

MISSION ZERO 2024: BUILDING CONSENSUS, DRIVING CHANGE AND DELIVERING ACTION

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MISSION 2024

Thank you for joining this event today, focusing on Mission 2024, and what is needs to happen this year to build consensus, drive change, and deliver action on reducing emissions and our pathway to net zero.

The Mission Zero Coalition was formed ten months ago, at the time of the government's response to the Net Zero Review, with the ambition of driving forward the recommendations in the Mission Zero Report, by producing several reports covering the ten missions outlined in the review.

Last year, the Coalition published four reports, including *The Future Is Local*, co-chaired by Ben Houchen, the Tees Valley Mayor; *Mission Retrofit*, co-chaired by Simon McWhirter, the Deputy CEO of the UK Green Buildings Council, and *Decarbonise Now*, the report of the Industrial Mission Zero Network, of which Aveva is a member. And I am grateful to Aveva today for their kind hosting of this event in their London offices.

The Coalition has also sought to widen its impact from UK policy, to a focus on international climate policy, publishing a history of the COP process, and held its first event at COP28 in the Innovation Zone, focusing on the work of its Mission Zero Buildings Network and the Buildings Breakthrough.

I am delighted to announce that in a few weeks time, the Coalition will be publishing its fifth report, *Building The Future*, which highlights the importance of UK leadership on the design and

development of new net zero buildings, as part of the work of our Buildings Network, that includes leading practitioners who are pioneering low emissions buildings, such as Amazon, AW Homes, Barratts, Grosvenor and Landsec. *Building The Future* will contain lessons for the Buildings Breakthrough, and I will be travelling to Paris in early March to attend the Buildings Breakthrough conference organised by the French government.

The coalition has also begun its work on a new report, the Mission Zero Power Generation Report, that encompasses four missions in the Net Zero Review, including Grid and Infrastructure, Solar, Wind and Nuclear, with the intention of publishing a final report at London Climate Action Week.

I am delighted to be joined by Dan McGrail, CEO of Renewable UK, who will be participating later in a Q&A session with me. Dan has kindly agreed co-chair the Power Generation Report, and I am greatly looking forward to working with him on what is an essential task for 2024: outlining the detail that is needed to meet the respective commitments of political parties to deliver a net zero grid, whether in 2030 or 2035. Already the Net Zero Review highlighted the opportunity and potential that renewable and clean power, combined with a more flexible grid system, can deliver for householders: with cheaper bills, more reliable sources of energy, and the chance to become active participants in their future energy use and savings, if only the barriers and delays that are preventing the adoption of such an energy system were removed. This year, as all political parties

prepare to set out their plans for the next five years if elected, is a moment that must be seized, to both set out the costs, but the also the benefits of what the energy transition can deliver for the future.

2024 has the potential to be one of the most important years facing any policy maker or politician dedicated to making the energy transition happen. In the UK, we not only have the General Election later this year, but in less than 90 days, voters across the country will be going to the polls on 2 May to elect both their local councillors and in many regions, their Mayor.

For myself, and for anyone committed to net zero delivery, the next few weeks are a critical time, for it will be Mayors who will be at the helm of making the UK's climate ambitions a reality. Across the world, it is our cities that are leading the charge towards decarbonisation. In the UK, Mayors such as Sadiq Khan in London, who chairs the C40, or Andy Street in the West Midlands have made clear their commitment to the energy transition, recognising that it is an opportunity not a cost, that can provide residents with warmer homes, less pollution on our streets, and ultimately deliver regional growth and regeneration, attracting inward investment worth hundreds of millions of pounds, just as the Bristol Mayor Marvin Rees has done with the pioneering Bristol City Leap. For other Mayors, such as Ben Houchen in the Tees Valley, net zero has become a central part of their vision for their regions, a chance to bring manufacturing back to industrial areas long left behind.

It no longer matters to me what political colour these Mayors stand behind. As I stated in my resignation letter, I will now work with anyone and any party who is serious about delivering and implement net zero commitments and the energy transition on the ground. I'm pleased to announce that the West Yorkshire Mayor, Tracy Brabin, will now be co-chairing the Mission Zero Coalition with me, demonstrating our mutual commitment that we shouldn't seek to play politics with action on climate. Whereas once we sat on the opposite benches in the House of Commons, today we stand together united that net zero and climate action is too important to seek to divide, and play political games. Anyone who is serious about making the UK economy stronger, anyone who is serious about creating and protecting jobs and communities, knows that there is no alternative: the energy transition is here to stay. And regardless of what takes place at Westminster, I have been deeply impressed how our Mayors are serious about delivering the benefits of the transition for their regions.

I will be joining Tracy and other Mayors at the Convention of the North in Leeds in early March, making the case for why net zero is a positive force for change, a change that will benefit communities, if the right investment and commitment is made across the country.

It is a message that I sought to demonstrate in the Net Zero Review, Mission Zero, that when you get out of Westminster, when you get around the country, and meet businesses and industries who trade globally, or who operate with international supply chains, there is a

willingness and a desire to move further, faster. They know that to delay the energy transition, to delay the measures that need to be taken to reduce their carbon dioxide emissions, will only cost them more, and may ultimately cost them their business. Not Zero- or to ignore the imperative that right now, across the world, decisions are being taken in boardrooms about where to place international investment, and if the UK does not step up, or turns its face against net zero opportunities- would be an economic disaster for the UK.

That's why in advance of the 2 May elections, while I may have stepped down from the House of Commons, I am now stepping up my focus on demonstrating why and how net zero is the opportunity of our generation to deliver inward investment as the Net Zero Review calculated of up to £1 trillion, to create nearly half a million new jobs, to future proof our economy for the future. I will be getting around the country, visiting the regions where Mayoral elections are taking place, and will share a platform with any Mayor or candidate, to highlight the chance that net zero can bring to their region, a chance for investment that may not come again.

It is a vision that I know many Mayors share for their regions, but the task for 2024, ahead of the national General Election, is to weave these stories of success, from businesses to community energy projects, into a wider narrative, a national reality of what net zero and our journey towards clean and renewable energy, our pathway towards warmer and better homes, the drive towards cleaner forms of transport, is delivering for the UK. For ultimately, this is about hope.

Elections are won by parties setting out what they stand for, not by those parties that simply shout what they are against. Elections are won by the party that voters believe will deliver a vision of hope, how life in Britain can be improved, made better, by those who are not content with the status quo.

And there is in my mind no better opportunity for all political parties to demonstrate hope for a better Britain than in embracing the benefits that net zero can bring. The chance to restore nature and conserve local environments. The chance to deliver investment, jobs, growth, to establish new trading partnerships and export opportunities, to get spades in the ground and regenerate, restore and empower local communities to take decisions over how they wish to produce their own home grown-energy.

It is a narrative that I sought to begin to weave in the Mission Zero report, but to be honest, there is still so much more to do to finish the task. In contrast the siren calls of disinformation and dishonesty that seek to destabilise climate action for ideological purposes are growing ever more prevalent. 2024 must be a year in which, regardless of our mainstream political differences, those who are serious about the future of the UK, who want to provide hope and reassurance that the future can be better than the present, and certainly better than the past, must step up to deliver their messages in ways that can clearly communicate and cut through.

Labour's plan for a green mission, for instance, has been trapped in a sterile and irrelevant media debate over a £28 billion figure. It doesn't seem to matter that the current government, if you add up all the various spending commitments from £11 billion on offshore wind announced at COP28, to £20 billion on CCUS over 20 years, to an additional £6 billion for a Great British Insulation Scheme, has probably also committed to a similar amount of spending. Regardless of this, no one has ever said that net zero and the energy transition is being delivered solely by the taxpayer. Across the country, net zero provides a remarkable moment for private investment, often with a multiple of several pounds, sometimes into double figures, matching every public pound spent. I look back to 2019 when I was Science Minister, and I secured the largest uplift in R&D spend in UK history, from £12 billion a year, to £24 billion a year by 2025, yet at the time there was no doubt, or division between parties, that this was not the right thing to do if the UK wanted to face the future. And so it should be for a Green Mission also.

What should matter rather is the outcome, and how a long term, programmatic, mission-based approach can in turn reduce costs, by creating economies of scale, greater efficiencies and productivity, especially if delivered through a place-based, regionally focused plan. The certainty of a commitment by government, moving beyond a spending review period, is exactly what the Net Zero Review called for to deliver the confidence that investors, business and industry all need if they are to back the UK.

What we also need now is the detail, for delivery will be in the detail, to highlight how net zero is and can continue to deliver on the ground. The Mission Zero report, and indeed the Mission Zero Coalition in its reports and future reports, has sought to highlight what success can look like, and how delivery can be improved if we have a detailed long-term plan. With a plan can bring also long-term international leadership and further economic success. Just as the UK led as the first G7 country to sign net zero into law, and we led at COP26 with the most ambitious National Determined Contribution, so the UK can lead with an delivery plan on how to achieve net zero, that other countries can seek to emulate.

When it comes to Mission 2024, however, the UK is just one of many countries to be holding its national elections. Pakistan goes to the polls today, one of sixty countries in which elections will be held. In around twenty of these, making up a third of global emissions, the issue of climate action and the need to reduce emissions is a contested one. It is likely that in elections in the US and Germany, and wider EU elections, climate policies will become increasingly politicised, especially by populist parties that seek to stoke fear, insecurity and anger.

More than ever, if climate action is to succeed, it cannot merely go quiet at this moment in history, hoping to pass under the radar.

This is not a time for green hushing, when we need to be loudly proclaiming not just what needs to happen, but why and how net zero is the opportunity for growth, for a new economy, that the energy transition is happening regardless, and to turn back or to go slow and delay will only cost more, will add billions to the bills of those trapped on volatile fossil fuels, will cost jobs and growth that could have been ours. It is why it is so important in the UK, that we have a mature debate, based on the truth, and not falsehoods, on evidence and not slurs, that demonstrates consensus can be found.

It is a month today since I resigned in protest at new oil and gas licences. I did so not merely because countless organisations, from the Committee on Climate Change, to the UNCCC, to the International Energy Authority, have all stated clearly on record that new additional oil and gas is incompatible with climate commitments, but because there will be no future economic case for new oil and gas very shortly. To issue new licences, and to commission new oil fields, at a time when our demand for fossil fuels is about to plummet, is to create stranded assets, stranded communities, and stranded jobs that will soon cease to exist. At a time when we should be investing in the industries of the future, we cannot afford to subsidise the industries of the past. Above all, the case against new oil and gas is not merely because it is a climate disaster, but it is also an economic disaster in the making.

But to place false hope in oil and gas is just one failure in a wider lack of vision and hope for the future. When it comes to delivering the energy transition and net zero also, to row back, to delay and go slow, is to sleepwalk ever further into economic disaster, stagnation and decline. We are not only in a race against time to deliver on our emissions reductions, we are in a net zero race with other countries, seeking to attract the investment that could be ours.

That boardroom I mentioned earlier, where investment decisions are being made today, might be pausing its investment awaiting the outcome of certain elections, but ultimately those decisions will be made on the basis of which country provides the greatest certainty and the least risk. Let us ensure that the UK is their country of choice, rather than allow that investment to go elsewhere, by creating the investable and overwhelming case why we can be trusted to help lead the energy transition with all the benefits it can bring to industry and business. We can do better. And the country deserves better.