

Net zero will make the UK 'warmer and richer'

3 years ago



The MP who signed the UK's net zero pledge into law has told an [industry podcast](#) that adapting buildings will deliver economic growth and better quality of life.

Former energy minister Chris Skidmore OBE, who chaired the government's independent net zero review, said building services had driven major social change in the past and could do so again.

He was a guest on the latest [Building Engineering Services Association](#) (BESA) podcast with the Association's chief executive David Frise and two representatives from heat pump manufacturer [Mitsubishi Electric](#) – head of sustainability Martin Fahey and net zero design manager Chris Newman.

Skidmore pointed out that, in the four years since the UK's pledge became law, more than 90% of global GDP had been committed to net zero work.

"There are tremendous economic opportunities [from delivering net zero] so we should be doing this whether there was a climate crisis or not," he told the ['Mission Zero – step by step' podcast](#). "There could be a trillion pounds worth of inward investment into the UK by 2030 if we put the right measures in place."

He cited the adoption of central heating that transformed quality of life in the 60s and 70s as an example of how the building engineering sector had driven major change in the past.

"This is not about making the country colder and poorer...we want to make it warmer and richer," said Skidmore. "We need to make sure we do not damage profit margins, but if you don't get the basics right around investment and skills – then it will be other countries that make the running."

Competitive

He said the government should be focused on what was needed to give the UK a competitive edge and create policy certainty for businesses, so they make the right investment decisions.

His 'Mission Zero' review, which was published in January, made 129 recommendations for delivering a prosperous UK 'green economy'. These included speeding up decisions around low carbon heating, the role of energy efficiency in buildings, and accelerating the process for connecting renewable power generation to the grid.

Measuring building carbon emissions remains a challenge and Skidmore pointed out that Energy Performance Certificates were an imperfect tool. "The EPC was never designed to judge carbon emissions but is being used as such. The government is willing to review that, but we must not throw the baby out with the bathwater."

The Future Buildings Standard, which comes into force in 2025, will be an important lever but he said there was already no excuse for some of the ongoing bad practices in housebuilding.

"There's no reason why all new homes shouldn't have solar panels on them now," he said. "It's also unacceptable that we built 1.3 million homes that will have to be retrofitted by 2050. Hands up, it was government policy that allowed that to happen."

However, he said he was delighted that the government had recommitted to the abolition of gas boilers by 2035. "The future is heat pumps and it's useful to have a fixed destination to aim for so people can work towards it."

Frise pointed out that the industry had made a similar change work before with the mass transition to gas condensing boilers, which "completely changed the market".

However, he said BESA members often complained about lack of enforcement of existing regulations and the podcasters discussed how linking net zero to the new more rigorous safety agenda driven by the Building Safety Act could improve compliance.

"This should not just be an environment policy framework," agreed Skidmore. "We are the poor man of Europe when it comes to energy efficiency so by improving that we can also improve quality of life for people."

To listen to the full [industry podcast click here](#).