# Sir James Cleverly urges Tories to outpace sceptics with stronger green leadership



Sir James Cleverly is set to deliver a pivotal speech on Wednesday, urging Conservatives to adopt a proactive approach to climate change and green technology in the face of opposing viewpoints within the party. Speaking to the Conservative Environment Network, Cleverly will emphasise the need for the party to reject the "luddites" on both ends of the political spectrum who resist progress and innovation.

In a clear critique of the political climate, he will highlight the dangers of a “negative right,” which is content with the status quo, alongside a “negative left” that exhibits suspicion towards new technological advancements. Cleverly's remarks come in a context where the Conservative narrative has been notably shifting, particularly following statements from Kemi Badenoch, who has labelled herself a “net-zero sceptic.” Since becoming Conservative leader, Badenoch has questioned the feasibility of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050—a commitment established by the party under former Prime Minister Theresa May and unanimously endorsed in Parliament in 2019.

This divergence within the party has given rise to significant internal debate. Senior party members, like Andrew Bowie, have supported Badenoch’s stance, suggesting that such ambitious targets are “arbitrary” and lack clear pathways for implementation, which could leave the UK economically disadvantaged. Opposition parties, particularly Labour, remain steadfastly committed to the net-zero target but assert that it can be achieved without imposing drastic changes on everyday consumers.

Cleverly, in stark contrast to Badenoch's rhetoric, will advocate for a renewed focus on fostering investment in sustainable technologies and paving the way for the UK to regain its leadership role in global green innovation. He is expected to argue that the success in sectors like renewable energy, electric transport, and carbon capture must accelerate, warning that the UK risks ceding leadership to countries like China if it retreats from ambitious climate goals.

Moreover, his vision underlines the necessity for collaboration between the government and the private sector, asserting that while governmental initiatives are vital, true momentum will arise from private investment and innovation. He will state, “While government plays a role, the private sector must be the engine driving this green revolution,” positioning the UK as a potential leader in the forthcoming global market for green technologies.

However, the broader political landscape remains contentious. Recent actions from the Conservative Party, including Badenoch's abandonment of the net-zero commitment, have drawn criticism from environmental advocates. They warn that this change in direction could stifle green investment and increase reliance on fossil fuels, ultimately undermining the UK's long-term climate objectives. As Badenoch's government seeks to navigate these turbulent waters of energy policy and public sentiment, Cleverly's forthcoming address may serve as both a clarion call for innovation and a reflection of the urgent need for unified action within the Conservative Party.

The stakes are high; independent climate advisors continue to assert that achieving net-zero by 2050 is indeed possible, contingent on decisive policy-making and investment in sustainable practices now. As Cleverly calls for urgency, the question remains whether this will mark a genuine pivot in Conservative policy or merely a rhetorical flourish in a party divided on one of the most pressing issues of our time.

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* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/tories-must-reject-climate-change-luddites-on-left-and-right-warns-cleverly-L7WPAPA6GBID7AU2MUEUH6P3ZY/), [[4]](https://www.politico.eu/article/tories-uk-kemi-badenoch-conservative-opposition-net-carbon-zero-emissions-andrew-bowie/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/tories-must-reject-climate-change-luddites-on-left-and-right-warns-cleverly-L7WPAPA6GBID7AU2MUEUH6P3ZY/), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/ab0cb3fc-e45d-454b-83d9-c0284550aafe), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/uk-opposition-leader-drops-support-2050-net-zero-climate-target-2025-03-18/), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/mar/23/kemi-badenoch-accused-of-breaking-pledge-to-tory-mps-of-net-zero-by-2050)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/tories-must-reject-climate-change-luddites-on-left-and-right-warns-cleverly-L7WPAPA6GBID7AU2MUEUH6P3ZY/), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/mar/17/conservative-party-to-ditch-commitment-to-net-zero-in-uk-by-2050)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.politico.eu/article/tories-uk-kemi-badenoch-conservative-opposition-net-carbon-zero-emissions-andrew-bowie/), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/mar/23/kemi-badenoch-accused-of-breaking-pledge-to-tory-mps-of-net-zero-by-2050)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/tories-must-reject-climate-change-luddites-on-left-and-right-warns-cleverly-L7WPAPA6GBID7AU2MUEUH6P3ZY/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/ab0cb3fc-e45d-454b-83d9-c0284550aafe> - In 2019, the UK House of Commons unanimously passed legislation committing the country to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. However, this political consensus is now under strain. Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch has repeatedly criticised the net-zero target, suggesting it is 'impossible' and could lead to economic disadvantages. Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer and the Labour Party remain firmly committed to the climate target, though they assert it can be achieved without significant changes to consumer behaviour. This divergence in positions could alter the political landscape and the implementation of climate policies in the UK.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/uk-opposition-leader-drops-support-2050-net-zero-climate-target-2025-03-18/> - UK opposition leader Kemi Badenoch announced that the Conservative Party would abandon the goal of achieving 'Net Zero' by 2050, arguing that it is impossible and too costly for the British economy. This policy shift highlights the political challenges of moving away from fossil fuels. Badenoch stated that meeting the target would require a significant decline in living standards or could bankrupt the country. Independent climate advisors believe that reaching 'Net Zero' is possible with drastic measures, such as exclusively selling electric cars by 2030 and widespread use of heat pumps in homes by 2040. This decision aligns the Conservatives with the right-wing, climate-sceptic Reform UK party and comes as US President Donald Trump reverses green energy policies. Environmental groups consider this stance dangerous and misguided, emphasising the importance of transitioning to a low-carbon economy. The Conservatives currently face third place in the polls, behind the ruling Labour Party and Reform.
4. <https://www.politico.eu/article/tories-uk-kemi-badenoch-conservative-opposition-net-carbon-zero-emissions-andrew-bowie/> - Conservative MP Andrew Bowie criticised the UK's previous commitment to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, stating that setting arbitrary targets without clear plans does not benefit the country. He argued that such targets leave the UK economically worse off and at a competitive disadvantage. Former Prime Minister Theresa May had signed the target into law in June 2019. Since her election as Conservative leader, Kemi Badenoch has distanced herself from this policy, suggesting that the target was set without proper planning and that it is not feasible to achieve without significant economic consequences.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/mar/23/kemi-badenoch-accused-of-breaking-pledge-to-tory-mps-of-net-zero-by-2050> - Kemi Badenoch, the Conservative leader, has been accused of breaking her pledge to Tory MPs regarding the net-zero target by 2050. Critics argue that her approach could be damaging and harm green investment in the UK, as well as lead to higher electricity prices by making the country reliant on oil and gas for longer. Ryan Shorthouse, executive chair of the Bright Blue thinktank, emphasised that independent and rigorous evidence shows that net-zero emissions in the UK are achievable by 2050, but only if good policies are implemented now to support people on modest incomes with the costs and changes of the transition.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/mar/17/conservative-party-to-ditch-commitment-to-net-zero-in-uk-by-2050> - Kemi Badenoch is dropping the Conservative Party's commitment to reaching net-zero by 2050, as she launches the Conservatives' widest policy review in a generation. The Tory leader argued that hitting Britain's legally binding climate target is 'impossible', abandoning one of the most significant policies enacted by her predecessor Theresa May. Badenoch stated that the current policies the UK is implementing are largely failing to improve nature, while driving up the cost of energy, and that the country is falling between two stools – too high costs and too little progress.