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# The UK's Net Zero Strategy: The 11 Questions It Must Answer

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# Introduction

Amid a slew of ambitious UK climate announcements at the end of 2020 – from the Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution to the setting of a highly ambitious 2030 target – one passed under the radar: the government’s commitment to publish a “net zero” strategy<sup>1</sup> in advance of November’s COP26 summit in Glasgow.

The net zero strategy is perhaps the most important single document the government will publish this year. It needs to set out how the UK will meet its world-leading commitments on climate change, how we will share the costs and – crucially – how we will maximise the economic and social benefits across the UK. Aspirations or principles alone won’t do the trick: The level and pace of change required needs a comprehensive, far-reaching set of concrete commitments.

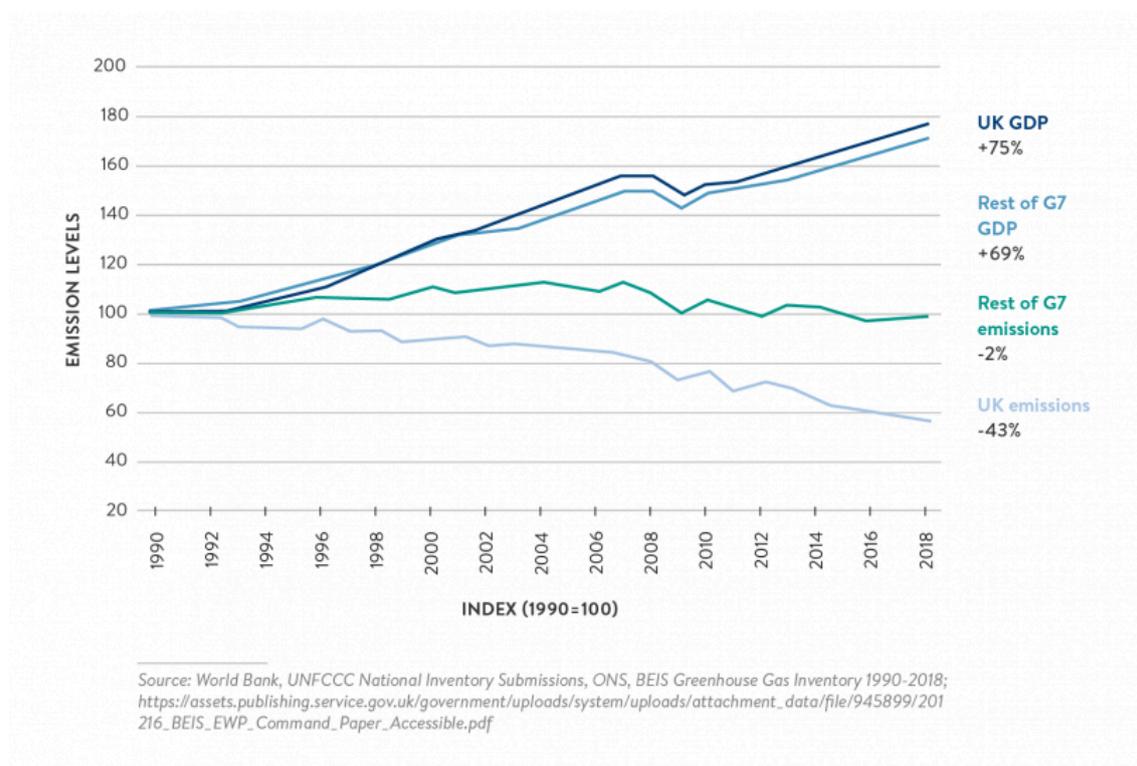
The timing couldn’t be more important. The prime minister is “more and more obsessed”<sup>2</sup> with COP26, for two reasons: It will allow the UK to set the tone for an ambitious and meaningful summit; and doing so is vital to Britain’s post-Brexit international and economic future.

No country has produced a comprehensive net zero strategy – and the UK, with its world-leading track record, ambitious targets and urgent need to set out a roadmap for future growth, is perfectly placed to do so. A strong net zero strategy can set the template for countries across the world to produce similar plans, helping deliver rapid climate action, and build and cement international alliances. This paper sets out the 11 key questions that the net zero strategy needs to answer.

## Context: Strong Progress to Date, but a Mountain to Climb

The UK often claims to be “world leading” – and in climate change, unlike some other areas, that claim is true. The UK has cut its emissions by almost half since 1990 while growing the economy by 75 per cent. The power sector has decarbonised at astonishing speed – halving emissions since 2012 and delivering the fastest decarbonisation in the world.<sup>3</sup> And this government has made a strong rhetorical commitment to a “green industrial revolution” – backed by promising commitments in the Ten Point Plan published in November.

**Figure 1 – GDP and emissions for the UK versus the rest of the G7**



The UK's action is framed by the Climate Change Act and by its international commitments under the Paris Agreement.

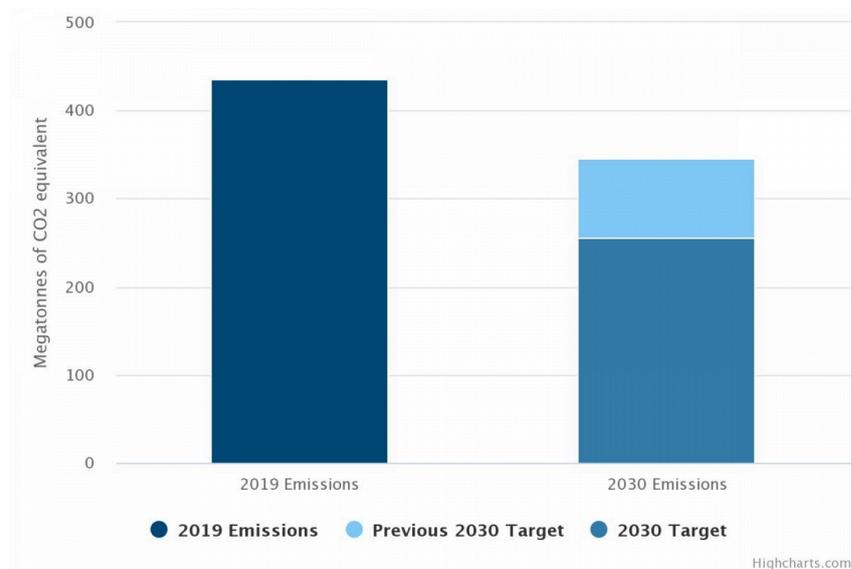
The Climate Change Act was amended in 2019 to make the UK the first major economy in the world to set a net zero target for 2050. It also includes legislative commitments to meet “carbon budgets” (five-yearly caps on emissions). These have been set up to 2032, and the UK must set its sixth carbon budget, covering 2033–37, this year.

The UK's targets are hugely ambitious. We currently emit around 450 million tonnes of greenhouse gases each year.<sup>4</sup> Net zero means cutting emissions by, on average, 3 per cent of 2019 levels every year to 2050.

The 2030 target is even more ambitious. Under domestic legislation, the UK needs to reduce emissions by around 20 per cent on 2019 levels. But the ambition of the UK's international commitments now exceeds its domestic legislation. In December, the UK published its revised Nationally Determined Contribution under the Paris Agreement. This committed to a 68 per cent reduction in emissions by 2030, compared to 1990 levels.

The new 2030 target approximately doubles the scale of the challenge in the next decade, requiring us to cut emissions by a massive 40 per cent on 2019 levels by 2030. That's roughly equivalent to removing all emissions from our road transport, and from heating all our homes, in just ten years. For comparison, it took the UK 26 years to cut emissions by 40 per cent from 1990 levels;<sup>5</sup> it must now cut a further 40 per cent in a decade, having taken much of the cheaper and less disruptive low-hanging fruit.

**Figure 2 – The UK 2030 target**



Source: BEIS 2019 provisional emissions statistics, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/875482/2019\\_UK\\_greenhouse\\_gas\\_emissions\\_provisional\\_figures\\_statistical\\_summary.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/875482/2019_UK_greenhouse_gas_emissions_provisional_figures_statistical_summary.pdf). Excludes international aviation and shipping.

But the ambition of these targets is not a reason for pessimism – they can be met. There are four reasons why now is the right time for an effective, long-term strategy to be put in place:

1. **Net zero can be central to the UK's post-Brexit international role:** The UK accounts for only around

1 per cent of global emissions – and we need the other 99 per cent to come down if our action is to be effective. Had COP26 taken place in November 2020, as originally planned, the prospects would have been poor – not least as the summit would have coincided with the outcome of the US election. But the delay to 2021 has created a window of opportunity, as leading countries and companies make firm commitments to rapid decarbonisation. The UK can use its role as COP president to define a progressive post-Brexit international role and strengthen alliances across the world.

2. **Businesses and the public are demanding action:** Businesses and investors are responding to governments' and consumers' focus on net zero, with large corporates setting their own net zero targets, and investors driving up the value of companies at the vanguard of the net zero transition. Individuals are increasingly concerned about climate change – with particularly high levels of concern here in the UK<sup>6</sup> – and are looking to their politicians to set out a vision on how net zero will be achieved.
3. **Technology means costs are coming down:** Those who argue that action to cut emissions is too costly are fighting the battle of the last decade, not the next. Rapid and sustained cost reductions mean that in many areas – particularly power generation and road transport – the low-carbon solution is also the low-cost solution. For years, wind power and electric vehicles have been derided as expensive and disruptive – but their plunge in costs completely changes the debate. In other areas, like CCUS and hydrogen, investment in technology innovation and deployment could cut costs significantly.
4. **Net zero will define the 21st century economy:** The UK economy is at an inflection point. Brexit has fundamentally changed our trading relations; new technology, from automation to machine learning, will revolutionise whole sectors; and our primary energy use must shift from fossil fuels to renewable sources. Already, growth in green sectors outstrips that of the wider economy. And this transition is happening not just in the UK, but globally. The opportunities of getting ahead of the curve are significant, and the risks of not doing so profound.

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## A Net Zero Strategy: The 11 Big Questions

There is no clear template, either national or international, for what a net zero strategy should include.

The strategies of the past – like the 2017 Clean Growth Strategy, 2011 Carbon Plan and 2008 Low Carbon Transition Plan – have all adopted a similar approach: identify the key emitting sectors of the economy (buildings, transport, industry and so on) and set out plans on how they will be decarbonised to meet targets.

This approach had logic at the time, but the approaches of the past are not suited to the challenges of the future. Focusing on sectors in isolation, and on decarbonisation with little consideration of wider economic, social and technological changes, risks putting in place a strategy that will fail. We need to reflect the new paradigm where sectors will interact in new and systemic ways; cost reductions will increase the possibilities for rapid emissions cuts; global commitments mean the economic transition to net zero is about to explode; technologies which were in the lab are ready to demonstrate and deploy; public opinion indicates more readiness for action; and local and regional commitments provide a basis for real ambition.

Framing all of this is the urgent need for a strategy which is politically sustainable. The commitment to climate action from both right and left has meant that in the UK, unlike some other countries, climate is not a “culture war” issue. But it is vulnerable to becoming one as the net zero transition impacts voters and places in new and different ways. A politically sustainable coalition must be developed and maintained – building on the widespread desire for action and articulating a positive vision of the net zero future based around jobs, growth, technology, health, community and quality of life.

To achieve that, a credible net zero strategy for the UK must answer 11 defining questions.

**Table 1 – The 11 questions that should define the UK’s net zero strategy**

<b>A framework for action</b>	
<b>Area</b>	<b>Does the strategy...</b>
<b>1. Principles</b>	... set out clear principles, with cross-party consensus, on how net zero will be achieved?
<b>2. Targets</b>	... set clear targets, with transparency on timings and what is included and excluded?
<b>3. Pathways</b>	... set out a pathway to delivery of five-yearly targets to 2035 – including the role of different sectors of the economy and society, the role of government and the market, and targets for technology deployment?
<b>Enablers for net zero</b>	
<b>Area</b>	<b>Does the strategy...</b>
<b>4. Technology and innovation</b>	... identify the technologies which will be needed for net zero, targets for when they will be deployed, and how innovation will reduce costs and deliver growth for the UK?
<b>5. Capital mobilisation</b>	... set out in detail how the hundreds of billions of pounds of investment required will be mobilised, adapted to each sector of the economy?
<b>6. Behaviour change and engagement</b>	... set out what is expected of consumers and businesses, and how they will be engaged and supported to invest in new technology and change behaviours?
<b>7. Fiscal impacts</b>	... identify the fiscal impacts of net zero and when they will arise, and set out how fiscal levers will be used to enable net zero delivery – including the future of carbon pricing and fuel taxes?

## A whole-UK transition

Area	Does the strategy...
<b>8. Growth and trade</b>	... give a detailed plan on where the UK can secure economic benefit from the net zero transition, and how that will be secured – both nationally and regionally?
<b>9. Fairness</b>	... set out where the costs and benefits will fall, and how those most at risk from the transition will be supported?
<b>10. Local and regional</b>	... give clarity on the roles of national, local and regional actors in delivering net zero?

## Delivery

Area	Does the strategy...
<b>11. Milestones, data and governance</b>	... give a clear roadmap for implementation – including key decision points, milestones, data and governance to ensure delivery?

### 1. Does the Strategy Set Out Clear Principles, With Cross-Party Consensus, on How Net Zero Will Be Achieved?

A truly ambitious net zero strategy needs to embrace the new reality – that net zero will define economic and societal development over the next 30 years. That will only be achieved with a high degree of cross-society and cross-party consensus – a sustainable political coalition must be built and maintained over multiple parliaments. A net zero strategy needs to build that consensus by setting out the principles which will underpin the transition. These should include:

- 1. Speed trumps perfection:** The climate crisis is happening, now. A net zero strategy needs to focus on the route to 2050 with the lowest costs and greatest benefits – but that should not be at the expense of immediate and sustained action. The rate of progress matters as much as the 2050 target. Two things flow from this: First, as in our response to Covid-19, speed trumps perfection, and we need to make rapid progress across the economy, particularly where the evidence on the right

technology approaches is clear; and second, where the evidence is imperfect, we need to be clear on *how* and *when* decisions will be made – will we “pick winners” (for example, by deciding early to decarbonise heat with either electricity or hydrogen) and, if not, how will we reach and maintain the pace needed?

2. **Systems, not silos:** Previous strategies treat decarbonisation as a series of silos, rather than an interconnected system. While this was an understandable approach at the time, delivering net zero means acknowledging that systems across the economy will interact (for example, as the electricity system interacts with transport and heating; or as land use interacts with production of low-carbon hydrogen). Any credible strategy must take a systems approach, reflecting the complexity of the challenge and the interactions across the economy.
3. **A strategy for growth:** Building social and political consent for net zero requires it to be a positive economic story. Joe Biden’s platform, with its focus on jobs, reflects this; and the UK’s Ten Point Plan also frames net zero as a jobs and growth agenda. But we will need to go beyond words and incremental investment. The net zero strategy should offer clarity on how and where the UK will seize the economic benefits of the low-carbon transition, and how sectors and regions which are dependent on fossil fuel industries will be able to adapt and grow in a net zero context. This is about both the “low carbon” sectors of the economy, and how *all* sectors of the economy can change their business models to deliver net zero.
4. **Low cost and high tech:** The path to net zero is now possible because of the pace of innovation which has cut the costs of key technologies, from offshore wind to electric vehicles. The UK needs to embrace this, focusing on technology innovation and deployment to reduce costs and drive growth.
5. **A market-driven transition:** The unfettered market will not deliver net zero at the pace that the climate emergency demands. Even in areas where cost reductions will drive the transition – like electric vehicles – state actors have a vital enabling role to play. But that should not mean that we pivot to a big-government approach. We need government and markets to have clearly defined roles, with government focused on establishing clear market frameworks to drive investment; addressing clear market failures where they exist, for example in innovation and infrastructure; and providing direct support to those who risk being negatively impacted by the transition.
6. **A defining mission for the whole of government and society:** A credible net zero strategy must include:
  - *Making climate action a priority across government, with every decision justifiable from a net zero perspective:* Delivery of climate change is too often a second or third priority, traded off against other objectives. Even now, decisions – such as the granting of planning consent for a new coal mine in Cumbria – appear at odds with the UK’s climate commitments. A net zero strategy must set out how all arms of government will realign their activities in support of the target, set clear objectives and milestones for them, and hold them accountable for delivery.
  - *Defined roles for government, businesses and individuals:* Too often, delivery of climate change focuses on the role of the individual. That role is important, but it must be contextualised in a whole economy effort, with clear responsibilities and accountabilities for government, business and industry, and individuals.

- *Harnessing the momentum for local and regional action:* There is a groundswell of climate action across the UK – whether in Scotland, which has set a net zero target of 2045, or in cities and regions which have set ambitious targets. But major strategies to date have focused on the role of the national government. The net zero strategy must define the roles and responsibilities of different actors at all levels and harness the ambition and energy of local areas and regions.
- *Commitment to a fair transition:* The costs of net zero are falling, and the economic opportunities growing. But a viable strategy must not pretend that it is a win-win for every voter, sector or region, or that hard choices are not required. Fairness – both within the UK and globally – needs to be at the heart of decision making to ensure political and social consent is built and maintained.

## 2. Does the Strategy Set Clear Targets, With Transparency on Timings and What Is Included and Excluded?

Any effective strategy needs to set out what it is aiming to achieve. To address climate change, that means clear, time-specific targets that are set in legislation. For the UK, this needs to include:

**Clear targets:** We already have a clear 2050 target – net zero, across the economy. But the strategy needs also to include clarity on our five-yearly targets to 2035 – in particular by confirming that we will achieve, through domestic action, a reduction in emissions of at least 68 per cent on 1990 levels by 2030; and setting the level of the sixth carbon budget (covering the years 2033-37), recommended by the Climate Change Committee (CCC) as a 78 per cent reduction on 1990 levels. In the UK, and elsewhere, this needs to take account of what is deliverable if we operate at high pace, and our international responsibilities and obligations.

**Clear definitions:** Even a superficially clear target conceals significant complexity and risk of misinterpretation. The UK needs to be clear on:

- *The 1990 baseline:* There is uncertainty around the baseline and what will be included and excluded, for example how emissions from peatlands and wetlands are counted.
- *Inclusion of international aviation and shipping:* The UK’s 2050 target includes international aviation and shipping, but the 2030 target does not. This matters. International aviation and shipping account for around 10 per cent of the UK’s current emissions and are very challenging to reduce. The UK’s strategy needs to be clear that these emissions are included in its targets from the sixth carbon budget onwards.

**Territorial and consumption-based emissions:** The UK’s targets, in line with international practice, are based on “territorial” emissions. This is the right approach, reflecting the fact that we should be measured against what we control. But, as the CCC and others have argued, an approach which focuses purely on territorial emissions risks ignoring our wider impact on climate change. The net zero strategy

must set out how the UK will decrease both our territorial emissions, and our wider climate footprint, and do so in a way that minimises the risk of emissions being offshored, with costs to the UK economy and the climate.

### **3. Does the Strategy Set Out a Pathway to Delivery of Five-Yearly Targets to 2035 – Including the Role of Different Sectors of the Economy and Society, the Role of Government and the Market, and Targets for Technology Deployment?**

If we are clear on the targets we are trying to achieve, and the principles we will apply to get there, we get to perhaps the biggest question of all: *How will we get there?*

Delivering net zero is undoubtedly complex, but we shouldn't hide behind that. For many elements of the transition, the route is clear – for example, we know that that electric vehicles will be at the heart of transition in transport; renewables and storage in electricity; tree planting and biofuels in land use. In other areas, we know we will need new technologies and infrastructure systems – such as hydrogen and carbon capture and storage – but can't be precise on how much.

And the next decade could be where the fight against catastrophic climate change will be won or lost. The world is on track to use up its carbon budget for 1.5 degrees of warming in the next five to ten years. The UK, along with big-emitting countries globally, must act quickly.

The net zero strategy needs to be specific on where emissions will be cut and by how much; what combination of technologies and behaviour change will deliver those cuts; and the policies that will be put in place to ensure they happen.

Where we can be more certain on the route map, that should include specific technology targets for the next decade, and potential pathways beyond that, giving businesses and consumers the confidence to invest and take the decisions needed.

In areas where the route to net zero is less certain – for example, on whether heating will be decarbonised principally through electrification, or use of hydrogen – the strategy should do two things: first, by taking the no-regrets actions needed (for example, by decarbonising homes off the gas grid); and second, setting out *how* and *when* those decisions will be made, and on what evidence.

And in setting out the pathway, the strategy needs to take a systems approach – taking account of how different elements of the net zero system interact, and what that means for key decisions.

### **4. Does the Strategy Identify the Technologies Which Will Be Needed for Net Zero, Targets for**

## **When They Will Be Deployed, and How Innovation Will Reduce Costs and Deliver Growth for the UK?**

Technology drove the first industrial revolution – and technology will be at the heart of delivering the net zero target.

For each sector, a combination of market-ready and new or innovative technologies will be required. Some are specific to individual sectors; others can play a role across multiple sectors of the economy.

The UK's strategy needs to be clear on which technologies are going to drive the move to net zero and how their deployment will be enabled. In some cases, this will require innovation support; in others, skills and supply-chain development, or deployment support and changes to market frameworks. Clarity on how and where that support will be provided can enable our world-class science base to be translated into cost reduction and economic benefit.

## **5. Does the Strategy Set Out in Detail How the Hundreds of Billions of Pounds of Investment Required Will Be Mobilised and Adapted to Each Sector of the Economy?**

The costs of decarbonising the economy are falling all the time. In 2008, the CCC estimated that we could deliver an 80 per cent reduction in emissions for around 1-2 per cent of GDP in 2050. Now they estimate we can deliver zero emissions for less, with economic and wider benefits offsetting some or all of the cost. And this approach overstates the costs – the counterfactual if we do not act is not that we continue to grow the economy and emit large amounts of greenhouse gas emissions, but that we will face massive costs from unabated climate change.

But we must not be naive; this does not mean net zero will be cheap or easy. And, although investors are increasingly valuing companies and technologies which will drive decarbonisation, markets alone will not deliver the enormous capital mobilisation required. The strategy needs to make clear how the government will use the levers at its disposal – direct risk bearing, tax, regulation, innovation and technology support, and public engagement – to enable that capital to flow.

The approach we take needs to reflect the differing needs of different sectors. The investment required ranges from the largest mega-projects in the global economy – new nuclear power stations and gigawatt-scale offshore wind farms – to relatively small-scale investments in energy efficiency and low-carbon heating in every building in the country. It encompasses assets with relatively rapid turnover, like vehicles, to those with much longer investment cycles. It includes energy production and use, and the network infrastructure to support it, from strengthened electricity grids to brand new hydrogen and carbon storage infrastructure. And it is essential that all infrastructure decisions and investments – such

as roads and public buildings – are net zero compatible, and that any investment in high-carbon infrastructure can be justified from a climate and a cost perspective.

The rapid growth in renewable electricity in the UK shows that, if market frameworks which investors can utilise are in place, investment will flow. But slower progress elsewhere – for example in improving the energy efficiency of our buildings – demonstrates that decisive action, tailored to the needs of different sectors, will be needed to replicate that success.

## **6. Does the Strategy Set Out What Is Expected of Consumers and Businesses, and How They Will Be Engaged and Supported to Invest in New Technology and Change Behaviours?**

Technology deployment and infrastructure investment will get us a long way towards net zero. But we will also need consumers and businesses to consent to the changes needed, and alter some of their behaviours to support the transition. That means building on the high levels of public concern on climate change to put in place a sustainable, cross-society coalition to support the action required.

Some of those changes will be minor lifestyle tweaks with other benefits – eating a little less meat, or utilising online tools instead of international business travel. Some will be more challenging – in particular consumers’ and businesses’ willingness to invest in, and engage with, new heating and transport technologies where they are more costly or cause disruption.

At present, the public is increasingly concerned about climate change, and increasingly willing to act. But understanding of what is required is low. The net zero strategy needs to give clarity on why the public and businesses need to act; what they need to do; and how they will be engaged and supported in doing so.

## **7. Does the Strategy Identify the Fiscal Impacts of Net Zero and When They Will Arise, and Set Out How Fiscal Levers Will Be Used to Enable Net Zero Delivery – Including the Future of Carbon Pricing and Fuel Taxes?**

The UK’s economy is heavily based around fossil fuels, and that is reflected in our fiscal framework. Where it is considered at all, the role of fossil fuels in the tax system is mainly as a blunt instrument to raise revenue – almost £40 billion in 2019. But greenhouse-gas emissions, and incentives to reduce them, are not integral to our fiscal framework or consistently applied. We have a multitude of different carbon prices across the economy; we place costs of decarbonisation onto electricity bills, but not on heating; we are unprepared for the rapid revenue shifts which will take place as we transition to electric vehicles; and fiscal decisions, such as the commitment for massive new investment in our roads network, do not appear to take full account of the requirements of a net zero economy.

The UK is far from unique in facing the challenge of reforming its fiscal framework for a net zero future – and it is ahead of the game in doing so, with the Treasury carrying out a review of the costs of net zero.<sup>7</sup>

The net zero strategy needs to build on the outcomes of that review by setting out how carbon pricing across the economy will incentivise decarbonisation while maintaining competitiveness – including the future of our emissions-trading system, and the possible role of carbon border taxes to protect our economy as it decarbonises. It needs to be clear how we will adapt as the tax base shifts in response to decarbonisation. And it needs to provide a framework for incorporating the transition to net zero in all fiscal decisions across government.

#### **8. Does the Strategy Provide a Detailed Plan on Where the UK Can Secure Economic Benefit From the Net Zero Transition, and How That Will Be Secured – Both Nationally and Regionally?**

The UK blazed a trail on “clean growth” – both in its rhetoric, and increasingly in practice, by decoupling economic growth from emissions. Others, including the Biden administration, are framing their proposals on climate action as a jobs and growth narrative. And the evidence is increasingly clear that the economic transition to net zero is well underway.

But at present, the UK’s approach in this area is promising but incomplete. The government has made a commitment to deliver a “green industrial revolution” and is taking steps in areas such as carbon capture and storage and electric vehicles. But we lack a comprehensive view of the UK’s strengths and weaknesses, and an assessment of where we can develop home-grown supply chains and access the opportunities of growing international markets.

A successful net zero strategy needs to move past rhetoric and embed a zero-carbon economy as the central element of the UK’s post-Brexit economic and industrial strategy. That will require a hard-nosed assessment of our existing and potential strengths, and ambitious proposals on how those strengths can be maximised. It needs to encompass all the tools of industrial strategy, with detailed proposals on innovation and how the skills and supply chains will be developed and supported. And it requires a clear transition plan for high-carbon sectors, which provide the backbone of the economy in many regions.

#### **9. Does the Strategy Set Out Where the Costs and Benefits Will Fall, and How Those Most at Risk From the Transition Will Be Supported?**

As noted by the CCC and the Treasury, the transition to net zero should not stunt economic growth. But underneath that positive headline, there will be big changes – some sectors will grow, and others

shrink; some households and businesses will save money, but others will face additional costs. Without a plan, the differentiation between winners and losers risks fundamentally undermining the political and social case for delivering net zero. The legacy of other rapid transitions in local and regional economies – such as the decades-long impacts of the transition away from coal in areas dependent on mining – provides a salutary reminder of the long-term economic and social costs of a failure to plan.

The net zero strategy must not shirk this challenge. While it should focus on growth opportunities, it must also embrace the challenge of those growth opportunities being fairly shared. It needs to set out how the costs of net zero will be distributed, and how those most vulnerable to the transition will be supported to play their role in it.

## **10. Does the Strategy Give Clarity on the Roles of National, Local and Regional Actors in Delivering Net Zero?**

A major flaw of UK governance – not just on energy – is the tendency towards over-centralisation. This is as true on climate and energy as in any other sphere of policy.

While the UK's framework for action on climate is rightly national, the next phase of the net zero transition cannot and should not be delivered by centralised action alone.

This is partly about politics. The groundswell of local and regional action – such as the ambitious net zero targets set by London, the West Midlands and Manchester, and the acceleration of action in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – shows both the desire for, and the potential of, a more devolved approach.

And it is also about practicality – local and regional energy systems have different strengths and different requirements, and that means they will require different solutions. Hydrogen heating may be right for some areas but not others; power grid constraints will impact in different ways across the country; and economic and industrial potential are based in part on the strengths and weaknesses of local and regional economies.

The net zero strategy needs to reflect the political and practical reality that the net zero journey is one that will happen not just nationally, but in every nation, region, city, town and village across the country. It needs to set out how the different parts of the country – urban and rural, industrial and services-based – will be empowered to deliver change. And it needs to set out the practical institutional steps which will be taken to make that a reality.

## II. Does the Strategy Give a Clear Roadmap for Implementation – Including Key Decision Points, Milestones, Data and Governance to Ensure Delivery?

There is an old civil service story of putting together a major policy document. As publication approached, the ambitious proposals and milestones fell away as other departments got cold feet. When this problem was presented to the minister, he furrowed his brow before announcing “don’t worry – we can just drop all the announcements, talk in generalities, and call it a strategy!” With one bound, he was free.

But that approach won’t wash with the net zero strategy. The required pace of the transition means that the net zero strategy must be a clear plan, with a focus on delivery.

That means clarity in four areas:

1. **Delivery: how the strategy will be operationalised.** Every component of the net zero strategy involves huge delivery challenges – from deploying new technologies across the country, to ensuring the workforce has the skills to make it happen. As the Institute for Government has argued,<sup>8</sup> current delivery structures are not yet adequate to the task. The net zero strategy needs to include both what needs to happen, and how it will be delivered. This is likely to involve the creation of new institutions and structures, and the pivot of existing structures to a net zero future.
2. **Milestones: what will happen, and when.** The pace of action required means we need to be absolutely clear on what will happen, and by when. That includes milestones for policy, technology development and deployment, and for key future decisions.
3. **Data: clear metrics on how progress towards the strategy be measured; clarity on the data that will be used to inform the strategy; and a commitment that data will be made public.** Data will be at the heart of the net zero transition. The UK government has world-leading data and analysis, and should set out what data will be developed and used, and commit to making it public.
4. **Governance: clarity on how the strategy will be coordinated and overseen, and who is accountable for what.** At present, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is responsible for coordination of net zero strategy. That model can be successful, but it requires clear leadership from the prime minister, buy in and direction from the centre of Whitehall, and clear accountabilities beyond that – nationally, regionally and locally.

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## What Happens Next?

A net zero strategy which answers these questions could be transformational – providing a blueprint not just for the decarbonisation of the UK, but for the transformation of its economy. It could lay the groundwork for a sustainable political coalition, maintained over multiple parliaments. And it could allow the UK to exploit the global leadership opportunities of its G7 and COP26 presidencies to develop a progressive post-Brexit international role.

The government should look to develop the strategy in as open a way as possible – tackling the questions laid out here head on, and leveraging the excellent work of the Climate Assembly to engage not just climate and energy stakeholders, but the wider business community and public, in the development and implementation of their plans. By doing so, they can set an example which the rest of the world can follow.

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## Footnotes

1. ^ Page 5, The Government Response to the CCC's 2020 Progress Report to Parliament, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/928005/government-response-to-ccc-progress-report-2020.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/928005/government-response-to-ccc-progress-report-2020.pdf)
  2. ^ <https://www.reuters.com/article/climate-change-britain-idAFS8N2IW09I>
  3. ^ [https://www.drax.com/press\\_release/uk-tops-global-decarbonisation-league-amid-renewable-revolution/](https://www.drax.com/press_release/uk-tops-global-decarbonisation-league-amid-renewable-revolution/)
  4. ^ Excluding international aviation and shipping; megatonnes of CO2 equivalent; <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/provisional-uk-greenhouse-gas-emissions-national-statistics-2019>
  5. ^ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/final-uk-greenhouse-gas-emissions-national-statistics>
  6. ^ <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/climate-and-disaster-resilience-/The-Peoples-Climate-Vote-Results.html>
  7. ^ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/net-zero-review-publishes-initial-analysis-of-green-transition>
  8. ^ <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/net-zero>
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