



Pallavi Sethi

April 30th, 2025

## Voters should reject Reform UK's anti-climate agenda in the local elections

*Reform UK candidates in this year's local elections have been promoting an anti-climate, anti-net-zero agenda. Pallavi Sethi argues that this campaign goes directly against the interests of the local communities – communities directly exposed to the risks of climate change – that these Reform UK candidates seek to represent.*

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On May 1, voters in parts of England elect over 1600 councillors across 23 local authorities and six mayors, including the inaugural mayors of Hull and East Yorkshire and Greater Lincolnshire. Collaboration between local and national governments is critical to achieving the UK's 2050 net zero emissions target and protecting communities, states the [Climate Change Committee](#) (CCC). As regions like Bristol, Cambridgeshire, and Greater Lincolnshire face increasing risks from floods and heatwaves, local leadership on climate action is urgent. Yet, in several of these high-risk areas, Reform UK candidates are campaigning against net zero policies and ignoring the very threats faced by the communities they seek to represent.

Recent [evidence](#) shows that the net zero economy is generating billions for the UK economy and creating hundreds and thousands of jobs. However, Reform UK has chosen to ignore this data and promote a counter-narrative against climate policies. Now, the party's candidates in the local elections are using the same arguments: [scrap net zero](#), [levy taxes on renewables](#), and replace clean energy with [polluting energy](#).



*Voters in the upcoming local elections have a choice: support leadership that protects their future or choose candidates whose policies may jeopardise their future.*



Reform party candidates in the mayoral races for Greater Lincolnshire, Hull and East Yorkshire, and the West of England are out of touch with the needs of the local communities. Their opposition to net zero ignores the climate risks these regions face and the economic opportunities the green energy sector presents. Voters in the upcoming local elections have a choice: support leadership that protects their future or choose candidates whose policies may jeopardise their future.

## Three regions, three warnings

### 1 – Greater Lincolnshire – chasing short-term gains won't save long-term floods

Earlier this year, floods across Lincolnshire drowned almost **100 properties**. In recent years, the devastation has been worse. Storm Babet (2023) and Storm Henk (2024) flooded **900 homes** and left **hundreds of hectares** of agricultural land submerged in water. In October 2023, Lincolnshire recorded its wettest day in 76 years. The devastation caused £45 million in damages. Meanwhile, the county is also facing unusually dry summers. The heatwave in 2022 resulted in a **drought** across the region.

Human-induced global warming is causing and intensifying these floods and droughts. A Met Office **study** found that climate change increased rainfall during storms by 20 per cent between October 2023 and March 2024. Without urgent climate action, experts **warn**, the region could face more devastation from extreme weather. Yet despite overwhelming evidence, Andrea Jenkyns, Reform UK's candidate for Lincolnshire, has continued to spread **climate misinformation**. Jenkyns, director of the climate sceptic group Net Zero Watch, calls the UK's net zero policies "disastrous" and claims they destroy jobs and raise energy prices – assertions repeatedly debunked by **experts**.



*Jenkyns is pretending that floods are unrelated to climate change despite evidence that climate change is making floods more frequent and severe.*



Jenkyns has demonstrated she is not capable of tackling Lincolnshire's flood crisis. She acknowledges the rising crisis and promises "proper investment in flood defences" and "dredging" as solutions despite **growing evidence** that dredging can worsen flooding. She also rejects vital climate mitigation measures (net zero) that address the root causes of these floods. Jenkyns is ignoring **experts** who stress that flood risk management should include climate mitigation as reducing greenhouse gas emissions will make it easier, cheaper, and more manageable to adapt to climate change. By opposing net zero policies while advocating for engineering solutions to flooding, Jenkyns is pretending that floods are unrelated to climate change despite evidence that climate change is making floods more frequent and severe.

Jenkyns' position on renewable energy also reveals a similar pattern. Having previously **praised** solar power, she is now campaigning against solar panels, claiming that they "destroy farmland," again despite **evidence** that solar panels can coexist with food production.

## ***2 – Hull and East Yorkshire – attacking net zero means attacking prosperity***

Hull and East Yorkshire remain at high risk of extreme flooding. Indeed, both Hull and East Yorkshire have been impacted by **storms**. Yet, despite these challenges, the area is undergoing a remarkable transformation and is fast emerging as a hub for green job creation. For instance, Siemens Gamesa's investment of £310 million in an offshore blade factory in Hull has generated over **1,000 jobs** locally. The factory has produced more than 1500 blades and helped power over **6 million homes** with clean energy. Similarly, the newly approved Yorkshire Energy Park is expected to create around **4500 jobs**, with a commitment that 80 per cent will be filled by local talent. Therefore, net zero remains extremely important in the region.

Anybody standing for the inaugural mayoral election would recognise that Hull's economic success is driven by clean energy and that attacking net zero is attacking the region's prosperity. Yet, Reform UK candidate Luke Campbell continues to back his party's national policy to scrap net zero and tax renewables. When asked by the **Yorkshire Post** about his stance, Campbell praised Siemens as "fantastic" but dismissed net zero as a "hype."

## ***3- West of England – climate denial vs a legacy of clean energy leadership***

Of all the candidates fielded by Reform UK for mayoral elections, nobody appears more out of step with their electorate than Arron Banks, who is running for the West of England mayoralship. Banks' outright rejection of anthropogenic climate change stands in sharp contrast to a region where climate leadership is deeply valued. Bristol was the first city to have declared a climate emergency in 2018, followed by Bath and North East Somerset in 2019.



*Banks has dismissed climate change as ‘the ultimate hoax’... a comment that can only be interpreted as a direct insult to the many he seeks to represent.*



**Local polling** for the West of England Combined Authority shows that 65 per cent of people support net zero. Banks has dismissed climate change as “the ultimate hoax,” and repeatedly spread false claims about net zero calling it a “scam” and “the new religion for stupid people” – a comment that can only be interpreted as a direct insult to the many he seeks to represent.

## Reform UK's misalignment with local community interests

Reform UK candidates demonstrate a lack of understanding of the communities they seek to serve. Their misrepresentation of and attacks on net zero show that they are not driven by scientific evidence or local needs but by a rigid ideology. Experts, including the **Climate Change Committee**, have repeatedly stressed that a combined strategy of climate adaptation and mitigation is critical in protecting the UK from worsening climate change. Local governments are central to this effort. Without their support, communities will be exposed to extreme floods that wreck their homes, to droughts that threaten their agriculture, and to lost economic opportunities in the green energy sector.

In this year's local elections, voters have a clear choice: to elect leaders who have real plans to protect communities from climate threats or elect candidates who distort and deny evidence, leaving communities to face the consequences alone.

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## About the author

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Pallavi Sethi is a Policy Fellow (Climate Change Misinformation) at the Grantham Research Institute. She leads research on climate change misinformation in the UK and analyses its causes, impacts, and countermeasures. Her focus extends to exploring effective strategies, including the role of regulation, to combat climate change misinformation.

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