THE NEW STATESMAN

Spotlight

Thought leadership and policy

Energy and climate change

Miatta Fahnbulleh
Adrian Ramsay
Dale Vince
Andrew Bowie

THE NEW STATESMAN EVENTS

Energy and Climate Change

30 April Westminster

The *New Statesman*'s Energy and Climate Change conference is a day of insights, discussion and debate featuring leading lights from policymaking and industry. Together, we will explore the future policy and politics of energy, environment and climate change.

Join us on Wednesday **30th April 2025** in central London to hear from experts, politicians and industry leaders. We will examine topics including energy security, the role of innovation and technology in the clean energy transition and how we can create green jobs and deliver vital economic growth.

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- How can we bring UK consumers on the journey to net zero?
- How can we manage waste and reduce emissions across industries?
- Closing the green skills gap: What does our workforce need to deliver net zero?
- How can sovereign capability in energy make the UK more resilient and secure?
- Planning for a greener, more prosperous future: How can we deliver growth on the journey to net zero?

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Emissions impossible?

Is the net zero consensus unravelling? Last month, the Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch declared that reaching the target by 2050 was "impossible", saying what until that point had been unsayable among the UK's main political parties.

The political consensus reflected a popular consensus. In the run-up to last year's election, two thirds of the public supported the goal of net zero greenhouse-gas emissions by 2050, a policy introduced by one of Badenoch's predecessors, Theresa May, in 2019.

In this issue of *Spotlight*, we consider the energy and climate policy debate through its impact on consumers, businesses and the nation. Across these pages, the mid-century deadline looms. In our Symposium on page 18, we ask the achievability question directly.

Elsewhere, Miatta Fahnbulleh, minister for consumer energy, offers a full-throated defence of decarbonisation. Not for her are they a series of objectives at odds. Instead, she believes energy security, affordability and sustainability go hand in hand. "Reliance on fossil fuels got us into the worst energy crisis we've seen in generations," she says on page four. "The way out of this bind is to make the transition." There is, however, a puzzle to solve. Namely, while the UK waits for clean power sources at scale, how do households cope? Jam tomorrow has never made a very satisfying diet, as another Tory leader once said.

Elsewhere, the Green Party co-leader Adrian Ramsay (page 14) describes Badenoch's words as "deeply irresponsible". Why? Because the consensus provided "clear direction not just for politics but for industry, too".

Critics of the Conservative Party's consensus-ending, including Dale Vince (page ten), not only point to Badenoch's rhetoric but to the actions of the former prime minister, Rishi Sunak. In 2023, Sunak pushed back the deadline for ending the sale of new petrol and diesel cars. Yet his successor is tinkering with those commitments, too. Earlier this month, Keir Starmer relaxed the environmental rules on car makers, reducing EV-related fines and extending the period in which non-plug-in hybrids can be sold to 2035.

These measures are not as impactful as Sunak's, but they do suggest the road to net zero will be a bumpy one. The determination of political leaders – and the salience of popular support – will be tested the nearer we get to the deadline and the greater the impact it has on our daily lives.

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Feature interview

“I’m the minister for energy consumers and I’ve got one job”

Clean power and lower prices go hand in hand, insists Miatta Fahnbulleh

By Jon Bernstein

Miatta Fahnbulleh’s path to parliament was both highly conventional and utterly unconventional.

Conventional because she went from independent school to Oxford University where she studied philosophy, politics and economics (PPE) – a mainstay for wannabe politicians – before a postgraduate degree in economic development. Conventional, too, given she worked in the world of think tanks (first at IPPR and then as chief executive of the New Economics Foundation), as a policy adviser inside Downing Street, and as policy adviser to the then leader of the opposition – and now her departmental boss – Ed Miliband.

So far, so orthodox. But Fahnbulleh’s story is different, too. At the age of seven, she escaped civil war in West Africa and made a new home in the UK. Although the family settled in north London, their centre of gravity became

"I came into politics to try and change the economy so it works for people"

AIDAN SYNOTT/ASV PHOTOGRAPHY LTD

Peckham in south-east London. She says the area, with its sizeable Sierra Leonean community, taught her the values of compassion and solidarity that shaped her politics, and much more besides.

"We had family there but, more importantly, church was there, it's where you went to do your food shopping, it's where you went to braid your hair," she tells *Spotlight*. We are sitting in the bright expanse of the Portcullis House atrium, next to the Palace of Westminster and a place where journalists and politicians meet. Her only props are a large, yellow water bottle and an equally outsized red ministerial folder.

Fahnbulleh, 45, always knew she wanted to serve in some capacity. In the event, it took a pandemic to convince her to stand for parliament. And Harriet Harman's announcement that she was retiring as MP for Peckham and Camberwell was the clincher. Fahnbulleh was selected as the candidate for the redrawn Peckham constituency, and won it last July with 58.8 per cent of the vote. Within days she became one of five new MPs to be given a ministerial role despite having no previous parliamentary experience.

On how the Covid-19 lockdowns influenced her sense of purpose, she recalls the prevailing inequality – "the key workers we were clapping but had undervalued for too long" – and saw it as a "moment of change". However, when the country reverted to the old normal post-pandemic – "worse than the old normal, in many respects" – she says she felt "winded". She knew the country needed people who would push politicians into action. But she knew, too, that the country needed politicians.

"You feel it when you walk around Peckham because you see how much the system not working bears down on parts of the community," she says. "If I have a chance to have an impact on energy bills and to upgrade people's homes, that's bread-and-butter stuff."

Which brings us to her day job.

Spend time down the rabbit hole that is the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero section of the gov.uk website, and you'll encounter a laundry list of responsibilities that fall to the minister for energy consumers. Areas of concern include clean heat, fuel poverty, public-sector decarbonisation, prepayment meters, and much, much more. It's a wide brief.

Fahnbulleh, as the incumbent, has a pithier definition. "I'm the minister for energy consumers and I've got one job: to get the energy market to work for people." In practice this means reducing energy bills, making a "big sprint" towards clean power by 2030, and giving people greater confidence and trust in the market.

This is easier said than done. In early April the energy price cap went up for a third time in a row. The average annual energy bill rose to £1,849, an increase of 6.4 per cent on the previous price cap. For a government that pledged to cut bills by up to £300 within the lifetime of a five-year parliament, this is not a good start. And for an electorate that voted for change, the wait will feel endless.

According to Fahnbulleh's analysis, four fifths of the price cap increase is driven by wholesale energy prices. The solution? End our reliance on fossil fuels. "Sprinting to clean power by 2030 is about breaking that dependence."

Put aside how Westminster insiders will tell you privately that greening the electricity grid by 2030 is a delusion (Fahnbulleh calls the target "punchy"). There is another problem with this solution. It is a promise of jam tomorrow. What are households, struggling to pay their bills today, supposed to do in the meantime?

That's where a series of mitigations come in, says Fahnbulleh. She points to the Warm Home Discount, providing a one-off £150 electricity discount for up to 6.1 million households next winter, and the Warm Homes Plan, support to help householders upgrade drafty, energy-inefficient properties and save money in the process. Fahnbulleh told the Energy Select Committee late last year that retrofit activity could reduce bills by £200 on average. ▸

◂ Fahnbulleh is convinced that the department's clean power plan is a key part of the consumer story. "Reliance on fossil fuels got us into the worst energy crisis we've seen in generations. The way out of this bind is to make the transition."

Nevertheless, energy bills remain expensive and the application of levies, often for the best of reasons, only make them more so. Critics argue the levies are too high; that they are focused too heavily on environmental measures, accounting for almost two thirds of overall costs; too skewed towards greener electricity and away from dirtier gas (16 per cent and 5.5 per cent of final bills, respectively); and that they are regressive and likely to contribute to fuel poverty.

"Most of these levies are doing one of two things," says Fahnbulleh by way of defence. "They are either supporting low-income households... or helping with the transition. They will work if the transition happens and impacts on people's pockets."

Would it not be better to put some of those environmental costs through general taxation? "It's a question for the Chancellor, not me," she says, while acknowledging the importance of regularly reviewing the composition of levies. She cites the differential between electricity and gas. "What we won't do, however, is penalise consumers, particularly low-income consumers on gas. It's a policy quandary we are trying to work through but it is one we will find an innovative solution to."

The two-track strategy – accelerated transition to renewables in the mid-to-long term, and an effort to retrofit homes to make them warmer today, coupled with financial aid for those in most need – remains Labour's approach.

Perhaps the most difficult moment for the government occurred within its first few weeks in power, when it chose to restrict winter fuel payments to pensioners across England and Wales. Previously universal, those payments would be limited to those on low incomes who receive specified benefits such as pension credit.

The decision was taken not by Fahnbulleh's energy department but by the Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, in conjunction with the Department for Work and Pensions. Nor is it strictly an energy subsidy. It's a cost-of-living subsidy. Not that those affected care about such distinctions.

As minister for energy consumers, it may not be Fahnbulleh's policy but it has an impact on those she serves both in her constituency and at ministerial level. Asked what she thinks of the change, she says: "When energy bills are high, anything that puts people under pressure is difficult. I'd be completely tin-eared if I didn't [recognise] that." She again cites the mitigation the government is putting in place, this time £500m by way of support negotiated with the energy companies last winter, coupled with the £500m set aside through the Warm Home Discount.

One potential means of meeting the interlinked needs of energy affordability, sustainability and security is through the adoption of heat pumps. But here we encounter problems, too. The arms-length Climate Change Committee wants half of UK households to install a heat pump within the next 15 years.

There are two issues. First, costs remain higher than for a fossil fuel boiler. Second, given that less than 300,000 households have a heat pump today, the target of 17 million looks a long way off.

Again, the minister is bullish. She points to the fact that five of the six busiest months for the boiler upgrade scheme have come since Labour came into power. While Fahnbulleh insists that she is not going to force anyone to install a heat pump, she puts the uptick down to a government that is providing "clarity rather than misinformation".

Still, the target is a distant one, and perhaps the smart-meter rollout offers a cautionary tale. Initially launched in 2011, the Cameron government promised that every home would have a meter by 2019. Forty per cent of households are still without one today. Despite this, Fahnbulleh is a fan of the smart meter because she believes it allows people to take control of their energy consumption. "Consumers are massively attuned to making savings at a time of high prices," she argues.

> "Fossil fuels are finite. Prices are only going one way"

As with smart meters, there is a danger that perceptions of heat pumps worsen, then calcify. Once a brand is damaged, repair is almost impossible. Fahnbulleh takes issue with this framing, pointing to the impact heat pumps have had elsewhere, not least in Denmark. "They made their transition after the oil crisis in the 1970s," she points out. "They had the foresight to have those arguments decades ago."

She uses this as a moment to make the big rallying cry for renewables. "Fossil fuels are a finite resource that are depleting at pace and where consumption and demand is going up. Prices are only going one way," she notes. "Even if you don't believe in climate change, diversifying so you can give people access to cheaper energy and so you aren't being [buffeted] by global markets, is surely common sense."

When the *New Statesman* compiled its Left Power List ahead of last year's general election, it described Fahnbulleh "as a natural candidate to join the front bench in a Starmer administration". Is she surprised that the prediction came to pass? "I genuinely didn't think I'd have a job so early on," she replies.

As an economist by trade, might the Treasury be her next and natural home? "I came into politics to try and change the economy so it works for people. It doesn't matter what brief or portfolio I hold. For as long as I hold it, I'll always be trying to do that."

Towards the end of our conversation, she pays a tribute to Harman, her long-standing Peckham predecessor. Fahnbulleh says that when she's in the constituency, people tell her that Harman is a tough act to follow. Fahnbulleh doesn't need reminding. "National impact, yes, but huge impact locally," she says of Harman. "She fundamentally changed politics for women and also had that granular impact. That's a gem."

With that, she picks up her yellow water bottle and red ministerial folder, and heads off to her next meeting – this time with her colleague, the housing minister Matthew Pennycook. ●

The view from opposition

Andrew Bowie
Conservative MP and shadow minister of state for energy

"This country desperately needs a plan for energy that prioritises security and costs"

On 30 March 2011, the then chancellor Angela Merkel announced that Germany would shut down all of its nuclear power plants by 2022. As a result, energy generated by nuclear energy fell from 25 per cent of the country's energy mix, to 11.3 per cent in 2021, and then to zero in 2023.

Merkel pledged to fill the gap with renewables. It didn't happen. In 2021, coal provided 27 per cent of Germany's electricity. This failure had major implications for Germany's climate goals and it had a serious impact on Germany's energy security, too.

As a result of its rush to shut down its nuclear plants, Germany had to burn more natural gas – by 2021, more than 40 per cent was imported from Russia. Plans to increase this were thwarted when the Nord Stream 2 pipeline suffered serious damage from by a suspected Russian attack in 2022.

Consequently, Germany reopened some coal-fired power stations and expanded its liquefied natural gas (LNG) import capacity. All this was at huge cost to German taxpayers, damaging the country's net zero goals and exposing it to the volatility of international energy markets.

Germany suffered as a result of poor decisions made on the basis of ideology not reality.

In her defence, Merkel made her decision at a time when it was unthinkable that the international situation would deteriorate to the level that it has in recent years. The Energy Secretary Ed Miliband and the UK government have no such excuse.

The government knows how easily Russia weaponised energy in its war on Ukraine, and knows the financial and environmental cost of importing LNG on diesel-chugging ships from the other side of the Atlantic. Imported LNG now accounts for 60 per cent of gas used in the UK, with emissions four times larger than if we were to maximise gas extracted from British waters.

In extending and increasing the Energy Profits Levy, removing most investment allowances and refusing to issue new oil and gas licences in the North Sea, this government has created a negative atmosphere around the UK continental shelf that risks investment drying up, work stalling and workers leaving.

Promises reminiscent of those made in Germany, such as that renewables will fill the gap while delivering the high-skilled jobs to replace those being lost are proving difficult to achieve. And there is scant evidence that the cost of building this new system will prove cheaper.

And while Miliband claims his "Clean Power Mission" will make us less reliant on petro-states and dictatorships (I presume he means Norway), it will make us more dependent on China – a country that consistently tries to undermine the UK and the West due to its dominance in processing the critical minerals required in many new technologies, as well as the sheer might of its manufacturing base used to build the number of solar panels, wind turbines, battery storage facilities and pylons required by these mad-cap plans.

This country desperately needs a plan for energy that prioritises our security and the cost to business and the consumer. One that reverts to our policy, to maximise economic recovery of oil and gas from the North Sea, and to allow a domestic manufacturing and skills base to expand in order to build the new technologies required for transition.

We need a plan for critical minerals that makes us less reliant on China. And we need to build new nuclear – and lots of it – to meet our goal of 24 gigawatts on the grid by 2050. That would represent a quarter of the UK's overall energy demand met by clean, secure British power.

That's the plan I'm developing for Kemi Badenoch and the Conservatives. I only hope by the time we get into power again, it isn't too late.

MARTA SIGNORI

Advertorial

Radioactive waste: Britain's challenge

Delivering disposal solutions will be key to a safer future

By Martin Walkingshaw

In association with

In the journey towards a sustainable, low-carbon future, nuclear energy stands as a pillar of clean, reliable power. Yet a truly sustainable nuclear future requires a responsible, permanent solution for our legacy radioactive waste, plus any future waste generated from nuclear newbuild. At Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) we have a vital mission: to make nuclear waste permanently safe, sooner.

UK government policy is to establish a geological disposal facility (GDF) as the best long-term solution for the most hazardous radioactive waste in the UK. Our task at NWS, as part of the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) group, is to deliver this policy with the development of a world-class GDF. Geological disposal is not just about waste management: it is a fundamental part of the UK's commitment to tackling the climate crisis.

The background to our critical mission

The UK government has committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050, with nuclear power playing a significant role in providing stable, low-carbon energy.

At NWS, we work alongside other NDA group-operating companies, Sellafield Ltd and Nuclear Restoration Services (NRS), to safely manage radioactive waste already created – and we will enable the UK government's net zero ambition by providing a permanent solution for the most hazardous future radioactive waste.

Decommissioning the UK's nuclear legacy is a complex undertaking and relies on a wide range of expertise and skills. The NDA group brings together the best of the UK's expertise in nuclear decommissioning and radioactive waste management.

Within the group, NWS has more than 70 years of experience managing radioactive waste, with skills in areas such as nuclear science, safety case development, engineering and community engagement.

Cleaning up our nuclear past: the GDF programme

A GDF is made up of a series of highly engineered vaults and tunnels between 200 and 1,000 metres below ground in

a suitable rock formation. Combined with engineered barriers, this multi-barrier approach will protect the environment by keeping the waste isolated from the surface while the radioactivity naturally reduces to safe levels.

Geological disposal is internationally accepted as the only viable solution for the long-term management of the most hazardous radioactive waste.

Construction began in 2015 in Finland on the world's first GDF for spent nuclear fuel, while France – which relies on nuclear power for around 70 per cent of its electricity – and Sweden are each on track to build GDFs in the next decade. It's now the UK's turn to act and to move forward with the commitment to build a GDF to secure a cleaner, safer future for all. This programme is unique in the UK in that it requires explicit community support to go ahead; we not only require a suitable site but a willing community.

Investing in the communities we work in

While the development of a GDF in the UK will bring huge benefits to the environment by providing a site for the safe, permanent disposal of nuclear waste, it will also bring benefits to the local community that chooses to host it. More than 4,000 jobs could be created in the first 25 years of the project. The GDF facility will then be active for around 175 years before being closed, with the potential for employing upwards of 2,000 people in any given year during its lifetime.

Formation of a Community Partnership also triggers the availability of up to £1m per year of Community Investment Funding (CIF). This funding is available for projects and initiatives that support economic development opportunities, improve community wellbeing or enhance the local environment (including cultural and natural heritage).

The community which is eventually selected to host a GDF would also benefit from significant additional investment, potentially worth many millions of pounds. This investment would be shaped by a local community vision and could include improved local education and skills capacity, improved transport infrastructure or improved recreational facilities. Collaboration with communities is vital as we move towards delivering our mission, understanding our socio-economic context, increasing stakeholder engagement and hearing diverse views. We are making real progress, with site evaluations under way.

NWS plans to build a geological disposal facility in the UK

Thinking differently about waste: our sustainability strategy

For the NDA group, sustainability means putting waste at the heart of decision-making – optimising waste management to support accelerated decommissioning in ways that create a positive legacy for people and the planet. A GDF offers a sustainable, permanent solution for disposing of the most hazardous radioactive waste and removes the need for ongoing human intervention for future generations. ●

Martin Walkingshaw is chief operating officer at Nuclear Waste Services.

Learn more about the GDF programme and our mission to build a sustainable nuclear future www.nuclearwasteservices.uk.

NWS will join policymakers at the New Statesman's Energy and Climate Change conference 2025 to drive forward the conversation on sustainable nuclear waste management solutions.

NWS

“Trump has given credibility to the incredible”

Dale Vince on the US president, why Heathrow doesn’t need a third runway, and keeping up with Ed Miliband

By Megan Kenyon

Towards the end of February, at a dinner hosted by Airlines UK (an industry trade body), the Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander made her attitude to airport expansion clear. “I am not some sort of flight-shaming eco-warrior,” Alexander said, “I love flying. I always have.” The question of the expansion of three of London’s major airports (Heathrow, Gatwick and Luton) has been hanging over the government for weeks. The Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, has made it clear that she sees increasing the number of flights at these three hubs as a key engine for economic growth. On 3 April, Alexander confirmed Luton’s airport expansion, despite the Planning Inspectorate’s flat refusal.

For Dale Vince, the eco-entrepreneur and Labour donor, these moves are worrying. “I thought that was unfortunate language,” he says of Alexander’s derision of “flight-shaming eco-warriors” when we meet on a balmy afternoon at the *New Statesman*’s offices in central London. Vince adds: “I didn’t understand why Labour were talking like that. We don’t need to start a culture war. There are plenty of other people that will do that.”

Focusing on airport expansion is a mistake, says Vince. “I was surprised by the support for a third runway at Heathrow... It created a conversation, a kind of false choice between growth and green which is completely false because green is the right option for growth,” he says, pointing to the CBI’s reporting that the UK’s net zero economy has enjoyed the most growth in the past 12 months.

Vince’s concern has material reasoning behind it: ahead of last year’s general election, he donated £1m to the Labour Party’s campaign, bringing his total lifetime contributions to £5m. When we last spoke, the day after Rishi Sunak’s rain-soaked speech on Downing Street, Vince was optimistic and buoyant. Despite his concern around the new government's pursuit of airport expansion, in many ways, he still is. “I think Labour have done well,” he tells me. “We saw some immediate progress – within 72 hours, Ed Miliband had lifted the ban on onshore wind.”

It’s clear Vince thinks it is Miliband who is doing particularly well. Most Labour members are with him on that – the Energy Secretary was recently crowned the most popular cabinet

member in a Survation Poll for *Labour List*. "He started early and bold," Vince says. "Apart from the commitment to carbon capture and storage, which I don't understand... I think he's done good things."

Last year, the government pledged almost £22bn over the next 25 years for two carbon capture and storage projects in Merseyside and Teesside. These projects are intended to prevent or remove the carbon dioxide emitted through industrial processes from entering the atmosphere. Much of the technology, however, is still in the early phases of development.

To Vince, these kinds of projects are not the right approach. "I think it's a waste of our money," he explains. "We don't need to spend money on that." Instead, he thinks government funding and resources would be better used to decarbonise home heating or to expand the grid so it can fully support the UK's growing renewable energy resources.

A report by the Environmental Audit Committee last May found the queue to connect renewable projects to the grid contained more than twice the amount of generation required to meet the then Conservative government's target of decarbonising the energy system by 2035. (Miliband's goal is clean power by 2030.) This congestion is caused, in part, by the fact that the National Grid remains set up to deal with the energy system of the 1950s, when connections were required near coal-fired power stations, the last of which was switched off last year.

"We do need to spend money on the grid so that we can distribute the energy more quickly so that we don't have to switch projects off in Scotland," says Vince, referring to the fact that some renewable sites waste energy due to a lack of storage capacity. "Instead of turning them off, we should be making hydrogen with that excess energy, and then we can use that to make energy again when we need it."

Despite the government's intention to wean the UK off its reliance on fossil fuels, this is a make-or-break moment for the net zero agenda. The morning I spoke to Vince, the Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch had described the UK's net zero 2050 target as "impossible" without a "serious drop in our living standards".

JOHN GOMEZ/SHUTTERSTOCK

Vince, Emma Thompson and Caroline Lucas at the 2024 Restore Nature Now march

Through her speech, Badenoch (who as business secretary once made the economic case for net zero) firmly closed the door on the cross-party environmental consensus that the UK has enjoyed for the past decade. It even sparked criticism from the former Conservative prime minister, Theresa May, under whose government the 2050 target was signed into law.

When I ask Vince about Badenoch, he jokes, "Who is she again?" He tracks the end of consensus back to Sunak's speech in September 2023 in which the then PM rolled back on several of the UK's climate targets, including the upcoming ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel cars. "There was a moment when he pivoted away," Vince says. "I think it was 2023, the summer of Just Stop Oil." He is a former backer of Just Stop Oil. The group recently announced the end of its civil resistance. "Sunak weaponised eco protest and eco concerns... I think that was a strategic mistake," Vince says.

He describes Badenoch as a "politician just looking for attention", but puts the wider move against environmental policies down to the dawn of a second term for Donald Trump. "He's come along, and he is ferociously anti-renewable energy," Vince says of the US president, whose view on the environment could be discerned when he proclaimed, "Drill baby, drill." "I think he's enabled a lot of these voices to speak up. People are seeing an opportunity in aping Trump. He's given credibility to the incredible," Vince says. It is this desire to imitate Trump, Vince thinks, that is driving the Reform party's climate distancing under Nigel Farage.

What is Vince's advice to progressive parties (including the new Labour government) in keeping on with the net zero and clean power agenda?

"The opinion polls show the overwhelming majority of people in our country care about these issues and want to see something done about them," Vince says. "Don't be driven by a right-wing agenda."

He adds: "The green economy works. We've got to prove that it works for the people in this country that care about green issues and want to see something done about them."

"The science is clear on the need for carbon capture"

enfinium's Wayne Robertson on the opportunity offered by unrecyclable waste

Wayne Robertson is chief commercial and strategy officer at enfinium, one of the UK's largest energy from waste operators.

How is enfinium's work contributing to global climate goals?

Today, enfinium is one of the UK's leading energy from waste (EfW) operators. This means we are already playing a significant and often under-appreciated role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Our core function is to prevent unrecyclable waste from going to landfill, which results in significant emissions savings. There are several reasons for this, including the avoidance of methane emissions, a very potent greenhouse gas, as well as displacing virgin emissions and other useful products we recover from material that would otherwise be thrown away into environmentally damaging landfill. In 2023 this meant that, net, we prevented over 450,000 tonnes of CO_2e from entering the atmosphere as a business.

As a sector, our objective to end the routine use of landfill is on the horizon. At enfinium, we are now looking at what we can do next to address emissions from the waste sector. This is where carbon capture and storage (CCS) comes in. Last year we announced our Net Zero Transition Plan, setting out our intention to invest £1.7bn to install CCS technology across all our six facilities in England and Wales.

Crucially, not only will installing CCS fully decarbonise our operations, but it will see enfinium generate 1.2 million tonnes of high-quality, durable carbon removals every year by 2039. This is because half of the unrecyclable waste we process is biogenic material – such as food waste or contaminated card or paper – which has recently absorbed CO_2 from the atmosphere in its lifetime. By capturing this carbon at our facilities and permanently storing this, we prevent it from returning to the atmosphere and contributing to global warming.

Carbon dioxide removals (CDR) are not a nice to have, but a necessity to achieve net zero – this is according to the Climate Change Committee. In its latest advice ahead of the UK's seventh carbon budget, the CCC made clear that the UK needs over 35 million tonnes of engineered CDRs each year in order to reach net zero. This is where energy from

waste can play a significant role in UK-wide decarbonisation efforts. Once one of the UK's largest sources of territorial greenhouse gas emissions in the late 1990s, the waste sector can become one of the largest sources of negative emissions in the 2030s.

At enfinium we are already making progress on our plans at pace. Our Parc Adfer facility in North Wales has been put forward to the government to become a Track-1 project as part of the HyNet carbon transport and storage network and will, if successful, be online by 2030. Last year, we also deployed the UK's first carbon capture pilot plant on an EfW at our Ferrybridge 1 facility, capturing 1 tonne of CO_2 per day and providing valuable data that will help in designing our full-scale capture plants.

Which innovations will have the biggest impact in growing the sector?

A common misconception is that CCS technology is new – but it has been around for nearly a century and there are many examples of commercial plants currently in operation. What is new is what we want to use it for.

Historically, carbon capture has been used by the oil and gas industry for what is known as enhanced oil recovery. This has used amine-based solutions to capture carbon, which is then injected into depleted reservoirs to extract further oil. What we want to do is capture carbon and permanently store it to remove it from the atmosphere and prevent it from contributing to global warming. The technology is the same, but the purpose is very different.

This means we need greater scale, and we also need to find ways to make this cheaper and thus more commercially viable. One part of this will be finding new ways to capture carbon that are more energy efficient, which will be achieved both through new technologies and greater scale. This includes installing a further pilot at our Ferrybridge facility, which will test what is known as metallic-organic framework technology – a different method of capture that we hope will be less energy intensive and more sustainable. This is just one example of many now taking place across the sector as industry seeks to innovate in this exciting and vital new space.

What are the biggest challenges the CCS sector faces?

The first challenge is one of infrastructure. Installing a carbon capture plant at one of our facilities is one thing, but then transporting and storing the captured CO_2 requires significant shared infrastructure. Developing this infrastructure is where government can play a role – and the UK government is doing just that through its cluster programme. There will be many more emitters that would invest in CCS with the reassurance that they could get access to this infrastructure.

There is also a financial challenge. CCS is expensive to build and operate. When we look at the current uses of captured carbon, such as enhanced oil recovery, or utilisation in products like the food industry, the economic model is clear – there is a product to sell at the end. What we want to do now, however, is capture carbon to keep it out of the atmosphere – is that a product people want to pay for? This leads to the third challenge, public perception. Yes, there are some who are sceptical about the role of CCS, but the science is clear on its need – particularly the need for engineered removals at scale, which our sector can provide.

How important are public-private partnerships?

There is already a lot of collaboration between the public and private sector on CCS, for example the cluster programme – which has the potential to deliver the first at-scale clusters in the world, this decade. In the waste sector there are other policy areas that will require collaboration between public and private bodies to navigate the complex challenge that is decarbonising society's unrecyclable waste.

The Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) is being expanded to include the waste sector from 2028 (which will attach a new cost to fossil-derived emissions from EfWs). It is vital this is delivered in a way that can meaningfully drive decarbonisation while recognising the challenges in doing so. The ETS offers a real opportunity to support the roll out of CCS in the UK, but only if this is implemented in the right way.

The public and private sectors share a vision of a UK CCS industry which will not only contribute to the UK achieving its climate goals but also to driving economic growth. The UK's natural offshore geology presents one of the best locations in the world for storing captured CO_2, with the potential to unlock billions of pounds of investment and create tens of thousands of high-skilled jobs in the decades to come. This is an opportunity that we at enfinium are committed to help realise. ●

ENFINIUM

It is enfinium's objective to decarbonise the waste sector

"Marks out of ten for Labour? Three"

Green co-leader Adrian Ramsay on opposition, the net zero consensus, and the carbon capture and storage fig leaf

By Jon Bernstein

Adrian Ramsay is contemplating the pros and cons of sharing a job. As co-leader of the Green Party alongside Carla Denyer – who featured in the pages of *Spotlight* last November – Ramsay is part of one of the most high-profile political pairings in the country. The pros are coming quicker than the cons. "The best thing is that you bring together two sets of career backgrounds, two sets of skills," he tells me over a video call. "We're from different parts of the country, which means we can be in two places at once. And it reflects what the modern economy looks like in terms of more collaborative and flexible ways of working."

And the cons? Ramsay's quickfire delivery is absent momentarily, replaced by a politician's pause. Is the biggest annoyance, I suggest, constantly being asked about co-leadership? "Perhaps," he offers.

Ramsay has led the Green Party jointly since 2021, and became an MP last July at the third attempt. His share of the vote in Waveney Valley – 41.7 per cent in a traditionally Conservative part of the country – was sizeable, reflecting a record-breaking general election result for the Greens; nearly two million votes and four newly minted MPs.

Ramsay, 43, describes himself as "not too tribal", whether in his politics or in his support of his hometown club Norwich City. The latter is a sensitive subject given his constituency straddles the Norfolk-Suffolk border, much of which is closer to rivals Ipswich Town. He showed a spirit of bipartisanship in his maiden parliamentary speech in July, not only "warmly" congratulating Ipswich on promotion to the Premier League but welcoming Labour's commitment to renewable energy and the creation of a state-run investment company, Great British Energy.

Tribal or not, Ramsay had an early taste of Westminster rough and tumble when he called for a pause on a project that would see more than 500 pylons passing through his new constituency. He faced direct criticism from Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Energy Secretary Ed Miliband, and during a subsequent media round, he was dubbed "Nimby-in-chief".

Since the maiden speech, Ramsay's mood has changed. Asked to mark Labour's environmental progress out of ten, Ramsay gives it a three. Why so low?

He offers, as evidence, plans to expand Heathrow and other airports that would "completely wipe out" the carbon saving benefit of the government's national clean power plan. "And that's before you get on to their ambivalence towards the Rosebank oil field that would emit carbon equivalent to that of 28 low-income countries. And then you've got carbon capture and storage where they are looking to spend £22bn on projects that would allow new gas-fired power stations to go ahead, offering a fig leaf to fossil fuels."

When reminded of his initial embrace of GB Energy, he says: "It's not yet clear what it's going to deliver. It's just a brand at the moment." He would like it to focus on energy reduction and community-owned renewables.

Ramsay is keen to dismiss any notion that he is anti-growth, that he's a blocker not a builder. It has to be the right kind, he says; building that "meets ordinary people's needs and ensures we have a liveable planet for the future". He believes the government must take a more "systemic approach" to planning in order to safeguard food supplies, for example, or to ensure that public transport is not only the greenest option but the cheapest and easiest, too. That's why he objects to the "nature vs growth" binary; it's a false dichotomy in his view. Labour, he says, has a "blind approach to any type of growth even if it's going to wreck the planet, result in more inequality or more air pollution. That can't be right."

Last month, the Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch used the launch of her party's policy renewal programme to tell the "unvarnished truth" about the UK's climate change policy. "Net zero by 2050 is impossible," she declared.

Ramsay says her words were "deeply irresponsible", breaking an essential cross-party consensus that has provided "clear direction not just for politics but for industry, too".

A party-political consensus, maybe, but perhaps Badenoch is tapping into wider doubts among the electorate. After all, it's likely that many of the more than four million people who voted for Reform UK last July share their party's scepticism. "The voters I speak to are concerned about the environment regardless of where they appear on the political spectrum," Ramsay insists. "Yes, Reform has tried to weaponise the issue, but I don't think that means everyone who has voted for them entirely agrees with them."

Ramsay with fellow Green MPs (L-R): Siân Berry, Carla Denyer and Ellie Chowns

PHOTO BY DAN KITWOOD/GETTY IMAGES

But what of Badenoch's extended critique? First, she argued that where a net zero plan does exist, the UK is moving too slowly. She used the example of heat pumps and the aim to fit them in half of UK homes by 2040. That's 17 million domestic heat pumps. The total installed to date: fewer than 300,000. Ramsay points to higher rates of uptake in France and Ireland to illustrate what is possible but also what's missing in the UK: the right incentives. "You've got to have the long-term platform industry can rely on."

Second, Badenoch argued that in the pursuit of net zero "we are massively exposing ourselves to countries who don't share our values". Here she used the example of solar panels. "Ten years ago, we were heavily dependent on China for all of the key components. Today we're even more dependent." Ramsay isn't entirely unsympathetic. "There is far more that can be produced in the UK... and where we are using international supply chains, we need to minimise the extent to which that relies on particular countries. This is an area where there has been a very free-market approach to date. We could be doing far more to make sure British manufacturing is benefiting from these things."

Returning to his scepticism of carbon capture and storage (CCS), Ramsay maintains that he is not against technology as a means of helping mitigate climate change, pointing to a pre-parliamentary career working for the Centre for Alternative Technology, a charitable and educational organisation.

He worries, however, that solutions such as CCS provide an excuse for inaction. "I'm very pro the right sorts of technology but it's got to be applied in the right way," Ramsay says. "I'm in favour of more research... But at the moment the vast majority of CCS plants that have been developed nationwide have been abandoned because they have not been working. There's a real risk that it's a fig leaf for fossil fuels and that it gives false hope."

He takes a similar view when it comes to sustainable aviation. Asked if there would be any circumstances in which he would countenance airport expansion, Ramsay believes the case has yet to be made. On sustainable aviation fuel, he says, "Yes it should be researched, but it doesn't exist at the moment, so we can't rely on it."

Advertorial

Energy for a reset

There's no green growth without sensible, investment-friendly regulation

By Bill Bullen

In association with

utilita

As the UK aims to become a clean energy leader, the regulatory direction of travel in the sector has never been more critical. It is clear substantial reforms are essential to ensure regulation supports innovation, investment and green growth.

The government's focus on reforming regulation to make it growth-friendly is welcome and we have recently responded to its review of Ofgem, advocating for a revised regulatory approach in the energy sector.

The current framework, managed by Ofgem, is overly prescriptive and stifles innovation. By concentrating on detailed governance rather than encouraging competition and innovation, Ofgem's approach is inadvertently pushing suppliers towards homogeneous offerings. This reduces consumer choice and hampers the development of tailored, innovative services for diverse customer needs during the transition. It can also undermine trust.

To truly support green growth, Ofgem's role must be broader and more strategic. It should act as a guiding hand for the government's Clean Power 2030 (CP2030) goal, facilitating investment across the entire energy sector and related products and services. This means creating a regulatory environment focused on desired outcomes, encouraging innovation and competition, and setting minimum consumer standards while allowing room for differentiation and service excellence.

We know we want to lower bills and reduce demand while keeping people warm and dry in their homes. However, markets don't always deliver optimum outcomes. Even if we build a competitive supply of energy, we may still not achieve this goal. UK policymakers have limited influence over energy prices, which are heavily influenced by global factors. Consequently, we could still end up with high demand (harmful to the environment), stubbornly high prices (bad for customers' wallets) and damp and mould in homes (detrimental to health). This is where regulation should come in.

Instead of focusing solely on reducing energy prices, Ofgem can and should calculate the most efficient way to provide warm spaces. By looking at likely scenarios for energy prices, Ofgem can determine an efficient level of insulation and reflect that in building standards

with the government as part of the delayed, but much needed, Future Homes Standard. Similarly, Ofgem should assess the efficiency of other appliances to ensure they are set at an appropriate level. Through these measures, we can achieve the same outcomes of reduced bills for consumers and warm, dry homes in a manner that also benefits the environment.

The challenges of CP2030 and net zero 2050 require ambitious action from both Ofgem and suppliers. The latter need the headroom to innovate and develop new technologies and processes. We cannot be ambitious if we are struggling to keep businesses financially sustainable. Consequently, the retail energy sector must be made more investable. The stringent price cap, while intended to protect consumers, often leaves little room for suppliers to innovate and invest in new technologies. This is particularly challenging for smaller, specialist providers like Utilita that do not have the large balance sheets of legacy suppliers. It also harms customers who benefit from competition.

At Utilita, we have seen first-hand how engaged our customers are with energy efficiency and decarbonisation. It's a misconception to imagine that customers from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds are disengaged with these issues.

Our customers who use smart prepayment meters are often more aware of their energy consumption because they can see how changes impact their credit balance in real time. This awareness drives them to adopt energy-efficient behaviours, such as switching off lights in unoccupied rooms, supported by our smart in-app functions and industry-leading energy efficiency campaigns. Many of these changes are likely to be permanent, contributing to long-term sustainability.

Utilita created the first demand flexibility service designed specifically for prepayment customers, the "Power Payback". This awards customers instant credit on their meters for using energy outside of peak times during the National Energy System Operator demand flexibility events. The incentive is much more significant for smart prepay customers who can see this instant impact, rather than a few pounds' difference on a monthly direct debit. We want to invest more in innovations like this and work with Ofgem to design a framework that will allow us to do so.

UTILITA

Bill Bullen: "A sustainable, green energy future requires bold regulatory reforms"

Building trust in the energy sector is paramount. Without trust, consumers will not be able to reap the benefits of advancements in the sector. The current regulatory approach often demonises suppliers, undermining public confidence. Despite this, Ofgem's own research shows that satisfaction with the sector is at an all-time high. Ofgem must move away from prescriptive governance and set a framework that prioritises customer outcomes. This will foster greater trust and engagement.

Pushing for regulators to support growth is not a new concept. However, we have not seen Ofgem take sufficient account of the growth duty it already has. The government's ongoing review of Ofgem must provide clear direction, streamlined duties, and a focus on enabling investment.

The path to a sustainable, green energy future requires bold regulatory reforms. There must be a real urgency from government and the regulator for Ofgem to shift its focus from prescriptive governance to a more strategic, innovation-friendly approach. By doing so, it can help create a competitive, dynamic energy market that supports green growth and delivers better outcomes for consumers. ●

Bill Bullen is CEO of Utilita

Is net zero by 2050 achievable?

The Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch doesn't believe it is. Over to our experts

2050 IS AT RISK, SO WE NEED TO DOUBLE DOWN ON INNOVATION

Lindy Fursman
Director of climate and energy policy, Tony Blair Institute

The UK's commitment to reach net zero by 2050 is at risk. Climate ambition is stalling just as the crisis deepens. Rising emissions, record-breaking temperatures and worsening climate impacts demand urgent action – yet political momentum is fading. What was once a cross-party consensus on climate action is fracturing under economic pressure and growing public scepticism.

But this trajectory is not inevitable. The world's strategy to reach net zero is faltering, but the goal itself remains achievable. To get back on track, we must rethink how we deliver climate action: not through sacrifice, but through solutions that make sense to households, workers and businesses alike.

That means doubling down on innovation: using AI to drive smarter, faster decarbonisation; scaling clean energy investment so that all new generation is zero emissions; and investing and delivering carbon removal technologies.

It means nature-based solutions, such as reforestation and adaptation efforts – from flood defences to urban greening – must become national priorities. And we need to simplify global action, focussing on high-impact agreements that target the key sources of emissions rather than endless summits that attempt to cover too much.

Crucially, net zero must be politically sustainable. Ending the climate culture war is essential. We need to reframe the conversation – neither ideological nor alarmist, but pragmatic, solutions-driven, and focused on delivery. A counter to both extremes of the debate.

Leaders must show that climate policy can deliver tangible, near-term benefits: lower energy bills, good jobs, healthier communities. Net zero by 2050 is achievable but only if we disrupt the path to reaching it with practical, politically viable solutions – ones that work for voters and the planet.

WHETHER WE ACHIEVE OUR TARGET IS A POLITICAL CHOICE

Holly Brazier Tope
Head of politics,
Green Alliance

The short answer to whether the UK can achieve its 2050 net zero target is "yes". Government advisers have stated that it's possible and other countries are demonstrating how fast emissions can be cut.

Whether the UK will achieve the target is political. Many are struggling to get by and worry the cost-of-living crisis may never end. Some blame net zero for rising costs. But a major reason the UK has seen higher price rises than other major economies is our dependence on gas for 40 per cent of our energy, and that's expensive. Climate action and the cost of living are connected, but not in the way some think.

The way to cut bills is to insulate homes and power cars and heating with cheaper renewable electricity. For people to feel the benefits quickly, we need change at the speed of previous tech revolutions, from fridges to the internet. This needs upfront investment, but renewable energy already attracts twice as much investment globally as oil and gas. Hitting climate targets won't just make people better off, it's an economic boost too.

Kemi Badenoch recently claimed there's no plan for net zero. She's forgotten that the UK's world-leading blueprint to do it, covering all sectors of the economy, was published by the Conservatives four years ago. Successive Conservative leaders understood its electoral importance and, while Reform is clearly piling on the pressure, the popularity and value of aiming for this target, rather than not, is clear.

The current government won its majority promising to improve living standards and give us clean power. Delivering on both won't be easy, but it's possible.

The majority supports a national effort to reach net zero and they expect leaders to have a plan to get there, not pretend there isn't one.

THE ECONOMICS SHOW US THAT NET ZERO IS POSSIBLE

Daisy Powell-Chandler
Head of energy and environmental practice, Public First

Net zero is entirely achievable by 2050. We picked that date because it complies with binding international treaties we have signed.

We could do it in a decade if we wanted to – taking the extra time will allow us to do it far cheaper and with much less disruption to our lives.

To ensure our climate plans are realistic, we have an independent scrutiny body: the Climate Change Committee (CCC). Every five years it sets a carbon budget and has to prove that it is realistic by looking at the technology that is currently available, not at any future innovations.

This means that the CCC's estimates tend to be quite conservative. Successive CCC reports said we were off track to achieve our carbon reduction goals only for us to then exceed the required reductions.

It isn't just our track record that shows net zero by 2050 is possible – it's the economics. In every carbon budget the projected cost of net zero has reduced dramatically, and the return on that investment has increased. The net zero-related parts of the economy have grown by 10 per cent since 2023, while the rest of the economy struggled to grow at all. And 94 per cent of British exports go to countries that have their own net zero targets – so the incentives for business to go green are beyond our control and growing.

The costs of not working together to prevent climate change are also increasingly clear.

Floods across the UK are becoming more frequent and more damaging. New Public First research shows that this already costs us more than £6bn each year.

Elsewhere in the country, new homes are being blocked because there isn't enough water. Not only is it possible to achieve net zero by 2050, leaving it later would be a reckless gamble. ●

"Leaving it later would be a reckless gamble"

Advertorial

Artificial intelligence and energy security

Advanced technology can be a double-edged sword

By Stephanie Baxter

In association with

The Institution of Engineering and Technology

Energy infrastructure outages can have widespread and serious consequences for both individuals and society. As well as the impact of physical damage to infrastructure – such as the recent substation fire which saw the closure of Heathrow Airport – vulnerability to AI misinformation and cyberattacks is rapidly becoming one of the biggest threats to the UK and one which government must mitigate.

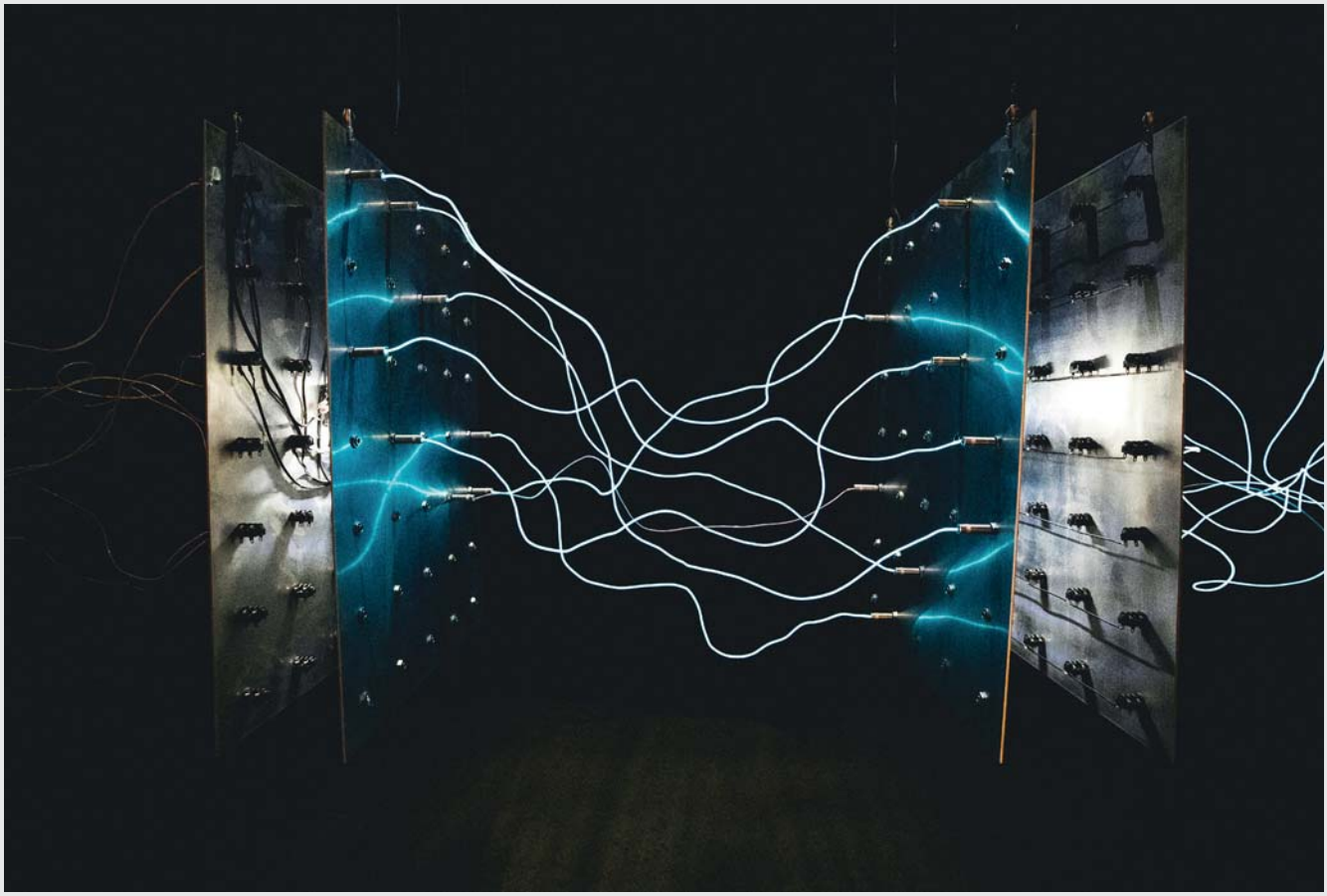
The damage of an electricity blackout to the UK economy depends on factors such as its duration, geographic impact, and affected sectors. However, estimates suggest that a nationwide blackout lasting 24 hours could cost billions of pounds. These are not just hypothetical scenarios – between 2023 and 2024 the UK economy suffered a loss of £17.6bn in economic output due to connectivity outages, with the average UK business losing over £11,000 in economic output.

These were relatively short power outages. However, if a system blackout lasts more than a few days, the economic damage could reach tens of billions of pounds. There would be supply chain failures, an impact on hospitals and emergency services, mass business closures and potential social unrest. That's why investment in cybersecurity and network resilience today could save billions in lost revenue tomorrow.

The increasing number of devices connected by digital networks, including in energy infrastructure, exposes these areas to new risks. If these systems are fed with incorrect or misleading information, they might fail to identify potential issues such as impending equipment failures or capacity shortages.

Misinformation can be a tool of cyber-attackers aiming to disrupt grid operations. AI-driven malicious misinformation campaigns could mislead operators or automated systems, causing disruptions and outages. An AI system manipulated by false data could also open vulnerabilities that hackers could exploit, potentially resulting in a third party taking control of critical infrastructure, disrupting operations, or gathering confidential information.

To mitigate these risks, it is crucial to ensure that AI systems are robust, transparent and subject to comprehensive validation and verification processes. There should also be tools and techniques that are available to developers that help prove



AI can be harnessed to upgrade the UK's grid infrastructure and help meet growing demand for low-carbon electricity

they are safe and fit for purpose to regulators, with competency frameworks and lists of recognised qualifications to provide organisational reassurance and developer competence.

As well as ensuring secure AI systems, training for all staff and effective cybersecurity measures are also essential to protect systems from manipulation. Workers will need differing levels of awareness and training on AI depending on their organisational roles – such as "working", "practitioner" and "expert".

There is a challenge finding people with the required skills at competitive salary rates, which is why the new Growth and Skills Levy should ensure flexible funding, particularly for SMEs, to upskill existing workers with bespoke short courses (micro-credentials) to ensure a basic standard of safety and competency for those at "working" and "practitioner" level. At the higher "expert" level, key cybersecurity roles should have protected status (in the same way as "medical doctor") to help drive up and guarantee standards.

While the integration of new technologies into our energy infrastructure poses threats, there are also significant security and resilience benefits to be gained from harnessing them in a safe way.

For example, by integrating AI alongside the adoption of cyber-physical systems like "digital twins", virtual models connected to a real-world counterpart by a two-way flow of right-time data, we can monitor and rapidly address faults – boosting security and resilience. This can and is already being adopted on a case-by-case basis, but the potential benefits from a whole-systems approach is game-changing: if the government coordinates industry to bring together the different digital twins of critical energy infrastructure into one holistic model, this could then be coordinated to monitor and address issues across the whole energy system. By joining up monitoring and intervention of generation, transmission and consumption, government can ensure a secure supply of energy across the UK.

But we cannot realise the potential of these technologies without the skilled workforce to utilise and adopt them. The UK's engineering and technology firms are the least likely to recognise Digital Twins as a priority for reaching net zero (5 per cent), and less than a quarter of employers think that we have the skills in this area, which include data collection and analysis.

The introduction of AI into the systems that control our energy infrastructure is already under way, bringing both the potential to strengthen security and resilience through innovation, and the risk of a system failure – either through unintentional failures or from the ongoing efforts of malicious actors to access and weaken our systems.

The best way to reap the benefits of new technologies and mitigate the risks is to ensure all workers are given sufficient and appropriate training on the safe and effective use of AI and digital systems, along with investment in cybersecurity expertise and robust regulation. ●

Stephanie Baxter is head of policy at the Institution of Engineering and Technology

Comment

Dan McGrail
Interim CEO,
Great British Energy

"We have the opportunity to turn Great British Energy into an enduring national institution"

Last year, the Climate Change Committee (CCC) delivered its emissions reduction progress report to parliament. In it, the CCC said that "the cost of key low-carbon technologies is falling, creating an opportunity for the UK to boost investment, reclaim global climate leadership and enhance energy security by accelerating take-up. British-based renewable energy is the cheapest and fastest way to reduce vulnerability to volatile global fossil fuel markets. The faster we get off fossil fuels, the more secure we become."

It's a statement that underpins the formation of the UK's first publicly owned energy company in over 70 years, Great British Energy. Since 1986 when the gas sector was privatised, with the electricity sector following in 1990, virtually all the components of the UK's electricity generation, transmission and distribution were placed into private hands. It's for this reason that when polling was conducted in 2024 by More in Common, 63 per cent of Britons thought that GB Energy was a good idea.

While Great British Energy is at the beginning of its journey, we are quickly taking the first steps towards unlocking the scale and size needed to make a real impact to homes and businesses. To achieve clean power by 2030, according to the National System Energy Operator, the government will need to need to contract as much offshore wind capacity in the coming one to two years as it did in the last six years combined.

It will need to scale and operationalise carbon capture, usage and storage and hydrogen across the UK, and it will need to build all planned transmission networks on time, which involves twice as much in the next five years as was built in total over the past decade.

Great British Energy has a role to play here, and while the size of the task seems great, the British public should be under no illusion as to the huge opportunities ahead. One of our first jobs is to create a vision and yearly plan that the public can get behind. We need to show where the public's money will be invested and the tangible return it can make, either in job creation or community energy projects.

We have an opportunity to lead in new, novel areas like floating offshore wind. For each gigawatt of offshore wind installed the sector contributes about £2bn-£3bn of gross value add to the UK. This is where we can create the long and enduring supply chains, moving the British workforce into a new era of manufacturing assets, rather than simply operating them.

As the CBI said in its recent *Future Is Green* report, "The net zero economy has become a powerhouse of job creation and economic expansion," supporting 951,000 jobs in both core and wider supply chain net zero work.

Great British Energy has big ambitions. We have already appointed a brilliant start-up board with huge experience in industry, government and the trade union movement, as well as announcing our headquarters in Aberdeen. Plus, we have formed our first partnerships with the Crown Estate, the Scottish government and now hundreds of schools and hospitals with the mass deployment of solar panels, helping them to save thousands of pounds.

Great British Energy will be an enduring energy company and national institution far beyond 2030, generating ongoing wealth for Britain. For the first time in decades, we have an energy company that is owned by the British people and delivering for the British people, with clean energy at its heart.

MARTA SIGNORI

The view from parliament

Pippa Heylings
Lib Dem spokesperson for energy security and net zero

"The net zero transition will not happen without local communities"

We are living in the shadow of the previous Conservative government's failure to invest in renewable energy and insulate our homes. With Vladimir Putin's war on Ukraine, these failures have contributed to an energy crisis that has left households struggling with soaring bills and businesses facing crippling costs. Now more than ever, we need to strengthen our homegrown energy security and stop our dependency on fossil fuels that makes the UK vulnerable to volatile and uncertain energy prices.

We have a huge opportunity to become a leader in the green industries of the future, particularly in offshore wind. It is ours to lose, though. While the UK ranks second globally for fully operational floating offshore wind projects, a lack of vision and investment over the past decade has meant that we have not developed our manufacturing capacity at the same pace. The clean power ambition of the UK government now must be delivered in a way that builds our supply chain capability. The prize must be a homegrown energy future, not one that is imported.

Jobs in the oil and gas industry have halved over the past decade as the North Sea reserves have declined. We must pursue a just transition, reviving our manufacturing capacity by producing more wind components domestically and investing in our port infrastructure, home to some of our poorest communities.

However, we can only deliver on this promise if we also empower communities through the transition. That is why my colleagues and I were pleased to bring about an amendment to the legislation to establish GB Energy, a new publicly owned clean energy company. It now includes explicit support for both community-owned energy projects as well as community benefits for those that host energy infrastructure. The transition must happen with communities and not be something that is just done to them.

Communities and local authorities are under-utilised forces in the drive to lower emissions. Roughly one third of our emissions come from sectors directly influenced or shaped by local authorities. Local-led action could save £140bn in reaching net zero compared to a top-down approach, while delivering almost double the energy savings. More than national government or businesses, local authorities are uniquely positioned to connect climate action with actions that also restore local nature, manage flooding, reduce health inequalities and alleviate fuel poverty.

Yet there is no current framework to empower them to do this. They should be given a clearly funded statutory duty to meet climate and nature targets.

At a time when Reform UK and the Conservatives seek to weaponise net zero and renewables, the path to building support for the energy transition is about winning people's trust by delivering tangible changes that benefit their lives.

The majority of people polled say that they want to see more action on climate change. In my constituency, South Cambridgeshire, groups like the Zero Carbon Communities network, the Haslingfield and Harlton Eco-Group, 2G3S (Going Green in the Shelfords, Stapleford and Sawston), and Sustainable Shepreth are demonstrating that local action can be effective and impactful.

This government has paid too little attention to tackling energy demand. The Climate Change Committee's seventh carbon budget clearly underscores the importance of upfront investment in low-carbon heating and insulation, particularly for low-income households, alongside the delivery of new homes built to the highest energy efficiency standards. This approach would help reduce household bills and address the shocking reality that far too many people are still living in cold, damp homes, with devastating consequences for their mental and physical health.

In these volatile times, we must ensure the power, energy, and heating of our homes and businesses are in our hands; not in those of potentially hostile powers. Putin may have control over the gas supply, but he cannot shut off the wind, waves or sunshine.

MARTA SIGNORI

GETTING HOME RETROFIT RIGHT: ASSURING CONSUMERS THAT ENERGY EFFICIENCY UPGRADES 'DO WHAT THEY SAY ON THE TIN'

MIMA's vision is for everyone, in every part of the UK, to have a home which is proven to be low energy, low carbon, healthy, comfortable, and safe to live in.

Pivotal to achieving this is building strong consumer trust and confidence in the retrofit process and by 'taking people with us' on the energy transition. We, as an industry - the insulation, energy efficiency, and clean heat sectors - need to ensure we achieve reliably good, proven outcomes for customers when retrofitting their homes. This will:

1 **De-risk decarbonisation**
By starting to routinely check, verify, and increasingly guarantee aspects of building performance as the housing stock is decarbonised, we, as the industry, take many of the real or perceived risks of the transition off the shoulders of householders and government and onto ourselves.

2 **Secure heating bill savings**
By measuring and monitoring the actual energy performance of people's homes, the industry can give consumers greater assurances of a good outcome, verifying the energy savings and emissions reductions aimed for are realised in practice.

In our new report "Making Performance-led Home Retrofit a Reality", MIMA is calling for policy and standards to be woven into the very fabric of the Government's Warm Homes Plan, so that by 2030:

- Measuring key aspects of home energy performance has become the norm. All UK households getting a home fabric and/or clean heat upgrade should be able to opt for a service from their Retrofit Provider which includes checks of the actual performance of the fabric and clean heating system, pre- and/or post retrofit as appropriate, using accredited methods, technologies, and forms of monitoring.

- An ever-growing number of households can benefit from 'Outcomes-Based Guarantees'. Widespread and routine checks of fabric and heating system performance will enable and encourage more Retrofit Providers to innovate with market offerings we are calling Outcomes-Based Guarantees, such as to "meet or beat" historical heating costs after fitting a new heat pump.

We now need government policies to support and encourage Retrofit Providers to guarantee more outcomes of home upgrades to help to de-risk and improve the journey for the consumer and create genuinely low energy, low emissions homes.

For a copy of our report, please visit www.mima.info or scan the QR code.

ROCKWOOL KNAUFINSULATION Intelligent Environments Superglass MIMA MINERAL WOOL INSULATION MANUFACTURERS ASSOCIATION

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