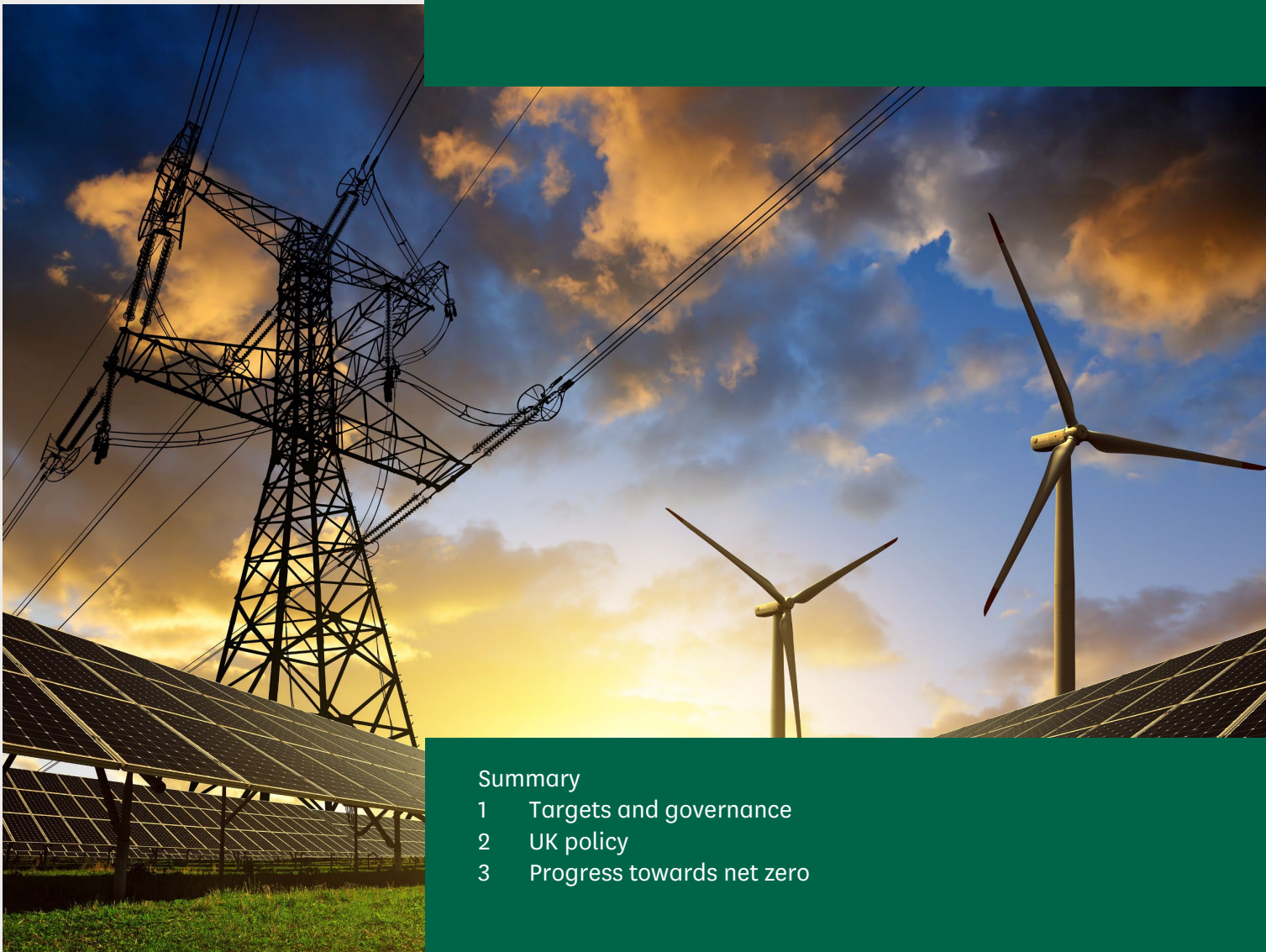


Research Briefing

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The UK's Plans and Progress to Reach Net Zero by 2050



Summary

- 1 Targets and governance
- 2 UK policy
- 3 Progress towards net zero

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Contents

Summary	4
1 Targets and governance	6
1.1 Net zero by 2050 target	6
1.2 Carbon budgets	7
1.3 Interim targets up to 2050	7
1.4 Assessing progress	8
2 UK policy	11
2.1 The Net Zero Strategy (October 2021)	11
2.2 Net Zero Growth Plan and associated policies (March 2023)	12
2.3 Carbon Budget Delivery Plan (March 2023)	13
2.4 'New approach to net zero' (September 2023)	14
2.5 Energy Act (October 2023)	16
3 Progress towards net zero	17
3.1 Overall assessment	17
3.2 Transport	22
3.3 Energy	24
3.4 Heat and buildings	25
3.5 Industry	27
3.6 Agriculture and land use	28

Summary

The UK is committed to reaching net zero by 2050. This means that the total greenhouse gas emissions would be equal to the emissions removed from the atmosphere, with the aim of limiting global warming and resultant climate change.

The UK Government has adopted a suite of policies in order to reach net zero, set out in two strategy publications, the [Net Zero Strategy](#) (2021) and [Powering Up Britain: The Net Zero Growth Plan](#) (2023).

Policy developments in 2023

The 2021 Net Zero Strategy set out a series of policies and commitments designed to enable the UK to reach net zero by 2050. It includes measures to deliver emissions reductions to meet targets up to the sixth carbon budget (which covers the period between 2033 and 2037).

The 2023 Net Zero Growth Plan set out an update to the existing strategies, focusing on the scale up and deployment of technologies for decarbonising homes, power, industry and transport. This update also fulfilled the 2022 [High Court judgment](#) for the government to set out more detail on how it aims to reach net zero.

Recent policy developments also include the [Prime Minister's speech on net zero](#) in September 2023, which updated policy positions and set out a revised approach to reaching net zero with the intention “to ease the burdens on working people”.

Scrutiny of the government approach

These strategies and policies have been subject to scrutiny from parliamentary committees, independent third-party reviews, and wider media attention. The Climate Change Committee undertakes an annual assessment of policies that contribute to the net zero by 2050 target, which it submits to Parliament. Its June [2023 Progress Report](#) (PDF) set out a decrease in confidence for the UK meeting mid-term targets on the way to 2050. Wider stakeholders have also commented on the [UK's progress and whether it is on track to reach the net zero target](#).

This briefing provides an overview of the background context for net zero, key UK policies since 2020, and current progress towards this goal. It gives a

breakdown of current net zero policy by some of the key sectors, including stakeholder commentary on this progress.

1 Targets and governance

1.1 Net zero by 2050 target

The [Climate Change Act 2008](#) sets the legislative basis for the UK's action on climate change.¹

In 2019, following the recommendation of the Climate Change Committee (CCC), the Government committed to a 100% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 as compared to a baseline of 1990. This was done via the [Climate Change Act 2008 \(2050 Target Amendment\) Order 2019](#). This is referred to as the net zero target and is legally binding.

The legal definition of net zero as set out in the Climate Change Act is to ensure that the “net UK carbon account” is 100% lower than the 1990 baseline. This can be achieved through reducing emissions as well as offsetting greenhouse gases, such as planting trees or using carbon capture and storage technologies.² This means the total greenhouse gas emissions produced would be equal to the greenhouse gas equivalents removed from the environment.³

Net zero targets in the four parts of the UK

All of the UK must meet net zero by 2050 in line with the target set out in legislation; however, the four parts of the UK have different emissions profiles and approaches to achieving this.⁴

England, Wales and Northern Ireland will reach net zero by 2050, whilst [Scotland has set its own target](#) to become a net zero economy by 2045.⁵ In 2020, [the interministerial group for Net Zero, Energy and Climate Change](#) was established to support collaboration across the parts of the UK.⁶

¹ [Climate Change Act 2008](#).

² GOV.UK, [UK becomes first major economy to pass net zero emissions law](#), 27 June 2019.

³ Office for National Statistics, [Net Zero and the different official measures of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions](#), 24 July 2019.

⁴ National Audit Office, [Approaches to achieving net zero across the UK](#), 15 September 2023

⁵ [Climate Change \(Emissions Reduction Targets\) \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#).

⁶ GOV.UK, [Interministerial Group for Net Zero, Energy and Climate Change Communique: 30 June 2021](#), 6 November 2023.

1.2 Carbon budgets

Under [Section 4 of the Climate Change Act 2008](#), as amended, the government must set five-yearly carbon budgets, twelve years in advance, from 2008 to 2050, and must meet these targets.⁷ Carbon budgets are a statutory cap on the total greenhouse gas emissions the UK can emit in a five-year period.⁸ The carbon budgets that have been set are as follows:

- The first carbon budget ran from 2008 to 2012 with an emissions cap of 3,018 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (MtCO₂e). A 26% reduction on 1990 levels.
- The second carbon budget covered the period from 2013 to 2017 with an emissions cap of 2,782 MtCO₂e. A 32% reduction on 1990 levels.
- The third budget covered the period from 2018 to 2022 with an emissions cap of 2,544 MtCO₂e. A 38% reduction on 1990 levels.
- The fourth budget covers the period from 2023 to 2027 with an emissions cap of 1,950 MtCO₂e. A 52% reduction on 1990 levels.
- The fifth budget covers the period from 2028 to 2032, with a cap of 1,725 MtCO₂e. A 58% reduction on 1990 levels.
- The sixth budget covers the period from 2033 to 2037, with a cap of 965 MtCO₂e. A 78% reduction on 1990 levels.⁹
- A seventh carbon budget is due to be set in 2025 to cover the period from 2038 to 2042.¹⁰

These carbon budgets apply to the UK as a whole; however, Wales has set different carbon budgetary periods to England and Northern Ireland. Legislation in Scotland does not require carbon budgets to be set, but there is a requirement to meet annual carbon reduction targets.¹¹ The emissions of all four parts of the UK contribute to the carbon budgets, even if their individual approaches are different.

1.3 Interim targets up to 2050

Following the 21st United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) in 2015, the Paris Agreement was adopted. It is a legally binding international

⁷ [Climate Change Act 2008](#).

⁸ "What are Britain's carbon budgets?", LSE Grantham Institute, 30 April 2020, accessed 14 November 2023.

⁹ CCC, [Advice on reducing the UK's emissions](#), accessed 16 October 2023.

¹⁰ CCC, [Advice on reducing the UK's emissions](#), accessed 16 October 2023.

¹¹ National Audit Office, [Approaches to achieving net zero across the UK](#), 15 September 2023.

agreement on climate change with an overarching goal to keep the increase in global average temperature to “well below” 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and to “pursue efforts” to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C. It entered into force on 4 November 2016.¹²

As part of the agreement, countries (including the UK) have to submit a “[nationally determined contribution](#)” (NDC) to set out the actions they will take to meet the goals of the agreement.¹³

In [December 2020, the UK Government submitted its NDC](#) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in line with Article 4 of the Paris Agreement. In its NDC, the UK committed to reducing economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions by at least 68% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels.

There are no separate interim targets for England, with progress assessed against UK-wide targets. Northern Ireland has set an interim target of 48% reduction by 2030 through the [Climate Change Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2022](#), and Scotland has set an interim target of 75% by 2030 through the [Climate Change \(Emissions Reductions Targets\) \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#). Wales has set an interim target of 63% by 2030 through the [Climate Change \(Interim Emissions Targets\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2021](#).¹⁴

1.4

Assessing progress

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ)¹⁵ is the government department primarily responsible for policies relating to net zero in England, although this is a cross-cutting issue that requires coordination with other departments (for example, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Department for Transport).

Government progress towards net zero is assessed by parliamentary committees and the independent Climate Change Committee, as well as the independent parliamentary body the National Audit Office (NAO).

Scrutiny of UK Government policy

The Climate Change Committee

Scrutiny of the government’s policy progress towards net zero is undertaken by the independent Climate Change Committee (CCC), which produces

¹² UNFCCC, [The Paris Agreement: What is the Paris Agreement?](#), accessed 26 October 2023, and United Nations, [Paris Agreement \(PDF\)](#), 2015.

¹³ UNFCCC, [Nationally Determined Contributions: The Paris Agreement and NDCs](#), accessed 10 November 2023.

¹⁴ National Audit Office, [Approaches to achieving net zero across the UK](#), 15 September 2023.

¹⁵ Previously referred to as the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, before the Machinery of Government Change, see: [GOV.UK explainer](#).

annual progress reports. The CCC is an independent statutory body established under the [Climate Change Act 2008](#), and its purpose is:

To advise the UK and devolved governments on emissions targets, and to report to Parliament on progress made in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and preparing for and adapting to the impacts of climate change.¹⁶

The CCC also scrutinises climate change policy progress and plans across the other parts of the UK, including issuing progress reports to the Scottish Parliament and Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliament, as well as providing advice to the Northern Ireland Assembly.¹⁷

Energy Security and Net Zero Committee

The Energy Security and Net Zero Committee is a House of Commons select committee that scrutinises the policy, spending and administration of the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and its public bodies (including Ofgem and the CCC).

The committee covers topical inquiries, alongside overarching scrutiny of the work of the department. Its most recent [report on preparing for the winter](#) was published in September 2023 and focuses on energy security enabled through renewable energy.¹⁸

Environmental Audit Committee

The Environmental Audit Committee is another Commons select committee, which considers and audits policies and programmes that contribute to environmental protection and sustainable development.

The committee covers topical inquiries and pre-appointment hearings of those considered for public office, amongst other non-inquiry work. Two recent reports include [the contribution of forestry and timber sectors to biodiversity and net zero goals](#) (July 2023) and [accelerating the transition from fossil fuels and securing energy supplies](#) (January 2023).¹⁹

Environment and Climate Change Committee

The Environment and Climate Change Select Committee is a House of Lords select committee, and it considers the environment and climate change. Its work consists of specific topical inquiries.²⁰

¹⁶ CCC, [About the CCC](#), accessed 26 October 2023.

¹⁷ For scrutiny of other parts of the UK, see: CCC, [publications on Scotland](#); [Wales reports](#); [Northern Ireland reports](#).

¹⁸ ESNZ Committee, [Preparing for the winter](#), 23 September 2023.

¹⁹ EAC, [Seeing the wood for the trees: the contribution of the forestry and timber sectors to biodiversity and net zero goals](#), 19 July 2023.

EAC, [Accelerating the transition from fossil fuels and securing energy supplies](#), 5 January 2023.

²⁰ House of Lords, [Environment and Climate Change Select Committee](#), accessed 14 November 2023.

Scrutiny of policy in Wales and Scotland

The Scottish Parliament's Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee scrutinises the Scottish Government's policies and progress towards meeting climate change targets.

The Senedd Cymru's Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee looks at policy and legislation and holds the Welsh Government to account on climate change policy, the environment, and energy. It has produced a report on [progress towards delivery of climate change commitments](#) (February 2023) focused on the Welsh Government's net zero delivery.²¹

Other assessments

The NAO audits government spending, which includes its spending on net zero. In December 2020, the NAO published a report on '[Achieving Net Zero](#)'. In September 2023 it published a joint publication with the four audit offices of the UK on '[Approaches to achieving Net Zero across the UK](#)'.²² Further assessments of the costs of net zero have been published by [the CCC](#)²³ and the [Office for Budget Responsibility](#).²⁴

Most recently, the [independent review 'Mission Zero'](#) was commissioned by the Secretary of State for the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy²⁵ on 26 September 2022. This was undertaken by former Energy Minister, Chris Skidmore MP (Con) and published on 13 January 2023, setting out 129 recommendations to government on how to take economic advantage of the transition to net zero.

²¹ Welsh Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee, [Progress towards delivery of climate change commitments](#), 16 February 2023.

²² National Audit Office, [Achieving Net Zero](#), 4 December 2020, and National Audit Office, [Approaches to achieving net zero across the UK](#), 15 September 2023.

²³ CCC, [2023 Progress Report to Parliament](#), 28 June 2023.

²⁴ The Office for Budget Responsibility, [The fiscal cost of net zero in the UK in an international context](#), July 2023.

²⁵ Following a [Machinery of Government Change](#), the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) ceased to exist and departmental responsibility for climate change policies transferred to the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ). See [government guidance, 2023](#).

2 UK policy

2.1 The Net Zero Strategy (October 2021)

The UK Government's main climate change policy document is the [Net Zero Strategy \(Build Back Greener\)](#) which was published on 19 October 2021 and last updated in April 2022.²⁶

It sets out policies and proposals for decarbonising all sectors of the UK economy to meet the government's net zero target by 2050. The Net Zero Strategy builds on wider government policy, such as the [ten-point plan for a green industrial revolution](#) which was published on 18 November 2020.²⁷

Several sector and technology specific strategies have also been published by the relevant government departments.

Wider policy documents include:

- [Environmental Improvement Plan](#), updated February 2023 (applies to the UK)
- [British Energy Security Strategy](#), April 2022 (strategy to decarbonise the power sector, applies to England, Wales and Scotland)
- [Transport decarbonisation plan](#), July 2021 (strategy to decarbonise the entire transport system in the UK, most policies apply to the UK and some apply just to England – these are specified within)
- [Industrial decarbonisation strategy](#), updated April 2021 (strategy to reduce industrial emissions for the UK)
- [Hydrogen strategy](#), August 2021 (strategy to develop the low carbon hydrogen sector, applies to the UK)
- [Heat and buildings strategy](#), October 2021 (strategy to decarbonise homes, commercial, industrial and public sector buildings – some policies are specific to England, and other parts of the UK will produce their own policy frameworks).

²⁶ Department for Energy Security and Climate Change, [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener](#), 19 October 2021 (Updated 5 April 2022).

²⁷ GOV.UK, [The ten point plan for a green industrial revolution](#), 18 November 2020.

The Net Zero Strategy (and the Net Zero Growth Plan) applies to the UK as a whole, although policies are also set by the devolved administrations, for example:

- [The Scottish Government published an update to the climate change plan 2018-2032](#) (PDF) in April 2023.
- The [Welsh Government published an update to the All Wales Plan 2021-25 Working Together to Reach Net Zero](#) (PDF) in April 2022.
- The [Northern Ireland Executive published its Path to Net Zero Energy](#) (PDF) in December 2021.

2.2 Net Zero Growth Plan and associated policies (March 2023)

An updated series of government commitments were published on 30 March 2023. This followed the independent review of net zero (Sections 1.4 and 3.1) and the High Court judgment that called for the government to outline how its policies would meet the 2050 net zero target.

The overarching strategy document [Powering Up Britain](#) included the government's policy response to the [independent review](#) and the [Powering Up Britain: Net Zero Growth Plan, both published in 2023](#). These documents apply to the UK.

The Net Zero Growth Plan set out an update to the policies in the 2021 Net Zero Strategy, focusing on scale up and deployment of technologies for decarbonising homes, power, industry and transport. The [policy response to the independent review](#) addressed the recommendations made by Chris Skidmore MP and sets out government actions in response.

High Court Judgment

On 18 July 2022, following a claim brought against the UK Government by Friends of the Earth, ClientEarth and the Good Law Project, the English High Court determined the 2021 Net Zero Strategy to be “unlawful” and “inadequate” in meeting the 2050 net zero target.²⁸

²⁸ White&Case, [Landmark High Court decision that the UK's Net Zero Strategy is unlawful](#), 31 August 2022.

The [High Court ordered the government](#) to refine and reissue the strategy by the end of March 2023.²⁹

Following the publication of the Net Zero Growth Plan, the same organisations have indicated that they will be taking further legal challenge against the government.³⁰ As of 25 October 2023, Client Earth, Friends of the Earth and the Good Law project have requested a judicial review of the revised UK Net Zero Strategy, due to its reliance on “unproven and high-risk technological fixes”.³¹

Other policy documents released in March 2023 included:

- [Powering Up Britain: Energy Security Plan](#) (applies to the UK)
- [Carbon Budget Delivery Plan](#) (see below, applies to the UK overall and to England)
- [Government response to CCC 2022 progress report](#)
- [Government response to the independent review](#)
- [Green finance strategy](#), updated 11 April 2023 (applies to the UK)
- [2030 strategic framework for international climate and nature action](#) (applies to the UK)
- [UK international climate finance strategy](#)
- [UK Net Zero research and innovation framework: Delivery plan 2022-2035](#)

2.3

Carbon Budget Delivery Plan (March 2023)

The [Carbon Budget Delivery Plan](#) was produced by the government as part of its statutory duties under the Climate Change Act 2008.³² It sets out proposals

²⁹ [HL Deb 21 July 2022 c 2099 FoE v BEIS \[2022\] EWHC 1841](#)

³⁰ Client Earth, [UK government faces fresh legal challenge over 'unlawful' climate plans](#), 7 July 2023.

³¹ Client Earth, [We're taking the UK government back to court over its climate plan](#), 25 October 2023, accessed 3 November 2023.

³² Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, [Carbon Budget Delivery Plan](#), 30 March 2023.

and policies, and associated timescales and delivery risks, that enable [carbon budgets four, five and six](#) to be met.

The plan estimates that its quantified proposals and policies will deliver 100% of the savings required to meet the fourth and fifth carbon budgets, and 97% of the savings required to meet the sixth carbon budget. The plan outlines that the remaining 3% of sixth carbon budget is expected to be met through areas in which further savings are estimated, but not yet quantified, such as agriculture and land use, energy efficiency and local emissions reductions.³³

Funding to deliver carbon budgets has been announced in the following:

- The [Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021](#) confirmed that since March 2021 the government committed a total of £30 billion of public investment for the green industrial revolution in the UK.
- The [Autumn Statement 2022](#) made available £6 billion additional funding to drive improvements in energy efficiency.
- The [Spring Budget 2023](#) made up to £20 billion available for Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS).
- The [Net Zero Innovation Portfolio](#) is £1 billion of funding to accelerate the commercialisation of low-carbon technologies, systems and business models in power, buildings, and industry.

2.4 'New approach to net zero' (September 2023)

On 20 September 2023, the Prime Minister [made a speech outlining the government's "new approach to Net Zero"](#), which was framed as "a more pragmatic, proportionate, and realistic approach to meeting Net Zero that eases the burdens on working people".³⁴

Key policy points of this speech included:

- Moving back the proposed ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans by five years, so all sales from 2035 will be zero emission.
- Delaying the proposed ban on installing oil and liquid petroleum gas boilers and new coal heating for off-gas-grid homes from 2026 to 2035.

³³ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, [Carbon Budget Delivery Plan](#), 30 March 2023.

³⁴ GOV.UK, [PM Speech on Net Zero: 20 September 2023](#), 20 September 2023.

- Setting an exemption to the proposed 2035 phase out of all fossil fuel boilers for households that would struggle to switch (for example, homes that would require major retrofit).³⁵
- Raising the [Boiler Upgrade Scheme](#) grant by 50% to £7,500.
- Scrapping policies to force landlords to upgrade the energy efficiency of their properties.³⁶

In addition, the Prime Minister said he planned to change the way in which the government's carbon budgets are agreed in Parliament. Currently, carbon budgets are passed using delegated legislation, with carbon budget six agreed under the [Carbon Budget Order 2021](#). The Prime Minister criticised this process, saying that this statutory instrument had only been debated in the House of Commons for 17 minutes.³⁷

The government said that it will ensure that in the future “Parliament gives full scrutiny to all future measures that might be needed to fulfil the Carbon Budget”.³⁸

The Prime Minister also announced several additional measures aimed at improving energy security by supporting energy infrastructure and grid connections. As described in the [supporting government press release](#) published on 20 September 2023, these measures include:

- The first ever spatial plan for energy infrastructure “set out to give industry certainty over where it will be and give every community a say”.
- A “fast track” through the nationally significant infrastructure project planning regime, available for major eligible transmission projects, to ensure they are prioritised, helping businesses and households connect to the grid sooner.
- A new approach to grid connections, where energy projects that are ready first will connect first.³⁹

On 28 September 2023, the government also confirmed the [zero emission vehicle \(ZEV\) mandate](#) will apply from January 2024. The ZEV mandate will require 80% of new cars and 70% of new vans sold in Great Britain to be zero emission by 2030, increasing to 100% by 2035. A [consultation on the ZEV](#)

³⁵ In the [Heat and Buildings Strategy](#) (2021), the government committed to “phas[ing] out installation of new natural gas boilers from 2035, once the cost of low-carbon alternatives has come down”.

³⁶ Under the [Minimum Energy Efficiency regulations](#), privately rented properties already must have an EPC rating of at least E to be let or continue to be let, unless the landlord has a valid exemption. The [Heat and Buildings Strategy](#) (2021) set out a policy to raise this requirement to EPC C by 2025 for new tenancies and by 2028 for all tenancies.

³⁷ House of Lords Library, [Kings Speech 2023: Energy security and Net Zero](#), 1 November 2023.

³⁸ GOV.UK, [Press Release: PM re-commits to Net Zero and by 2050 and pledges a ‘fairer’ path to achieving target to ease the financial burden on British families](#), 20 September 2023.

³⁹ GOV.UK, [PM re-commits UK to Net Zero by 2050 and pledges a ‘fairer’ path to achieving target to ease the financial burden on British families](#), 20 September 2023.

[mandate](#) ran from 30 March until 24 May 2023⁴⁰, and further details can be found in the [zero emission vehicle \(ZEV\) mandate consultation: summary of responses and joint government response \(PDF\)](#).⁴¹

2.5 Energy Act (October 2023)

The government's [Energy Act 2023](#) received Royal Assent on 26 October 2023. It was originally called the Energy Security Bill in the Queen's Speech on 10 May 2022.⁴²

The government's [Energy Security Bill overarching factsheet](#) stated the aim of the Energy Act is to “deliver a cleaner, more affordable and more secure energy system for the long term”⁴³, building on the commitments in the April 2022 [British Energy Security Strategy](#) to “invest in homegrown energy and maintain the diversity and resilience of the UK's energy supply”.⁴⁴

The Energy Security Bill factsheet also highlighted the need for a “transformation of our energy system” and “more home-grown energy from more diverse sources which reduce our dependency on imported fossil fuels and our exposure to volatile and high prices in international markets”.⁴⁵

The Library Briefing [Energy Bill \[HL\] 2022-23: Overview](#), which was prepared for the Bill's second reading, provides an overview of the Bill (now an Act) and includes details of the clauses added to the Bill after defeats in the House of Lords. It also provides links to five additional Library briefings which cover specific provisions in more detail.

The Library Briefing [Energy Bill \[HL\] 2022-23 Committee stage report](#) covers changes made to the Bill at committee stage in the Commons, and [FAQ document](#) provides an overview of what the Energy Act means for households.

⁴⁰ Department for Transport, [Consultation Outcome: A Zero-Emissions Vehicle \(ZEV\) Mandate and CO2 emissions regulation for new cars and vans in the UK](#), 30 March 2023, updated 25 October 2023.

⁴¹ UK Government, [Zero Emission Vehicles \(ZEV\) mandate consultation: Summary of responses and joint government response \(PDF\)](#), September 3034.

⁴² GOV.UK, [Queen's Speech 2022](#), 10 May 2022.

⁴³ DESNZ [Energy Security Bill overarching factsheet](#), updated 1 September 2023

⁴⁴ GOV.UK, [British Energy Security Strategy](#), 7 April 2022.

⁴⁵ DESNZ [Energy Security Bill overarching factsheet](#), updated 1 September 2023

3 Progress towards net zero

3.1 Overall assessment

Independent Review of Net Zero (January 2023)

On 26 September 2022, the Secretary of State for the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) commissioned an independent review into net zero. This review was led by Chris Skidmore MP.

On 13 January 2023, the government published the results in [Mission Zero: Independent Review of Net Zero](#).

The independent review (also known as ‘the Skidmore review’) made 129 recommendations to government and proposed 25 key actions, setting out a series of ‘missions’ to take economic advantage of the transition to net zero.

On 30 March 2023, the Government published its [response to the review](#) stating “decisive action” was needed to capitalise on economic opportunities:

We agree with the review’s conclusion that net zero is the growth opportunity of the 21st century and could offer major economic opportunities to the UK – but that decisive action is needed to seize these. Other countries such as the USA with the Inflation Reduction Act are moving quickly, and we must do the same. We are focused on unlocking the ambition of places and communities to deliver net zero by 2050.⁴⁶

The House of Lords Library article, [Mission zero: Independent review of net zero](#), published in January 2023, provides further information on the scope of the review, its findings and reactions from government and stakeholders.

Climate Change Committee

On 28 June 2023, the CCC issued its [2023 Progress Report](#) to Parliament, which is its annual statutory assessment of the UK’s progress towards meeting emissions targets.⁴⁷

This report stated that by 2022, the UK had reduced greenhouse gas emissions (including international aviation and shipping) by 46% relative to

⁴⁶ DESNZ, [Responding to the independent review of net zero’s recommendations](#), 30 March 2023.

⁴⁷ CCC, [2023 Progress Report to Parliament](#), 28 June 2023.

1990 levels. The CCC's confidence in meeting the fourth carbon budget, which restricts the total amount of greenhouse gases the UK can emit over the period 2023-2027, had slightly increased since the previous year, largely due to progress in the transport sector (see section 3.2).

However, its confidence in the UK meeting the mid-term targets – that is, the 2030 nationally determined contribution (NDC) and the fifth and sixth carbon budgets – had decreased. This was due to delays in policy development, as well as new information in the Carbon Budget Delivery Plan which allowed for a more detailed assessment. The CCC made 300 recommendations, of which 27 were highlighted as priorities.⁴⁸

On 27 October 2023, the [government responded to the CCC's Progress Report, saying it was acting on the majority of the recommendations](#):

Government is acting on 85% of the CCC's priority recommendations and is acting on the majority of the remaining 273 recommendations – demonstrating our commitment to seizing the economic opportunities presented from the energy transition and net zero and the value of the CCC's advice.⁴⁹

On 12 October 2023, [the CCC released an update](#) assessing the effect of recent announcements on the fifth carbon budget, based on information available at the time. This included assessment of the impact of the Prime Minister's "new approach to net zero" (see Section 2.4).

The CCC welcomed "real and tangible policy progress" since June 2023, namely the confirmation of the zero emission vehicle mandate (see section 3.2) and the deal with Tata Steel for industrial electrification in Port Talbot (see section 3.5). The implementation of a cap for the Emissions Trading System that is aligned with net zero was also called "an important step forward."⁵⁰

The CCC was concerned, however, that the government's recent announcements had not been accompanied by corresponding estimates of their effect on emissions. The CCC also noted that the government's plans remained "insufficient to meet their own emissions targets [...] taking all recent developments into account".⁵¹

CCC assessment of government policies and plans

The CCC is an independent statutory body that assesses the UK Government and devolved administrations' plans, progress and policies across sub-

⁴⁸ CCC, [2023 Progress Report to Parliament](#), 28 June 2023.

⁴⁹ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, [Committee on Climate Change 2023 progress report: government response](#), 26 October 2023.

⁵⁰ CCC, [CCC assessment of recent announcements and developments on Net Zero](#), 12 October 2023.

⁵¹ CCC, [CCC assessment of recent announcements and developments on Net Zero](#), 12 October 2023.

sectors to determine what needs to be addressed to meet government targets.

It has four scoring criteria for assessing policies and plans:

- **Credible plans:** plans with funding, enablers and timelines in place.
- **Some risks:** some adjustment to plans may be needed to mitigate uncertainties and there may be delivery or funding risks.
- **Significant risks:** plans under development and/or further work needed to enact policies and overcome uncertainties and delivery or funding risks.
- **Insufficient plans:** plans are either missing, clearly inadequate, or lack funding, and new proposals are needed.⁵²

The CCC assessed that government policies between June and October 2023 had a mixed impact on risks relating to the delivery of the UK's future emissions targets.

The chart below shows the change in assessed risks for the Government pathway for the fifth carbon budget (2028-2032). The "Government pathway" refers to the quantified plans described in the Carbon Budget Delivery Plan (see section 2.3). These plans are estimated by the government to lead to emissions reductions of around 163 million tonnes of CO₂-equivalent (MtCO₂-eq) over this period, relative to the 'no action' scenario of 473 MtCO₂-eq. There is a small decrease in overall risk from June to October 2023.⁵³

This can be seen by the small increase in the emissions reductions that are covered by "credible" plans (see box above for definitions). The "credible" category increased from 26% to 29% of the Government pathway (or from 25% to 28% of the 2030 NDC, because the pathway falls slightly short of the NDC: see chart notes) from June to October 2023. This increase is again driven by the transport sector (see section 3.2). There is a corresponding decrease in the total emissions reductions assessed to be at "some" or "significant" risk or with "insufficient" plans.⁵⁴

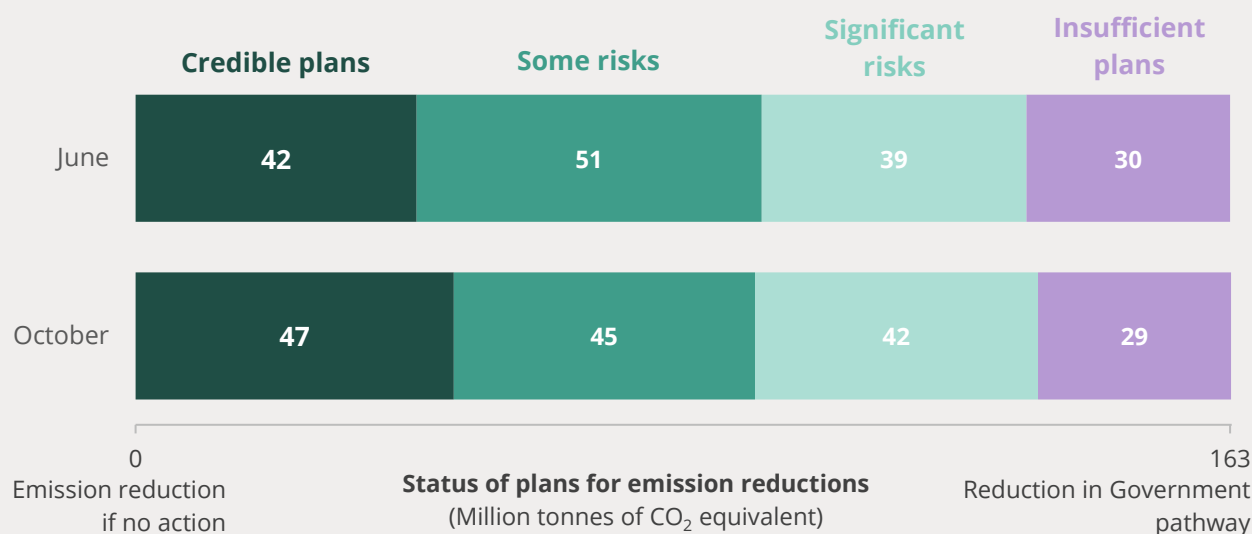
⁵² CCC, Annex 1: Policy assessment criteria of the [CCC 2023 Progress in reducing emissions](#), 28 June 2023.

⁵³ CCC, [CCC assessment of recent announcements and developments on Net Zero](#), 12 October 2023.

⁵⁴ CCC, [CCC assessment of recent announcements and developments on Net Zero](#), 12 October 2023.

CCC assessment of changes in the risks to meeting emissions targets

Change in status of plans, June and October 2023 assessments, MtCO₂-eq reduction required by 2028-2032



Notes: Constituent parts may not sum to the totals due to rounding.

Total emissions under the 'no action' scenario are 473 MtCO₂-eq (annual average for 2028-32).

The 'Government pathway' has emissions of 311 MtCO₂-eq, ie. a reduction of 163 MtCO₂ (rounded) from the 'no action' scenario. This reduction falls 4% short of that required to meet the 2030 Nationally Determined Contribution. The Government has said this gap will be closed by unquantified plans.

Source: Climate Change Committee, [CCC assessment of recent announcements and developments on Net Zero](#), 12 October 2023.

The CCC also highlighted that perceptions of weakened commitment and greater uncertainty could undermine consumer confidence, supply chain development and investment, and that this effect was only partly quantified in its analysis.⁵⁵

Environmental groups

A more critical [quantitative assessment of the UK's progress](#) was published by the non-profit project Climate Action Tracker on 22 September 2023.⁵⁶ It stated that the Prime Minister's speech on the new approach to net zero had contributed to downgrading the UK's policies and actions from "almost

⁵⁵ CCC, [CCC assessment of recent announcements and developments on Net Zero](#), 12 October 2023.

⁵⁶ The [Climate Action Tracker \(CAT\)](#) is an independent scientific project tracking government action towards the Paris Agreement. A collaboration of two organisations, Climate Analytics and NewClimate Institute, the CAT has been providing this independent analysis to policymakers since 2009.

sufficient”, which means compatible with limiting global warming to below 2°C, to “insufficient”.⁵⁷

Environmental organisations have frequently critiqued government policy towards net zero, with groups such as the Green Alliance [commenting that the government displays “a lack of ambition and policy delivery across all sectors”](#) in the March 2023 announcements.⁵⁸ Ongoing legal action against the UK Government focuses on the ability of current plans and commitments to reach net zero (see box in section 2.2).

On 29 September 2023, the Environmental Audit Committee [wrote to the Prime Minister](#) about concerns over presentation of the debate as a binary choice between “those who oppose net zero policies on the grounds of excessive costs, excessive burdens or rejection of the evidence of climate change, and those who demand change at a pace which is impractical or unaffordable” and how the current measures will affect the delivery of the carbon budgets and 2050 net zero target.⁵⁹ The committee has published the [response to its letter from Secretary of State for the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, Claire Coutinho](#).⁶⁰

An open letter from environmental think-tank E3G to the Prime Minister, opposing the “weakening” of net zero policies, was signed by more than 400 companies and civil society groups.⁶¹

Other stakeholders

A range of views from observers and stakeholders to the Prime Minister’s speech can be found in the Carbon Brief [Q&A on what the statement means for UK climate policy](#).⁶²

On 20 September 2023, a spokesperson for the free market think tank the Institute of Economic Affairs, said:

Sunak’s Net Zero rebalance is a welcome step. Government policies like petrol and diesel car and gas boiler bans, have gone too far in hurting families and businesses for minimal environmental gain.⁶³

⁵⁷ In evaluating progress of a country, the CAT assesses the effect of its policies, pledges, and comparability of effort against their ‘fair share’ or contribution towards a global effort to limit warming), allowing for comparison of nations. [This assessment](#) ranges from critically insufficient to compatible with the Paris Agreement.

⁵⁸ Green Alliance, [Net Zero Policy Tracker: March 2023 Update](#), 17 March 2023.

⁵⁹ EAC, [Letter from the EAC to the Prime Minister](#), 29 September 2023.

⁶⁰ DESNZ, [Letter from Claire Coutinho to Philip Dunne of the EAC](#), 19 October 2023.

⁶¹ E3G, [Net Zero letter to the PM \(PDF\)](#), 20 September 2023.

⁶² Carbon Brief, [In depth Q&A: What do Rishi Sunak’s U-turns mean for UK climate policy](#), 22 September 2023.

⁶³ Institute for Economic Affairs, [Sunak’s Net Zero rebalance is welcome, but more to be done](#), 20 September 2023.

On 22 September 2023, the Methodist Church issued a [joint statement with the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the United Reform Church](#) in response to the Prime Minister's speech, stating:

It is a source of extreme disappointment that the Prime Minister's announcement will damage the confidence and undermine our collective efforts. As a country, we have moral and legal responsibilities to show leadership in tackling the climate emergency together. ⁶⁴

The following sections describe progress in five sectors assessed to contribute the most to UK emissions: transport, energy, heat and buildings, industry, and agriculture and land use. These sectors cover the UK as a whole, although relative sectoral emissions do vary across the different parts of the UK, and different parts have adopted specific strategies and approaches in addition to wider UK Government policy.

3.2 Transport

Surface transport (emissions from vehicles on the roads and rail) is the highest emitting sector, responsible for 23% of UK emissions in 2022.⁶⁵ The CCC's 2023 Progress Report assessed that increased confidence in meeting the UK's fourth carbon budget (see section 3.1) was largely driven by this sector because of a persistent reduction in vehicle kilometres since the pandemic and increasing sales of electric vehicles.⁶⁶

In October 2023, the CCC provided an updated assessment (see section 3.1), considering announcements of the delayed ban on sales of new petrol and diesel cars and vans and the zero emission vehicle (ZEV) mandate (see section 2.6). It has expected the delayed ban to have only a small direct impact, due to the ZEV mandate.⁶⁷

The chart below shows the ZEV mandate leads to a substantial increase in "credible" plans, from 40% to 53% of the Government pathway for transport during 2028–2032. This is the source of the overall increase in confidence for this period (see section 3.1).

⁶⁴ The Baptist Union of Great Britain, The Methodist Church and The United Reformed Church, [Statement in response to the Prime Minister's announcement on Net Zero policies](#), 22 September 2023.

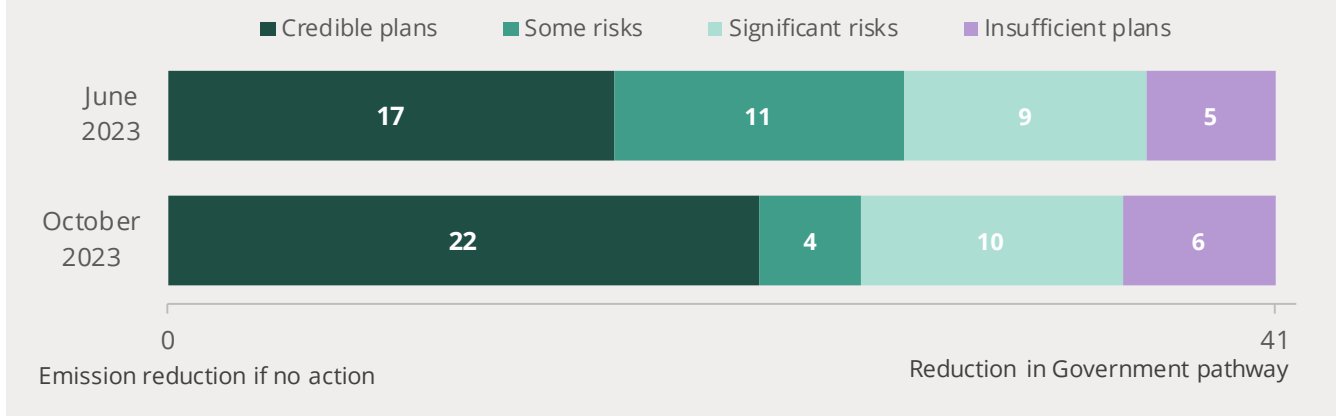
⁶⁵ CCC, [2023 Progress Report to Parliament](#), 28 June 2023.

⁶⁶ CCC, [2023 Progress Report to Parliament](#), 28 June 2023.

⁶⁷ CCC, [CCC assessment of recent announcements and developments on Net Zero](#), 12 October 2023.

Surface transport: CCC assessment of changes in risks to emission reduction plans

Status of plans for emission reductions required by 2028-2032 in MtCO₂-eq



Source: Climate Change Committee, [CCC assessment of recent announcements and developments on Net Zero](#), 12 October 2023

[A survey of automotive retailers by Auto Trader](#) in September 2023 (1,149 responses) found that 75% of respondents agreed with the delay to 2035. However, retailer understanding of policy was relatively low: 39% of respondents were not sure what the ZEV mandate is.⁶⁸

A survey of car consumers by Auto Trader in the same month found 37% of the 3,731 respondents said they were unlikely to ever buy an electric vehicle, an increase from 21% who said the same when surveyed in 2021. The number of respondents who said they would buy an electric vehicle by 2035 was 39%, a decrease from the 49% who said they would before 2030 when surveyed two years ago.⁶⁹

However, consumer understanding of policy was also low: 70% of respondents did not know the ban applies only to sales of new vehicles. This was age-dependent: 57% of respondents aged 65 to 74 knew that the ban applied to new sales, compared with 23% of those aged 17 to 24. The managing director of car-buying platform Carwow said the changes would “leave many feeling frustrated and calling for clarity, support, and assurances that the goalposts won’t move again.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Auto Trader, [Press Release: Sunak’s date stall delays long term EV adoption buy in-market electric buyers haven’t lost their spark](#), 11 October 2023.

⁶⁹ Auto Trader, [Press Release: Sunak’s date stall delays long term EV adoption buy in-market electric buyers haven’t lost their spark](#), 11 October 2023.

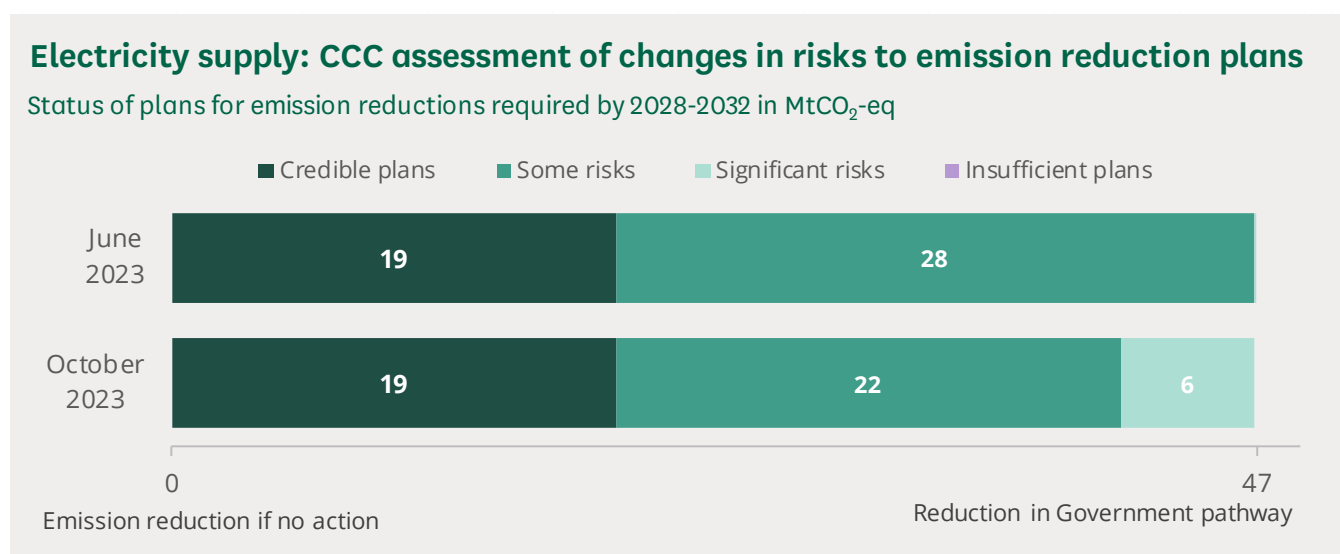
⁷⁰ “[UK carmakers will have to meet electric car sales targets despite Sunak U-turn](#)”, The Guardian, 21 September 2023.

3.3

Energy

Electricity and fuel supply together contributed 18% of UK emissions in 2022.⁷¹

For electricity supply (11% of UK emissions), the CCC Progress Report assessed that “credible” plans were in place for 41% of the Government pathway for the fifth carbon budget, shown in the chart below, decreasing to 31% of the pathway for the sixth budget. For fuel supply, the CCC assessments of “credible” plans were lower: 25% and 17% of the Government pathway for the two periods, respectively.⁷²



Source: Climate Change Committee, [CCC assessment of recent announcements and developments on Net Zero](#) (12 October 2023)

The CCC’s confidence in meeting the Government pathway had decreased since 2022, due to limited policy progress for electricity supply, the [approval of a new coal mine in Cumbria](#)⁷³, delay of the [Biomass Strategy](#) (now published)⁷⁴, and new risks relating to hydrogen deployment.

In October 2023, the CCC update assessed the impact of the recent offshore wind auction on the fifth carbon budget. As seen in the chart for the electricity sector above, the auction led to an increase in plans the CCC assessed to be at “significant risk”.⁷⁵

⁷¹ CCC, [2023 Progress Report to Parliament](#), 28 June 2023.

⁷² CCC, [2023 Progress Report to Parliament](#), 28 June 2023.

⁷³ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, [Letter approving plans for a new coal mine \(PDF\)](#), 7 December 2022.

⁷⁴ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, [Biomass Strategy \(PDF\)](#), 10 August 2023.

⁷⁵ CCC, [CCC assessment of recent announcements and developments on Net Zero](#), 12 October 2023.

The CCC welcomed the implementation of a [new cap for the UK emissions trading scheme](#), but this was not included in the October assessment due to insufficient information.⁷⁶ It also welcomed a “high-level commitment to a spatial energy infrastructure plan and to changing the process for electricity grid connections in the PM’s speech,” adding it was awaiting details of both.

The Contracts for Difference scheme (CfD) is the government’s main support scheme for large scale, low carbon power infrastructure. Offshore wind has previously been the dominant technology in CfD auctions; however, offshore wind developers did not place any bids in the fifth auction round (March 2023).

The CCC attributed this lack of bids to the government’s decision not to increase the price that offshore wind generators would receive to reflect significant increases in supply chain and development costs. The CCC said it is “imperative that policy is adjusted to deliver contract awards and the commissioning of offshore wind farms as soon as possible, given the essential contribution of offshore wind to Net Zero and the very high costs of gas-fired generation used in the meantime.”⁷⁷

The trade association RenewableUK urged the government “to develop and fund supply chain growth and an internationally competitive fiscal regime which attracts capital into the UK”.⁷⁸ For further information about CfDs, see the Library briefing [Contracts for Difference Scheme](#).

3.4 Heat and buildings

Buildings accounted for 17% of UK emissions in 2022. The CCC 2023 Progress Report said progress in this sector had stalled, with no “substantive” reductions in emissions since 2010, and that a “step change” in delivery would be required to meet the fifth and sixth carbon budgets.⁷⁹

In its October update, the CCC judged that the 2035 date for phasing out fossil fuel boilers was itself potentially compatible with the net zero target, but that the exemptions for 20% of households would make net zero “considerably harder” to achieve. In addition, it highlighted concerns that larger grants for heat pumps would serve fewer homes, as the total budget available had not

⁷⁶ GOV.UK, [Tighter limit on industrial, power and aviation emissions, as UK leads the way to net zero](#), 3 July 2023.

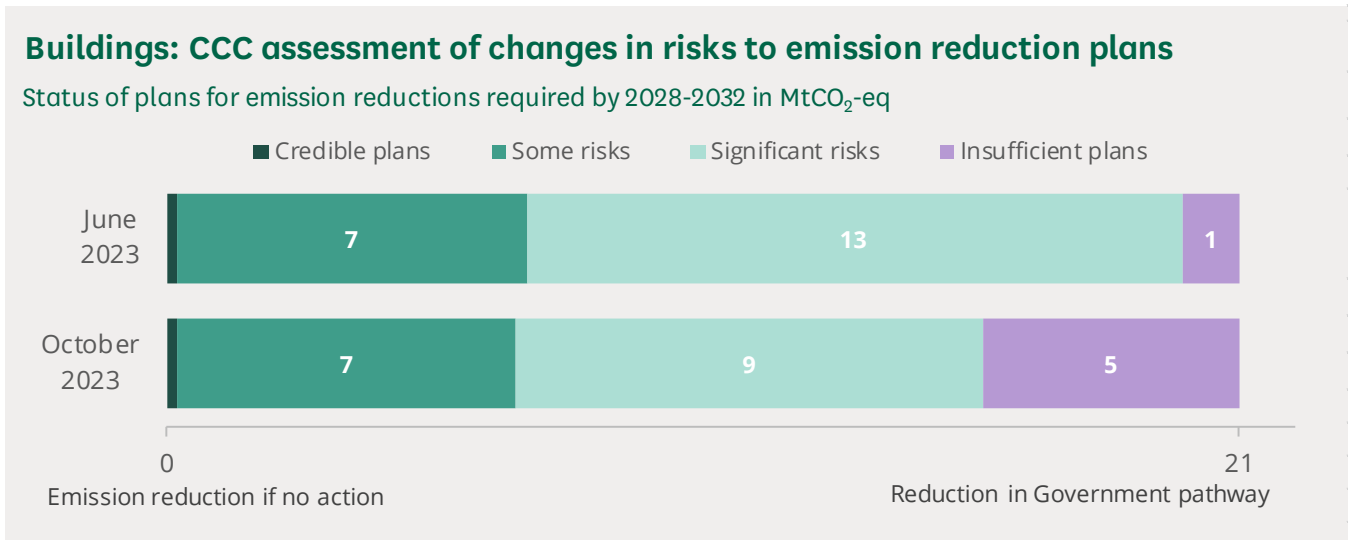
⁷⁷ CCC, [CCC assessment of recent announcements and developments on Net Zero](#), 12 October 2023

⁷⁸ RenewableUK, [Industry warns urgent action needed to restore investor confidence following renewables auction](#), 8 September 2023

⁷⁹ CCC, [2023 Progress Report to Parliament](#), 28 June 2023.

increased, and also that the cancelled regulations for private rental housing would have saved energy and reduced energy bills.⁸⁰

The chart below shows the resulting increase in “insufficient” plans for buildings from June to October 2023, from 5% to 24% of the Government pathway for emissions reductions. (Assessed “credible” plans are not visible on the chart: these are 0.2 MtCO₂-eq, or 1% of the total, in both periods).



Source: Climate Change Committee, [CCC assessment of recent announcements and developments on Net Zero](#), 12 October 2023

The Institute for Economic Affairs, a free-market think tank, said the delay until 2035 was an “entirely sensible step”.⁸¹ The Countryside Alliance also “welcomed” the delay, because “the available technology and infrastructure meant that people in rural communities would have faced eye-watering bills and immense practical difficulties”.⁸²

Other stakeholders were critical. The chief executive of E.on UK said the policies would be

condemning people to many more years of living in cold and draughty homes that are expensive to heat, in cities clogged with dirty air from fossil fuels, missing out on the economic regeneration this ambition brings [...] this is a misstep on many levels. From a business perspective, companies wanting to invest in the UK need long term certainty to create the jobs and economic prosperity the country needs.⁸³

The [i newspaper also reported concerns](#) from anonymous industry installers and manufacturers that the resulting uncertainty was likely to “turn investors cold” and “drive investors elsewhere”, and that the original heat pump grant

⁸⁰ CCC, [CCC assessment of recent announcements and developments on Net Zero](#), 12 October 2023.

⁸¹ Institute of Economic Affairs, [Sunak’s Net Zero rebalance is welcome, but more to be done](#), 20 September 2023.

⁸² Countryside Alliance, [Tim Bonner: Rishi responds to rural concerns](#), 21 September 2023.

⁸³ “[Rishi Sunak announces U-turn on key green targets](#)”, the Guardian, 20 September 2023.

level “was already generous and other policy changes [such as switching green levies from gas to electricity] would have been more effective”.⁸⁴

Several industry leaders gave mixed responses to the policies. The [managing director of Vaillant Group UK and Ireland](#) welcomed the increase in heat pump grant value, but said that unless the overall budget was increased, annual access would be limited to “less than 0.1% of the housing stock in the UK, potentially slowing down the transition to heat pumps”.⁸⁵ A senior associate of the [Regulatory Assistance Project](#), an independent non-governmental organisation, said:

All of this uncertainty is not good for industry which needs to invest if the UK is to reduce emissions and reduce gas imports. My biggest concern is around the weakened energy efficiency proposals which will mostly affect the poorest in society and renters. Overall this looks like a big win for landlords.⁸⁶

3.5 Industry

The industry sector contributed 14% of UK emissions in 2022. The CCC 2023 Progress Report assessed higher risks to decarbonisation than in 2022, with “insufficient” plans for the majority of the Carbon Delivery Budget Plan targets for the fifth and sixth carbon budgets due to a “continuing lack of progress”. The report highlighted the need for greater support for industrial electrification, particularly for the steel sector.

In October 2023, the CCC estimated that the [recent deal with Tata Steel for electrification in Port Talbot](#) had substantially improved its assessment. The chart below shows the decrease in “insufficient” plans, from 70% to 44% of the Government pathway for industry emissions reductions, and a corresponding increase in the more positive category assigned “some risks”.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ “[Rishi Sunak condemning public to cold homes and polluted air, says heat pump industry](#)”, The i 20 September 2023.

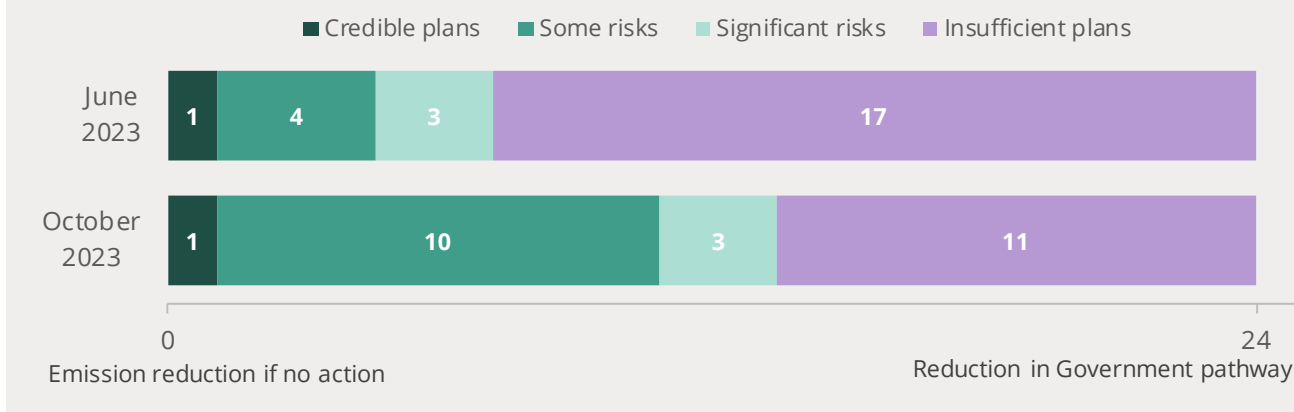
⁸⁵ The installer, [Ban on new oil boilers put back to 2035 as government announces new net zero policies](#), accessed 6 November 2023.

⁸⁶ The installer, [Ban on new oil boilers put back to 2035 as government announces new net zero policies](#), accessed 6 November 2023.

⁸⁷ CCC, [CCC assessment of recent announcements and developments on Net Zero](#), 12 October 2023.

Industry: CCC assessment of changes in risks to emission reduction plans

Status of plans for emission reductions required by 2028-2032 in MtCO₂-eq



Source: Climate Change Committee, [CCC assessment of recent announcements and developments on Net Zero](#), 12 October 2023

3.6 Agriculture and land use

Agriculture and land use contributed 11% of UK emissions in 2021, of which 98% were from agriculture. The CCC 2023 Progress Report stated that around a third of plans in the Carbon Budget Delivery Plan for this sector are “speculative technological and innovative measures that either have no supporting policies, are in development, or are highly dependent on market uptake”. It expressed concerns that there was little emphasis on demand side measures such as “encouraging healthier, more sustainable diets”.⁸⁸

The CCC also highlighted that methane emissions from agriculture (comprising just under half of UK methane emissions) have remained stable since 2008, which “will hamper the UK’s commitment to adhere to the [Global Methane Pledge](#) signed at COP26”, and that targets for planting trees and restoring peatland have not been met.⁸⁹ It also stated that policy gaps and reliance on voluntary measures are “hampering uptake and confidence” in the agricultural sector.⁹⁰

The CCC therefore assessed that none of the plans are “credible” for any of the UK’s targets (fourth, fifth and sixth carbon budgets), and that 65% of the emissions reductions in the Government pathway are at “significant” risk. This can be seen in the chart below.

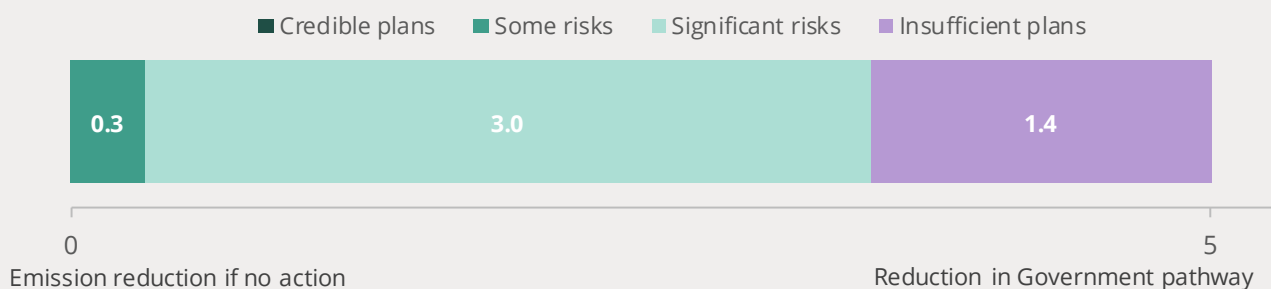
⁸⁸ CCC, [2023 Progress Report to Parliament](#), 28 June 2023.

⁸⁹ A pledge to rapidly reduce methane emissions in line with the 1.5C ambition, see: [Global Methane Pledge](#), accessed 8 November 2023.

⁹⁰ CCC, [2023 Progress Report to Parliament](#), 28 June 2023.

Agriculture: CCC June 2023 assessment of risks to emission reduction plans

Status of plans for emission reductions required by 2028-2032 in MtCO₂-eq



Source: Climate Change Committee, [2023 Progress Report to Parliament](#), Figure 9.9, 28 June 2023

There was no update for this sector from the CCC in October 2023, as this analysis only included the effect of policy announcements described in the previous sections.⁹¹

Analysing the Carbon Budget Delivery Plan shortly before the CCC Progress Report was published, the [Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit](#), an independent research and briefing organisation, said:

plans to decarbonise farming and land use lack both substance and credibility. In many areas, such as peatland restoration and woodland creation, progress is too slow and policies are not capable of operating at the scale needed to meet the recently published targets in the Carbon Budget Delivery Plan.

[In] reducing methane emissions from livestock, reducing emissions from lowland peat and increasing the production of energy crops, there is very little progress at all, and in some cases no policies in place to get it started. This is in the context of already unambitious plans for farming and land use that will see it double its share of UK emissions from around 11% to 19% by 2037. [...]

Reducing emissions is key to mitigating [climate] impacts. Many of these measures, such as agro-forestry, will also help farmers adapt and build resilience, but urgent progress is needed to get farming and land use back on track to net zero.⁹²

The [National Farmers Union's \(NFU\) response](#) to the CCC Progress Report assessments asked for more clarity on Defra's commitment to set out how farmers will be supported to understand their emission sources and decarbonise their businesses.

In response to the CCC's emphasis on healthier diets, the NFU said farmers had worked hard to produce "some of the most sustainable and climate friendly livestock in the world" and said that the government's continued

⁹¹ CCC, [CCC assessment of recent announcements and developments on Net Zero](#), 12 October 2023.

⁹² ECIU, [Farming and land use falling behind in raced to net zero, new analysis shows](#), 27 June 2023.

reliance on reducing livestock numbers to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions was “disappointing”.⁹³

⁹³ NFU, [NFU responds to Climate Change Committee's progress report](#), 7 July 2023.

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