

# Creating a sustainable future through property

**Louisa LeRoux, Net Carbon Zero Programme Manager for the Government Property Agency, looks at maximising energy efficiencies and reducing carbon emissions across property portfolios. And how changes and initiatives enable offices to play a leading role in creating a sustainable future.**

The property industry has a huge role to play in reducing carbon emissions and maximising energy efficiencies as the world tackles climate change.

The Government has updated plans to achieve Net Zero by 2050 with the UK setting the world's most ambitious climate change target. In June 2021, the new target was published in law that would reduce Scope 1 emissions by 78 percent which means that the UK will be more than three quarters of the way to Net Zero by 2035. As the delivery body for the Government's office and warehouse portfolio strategies, we have committed to reaching the same target for Government buildings – the ones that we manage – by 2032, three years ahead of the Government's target.

Scope 1 emissions are direct emissions such as those from vehicles and gas boilers, as well as what we use as individuals. To reduce these emissions in buildings, the aim is to decarbonise and move away from fossil fuels and adopt sustainable forms of electricity.

Achieving the required 78 percent carbon reduction by 2032 will not be easy, and to achieve this we will need both concerted effort and work to deliver the quick wins.

## **Maximising sustainable, clean technologies**

We currently manage more than 700,000 square metres of the Government's office portfolio. This offers us a huge opportunity to maximise the use of sustainable, clean technologies and low and zero carbon energy wherever possible. For example:

- Through insulation and reduced consumption by optimising heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) and building management system (BMS) technology, use of micrometers, sensors and light-emitting diode (LED) lighting.
- Use green energy and move to decarbonised electric by switching to a renewable supplier.
- Generate and store renewable energy locally through integrated generation, storage and use.

Across the industry, we are seeing more businesses shift focus to a wider array of green initiatives such as sub-metering. This is allowing greater understanding of energy usage so that the right measures can be identified. These measures mostly include switching to suitable green tariffs, and

landlords installing more EV charging units and revisiting their heating and cooling units. We are also seeing smarter use of design elements on buildings to allow sustainable solutions to blend in better with the facade and fabric of older buildings.

### **Retrofitting can be done**

It's been proven that retrofitting can be done within heritage buildings to improve sustainability. For example, we are in the process of planning to decarbonise our Whitehall District Heat System which will go a long way to reducing carbon emissions on our Central London heritage estate.

### **Workplace Design Guide, Net Zero**

In August 2020, we published the [Government Workplace Design Guide](#). This includes the [Net Zero and Sustainability Annex](#) covering construction and operational energy. The Guide was created with flexibility in mind, because we understand not all buildings are or should be the same. It supports buildings to operate as sustainably as possible, whether it's a new build, renovation or refurbishment.

I'm sure we can all agree that the property industry is facing some unique challenges to achieve Net Zero. But we do have many ways in which we can overcome them. At the GPA, we plan to lead by example and encourage every stakeholder in property to not just reach a standard, but to innovate and find ways to push higher and achieve better.

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## **[Chancellor backs small businesses to thrive and grow](#)**

- Rishi Sunak hosts SME roundtable with Exchequer Secretary, visits small businesses and launches Google's nationwide skills training tour.
- Government support on offer highlighted in letter to thousands of SMEs including cuts to employment taxes and business rates alongside support for them to thrive and grow.

The Chancellor hailed small businesses as the "heart of our economy" today as he set out how the Government is backing firms to train and invest, helping

the economy to recover and grow, and support jobs during a whistle-stop tour of Suffolk.

Rishi Sunak hosted a roundtable – at Suffolk Food Hall – with local SMEs that had benefited from the Help to Grow: Management programme to discuss how the government scheme has supported them.

He was joined by Exchequer Secretary Helen Whately and visited local businesses including a bakery, gardening and gift shop, before launching the Google Digital Garage nationwide skills training tour at an event hosted at Ipswich Town Football Club.

This consisted of a day of workshops and mentoring to support SMEs to learn new digital skills to grow their businesses and improve productivity. Levi Roots, the entrepreneur behind Reggae Reggae sauce, also attended to share advice with local businesses.

The government has today written to thousands of small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) outlining government help available to them including cuts to employment taxes and business rates alongside support for them to thrive and grow.

**Following the visits, Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak said:**

Small businesses are the heart of our economy – creating jobs and prosperity across the UK. It's been inspiring to meet so many of them in Suffolk today.

I want them to know we will always stand behind them which is why we have written to thousands of businesses across the country to highlight government support on offer to support them in the uncertain months ahead.

From cuts to employment taxes and business rates, to incentivising firms to train and invest more, we want to create the conditions for our SMEs to thrive, helping the economy to recover and grow, and support jobs.

**Managing Director for Google UK and Ireland, Ronan Harris, said:**

The UK's growing digital economy has created opportunities for record numbers of British businesses to thrive, and we're committed to helping them make the most of that opportunity as they adapt to a hybrid world.

That's why we're launching the next phase of our in-person digital skills training and offering Google Career Certificates scholarships to help small businesses to develop the high impact tech skills needed to maximise their earning potential and level up.

Whilst in Ipswich, the Chancellor and Exchequer Secretary also visited some small independent businesses in the town centre. This included a gift shop, coffee shop and Ukrainian-owned affordable womenswear shop, whose owner is helping the war effort.

The Chancellor announced a series of measures in the [Spring Statement](#) to help businesses boost investment, innovation, and growth – including a £1,000 increase to Employment Allowance to benefit around half a million smaller firms.

## Further information

Five ways the Government is supporting SMEs:

### 1) Cutting employment taxes for small businesses

- Employment Allowance is a tax relief which allows eligible businesses to reduce their National Insurance Contributions (NICs) bills each year. Last month we increased the Employment Allowance from £4,000 to £5,000.
- That's a new tax cut worth up to £1,000 for nearly half a million SMEs (30% of all businesses). This includes around 50,000 businesses which will be taken out of paying NICs and the Health and Social Care Levy entirely.

### 2) Help to Grow

- Help to Grow: Digital is a UK-wide government-backed scheme that aims to help you choose, buy and adopt digital technologies that will help you grow your business.
- Eligible businesses can receive a 50% discount on buying new software worth up to £5,000 per SME alongside free impartial advice and guidance about what digital technology is best suited to boost your business performance.
- Our Help to Grow: Management scheme provides small businesses with access to world-class business expertise on everything from leadership and financial management to marketing and digital adoption- and is 90% funded by the Government.

### 3) Business rates reliefs

- From April this year, small retail, hospitality, and leisure businesses can benefit from [50% off their business rates bills](#). This is the biggest single-year cut to business rates in 30 years.

- From April 2022 there will be no [business rates](#) due on a range of green technology including solar panels and batteries, whilst eligible heat networks will also receive 100% relief. Together these will save businesses around £200 million over the next five years.

#### 4) Super-deduction and Annual Investment Allowance

- To spur business investment, the [super-deduction](#), the biggest two-year business tax cut in modern British history, allows companies to cut their tax bill by 25p for every £1 they invest in any qualifying machinery and equipment. This can include the purchase of computers, most commercial vehicles and office furniture.
- On top of this, we have extended the temporary £1 million limit for the [Annual Investment Allowance](#) to the end of March 2023.

#### 5) Fuel Duty

- We have cut fuel duty on petrol and diesel by 5p per litre for 12 months – effective from 23 March 2022.
- This the largest cut, in cash terms, that has ever been applied across all fuel duty rates at once. This cut, plus the freeze in fuel duty in 2022-23, represents a £5 billion saving.

### **About Google's Digital Garage**

[Google Digital Garage](#) – is one of Google's flagship investment programmes in the UK, providing free digital skills training to individuals and businesses both online and in person. Since its launch in 2015, Google has trained 800,000 people in more than 500 villages, towns, and cities across the UK. Google will advertise details of each of its 30+ skills training events in 2022 locally, and share details on how local people and businesses can sign up.

The Google Digital Garage digital skills training programme will visit over 30 towns and cities this year to deliver free in-person digital skills training to help businesses grow in the new hybrid world, including Ashford, Boston and Skegness, Leeds, Lincolnshire, Maidstone, Salisbury, Perthshire and Watford.

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Sellafield Ltd's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion lead Alan Rankin, said:

This is Me is a fantastic campaign and we are proud to be getting involved with it again. We are keen to end the stigma associated with mental health and aim to break the culture of silence by supporting people to tell their own stories.

The first step towards improving your mental health is often having a conversation, so we want our employees to know that it's okay to talk about their mental health.

Around 1 in 4 people in the UK experience a mental health problem each year.

Published 9 May 2022

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## [Tungsten x-ray breakthrough advances fusion roadmap](#)

Tungsten is the strongest of any natural metal. Only diamonds can lay a scratch on its surface.

It is extremely durable and can manage intense conditions. This unique quality makes it the perfect material to line the inside of a fusion energy machine, where temperatures reach 10 times hotter than the core of the sun. That is 150 million degrees Celsius, and the hottest place in our solar system.

Despite tungsten's durability, withstanding such an intense in-vessel neutron bombardment from the fusion process could eventually compromise reliability and lead to wear out, especially in future powerplants operating around the clock. Until now, engineers and scientists had no dependable way of detecting potential structural damage – normal 3D x-ray scans are unable to penetrate due to tungsten's incredible density.

However, a new paper published by scientists from the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) reveals for the first time how tungsten components have now been successfully scanned with x-rays to help detect defects and accurately judge its lifespan.

This is a major step forward on fusion's roadmap to commercial power, because structural analysis and longevity is a significant hurdle to delivering this form of safe, sustainable, low carbon energy for humanity.

Heather Lewtas, UKAEA's Head of Innovation and co-author of the paper 'Are

tungsten-based fusion components truly invisible to x-ray inspection?,' explains the significance of their research carried out in Culham, Oxford.

She said: "Fusion promises to be a safe, low carbon and sustainable part of the world's future energy supply. Its predictability is one of its main strengths, but it is therefore crucial that powerplants are not taken out of service for unnecessary maintenance.

"This breakthrough study gives us confidence we will be able to assess the condition of our large and small tungsten components, which have to repeatedly withstand some of the most challenging conditions on the planet.

"The insight will allow us to assess the lifespan of our inner-vessel wall and reduce future powerplant downtime to a minimum. It is a major step forward and we are extremely proud to demonstrate this technology for the first time."

The tungsten x-ray pilot study was led by scientist Triestino Minniti and completed under the UKAEA Fusion Technology Facilities programme, using emerging techniques.

Putting fusion electricity on the grid economically and reliably requires technological solutions to several challenges. UKAEA is undertaking cutting edge research in each category of innovation through its world-leading facilities.

Heather adds: "It is clear we must make significant changes to address the effects of climate change, and fusion offers so much potential. It has the potential to provide 'baseload' power and could help sustain net zero in the second half of the century.

"The ground-breaking research and innovation taking place in the UK is moving us closer, step-by-step, on this exciting roadmap to commercial power."

Based on the same process that powers our sun and the stars, fusion has long been considered the ultimate energy source. Fusion is rightfully difficult, but here are the basics:

When a mix of two forms of hydrogen (deuterium and tritium) are heated to extreme temperatures (10 times hotter than the core of the sun) they fuse together to create helium and release vast amounts of energy in the form of heat.

This superheated material forms a plasma, the fourth state of matter found in lightning and neon signs.

There is more than one way of achieving fusion. At UKAEA, they hold this hot plasma using strong magnets in a doughnut-shaped machine called a tokamak.

The energy created from fusion can generate electricity similar to existing power stations, namely by boiling water into steam to run a steam turbine.

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## Economic Secretary visits Solihull to highlight support for people facing problem debt and mental health crisis

- Economic Secretary John Glen visited Rethink in Solihull today (9th May) to support Mental Health Awareness Week.
- Visit comes one year since the launch of the Breathing Space scheme, which has protected nearly 60,000 vulnerable individuals from creditor action while they seek debt advice.
- John Glen urges those in crisis who need help to seek advice from mental health professionals and debt advice providers, such as Rethink Mental Illness.

One year on from the launch of Breathing Space, nearly 60,000 people have benefited from the government's scheme. This has provided individuals in problem debt with legal protection from creditor action while they seek debt advice – including through measures such as freezing interest payments and creditor enforcement for up to 60 days.

More than 900 of those taking this support entered “Mental Health Crisis Breathing Spaces”, which extends the protections while they receive mental health crisis treatment.

Economic Secretary to the Treasury, John Glen said:

Mental health is a challenge for us all – but these concerns can be exacerbated for people who are experiencing a mental health crisis and are in problem debt.

That's why I launched the Breathing Space scheme one year ago and will shortly be consulting on proposals for a Statutory Debt Repayment Plan – to give people the confidence, support and clarity they need to tackle problem debts.

The work Rethink Mental Illness are doing to support their clients is transforming lives. So I would urge anyone struggling with their mental health and in need of financial advice, to reach out to their nearest debt advice provider for support.

Mr Glen welcomed the work Rethink are doing to support their clients and raise awareness of the Mental Health Crisis Breathing Space. He urged others in problem debt to seek advice from a mental health professional, debt advice provider, or using the tools offered by the Money and Pensions Service.

The minister also thanked staff at Rethink for providing dedicated support to

members of the local community suffering with mental health issues and problem debt. He discussed ways the government is tackling problem debt, including investing more than £90 million to support debt advice charities, providing £3.8 million to pilot the No-interest Loans Scheme, and accelerating the release of dormant assets funding. The latter of which has made £96 million immediately available to Fair4All Finance to support their work on financial inclusion.

The government will shortly be consulting on proposals for a Statutory Debt Repayment Plan, which will enable someone in problem debt to repay most debts over a manageable timetable. Individuals entering a repayment plan under the scheme will benefit from a range of protections. This includes being shielded from enforcement action by creditors, creditors being unable to contact a debtor, and halting fees, additional interest on debts, and other charges, while any outstanding arrears are managed.

### **Further information**

- Rethink are an organisation dedicated to helping people with mental illness. They provide support to individuals in problem debt with mental health issues including through the Mental Health Crisis Breathing Space scheme, which is part of the Breathing Space scheme.
- The Mental Health Crisis Breathing Space ensures that people with mental health issues in problem debt can access mental health support first, creating time and space for a person to get the treatment they need, without having to worry about their debts growing or their creditors contacting them during their treatment.
- The government is providing £22 billion of support this financial year to help individuals tackle the cost of living. This includes providing an additional £500 million for the Household Support Fund, lowering the Universal Credit taper rate to help people keep more of the money they earn, and providing households with up to £350 each to help tackle rising energy bills.
- The latest Breathing Space data is published by the Insolvency Service and is available on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk). Between the launch of the Breathing Space scheme on 4 May 2021, and 31 March 2022, there were 58,463 registrations, comprised of 57,555 Standard breathing space registrations and 908 Mental Health breathing space registration.
- Healthcare professionals can access further information and resources about referring patients to MHCBS [here](#).
- If you are experiencing problem debt, or know a family member, friend or carer of someone who is, further details are available [here](#).
- We are investing at least £2.3 billion per year for mental health services by 2024 to support an additional two million people in England, and last year invested £79 million in children's mental health services, providing around 22,500 more children and young people with access to community health services and boosting support teams in schools and colleges.
- We provided an additional £500 million last year to accelerate our NHS mental health expansion plans and to target people most affected by the pandemic, and we are asking members of the public – including those with

experience of mental ill health – for their views to inform a new 10-year mental health plan.

- On 12 April we launched a [public call for evidence](#) to support the development of a new cross government ten-year plan for mental health. This is a key part of our commitment to level up and improve unequal outcomes and life chances across the country. This call for evidence will be open for 12 weeks, closing on 5 July.
- We are fully committed to attracting, training and recruiting the mental health workforce of the future. Our aim is for there to be an additional 27,000 mental health professionals in the workforce by 2023/24 to deliver the transformation of mental health services in England. We are training a new dedicated mental health workforce for schools and colleges with mental health support teams to cover an estimated 3 million children and young people by 2023.