

Going green: Debating the socio-economic impacts of achieving Net Zero

Wed 24th January 2024, University of Southampton Science Park

Introduction to the Conference

Achieving Net Zero is highly complex, requiring government leadership and strong engagement from industry, academia, communities, and individuals. However, discussions have often focussed on the technical and ecological challenges of decarbonisation. This one-day conference seeks to focus on the economic and social factors that will crucially drive – or impede – this transition in the UK.

The conference is hosted by the University of Southampton, in partnership with University of Strathclyde Centre for Sustainable Development and the UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose (IIPP), host institution of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network UK (SDSN UK). It will bring together researchers – both established and early career - policy makers and industry professionals with the aim to mobilise collective knowledge and experience to identify the most pressing, cross-sector research questions surrounding a Net Zero future. The conference will include a plenary session, small group discussions as well as a poster event where early career researchers will have the opportunity to showcase their work.

The UK Context

A Net Zero transition requires technological innovation and investment across sectors – including energy, transport, built environment, food and agriculture, and industrial production – as well as attention to the political, social and educational, and economic structures that can support these transformations. This task has become more complex as the economic and social impacts of Brexit, the pandemic, and the cost-of-living crisis affect our daily lives

Hearteningly, the UK has been making progress. The energy sector is moving towards Net Zero, with important shifts towards renewables. Industries, including transport, rely upon improved energy infrastructure and the rapid development of new energy sources, including hydrogen-based fuels, to enable change. Other sectors such as agriculture and land-use need clearer, holistic policy frameworks, with the [House of Lords calling for a land-use framework](#) to improve the management of competing pressures on UK land (e.g., housing, nature restoration, food security, Carbon Capture Storage).

There is also growing recognition of the positive spillovers of decarbonisation. For example, the [UK's Net Zero Strategy](#) recognises that decarbonisation offers multiple co-benefits to health (e.g. reducing pollution, improved walking and cycling routes). The [Climate Change Committee](#) has gone further, highlighting the health benefits of improved housing standards and a more sustainable diet. The extent to which health benefits and other second-order benefits are realised will depend on our route to decarbonisation and the degree of public engagement and systemic behavioural change.

As noted above, achieving Net Zero is highly complex, requiring government leadership and strong engagement from across society. Convenings such as this event provide an opportunity for engaging with this complexity, understanding both interlinkages and spill overs, and considering how academic research from across disciplines can help support the critical transition towards Net Zero.