

A green industrial revolution?

The Prime Minister this week wrote an article setting out his plans for a green revolution. His immediate target is to help create 250,000 new jobs to go with the 450,000 jobs currently said to be involved with decarbonisation. The plans entail £12bn of public investment designed to lever in an additional £48bn of private sector cash. That's under 1% of the total jobs in the economy.

There are some good ideas in the list. He wishes the UK to plan an additional 30,000 hectares year with trees, some 100m additional trees. Last year the UK added 13,000 hectares of new wood to the total, with the largest share in Scotland.

I would add to this ambition the rider that we should at the same time plant trees that can be harvested and replaced with others, so we remove the large amount of timber import we currently bring in. We should above all wish to eliminate the import of wood pellet for Drax power station and replace it with domestic output that needs much less fuel to transport.

We need to know how this investment is going to be raised. Are there going to be more tax incentives for people to put their money into timber? Will the UK public sector start buying domestic timber for its needs?

He wishes to extend the Green Homes Grant scheme. It needs simplifying to get it to take off. Offering people cash help to get their homes better insulated, with double glazing and good draught exclusion is a good idea.

He wishes to fund research and development into hydrogen powered systems for homes and vehicles, and wants to pump prime UK made batteries. It is worrying how the UK and the EU have let China establish a lead in these areas, and gain a dominant position in some of the rare earths and materials needed to make modern batteries, which places us at a current disadvantage.

The headline from the PM's intervention was a negative. The UK wishes to ban new diesel and petrol vehicles from 2030. The best way to cut the number of diesel and petrol cars is to produce new products which are better and better value than the cars we currently rely on. If the industry has done that by 2030 then moving on from diesels and petrol cars will be easy. If they have not, maybe the then government – which might just have some different Ministers around the table – will not want to end good products that people need.

There is need for more work on how all the electricity will be generated and how the cable network will be strengthened to take all the extra power. The UK is short of power and needs more reliable power as back up to wind farms. I will talk more about the policy of banning diesel and petrol cars and gas boilers tomorrow.