

Things You Can Do

A practical guide to climate action for ordinary people

Inspired by The People's Emergency Briefing · June 2026

Why this list?

The People's Emergency Briefing makes clear that the climate and nature crisis is not a distant threat — it is already affecting British life, from food prices and public health to national security. The science calls for urgent, system-wide change. That requires government action. But it also requires all of us.

This guide brings together 41 practical actions ordinary people can take — in their homes, their workplaces, and their communities. Not everyone can do everything on this list. That is not the point. The point is that there is something here for everyone: a starting place, a next step, a sense that we are not helpless.

Research shows that when people take individual action, they become more politically active over time. Personal and political action are not alternatives — they feed each other. And individual actions, taken at scale, can drive 25–30% of the global emission reductions needed to avoid the worst of climate change (Project Drawdown).

How to read this guide

Each action is colour-coded in two ways:

Effort (third column) — how easy or demanding the action is to take.

Carbon impact (fourth column) — the approximate scale of the action's benefit, set in the context of the average UK carbon footprint of around 12.7 tonnes of CO₂e per person per year (The Eco Experts / DEFRA, 2024). The categories are: under 0.5t ("A good start"); 0.5–1t ("Meaningful", or 4–8% of the average UK footprint); 1–2t ("Significant", or 8–16%); and 2t+ or large systemic leverage ("Game-changing", or 16%+). Carbon figures are approximate annual estimates. Non-carbon benefits — such as biodiversity gain, political leverage, or motivational value — are noted and colour-coded as "A good start" unless their systemic impact warrants a higher rating.

Effort key

Easy	Medium	Big step	NEB priority
Can be done today	Requires planning or cost	Significant change or investment	Specifically recommended by the National Emergency Briefing

Carbon impact key

A good start	Meaningful	Significant	Game-changing
Under 0.5t CO ₂ e/yr, or non-carbon benefit	0.5–1t CO ₂ e/yr (4–8% of average UK footprint)	1–2t CO ₂ e/yr (8–16% of average UK footprint)	2t+ CO ₂ e/yr or large systemic leverage (16%+ of average UK footprint)

Food & Diet

#	Action	Effort	Carbon impact
1	Eat less meat and dairy — especially beef and lamb You don't need to go vegan. Shifting to meat-free weekdays	Easy–Medium	Meaningful 0.4–0.8t CO ₂ e/yr

Food & Diet

	saves roughly 0.4–0.8t CO ₂ e/yr. Going fully plant-based saves around 0.8t. Animal products account for 57% of food-related emissions globally. Source: Wynes & Nicholas (2017), <i>Environ. Research Letters</i> 12(7); Xu et al. (2021); APS 101 Things (2021)		
2	Cut food waste Around 30% of all food is wasted globally, contributing 8–10% of total greenhouse gas emissions. Plan meals, use your freezer, and embrace leftovers. Compost what you can't use. Source: Project Drawdown (2020); APS 101 Things (2021); UN ActNow (un.org/en/actnow)	Easy	A good start ~0.3t CO ₂ e/yr
3	Eat seasonally and locally Choosing UK-grown, in-season produce reduces transport and storage emissions, and supports local food systems that are more resilient to future climate shocks. Source: GWU Online Public Health (onlinepublichealth.gwu.edu , 2021); APS 101 Things (2021)	Easy	A good start ~0.1–0.2t CO ₂ e/yr
4	Grow some of your own food Even a window box of herbs or a small vegetable bed reduces packaging waste and reconnects you to food systems. Saving seeds at the end of the season also preserves varieties at risk from a changing climate. Source: APS 101 Things (2021); One Tree Planted, 27 Ways (onetreepanted.org)	Easy	A good start Small but symbolic
5	Calculate the carbon footprint of what you eat Tools like WWF's My Footprint app, Project Drawdown's SHIFT guide, or Mike Berners-Lee's book <i>How Bad Are Bananas?</i> help you understand the relative impact of different foods and lifestyle choices — and identify where to focus your effort most effectively. Source: WWF My Footprint app (footprint.wwf.org.uk); Project Drawdown SHIFT (drawdown.org/shift); Berners-Lee, <i>How Bad Are Bananas?</i> (2021, Profile Books)	Easy	A good start Awareness tool — enables higher-impact choices

Travel & Transport

#	Action	Effort	Carbon impact
6	Go car-free or car-light Living car-free saves around 2.4t CO ₂ e per year — one of the single largest lifestyle changes possible. If you can't go car-free, cutting trips, car-sharing, or switching to electric all help. Source: Wynes & Nicholas (2017); UN ActNow (un.org/en/actnow/ten-actions); WRI '19 Ways' (2025)	Big step	Game-changing Up to 2.4t CO ₂ e/yr
7	Fly less A single avoided return transatlantic flight saves around 1.6t CO ₂ e — equivalent to eating plant-based for two years. This is the highest-impact individual choice for frequent flyers. When you must fly, buying verified carbon offsets is a meaningful mitigation. Source: Wynes & Nicholas (2017); UN ActNow; APS 101 Things (2021); BeZero Carbon on offset quality (bezerocarbon.com)	Medium–Big	Significant 1.6t CO ₂ e per avoided transatlantic return flight
8	Walk, cycle, or use public transport by default Beyond reducing emissions, active travel improves health and	Easy	Meaningful 0.2–1.0t CO ₂ e/yr (varies)

Travel & Transport			
	wellbeing. Advocating for better cycling infrastructure in your area shifts the options available to everyone. Source: <i>UN ActNow</i>; <i>GWU Online Public Health (2021)</i>; <i>APS 101 Things (2021)</i>; <i>EPA (epa.gov)</i>		
9	Switch to an electric vehicle If you need to buy a car, choosing electric can reduce your carbon footprint by up to 2t CO₂e per year compared to a petrol or diesel vehicle. As the grid gets greener the saving grows further. Source: <i>UN ActNow ten actions (un.org/en/actnow/ten-actions)</i>; <i>Eco Experts, Average UK Carbon Footprint (theecoexperts.co.uk, 2024)</i>	Big step	Game-changing Up to 2.0t CO₂e/yr vs petrol
10	Work from home when possible Even a few days a week without commuting reduces transport emissions significantly, and often reduces office energy use too. Source: <i>APS 101 Things (2021)</i>; <i>Imperial College London Grantham Institute (imperial.ac.uk)</i>	Easy	A good start 0.1–0.5t CO₂e/yr

Home & Energy			
#	Action	Effort	Carbon impact
11	Switch to a renewable energy tariff One of the easier high-impact switches. World Resources Institute research ranks home renewable energy among the most impactful individual actions. Check Uswitch or your supplier's green tariff options. Source: <i>WRI '19 Ways' (2025)</i>; <i>UN ActNow</i>; <i>GWU Online Public Health (2021)</i>	Easy	Meaningful 0.5–1.5t CO₂e/yr
12	Install solar panels Generating your own renewable electricity from rooftop solar panels can significantly cut your home emissions and reduce energy bills over the long term. Check for government schemes and grants. Source: <i>UN ActNow ten actions</i>; <i>APS 101 Things (2021)</i>; <i>GWU Online Public Health (2021)</i>	Big step	Meaningful 0.5–1.5t CO₂e/yr
13	Insulate your home Loft insulation, cavity wall fill, and draught-proofing cut heating bills and emissions year-round. It's also resilience against future energy price shocks. Check for government grants through the Great British Insulation Scheme. Source: <i>WRI '19 Ways' (2025)</i>; <i>GWU Online Public Health (2021)</i>; <i>UK Energy Saving Trust</i>	Medium	Meaningful 0.5–1.5t CO₂e/yr
14	Use a smart or programmable thermostat Programmable thermostats automatically adjust your heating when the house is unoccupied. They can save up to 10% on heating and cooling bills and reduce your carbon footprint without any effort once set up. Source: <i>GWU Online Public Health (onlinepublichealth.gwu.edu, 2021)</i>	Easy	A good start ~0.1–0.3t CO₂e/yr
15	Get a smart energy meter — and use smart plugs to find the energy guzzlers A smart meter shows your real-time energy use in pounds and pence, making it easy to see the impact of everyday choices. Smart plugs go further, letting you monitor and control individual appliances via your phone, and set timers to eliminate standby	Easy	A good start ~0.1–0.3t CO₂e/yr

Home & Energy

	waste. Together they are powerful tools for cutting energy use with minimal effort. Smart meters are free from your energy supplier; smart plugs start at around £10 each. Source: <i>Ofgem, Get a Smart Meter (ofgem.gov.uk); Centre for Sustainable Energy, Smart Plugs (cse.org.uk, 2025); MoneySavingExpert, Smart Meters (moneysavingexpert.com)</i>		
16	Turn down, switch off, unplug Reducing home energy use through behaviour — lowering the thermostat by 1–2°C, using cold washes, switching off standby — is accessible to almost everyone regardless of tenure or income. Source: <i>UN ActNow; EPA (epa.gov); APS 101 Things (2021)</i>	Easy	A good start 0.1–0.4t CO₂e/yr
17	Ditch the tumble dryer — line dry instead Tumble dryers account for around 4% of household electricity use. Drying clothes on a line or airer costs nothing and saves energy. Even switching to lower heat settings and removing lint regularly cuts emissions significantly. Source: <i>WWF UK, Ditch the Tumble Dryer (wwf.org.uk/challenges/ditch-tumble-dryer); GWU Online Public Health (2021)</i>	Easy	A good start ~0.1–0.2t CO₂e/yr
18	Maintain your fridge and freezer — and keep them running efficiently Your fridge-freezer runs 24 hours a day and is typically the third most expensive appliance to run. Simple maintenance cuts that cost: clean the condenser coils (dust prevents proper cooling), check and replace worn door seals (warm air leaking in forces the motor to work harder), set the correct temperature (fridge at 3–5°C, freezer at –18°C), keep it well-stocked but not overfilled, and defrost manually-defrosting models regularly — even 5mm of ice build-up increases energy use by up to 30%. Source: <i>Which?, 7 Tips to Lower the Cost of Running Your Fridge Freezer (which.co.uk, May 2026); Which?, How to Defrost Your Freezer (which.co.uk, 2025)</i>	Easy	A good start ~0.05–0.15t CO₂e/yr
19	Switch gas appliances for electric when they need replacing Heat pumps instead of gas boilers, induction hobs instead of gas stoves. You don't need to rip anything out today — just make better choices at the point of replacement. As the grid greens, electric becomes ever cleaner. Source: <i>WRI '19 Ways' (2025); UN ActNow; Imperial College Grantham Institute (imperial.ac.uk)</i>	Big step	Significant 0.5–2.0t CO₂e/yr
20	Dispose of old fridges and air conditioning units responsibly The refrigerant gases inside these appliances are far more potent than CO₂. When replacing them, ensure the old unit is properly decommissioned and refrigerant recovered, not released. Source: <i>Project Drawdown: Refrigerant Management (drawdown.org); One Tree Planted (onetreepanted.org)</i>	Easy	Game-changing Up to several tonnes if refrigerant released

Water

#	Action	Effort	Carbon impact
21	Get a smart water meter — and switch to metered billing	Easy	A good start ~0.05–0.1t CO₂e/yr

Water			
	A smart water meter measures your water use in near real-time, helps detect leaks, and means you pay only for what you use. Severn Trent report that a family of four just turning off the tap while brushing teeth could save around £100 a year. Contact your water supplier to request a free smart meter. Source: Severn Trent Water, <i>A Smarter Way to Use Water</i> (stwater.co.uk); Ofgem / MoneySavingExpert, <i>Smart Meters</i> (moneysavingexpert.com)		(indirect, via energy saved heating water)
22	Fix dripping taps and leaks immediately A dripping tap can waste up to 5,500 litres of water per year. Even a slow drip of 30ml per minute adds up to hundreds of pounds over time in water and heating costs. Replacing a worn tap washer is a simple DIY job costing pennies. Source: Affinity Water, <i>How Much Is That Drip Really Costing You?</i> (affinitywater.co.uk); Plumbworld, <i>Water Efficiency in Kitchen Taps</i> (plumbworld.co.uk)	Easy	A good start Small direct; significant cost saving
23	Fit tap aerators to your kitchen and bathroom taps Tap aerators are small, cheap devices (typically £5–10 each) that screw onto the end of your tap and mix air into the water flow. They reduce water use by 30–60% while maintaining the same feel of pressure. An average household can save up to 1,274 litres per month across kitchen and bathroom taps, cutting both water bills and the energy used to heat it. Source: TheGreenAge, <i>Tap Aerators</i> (thegreenage.co.uk); Lime Kitchen & Bathroom, <i>Save Water Save Energy</i> (limekitchenandbathroom.co.uk); SaveMoneyCutCarbon (savemoneycutcarbon.com)	Easy	A good start ~0.05–0.1t CO₂e/yr; up to £47/yr saving per household
24	Reduce water use — shower smarter, run full loads, turn off the tap Heating water consumes significant energy. Take shorter or cooler showers, wash clothes in cold water, fix leaking taps promptly, only run dishwashers and washing machines on full loads, and never leave the tap running while brushing teeth or washing vegetables. Source: GWU Online Public Health (2021); Severn Trent Water (stwater.co.uk); UN ActNow; EPA (epa.gov)	Easy	A good start ~0.05–0.15t CO₂e/yr

Money & Consumption			
#	Action	Effort	Carbon impact
25	Buy less, buy better, buy second-hand The most sustainable product is usually the one you don't buy. Reducing consumption, repairing things, and choosing second-hand goods cuts embodied carbon and reduces demand for new production. Source: APS 101 Things (2021); GWU Online Public Health (2021); One Tree Planted (onetreeplanted.org)	Easy	A good start 0.2–0.5t CO₂e/yr
26	Recycle properly — and reduce packaging Recycling significantly reduces carbon emissions, but only when sorted correctly. One tonne of recycled plastic saves around 5,774 kWh of energy. Choosing products with minimal or recyclable packaging reduces waste further upstream. Source: GWU Online Public Health (2021); EPA (epa.gov); APS 101 Things (2021)	Easy	A good start 0.1–0.3t CO₂e/yr
27	Move your money — banking and pensions Banks differ enormously in how much they lend to fossil fuel	Medium	Game-changing Potentially very large — indirect

Money & Consumption			
	companies. Switching to an ethical bank, or asking your pension provider about their fossil fuel exposure, withdraws capital from harmful industries and sends powerful market signals. Source: WRI '19 Ways' (2025); APS 101 Things (2021); Imperial College Grantham Institute (imperial.ac.uk)		
28	Research companies' sustainability before buying Reading up on companies' environmental commitments — their supply chain, sustainability statements, and green certifications — helps you make informed choices and rewards responsible businesses with your custom. Source: GWU Online Public Health (2021); One Tree Planted (onetreeplanted.org)	Easy	A good start Systemic — hard to quantify individually
29	Choose biodegradable and non-toxic cleaning products Many conventional cleaning products contain harsh chemicals that harm ecosystems when they enter waterways. Switching to green-certified or concentrated products (which also reduce packaging) cuts both environmental and indoor air pollution. Source: GWU Online Public Health (2021); Warwickshire Wildlife Trust (warwickshirewildlifetrust.org.uk)	Easy	A good start Small direct; ecosystem benefit

Civic, Political & Community			
#	Action	Effort	Carbon impact
30	Write to your MP — and make climate a priority when voting The NEB's top ask for individuals. MPs respond far more to direct constituent contact than people imagine. A personal letter or email — not a template — gets noticed. You can find your MP at nebriefing.org. Ask them to sign the Parliamentary Call for a Televised Emergency Briefing. Source: National Emergency Briefing, Next Steps (nebriefing.org, 2026); NEB MP Engagement Guide	Easy	Game-changing Political — potentially enormous leverage
31	Sign the NEB open letter and share it The National Emergency Briefing has an open letter to the Prime Minister calling for a televised national briefing — similar to the Covid briefings. Tens of thousands have already signed. Find it at nebriefing.org. Source: National Emergency Briefing open letter (nebriefing.org/open-letter-keir, 2026)	Easy	Game-changing Political leverage
32	Host or attend a People's Emergency Briefing screening The NEB film is being shown in community venues across the UK. Hosting a screening in a village hall, workplace, or faith space brings your community and local MP together. Kits and guides are available at nebriefing.org. Source: National Emergency Briefing film (nebriefing.org, April 2026); LBB Online / Execute (April 2026)	Medium	Game-changing Community multiplier effect
33	Talk about climate change — openly and often Climate scientist Katherine Hayhoe's research confirms that conversations done well are genuinely influential. Connect climate to what your listener cares about. APS research shows that making your environmental values visible to others helps shift social norms.	Easy	Game-changing Social contagion — multiplier effect

Civic, Political & Community			
	Source: <i>Project Drawdown SHIFT</i> (drawdown.org); <i>APS 101 Things</i> (2021); <i>Warwickshire Wildlife Trust</i> (warwickshirewildlifetrust.org.uk)		
34	Advocate for climate justice — at home and globally Climate change hits the world's poorest hardest, despite their having contributed least to the problem. Supporting organisations working on climate justice — such as Oxfam — and pushing for fair international climate finance is an important dimension often left off personal-action lists. Source: <i>Oxfam UK, Climate Action</i> (oxfam.org.uk); <i>One Tree Planted</i> (onetreepanted.org)	Easy	Game-changing Systemic — global equity dimension
35	Join or support a community or campaign organisation Whether the Climate Majority Project, Parents for Future, Zero Hour, local rewilding groups, or Citizens' Climate Lobby — collective action is far more powerful than individual action alone. The NEB's next-steps page lists partner organisations. Source: <i>National Emergency Briefing Next Steps</i> (nebriefing.org, 2026); <i>Project Drawdown SHIFT</i> (drawdown.org)	Medium	Game-changing Systemic — potentially very large
36	Use your professional role Whether you're a teacher, nurse, manager, architect, accountant, or lawyer — you have influence in your sector. Advocating for greener practices in your workplace on energy use, procurement, travel policy, and pensions can have an impact far larger than any personal lifestyle change. Source: <i>Project Drawdown Job Function Action Guides</i> (drawdown.org); <i>APS 101 Things</i> (2021); <i>IPCC AR6</i> (2022)	Medium	Game-changing Workplace multiplier — potentially large
37	Build community resilience Climate change is already happening. Joining or starting a local resilience group — whether around food growing, flood preparedness, community energy, or mutual aid — helps your community adapt. The Climate Majority Project offers guidance and support. Source: <i>National Emergency Briefing / Climate Majority Project</i> (nebriefing.org, 2026); <i>UN SDG Goal 13</i>	Medium	Significant Adaptation — reduces future harm

Nature & Land			
#	Action	Effort	Carbon impact
38	Plant for pollinators and biodiversity Choosing plants that support local pollinators — in a garden, window box, or container — helps build ecological resilience. Native species require less care and provide greater habitat value. Source: <i>Warwickshire Wildlife Trust</i> (warwickshirewildlifetrust.org.uk); <i>One Tree Planted</i> (onetreepanted.org)	Easy	A good start Biodiversity — not primarily carbon
39	Support rewilding and nature restoration Whether financially, practically, or as a volunteer, supporting projects that restore forests, wetlands, and grasslands addresses both the emissions and the biodiversity crisis. The UK ranks in the bottom 10% of countries globally for biodiversity intactness. Source: <i>Nature-Based Solutions Initiative NEB briefing</i> (Nov 2025); <i>One Tree Planted</i> (onetreepanted.org)	Easy–Medium	Significant Carbon sequestration + biodiversity

Nature & Land

40	Spend time in nature — and share it with others Australian Psychological Society research shows that spending time in natural places increases pro-environmental behaviour and wellbeing. Taking friends or family to a nature reserve or joining a bird watching group connects people emotionally to what is at stake. Source: APS 101 Things (2021); Warwickshire Wildlife Trust (warwickshirewildlifetrust.org.uk)	Easy	A good start <i>Motivational — builds commitment to action</i>
41	Participate as a citizen scientist Apps like iNaturalist allow you to upload photographs of plants and animals, helping scientists track populations and measure biodiversity. Contributing local nature data supports the research base that underpins climate and nature policy. Source: Warwickshire Wildlife Trust (warwickshirewildlifetrust.org.uk); One Tree Planted (onetreeplanted.org); iNaturalist.org	Easy	A good start <i>Data — supports evidence base</i>

A note on scale

Individual action matters — but it is not the whole answer. The People’s Emergency Briefing is clear that government-level action is essential. The most powerful things on this list are the civic and political ones: talking to your MP, signing the open letter, hosting a screening, joining an organisation. These are the actions that create the political space for the system-wide change we need.

Carbon savings shown are approximate annual figures for a person in the UK, drawn from Wynes & Nicholas (2017), Project Drawdown, UN ActNow, World Resources Institute (2025), and DEFRA consumption-based emissions data. The average UK carbon footprint is approximately 12.7t CO₂e/person/year (The Eco Experts / DEFRA, 2024). Individual circumstances vary significantly.

People’s Emergency Briefing: nebriefing.org · **Find your MP:** parliament.uk/findyourmp · **Calculate your footprint:** footprint.wwf.org.uk