

# THE WARREN REPORT



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## Net zero by 2050? Let's get to 30 by 30

The UK is now committed to a zero carbon society by 2050. But would it be wise to set a '30-by-30' target as Theresa May suggested just two years ago?

**T**his month the UK formally becomes the first G7 nation to adopt as a legally binding commitment that we shall be living in a net zero-carbon economy in 30 years' time.

It is a clear and bold commitment, that has rightly been lauded practically everywhere.

The few cynics have concentrated upon the undeniable fact that practically all of the politicians taking the plaudits will long since have quit the public stage, well before the magic year of 2050. And therefore won't be around to face any difficult questions. Or indeed to accept the congratulations that will be due.

That is undeniably a fair point. Doubtless a good reason why many are calling for more immediate targets to be created. Like the '30 by 30 Energy Efficiency Act.'

What is this? Put simply, a firm commitment and programme to ensure that around 27m homes and 3m non-residential buildings will be made completely energy efficient. Completed by 2030. Hence the slogan: 30 by 30.

Already we have the genesis of this, created by Theresa May, who ceases being Prime Minister just this month. Back in 2017, she launched the Clean Growth Strategy for the next 30 years. This identifies the enormous economic potential for business to save fuel. At least one-fifth could very cost-effectively be saved. Interestingly, the vast majority of this potential (over 80 per cent) was to be released not so much by improving industrial processes but by improving the way buildings are run.

Doubtless that was one of the main motivations why as Prime Minister she launched last summer her "Buildings Mission" in a speech at the Jodrell Bank observatory complex in Cheshire.

She promised that within 12 years - in other words, by 2030 - energy usage in all new construction will be "at least half" of that permitted under current building regulations. "Heating and powering buildings accounts for 40 per cent of our total energy usage.

"By making our buildings more energy efficient and embracing smart technologies, we can slash household energy bills, reduce demand for energy, and meet our targets for carbon reduction", promised Theresa May. "By halving the energy use of buildings, we could reduce the energy bills for their occupants by as much as 50 per cent."

Subsequently, the Government has confirmed that while such calculations will for the first time include energy usage from appliances within their calculations, they will not include transport usage. Presumably that caveat is to remove any recharging of electric vehicles from assessments.

Describing her initiative as the "catalyst for new technologies and more productive methods," which she maintained could be "exported to a large and growing market", acknowledging the enormous potential to improve the existing building stock.

### Halve the energy costs

As part of the "clean growth and grand challenge mission," the Government is also aiming to halve the energy costs for the existing building stock - both

domestically and commercially by "reaching the same standards in existing buildings too."

And not just delivering ecological benefits. The social benefits of the 30 by 30 programme are uniquely broad. Fusing the public's clear rejection of continuing austerity and cuts with the growing desire to tackle climate change, it makes this the key capital infrastructure investment priority.

It provides occupants with comfortable living conditions in cold winter and high summer. It requires a massive training programme, resulting in a wide range of jobs, both skilled and unskilled. Already far more people are employed in manufacturing, distributing, installing and maintaining energy efficient equipment than in any other part of the energy sector. The programme offers new business and investment opportunities in every single constituency. And it will, at last, abolish the scourge of fuel poverty forever.

We know the technical potential exists to cut energy consumption levels by over 50 per cent. Achieving this target will require the adoption of world-leading quality standards for retrofitting and constructing buildings.

This is a genuinely ambitious project. After all, the vast majority of buildings we will be living and working in by 2050 have already been built. Upgrading these has been likened by civil servants charged with delivery as being much akin to the challenge set in President Kennedy inaugural speech in 1961. This was to see a man walk on the moon before the decade was out.

At that point, nobody knew with any precision how this noble objective would be achieved. But that speech became the catalyst. It ensured that in July 1969, a man named Armstrong would walk upon the moon.

I don't really think that realising this buildings' Mission is anything like as difficult. Unlike with space research, we do already have practically all the technologies around to achieve our goal. It is the delivery techniques we have to improve upon. Do that and we shall have knitted together one of the most effective social and environmentally beneficial programmes. So, 30 by 30 it must be. ■

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