

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State
Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London, SW1P 4DF

Dear Mr Jenrick,

Gas Boiler Ban and Retrofitting Support

I am writing on behalf of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (formerly the Oxfordshire Growth Board) of which I am currently Chair. The Partnership is a joint committee of the six Oxfordshire councils together with key strategic partners including Oxford's universities, the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, Oxfordshire Skills Board, Homes England, the Environment Agency and the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group.

We write offering our strong support for HM Government regulations to ban the installation of fossil fuelled gas boilers in new and existing residential property as soon as possible, in favour of more sustainable alternatives. The recent publication of an independent landmark study undertaken by the University of Oxford¹ has underlined the urgent need to replace our heating systems which rely on gas and oil if we are to meet our net zero carbon commitments. In line with our high ambitions, this unparalleled report makes clear that to lead the way nationally and meet net zero 2050, there must be no new gas boilers installed across our building stock from 2025 and no new homes in Oxfordshire being connected to the gas grid.²

To optimise the impact of switching to decarbonised heat sources, the significant challenge of retrofitting must also be addressed head on. All pathways to net zero 2050 will involve a major programme of retrofit for existing homes and nondomestic buildings, led by strong and consistent national policy including significant subsidy.³ Retrofit and the energy efficiency of all homes must be a strategic priority for the Government in its decarbonisation agenda, and local authorities need robust legislative and financial

¹ Co-commissioned by 12 public, private and community sectors organisations, including Oxfordshire's six councils. Available at: <https://www.eci.ox.ac.uk/research/energy/pathways-to-a-zero-carbon-oxfordshire-report.html>

² Under the Societal Transformation Pathway

³ Environmental Change Institute, 2021. Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire. p.137.

support to deliver on a vast scale. To lead the way, the Pathways report estimates the local investment requirement for retrofitting and heat pumps to be in the region of £1.5bn between 2021-2030, accounting for nearly half of all investment needed to achieve net zero by 2050. We therefore question the development of new buildings now which utilise fossil fuels knowing that they will soon have to be retrofitted with new heating systems, at significant expense.

Oxfordshire is on track to achieve a 50% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030, and our shared Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire⁴ aspires for carbon neutrality by 2040. Local progress is aided by local scientists, businesses and researchers who are at the forefront in solving the most pressing ecological challenges of our time, driving global change through a thriving zero-carbon sector. However, without support from Government, we cannot leverage the pace of change required to achieve local and national targets in this area. For national environmental ambitions to be realised, HM Government must empower local authorities with the right powers and resources, such as through improved building standards, to deliver.

In conclusion, the Future Oxfordshire Partnership supports the national direction with respect to the banning of fossil fuel gas boilers but asks for higher ambition and a wider system view to be taken on the need for a comprehensive retrofit programme. Our partnership remains keen to discuss opportunities with HM government to work together in this area to ensure we can deliver a sustainable net zero future for our residents.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michele Mead'.

Councillor Michele Mead, Chair of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership

⁴ Oxfordshire's six Local Authorities agreed a Strategic Vision for the County in April 2021. Available at: <https://www.oxfordshiregrowthboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Strategic-Vision-full-document.pdf>