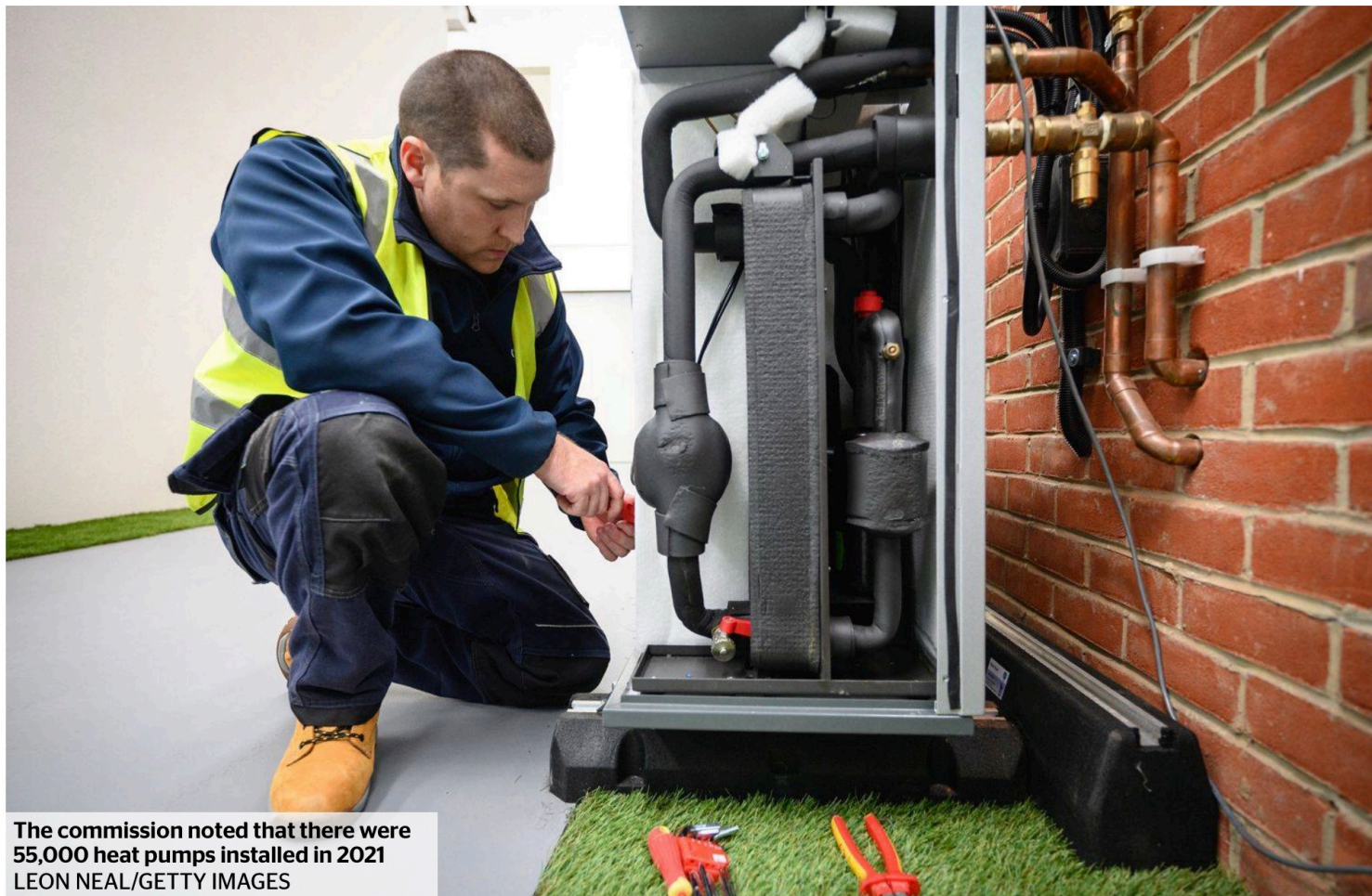


# Ministers' failures 'threaten net zero'



The commission noted that there were 55,000 heat pumps installed in 2021  
LEON NEAL/GETTY IMAGES

## Adam Vaughan, Environment Editor

Government advisers have condemned ministers' "negligible" progress on replacing gas boilers with green alternatives in homes.

The head of the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) said that without better policies and incentives to spur the take-up of heat pumps and electric cars, Britain would miss its 2035 carbon target.

In a report today the group, launched by George Osborne in

2015 to provide the government with impartial expert advice, said progress had been seen last year on broadband and renewable electricity. However, it said the government was off-track on measures key to meeting net zero. The commission cited "more uncertainty" over HS2, low installation figures for home insulation, and recycling rates failing to improve.

"I'd give it four out of ten, or five if I'm being generous," Sir John Armitt, the commission's chairman, said. "Government comes forward with these big

ideas, but what you don't see is the necessary detail to back that up." A number of government energy policies are expected to be announced on Thursday — dubbed "Green Day" or "Energy Security Day" — including a mandate on how many electric models carmakers must sell next year.

Armitt said that the UK's binding 2035 climate target of reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 78 per cent on 1990 levels — up from a 49 per cent cut so far — will be missed without faster action.





**Analysis**

Sir John Armitt's scathing report is probably not how Grant Shapps, the energy secretary, hoped to kick off a week rebooting the net zero strategy (Adam Vaughan writes).

The government has to set out a revised version of its 2021 plan by Friday to meet a High Court deadline after the Good Law Project and green campaigners won a legal challenge last year against its shortcomings. Ministers also need to respond to the findings of a review by the Tory MP Chris Skidmore

which called for planning reforms to enable a "solar revolution". His report, commissioned by Liz Truss, said a ban on sales of gas boilers should be brought forward from 2035 to 2033.

There is little to suggest Shapps will embrace the latter recommendation. But Armitt's sober and serious-minded group has rightly identified the need to speed up the rollout of heat pumps, vital to weaning the UK off boilers and the costly, carbon-intensive gas that fuels them. As Ofgem has repeatedly

pointed out, wholesale gas price rises are the overwhelming reason that household energy bills have surged.

Yet Shapps is reportedly considering the oil and gas capital Aberdeen as the site of the mooted "Green Day", which sources indicate could instead be billed as "Energy Security Day".

With Ed Miliband, the shadow net zero secretary, due to set out his own stall on Tuesday, the government is under pressure to deliver detailed policies and incentives to curb emissions.

"If we don't accelerate on two fundamental things, heat pumps and the rollout of electric vehicle charge points, you are not going to meet 2035," he said. The commission noted that there were 55,000 heat pumps installed in 2021, against a target set by Boris Johnson's government of 600,000 a year by 2028.

There are 37,000 public charge points for electric cars, with a target of having 300,000 by 2030.

Armitt said air source heat pumps, which are powered by electricity, typically cost at least £10,000, which was "a very sig-

nificant capital sum for people to find" and the government's grants of £5,000 towards one were "not cracking it at the moment for people".

Labour calculated that at the rate of take-up since May last year for the grants under the boiler upgrade scheme, it would take 58 years to meet the government's 600,000-a-year goal.

The NIC warned that "a further year of prevarication" risked losing momentum on efforts to meet the country's binding target of reaching net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Armitt said another big problem was the planning system harming deployment of wind and solar power projects.

He also noted that national policy statements had not been updated for a decade, during which consent times for big energy projects had slowed from around two years to about four.

"What we need is bigger and bolder decisions and interventions by government," Armitt said. "Multiple small interventions don't cut the mustard."

The government did not respond to a request for comment. ■