



Greens grassroots push back: Burnham is 'not what we stand for'

Description

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Green Party Burnham

A Green Party [membership coalition](#) has hit back at [senior party figures](#), urging the Greens to stand aside in the Makerfield by-election. [Their letter](#)'s message is unambiguous: the grassroots will not be managed into irrelevance.

Green grassroots hitting back at Burnham

The *Canary* can reveal [a letter](#) signed by Green Party members, circulating in response to a joint statement from high-profile party figures including former co-leader Jonathan Bartley and ex-councillor Rupert Read.

It calls on Zack Polanski to rule out stepping aside for Labour's Andy Burnham in Makerfield. Over 120 members and counting have so far signed the open letter, launched on 25 May.

They oppose a Green stand-down, *even if* the Greater Manchester mayor commits to backing proportional representation (PR) – which he's [already disavowed](#) – for the next general election manifesto.

The grassroots response – signed by members from Stockton, Stockport, Alnwick, Northumberland, and Hartlepool Green Party branches, among others – is pointed. In parts, it is scathing.

- EXCL: Senior Green Party figures have urged Zack Polanski to consider stepping aside for Andy Burnham in the Makerfield by-election if the Greater Manchester mayor commits to introducing proportional representation

Green councillors, activists and former party leaders have

by Daisy Eastlake (@daisyeastlake) [May 24, 2026](#)

PR already off the table

The response comes to an original letter signed by a campaign group within the senior party ranks calling themselves 'Greens for Proportional Representation in Makerfield'.

Central to the senior figures' case for standing aside is the prospect of Burnham backing PR. This reform is long championed by the Greens as essential to breaking Britain's broken two-party duopoly. But the letter-writers are having none of it.

As they bluntly note: Burnham has [already ruled out PR](#). The letter states that its signatories are

confused as to why the point keeps being argued as if it is still on the table.

It's a significant problem for the pro- and anti-PR camp. Their entire strategic rationale rests on a concession which Burnham has [explicitly declined](#).

Urging Greens to sacrifice their presence in a historic by-election, a promise that simply doesn't exist, isn't strategic pragmatism. It's wishful (and, arguably, politically suicidal) thinking dressed up as 'realpolitik' or centre-ground coalition-ism.

[Burnham WON'T back proportional representation this parliament](#)

Greens want more than PR

Even if Burnham were to change his position overnight, many Green members would remain unconvinced. The letter is entirely frank about why: it's Labour's horrific record.

The signatories cite the Labour Party's complicity in [genocide in Gaza](#), its attacks on trans rights, which Burnham recently [doubled down on](#) and its continued embrace of [austerity](#). These are reasons why PR alone cannot and should not function as a get-out-of-scrutiny-free card.

Not for Burnham, nor anyone still imbricated in Labour's machinery. This is a crucial point.

The argument from Bartley, Read, and their co-signatories implicitly frames Labour – specifically Burnham's Labour – as a vehicle somehow worth protecting. Ultimately, that's their core premise.

The grassroots letter refuses this frame entirely. You do not stand aside for a party that, in their words, you are fundamentally at odds with – especially on the defining moral and political questions of our

moment.

Steering away from party members

Perhaps the most stinging section of the letter concerns internal party democracy. The signatories describe the senior figures' letter as 'symbolic of wider tension' inside the Greens, with officers attempting to:

steer decision-making around election campaigning away from grass roots membership [sic].

This cuts to the heart of what the Green Party is supposed to be.

Unlike Labour 'whose membership has repeatedly seen its preferences overridden, managed, and suppressed by the parliamentary leadership and NEC' the Greens built their recent surge in membership on an explicit promise: this would be a *member-led organisation*. People joined, as the letter puts it:

because we were promised a member-led organisation. We can fight against both the far-right and neoliberal establishment.

Nobody, the signatories remind us with quiet fury:

has signed up in the last year to further enable the two-party system.

[Greens' Makerfield candidate withdraws after Israel lobby pile-on](#)

Stakes of getting this wrong

The letter doesn't mince words about what capitulation would cost.

The Greens' meteoric membership growth is driven by activists who see the party as a genuine vehicle for socialist and progressive politics, particularly outside of Labour's grip. As such, it's fragile in the ways that all political momentum is fragile. It depends on trust.

If members repeatedly see their enthusiasm 'stifled' by self-appointed senior figures making unilateral strategic calculations, that momentum will collapse. Perhaps irreparably.

The letter warns that the stakes are too high 'for working class people, for the left, for the prospect of any serious challenge to the two-party stranglehold' to absorb yet again:

another 7-year setback in bringing socialism to Britain.

Speaking exclusively to the *Canary*, the principal author of the Greens' letter, [Georgina Hollifield](#) of Stockton Green Party, said:

The idea that some local green parties should simply give up on campaigns for some 'greater good' often comes at the expense of northern, working class parties. We have a real shot at making significant breakthroughs in areas like this that didn't seem would ever be possible 12 months ago.

The quickest way for the party to kill that momentum and demoralise northern working class members is by having more 'senior' members based in the south-east telling these local parties that sitting on the sidelines is for the best.

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The grassroots demand: **let members decide**

The Greens' letter's conclusion is constitutionally modest but politically significant.

The decision on whether to stand and whether to campaign - which, the signatories correctly note, are separate decisions - should rest with local party members in Makerfield. Not with Bartley. Not with Read. Not with anyone firing off letters from outside the constituency.

This is, at its core, a demand that the Green Party actually be what it says it is.

The Makerfield by-election may not be winnable for the Greens. But the battle over what kind of party the Greens will become? That fight's very much still on.

*Paid-up Green Party members *only* can [sign the open letter here](#)*

Dear "Greens for Proportional Representation in Makerfield",

The Makerfield by-election is a major point of contention at the moment, with many differing perspectives on what, if any, campaigning Green Party of England and Wales should do, and on whether we should stand aside for Labour to allow Andy Burnham a better chance of winning the seat.

We note that on many occasions the justification for standing aside in this by-election is on the basis of Andy Burnham supporting proportional representation for the next general election in 2029. Burnham has already ruled this out, so we are confused as to why this point keeps being argued as if it is still on the table. Moreover, many of us do not believe PR is worth compromising on issues that Labour are complicit in, such as the genocide in Gaza, attacks on trans rights, and austerity, and we would be concerned about the direction of the party if members continue to be pressured to make these compromises in order to have a better chance to get elected.

We believe if we are to have any long term success we must stand vehemently against neoliberalism, not compromise with it.

We also believe that the letter penned to wider membership on this topic is symbolic of wider tension that is being felt within the party, with senior officers attempting to steer decision-making around election campaigning away from grass roots membership. The recent expansion in our party's membership is made up of both new and old political activists who have come together behind the Greens because we were promised a member-led organisation where we can fight against both the far-right and neoliberal establishment that have been a blight on our society for decades. Nobody has signed up in the last year to further enable the two-party system. We worry that the constant stifling of this enthusiasm from self appointed seniors will damage our momentum and prevent the success of our movement. The stakes are so high for the average working class person, we cannot afford another 7- year setback in bringing socialism to Britain.

Ultimately we believe the decision on whether to stand a candidate in Makerfield, and whether or not to campaign (since these are separate decisions), should lie with local party members. We believe they should be trusted to make decisions and organise without top-down pressure, as that is not what we stand for as a party.

Respectfully,

Georgina Hollifield, membership officer for Stockton Green Party
Jack Morgan, Stockton Green Party
Devon Smith, Stockton Green Party
Jamie Mulvay, Alnwick Green Party
Pete Burns, membership officer for Northumberland Green Party
Adam Waller, membership officer for Hartlepool Green Party

The grassroots Greens's letter via [X @sp4rk13jumpr0p3](#)

Featured image via the Canary / X

By [Cameron Baillie](#)

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