

Environmental Audit Committee

Oral evidence: Carbon Budget Seven follow-up, HC 361

Monday 15 June 2026

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Members present: Mr Toby Perkins (Chair); Julia Buckley; Jonathan Davies; Barry Gardiner; Sarah Gibson; Chris Hinchliff; Sojan Joseph; Manuela Perteghella.

Questions 1-60

Witnesses

I: Katie White MP, Minister for Climate, and Ryan McLaughlin, Director of Net Zero Strategy, at the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Katie White and Ryan McLaughlin.

Q1 Chair: Welcome, everyone, to the latest meeting of the Environmental Audit Committee. This is a follow-up to the report the Committee did on carbon budget 7 and, more recently, to the response we had from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

Today, we are pleased to have with us Ms Katie White, the Minister for Climate, and Mr McLaughlin, from the Department. First, welcome. Secondly, questions will be to you, Minister. If you think any would be more appropriately answered by Mr McLaughlin, we will leave it to you to pass them on. If we consider any to be more political than departmental, I am sure you would be unlikely to pass them on anyway, but we would say so. Beyond that, we will leave it to you to decide who is most appropriate to answer.

We are grateful to the Department for its involvement with this Committee in the carbon budget 7 process. We are also grateful for the fact that this process will go through far greater scrutiny than previous iterations have done. That is very welcome, as is the fact that we were able to get you before the Committee at relatively short notice to respond. A number of things were raised in our report that the Government subsequently responded to. On some questions, we did not entirely understand where the Department was, so we will go through those.

Before that, I will start with an issue where the sands appear to be slightly shifting in terms of where we thought the land lay, and where briefings are suggesting that things might change: the Government's zero emission vehicle mandate. It was reported this weekend that the Government are considering changing the ZEV mandate. As we know, the industry was on target with Government's requests of it in the period up to 2025. Reducing emissions from vehicles is the Government's single biggest carbon-saving measure, so we are interested in what implications any changes might have for the delivery of carbon budget 7. Minister, can you tell us whether there are plans to alter what we previously understood to be the Government's position on the ZEV mandate?

Katie White: Thank you to you, Mr Perkins, for inviting me, and to the Committee for all the scrutiny you have done; as you say, it is a key part of the process towards setting carbon budget 7, and I am very grateful for your input and feedback.

On your question about the ZEV mandate, electrification of vehicles is key to our transition. That is the truth. I am very excited about that transition. In the context of the middle east crisis, the transition and the electrification of vehicles make huge economic sense. It is key to the Department right now in terms of those energy price rises.

We have always said that we would look to review the mandate, and we are committed to doing that. We work across Whitehall. A number of Government Departments are interested in this key policy, as are a



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number of key stakeholders, whether that is car manufacturers, unions or the electric vehicle grid infrastructure sector, which is an exciting and growing part of our economy. We will continue to work with them and across Government, and look at the review, as we have always said we would.

Q2 Chair: Just to be clear, in terms of the review that we did of CB 7, based on the policies of the Government as they were, are there likely to be substantial changes that will undermine what the Government had previously said would be their biggest carbon saving: the removal from sale of new fuel vehicles by 2030, and the selling of electric-only vehicles by 2035?

Katie White: The ZEV mandate will be a core part of our carbon budget going forward. We remain committed to that review and making sure that we are doing it most effectively. There are also, as I alluded to in my previous answer, other factors going on, and the economics is doing a lot of the work for us right now; that is the situation we see. The mandate will still be a core part of it. We remain committed to the review process. Electrification is and will remain key to our carbon budget. Right now, the economics means that it makes sense for customers and citizens across the country to do everything they can to shift towards electrification. There has been no better time to do that.

Q3 Chair: No, I entirely agree. You referred to the various other stakeholders in Government. Can you tell us about any pressure you as a Department have come under—from the Department for Transport, trade unions or the sector, or indeed from the Treasury and No. 10—to weaken the stance on the ZEV mandate?

Katie White: We have constructive relationships across Government, within Parliament and with stakeholders. There are a variety of different opportunities and concerns around the transition. We want to make sure we have the best route for doing it, and we will continue to do that. But we are having constructive and robust discussions.

Q4 Chair: Great—I hope they are more constructive than robust. You just said that the Government was on target with the existing 2024-25 ZEV mandate, and that there has never been a better time to get an electric vehicle. I imagine that that gives you quite a bit to push back with against colleagues in these robust discussions. All of that sounds like a very good argument for carrying on with the policy as it is. Can you explain who it is who says we should be making changes?

Katie White: As I said, electrification is going to be key in the transition across carbon budgets. It is the No. 1 thing we are focusing on right now, particularly in the run-up to winter. It is the No. 1 thing I am concerned about in making sure we protect our citizens from price rises.

Q5 Chair: I think we are in the same place here, but that was not the question. The question is, who is telling you you are wrong?

Katie White: We are having discussions across the board. There are multiple elements in this transition. We want to make sure we deliver on



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our carbon budgets in a way that helps people, and we are going to have discussions across Government. We have already committed to the review, and we will look at it in the context of what is going on internationally and the changing circumstances.

Q6 **Chair:** Be a bit clearer with me, if you would, Minister. Who is saying, "We think you have got this wrong. You need to be less ambitious"?

Katie White: With due respect, I am not going to come and say, "This person said this and this person said that."

Q7 **Chair:** What arguments are being made for why the approach might not be the right one?

Katie White: We have always committed to having that review. We want to make sure we maintain a good car manufacturing base in the UK. We want to support the industry to transition towards those lower-carbon vehicles. It has been doing a lot of heavy lifting to do that, and we are seeing the benefits. We are making sure we continue that in the next phase of our transition.

Q8 **Chair:** Moving on to where we were ahead of this weekend's briefings, high levels of uncertainty are a feature of planning for the seventh carbon budget; obviously, the process is looking to the 2038 to 2042 period, so that is not surprising. What are the key delivery risks currently identified by the Department to achieving the budget set out for 2038 to 2042?

Katie White: We have a process that we manage continually to make sure we are on track. Clearly, there are always new things coming forward, and I am sure we will come on to AI, which was not discussed when we were setting carbon budgets 1, 2 and 3, but which is now part of our discussions all the time. We want to make sure that we have enough precautionary principles in our budget setting and that we allow that flexibility. We want to make sure that we grow the economy, but also that we have the right energy demand and meet our carbon commitments internationally and domestically. We have over 170 pages of impact assessment that will lay out those different elements. We will continue to do those things, and we monitor on a regular basis. Obviously, we also have the Committee on Climate Change, who give us our annual homework marking to see how we are doing.

Q9 **Chair:** We expect a debate and a vote on CB7 in Parliament imminently. When you stand up to present CB7 and explain why it is the right approach, Members will want to know what you have identified as key risks. What things will we most need to keep our eye on, given the uncertainty that we all understand is a feature of making policy 12 to 17 years in the future? What do you see? We as a Committee have identified things, but what do you see as the key risks to it being ready by 2038 to 2042?

Katie White: Let me flip it around slightly. I think the biggest opportunity and risk around—

Chair: With the greatest respect, the question I asked is clear. It was,

what are the risks, not what are the opportunities.

Katie White: I was going to say, if you will just let me finish, that the risk is around making sure we have that long-term investment; we need to make sure we have that investment trajectory. I am sure we will come on to the investment needs; we need to make sure that we have the investment and that we deliver. It is a big transition across the whole of our economy. We have done a great job on the electricity system, but we need to make sure we have electrification across the whole of our economy. As we move further ahead to carbon budget 7, agriculture becomes a bigger area, and we also need to look at homes, buildings and so on. There are areas that we need to keep under review to ensure that we are delivering; the targets are ambitious, and we want to make sure we are delivering on them.

Ryan McLaughlin: The carbon budget 7 target builds on the carbon budget 6 target. The carbon budget growth and delivery plan we published in October sets out the policies we see today. As you mentioned, Chair, it is a snapshot—things will change—of how we will achieve carbon budget 6. That gets you to 84% reductions in the CB7 period, which is a long part of the way there.

You can see in that plan that we have policies that are well developed and policies that are further down the line. Within Government, we keep really clear track of how policies are progressing; I would describe it as a portfolio of portfolios, because multiple major projects sit beneath it. Each of those policies and portfolios has an SRO assigned to it, and the correct governance on that. Many of those policies and portfolios will appear in their own right at this and other Committees for proper scrutiny.

Then, on the net zero side, we pull that all together to see what the picture looks like overall. We then ask, "How can we help to unblock some of this? What can we do to push it?" To do that, I chair a meeting of all the SROs across Government—from our Department, DEFRA, DFT and others. To take a small example of where we have identified things that could help, we noticed challenges with regulation and engaging with regulators, so we set up a cross-regulator forum. We are constantly monitoring delivery risks, but each programme is responsible for its own delivery risk within that.

Q10 **Chair:** I have let you finish your answer, and I still do not have an answer to the question: what are those key delivery risks?

Katie White: We have gone through what Ryan called the portfolio of portfolios, but we could go through sector by sector and talk about areas where we are over-delivering and where we are more—

Q11 **Chair:** What do you see as the main dangers to not achieving it? *[Interruption.]* Sorry.

Katie White: I thought there was a danger flag on your watch. Making some of those shifts across some of our building sectors is going to be difficult. On retrofit, those of us who have been around the sector for a



while know that some of that has been harder to achieve than we would have wanted; people do not like to look at retrofitting their homes. We know that agriculture is also an area where these things become challenging, and we need to look at some of them in the longer term to make sure we have solutions to reduce our emissions from agriculture. Those are two of the areas I am concerned about and keep an eye on.

Q12 Chair: Great. The Committee identified a number of big concerns. First, there is the competing demand for clean electricity and network capacity, and the ability of the grid to keep pace with the various demand. On sustainable food stocks, we have the aviation and biogas sectors with their demands, and often fighting over the same criteria. We also identified the growth in data centres, which we will come on to in more detail. On the contingency planning for carbon removals, the Government are apparently not considering behaviour change and do not want demand management on aviation, which then leaves holes in the Climate Change Committee's budgets. To what extent do those kinds of risks factor in your thinking? What actions are the Government taking to get from where the Climate Change Committee was suggesting to where the Government want us to be?

Katie White: You raised a number of points there, Chair. You are absolutely right that the Committee on Climate Change proposed a trajectory that was slightly more focused on behaviour change. Having reflected, we have decided to try a different route that is less reliant on consumers to make those differences. It may be that some behaviour changes happen for other reasons—for health reasons, for example, as people decide they want a more plant-based diet because of the co-benefits—but we are not going to force anybody to make those changes. We are focusing on making it cheaper and easier to do the right thing. That is the choice we have made.

You raised an array of other points; let me try to work through them. On competing demands, I think you will agree that our Secretary of State has been ferocious at working through the system since July 2024, when we came into government. This goes on to your second point around network capacity, but it is slightly adjacent: we are going through the grid queue and reordering it to make sure that the projects coming forward are real projects, not zombie projects or speculative projects, where often figures are put out that are not quite as big in reality as was speculated. With the clean power 2030 mission, we have been working through that systematically. You are absolutely right that grid capacity is a key area where we have been looking for investment, as well as ways to optimise. I am sure we will come on to AI, which could be helpful. More grid-to-vehicles ability in terms of batteries could also be helpful in managing grid infrastructure.

You talked about sustainable food stocks and land. You are right and you have huge experience in this area. It is really good that DEFRA introduced the land use framework, because in the longer term, land will become more valuable, and we need to be careful in choosing how we use land most effectively. At the moment, we need to prioritise food and biomass at



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the same time as carbon reduction, nature and biodiversity, and house building. Having the land use plan will help us to do that. Some of the choices we have made around biomass—I know my colleagues are very interested in this—are around shortening that transition. As other technological solutions come forward, we hope that land demand pressures will reduce, but those are longer-term choices.

You talked about data centres. There is a lot of excitement about this industry, and I think that is great. It is a growth opportunity for us, and we are keen to look at the ability of AI to reduce our energy needs and demands and how we can use it most effectively to be our tailwind and not our headwind. We are also looking at how we can site data centres where we have excess electricity production and how we can get it to work with our system as it is today. I do not know whether I missed anything in that canter through your questions.

- Q13 **Chair:** That is good. On the question of the Government's approach to demand management and behaviour change, your current CB7 pathway depends on nascent technologies, greenhouse gas removals and other less mature technologies that are not proven at this stage. Will you have to lean more heavily on those if public choice plays less of a role?

Katie White: We think that these technologies have a role. The Committee on Climate Change has been clear in each of its scenarios that CCUS has a role. There is also a role for GGRs. We have put a certain amount of investment in those, and we see the opportunity for the UK. Because of our geological heritage, we could have a comparative advantage in the longer term as well. It is a longer-term plan. We will keep things under review, but that is the plan as we set it out today.

- Q14 **Chair:** We know that you are not following the Climate Change Committee's advice on demand management, aviation, and behaviour change, so that means that something has to give; there is something extra that you are going to be doing in order to achieve the same outcome. Do you envisage a greater role for greenhouse gas removals and nascent technologies than the Climate Change Committee proposed, or is there something else I have not seen?

Katie White: No, you are absolutely right that we envisage a greater role for those technologies. We are looking at aviation technologies—some that are available now and others that are being explored. Whether it is electric planes or power-to-liquid, we are looking at all those different options. Technology plays a greater role in our pathway than in the Committee on Climate Change's pathway.

- Q15 **Chair:** Will we have a clearer idea of what it is by the time we vote on this? How much of the slack are nascent technologies likely to take up, given the choices that the Government are making?

Ryan McLaughlin: As I mentioned before, the pathway set out in the carbon budget delivery plan for carbon budget 6 does the vast majority of the heavy lifting for carbon budget 7. It prioritises known, established

technologies such as heat pumps, electric vehicles and electrification within industry. Of course, there

There is of course a role for nascent technologies, and while the view of the Government is slightly different from the CCC's in terms of the balance between the two, there are not different new technologies in the Government's pathway; there is a slight difference in how you lean on each one. The impact estimate that the Minister has referred to breaks down the deployment ratios in the carbon budget 7 period across each of those sectors. You can go through the impact assessment and see how much the Government are relying on CCS or on different types of technology. If you compare that with the CCC's, you come up with what you have just described as a pathway that is more reliant on some of the technological changes than on the behaviour ones.

- Q16 Manuela Perteghella:** I want to focus on the lack of cross-Government co-ordination. The advice from the Committee on Climate Change stated that the delivery of carbon budget 7 depends on co-ordinated action across all Government Departments, but we heard evidence that that is not happening—that there is misalignment of policies across Departments and that the Departments work in silos. Our own report recommended that the Government publish a cross-Government delivery framework. In your response, you committed to that. Will you commit, loud and clear, to publishing the robust framework that you have to track policy delivery on carbon budgets on an ongoing basis to ensure that transparency?

Katie White: Thank you for your question, although I somewhat refute the premise. I have been working in this area for a long time. When I came into this role last September, one of the things that I was really excited to see was the engagement from Departments that I had not worked as closely with before. For instance, the Department of Health and Social Care has been very involved. I work very closely with a lot of Government Departments, including the Foreign Office, as you would expect, DEFRA, the Treasury, DBT and the Department for Transport. I also work closely with the MOD.

In my experience, we work collaboratively across Government. What you are saying is welcome, but I cannot think of another area of Government where there is more scrutiny than carbon budgets. We have an independent adviser who does a yearly statement. As Ministers, we are always keen to come and talk to you; we welcome that, but at this stage I am not going to commit to another part of the process. It is an excellent process, but I do not think we are going to commit to other areas right now.

- Q17 Manuela Perteghella:** The Department's response stated that you were going to publish this robust framework to track the policy delivery. Are you doing that?

Katie White: We always come back with the carbon budget delivery plan, and we will do that. As you remember, last October we had to come back with a revised carbon budget delivery plan for carbon budget 6 because of

the legal challenge that happened under the last Government. We did that. Officials have been focused on setting carbon budget 7, and we will now move forward at pace to set the carbon budget delivery plan for carbon budget 7.

Manuela Perteghella: Would you like to add anything, Mr McLaughlin?

Ryan McLaughlin: As the Minister says, through the carbon budget plans, we have published thousands of pages-worth of scrutiny. Last time I was in front of this Committee, I mentioned that when we publish a plan, it has on it not the DESNZ logo but the HMG logo. That references the fact that it is a cross-Government document that requires input from DEFRA, DFT, Treasury and others, as the policies sit beyond the Department. As part of that, we publish indicators, which we committed to doing in the first carbon budget delivery plan in 2021. We also publish how we track that through. There is quite a lot of evidence and information in the public domain.

Q18 **Manuela Perteghella:** Will you commit to publishing a regularly updated risk and contingency register throughout CB7, as we recommended?

Katie White: We think that what we have in place at the moment is robust. I want officials to focus on making sure that they are delivering on the projects. We want scrutiny to be done—we have a huge amount of scrutiny, which is excellent—but I want officials to focus their time on delivery. I do not think we need another scrutiny stage at this point.

Q19 **Manuela Perteghella:** How can Parliament track Department-by-Department delivery, then? We are the scrutinising body for the Government's environmental targets.

Katie White: For sure. For these specific environmental targets, an annual report is published by the Committee on Climate Change, which is an annual marking of homework. I do not recall many other parts of Government getting an annual homework mark. That, I am sure, is an opportunity to scrutinise Government.

Q20 **Manuela Perteghella:** Our recommendation was that your Department publish, for transparency and accountability, the cross-Government policy delivery framework on carbon budgets.

Katie White: As Ryan said, when we publish something, it is on the basis of it being an HMG document. We were grateful for the scrutiny of the Committee, a lot of which we accepted, including pushing for a debate and so on; there were a lot of elements that came back, but we have to make a judgment about officials' time, and I would prefer that we focus on delivery rather than on any more scrutiny, as I think we have sufficient scrutiny at the moment.

Q21 **Manuela Perteghella:** You said that you work very well with your colleagues and in cross-departmental work. Can you give us an example of when your Department has successfully unblocked a cross-Government issue, taking remedial action if necessary, so that we remain on track to deliver the planned carbon emission reductions?



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Katie White: Since we came into office in 2024 with our clean power 2030 mission, we have made huge progress, whether that be reordering the grid connection queues, scrapping the onshore wind ban or announcing the warm homes plan. We have worked across Government in a number of areas; those were all cross-Government decisions that have ensured that we are on track to deliver on our carbon budgets.

Q22 **Jonathan Davies:** Thank you for joining us today. Information that the Government provided alongside the preparation for the carbon budget 7 delivery plan talks extensively about its economic benefits—perhaps more than £800 billion-worth of economic benefit, while cutting carbon emissions by 87% compared with levels in the 1990s. Industry, markets and investors are very much looking for detail on what will come so that they can make decisions around working with Government to deliver it. Will the delivery plan be a stand-alone document or will it form part of an updated plan covering carbon budgets 4 to 7?

Katie White: Thank you, Mr Davies, for your question, and for championing of parts of the industry, particularly around heat pumps. You are absolutely right that there is opportunity here. You will know that since coming into office in July 2024, we have secured £90 billion of investment around the clean energy transition. The carbon budgets allow that long-term certainty, fundamentally to make sure that we get investment, as investors want certainty more than anything else. As has been the precedent, we will be publishing a stand-alone document.

Q23 **Jonathan Davies:** Thank you very much for your support of the heat pump industry in Belper; it was a joy to have you there recently. I am pleased to hear that there will be a stand-alone document, but could you give us a rough timescale for when it might come?

Katie White: I might lean on Ryan, but my understanding of the precedent is that it usually within an 18-month period. Is that correct?

Ryan McLaughlin: Through the previous six carbon budgets, it has taken different times to prepare plans. As you can imagine, preparing plans out to 2042 takes some time. The Government will respond as soon as is reasonably practicable, but—I refer to the previous question as well—it is a cross-Government effort. First of all, we require the setting of the target: hopefully that can be achieved by the House later this month. Then, we can begin the work of understanding the policy options that sit beneath the technical feasibility information we published in the impact assessment. My team and I have already started working on that, and we will continue to work on it at pace. We will publish the document as soon as is reasonably practicable.

Q24 **Jonathan Davies:** Do you think you might be able to give us an update, perhaps within three months, on where you are?

Ryan McLaughlin: I do not think we could commit to a particular timeline today. As I say, we first have to understand where Parliament wants to set the level, and then we can take it forward from there.



Q25 Jonathan Davies: I want to ask about aspects of the delivery plan. Green hydrogen, if we can generate electricity to deliver it, is a massive opportunity, especially for the steel industry, which accounts for 14% of Britain's industrial emissions and 7% of all global emissions. To what degree will the opportunities offered by green hydrogen feature in the delivery plan?

Katie White: I cannot comment specifically or give you a number to add to the impressive numbers that you have shared around green hydrogen. At the moment, we are focusing on electrification and areas where the shift is perhaps easier and is already happening. We are building on that success. You mentioned the harder to abate sectors, such as steel. That is obviously something that our party and our Government are very keen on. We are exploring all the options for how to support those sectors, but I do not want to say today specifically which technologies would be the right ones to do that.

Q26 Barry Gardiner: To follow up what the Chair was pressing you on earlier, Minister, when will the Government respond to the Whitehead review?

Katie White: I believe the greenhouse gas removals review, which Lord Whitehead is very passionate about, is imminent, but let me just double check. Ryan, do you know when it will be?

Ryan McLaughlin: I am afraid I do not.

Q27 Barry Gardiner: It has now been eight months. Perhaps you could write to us if and when that becomes clear.

Katie White: For sure. He is, as you know, very passionate about it.

Q28 Barry Gardiner: Indeed. One of his recommendations says that the "Government must continue to aim to achieve net zero as far as possible through emissions mitigations, with only supplementary roles for GGR solutions that balance emitted GHGs." Do you agree that they should play only a supplementary role and that we have to continue down the mitigation route as the maximal route?

Katie White: Yes, mitigation has to be our primary lever. As we have said, right now, electrification is the primary route towards delivering emissions reductions, and it is the best thing at the moment. You are right that it will be the primary route, but the supplementary role obviously has a larger window. I am conscious that—

Q29 Barry Gardiner: That leads me to the crunch question: will you publish a response to the Whitehead review before you set out the role of GGRs in delivering carbon budget 7—in the carbon budget delivery plan? The Government cannot really do that until you have properly considered the GGR strategy that the Whitehead review says you should create.

Katie White: I think we can commit to making sure that we come back to you on when there will be an official response to the Whitehead review and how we anticipate it will interact with the delivery plan.

Q30 Barry Gardiner: Yes, and the creation of a greenhouse gas removals

strategy being a logical precedent.

Katie White: I agree. We will come back to the Committee on when the Whitehead review will be published and how that will interact with the delivery plan.

- Q31 **Barry Gardiner:** Super. Right, aviation: the Climate Change Committee's CB7 advice states that the current goals and design of CORSIA—the carbon offsetting and reduction scheme for international aviation—"are not sufficiently ambitious and robust to consider their use towards UK carbon budgets." The CCC has also advised that "The Government should not plan to use international credits...to achieve the Seventh Carbon Budget."

However, in the carbon budget growth and delivery plan in October, which the Government say should contribute significantly towards us meeting CB7, they credit CORSIA with having an emissions reductions and removals impact of 2.8 mtCO_{2e} over the CB6 period from 2033 to 2037. That adds up to 10 megatonnes over that period, which should not be included according to the CCC.

CORSIA will end in 2035, and we are not even in the mandatory phase of the scheme, which does not start until next year. How on earth can Government credit the scheme with having such a significant emissions reduction impact when it has not even started, it will finish halfway through the CB6 and the CCC has explicitly told you not to use it when accounting for carbon budgets?

Katie White: This is the first budget that we are looking at including international aviation and shipping in. You know that we work through the IMO on CORSIA and it is limited to international aviation and shipping. To date, we have not used any of those international credits.

- Q32 **Barry Gardiner:** You have predicated it for that amount coming from CORSIA, but I do not see how, first, that is in line with what the CCC recommended, and secondly, how you can do it when we are not in the mandatory phase and it will be extinguished by CB7.

Ryan McLaughlin: The UK works collaboratively with its international partners through the IMO to ensure that CORSIA will be robust credits. We remain confident that at the time we will come to use them in the carbon budget 6 period they will be robust and credible enough to use. That was the position set out in October.

- Q33 **Barry Gardiner:** Look, I am a reasonable man. *[Laughter.]* Well, some people think I am a reasonable man; some people do not. I do not accept that as an answer, because it is not an answer. I do not expect a full answer to it now, but I would like you to go away and write to us to say how you marry up what the CCC has advised with the construction of CORSIA and with what you have already put in as the element that will be taken up by this, which is 10 megatonnes. I am happy for you to write to us and try to square that circle, but at the moment, I cannot see how you do it.



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Can I talk about the economic modelling that goes with the draft CB7 order? The seventh carbon budget uses fuel prices from 2024 and OBR fiscal projections from 2025. As of last night, we think a bump in the road might have been sorted out—who knows? The Department must be considering the effect on energy prices and supply chains from the conflict in the middle east, whether it goes on or not. Gently, I put it to you that given what has happened is not that your projections are already out of date, but the central estimates of both climate damage and net zero transition are sensitive to those assumptions. I would like to know how you are balancing them and the way in which you are approaching the budget, given the situation.

Katie White: You are a huge expert in this field, and you are right that, with the international fossil fuel price spike, the figures would have looked more favourable to low carbon investment, and do look more favourable today. You also know that we are trying to strike a very fine balance, because factors change in different directions. We know that fossil fuel price spikes are becoming increasingly frequent. We also do not want in any way to overestimate what these figures are. We have tried to take, if anything, a modest and conservative approach to doing this, so that we can make sure that people are aware. If our figures end up being more compelling, that will be in many ways a good thing for the transition. At the moment, you are right that the figures mean that those return on investment costs are even better. We do also all hope that the fossil fuel price comes down, because at the moment, none of us are content with the impact on all our constituents. Do you want to say anything more about the modelling?

Ryan McLaughlin: I think that answers that. These are necessarily a snapshot. In the impact assessment, we modelled from that snapshot and modelled sensitivities to a wide range of different scenarios. We did high fossil fuel prices and low fossil fuel prices, and we assessed the impact of carbon value changes. For the first time, we did an assessment of a no net zero scenario versus the pathway that we are on, where we already bake in a lot of the savings of policies. In every one of them, it came out with a positive cost-benefit analysis to take action. You are completely right that, if we ended up in a world where fossil fuel prices were higher, the benefits would be commensurably greater.

Q34 **Barry Gardiner:** The impact assessment actually states that you have not considered feedback loops as part of the cost assessment. Let us suppose, counter to what we all hope, that fossil fuel costs do rise and continue to be high, and the cost-benefit analysis then works out even more in the favour of the transition. I suppose what I really want to hear from you, Minister, is that that will not in any way allow you to lessen and slacken your targets. Do you see what I am saying?

Katie White: In many ways, it should help—you are right. You know how committed I am—



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Barry Gardiner: It would be the wrong expression to say that I do not want you to take your foot off the gas, but you know exactly what I am saying.

Katie White: My foot is on my EV pedal, within the speed limits, at pace. I think you are absolutely right that, if anything, since these figures and this assessment, it has moved towards a more compelling argument towards a low carbon transition. Sadly, there are no Members here from the official Opposition, but we are slightly protected because of the decisions they made about offshore wind and because of the carbon budgets and the continued investment that happened under the last Government. We would be more exposed if we did not have those renewables on our system at the moment. That is a cross-party effort and I hope we can move forward with that. Fossil fuel price spikes are continuing. We are trying to make sure we have a modest view, but as Ryan said, it was a snapshot in time.

Q35 **Barry Gardiner:** I have one last question, which I do not expect you to answer. When will the carbon budget 7 delivery plan be published?

Katie White: As soon as possible.

Barry Gardiner: Exactly what I thought—you did not answer it.

Chair: Here's someone who does expect his questions answered—Chris Hinchliff.

Q36 **Chris Hinchliff:** Minister, you spoke about your approach to achieving carbon budget 7 being focused on avoiding risk by leaning toward technology where possible rather than behaviour change, in order to get where we need to. We have also spoken a lot about electrification, but of course, electrification itself will require behaviour change. We have seen in the news recently quite a lot of debate about the fact that the CCC, for example, is predicting massive increases in electricity demand, but what we have seen in the last two decades is a reduction in electricity demand in this country. Do you feel there is any risk of being over-optimistic about the behaviour change needed for an electrification route to CB7?

Katie White: I do not disagree with your premise. You are absolutely right that there is a certain amount of shift—there is behaviour change in terms of EVs, the electrification of homes etc. But when we talk about behaviour change in this context, we are talking about the harder, more challenging behaviour change elements, which are usually focused around diet and so on. You are absolutely right that there has been a shift.

Let's talk about EVs for a second. Not least because of the impact of the middle east crisis and the price and cost efficiencies, we have had the best March and the best May of EV sales ever. We have had to say that running an electric vehicle is now half the price of running a petrol vehicle, and it is. It is in part because of the price, but also because the charging infrastructure has changed entirely. I have been an electric vehicle driver for six years. When you started out, it was pretty horrendous and you were having to give your inside leg measurement every time you tried to



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sign up to each different thing. Now you just tap and go on every single one. There are now 119,000 charging points, so I think there are more public charging points than petrol points in the UK. The shift to electric vehicles is going really well. That is partly because of the policy measures that we have introduced, such as the charging points and the £3,750 that you can get off vehicles, but also the economics are now stacking up because of external factors as well.

We are keeping the number of sales constantly under review all the time, and we are making sure that we are on track to deliver. That is the point of the budget: we have to make sure at all times that we are keeping on track. We have taken a central route, which is ambitious but not overly ambitious; it is realistic. We keep it under review all the time. I am always in touch with officials about how we are delivering on each of these elements and whether there are tweaks to do. We also work with industry and with stakeholders to deliver on that.

- Q37 **Chris Hinchliff:** My point was that, in the political and policy space, we often say that electrification is easier than what we traditionally refer to as behaviour change, but some people are starting to dispute that based on the evidence we have seen so far. It is good to hear your positivity, but just to push again, would you not accept what we heard from the CEO of EDF that energy demand is heading down when we expected it to head up, and we therefore need to reassess our infrastructure approach to renewable energy, for example?

Katie White: Energy demand has declined since the last fossil fuel crisis—the invasion of Ukraine. There was a shift in behaviour in that people looked around their houses to see whether they could make tweaks and adjustments, and some of those have been maintained. That is true, but at the same time, the electrification of vehicles and homes has continued to increase. Obviously energy overall is different to electrification, but that is what I see at the moment.

In this period we talk about the middle east crisis, and we have never seen such demand for sales and electrification. We won't get Ryan started on his solar panels and his batteries, but the shift over is greater than we have ever had. Right now, I think we are in the best moment possible for electrification. Obviously it is my job and the Secretary of State's job to make sure that that meets our budgets in the long term.

- Q38 **Chris Hinchliff:** To take a slightly different angle, and again thinking about transport in particular, the Government's CB7 is predicated very much on reducing emissions in transport through moving people into electric cars, much more so than on modal shift into public transport. Again, that approach, which is reliant on electrification, obviously also has implications for the amount of infrastructure that we need to construct and host in our communities, which you will be aware is often a thorny subject. Do you have concerns about the political risks to delivery of CB7 of an approach that—again—is a high-infrastructure approach based on electrification?

Katie White: There are multiple layers to the requirements that you are talking about, whether it is around an off-shore wind turbine, an interconnector, a pylon, a charging point, or within our homes. When Ryan talks about portfolios of portfolios, there are different elements that we could comment on and say how each one of those elements is doing.

It is really important that we bring people with us on this journey. We need to invest in our electricity and energy infrastructure; I do not think that there is an option of no investment. Sometimes, people compare it to, “We will do nothing”, and I do not think that is an option.

We have a grid infrastructure that does not meet the demand that we have at the moment. The options are that we either have a fossil fuel-based system going forward, or a system based on renewables and clean energy going forward. We have chosen the latter.

We want to consider how we achieve grid optimisation, whether that is through vehicle-to-grid options and whether AI can help us in terms of that. However, there is a certain amount of infrastructure required, and you are right that we need to work with communities to make sure that they are supportive and look at those options. That is why we have looked at community energy and community benefit. However, it is about working with communities to look at the role they are playing and to ensure that they understand their role, and about how we support them in that transition.

Is there anything you want to add, Ryan?

Ryan McLaughlin: It is such a good question, because it is such a challenge. When we published the public participation plan at the end of last year, that was about how we tell the story and speak to people’s hearts as well as their heads.

The Minister and I have talked about the economic benefits, but there are also the stories that have to be told. What we see from the stories and the communications is that people buy these technologies and they do not want to go backward, whether that is EV, or the solar panel and the battery. And the approach taken in carbon budget 6 and for carbon budget 7 will be to make those green choices—the cleaner and greener options—the easier options and the cheaper options, so that people move that way.

Then the challenge becomes: “How do you build our infrastructure in such a way that people can access it and are not held back from accessing it?” You can start to shift the conversation into a much more positive reinforcing cycle. It is really important that we get that story right as we step through this and that we work to set the right incentives. That is why there is the warm home plan, the boiler upgrade scheme and the electric vehicle car grant, to try and work through these options to make them the positive option, so that they become the greener option as well.

Q39 **Chris Hinchliff:** Okay. That brings me on to probably my last question. Obviously, I completely agree that we are only going to reach net zero if we bring the public with us. Do you feel that your approach is doing



enough at this stage to make sure that the low-carbon options in all sorts of aspects of our lives are affordable for people of all backgrounds in our country?

There is another aspect, distributional fairness, which is perhaps more often left out of this debate than other aspects. As we have more and more infrastructure related to a net zero economy in our country, there is the possibility that it gets clustered in certain communities, which relates back to the point I made before, and it can lead to a lot of political division. What approach will the Government take to minimise risks to CB7 by ensuring a fair geographical distribution of the infrastructure?

Katie White: I think I know where you are coming from. Are we doing enough? We could point to all the things we have done since we came into office. For community benefit, we have the GB Energy community ownership models. We are looking at various approaches, and a lot of that has been informed by talking to parliamentarians, including your, who have played an excellent role on the ground saying how communities would support this work and how we could make amendments to achieve it.

Is there more to do? I am sure that there is always more to do, and we are always looking for opportunities. We are looking at where the distributional impacts are—we always look at the distributional impacts of our policies. For example, if someone is home charging their EV—I will come on to solar, which is there—it is a lot cheaper if they have a driveway and can get some of those overnight charging rates. We are looking at such things to make sure that the policy is fair. We are looking at those opportunities across the board.

You are absolutely right that there is some clustering. It is interesting and helpful to hear about hosting infrastructure. I had an excellent conversation with Lord Deben, who is a former chair of the Committee on Climate Change and himself, I believe, a host of a solar farm. He is quite strong in his defence of that—"It's temporary infrastructure." Tom Bradshaw, chair of the NFU, has talked about being able to diversify. At the same time, however, we need to make sure that we are thinking about the land use plan, which we discussed before. You are right that need to look at clustering. It is about looking at the 1% of land, and how that is something that we will take into account.

Q40 **Chris Hinchliff:** You have mentioned a couple of times a working paper, which I believe was published by your Department last year, about community ownership, community benefit and standardising that. It was going to look at shared ownership as a standard offer to communities hosting renewable energy. As far as I am aware, there has been no response yet to the request for public input on that working paper. I do not think that this is in your ministerial portfolio, but if you could take it away—

Katie White: No, it isn't but I will report to, I believe, Minister Shanks and ask him to come back to you.



Q41 Sarah Gibson: Thank you for being here, Minister. While your response to our report cites that actions have already been taken by the Government to lower electricity prices, such as on the renewables obligation and the energy company obligation, it does not really address our specific recommendation, which was to move the appropriate policy costs from energy bills to general taxation. Will you elaborate a little on why you did not respond to that?

Katie White: We have taken some out. I think 75% of the renewables obligation was taken on to general taxation, which is £150 off the costs of energy. That was a political decision made in exactly that format, so we did do that. We also have the warm home discount, which is £150 off for another 6 million individuals, and we started this process of looking at decoupling the gas from the electricity price. We very much did do that.

Q42 Sarah Gibson: In that case, I am pleased to hear that. We have all been talking about decoupling for such a long time. At every emergency briefing that I go to in the constituency, that is the one thing that people come up to ask me about afterwards. This is a difficult question, but is there any timeline for being able to do that? That leads on to my next question, which is about the Climate Change Committee being clear that the electricity-to-gas price ratio needs to fall.

Katie White: You are absolutely right about that coming up in every briefing. If we can bring down the costs, it will make this whole thing a lot easier, for sure. On the pace at which we have moved, I do not think that anyone would deny—excuse this pun—the energy with which the Secretary of State has approached this agenda since we came to office in 2024. He has absolutely hit the ground running on the clean power mission and on looking at those costs. We have had the warm home discount and the £150 off renewables, and we have begun this process. Ryan might want to say more about the timeline, but we have begun this process to look at the decoupling. It is absolutely within everyone's interest to do that as quickly as possible, but obviously these are big decisions. We will continue to do that. I am sorry, there was a second question.

Q43 Sarah Gibson: Yes. The Climate Change Committee was talking about reducing the electricity-to-gas price ratio. It needs to fall further, from about 4 to about 2.2 to 2.6 by 2040, to meet CB7. Do you accept that analysis? If so, what further plans are there to bring electricity prices down?

Katie White: You will understand that what we are doing is shifting from a model of, broadly, almost renting a commodity off other countries, in terms of buying gas and fossil fuels off other countries. We are shifting to an ownership model where we invest in our infrastructure as if we were investing in our own home, and there is a down payment cost on that. The costs do come down longer term in terms of electrification. We want to do that as quickly as possible, but we are trying to build that new system as well as bring down costs. Ryan, can you speak in terms of the specific figures?



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Ryan McLaughlin: I will not comment on the 2.2 to 2.6., but the CCC is right to say we need to go further to bring that ratio down. Electricity prices are high because a lot of the time the price is set by gas and we need to reduce that gas. The contracts for difference have been really successful. Modern renewables build is set on a contract for difference, so the price is stable and not linked to gas.

What the Government announced in April and are taking forward, is to offer legacy low carbon generators that currently receive the renewables obligation the option to move to a fixed-price CfD. That can build on the success of what we have at the moment and further decouple those prices. The key bit is to avoid the gas price setting the electricity price, and that pushes the ratio right down. That is the next big thing that we are pushing.

We will bring forward plans later this year. The second thing is looking at the pricing. The Government committed to further work on reforming national pricing. That work is continuing because that will help us bear down on costs and make sure that we are sending the right price signals throughout the network so that we can really push the electrification challenge and show people the benefits of it.

Q44 **Sarah Gibson:** Going back to Chris's point about bringing the public with us, my biggest concern at the moment is that the costs are high so there is a large segment of the population who are not only not able to benefit from this, but are at some point going to become antagonistic towards it. We are in the very difficult position of a them-and-us sort of situation, which I am sure you are keen to avoid.

Katie White: Of course. Since I took on this role last September, it has very much been my endeavour to make the case as much as we can and bring colleagues with us. That is across Parliament and the country. You are absolutely right that costs are key to this. In some areas, the costs are working in our favour because they are obviously coming down. We are having some of those cascade effects, which is great. Electric vehicles are turning out to be cheaper, and, obviously, the second hand market is coming forward as well.

We are looking at all options to see whether we can accelerate that, but you are absolutely right, this is key to doing it. We are also looking at working together as parliamentarians to explain what the direction of travel is, why these decisions are taken and how they will affect security and bring down your bills in the longer term. We need to make sure that those bills come down. That is why we made that big decision about the £150 off; we knew that cost of living was the number one issue for our constituents up and down the country. We all hear that every day, so we have taken those decisions. We also want to invest for that longer term trajectory that will put us in the most secure position that we can be in.

Q45 **Sojan Joseph:** Thank you, Minister, for your time. The role of local authorities is crucial. Do you accept that local authorities will not be able to deliver the measures needed to meet the CB7 target without



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appropriate powers and resources, including ringfenced funding?

Katie White: I absolutely agree that local authorities are key to this. We have some excellent pioneering local authorities who are leading the way on this and. We and DESNZ work with the local net zero delivery group. I chair a group on that, and I am looking forward to meeting them in the next week or two. It is a cross-party group of excellent council leaders who give me invaluable advice in terms of what is actually happening on the ground. You will know that this Government have had a settlement for councils that is way above what was in the previous Government and has that long-term settlement agreement. There has been a recommendation, which we will be talking through at the local net zero delivery group, around whether there should be targets on that. I am open to discussions, but to be honest, I think it is for each council leader to decide the most effective way to do that, because we are all sat in different parts of the country, whether urban or rural, and therefore the needs will be different.

I absolutely think they are key to that, and I am working with all parties to decide the best way of supporting them in doing that. But we do not want to have onerous targets, or hypothecation, if they are not going to be helpful in doing that.

- Q46 **Sojan Joseph:** Maybe you can explain it a little more in relation to a particular example I am going to share with you. It is welcome that the Government announced £25 million for the electric vehicle payment channels grant for 2025-26. I have concerns about how this grant will be used in Kent. I wrote to the local council and, in a letter to me dated 14 November, it said, "The council, after careful consideration, has decided not to submit an application for this electric vehicle payment channels grant... Our decision is based on the need to ensure that the electric vehicle charging infrastructure introduced within the public areas meets all relevant safety and technical standards."

The Government's own document, published on 30 April 2026, states that Kent county council had £667,000 allocated for this purpose, but it used only £50,000, so the public are missing out. We are going to miss the targets, and the document itself says that many councils did not apply for this grant, which was available. How are we going to meet this CB7 target if local councils are refusing to claim this grant and do the job?

Katie White: It sounds like Kent county council missed a real opportunity there, because I know we have had a lot of investment going out through LEVI networks. I am sure many of your colleagues will be benefiting from that, and it is a shame if your constituents are not getting that opportunity.

As I said in a previous answer, we now have more charging points than petrol pumps in the UK, which is unprecedented. But it is something for us to reflect on where councils are not taking up those opportunities. We have a lot of excellent councils that are taking them up and are delivering on this at the moment, and we are looking at following that leadership model. I would be very interested to hear examples of laggards, and it



sounds from what you say that Kent is not taking advantage of the opportunities being taken by the councils that are leading the way.

- Q47 **Sojan Joseph:** Whether it is due to the ideological principles of certain political parties or safety concerns, how are we going to address that challenge? Earlier, you said you were working closely with some of the councils.

Katie White: There are no safety concerns, and it is the responsibility of parliamentarians across the board to be really clear about this, because these are incredibly safe technologies that are being used across the world and across our country.

We have talked about support among the public. There are definitely some people who want to politicise part of this agenda and talk about the logos, the commitments and so on, but at the same time they are very keen to keep the investment and the jobs that are attached to the low-carbon transition. I have seen this in Hull, for instance, where people do not want the climate emergency, but they definitely want the jobs and the investment. To be honest, I want to move forward with those jobs and that investment, and I do not want to get into lots of debates about what logos are on things. That is a waste of everybody's time.

People who peddle this nonsense are almost back-peddalling Britain. We should be looking at the opportunities. The carbon budgets were the idea of a Conservative Government and introduced by a Labour Government, and the last few were delivered by a Conservative Government. There has been a cross-party consensus that has delivered the long-term investment that is now crucial to our communities and jobs. The CBI has had a report out in only the last couple of weeks saying that we now have about a million jobs attached to the low-carbon transition. Let us focus on that and, in the longer term, on how we can deliver on it for our constituents.

- Q48 **Julia Buckley:** Building on what we just heard—that there is effectively a postcode lottery and that where you live in the country and which council you have determines whether you are lucky enough to have some of this infrastructure—is there any appetite from the Government to look at introducing not targets, but a clear statutory duty on each council to explore how they could help to deliver our targets?

Katie White: I understand that that was a recommendation of the Local Government Association. We will be discussing it with the Local Government Association and the Local Net Zero Delivery Group to see what is most practical. I think we just need to be practical about this. If it ends up, as you say, with communities missing out, a duty may be the right way forward. But we are open, we are practical and we are looking at the most sensible ways forward, so that we can optimise the outcomes for our constituents and communities around the country.

- Q49 **Julia Buckley:** Would it help to depoliticise some of this space if the funding and resources that would flow with a statutory duty were a given, rather than an option?



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Katie White: It is definitely worth considering. At the end of the day, we need to think about the impacts for our citizens across the whole country, and it is the responsibility of each Government Department to think about that. If there are significant issues, that will definitely factor into our decision making. As I say, we will go into this with an open mind and look at the evidence and at the suggestions from across the country to see what will help. You make some excellent points, and I will take them in with me.

Q50 **Julia Buckley:** Can you assure us that when you meet the LGA, you will have colleagues from MHCLG in the room to make sure you have that join-up?

Katie White: That is an excellent suggestion. MHCLG come with me to various meetings. We have another grouping, called the Net Zero Council, and MHCLG have definitely attended different meetings. I am not sure if they are due to attend this one, but I will take the point away and let you know what the interaction is. We have a great working relationship with MHCLG.

Q51 **Julia Buckley:** Get them locked into that one.

Katie White: Okay. Thank you for the suggestion.

Q52 **Manuela Perteghella:** I want to continue with the issues raised by Sojan and Julia. Warwickshire county council has declared that they will abandon their carbon net zero commitments. They have amended their new council plan and will not be bound by the two climate emergency declarations from 2019 and 2025. What are the implications, if any, for national carbon budget delivery of rolling back local climate targets?

Katie White: On the different examples that have been raised by Committee members, I would gently ask council colleagues, when we are seeing heatwaves, increased flooding and impacts across the country, and no one, I believe, is denying that climate change is happening, what their response is. If they are responsible people in positions of leadership, there is surely a response to that, so what is their action plan?

We, as central Government, will support in any way we can, but local leaders and council leaders are obviously best placed to deliver on a lot of these opportunities. We do not want some communities taking advantage of those, and other communities missing out on them. We have talked a number of times in this Committee about electrification, and it is a real opportunity.

To be honest, the thing that really worries me right now is how we protect consumers. We know that energy prices are likely to continue to rise—although a deal is hopefully made on the international stage—so how do we protect consumers? For all political parties, the common-sense approach, it seems to me, is to ask how we protect people.

As I say, councils have a key role in delivering, whether it is around infrastructure or social housing, or working with us on schools and



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retrofitting infrastructure. I would love them to be part of the solution and to give us those tailwinds, so that we can work together to deliver.

Again, I am very happy to have constructive feedback on where the challenges are or where communities are not happy. But for prices, for energy security and for future generations, we have to have a clear plan around clean energy and a nature-positive climate future.

- Q53 **Chair:** This session so far has focused on Members on the Committee asking the Government to go further, be quicker and double down on those commitments. There are also Members on the Committee who take a different view and who oppose net zero, just as there are in Parliament. Unfortunately, they are not able to be with us today, but it is worth while at least getting you to respond to some of those calls, to reflect the debate in the country and in Parliament, and to recognise that, while there are those hitting the Government over the head for not doing more, there are also those saying that the Government are going too fast. Your comments about rejecting the CCC advice on behaviour change and demand management suggest that the Government are at least sensitive to some of those calls. What do you say to those who say, "Yes, we accept that climate change is real, but we think that net zero is unaffordable or too ambitious, and is going to punish people who can't afford it," and that the Government should slow down?

Katie White: What I would say is that if you actually listen to the public and look at the polling on this, public support for our transition is incredibly high—I think we are at 68% support for taking more action to tackle climate change. I think most political parties would bite your hand off for some of those numbers.

Chair: I know one that would.

Katie White: I appreciate that, in this context and the social media world we live in, sometimes saying controversial things gets you more attention, so I wonder whether that is the motivation for some of this. But when we look at the UK, our natural resources on this windy little island are wind. I would like to take advantage of our most abundant resource. I want to set us up for an energy-secure future that gives us reliable, low-cost energy that we can hand over to the next generation, and for us to be in a slightly better position. I think that is the motivation of most people.

I am surprised when we hear these things from Members. I understand that Members from other parties, including Mr Tice, have their own electric vehicles, and I think that would only be fair for other people. I want to support as many people as possible to also have the joy and price benefits of driving an electric vehicle.

- Q54 **Chair:** When it comes to behaviour change and demand management, you accept to an extent that we have to take the public with us. You are right that the polling for Government taking action to improve climate change is very positive. When it comes to measures like ULEZ or others, where we are asking the public to make changes rather than the Government, then



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the polling becomes more hazy. I was here in the last Parliament, when our party got a bit nervy about ULEZ and some of those measures. How do you balance what we are apparently hearing on things like the ZEV mandate, demand management and aviation with the much more robust approach the Government have taken to, for example, those calling for more oil and gas exploration? Where do the lines sit for you?

Katie White: There is quite a lot in there. I think people can hold the sense that they would like a low-carbon, secure, cheaper energy future, and at the same time there are behaviour change measures. You talk about aviation, where people would still like to go on holiday and fly, but they would like to have a low-carbon future. I think it is for us to sit back and think, "Where can we make those shifts, where it is easier and within our constituents' interests, most effectively?"

We have talked a lot about electrification, and having an electric vehicle is an upgraded experience, as is having solar panels like Ryan, in terms of bringing bills down. I was door-knocking the other day in a constituency that was not mine, and a gentleman was complaining that he had had energy debt of £1,000, but he had had some solar panels fitted and had managed to bring that down to £170. So this is about giving constituents the opportunity to take back control of their energy and actually reduce some of those prices.

Of course, with each of these things—we blow them up into different moments and we can go through each of those moments—we want to make it as cheap and easy as possible for each of our constituents to come along on the journey with us. We also want to make sure that people have an upgraded and fulfilling life. Those are choices, and we have tried to navigate that in the most practical and sensible way we can.

Q55 **Chair:** You referred to electric vehicles, and you and I both have one. When you have your own drive and are able to charge at home, it is a relatively easy choice. If you live in a flat or on a terraced street, it becomes a much more difficult choice. One of the things we were really concerned about in our report was that those with less means found the transition more difficult, for a whole variety of reasons. So can you tell us more about how the Government are going to address these questions of equality and fairness, and support people with lesser means and without the benefit of a drive, to get into the electric vehicle revolution?

Katie White: You raise an excellent point. For those fortunate enough to have a driveway, which is 70% of the country, there is an opportunity to install a charging point, and we have a grant—I think it is £500—available right now if you want to install a charging point in your own house or driveway. But that is not as easy for others, as you say, and so we are looking at multiple options.

One option is about making sure that people who are renting are able to make an application to their landlord, and making sure that it is easier for them to get access. At the moment, there has been some friction. We are also looking at flats and new builds and what all the different opportunities



are to do that, and at the prices. As you say, at the moment, those who have their own driveway can take advantage of overnight charging rates, which are pretty exceptional, but that is not available to everyone. So we are looking at that across the board to make sure that, as you say, there is less of an impact on people and we can make sure that everyone can take advantage. Salary sacrifice schemes are also available. That supports people to make the transition. So we are looking at various options. Ryan, I am sure I have missed things, because I know there are multiple layers to this.

Ryan McLaughlin: You have got the vast majority. There is a wide range of things we are trying to do to support people into electric vehicles, as the Minister has set out. We should also accept that more electric vehicles on the grid being charged optimally, once we get to the position of vehicle to grid, helps bring down energy costs for everyone, because you are using the system well, too. So the transition does benefit everyone.

To Mr Gardiner's point about the spill-over and feedback loops, that is supporting everyone. The Government did commit in April to permitted development rights for gullies along pavements. There is the grant funding that an hon. Member mentioned for different local councils. There are permitted development rights. There is the right-to-charge consultation that is going on. So the Government are trying to push this further.

Understandably, with these new technologies, prices tend to be more expensive at the start, and then they start to come down. So you are on that cost curve—that adoption curve. We are now going past the early adopters and moving into the mainstream, and we obviously take into account distributional impacts as we do that.

Q56 **Chair:** You made the argument for electric vehicles, and I have one. When it comes to a heat pump, I confess I haven't. I am unconvinced that the numbers add up as well, as easily, on that. Where are we on the cost curve for heat pumps? Do you see it as credible that we are going to have the same success on heat pumps as we have had on electric vehicles?

Katie White: I believe so. The hon. Member from Derby is a huge advocate, as the Vaillant factory is in his constituency. Again, we are monitoring each of these. There has been a huge uptake, since the middle east crisis, of electric vehicles, heat pumps and solar panels on people's roofs. We tend to see as well that once people invest in one of these technologies, it quite often ends up being a sort of gateway drug to some of the others. Clearly, that is not the case for you yet, Chair. Ryan, do you want to add anything on heat pump deployment?

Ryan McLaughlin: No, I think that is it. Once you start to see the agglomeration of different technologies—when you have solar panels and a battery—suddenly, in terms of having a heat pump, the economics stack up much quicker. We are also seeing a lot of innovation. Heat pumps are a very established technology. They are safe, easy to use and well understood, but we are seeing more and more innovation in heat pumps, whether that is high-pressure heat pumps, hybrid heat pumps or other



technology. We are still on that curve, and there is still improvement, which is really exciting to see.

Katie White: We were also trying to learn from other countries. I was talking to my Swedish counterpart, who said they have 70% heat pumps, obviously in a much colder environment. I was asking how on earth they managed to do it. They said it was the 1973 oil crisis. His own grandmother said, "That's it! We will not be spending any more money on oil, and we all will shift," and they had a massive shift. We should be trying to learn from other countries that are ahead of us in deployment.

Chair: Whether one technology leads to another remains to be seen, but the phone call I missed earlier was someone trying to sell me a solar panel.

Q57 **Chris Hinchliff:** I am sorry to turn to quite a sombre note at this point, but between 2012 and 2024, more than 2,000 land and environmental defenders were murdered or disappeared globally. I think many of us would feel that cutting our carbon emissions in the UK is frankly by the by if we do not also succeed in protecting forests in the Amazon, the Congo and other critical ecosystems across the globe. Will you talk to Ministers in the Foreign Office about making protection of the communities who stand up for these environments, on which all our futures depend, an absolute priority of our work overseas?

Katie White: Absolutely. Forests have been key to this Government's agenda and, with due credit to the previous Government, its agenda as well—I think they had begun work on this. I used to work in the predecessor Department, and what I noticed coming back in was the centrality of nature and specifically forests to the international climate agenda. I want to pay tribute to our excellent special representative on nature, who has really championed this.

There are a couple of key initiatives that we are working on. One is the Forest and Climate Leaders' Partnership, which we co-chair with Guyana, and another is supporting the establishment of the TFFF, which I know my hon. Friend is familiar with. When I was at the COP last year, there was a huge push around indigenous leaders' rights and protections. You are absolutely right: this has to be key, because those standing forests are hugely important to our international ecosystem. It is in everybody's interests to protect those, and it is central to our international climate change work. Our excellent and world-leading civil servants—the international climate change people are not here today—work hand in glove with the Foreign Office, which has a special representative on climate. Those two special representatives are quite formidable, for those who have not met them.

Q58 **Barry Gardiner:** Looking at the Paris principles, there is equity and common but differentiated responsibilities. Your impact assessment says, "Under the Paris Agreement, all countries are required to communicate Nationally Determined Contributions...representing their highest possible ambition to the UNFCCC". Ours is not—you have chosen a pathway that is



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not the highest. The Government's own impact assessment tells us that if "mitigation efforts are shared such that abatement costs as a share of GDP are equal across countries," the UK's reduction target for 2040 would be 106%, if we were sticking to the Paris agreement of no more than 1.5°. Do you accept that the CB7 target proposed by the Government is not a target that would be set by you if you were fully committed to those principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities, and that the CB7 proposal does not represent the UK's highest possible ambition, given that you could have set a pathway that is higher than the 88% you have chosen?

Katie White: With all due respect, my hon. Friend is an expert on international negotiations and knows that our nationally determined contribution, which I believe is 81% by 2035, is absolutely world leading. We are held up as an example among other leaders. We want to make sure that we have an ambitious target that we can deliver on. However, we must make sure that our ambition is credible. Our NDC and our international commitments are ambitious, but they are also credible.

Q59 **Sarah Gibson:** I am going to go from the macro back to the micro. Picking up on our Chair's concerns about heat pumps and suchlike, bad news always travels faster and further than good news. We only need one or two bad news stories for even people such as our esteemed Chair to have their doubts. However, a lot of the time, those doubts are founded on the fact that we are putting bolt-on systems on to an entire dwelling. At universities, we have been teaching "fabric first" for the last 15 or 20 years. I know that the Climate Change Committee always says that it is too late and that we just need to throw everything at it. However, we had an awful lot of issues with the ECO4 system; there was a 98% failure rate on our external insulation systems. How are we going to ensure that the bad news does not continue to travel fast and that the warm homes plan delivers and we do not end up with poorly ventilated homes with mould and all the other things that stop people buying into a system, because they hear about the disasters? How are we going to bring people with us in this?

Katie White: You are absolutely right to raise ECO4. We have to be honest, and that was what we did with ECO4. We said, "This is not working. It has been a failure. We are going to stop it now and shut it." Being honest when things are not working is really important. We are trying to make choices, but there is no perfect way of doing this, and we do not want the perfect to be the enemy of the good in terms of moving forward. I think I know what you mean by "fabric first", and you are right in terms of thinking about integrated systems and moving forward on that.

Part of this has also been about making sure we have the right people to do this. I remember asking for a heat pump six years ago, and it was so hard to find someone. Now, they are overwhelmed with business. How do we make sure that people can look at a dwelling in its entirety? That expertise is improving over time.



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So we need to be honest; we need to learn all the time if there have been mistakes, but we also need to be clear what the opportunities are and when things are working. If there are myths, we should work together to try and dispel them. I got asked if you could have a hot bath with a heat pump, and you can. What are those myths that are stopping people making that shift forward? Once those people have shifted, we should look at opportunities for other people and be clear about them. It is often once you have seen your neighbour or friend, or have been in an electric vehicle or a home, that you become interested. I remember being in Leeds PIPES, where they have a heat network, and they gave me a long presentation. At the end, a lady of a certain age just said, "Do you know what? I can have my bath, and it is warmer." I thought she is going to sell it much more than, sadly, the corporates would after hours and hours and with lots of figures.

So it is important that we all have a role to play in explaining when things do work. When they do not work, it is for Government and everybody else to be honest about what has not worked and what we are going to learn from that transition.

Q60 Sarah Gibson: In the warm homes plan, can we make sure that the advisory service is properly funded, so that we have the technical support required and the heat pump engineer going in is not having to make decisions without support. It is unfair on them to have to say things like, "Well, actually, this house is not going to work, because you do not have x, y and z." That is not their area of expertise, and I know from the Heat Pump Association that that makes for a very uncomfortable conversation. Having real support from the advisory service, free at the point of use, will make such a difference. If people can ask those questions of somebody independent, we will have a much better success rate.

Katie White: You make some excellent points. At the moment, we have these net zero hubs, and with the warm homes plan and Great British Energy we are looking at what the needs are going forward, what we have learned and what the service should be. We are also looking at what is out there in the market already. I will not name energy companies, but there are some that do an excellent job of taking customers on a journey and looking at that fully. As we move towards more of an energy services model, that will be more effective. You are absolutely right that we need to make sure that we have that information, and we need to look at what is in the market at that time to make sure. So we are learning.

Ryan McLaughlin: As we are designing the policies under the warm homes plan, it is very much that you must put people first. A lot of the questions we have had from the Committee today have been about how we get people to do this, and we are only ever going to get to do these things if we put people at the heart of it. We need to ask how we make things as simple as possible, communicate clearly with people and give them choices. That is the only way we are going to make this transition happen, so that is how we are trying to design all our policies in this space.



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Chair: Minister White and Mr McLaughlin, thank you very much indeed for your appearance here today and all that evidence. We are very grateful to you. We look forward to debating carbon budget 7 in Parliament very soon.

Katie White: Thank you to all the Committee for some excellent questions and for food for thought. I look forward to continuing to engage with you and to hearing more of your feedback. It is genuinely welcome.