Closing the climate gap 2026

An annual report on progress towards sustainable consumer lifestyles in the UK

Ethical Consumer Research Association

OCTOBER 2026

CLIMATE GAP REPORT

Sponsored by Ecology Building Society

Ecology Building Society

Contents

	Foreword	3
1.	Introduction and Summary	4
2.	Key Observations	6
3.	The Climate Gap report cards	9
3.1	Food report card	9
3.2	Heating report card	10
3.3	Transport report card	11
3.4	Selected Consumer Goods report card	12
4.	Campaigns for wider political reform	13
	Acknowledgements	15

Foreword to Ethical Consumer's Climate Gap Report 2026

I'm delighted that Ecology Building Society is sponsoring Ethical Consumer's Climate Gap Report for the fifth successive year. Since our involvement began, one recurring theme has emerged: that of the real gap between ambition and the conditions needed to deliver it. And the evidence for closing the gap is greater than ever before.

People, places and nature are increasingly experiencing the consequences of a changing climate. Business and communities are bearing the financial costs of climate disruption. And those impacts are not evenly distributed: too often, those with the fewest resources and choices are least able to absorb them.

While we should recognise that progress is being made in some places, the pace of that progress must accelerate. More worryingly still is the regression we see in critical areas and the damning consequences of delays. Which means a Just Transition isn't just a nice to have. It's essential.

Closing the gap isn't simply a question of effort. It's a question of power – and of providing the infrastructure, policy and affordability that allows more action, more quickly.

But we can't simply wait for the perfect conditions to act. Imperfect conditions don't cancel agency. They redefine it. Agency becomes the choices we make and how we practise change within our own spheres of influence, while also pushing for the conditions that enable others to do the same.

Our power is in turning individual action into collective influence. How we vote. Where we spend. Where we save. What we choose to reward. Together, our choices can send powerful signals to businesses and policymakers about the change we expect.

At Ecology, our savers are already showing that it matters where we place our money. Through the money they entrust to us, we can support borrowers who are deliberately choosing to build and create more environmentally friendly homes. They are also supporting projects that help people to live more sustainably and create vibrant communities.

If we are to close the gap, we need to share and celebrate positive stories such as these. And we need to create a culture in which consumers expect – and reward – change so that others follow.

Our individual power may be constrained by our surrounding conditions, but our collective influence can be used today to create better conditions for everyone tomorrow.

GARETH GRIFFITHS
Chief Executive Officer at Ecology Building Society

Ecology Building Society

1. Introduction

This is the sixth annual Climate Gap Report from Ethical Consumer.

What is the climate gap? The gap is, at the very least, the difference between the UK's current carbon emissions, and the decarbonisation targets set out by the UK's Climate Change Committee (CCC) for the year 2030. The report's main aim is to try to simplify data for consumers on the UK's progress towards meeting these targets, and to help identify key actions we need to take.

The graphs in the report are tracking data in four impact areas that together account for about 75% of UK consumer emissions: Food, Heating, Transport, and Consumer Goods. For each area, we situate consumer action alongside actions for governments and companies, and list some key campaigns to support (web links are provided on the report cards in the digital version of this report).

However, the CCC's advice to the government is under scrutiny. We continue to push for the UK to make a 'fairer' contribution to the global target (see **2.5**), and to challenge the idea that an economic growth focus for our societies makes sense (see **2.6**). This ties in with Ethical Consumer's evolving work on '**Challenging Corporate Power**'.

A more compact report

This year the report is designed to be more compact, but you can still refer to our 2025 report for sections on:

4. **Our research for the Consumer Goods impact area**
5. **Making sure the targets still make sense**
   - 5.1 **The quality and timeliness of data**
   - 5.2 **Growth and degrowth**
6. **Consumer climate emissions and inequality**
7. **Direct political campaigns to support**
8. **Consumer intentions**

The 2025 report also includes over 50 links to relevant guides and articles.

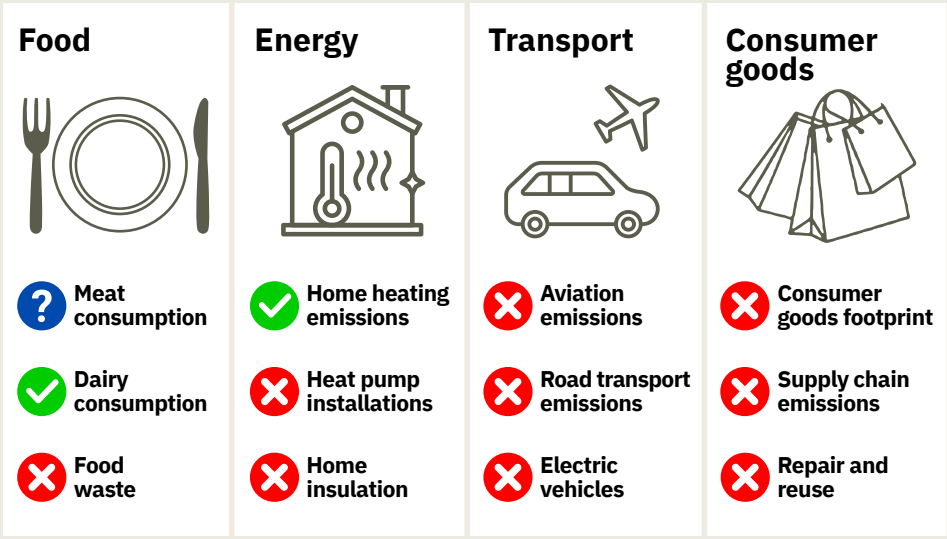
The *Notes, Sources and Appendix* for this report can be found on our Climate Gap page on the website too: **www.ethicalconsumer.org/climate-gap-report**

Quick links to Ethical Consumer shopping guides (all companies receive a Climate rating):

- **Food and Drink**
- **Energy**
- **Transport & Travel**
- **Clothing, Home & Garden, Technology**

Research summary

The CCC stated in 2026 that "The UK Government is not moving fast enough to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions", and in particular that "If sufficient progress on electrification is not made in the next year, the 2030 [goals] may become out of reach and there would be significant risks for both the Sixth Carbon Budget and reaching Net Zero by 2050" (see **2.3** below). As the bar charts on the four report cards show, only two of the twelve areas appear to be on track. The graphic below will accompany the release of this report on social media.



IN FOOD, we found meat consumption per capita slightly increased, although if you only include beef, veal and sheep meat – the CCC tracks beef and lamb as they are more carbon intensive than poultry – consumption had fallen, and the number of cattle and sheep, and consumption of beef and lamb were said to be on track. Dairy consumption had fallen, but the CCC said people would need support to make alternative choices. There was no update on food waste, but the CCC said the "recycling rate of waste from households" was off track.

IN HEATING, residential building emissions remained not far from the CCC target, but likely due to rising costs as there had not been much progress on decarbonising home heating. Heat pump retrofits had slowed significantly, and while cavity wall insulation had increased, government support for further insulation was unclear.

IN TRANSPORT, surface transport emissions were estimated to have increased, although the CCC said it had more confidence in the government on transport emissions than in 2025. Electric car sales were on track but needed to accelerate fast and regulations around supporting this were under review at the time of writing. There had been a very small fall in aviation emissions and further action is needed.

IN CONSUMER GOODS, government statistics on the carbon footprint of selected consumer goods sectors show a slight reduction between 2022 and 2023, but this was not fast enough to make the target that we estimate is needed for 2030. Of the 40 giant consumer goods companies whose carbon reporting we track ourselves, these too appeared to be moving in the wrong direction at this critical time (see **2.6** below). The proportion of consumer spending on secondhand goods and repairing existing products appears to have remained static at around 20%.

2. Key Observations

2.1 A changing political climate

Much has changed in the six years since we began this annual report. 2026 is a year when **72% of newspaper reports** on the UK heatwaves in June decided not to mention climate change or carbon emissions at all. It is also a year when a climate change denying party has led in the polls for a while, and the Conservative party has officially dropped **its commitment** to the UK's 2050 net zero targets.

In this context, it might seem churlish to be criticising the current UK government for its inadequate response to the current targets, and indeed to be criticising the UK's Climate Change Committee (CCC) for its failure to propose targets that are robust enough. But, as the great Bertrand Russell said, "as soon as we abandon our own reason, and are content to rely on authority, there is no end to our troubles".

For this reason, as well as making the other observations below, we are also republishing in this report some groups consumers can support for wider political reform. In the context of the political changes we are observing, supporting campaigns addressing issues like misinformation and defending the right to protest are becoming critical.

2.2 Civil society response

Also because of the above, civil society's calls for the UK government to communicate honestly about the climate emergency are growing.

Over 3,500 screenings of the '**National Emergency Briefing**' film have been organised by communities since April 2026, in a campaign to get MPs to support a live emergency briefing for the UK. The campaign group **Extinction Rebellion marched in London** in September 2026, calling for the UK intelligence services' national security assessment of the risks of ecological breakdown, suppressed in October 2025, to be published in full.

2.3 Fixing electricity pricing is an important first step

The CCC's 2026 report to Parliament showed a significant slowdown in the number of retrofit heat pump installations. Because of this and other factors, the CCC's number one recommendation for the government this year was to "make electricity cheaper through measures such as removing remaining policy costs from electricity bills." Ethical Consumer and Ecology Building Society agreed with this approach and we put out **statements in support** of this in July.

2.4 Data centres

The UK has the third most data centres in the world, just behind the US and Germany – and another **100 are currently at planning stage**. The UK government is actively encouraging this expansion, but the significant increase in electricity required is not yet part of the carbon budgets drawn up by the CCC. It is vital that this is done as soon as possible to retain credibility. See our Challenging Corporate Power pages for **links to data centre campaigns**.

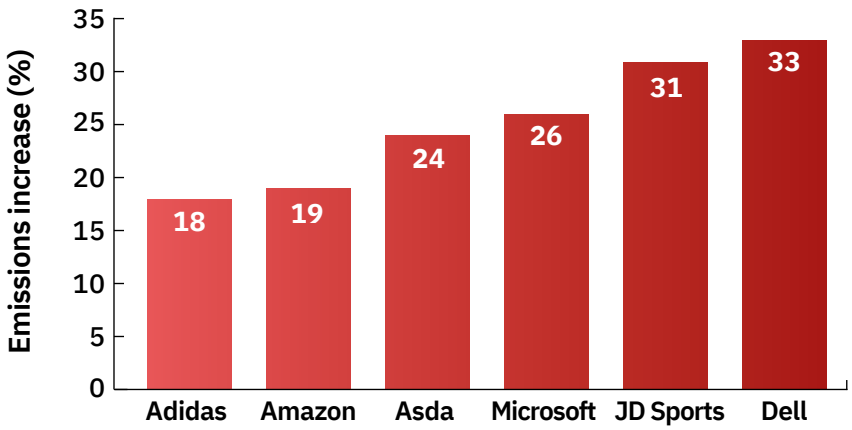
2.5 Legal challenge around targets

In June 2026, the Seventh Carbon Budget (7CB) passed into UK law, but a legal challenge has begun against the government calling for a review of the process. The '**Carbon Reckoning**' campaign states that the 7CB is "a carbon budget for a world that no longer exists", as it is based on a 'global carbon budget' that was calculated in 2018 and has almost been exhausted.

Nor does the 7CB demonstrate that Britain's budget share is consistent with our Paris Agreement obligations and the International Court of Justice's advice, and the UK's Climate Change Act itself, which calls for the UK to make a 'fair' contribution considering its historic responsibilities and current capabilities.

2.6 Emissions from consumer goods appear to be rising

We have again collated the Scope 3 emissions of the UK's 40 biggest consumer goods companies (see Appendix) – most of whom are manufacturing overseas. Although data remains patchy, figures overall show an increase (see **3.4**), and from some companies in particular (see graphic below). In theory, if all companies have credible net zero plans, and the countries they are producing in have decent net zero plans too, these emissions should be going down. The fact that they are not gives more weight to our argument that the CCC and government targets should be considering imported emissions too. Rising emissions are also due to the growth and profit focus of economies and companies, which pressures them to keep growing, even if carbon intensity is reduced.



Figures calculated from companies' Scope 3 emissions reporting for the latest year compared to the previous year

2.7 Consumer engagement plans

Ethical Consumer also welcomes a rare mention for “public engagement and awareness” in the CCC’s 2026 report, where they noted that the UK government had published a public participation plan called “Energising Britain” in December 2025. We also agree with the CCC that the government’s current strategy needs to set out a concrete programme for public engagement.

2.8 Quality of the data

As we have noted in previous years, the quality, timeliness and consistency of various data across almost all 12 impact areas continues to be a problem, making it tricky to draw conclusions and to track progress. Our 2025 report contains a table analysing information delays in each area. We continue to call on the government to provide resources to fix this issue.

2.9 Heathrow airport

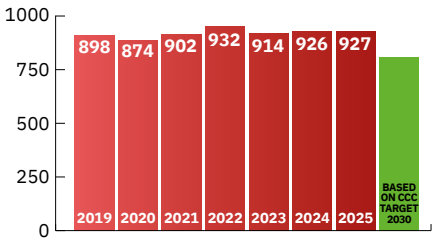
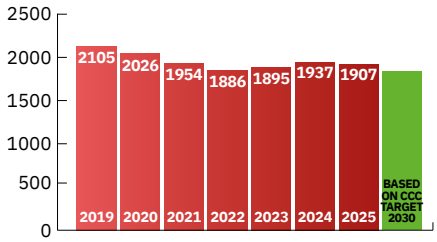
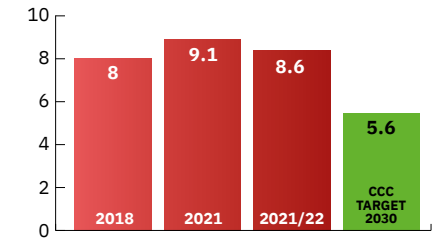
In September 2026 the CCC stated that “there is no credible pathway for Heathrow Airport expansion within the UK’s climate commitments under current policies.” As **reported by the Guardian**, it did suggest that the aviation industry could fully address its emissions through using ‘sustainable aviation fuel’ and paying for engineered carbon removals, a claim that was rejected by campaigners, as recent research has found these methods to be unproven.

2.10 Adaption to climate change

The CCC also published a report in May 2026, which found that none of the UK’s existing adaptation plans were fit for purpose, listing increasing risks from global heating, flooding and drought. The chair of the adaptation subcommittee of the CCC, **Julia King, was quoted** as saying, “With the right decisions, we can protect the people and the places we love,” “So,the strong message is that decline is a choice, it’s a political choice, it’s not inevitable. We can do something about it.”

3. The Climate Gap report cards

Food (c.26% total UK emissions)

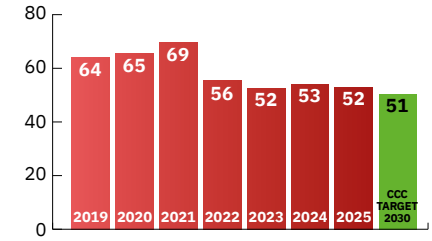
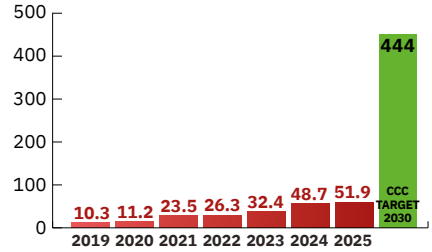
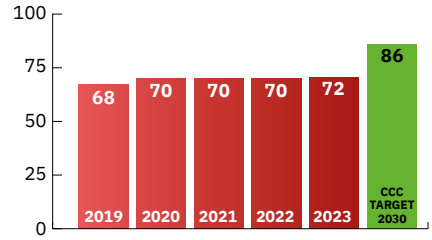
	Actions for government	Actions for companies	Actions for consumers
MEAT CONSUMPTION grams per person per week  	Use public procurement	Better carbon labelling	Reduce meat consumption
	Rebalance agricultural policy	More plant-based options	Support the **Sustain** alliance
	Assess future trade deals	More investment in alternatives	Support **Animal Rising**
	Promote alternatives to meat and make them more affordable	Support the **Secure Your Future** campaign	Support the **Vegan Society**
DAIRY CONSUMPTION grams per person per week  	Use public procurement	Better carbon labelling	Reduce dairy consumption
	Rebalance agricultural policy	More plant-based options	Support the **Vegan Society**
	Promote alternatives to dairy and make them more affordable	More investment in alternatives	Support **Animal Rising**
FOOD WASTE million tonnes per year  	Mandate food waste reporting for companies	Reduce and report on supply chain food waste annually	Reduce food waste
	Policies on food waste prevention from field to fork	Support **Food Rise**	Support the **Secure Your Future** campaign
	Funding for food waste prevention	Support **WRAP**	

Food results

OECD data shows UK meat consumption slightly rising and dairy slightly falling. The CCC focuses on the more intensive emissions of red meat and its 2026 progress report stated that the number of cattle and sheep, and consumption of beef and lamb, were on track. It did not comment on dairy reduction but said that livestock numbers need to fall further to both reduce emissions and release land to sequester carbon.

In 2025 WRAP estimated total food waste in the UK (not including farm waste) to be around 5% lower compared to 2021 but higher than in 2018. There is no new update.

Heating (c.14% total UK emissions)

	Actions for government	Actions for companies	Actions for consumers
EMISSIONS FROM HOME HEATING million tonnes CO_2e 	Provide clear and consistent framework	Reduce demand through smarter heating	Reduce demand
	Mandate and enforce quality standards	Support **Business Declares**	Support the **Secure Your Future** campaign
	Implement regulations to ensure new homes are climate fit for the future		Support **Fuel Poverty Action**
HEAT PUMP INSTALLATIONS thousands of installations per year in existing homes 	Subsidise installations	Install heat pumps in commercial buildings	Get a heat pump if suitable for your home
	Remove barriers to heat pump installation	Develop creative funding instruments	Find a **United For Warm Homes** local group
	Make electricity cheaper	Address the skills gaps	Support **Just Stop Oil**
HOME INSULATION % of homes with cavity wall insulation 	Subsidise installations	Insulate commercial buildings	Insulate your home
	Provide clear and consistent framework	Develop creative funding instruments	Find a **United For Warm Homes** local group
	Mandate and enforce quality standards	Address the skills gaps	See the **Great Homes Upgrade** Toolkit
	Implement regulations to ensure new homes are well insulated		

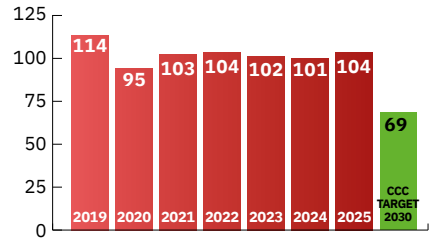
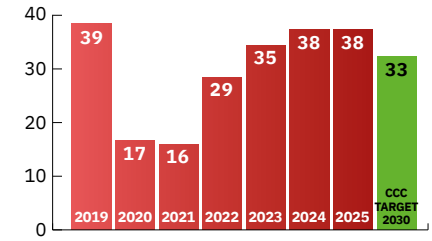
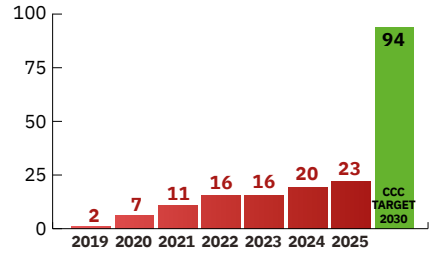
Heating results

Again the CCC said that it is likely to be higher energy prices that are keeping energy demand down, as there has been little progress on decarbonising home heating.

The CCC reported that the growth in retrofit heat pump installations has slowed significantly, driven by a reduction in installations under schemes targeting low-income households, but it urgently needs to accelerate.

The CCC reports that cavity wall insulation is on track, but following the closure of the ECO grant scheme, installations could fall significantly in 2026 unless other grants continue to be available. See **https://greatbritishenergy.com/eligibility-checker/**

Transport (c.25% total UK emissions)

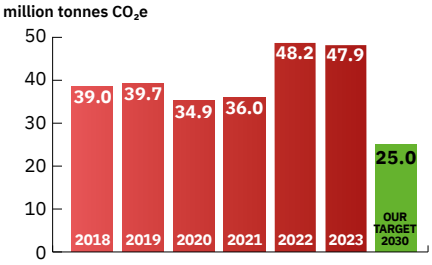
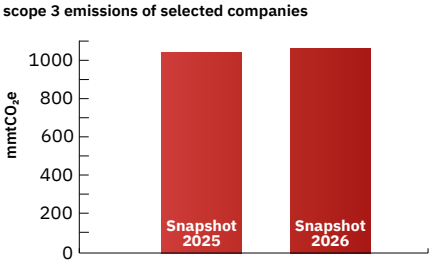
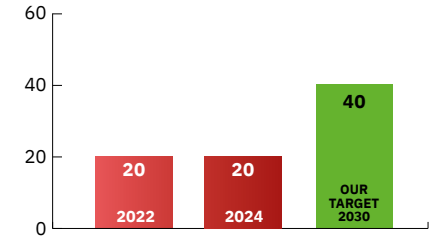
	Actions for government	Actions for companies	Actions for consumers
SURFACE TRANSPORT EMISSIONS million tonnes CO_2e  	Introduce climate statutory duty for councils	Switch to electric cars and vans	Reduce distance travelled and switch to lower carbon travel where possible
	Sense check road building	Reduce distance travelled	Support **Walk Wheel Cycle Trust**
	Support walking, cycling and public transport	Continue innovating on decarbonising HGVs	Support the **Transport Action Network**
		Phase out sales of combustion engine cars	Support **Transport and Environment (T&E)**
ANNUAL EMISSIONS FROM AVIATION million tonnes CO_2e  	Halt airport expansion	Replace business travel	Reduce flying where possible
	Frequent-flyer levy	Increase plane efficiency	Support **Friends of the Earth**
	Encourage efficiency gains	Plan towards a just transition for the aviation industry	Support **Transport and Environment (T&E)**
	Aviation tax reform		
ELECTRIC CAR REGISTRATIONS registrations (% of all)  	EV purchase subsidies	Switch to electric cars and vans	If you need a car, replace it with a fully electric vehicle as soon as possible
	Support rapid rollout of charging infrastructure	Invest in charging infrastructure	Support **Stop Funding Heat**'s disinformation work
	Mandatory zero-emission sales targets		

Transport results

Transport accounts for about a quarter of UK emissions, and surface transport emissions are higher than buildings, industry, agriculture, or aviation.

Emissions from the surface transport sector are estimated to have increased, despite rising EV sales. The CCC had more confidence in the government on transport emissions than in 2025. Electric car sales were on track but needed to accelerate fast and the ZEV mandate had been put on review at the time of writing. Emissions from aviation fell by too small an amount to show on our graph.

Selected Consumer Goods (c.10% total UK emissions)

	Actions for government	Actions for companies	Actions for consumers
CLOTHING, FURNISHING AND ELECTRICALS 	Collaborate on carbon pricing internationally	Decarbonise supply chains	Try to reduce overall consumption
	Invest in more timely data collection	Design lower impact product lines	Support **Fashion Revolution**
		Support the Secure Your Future campaign	
SUPPLY CHAIN EMISSIONS 	Require supply chain (scope 3) emissions reporting annually	Report supply chain emissions annually	Choose brands reporting supply chain emissions
		Reduce in line with Paris goals	Subscribe to **Ethical Consumer**
		Subscribe to **Ethical Consumer**	
CONSUMER REPAIR AND REUSE 	Extend repairability obligations	Design for repairability	Choose secondhand products and repair
		Price spare parts fairly	Support the **Restart Project**
		Join the **Wellbeing Economy Alliance**	**Support campaigns for wider political reform (see Section 4)**

Consumer goods results

The UK government's own statistics for the carbon footprint of the consumer goods sectors we track were re-stated again this year. They now show quite a big jump in total carbon emissions since 2021. Although there was a slight reduction between 2022 and 2023, this was not fast enough to make the target that we estimate is needed for 2030.

In 2026, 80% of the 40 giant consumer goods companies we track for this report are now reporting on their supply chain carbon emissions. Although this is not the 100% we had hoped for by 2025, we are now moving to show whether their net zero plans are actually leading to their combined carbon emissions reducing. Unfortunately this too appeared to be moving in the wrong direction at this critical time.

The proportion of consumer spending on secondhand goods and repairing existing products appears to have remained static at around 20%. The data we use to make these estimates is not of very high quality, but some **consumer surveys** do also show an interest in secondhand rising.

4. Wider Political Reform

As we mention in **2.1** above, the ongoing failure of our political systems to deliver an appropriate response to the seriousness of the climate crisis, means that taking action to address more systemic change becomes increasingly important. Here are just six groups working in this space.

Reforming the voting system

The Electoral Reform Society has been fighting for proportional representation and a better functioning democracy in the UK since 1884. It is a democratic membership organisation welcoming individual members and has successfully campaigned for the use of proportional representation in Scottish, Northern Irish and Welsh elections.

www.electoral-reform.org.uk

Reforming political finance

Although Transparency International works on corruption around the world it has a UK chapter with a specifically 'money and politics' topic area.

Within this, it 'aims to end the corrupting influence of big money in UK politics and to instill integrity into the conduct of those in public office.'

It has a Friends of TI UK programme for supporters to engage with its work and networks.

www.transparency.org.uk

Addressing climate disinformation

Stop Funding Heat is a spin off organisation from Stop Funding Hate. It is 'concerned at the way newspapers, news sites and online platforms spread climate lies in the pursuit of sales, clicks or vested interests'. By alerting brands to problem content they may decide to disassociate from, they can make climate disinformation less profitable for publishers. Supporters can help them identify problem content and much more.

stopfundingheat.info

The Conscious Advertising Network (CAN) is a not-for-profit coalition of more than 180 advertisers, agencies and civil society groups, all working together to embed human rights within commercial and political decision making in relation to advertising.

www.consciousadnetwork.com

Protecting the right to protest

In May 2023 the Public Order Bill became law in the UK. The bill further restricts people's fundamental rights to peaceful protest. Amongst the groups campaigning for its repeal are Amnesty International.

www.amnesty.org

Liberty is another group working in this area. It says: 'There is a democratic crisis in the UK. The Government are shutting accountability in Parliament, through the courts, on the streets and in civil society. Help Liberty keep these avenues of accountability open so we can all stand up to power.'

www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk

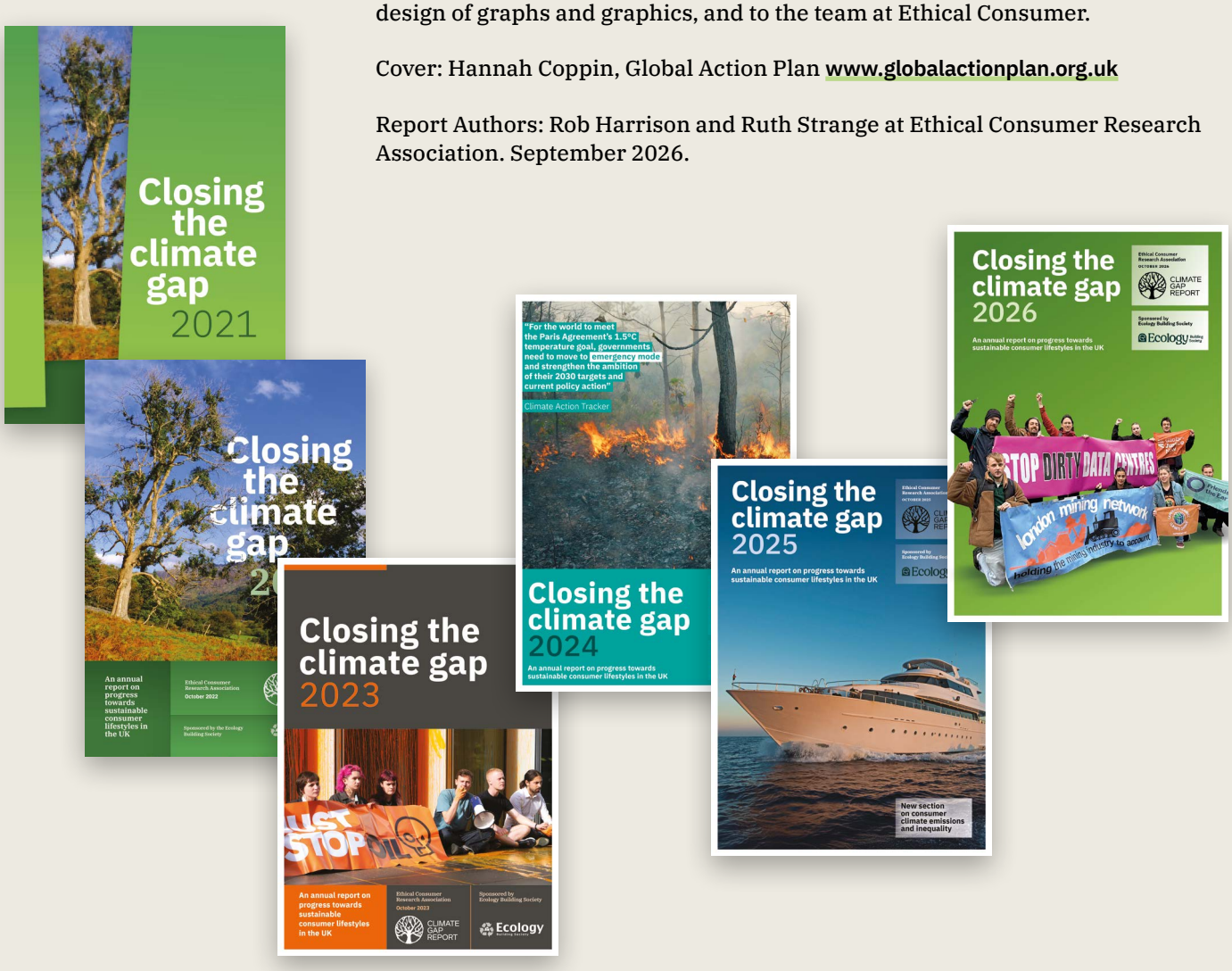
Acknowledgements

We would like to express gratitude to Ecology Building Society for its sponsorship of the 2022-2026 Climate Gap Reports.

Thanks also to Tom Lynton for design and layout of the report, Alyson Tyler for design of graphs and graphics, and to the team at Ethical Consumer.

Cover: Hannah Coppin, Global Action Plan **www.globalactionplan.org.uk**

Report Authors: Rob Harrison and Ruth Strange at Ethical Consumer Research Association. September 2026.



All reports in this series are available from:

www.ethicalconsumer.org/climate-gap-report

The 2026 ***Notes, Sources and Appendix*** can be found in a separate document at the link above.