

INSULATION SPECIAL EDITION



1. Editorial: Building a Retrofit Campaign as a matter of urgency

At its recent annual conference, the Labour Party announced that, if elected, it would undertake a £60 billion programme of home retrofit including insulation and heating. At the recent SERA AGM Shadow Energy Minister Alan Whitehead MP explained how this would be “180 degrees different” from the Conservatives two failed attempts to grapple with this since 2010.

- It will be done collectively on an area basis and managed by local authorities with FE Colleges involved in local training.
- Neighbourhoods will be designated as low carbon/ efficiency zones.
- Each of these will contain a mix of tenures. Home owners will get 0% loans. Private sector landlords will be required to meet the standard before being allowed to rent out. Social housing would be done through direct grants to LAs.
- This should get all homes up to standard before 2035.

This programme, especially if carried out by local authority direct labour and/ or a national retrofit task force has the prospect of both getting the job done and generating electoral support for any Party that campaigns for it.

The Great Homes Upgrade campaign (see below) has already gained significant support from Metro Mayors and local authorities and aims to build local task forces involving councils, unions, NGOs, universities and colleges to campaign and organise what can be done now and push for that to be expanded. Its worth signing up to this to join in campaigning in the New Year.

The Scottish TUCs Our Climate, Our Homes campaign (see below) is trying to organise this on all Scotland level and we need a similar breadth of campaigning South of the Border too; as this is an issue that can unite the entire movement, so we should make sure that it does.

The Campaign Against Climate Change Trade Union group has, in its Climate Jobs booklet, laid out a comprehensive retrofit plan, which lays out in detail how this might be done, as eloquently described by Wolfgang Kuchler below.

Contents

1. Editorial - the urgent need for a retrofit campaign
Paul Atkin Tahir Latif
2. The Scottish model
Roz Foyer
3. The NEF/GND Great Homes Upgrade campaign
Aydin Dikerdem
4. How we could do it
Wolfgang Kuchler
5. How to train the skilled workforce we need
Linda Clarke
6. Stats of the month



Quote of the Month

the climate action army, led by young people, is unstoppable.

They are larger. They are louder. And, I assure you, they are not going away.

UN Secretary General António Guterres

The GJA has been a long-time advocate of ensuring that the training is available to support such an initiative and that issues of equality and justice are to the fore. See Linda Clarke's article below

Some basic principles on which we should be able to unite include:

- Retrofitting should be 'Free at the point of use' and collectively managed; including guaranteeing that the costs and disruption of large scale works in people's homes, which will require decanting in some cases to do the job as thoroughly as it needs to be done, do not fall on individuals.
- Everyone in the affected area should be involved in the process, via local citizens assemblies, or energy futures groups, and unions part of the process through trades councils and/or as part of local task forces.
- Local Authorities must be funded sufficiently to be able to coordinate retrofit locally, upgrade their own buildings; and employing, training and upskilling the workforce needed to do the job.
- Everybody involved needs to feel secure within a stable long-term framework at national and local level.
- Everyone doing this work should be a trade union member to guarantee proper terms and conditions and adherence to Health and Safety procedures.
- The workforce doing this work should be diverse fully reflective of the communities they are working with, with recruitment for courses and jobs making sure that this is the case.

In the coming weeks we will be seeking the broadest active unity around these proposals. Sign up to these Newsletters to stay in the loop.

Paul Atkin & Tahir Latif

2. STUC launches campaign to upgrade Scotland's homes

Scotland's trade unions have joined forces with tenants unions, anti-poverty groups, environmentalists and academics to launch a nationwide campaign to upgrade Scotland's homes.

Led by the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC), the '**Our Climate, Our Homes**' campaign is calling for Councils to establish local energy companies and upgrade homes. The campaign is supported by Living Rent, the Poverty Alliance, Friends of the Earth Scotland, Common Weal, Energy Action Scotland, Energy Poverty Research Initiative, and leading academic on public ownership, Professor Andy Cumbers.

- without action, spiralling energy prices and cuts to Universal Credit will create a perfect storm that will drive up fuel poverty. The latest figures show that 613,000 households in Scotland were in fuel poverty in 2019.
- Scotland's buildings are responsible for almost a quarter of Scotland's emissions and more than £33billion is needed to upgrade buildings in line with climate targets.
- investment in energy efficiency more than pays for itself and, if the Scottish Government support Councils to establish municipal energy companies, and set up their own National Infrastructure Company, more than 60,000 jobs could be created over ten years.
- In Europe a number of municipalities have successfully established publicly-owned renewable energy companies.
- The successful transition from town gas to natural gas in the 1970s, was led by National and Local Government.

- This contrasts with the UK construction industry today, where price-fixing, fraud, and embezzlement are well-known problems alongside poor employment practices such as bogus self-employment; umbrella contracts, a lack of health and safety standards, and the systematic blacklisting of workers.
- Municipal energy companies and a National Infrastructure Company could drive-up standards while also helping address skills gaps.

The STUC has launched an **e-action tool** that allows constituents to email their local councillor to demand funding from the Scottish Government to create municipal energy companies and demands political parties to commit, in principle, to setting them up with appropriate financial support from the Scottish Government. Roz Foyer, STUC General Secretary, stated,

"Our campaign sets out how to upgrade our homes in a way which creates good quality green jobs, tackles fuel poverty, reduces emissions, and provides better value for money for the taxpayer. With the right level of funding, Municipal Energy Companies could truly be transformative, and the creation of a National Infrastructure Company would ensure that Local Authorities can be adequately supported to decarbonise buildings."



Roz Foyer
STUC
General Secretary



3. Great Homes Upgrade

For many people, climate justice and the question of a transitioning to a zero carbon economy is wrought with worry and concerns. Will this mean losing out on the things I have now? Will my own job be at risk? What even is a green job? My life is hard enough as it is!

For three months now I have been organising for the New Economics Foundation (NEF) on a national campaign around retrofitting homes called the **Great Homes Upgrade**. For NEF this is a crucial area where hundreds of thousands of green jobs and a tangible plan for a Green New Deal for communities can be realised.

Upgrading our homes, also known as 'retrofitting', is the process of installing new features to make a house more energy efficient, through things like better insulation and double- or triple-glazed windows. It also involves technological changes like replacing dirty fossil-fuel reliant heating, like gas boilers, with clean alternatives, like heat pumps.

Currently our damp and leaky housing stock is one of the largest sources of carbon dioxide emissions in the UK, our home energy use alone being around 20% of total UK carbon emissions. If we are to meet our climate targets and avoid devastating climate emergency, we will need to retrofit **at least 19m homes** by 2030. We have to get moving on this work, but currently even if we wanted to, we wouldn't have the skills, supply chains or capacity to get started.

For me, this should not be seen as a challenge but an opportunity. Retrofitting is one of those golden green policies that is not about taking away any kind of modern convenience but about making our lives better. Our homes will be warmer and safer, our energy bills lower, and we can create hundreds of thousands of jobs in the process, seeing small businesses and suppliers flourish up and down the country. The fact it will help us lower our greenhouse gas emissions is a bonus.

To kickstart a Great Homes Upgrade we need the government to provide funding and a long-term plan. But to make this work for local communities, it is important that local authorities are the engines of the retrofit transformation. Many of them have already begun work on upgrading their own housing stock, and a national funding scheme offers a chance for councils to stimulate their local economies and create thousands of jobs in-house. This would build up skills and supply chains locally, driving down the price of home upgrades and unlocking private finance.

If you are a climate activist, it's likely you have taken part in a fossil-fuel divestment campaign or an action around pollution. But upgrading and future-proofing our homes remains a technocratic and fairly niche area. If we are to cut our carbon emissions fast enough this needs to change. Activists should be organising in their communities demanding that our housing is upgraded and the Trade Union movement should seize the opportunity to support the creation of hundreds of thousands of good green jobs. Be it through setting up retrofit taskforces with your local authority, meeting with local further education organisations and training colleges to see what training is being set up, or helping residents work with housing associations to upgrade their homes.

NEFs Great Homes Upgrade hopes to put retrofitting on the national agenda, so everyone can live in a warm, safe home which doesn't pollute the planet. If you care about housing, jobs, inequality and the climate crisis, come and **join us!**

Aydin Dikerdem NEF



4. Climate Jobs: Building a workforce for the climate emergency

The government makes out that there's a trade-off between jobs and the climate. Their proposals are skewed towards money-making opportunities. Yet hundreds of thousands of people agree that a national strategy of reducing energy use, changing transport, agriculture and industry, and increasing renewable energy is the answer.

But what has been missing is two things: how do we actually make it happen – what's the plan and how do we get it implemented? And how do we look after people who lose their jobs as a result of climate change?

Climate Jobs: Building a workforce for the climate emergency ties together data from the New Economics Foundation, the Green New Deal and others, to propose a National Climate Service to coordinate the changes needed, and to make sure everyone has a place in a new economic future. Coming from the trade union movement, we make solid proposals for new jobs in energy, transport, retrofit, agriculture and industry, and show how we can upskill millions of people over a decade while transforming our economy to one that serves people and planet.

We make no bones about the price. Higher taxes on those who can afford it will be needed – for example, to retrofit homes without complicated loans and grants – and we will need to move away from the kind of throw-away consumerism we have got used to. But we believe this is no time to pull the wool over people's eyes.

Read the **pamphlet**, distribute it online and on the street, get your union or community group to support it, take the demands on demonstrations and to your MP and councillors.

Wolfgang Kuchler



5. Retrofitting needs a highly qualified workforce

Britain has one of the highest proportions of buildings in Europe built before 1945 and generally 'hard to heat', resulting in many estates suffering fuel poverty. In small recognition of the possibilities this situation presents in addressing climate change and creating new employment opportunities, the government offered a Green New Deal package of £1.5bn in September 2020, offering households grants of up to £5,000 or £10,000 to put in insulation or low-carbon heating. This compares with £12bn in France and £36bn in Germany, which have a far lower proportion of 'hard to heat' building stock. Six months later, the scheme was scrapped with only 5,800 energy efficient measures installed. This was therefore a repeat of the 2013 Green Deal, for which Ministers projected 250,000 possible jobs and that 14 million homes would be more energy efficient by 2020. In July 2015, with just 10,000 households benefitting, the government stopped funding. This earlier 'Green Deal' exposed the difficulties entailed in retrofitting on an individual basis and seeking to embed low energy construction by certificating and training particular skills on a one-off basis without a comprehensive rethink of the entire vocational education and training (VET) system for construction and the organisation of the construction process.

Extensive studies across Europe have highlighted the need to upgrade construction VET systems to achieve energy literacy and overcome the performance gap in, for instance heat pump installation, between the energy efficiency envisaged in the design and the actual building performance on site. Zero energy construction requires a high standard of knowledge and know-how, including physics and how to achieve air tightness, as well as integrated teamworking to bridge occupational and professional interfaces. Yet the number of construction trainees, including apprentices, has declined dramatically over many decades and the industry faces a major skills shortage crisis, not helped by Brexit. With half of the construction workforce 'self-employed' and a reliance on micro firms and extensive subcontracting, there hardly exists an infrastructure for work-based training and Further Education (FE) colleges themselves have been starved of funds and facilities.

The alternative is for the councils to rely more on their own resources and to work with the FE colleges, the unions and local organisations to achieve the energy literate skilled construction workforce required for large-scale retrofitting of council property. Glasgow City Council has shown the way, with 2,200 construction workers directly employed in its City Building workforce, innovative low energy new build housing and retrofit schemes, and a comprehensive 4-year training programme for 250 trainees carried out in its training centre and local FE colleges. Other councils have

been in-sourcing the repair and maintenance of their properties, training and directly employing the workforce required. At the same time, some FE Colleges have been upgrading their construction workshops, including in the case of Cardiff and Vale College, with a model house for trainees to understand air tightness principles and heat pumps and solar panels for electrical and plumbing trainees to learn how these are installed. What is important is not to short-change the future retrofit workforce, tenants and residents. Local authorities can in partnership, address the climate emergency and play a central role in planning and carrying out the retrofitting of their properties to a high standard with their own well-trained workforces, employed under good conditions. This then is the vision for an accountable, large-scale, and high-quality retrofit programme focussed on energy saving rather than accommodating to energy demand.

*Linda Clarke
Centre for the Study of the Production of the Built Environment (ProBE), University of Westminster*



6. Stats of the Month

Stats of the month

65%

Voter support for a National Retrofitting Task Force. *(NEF Survey)*

95%

How much home insulation fell 2012-2019
(National Energy Action)

2187

The year gas boilers will be replaced by heat pumps at the current rate.
(Onward)

Building the Greener Jobs Alliance

In addition to all our campaigning activities, at the GJA we are also seeking to improve our communications and services. First, our currently creaking website is about to undergo a much needed overhaul, thanks to our website guru Wendy Mayes. This plan, which we hope to implement by the autumn, should give us a much more flexible and responsive web presence, much more scope for updates and current news, and the ability to carry regular blogs from members or guests, while still carrying the course modules and newsletters that are the backbone of the website.

We've also produced a new GJA constitution which will be available on the new website, to update our membership, our purpose and aims, and how we operate independently of the policies of our constituent membership. It's also our aim to review our list of supporters and seek to engage more often and more directly so that we can build campaigns and alliances directly to support our primary objective of supporting the development of climate jobs for workers across the whole economy.

[Subscribe to the GJA Newsletter](#)

[Donate to the GJA](#)

Supporting the Greener Jobs Alliance

The GJA is a loose coalition of organisations involved in climate change work.

We wish to make it clear that the views expressed in our publications and activities do not necessarily reflect the position of all the organisations whom we work with.

We will always seek to make that clear by listing the organisations that have specifically signed up to a particular initiative.