



More in
Common

Accelerating a Just Transition

Public opinion insights briefing for JET dinner series

¹ June 2022

Accelerating a Just Transition

More in Common Public Opinion Insights briefing

About More in Common and our work on Net Zero

Over the last three years, More in Common has polled more than 20,000 people and held dozens of focus groups with hundreds of participants across the UK. We've built a unique segmentation model (based on values, core beliefs and social psychology) to understand more deeply Britons and British society – more information about the 'British Seven segments' is available in Annex A.

A key plank of our work has focused on supporting institutions and organisations in the public and private sectors in navigating the challenges and opportunities of net zero transition. More in Common is keen to support energy sector leaders on how to bring the British public with you as they accelerate plans for a just transition.

This memo highlights provides a summary of quantitative and qualitative research by More in Common about how Britons approach both a 'just transition' and the idea of accelerating it.

The challenging context

Efforts to make progress on accelerating a just transition in the UK will face stark challenges on two fronts in the coming months – both falling levels of trust in politics, and ever-growing worries about cost of living and rising energy bills.

Low trust in politicians and government is a feature of many modern democracies, and in many cases, it can be a healthy dynamic and a sign that our democracies are working. However, our polling and focus groups suggest a stark deterioration in recent months. Four in five Britons (78 per cent) now think the system is rigged to serve rich and influential and seven in ten (69 per cent) believe the government are 'out of touch' with the concerns of ordinary people. This is coupled with rising concern about the cost of living – with concern for this as a top issue facing the country doubling in the last six months – from 36 per cent in November 2021 to 67 per cent in June 2022.

These dynamics make efforts to accelerate just transition more challenging for several reasons:

- The public consider politicians (and other members of the media and business elite) to be out of touch with their concerns – and consequently the public do not trust them to understand what a fair and just transition would look like for them – or design it on their behalf

- The context of economic insecurity and low trust means Britons are becoming increasingly cynical about the ‘sunlit uplands’ of a ‘just transition’ and few trust the political class to deliver it
- Partygate has damaged trust in politicians and many now believe that politicians will use net zero transition as an opportunity to make money for themselves
- The public are tired of being asked to frequently change their behaviour, before rules quickly change again to focus on something else or the new best thing. Many cite diesel cars and gas boilers as example of things they were asked to do that they’re now being asked to change again.

From a strategic communications perspective when few trust that any new system will be fairer or more just, a premium is placed on *showing* the public, and not just *telling* them, what a ‘just transition’ means in practical terms – and focusing on an achievable just transition, and one that the public believe is deliverable, not idealistic one that may be quickly dismissed.

Britons’ starting points on accelerating just transition

The following starting points provide a summary of what More in Common has heard from the British public over the last nine months when exploring questions around net zero transition and energy independence.

Differences over what a ‘just transition’ means – There is a clear gap between how progressive segments (like the Progressive Activists) and more conservative-leaning segments (like Loyal Nationals and Disengaged Traditionalists) approach issues like a ‘just transition’ – stemming from their different moral foundation starting points. Progressives (who mainly see the world through a care-fairness lens) are more likely to see the just transition as an opportunity to bring about radical political changes in the country and use it as a tool to correct injustices and inequalities. Conservatives (who view things from boarder lens including care, fairness, authority and loyalty) are more likely to see a just transition as an orderly one with clear rules that everyone signs up too.

Preference for a slow and steady approach to transition – Britons want to do net zero transition well, but they think it’s important to take the time to get it done right. They think we talk too much about climate issues and would prefer if we ‘just got on with it’. In our polling, Britons prefer a ‘gradual transition that gets things right’ over a ‘quick transition that takes action because there is no time to waste’ by a margin of 58:42. Britons have a strong preference for a more conservationist approach to building a just transition and a less activist approach – when asked how warm or cold (out of 100) they feel towards different groups in society, Britons feel warmth towards conservationists (79/100) and cold towards

climate protestors (37/100)¹. If an activist approach is adopted towards accelerating transition, it risks weakening strong public support, as many people are alienated by the tactics and approaches of activists.

Britons are practical, not political, about transition – most Britons approach energy transition with a series of practical questions:

- *How much space will a heat pump take?*
- *Will my house be colder than it was before?*
- *Will there be charging points in the supermarket?*
- *How many times will I need to stop to charge when I go to see my family on long journeys?*
- *Will my trusted mechanic or plumber be able to fix these new machines when they break down?*

Strategic communications strategies to build public support for accelerating transition should focus on answering these very practical questions – and using the messengers of skilled workers and professionals (like plumbers, installers and engineers) who interact with members of the public in their homes every day. The people who install, service and upgrade energy equipment and technology in homes across the country are the people who can make a real difference to advising consumers on how to make choices that help accelerate a just transition. The strategic communications priority should be on better training engineers and installers to talk about energy transition in their regular household visits. Both at this level, and at a corporate communications level, the benefits of transition need to be spoken about in practical and tangible ways that can resonate with people – tangible benefits like cleaner air and better prospects for children and grandchildren.

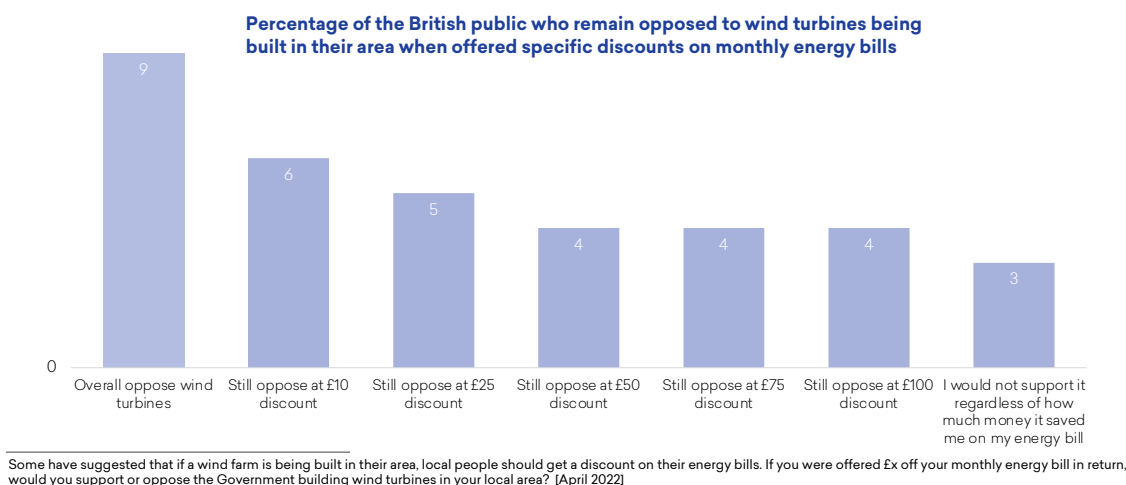
Britons expect a just transition to mean cheaper energy bills – in this context of the cost-of-living crisis and widespread economic insecurity, a key expectation will be that energy bills are reduced. In focus groups since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, people from across segments have been clear that renewables are our best (and perhaps only) bet left to reduce the price of our energy bills – and stop a cycle of households' energy security being held to ransom by global shocks and events. How people will be able to afford transition more broadly will have an outsized influence on whether or not they feel the transition is just. Our polling and focus groups show that the top barriers to switching to heat pumps or electric cars are fears that the upfront costs are too expensive – alongside clear knowledge gaps on the cost savings/burdens to run the new technology. In addition, cheaper bills can also be used to reduce opposition to renewable energy development like wind turbines. In our latest polling, we explored opposition to the development of wind turbines in local areas and found that only 8 per cent of the public oppose wind turbines being developed in their area. When the nature of their likely opposition is explored, almost

¹ In November 2021, we polled the following question: On a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 means very cold and 100 means very warm, how do you feel towards: 'People who look after nature and the countryside' and 'Climate change protestors'

two in five opponents to local wind turbine development respond, “I’d do nothing about it even if I wasn’t very happy”. When a potential energy bill reduction for those in areas where wind turbines are to be developed, most people switch from opponents to supporters as detailed in the graph below – including 18 per cent of wind turbine opponents who become supporters when offered a reduction of £10 per month.

Reducing wind turbines opposition with energy bill discounts

Most of those opposed to the government building wind turbines in their area would be persuaded to support if they got a discount on their monthly energy bill. Only a small minority, equivalent to 3 per cent of the population, would remain opposed to the development of wind turbines when offered a monthly discount of £100



Build on what Britons are already doing, rather than talking action down as insufficient

– 82 per cent of Britons feel a responsibility to make daily choices to protect the environment – and many are recycling every day and are open to making small changes to their diet. However, on more demanding behaviour changes like home heating or the cars people drive, there is a significant action gap. Our research suggests that efforts to accelerate transition should focus on building up collective actions like recycling, rather than talking them down. People tell us that they love recycling because the rules are clear, enforceable and people can hold each other to account. This is particularly important for the Disengaged Traditionalist segment (who make up just under one fifth of the British public) – a group which places a premium on orderly and consistent rules, that apply to all, and are not subject to frequent changes.

The energy sector should see the public’s support for clear rules and bans as an opportunity to accelerate transition.

When asked whether using bans was the right approach for the UK to tackle climate change, the public favour bans by 58:42. Two thirds also believe banning single use plastics is a price worth paying for transition and in focus group conversations, many people talk passionately about the need for bans on single use

plastics. Clearly, banning single use plastics alone will be insufficient to deal with net zero transition, but this approach should be tested across policy and societal challenges.

Annex A – The British Seven Segments

More in Common worked with data scientists and social psychology researchers to build a model that maps the British population not according to their party, age, income or other demographic factor, but according to their values and core beliefs. Analysing a representative sample of more than 10,000 people in partnership with YouGov and conducting focus group conversations and one-on-one interviews with hundreds of Britons, we identified seven distinct population groups – the ‘British Seven’³.

Progressive Activists (13 per cent of Britons): A passionate and vocal group for whom politics is at the core of their identity, and who seek to correct the historic marginalisation of groups based on their race, gender, sexuality, wealth, and other forms of privilege. They are politically engaged, critical, opinionated, frustrated, cosmopolitan, and environmentally conscious.

Civic Pragmatists (13 per cent of Britons): A group that cares about others, at home or abroad, and who are turned off by the divisiveness of politics. They are charitable, concerned, exhausted, community-minded, open to compromise, and socially liberal.

Disengaged Battlers (12 per cent of Britons): A group that feels that they are just keeping their heads above water, and who blame the system for its unfairness. They are tolerant, insecure, disillusioned, disconnected, overlooked, and socially liberal.

Established Liberals (12 per cent of Britons): A group that has done well and means well towards others, but also sees a lot of good in the status quo. They are comfortable, privileged, cosmopolitan, trusting, confident, and pro-market.

Loyal Nationals (17 per cent of Britons): A group that is anxious about the threats facing Britain and facing themselves. They are proud, patriotic, tribal, protective, threatened, aggrieved, and frustrated about the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

Disengaged Traditionalists (18 per cent of Britons): A group that values a well-ordered society, takes pride in hard work, and wants strong leadership that keeps people in line. They are self-reliant, ordered, patriotic, tough-minded, suspicious, and disconnected

Backbone Conservatives (15 per cent of Britons): A group who are proud of their country, optimistic about Britain’s future outside of Europe, and who keenly follow the news, mostly via traditional media sources. They are nostalgic, patriotic, stalwart, proud, secure, confident, and relatively engaged with politics.

