

Response from Vaughan Gething MS, February 2024

- **Act on the work of the independent Wales Net Zero 2035 Challenge Group chaired by Jane Davidson.**

Climate change is the biggest collective challenge of our generation. In my [manifesto](#), I declared that achieving climate justice and social justice would be the twin economic missions of my government. If elected First Minister, I would look forward to the independent perspective provided by the Wales Net Zero 2035 Challenge Group. We would use the tools of devolution to ensure it helps us build a stronger, fairer, more sustainable future. The next generations rely on us to deliver and I'm confident that by working together, we will.

- **Guarantee Wales' future as a fossil free nation by introducing a ban on coal extraction in Wales.**

I support the Welsh Government's policy to bring to a managed end the extraction and use of coal.

- **Restore former opencast coal sites so they are safe and accessible for the local community, and initiate an independent public enquiry into contaminated land sites and dangerous industrial legacies in Wales.**

As First Minister I would do all I could to ensure the UK Government works with us – especially if we have a constructive Labour administration in Westminster – to bring about overdue action on unsafe coal tips, which are only likely to be made more dangerous by more frequent and intense storms. Our Welsh Labour Government would also invest to protect communities from flooding, coastal erosion and other impacts of the climate emergency.

- **Commit to reducing microplastics in Wales by bringing together a panel of experts and agreeing a plan of action.**

Tackling the nature and climate emergencies would be a priority for my government and I'm proud to have been a member of the Welsh Government which introduced the restrictions on single-use plastic in Wales. Understand that over 3,000 people signed the Friends of the Earth Cymru petition calling for a Microplastics Action Plan for Wales and I look forward to the outcome of the Petitions Committee's considerations. As First Minister, I have pledged to work collaboratively across sectors to protect our precious environment for current and future generations.

- **Introduce air quality targets for Nitrogen Dioxide (No2), as a matter of urgency, and ensure the clean air plan and legislation is implemented swiftly and effectively for the sake of our health, reducing inequalities, and the environment.**

The Welsh Government has set out a clear pathway to improving air quality across Wales. Under my leadership, we would continue to work closely with the independent clean air advisory panel to develop evidence-based and effective air quality targets for the benefit of current and future generations. Improved monitoring of air quality would enable us to take action that would benefit health and reduce environmental impact at a local and national level.

- **Stick to the commitments made following the publication of the independent road review panel report, support the 20mph speed limit, and make other brave decisions necessary to decarbonize our transport system and encourage a modal shift in the way people travel around Wales.**

I believe the 20mph speed limit is the right policy and as First Minister, I would lead a listening Government that brings people with us on the decisions we make. Active travel is the cheapest, greenest form of transport, but people choose to walk or cycle for their commute if they feel safe. We are committed to active travel infrastructure improving safety.

My Welsh Labour Government would pass legislation to regulate the bus network before the end of this Senedd term. Introducing franchising would ensure services meet communities' and people's needs. Franchising would also allow for better-integrated public transport, with bus schedules linking better with each other and train timetables, with more availability of single tickets for trains and buses. We would explore fare reduction schemes as finances allow, including free-at-the-point-of-boarding bus travel. Accessibility is key and we would review the application process for bus passes for disabled people, to ensure everyone entitled to a bus pass can navigate the application system.

Would continue to work with the sector to increase the use of electric buses and support hydrogen bus trials. Alongside more electric vehicles, it is vital the necessary infrastructure to support EV charging is ready. We would work with delivery partners to build a reliable and efficient national charging network, in line with the existing strategy.

You refer to a national modal shift and I have committed to increase the presence of Transport for Wales in North Wales, improving transport connections, including pressing the UK Government to deliver a credible and properly funded plan for railway upgrades so we can deliver reliable metro services on key routes. I remain committed to developing a Swansea Bay and South West Wales Metro, to improve public transport connections within the region.

- **Urgently implement part 1 of the Warm Homes programme, to support fuel poor homes, introduce proposals for the energy efficiency and decarbonisation of all Wales' homes, and lobby the UK government for additional funding to deliver these policies in Wales.**

If I'm elected as First Minister, we would accelerate building social housing. Constructing green homes across Wales will help tackle the housing crisis and create good quality jobs. Building more social housing would be a priority. It is one of the most powerful tools in alleviating poverty and helping people to build better, more secure futures. We would use the existing Social Housing Grant to boost innovation in this next generation of social housing. Latest construction methods and modular housing offer sustainable and cost-effective means of delivering new homes. New homes that help to meet the climate crisis challenge and lower energy bills. We would prioritise Welsh supply chains and work with the housing sector to ensure our workforce has the skills to fill these opportunities, including through apprenticeships. Our government would also increase the number of accessible homes for disabled people.

To cut carbon emissions and household energy bills, we need to embark on an ambitious programme of retrofitting existing housing stock. Our government would work with the sector and private finance to roll out this programme at the pace and scale needed. The commitment to more

apprenticeships would help ensure we have a pipeline of skilled people to carry out the work as part of a wider green jobs revolution. We would pilot the creation of local retrofitting networks bringing together small-scale providers and sole traders into a co-operative, with access to public sector retrofitting contracts – giving contractors opportunities to grow.

- **Prioritise an economy that works for people and the planet, by focusing on the foundational economy, and following the lead of New Zealand by developing a Living Standards Framework to measure progress and shape policy rather than a focus on GDP.**

The Welsh Labour Government has done a lot of work to ensure we are measuring well-being of people as well as GDP – including developing [national indicators](#) to measure progress against our well-being goals. We will continue to build on this approach, and my manifesto has pledged to create a fair work milestone alongside trade unions and businesses to ensure that we are measuring and seeking to improve fair working practices. This means we will continue to focus on well-being as well as GDP, and will increase our focus on fair working practices as part of this.

I am proud to deliver on and promote the foundational economy approach to build stronger communities and I have worked across government to boost social value. This has ranged from ensuring that more NHS contracts have been won in Wales to relocalising manufacturing based on public sector demand (a recent example being a major TfW contract which will see uniform production support quality jobs for disabled workers).

Green prosperity is one of my key pledges in this election campaign. As First Minister, I would place green job creation at the heart of protecting Wales' future. We would act to deliver a just transition that tackles poverty and protects our planet, with good jobs and community wealth. We would also harness Wales' advantages in industries such as clean energy and advanced manufacturing. Wales would join the wave of countries recognising governments must take more active roles in private markets to secure better results for citizens and bolster industries providing good jobs.

Our government would support for Welsh businesses and Welsh workers to adapt to, and thrive in, the transition to net zero, ensuring that workers are the priority during this process. While looking to secure and create jobs in the green industries of the future, we would never neglect our vital everyday economy that provides the everyday goods and services we all rely on. It supports so many jobs and livelihoods and makes a huge contribution to our overall economy, and also has potential to increase quality of life for everyone. We would focus on improving the quality of jobs in the everyday economy, including in sectors like care, food, and manufacturing. We would nurture our everyday economy to support local businesses and build stronger community wealth, embedding foundational economy principles across public bodies and explicitly linking all public investment to better outcomes for local economies.

- **Do not invest or give permission to new high-carbon infrastructure, which is incompatible with our net zero targets, and ensure that the annual fiscal budget aligns with our carbon commitments and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.**

My Welsh Labour Government would be committed taking the necessary action to meet net zero targets. We would establish a new Office of the First Minister focused on delivery to ensure that core cross-government priorities, including tackling climate change, are progressing.

I am proud of the pioneering leadership Wales has demonstrated through the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. This is a model which has attracted attention from across the world, and I believe that there is much that can be learned from our example. If elected as First Minister, I look forward to working closely alongside the Future Generations Commissioner to ensure that we are well placed to meet the challenges of today and to create a fairer, healthier, and greener Wales for generations to come.

- **Strive to transform Wales into a green economy 'powerhouse' to enable a fair transition to a low carbon future in a way that protects workers and the most vulnerable, creating jobs and investing to make our nation more prosperous and sustainable for current and future generations.**

We must achieve climate and social justice together. Wales once led the world into the Industrial Revolution; now we must lead the way in the Green Industrial Revolution.

As First Minister, I would support Welsh businesses and Welsh workers to adapt to, and thrive in, the transition to net zero, ensuring that workers are the priority during this process. We would create a National Manufacturing Institute for Wales and deliver new Clean Growth Hubs – clusters of environmentally-friendly businesses powering local growth and better jobs – building on those that I have supported as Economy Minister. We would also extend Green Business Loans, helping businesses decarbonise and lowering energy bills for good. I support the devolution of the Crown Estate and my government would harness our natural assets like wind and tidal power. We would take action to ensure renewable energy generated here benefits people in Wales while also delivering nature protection.

- **Ensure that public sector organisations make decarbonisation a priority and meet net zero carbon by 2030.**

Attracting more green investment is essential for our sustainable future and we would limit public investment that contributes to climate change by supporting local authority pension funds divesting from fossil fuel. As stated above, my government would be committed to taking the necessary action to meet net zero targets.

- **Champion the deposit return scheme (DRS) for Wales and the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme by working closely with the UK and other devolved governments to avoid further delays in their introduction.**

The current Welsh Government Minister for Climate Change has been considering the phase implementation for a deposit return scheme. The implementation of the scheme in Scotland would have given the rest of the UK an opportunity to learn from its implementation as we developed our own scheme. It is crucial that any approach would be effective in delivering improved performance against Wales's high baseline recycling rates in the short term and in line with our commitment to a zero waste and net zero carbon Wales. My Welsh Labour Government would continue to engage constructively with other nations through the deposit return scheme industry fora.

- **Protect the most vulnerable communities and groups from the impacts of climate change, and proactively plan for current and future climate risks e.g., housing standards that are adaptable to heatwaves, and introducing a recommended water use level per person.**

We must deliver an equitable response to the climate emergency and understanding the needs of those who are vulnerably housed is an essential part of this. Welsh Labour has a proud record of improving security and rights for tenants through the Renting Homes (Wales) Act, which simplified the process of renting a home and created a new system for tenancies. Our housing standards must be consistently reviewed to deliver sustainable and secure housing for people living in different tenures across Wales.

- **Make it your mission to tackle the nature emergency alongside the climate emergency by delivering on the 30 by 30 target and on the recommendations in the biodiversity deep dive, particularly the recommendation to set statutory nature recovery targets for Wales.**

A new Nature Positive Bill must be developed alongside the Sustainable Farming Scheme which better connects families with affordable, nutritious food. We would set strong statutory targets for the protection and restoration of nature and include payment for farmers in exchange for public goods. By 2030, 30% of our land and sea would be protected and we would lead by example in sustainably managing and expanding woodland.

Our Welsh Labour Government would strengthen enforcement action to protect our environment, starting with the creation of a fully-functioning environmental governance body, filling the gap left post-Brexit. The pollution of our rivers and watercourses has been one of the great scandals of the last 14 years of Tory rule, and we would introduce stricter penalties for those who break environmental rules.