Dear Gordon

open letters on green goals for your government
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edited by Rebecca Willis and Faye Scott

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Green Alliance
Green Alliance is an independent charity. Our mission is to promote sustainable development by ensuring that environmental solutions are a priority in British politics. We work with representatives from the three main political parties, government, business and the NGO sector to encourage new ideas, facilitate dialogue and develop constructive solutions to environmental challenges.

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Dear Gordon,

Some summer reading on environmental priorities for action...

Congratulations on becoming prime minister. I know the first few weeks have been pretty intense, so we have put together some light holiday reading for you.

As you moved into your new home, around 60,000 of your fellow Britons were driven out of theirs by heavy flooding. It was a stark reminder of the extreme weather events that will become more frequent as climate change takes hold.

Climate change is the most pressing issue facing today’s world. This collection demonstrates the breadth of support for rapid and decisive leadership on this issue by your government. Contributors from Alex Ferguson to WWF, from Christian Aid to UNISON all call on you to secure an effective global agreement matched by ambitious policies to reduce emissions at home. The Stern report that you commissioned provides a route map for the way ahead. Please make it the first priority of your administration. Your advisor, Al Gore, will settle for nothing less.

The voluntary sector leaders, business leaders and even footballers who have contributed are calling for action on a broader front. They outline the moral, economic and political case for prime ministerial leadership to create a green economy, to focus on the environment at the community level and to protect our countryside.

The economic development and competitiveness of the UK has always been central to your political outlook. As the Stern report argues, the best way to protect this is to climate-proof the economy. But a broader argument applies. The cost of wasted natural resources to UK manufacturing industries is equivalent to around seven per cent of profit. Energy efficiency improvements alone could save £12 billion annually. Taxes and emissions trading are central to tackling this.

But they are insufficient on their own. We also need to unleash the opportunity side of this coin, through an innovation policy that encourages entrepreneurs and forward-thinking companies to put the environment at the heart of their efforts. Businesses are looking for leadership from government in this area.

Your new Business Council for Britain has little representation from the environmental solutions industries. Appointing a green entrepreneur to the council would be a real sign that you take this seriously. The council could then work with others to assess what Britain needs to do to lead the world, and to prepare for the impacts that we cannot avoid.

Allow me to highlight two contributions in particular. The first is by Tony Hawkhead of Groundwork. Their work proves the value of investment in local environments, to help the poorest communities and to contribute to regeneration. The second is from Shaun Spiers of the Campaign to Protect Rural England. Your current approach to planning policy needs to be re-thought to reflect your commitment to climate change, and a Labour tradition of countryside protection.

Leadership on these issues would be popular as well as effective. Polls show that concern for the environment is widespread. People want to play their part. Crucially, they are looking to government for guidance, and to provide a framework which makes it easier to do the right thing. Transport, energy, housing and other policies need to make the green choice the natural choice.

This collection offers a menu of concise and positive ideas for prime ministerial leadership. I hope you will want to pick liberally from the choices offered here.

Yours,

Stephen Hale
Director, Green Alliance
Dear Gordon,

Build a low carbon workforce and lead by example in the public sector

Never before can the to-do list of an incoming prime minister have looked so challenging! I know that sorting out public service reform and public sector pay must be high on that list, and you will of course be hearing a lot from us on these issues over the coming weeks. However, I am sure it won’t surprise you to know that UNISON members also want to see tackling climate change as a key priority for your government. There were no fewer than nine motions on environmental issues on the agenda at our recent national delegate conference in Brighton. Many of the points our members raised in debate related closely to the broader themes of the week:

• the importance of the public sector and the public service ethos in delivering social justice and sustainability;
• the need to use the experience and expertise of frontline staff to shape change at work;
• and, in echo of the Stern report, the failure of markets to guarantee public and environmental goods.

It is on this basis that I am dropping you a line to set out two areas where we believe it will be relatively easy to develop measures to help tackle what is the challenge of our generation.

1 Work with trade unions to secure a just transition to a low carbon labour market

Over half of emissions are work related. Whilst addressing this will demand a significant technological and regulatory response, it will also require social partner engagement at all levels in order to foster new green jobs and to encourage the development of new ways of working and travelling to and at work.

As a first step, the ACAS code of practice on time off for trade union duties needs to be amended to give trade union environmental representatives the same facilities time as health and safety reps. This will enable working people to put environmental sustainability on the consultation and negotiation agenda and ensure that we are stakeholders in durable change. It will also help to grow the human resource that we need to create a sustainable, low carbon labour market.

2 Unlock the potential of the public sector

Accounting as it does for approximately one third of the economy, we believe that the public sector has an enormous role to play in tackling climate change. As the recent NHS Confederation report Taking the Temperature points out, the NHS alone has net emissions of around one million tonnes annually. Five per cent of all the UK’s emissions from road transport are NHS related.

There are clear opportunities for win-win outcomes in relation to public procurement, new public service buildings and how public services manage their affairs on a day to day basis. But to make the most of these opportunities, government needs to address the current contradiction between the efficiency agenda and tackling climate change. Public services must be able to invest in the short term to make longer terms gains, in terms of lower emissions and reduced energy bills. This should be complimented by government providing clearer direction to local authorities to monitor and take action on carbon emissions and promote one planet living in the communities that they serve.

Best wishes,

Dave Prentis

General Secretary, UNISON
Dear Gordon,

**Lead the way on global emissions cuts to help those who need it most**

If the UK does not set a 2050 target of at least 80 per cent cuts in carbon dioxide emissions and show willingness to repay its carbon debt to poorer countries, then hopes of keeping global warming below 2°C are all but lost.

Two degrees is believed by scientists to be the crucial ‘tipping point’ beyond which climate change becomes unmanageable. Poor people worldwide are already facing profound changes as a result of 0.8 degrees of warming.

As chancellor, you were a strong supporter of more finance for international development. But warming above two degrees will threaten to sweep away all that your support has achieved in the past ten years. Many people’s lives and livelihoods will be lost as droughts and floods ravage poor communities.

Christian Aid is already seeing changes take place. In northern Kenya, where some of the world’s poorest people have survived for centuries by herding cattle, drought has increased four-fold in the past 25 years. Families are losing their herds, dropping out of the economy and becoming dependent on aid. This is the opposite of development.

As prime minister you must light a beacon of hope in the UK for the poorest worldwide. Labour has set an international precedent by proposing to enact legal limits on harmful emissions. This is groundbreaking and the rest of the world is watching. But the targets in the bill, as currently proposed, are inadequate. The UK’s Tyndall Centre and other world-renowned experts point to the need for an 80 per cent cut in our domestic emissions by 2050. If we do not adopt this target then no other rich country is likely to.

On the other hand, if Brown’s Britain enters climate change negotiations later this year with an 80 per cent bill passing through its parliament, it will set the benchmark for other industrialised countries. But even if this were paralleled in Europe and north America, it would still not be enough to secure a global agreement.

Poorer countries are understandably vexed at the notion that they should reduce their carbon dioxide emissions before they’ve finished the job of development, especially since we are still emitting more per head than they are.

From a moral point of view, it’s quite clear that if poorer people are to be denied the opportunity of burning fossil fuels to develop, then they should be compensated for this; through the financing of clean development, the free transfer of technology and, crucially for the poorest nations, support for adaptation. But from a practical point of view, this also makes sense. As Sir Nicholas Stern’s report made clear, none of us can do business in a world of catastrophic climate change.

When Hilary Benn leaves for Bali in December, please make sure he has in his attaché case a firm promise of 80 per cent cuts by 2050 in the UK.

We can tackle poverty and climate change at the same time, but we need nothing short of a new, global deal.

Yours,

Daleep Mukarji
Director, Christian Aid
Dear Gordon,

Support for action on climate change is strong and growing

Congratulations on your election as leader of the Labour Party and becoming our new prime minister.

I have had something of a late awakening in the past two years with a visit to Malawi and a move to a new house in Devon. The first allowed me to witness at first hand the terrible effects of climate change. The second has given me new opportunities to adopt a greener lifestyle.

My visit to Malawi brought home to me that a commitment to poverty relief in Africa and elsewhere cannot be separated from a commitment to tackle climate change. My foundation, which works primarily to help develop sustainable agriculture in Malawi, cannot succeed unless we can halt the already devastating effects of global warming. Those in poverty are most vulnerable to these effects. Climate change for them means death and displacement, hunger and disease.

So I would urge you to continue the excellent work done by Mr Blair and secure an effective global agreement on climate change. This is one issue where borders literally do not matter. The future of life on the planet is at stake. What more important legacy could you aim for?

I am in a very fortunate position. Due to the seemingly inexorable popularity of football I am able to attract a great deal of attention to the issue, and to source and purchase the most eco-friendly products and ethical ways of living. But in doing so I have become aware of how expensive this can be, and that many of the options I can take up are not available to all. I hope that your efforts will allow everyone to make choices that reduce their carbon emissions without a financial burden. If high carbon options remain the cheapest, then there is something wrong with the costings. ‘Buy now, pay later’ has never seemed so apt. I hope you will make the green option the easy option.

We are working with the English Premier League to put football at the forefront of the battle against climate change, through player advocacy and through the physical implementation of carbon cutting action – greener stadia, ticket and train packages and so on. I hope that this will reach a new section of the population and allow people to see that all aspects of life can have environmental impact, and how working together can ease that impact.

Al Gore told me recently to ‘just keep doing what you’re doing’, which was great to hear. But there’s no room for any of us to feel complacent on this. I feel very privileged to have been invited to join the ever increasing body of individuals, companies, schools and organisations who are committed to making a difference. We cannot miss this opportunity to act. Time is against us, we must act now.

Thank you for your attention,

David James
Portsmouth and England goalkeeper
Dear Gordon,

Climate change requires a team effort

Congratulations on your new job. In some ways your new job is a little like the one I’ve had for the past 21 years. In all that time, there has never been a shortage of people offering me advice. I’m sure you’ll find the same, so I’ll keep it short.

Climate change is a game of two halves. Tony has made a great start in Europe and internationally but there’s still a lot to play for through the EU, G8 and the United Nations. It’s not a winner takes all contest, so it’s in the interests of all countries to reach an agreement that limits the potentially devastating impacts of climate change.

One of the issues regarding our record here in Britain is that it has been worse than other countries in Europe since 1997. Our home record is also critical to success in the competition we are in so I am sure you will address this and bring about the improvement necessary.

There are some huge issues in your in-tray. Economic prosperity. Security. The fight against poverty in Britain and in the developing world. But Al Gore’s climate master-class, which I attended, brought home to me that issues don’t come any bigger than climate change. Unless we can rise to the challenge it will damage our economy, our security, and the fight against poverty in the UK and internationally.

I wish you the best of luck.

Sir Alex Ferguson C.B.E.
Manager, Manchester United F.C.
Dear Gordon,

A view from the front line of climate change impact

Congratulations from Bangladesh.

We are very pleased to see changes in political leadership in the context of the many challenges in the UK and the international arena. We hope that your leadership will enhance the role of the UK in all international forums, including the United Nations and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. We appreciate the strong role of the UK in the European Union, the Gleneagles Plan of Action for managing the impacts of climate change and your commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20 per cent to stop dangerous climate change.

As you know, global climate change is the consequence of global injustice – the unequal over exploitation of global resources and the wasteful consumption by economically developed western societies – and it will result in increasing social inequality and injustice, poverty, food insecurity and hunger for millions. Climate change enhances both intra generational and intergenerational inequity across the world and its devastating negative impacts will affect the society, economy and ecology of developing and poor countries the most. Thus, climate injustice will violate the human rights of the poor and marginalised people in many countries. According to a recent Time magazine report, Bangladesh will be the second most vulnerable country to climate change impacts but the country has very little capacity to address its devastating impacts. We need your sincere support in our efforts to tackle this problem.

The Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies is an independent research and policy institute based in Dhaka, Bangladesh and we work both regionally and globally to achieve sustainable development for the global community. We strongly feel and demand that your government and country stay with us in tackling the ever bigger environmental and developmental problems facing poor and marginalised groups in Bangladesh and other developing countries.

We hope that your country will play a vital role in formulating and implementing international policy for climate response by taking greater responsibility in mitigation and supporting adaptation in vulnerable countries. We think that a 20 per cent reduction of green house gas emission is not an adequate or fair target for the EU states and we demand that the UK commits to at least a 30 per cent reduction by 2020. We also expect that the UK will play an important role in the upcoming COP13 and MOP in Bali in making strong commitments and decisions for a substantial green house gas reduction target for the Annex-1 countries beyond the 2012 climate regime. We also expect that, through your dynamic leadership, you will make your best efforts to bring the USA back to complying with the UNFCCC, with clear commitment and urgent action for green house gas reduction.

We wish you great success.

With very best wishes,

Dr. A. Atiq Rahman

Executive Director, Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies
Dear Gordon,

One planet is all that we’ve got

Congratulations on taking over the role of prime minister. As I am sure you are aware you take on this responsibility at a time of crucial importance for the environment.

Humanity has moved into a huge ecological deficit, indeed if everybody on earth lived as we do in the UK we would need three planets to support us. This underpins WWF’s international ‘One Planet Living’ campaign and we would like to see you commit the UK to its aims – a drive for sustainable consumption using a combination of personal behaviour change, business innovation and shifts in government policy.

Climate change is clearly a major consequence of this over-consumption. If we are to tackle it globally the UK must continue to provide leadership in the pursuit of an international agreement to succeed the first phase of the Kyoto Protocol. It is vital that a robust, ambitious agreement is reached by 2009 at the latest.

In demonstrating international leadership, it is also vital that the UK urgently begins to deliver significant emissions reductions at home. In this respect we welcome your government’s commitment to introducing a Climate Change Bill in this session. However, the draft bill, as it stands, would allow for serious loopholes in the control of emissions by excluding major emitters such as international aviation. Additionally, by setting a target to reduce carbon emissions by 60 per cent by 2050, rather than the reductions of at least 80 per cent that the scientific community says are necessary in developed countries, the bill sets in place a trajectory and precedent that will not keep global temperature rises below the critical threshold of 2ºC.

‘One Planet Living’ also calls on us to protect the planet’s bio-diversity. A key piece of legislation that has been long promised in your party’s manifestos is a Marine Act to protect Britain’s coastal waters and to allow for proper, planned development and conservation of the seas and their wildlife. In particular, with the urgent need to develop off-shore wind farms, a proper planning policy for coastal waters becomes vital. The bill has cross-party support and is, I understand, in a near state of readiness. It would be a refreshing and welcome signal of your government’s commitment to the environment if it were to be introduced in the Queen’s Speech.

Finally, in the UK many still think of the environment as the luxury concern of the affluent, with environmental policies running counter to access to cheap goods and services for low-income communities. This is an issue that WWF-UK takes very seriously and it will form the theme of our party conference activity. You have already signalled that you consider the environment and social justice to be two of your priorities and, having formally worked as a director of Oxfam for a number of years, I share this perspective. We at WWF believe that the right approach, based on sound sustainable development policies, means the two can go hand-in hand.

I wish you well as you start your term in office, and look forward to a constructive relationship.

Yours sincerely,

David Nussbaum
Chief Executive, WWF
Dear Gordon,

Take a walk in the countryside – your job isn’t just about the economy anymore

I have to confess that I’d never taken you for a countryman. But in questions after you speech to Green Alliance in March you spoke warmly of summers spent on farms and the importance of the countryside to any notion of Britishness. You also coupled the countryside and the environment in your Labour leadership acceptance speech in June: ‘advancing and protecting the British way of life means taking seriously the stewardship of our environment and the countryside’. This is an astute connection, because when most people think of the environment they are just as likely to think of the environment near them and the places they love as they are to consider the huge problems facing the planet.

So at CPRE we’re encouraged that you understand and share our love of the countryside – not only the English countryside, lovely though it is, but the countryside of Wales, Northern Ireland and, of course, Scotland as well.

There is a strong Labour tradition of protecting, improving and celebrating the countryside and there have been some lasting Labour achievements, among them the first green belts, the National Parks, and the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, one of the great legacies of the Attlee Government. This government has given us a new National Park in England and the first ever in Scotland; the right to roam; and an urban renaissance agenda that has saved vast amounts of countryside, brought new life to run down towns and cities and reduced carbon emissions.

But here’s the problem. Better land use, with its environmental and social benefits, has been achieved through the democratic planning system. And you appear to have a few problems with planning.

I hope we can get past these. It is understandable that, as chancellor, you were frustrated with a planning system that sometimes delays or prevents developments that may boost the economy. That’s a legitimate perspective for a chancellor – even a chancellor in a government committed to sustainable development. But now you’re in charge of the whole show. So I hope you’ll come to see the beauty of a planning system that mediates between different interests – local and national, economic and environmental, short-term and long-term – and seeks solutions in the wider public interest. Planning deals with complex questions and conflicts, but the complexity won’t go away or harmony break out if you elevate economic interests over those of communities or the environment.

The system can be improved, but implementing the proposals in the Planning White Paper would be a disaster for the countryside and for local democracy. The environmental movement is united on that. We hope you’ll think again. To help your thinking, you might consider setting up some sort of environmental or civic sounding board to balance the advice you’ll receive from your new Business Council for Britain. Business is important – but there’s a lot more that makes life worth living, including our glorious countryside.

CPRE wishes you well in your new role. You’ll be busy, of course. But if you’re ever down and feel like a life-enhancing, soul-restoring day in the country, let us know. I think we could show you some things that would really cheer you.

Yours sincerely,

Shaun Spiers
Chief Executive, Campaign to Protect Rural England
Dear Gordon,

Rethinking food and farming will benefit the planet and the nation’s health

I can’t help but admire your efforts to implement important cultural changes in the way that government works in your first months as prime minister.

But I trust that one exception to your gospel of change will be the climate. I hope you will permit me to offer some suggestions as to how this thorny issue should be tackled—and how doing so might promote many of your government’s other objectives.

Let me begin by outlining the problem. We know that food and farming contributes nearly a fifth of the UK’s greenhouse gas emissions. We know that the changes in people’s diet over the last 25 years has led to a rise in obesity and heart disease.

We also know that in the same period the major British food retailers have virtually abandoned local, seasonal and fresh produce in favour of processed, ‘value added’ foods and the perennial availability of all fresh produce. This has resulted in a quantum leap in the amount of produce air freighted and transported from the other side of the globe. In truth, food retailing is now focused primarily on shareholder value regardless of the costs to UK farmers and the environment.

Yet the huge success story of the organic food sector in recent years suggests that the public mood may be turning. The demand for climate friendly food is there, what remains is for government to rethink the way it approaches food and farming. Until you do, it will not be possible to significantly reduce the sector’s greenhouse gases. If ministers for health, environment, education, and farming could coordinate policy to encourage the consumption of fresh, organic, seasonal, unprocessed food, then the goals of a healthier society, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and a sustainable future for British farming and the countryside could be achieved.

As a first step, the Dutch Ministry for Agriculture only uses local, organic food. Defra should lead the way in the UK by only sourcing organic, seasonal, unprocessed, British grown food, as a very real demonstration of their commitment to sustainable farming.

Good luck,

Keith Abel
Founder, Abel & Cole
Dear Gordon,

Find space in your vision of economic prosperity for sustainable development

Anyone who has followed your political journey will have been struck by your consistency. A zeal to improve the life chances of those who have least in our society is matched by a conviction that the most effective way to alleviate poverty is to build a healthy and stable economy.

Social justice and economic prosperity will no doubt remain your goals in office. But is there room in your vision for that third principle of sustainable development: the need to live within environmental limits?

Once upon a time greenies blamed business and the market for many of our woes while economists – and many politicians - saw concern for the environment as merely a check to growth. Thankfully we’ve moved on.

Policy and rhetoric around sustainable development no longer focuses on no-win compromises but on win-win solutions. We can have growth and save the planet, but we need a different kind of growth and a different economic mindset.

Consensus on climate change has made that switch easier and the most obvious expression of this new realism is the report you commissioned from Nicholas Stern, which adds to the social case for action that we’ve had for some time. On a global scale it’s clear to all that people living in fragile or sensitive environments suffer first and suffer most when nature fights to regain its equilibrium.

The challenge now is to bring these debates centre stage in your domestic, as well as your international, policies. For exactly the same dynamics are in play in Birmingham as they are in Bangladesh.

As the impacts of climate change begin to be felt, it is those in our communities who have least who will feel the pain of flooding, fuel price hikes and water rationing. If we’re not careful it will also be those same people who are priced out of the choices the more affluent can make in terms of transport, waste and food supplies as we develop our policy responses.

But it’s not just a question of making sure that our environmental policies pass the fairness test. Investing in environmental sustainability can also be a lever for reviving economies and lifting whole neighbourhoods out of decline. Enterprises looking at reuse and recycling, landscape management and local energy generation can operate on a relatively small scale. They’re needed in our most deprived neighbourhoods and can be viable using skill-sets that already exist.

Investing in our housing stock – particularly bringing our social housing up to decent standards – will work best if we’re addressing the environmental performance of those buildings and the environmental quality of the neighbourhoods in which they’re located.

The key to all of this is ensuring that sustainable development is part of the way we deliver education, improve public health, promote skills and drive forward regeneration in our communities.

Tackling poverty and tackling climate change are two sides of a coin. At home, as abroad, the cost of doing nothing will far outweigh the cost of doing something.

Tony Hawkhead
Chief Executive, Groundwork
Dear Gordon,

**Women want action on climate change, but we’re part of the solution too**

As incoming prime minister you are faced with a number of challenges, all jostling for the top spot. Women want many things from your government and leadership on environmental issues are top of our list.

Globally, women are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to our different social roles and status. In the UK and other developed countries, increasing costs for energy, transport, healthcare and nutrition are likely to affect women, especially single mothers and older women, more than men. In developing countries, women are already suffering disproportionately as a consequence of climate change – 70 per cent of the world’s poor, who are far more vulnerable to environmental damage, are women, and 85 per cent of the people who die from climate-induced disasters are women.

**Equality:** Women in the UK have a key role in tackling climate change as consumers and as educators in our homes. Unfortunately, our importance is not reflected in our participation in environmental decision-making in government, industry and the scientific community, where we are under represented. Government needs to work actively with women’s organisations to achieve equal involvement in environmental decision-making. We would also like to see measures to increase the number of girls and women studying science subjects and working in science related jobs.

**Climate Change:** 97 per cent of the women who took part in our recent survey on climate change do not believe that the government is doing enough to tackle the problem. Women want to see government support a Climate Change Bill that commits to reducing UK carbon emissions by at least 80 per cent by 2050.

We would also like to see an ambitious campaign to educate citizens and to incentivise green choices. Actions could include plans to accelerate the phasing out of incandescent light bulbs and the phasing out of standby options on all new appliances.

These views and many more are outlined in the Women’s Manifesto on Climate Change, which highlights the fact that women across the UK are demanding much more government action in tackling climate change.

**The wider environment:** As consumers, women are increasingly concerned about landfill and the reckless use of our resources. This was highlighted by the WI campaign on excessive food packaging. Retailer and consumer attitudes towards waste are improving, but both sides are struggling with the lack of infrastructure to dispose of waste sustainably.

Central government must take a leadership role to ensure that waste is managed effectively and that the infrastructure is in place to allow manufacturers, retailers and consumers to reduce, reuse and recycle effectively. We would also like to see higher minimum standards for household recycling collection by all local authorities and central government must ensure that industry and local government work together to achieve the most effective and sustainable approach to waste.

Our research has demonstrated that women are far more concerned about environmental issues than men and, as such, are your single biggest constituency and an important part of the solution. Women want their children and grandchildren to inherit a healthy planet – the changes outlined above need to be made now – the time for inaction has passed.

Yours sincerely,

Fay Mansell

Chair, National Federation of Women’s Institutes

“women are far more concerned about environmental issues than men and, as such, are your single biggest constituency and an important part of the solution”
Dear Gordon,

A low carbon energy future is achievable if you provide stability along the way

The challenge in today’s electricity market is the transition to a low carbon economy whilst maintaining affordable and secure sources of energy.

This represents the biggest challenge the energy industry has ever faced. Businesses, consumers and government all have a role to play and must rise to the challenge. However, this is not a challenge the UK can tackle alone. We have the opportunity to lead Europe towards a low carbon economy and to work with governments and regulators to create a stable policy framework in which companies can deliver the significant investment programme in the energy infrastructure of the future.

Over the coming months several key policies are up for debate including planning, renewables policy and the future of nuclear power. It is important that the resulting regulatory framework delivers long-term regulatory stability. The energy business does not deal in short timescales; we are facing billion-pound investment decisions on power stations that will take several years to build and have a lifetime of several decades. Without the regulatory certainty, both in the UK and Europe, this capital may go elsewhere.

The EU Emissions Trading Scheme is key to achieving the UK’s and Europe’s climate change objectives, and it is critical that it is maintained in order to underpin long-term investment by industry in low carbon technologies. Extending the scheme beyond 2012 for a period of at least 15 years is crucial to providing a clear and stable framework and we encourage you to make this a priority for you and your government.

We believe that the UK benefits from the balanced portfolio it has built over the last 100 years and maintaining this balance is key to delivering affordable and secure energy in the future. Government must work with industry to facilitate the research and development needed to ensure the next generation of low carbon technologies are available. However, it is important that the government does not use policy to try and pick winners from the range of technologies available. Rather, it should support a mix of technologies and let the winners emerge of their own accord.

The shift to a low carbon economy represents one of the greatest challenges but also one of the most significant opportunities for the UK and Europe and must not be missed. We must all work together to ensure that we are at the forefront of this development and able to secure the economic benefits it brings.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Duff
Chief Executive, RWE npower
Dear Gordon,

Support environmental innovation as an economic opportunity

You take over as prime minister following a year when the gravity and urgency of protecting the planet we live on has, at last, taken centre stage. Indeed, you stated in your recent speech to Green Alliance that environmental care now sits alongside economic growth and social justice as ‘a central concern of policy’.

The key challenge of public policy, therefore, must now be to reconcile those central concerns – to achieve a transition to a low carbon, resource efficient and competitive economy. Furthermore, that challenge must be met quickly and across the globe.

The business world is starting to see environmental protection as a huge opportunity. The City of London has become the centre of the emerging global carbon trading market and the UK has world class solutions to offer in areas such as land remediation, water pollution control and environmental services. The environmental industry now employs some 400,000 people in the UK.

This points the way for government. Business leaders setting the pace in emerging markets in environmental technology and resource efficient goods have a clear message as to what they need you to do. Put in place an environmental policy framework that stimulates innovation and investment – then stick to it.

This means asking your ministers to follow a new approach to setting environmental policy that is long term, outcome focused and, above all, stretching. Key to this will be asking your new chancellor to shift gear on the 1997 pledge to move the burden of taxes away from ‘goods’ such as labour and on to pollution and resource use. The recent increase in the landfill tax was a good first step.

It means the government using public procurement and fiscal incentives to incentivise new environmental technologies until they can achieve sufficient market share to be self-sustaining. We also need a more proactive approach to help environmental innovators who face problems with regulations and standards that were designed for existing technologies.

Implementing a new approach to policy should be at the heart of the new Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (DBERR). Rather than knee jerk opposition to new environmental policies, it must work to ensure they are designed to stimulate business ingenuity and resources.

A key tool for DBERR will be ensuring the current reform of regulatory impact assessments leads to an assessment of all new policies against their carbon and sustainable development impacts and how they stimulate environmental innovation and investment – not just their costs.

Landing on ministers’ desks shortly will be the recommendations of the Committee on Environmental Markets and Economic Performance that the government set up. This is an ideal opportunity to take this new approach to policy forward.

The Archbishop of Canterbury recently described the economy as a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment. The world urgently needs an example of how to run that subsidiary without destroying the parent company. We urge you to take up the challenge.

Adrian Wilkes and Merlin Hyman
Executive Chairman and Director, the Environmental Industries Commission
Dear Gordon,

Address the obstacles to a low carbon economy

Confidence in a significant price for carbon over the long term is needed to encourage the investments that are necessary to deliver a low carbon economy. The government must stand strong and persevere, supporting greater ambition in the international climate change regime and removing the politics of national allocation from the EU Emissions Trading Scheme. But while a long term carbon signal is essential, and is transforming business culture, it is insufficient on its own. For infrastructure investments to reach the appropriate scale, the carbon price needs to sit within a broader enabling environment.

• Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS): The UK is positioned to take a leadership role in this business because of our need for clean power, our offshore expertise and our North Sea infrastructure. These circumstances mean that the UK could lead this industry at relatively low cost. The technology exists and what is needed now is a demonstration of economic rationality and political will. The government needs to commit to deploying the first generation of these plants and to making CCS the norm for fossil-based power generation in the UK and Europe. It is no longer acceptable to build conventional coal-fired power stations and no more licenses should be granted for these.

• Renewable energy: The UK is lagging behind other European countries in the use of renewables and we must rectify this. We must make sure that the UK legislation for delivering the EU’s 2020 targets is effective. Support for market mechanisms to bring forward the technologies is to be applauded but there has to be more certainty to drive long-term investment.

• Microgeneration: At the moment microgeneration technologies are not cost effective compared to centralised energy generation. This has to change. Energy suppliers, who have the ability through their customer bases to sell these technologies on a mass scale, do not want to do so because it would mean selling less energy. Regulatory drivers are required to incentivise suppliers to promote technologies to their customers and to offer financing solutions to reduce upfront costs. A cap and trade based supplier obligation could deliver such a framework.

• Our relationship with China: China needs help to meet its own goals and it is in all our interests to make a significant contribution towards cleaning up China’s development and reducing emissions to the atmosphere we all share. The UK and EU need to build a common vision with China around the thesis of interdependence. There must be accelerated learning and deployment of technology through public-private partnership – both in and out of China. Any trade barriers to the diffusion of low carbon technology must be removed.

We think that the areas above need special attention but, obviously, do not provide all the answers. We look forward to helping you meet this challenge, which we believe is full of opportunity and promise for UK citizens and businesses.

Yours truly,

James Cameron

James Cameron
Vice President, Climate Change Capital
Dear Gordon,

We need to innovate, not just educate, to achieve sustainability

Many will have welcomed your attempts to bring more clarity to the government’s approach to innovation, with the creation of a dedicated department linking innovation, skills and universities. But a new department will make little difference unless it has a clear sense of purpose.

The UK can’t afford to be vague about the kind of innovation it wants to be known for; we need a distinctive approach suited to an economy largely based on services, software and culture. We should be a society of mass innovation, mobilising know-how and creativity from many sources and applying it to many fields – not just high-tech.

The truth is that most of the biggest innovations are collective endeavours. In business, the most powerful innovations come about through mobilising scores of companies around the same goal. Environmental innovations vital to sustainability will require similar levels of collective and collaborative innovation; linking together new technologies, services and consumer lifestyles. And it will not come from clever gizmos alone; many players need mobilising around the same goals, with social, technological and business innovation working hand in hand.

To help achieve this, we need an education system suited to an innovation economy. An inflexible, top down, standardised curriculum can produce literate, diligent workers who follow rules, but an innovation economy requires education that is curiosity led, creates high levels of self-motivation and promotes collaborative problem solving. You must dare to do what Mr Blair did not: open up a debate about what education is for in a world in which tens of millions of Chinese and Indians will graduate from secondary school each year with a sound education in the basics.

The national curriculum should be slimmed down to allow disciplined, purposeful and energetic creativity to be at the heart of education. More learning needs to be done outside schools, in workplaces, homes, museums and galleries. Schools need to be remade to stimulate the collaborative creativity potential of a generation growing up by expressing themselves through blogs, YouTube and mySpace.

Secondly, Britain should be the leading nation of consumer innovators. Innovation policy traditionally pumps technology down a pipeline, but it was consumers who discovered the potential for SMS messaging, not the phone companies. Innovation to cut greenhouse gases will be stillborn unless consumers are enlisted early on in changing their lifestyles to incorporate new technologies.

Britain should lead the world in regulating to encourage rapid consumer innovation in all sectors and the City of London has a critical role to play by innovating approaches to carbon trading that could finance more distributed green energy production.

Successful innovative societies generally have a shared story that everyone in the society can relate to. In the Netherlands, innovation is focussed on collective adaptations that allow them to live below sea level, Korea has collectively created a dynamic image and US innovation stems from the national story of opening up frontiers for exploration and growth. In contrast, the UK’s dominant story about innovation focuses on gifted boffins and trendy creative types. It’s not compelling and it’s not a story the nation can share. Britain needs an approach to innovation that casts all its citizens as the innovators of today or tomorrow; as consumers, citizens and creators in their own right. We need to become a society of mass innovation, where everyone makes a contribution to the kind of collective innovation we require to live longer, more sustainable lives.

Yours sincerely,

Charles Leadbeater

Visiting fellow at the National Endowment for Society, Technology and the Arts
Dear Gordon,

**A green tax shift is your missing ingredient**

I am writing to recommend that in the early days of your premiership you re-invigorate your government’s policy on environmental taxation, as you did ten years ago as chancellor when New Labour came to power.

Then, as no doubt you remember, you issued within a few weeks of the election your Statement of Intent on Environmental Taxation, which proclaimed an aim to shift the burden of tax from ‘goods’ to ‘bads’. A flurry of activity on environmental taxation followed, culminating in the Climate Change Levy (CCL), the Aggregates Tax and the reform of Vehicle Excise Duty and Company Car tax, among other initiatives. However, the failure to uprate the CCL for inflation until 2007, and the freezing of fuel duties in nominal terms for many of the years since 2000, combined with the modest levels of other environmental taxes, have led environmental tax revenues as a share of taxation to fall such that they are now below their 1997 level. The intended tax shift has, therefore, not been achieved.

This is particularly unfortunate because most policy analysts now generally think that the price signal is a fundamental element of environmental policy in particular, and that achieving policy objectives without prices stimulating investment, consumption and innovation in the desired direction will be both more expensive and more difficult, if not impossible. The Stern Report cited adequate carbon pricing as one of the three absolutely key drivers requirements for addressing climate change, the other two being technology and behaviour change. In fact, carbon pricing is the most important of the three, because it is a driver of both technical change and behaviour change.

The government has admitted that it will fail to meet its domestic target of carbon emissions for 2010. At least part of the reason for this is surely that carbon remains too cheap and, therefore, that low-carbon technologies and behaviours remain relatively too expensive. In my view, there is little chance of the government meeting the 2020 targets for carbon reduction that have been included in the Draft Climate Change Bill without increasing the price of carbon for all energy users, and using the revenues to reduce other taxes, stimulate further carbon reduction and compensate groups that might otherwise be disproportionately disadvantaged. A systematic tax shift to encourage greater energy efficiency and conservation, and the development of low-carbon technologies, remains the missing element of the government’s climate change policies. It would both achieve significant carbon reduction in itself, and make all the government’s other climate change policies more effective.

The government of which you have been chancellor for ten years has done so much, both through its advocacy of climate change mitigation and the commissioning of the Stern Report, to raise the political profile and public awareness of climate change. Surely now, as you become prime minister, the time is ripe to implement the policy that is fundamental to achieving the emissions reductions that the government has aimed for but which have so far proved elusive. Without a tax shift based on carbon pricing they will remain so. With such a tax shift, the prospects for climate change policy could be transformed.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Paul Ekins

Head of the Environment Group, Policy Studies Institute
Dear Gordon,

**Build on what we have to meet our housing needs**

You have said that housing will be one of your top priorities as Prime Minister, but meeting housing need and providing enough decent, affordable homes, whilst building within environmental, social and political limits is very difficult. Ours is a densely populated island. Our green belts and countryside are treasured assets, which makes building unpopular.

We could meet housing need and renew communities, while putting far less strain on scarce natural resources, by building within current communities and using land and existing buildings more carefully. In any case, it is urgent to support the existing and often poorer communities within cities and towns. Most housing growth can happen within these areas, by refurbishing homes, using infill sites for new building and bringing empty buildings back into use.

Expanding and restoring existing communities requires meticulous neighbourhood management and careful local planning, but it is far more cost-effective in the longer term. It also creates more cohesive communities and maximises the use of existing infrastructure. It makes public transport, local services, and supervision of streets, parks and play areas more viable. Poorer inner city areas can become more mixed, more attractive neighbourhoods offering affordable, sustainable homes in accessible and lively communities.

We hope that Yvette Cooper, your new housing minister, will specify, through planning guidance, an expectation that developments will be built to a minimum density of fifty dwellings per hectare; maximising the use of infill brown sites within built up areas. These smaller spaces, even in London, offer enough land for most housing need for the next 30 years. Such an approach would do much to tackle social exclusion, as it would encourage people to stay or move back into our cities and towns and reduce urban sprawl.

The government has moved far to address the environmental impact of new housing. Making all new homes carbon neutral by 2016 is a bold and crucial commitment. The code for sustainable new homes helps too. But we must be equally bold with existing buildings, given that at least 70 per cent of the homes that we will have in 2050 already exist.

With the right incentives from government, we can expand our housing supply virtually without touching green belts or new greenfield land. Equalising incentives between new build and repairing existing homes is crucial. As you know, 17.5 per cent VAT on all repair, even in regeneration areas created by the government, gives perverse incentives for demolition. Incentives to reuse empty buildings and small infill sites within built-up areas could help small scale careful planning within communities. In regeneration areas, VAT could be reduced to five per cent, as happens in most other European countries.

How we meet our future housing needs will deeply affect not just our environment but also our increasingly fragmented communities. We very much hope that the fresh start you offer will tackle housing problems in new ways, focussing on the assets we already have.

Yours sincerely,

Anne Power

Professor of Social Policy, London School of Economics
This collection of open letters brings together a diverse group of individuals, from Alex Ferguson to WWF and UNISON to Christian Aid, with a common goal: to inspire our new Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, to take action on the environment.

The contributions in Dear Gordon highlight the critical issues that businesses, pressure groups and committed individuals want him to tackle.

All are united on the need for Gordon Brown to lead the international effort to secure an effective global agreement on climate change, while also setting an example at home. Contributors also stress the need for a broader green economic policy that encourages environmental innovation and a social policy that acknowledges the importance of high quality local environments for all communities. Another theme that emerges is the importance of long-term planning to protect and enhance our countryside, for which there is a strong Labour tradition.

The urgent need for action to address these challenges is clearer than ever. As these letters show, there is a moral, economic and political case for action – and growing support for the green cause among leaders from different sectors, as well as the general public.