025-03-18/), [[6]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/tory-conference-badenoch-net-zero-b2839278.html), [[7]](https://www.ice.org.uk/news-views-insights/inside-infrastructure/takeaways-from-2025-conservative-party-conference)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.ice.org.uk/news-views-insights/latest-news/ice-attends-uk-political-party-conferences), [[7]](https://www.ice.org.uk/news-views-insights/inside-infrastructure/takeaways-from-2025-conservative-party-conference)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ice.org.uk/news-views-insights/latest-news/ice-attends-uk-political-party-conferences> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ice.org.uk/news-views-insights/latest-news/ice-attends-uk-political-party-conferences> - The Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) engaged with the Liberal Democrats, Labour Party, and Conservatives during the UK's 2025 party conference season to discuss infrastructure plans. Key takeaways include the Liberal Democrats' proposal to halve energy prices by 2035, Labour's updates on new towns and Northern Powerhouse Rail, and the Conservatives' pledge to repeal the Climate Change Act 2008 in favour of a strategy for 'cheap and reliable' energy. The Conservatives also promised to cut public spending by £47 billion, mainly on welfare and foreign aid.
3. <https://www.itv.com/news/2025-10-02/kemi-badenoch-pledges-to-scrap-climate-change-act-in-favour-of-cheap-energy> - Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch announced plans to replace the UK's Climate Change Act with a strategy focused on 'cheap and reliable' energy. The original Act, introduced by the Labour government in 2008, committed the UK to reducing climate emissions by 80% by 2050. Under Theresa May's premiership, the Conservatives increased the ambition to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. Badenoch's proposal has been met with criticism from environmental groups, who view it as detrimental to both the economy and the environment.
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cly3pnjyzp4o> - Kemi Badenoch, leader of the Conservative Party, stated that achieving the UK's net zero target by 2050 is 'impossible' without significant economic consequences. The net zero goal, established by a previous Conservative government, aims to balance emitted greenhouse gases with measures like carbon capture and storage. Badenoch did not propose an alternative target date but suggested that the party would consider one if a more feasible approach to delivering net zero is identified.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/uk-opposition-leader-drops-support-2050-net-zero-climate-target-2025-03-18/> - Kemi Badenoch, leader of the UK's main opposition party, announced the intention to drop the 2050 net zero target, describing it as 'impossible' and potentially harmful to the British economy. This policy shift aligns the Conservatives more closely with the right-wing, climate-sceptic Reform UK party. Environmental groups have criticised the move, emphasising the importance of transitioning to a low-carbon economy for both environmental and economic reasons.
6. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/tory-conference-badenoch-net-zero-b2839278.html> - A survey revealed that a majority of Conservative Party members support the UK's commitment to achieving net zero emissions by 2050, despite Kemi Badenoch's pledge to repeal the Climate Change Act if the Tories win the next election. Former Prime Minister Theresa May and other party figures have opposed the plan, warning it could reverse nearly two decades of cross-party consensus on climate action and have detrimental effects on the environment and future generations.
7. <https://www.ice.org.uk/news-views-insights/inside-infrastructure/takeaways-from-2025-conservative-party-conference> - The ICE attended the 2025 Conservative Party Conference in Manchester, noting a shift in the party's infrastructure policy. Kemi Badenoch's pledge to repeal the Climate Change Act 2008 was a significant development, with the party proposing a new strategy focused on 'cheap, reliable power' and economic growth, without statutory emissions targets. This move has drawn criticism from various political figures and environmental groups, highlighting the ongoing debate over the UK's climate policies.