

Give us more time

Ground Source Heat Pump Association chair **Bean Beanland** says the heat pump sector can deliver on meeting the government's green recovery aims – but it needs sufficient time to do so

Under 'normal' circumstances, energy policy would not be expected to move much in a month, especially during the parliamentary summer recess. In March, I was questioning whether we were serious about Net Zero 2050. In July, on the back of the government's Future Support for Low Carbon Heat consultation, I questioned the scale of the UK's ambition for the electrification of heat.

Covid-19 seems to have changed a great deal of government thinking. In that time, BEIS has announced the Green Homes Grant (GHG) voucher scheme for homes with £2bn of funding and a further £1bn for the decarbonisation of public buildings. Heat pumps of all archetypes appear to be eligible for both, although not, at this stage, hybrid systems.

In addition, BEIS has formed the entirely new Electrification of Heat Task Group, gathering industry, consumer representatives, standards organisations and other stakeholders.

Taken together, these initiatives, among others we have campaigned for, seem to signal a new-found realisation in government that the heat pump sector has a massive contribution to make, both to the climate change agenda and, more immediately, to the post-Covid financial recovery.

Heat pumps are just one of a number of technologies that are eligible for support, but significant changes will be required to give the heat pump industry an opportunity to deliver on these initiatives and to maximise the benefits.

As things stand, both funds require the money to be spent by 31 March



2021. This is a laudable commitment to injecting cash into the economy in the short term, but it risks creating false employment that rises fast, doesn't have the time to acquire new skills and then falls away just as quickly on 1 April.

Poor skills will result in poor quality work and the value of the investments being reduced. This is also risking the homeowners' own money, because the voucher is "part" funding only. This has to be unacceptable.

Employment opportunities

Heat pump projects, particularly ground- and water-source, take many months in gestation. It is just not possible to see entirely new projects coming to fruition by the end of March of next year, except for very simple air-source applications and these do not actually add

↳ Bean Beanland: government and industry should be able to formulate a heat decarbonisation strategy that sets the UK on the road towards 2050

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employment. The industry would merely retrain fossil fuel technicians and engineers to install them.

By contrast, building in-ground or in-water energy infrastructure creates new jobs because it is displacing imported fossil fuels. This is a genuine new employment opportunity, but much more time is needed to grow the skilled workforce to deliver the substantial benefits. For the funding for public buildings, we need to add in the timescales for public procurement processes.

However, there are tangible benefits for both government and industry in extending the timeframe for these capital injections. Taking these schemes out until March 2022 would provide time for quality projects to be delivered, but critically, it would also buy the time for industry and government to collaborate on the development of a long-term energy strategy for the coming 10-15 years, maybe even out to 2050.

This process would be able to take into account the Heat and Buildings Strategy document, due in the Autumn, and the revisions to Part L and the Future Homes Standard, both due to be published later this year. There is even talk – indeed expectation – of an Energy White Paper from the government in the next few months.

With this wealth of research available, the combined strengths of government and industry should be able to formulate a heat decarbonisation strategy that sets the UK on the road towards 2050.

This should include energy efficiency measures; thermal storage; cooling considerations; demand side response; closing the spark gap; smart integration with EV charging loads; massive electrification and decarbonised gases. Hydrogen, too, will have its place, once commercialised.

The strategic policy opportunity is immense. What we need now is some pragmatism within the Treasury to allow us all to realise the true long-term potential.