



Net Zero

Six Pillars of a Better Future

Climate change is the existential challenge of our time. But tackling it need not be a story of costs and sacrifices alone. It is also an opportunity. Powered by a clean, secure and ultimately cheaper energy system, net zero can deliver a stronger, more resilient economy and a better way of life. Getting there demands urgency in policy, but pragmatism in politics. The direction and certainty that allow the market to drive change must be balanced with respect for freedom of choice. And action must be aspirational, avoiding the moralising that threatens to undermine broad but fragile public support for action.

Inaction and the Threat of Polarisation

The negative effects of climate change are no longer just predictions but a lived reality, growing in severity and frequency around the world. The science is beyond any doubt. Left unchecked, a warming planet will mean devastation on an unprecedented scale – from droughts and famines to fires and floods, leaving great swaths of Earth uninhabitable or under water.

While adaptation to this emerging new reality is essential, it will not be enough. We must limit the change as much as possible.

The UK cannot and is not doing this alone. We are one of more than 130 countries considering how to achieve net zero by 2050. But we cannot expect the developing world to take the action needed if the richest nations are not leading the way. And as the human costs mount, our international standing, stability and trade will all rely on bringing our technological prowess and economic power to bear and delivering on our commitments.

Rapid progress has already been made. UK emissions have fallen by 44 per cent since 1990, the baseline year of the first global climate deal in Kyoto, in part thanks to the world-leading deployment of offshore wind power. Public support for further action has never been higher, and innovation continues to accelerate the pace of change that is possible.

But we need a proper plan. The government's own independent advisors suggest that only the 11 per cent of emissions that come from power have a "good plan" in place.

The rest – especially the 44 per cent of emissions resulting from buildings, industry and agriculture – require greater ambition. Targets are important, but real action requires sufficient funding and credible delivery policies.

At the same time, political consensus and public support for this action is under threat from both right and left.

On the right, some seek to mischaracterise the net-zero agenda as the cause of, rather than the solution to, the growing cost-of-living crisis. Meanwhile on the left, some call for an almost immediate halt to emissions, seeing net zero as a Trojan horse in which to deliver an ideological degrowth agenda that would be disastrous for our prosperity and social cohesion.

Transformation Grounded in Political Consensus

Both views are a recipe for climate disaster, social polarisation and economic failure. Instead, we need to learn the 20th-century lesson that the ingenuity, innovation and investment required to decarbonise grow best in the soil of a liberal market economy, while moving on to 21st-century technology and solutions.

While the price of fossil fuels has risen to unprecedented highs, the costs of low-carbon technologies – from wind to solar to electric vehicles – are plummeting. New innovations are cropping up in every corner of the economy. From cheaper, lighter, more powerful batteries to new ways of producing food, technological innovation is already showing us the way to a better and more sustainable world.

Net zero is not a problem in need of solutions – it is the solution to multiple problems.

The job of policymakers is to accelerate that change. A durable and credible plan must be built on a new politics to that which has dominated in recent years – one that accommodates a broad spectrum of values, building consensus for change through pragmatism, explanation and expertise. One that recognises net zero not as a problem in need of solutions, but as the solution to multiple problems, offering energy and food security, cheaper and better living, and cleaner air.

A New Agenda for Climate Action

To realise this vision, we need policy shaped by three characteristics:

Leadership: Government must take the lead by decarbonising public buildings, social housing and public transport to drive down costs and build new markets. It must take imminent and critical decisions on existing national infrastructure such as whether to decommission the gas grid or transition it to hydrogen. It must urgently establish

delivery mechanisms for new national infrastructure, including nuclear power and carbon capture and storage. It must provide clear and credible long-term direction, such as regulating the phase-out of new gas boilers from 2035, backed by practical advice and financial support for householders [to make the switch](#). And it must develop practical and precise delivery plans, with clear timelines across all key sectors, not just for the small minority of emissions remaining in the power sector.

Innovation: Policy must support business to unleash innovation and growth. Time and again, [this approach](#) has revolutionised technology, transformed services and slashed costs, and it must do so again on an unprecedented scale. This means redesigning markets to reward smart flexibility, encourage demand reduction and incentivise new low-carbon technologies, rather than simply [patching up](#) a consumer switching model designed for a bygone era. It requires institutions capable of systems thinking and the reform of overzealous planning rules that hamper essential progress like the rapid expansion of offshore wind. And it means finding ways of removing barriers and pricing carbon so that going green does not put companies at a competitive disadvantage.

Consensus: The transition to net zero depends upon maintaining [broad public consent](#). Policy must ensure the benefits of action are universal and the costs are spread fairly. But it must also be built on a foundation of respect for people's freedom of choice and avoid the finger-wagging, moralising tone that risks alienating large numbers of people upon whose support success will depend. Better information, public debate and greater transparency will be essential.

This is the future of Britain – a clean, modern, prosperous land, built on cheap green energy and skilled green jobs. The time for action is now.

Further Reading

[Three Birds, One Stone: How Greener Homes Can Solve the Energy Trilemma](#)

[Can the Energy Retail Market Be Fixed?](#)

[Polls Apart? Mapping the Politics of Net Zero](#)

[An Efficient Energy Transition: Lessons from the UK's Offshore Wind Rollout](#)