looking back, thinking forward...
25 years of Green Alliance
1979 | 2004
Green Alliance’s mission is to promote sustainable development by ensuring that the environment is at the heart of decision-making.

We work with senior people in government, parliament, business and the environmental movement to encourage new ideas, dialogue and constructive solutions.

“thinking fresh thinking to stimulate new thinking and advance the environmental agenda into new areas
talking influencing decision-makers to make the environment a central political issue
acting ... smart policy to integrate the environment effectively into public policy and decision-making
Green Alliance occupies a unique niche in the environment movement. We aim to set the agenda rather than follow it; as our timeline of achievements in this review shows, our intervention often precedes external events. We are small but potent, achieving big outcomes on few resources. However, if there is one constant at Green Alliance, it is that we are always evolving. Former directors Tom Burke, Julie Hill, Peter Madden and Rebecca Willis give their perspectives on their tenure, following Green Alliance’s development over more than two decades.

We can claim many ‘firsts’ throughout our history. We influenced the main political parties to make their first ever policy statements on the environment in 1984. We were the first to articulate a common agenda between business and environmentalists in the mid-1980s. In 1987, we were the first environment organisation to raise the issue of genetic modification in the UK. We hosted the first environment conference which brought east and west European organisations together in 1989. In 1990, our joint campaign led to the first ever White Paper on the environment. We hosted Tony Blair’s first green speech in 1995, and his first as prime minister in 2000. In 2001, over half the UK waste industry signed up to new performance indicators developed by Green Alliance. In 2004, we influenced planning policy to require on-site renewable energy in new developments for the first time.

These are just a few highlights of a rich track record.

Starting out in 1979, we were described as ‘a bunch of optimists’ and we remain positive today, even as more complex and global environmental challenges unfold. We don’t underestimate the scale of these, but our continuing optimism lies in the knowledge that we really do make a difference.

We are mindful of the fact that we couldn’t achieve any of this without our friends and supporters, and so we extend a big thank you to our green allies: the members, funders and colleagues who have supported and worked with us along the way.

Welcome to this special review to celebrate our 25th anniversary. In thinking ahead, we have taken the opportunity to look back. It has been a revealing exercise. Our work involves lots of beginnings but the ends are sometimes much harder to see. The luxury of the long view is that it shows the great strides made in environmental policy over the past 25 years, due in no small part to Green Alliance.
25 years of achievements 1979|2004

thoughts from a small room
Tom Burke, director 1982-91, now Green Alliance trustee

Our office in Chandos Place was a tiny triangular room with a single high window. Green Alliance has grown since then, but living conditions for the current staff bear a striking resemblance to those early days. Maybe there is something about overcrowded offices that stimulates creativity?

A lot came out of that little room. The first steps in the environmental engagement with the business community began with a dialogue on pesticides. This was also where Tessa Tennant launched her stellar career as the pioneer of green investment. Our confined quarters were a powerful inducement to spin things off. The pesticides dialogue helped start the Pesticides Trust. We initiated the formation of the National Food Alliance, now Sustain, and collaborated with NCVO to help create Wastewatch.

Here we also recognised that politicians only really listen to other politicians. So we wrote environmental speeches for leading political figures on all sides to encourage them to compete. We also lobbied, successfully, for Britain’s first White Paper on the environment. The meetings we established then between environmental group leaders continue to this day.

We helped build the first links between east and west European environmental organisations. During preparations for the 1992 Earth Summit we brought together NGOs from Anchorage to Vladivostok for the European preparatory conference. At the subsequent Bergen Conference we set the model for NGO engagement in UN Conferences, used at Rio and after.

So much for the past. The future is more important. And more difficult. For all our efforts, the environment is in a more parlous state now than it was over three decades ago. Green Alliance has made real progress. The world is a better place than it would have been without our efforts. But the problems have mounted faster than our successes. The need for a persistent and effective political response to the challenges facing our environment is greater than ever. That means the need for, and the task facing, Green Alliance is greater than ever.

“Mr Maurice Ash, the chairman said: “We’re a bunch of optimists. We’re not the doomsters. We believe in the possibilities of the future...”’

Alliance launched
The Guardian March 1979

“...a serious attempt to focus the minds of British politicians on the need for more concern about the environment.”

Enter the Green Alliance
The Scotsman March 1979

"green alliance... 1979 | 2004"
We push for Environmental Impact Assessment until it is eventually adopted in the 1990s.

David Owen and David Steel are prompted to support Greenpeace against dumping radioactive waste.

The top three political parties are persuaded to produce their first comprehensive environmental policy statements.

The first meeting with prime minister Margaret Thatcher and environmentalists is organised.

We begin momentum for a common agenda for business and the environment, and the help to found the National Food Alliance, now Sustain, for better food and agriculture practices.

A UK tour is hosted for US author Jeremy Rifkin on genetic modification to put the issue on the UK agenda.

Consultations on Integrated Pollution Control are started which lead eventually to the formation of the Environment Agency in 1995.

The first global meeting of 30 international environment groups on ozone depletion is hosted.

Tom Burke, director of the Green Alliance pressure group, has written to the ministers on behalf of the 19 organisations, accusing governments of a persistent failure to act effectively on remedies which are well understood.

The Guardian December 1984

Pesticide safety cannot be guaranteed, the Green Alliance said this week. Issuing a 12 point agenda for action, it called on the government to take urgent measures to ensure public safety.

Environmental Health News February 1988

The appointment last week of Julie Hill, a leading environmental lobbyist, to the government’s advisory committee on the release of genetically modified organisms has been hailed as a victory for the green movement.

New Scientist August 1990
We have also interpreted the lessons of the biotechnology debate; to help politicians and scientists engage earlier with the public in advance of the nanotech revolution. Green Alliance makes the crucial connection between policy prescription and political opportunity.

There are other agendas where we are still working on the political case for change. Waste policy, merging with the resource and consumption agendas, is where some of the most exciting possibilities lurk. Our leaders should be enthusiastically embracing the closed-loop economy as the key to future technological and industrial advantage. Consumption is no longer the taboo it once was, but politicians shrink from engaging with the solutions. There is much to do, and perhaps not the luxury of another 25 years to do it.

"I joined Green Alliance for its objective view and ability to build bridges between all those who want to take the environment seriously."

— Rt Hon. John Gummer MP, former secretary of state for the environment, in 1997

Julie Hill, director 1991-97 now Green Alliance associate

Green Alliance’s 25th year is also election year. It is the politics of the environment as much as policy that is our sphere, and our work will have been an important influence on the tone of the parties’ environmental statements around this election. It was, after all, Green Alliance that brought about the first ‘green race’ – the competition between party leaders to be seen to be on top of the environmental agenda – and we created the expectation for the first green speeches from David Owen, Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair when he was in opposition.

The pace has increased. In 2004 Green Alliance gave platforms to Charles Kennedy, Margaret Beckett, Charles Clarke and Michael Howard, and was behind Tony Blair’s major environment speech in September 2004.

We have also been at the forefront of policy agendas with immediate political relevance. Our research into what the environment means to children found the response of the educational establishment wanting. We have looked at how the Private Finance Initiative can deliver sustainability through the education and health agendas. Our recent publication A Micro-generation Manifesto could not have been more timely.

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— Rt Hon. John Gummer MP, former secretary of state for the environment, in 1997
Our economic future is bound in with our environmental future. Our companies now know that growth must be sustainable if it is to be commercially viable in the long-term.”

Rt Hon Robin Cook MP
former foreign secretary, to Green Alliance in 1999

In 1997 Green Alliance was moving, metaphorically and physically, to a new place. The challenge was exciting. We set out a new direction and “vision”. At the core of this was our newly articulated mission: to promote sustainable development by ensuring that the environment is at the heart of decision-making. This remains entirely valid today.

Green Alliance is influential through its ideas, its political intelligence, and the people in its orbit. I wanted us – and the environment movement more widely – to look and feel positive. We developed a new image; revamped our publications, launched Inside Track and began a series of think piece pamphlets. And we made sure our events were fun.

While we were busy modernising, another group of ‘modernisers’ had taken over running the country. The incoming Labour government made a number of welcome promises. Amongst those were commitments for which Green Alliance had long been pressing. Julie Hill saw her hard work come to fruition, as we helped them to implement a range of mechanisms to green government.

Labour was starting to get the mechanics right, but not the politics. The environment was not really at the heart of the New Labour project. The prime minister, in particular, did not get it. So we held a series of meetings and seminars for Tony Blair and his advisers. We helped to turn the environment – and climate change in particular – from something he never mentioned, into an issue on which he spoke out proactively.

So we held a series of meetings and seminars for Tony Blair and his advisers. We helped to turn the environment – and climate change in particular – from something he never mentioned, into an issue on which he spoke out proactively.

Then, as now, Green Alliance was bringing people together to stimulate new thinking. It was a very full and exciting two years. Our success was due, in large part, to the skill and dedication of the staff and board. In the coming years, I am confident that Green Alliance will continue to punch well above its weight.

“Radical action is needed if an “emerging crisis” in waste management is to be avoided, according to analysis by one the UK’s largest waste companies and an environmental think-tank... Green Alliance also criticises a lack of “meaningful incentives or penalties”.”

Action needed to avert waste management crisis
Financial Times October 2002
Our work on the 2004 spending round means that the Department of Energy and Climate Change, now part of the Public Service Agreement to deliver the 20 per cent carbon reduction target.

The government's energy White Paper is influenced to state it will not support new nuclear plants. The inclusion of sustainable development commitments in the new European Constitution is ensured by our joint lobbying. The government's ten-year science strategy is influenced by Set through Science. The government adopts our recommendations in its environmental priorities for the UK presidency of the EU in 2005. Our work on the Kyoto Protocol round means that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs received unprecedented press coverage. The government's ten-year science strategy is influenced by Set through Science.

Of course, work at Green Alliance can be deeply frustrating too. Like the conference held in 2001, to help the DTI develop a target to drive their policy on resource productivity. The conference went well – and there was a surprising amount of consensus about the best ways to measure and manage the environmental intensity of our economy. Ministers promised to get back to us. Yet four years and many seminars later, we have no target – and policy in this area is going nowhere fast.

It can be hard to keep motivated in the face of opposition or apathy. But at the end of the day, there's something addictive about Green Alliance's work. It's the intellectual challenge of getting your head round a complex policy, the political challenge of working out what makes a minister tick, and the financial challenge of getting the books to balance. That's why I loved my three years as director, and my six years – and counting – of involvement makes a minister tick, and the financial challenge of getting the books to balance. That's why I loved my three years as director, and my six years – and counting – of involvement makes a minister tick, and the financial challenge of getting the books to balance. That's why I loved my three years as director, and my six years – and counting – of involvement makes a minister tick, and the financial challenge of getting the books to balance.
“Having reached our quarter century, we don’t intend to sit on our laurels. Looking back on 25 years of Green Alliance also gives us the opportunity to think forward. 2005 sees a UK General Election beckoning and the UK holding the presidency of the G8 and the EU. So what will be our big priorities over the coming year and beyond?

Working with the other green groups, we’ve worked hard to broaden the reach of the environment movement beyond the usual green suspects inside Westminster and Whitehall. It is easy to talk to your friends and allies but the real challenge is winning over the sceptics and the contrarians. This is the value of Green Alliance, in mapping out the political landscape to help NGOs and policy-makers navigate their way through.

Over the past five years, we’ve focused on the DTI and Treasury and sought to bring a green tinge to industrial and economic policy. We’ll now extend our political antennae to the bits of government responsible for land-use planning and housing. We’re already fast running out of space for landfill in south east England and water resources are being strained to the limit. Leave it to the market and we’ll get more Lego houses on greenfield land. So we’ll encourage policy-makers to aim high and adopt new technologies for zero carbon homes built to the highest green standards.

We won’t let our focus on the DTI and Treasury drop altogether though. The Treasury has gone strangely silent of late on shifting the burden of taxation away from ‘goods’ such as labour and towards ‘bads’ such as pollution. After the election, we’ll step up the pressure for new economic measures on energy efficiency, waste and transport.

Politics is as much a fashion victim as any other walk of life and the current theme in vogue is competitiveness. Under pressure from the Asian Tiger economies, politicians are worried about future economic growth in Europe. Environmental regulation has become the whipping boy. So we want to turn the debate about competitiveness on its head by showing that the environment is part of the solution. The future lies in high green standards to stimulate the innovation we need in a knowledge-led economy.

The business case is important to much of this policy work. Government is traditionally lazy when it comes to seeking out companies that have a different story to tell to the trade associations. So we’re going to make it easy for them. Over the next year, we’ll be looking to involve our corporate supporters more closely in our policy projects, providing the opportunity for progressive companies to become actively engaged in promoting the case for strong environmental policies to government.

By bridging the different perspectives on the environment debate in this way, we hope that Green Alliance will continue to play a valuable role for another 25 years to come.”

“Green Alliance punches well above its weight in Whitehall. It has played an important role in helping politicians and the green movement to understand one another, notably on energy policy in recent years. I wish Green Alliance well on its 25th birthday, and hope and expect it will go from strength to strength in the years ahead.”

Rt Hon Margaret Beckett MP
Secretary of state for the environment, food and rural affairs

“I congratulate the Green Alliance for their important contribution to the environmental cause. We Lib Dems have regularly benefited from your expertise and support, most recently when you co-sponsored a speech by Charles Kennedy. Your pragmatic approach to the challenges we face, and the respect you have from government make you a key player in all our futures.”

Norman Baker MP
Liberal Democrat environment spokesman

“Over the past 25 years Green Alliance has provided an invaluable service in proving it is possible to connect environmental concerns with business and industry through their in-depth research and imaginative solutions. The Conservative Party is proud of the close relationship we have had with the Alliance over the last 25 years; long may it continue.”

Richard Ottoway MP
Conservative environment spokesman
we couldn’t do it without you...

Funding Green Alliance’s work has never been easy. Results are not always immediately obvious and policy can seem abstract to a funder in search of concrete outcomes.

This review highlights just some of our achievements over two and a half decades. There were far too many to include them all. Those listed show that we have made a real impact and this is thanks to support from all those who have had the foresight and intuition to understand that what we do delivers tangible environmental benefits.

As our track record grows, we hope we can inspire more to join us as funders and members in making the environment an unassailable priority.

For a summary of our latest audited accounts and funding information, please visit www.green-alliance.org.uk

join us for our next 25 years...

Green Alliance has two membership packages and an information scheme, enabling individuals and organisations to join us in our work.

in good company

Our corporate support scheme is a forum for companies to discuss environmental policy and get involved in our advocacy and projects. We welcome companies who are actively seeking to reduce their impact on the environment.

Members benefit from advice and information, and our extensive network of contacts in other businesses, government and NGOs. In addition, we run specialist briefings for companies on policy issues relevant to the corporate environmental agenda.

Contact Russell Marsh
rmash@green-alliance.org.uk

thank you for supporting our work in 2003/2004

Ashden Trust  AWG  Barnardo’s  Biffa  British Gas
BT  Carbon Trust  Defra Environmental Action Fund  Defra  DTI Sustainable Technologies Initiative  English Nature
Environment Agency  Esmée Fairbairn Foundation  ESRC  Foreign and Commonwealth Office  GlaxoSmithKline
Greenpeace  Groundwork  Grundon  IKEA  The National Trust  Pilkington Energy Efficiency Trust  Royal Bank of Scotland
RSPB  Scottish Power  Severn Trent plc  Thames Water plc  United Utilities plc  Water UK  Westminster Foundation  WWF

our corporate members  BG plc  BP plc  BT  Conoco Phillips  GlaxoSmithKline  Interface Europe
KPMG  Lafarge Aggregates Ltd  National Wind Power Ltd  Rio Tinto plc  Royal Bank of Scotland  RWE Innogy
Sainsbury’s  Severn Trent plc  Shell UK  Thames Water plc  Unilever UK  United Utilities plc  Water UK

“Congratulations to Green Alliance on your 25th anniversary. You have played a key role in making the environmental case to government, business and other audiences. The RSPB values the work we have done in partnership with you, and we look forward to many more years of the same.”

Graham Wynne chief executive, RSPB

“Congratulate us on your 25th anniversary. We couldn’t do it without you…”
“Businesses that take sustainable development seriously need effective and creative NGOs to help them take ideas forward. I have always been able to rely on Green Alliance to fulfil that role. Congratulations to the organisation on its 25th anniversary.”

Jiggy Lloyd
group director of sustainable development, AWG plc

an individual members

Our individual members are a diverse group who have a common interest in the environment and who share our mission. They are from a wide range of backgrounds including academia, business, the voluntary sector, politics and the arts. We actively invite individuals who are making a significant personal contribution to the environment. Members receive our quarterly magazine Inside Track, featuring information on our work as well as articles by guest writers and members on topical themes. Members are also invited to our annual meeting.

Individual members pay £40 per year
Donor members contribute over £40 per year
Life membership is £500
Contact Catherine Pamplin
cpamplin@green-alliance.org.uk

keep up!

With one annual subscription, you can keep your organisation up to date with current environmental policy debates and Green Alliance’s work.

Subscribers to the information scheme receive:
• each Green Alliance publication as soon as it is published (around three a year including reports and think piece pamphlets)
• the fortnightly e-publication Parliamentary Newsletter providing the latest environmental policy news from Westminster, the European Union and the devolved administrations
• Inside Track Green Alliance’s quarterly magazine

The annual fee entitles up to five recipients within an organisation to receive all these benefits.

Annual subscription is £360 plus VAT or £380 plus VAT for charities, academics and not-for-profit organisations

individual members


Donor members

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director
Rachel Butterworth
fundraising and
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Tracy Carty
policy officer
Karen Crane
development co-ordinator
Kate Hampton
convener,
Green Globe Network
Paula Hollings
office manager/PA to director
Russell Marsh
head of policy
Catherine Pamplin
membership officer
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associates

Julie Hill
Derek Smith
Rebecca Willis

book keeper

Marta Silva

volunteers and internships

many thanks to the following who helped us in 2003 and 2004:

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and
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of Bare Brands for design work

Many thanks to Severn Trent and the Defra Environmental Action Fund for their generous support of our 25th anniversary celebrations.
“Green Alliance is one of those highly effective organisations we all love to work with. Small and light on its feet, it has had its finger on the pulse of what politicians think about the environment for the last 25 years. There have been moments of optimism and pessimism, but Green Alliance never stops energetically pursuing ideas, alliances and opportunities to promote a greener way forward.”

Fiona Reynolds
director general, The National Trust