

Funding the Future

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<https://www.taxresearch.org.uk/Blog/2024/12/10/we-need-a-carbon-army/>

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The UK's domestic properties need transformation if we are to meet our climate targets - and we need a carbon army of trained people to undertake that task.

<https://youtu.be/vWaf-qLa6bg?si=USg4YPZZn3I2QC4Z>

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=5tsvg-17656fd-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

This is the transcript:

We need a carbon army.

What do I mean? A carbon army would be maybe half a million people employed in this country to transform our domestic energy supply.

We live in a country where it is entirely possible to generate a lot of energy by putting solar panels on our roofs. But most roofs do not have solar panels on them.

We live in a country where the housing stock is older than average for the world and where very large numbers of properties are lacking some very basic things like insulation or double or even triple glazing which would transform their energy efficiency.

The energy efficiency of buildings in the UK is very often well below the C grade which is considered the minimum requirement that we should be targeting during the 2030s, and so far below the A level that is required by 2050 if we are to meet our targets for

climate change, that this investment is absolutely essential, and probably the single most useful thing that we could do to create a more efficient carbon environment for the UK.

And we need that more efficient carbon environment.

We need to consume less energy if we are to meet our energy targets. Because consuming less guarantees that throughout the energy cycle, there is no waste to put carbon into the atmosphere. And 25 per cent of all carbon we put into the atmosphere from the UK comes from our domestic properties.

So, we need to have people available who can do this essential task of bringing the UK's housing stock up to scratch so that we can meet that target and simultaneously do something which is also really important and that is end energy poverty in the UK, which as we all know is a massive factor in some people's lives.

The increasing cost of energy and our vulnerability to that price because of our dependency on energy imports is a serious issue for those people who are living on low incomes because energy now consumes so much of their available income. If we were able to reduce their energy consumption by increasing the quality of their housing, by removing the opportunity for energy to literally leak from it, which is the issue that they face, then we could solve that problem as well.

How could we do that? Look, this is really not rocket science. We need to invest in what I call that carbon army. People who will be trained to do these tasks which are fundamentally important to the future of our society. Tasks like insulation; tasks like fitting double-glazed windows, which would need to be made in the UK, and tasks like fitting new doors are deeply energy inefficient in most cases.

The question, of course, is how do we pay for this programme? And the answer is that it has to be funded upfront by the state. Because the capital available to do this is not in most people's possession. Remember that 70 plus per cent of people in the UK do not have sufficient savings to even manage the crisis that an unexpected bill might produce.

They are so poor in this sense that there is no spare capacity to, in any way, invest in their properties so that they can beat this energy crisis that we're all facing. Therefore, the capital has to come from somewhere else, and that has to come from the government.

I have suggested a source for that capital. It is very simple, and it is very straightforward. It is that all ISA funds should now be required to be saved in accounts that are linked to the Green New Deal, of which this idea of a carbon army is a part. And that money should be used to provide the capital for the purposes of undertaking energy transformation.

And yes, I know that ISA accounts can be withdrawn but if you look at the data on ISA account holdings over time, and we've got information for more than 20 years, almost without exception every year, the overall aggregate balance on ISA accounts grows, and as a consequence, we can use that money as capital because it is going to be left in savings in aggregate.

Therefore, If we change the rules on tax relief on ISAs so that anybody who wanted to take advantage of tax-free savings would have to make their money available for investment in the green economy, with the government guaranteeing a rate of return which would be market competitive at around the going interest rate, then we would end up with all the cash that is required to fund this carbon army to put the resources in place.

And the recovery of the money in question would come through future energy bills, which would be lower in the first instance simply because there would be less leakage. Therefore, overall, the consumer would pay less but would pay for the benefit that they get from insulation over the long term.

We would, therefore, get a series of advantages. We could beat our climate change targets.

We could put people to work in long-term employment in the UK, in the places where people live, doing jobs that will be secure for the long term where skills are required, and where there is, therefore, an opportunity for long-term careers.

And simultaneously, we could help beat the whole curse of energy poverty.

That, to me, is what a government who cares about this country should be doing.

And that's why we need a carbon army.