

The government's long road to COP 26

This week the government announced its support for hydrogen as a transport fuel and as a way of heating our homes. It said that it thought the hydrogen sector could create an additional 9000 jobs by 2030.

The UK economy has 31 million jobs, so the limited ambition for hydrogen this decade only sees an increase of 0.03% in employment if these hydrogen jobs are all additional. It contrasts with the current 1,000,000 vacancies the job market sports. It implies pessimism about the speed of expansion and take up of this new wonder fuel. These jobs would add just 0.9% to the total available if they are extra jobs.

Hydrogen has obvious advantages over some of the other proposed technologies. Heat pumps for homes would be much dearer and less effective than adapting our current gas boilers to run on 100% hydrogen instead of natural gas. Batteries cannot offer sufficient power relative to weight for heavy trucks and other large vehicles.

The intermediate plan is to see if they can introduce 20% hydrogen into our current natural gas. That at least has the advantage that we can keep our current boilers. I never saw how it could be green to make us dump our gas boilers long before they have worn out, given the amount of energy it would take to replace them with Heat pumps.

The energy policy priority I am urging is to secure the construction of some more electricity capacity before thinking of new ways to use more electrical power directly or indirectly via hydrogen. Producing green hydrogen will take a lot of renewable power.

I am also pressing to make COP 26 about China, Germany and other large producers of CO2 to catch up with the closures and changes the UK has already pushed through in the name of net zero.