

# OPINION

Philip Sellwood, chief executive of the Energy Saving Trust urges the government not to become sidetracked in meeting the important carbon emission targets



**W**e know what needs to be done; we just need to do it. Now.

Times are tough, belts are being tightened, but when it comes to climate change we cannot afford to take a gap year; there will be more recessions in the decades ahead. Yes, people need help right now to pay their bills but we need to think longer-term as well. If the average householder installed the basic energy saving measures like insulation they could save £340 year on year. That's a great message for householders. And with a trebling of calls to our advice line in recent months, it's proof that it's a message that is hitting home; but, we need more than just a message.

In 1960 John F Kennedy delivered his famous 'we choose to go to the moon this decade' speech. He went on to say that they were all in this as a team and that they were going to make this work, adding that he didn't know how to make it work but knew that he would do his bit and that it wouldn't fail because of him. This was great leadership; an extremely complex and challenging mission communicated to the nation in a simple and united way.

Fast forward to today and Brown has made an equally challenging promise. We are committed to a legally-binding pledge to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 80 per cent by 2050. Is there much difference between Kennedy's and Brown's rhetoric? Yes, there is one notable difference. Kennedy said that he didn't know how to make it work. We do. We have a plan and we must crack on with it.

The political will is there to make things happen but there is no time left to move from meeting to meeting, from debate to debate; we must get off the hamster wheel and start delivering. As David Ogilvy put it: "search all city parks and you won't find a statue of a committee".

If we throw everything at our existing housing stock together with a programme of behaviour change combined with sensible decarbonisation of the grid then we could achieve a 70 per cent cut in household carbon emissions. And this

doesn't take into account future technology advancements. We also know that energy generated by communities has the potential to deliver half of the UK household energy needs. So, the 80 per cent target is achievable so long as we don't get sidetracked. This is where my concern lies.

In recent months the government has committed to rolling out smart meters but has not said how quickly this will happen. It has announced a resolution on feed-in-tariffs but has not yet said how much pay-back householders will actually get. We've already seen a dilution down of the EU car emission target, the 2012 target has been so watered down that it is unlikely to be met until 2019, over twenty years after car manufacturers first signed up to a CO2 target. The target will be phased in up to 2015; but the penalties are set so that it will be cheaper for some manufacturers to miss the target than to meet it before 2019.

Political will is one thing; seeing delivery through is another. If we don't see a commitment from government on key policies then we won't hit the 80 per cent target. At the time of writing this we are waiting to hear whether householders will get help replacing the nearly five million G-rated boilers currently in use in the UK through CERT (Carbon Emission Reduction Target). With the definition for zero-carbon-homes out for consultation, we hope that zero-carbon-homes will do what they say on the tin: householders of zero-carbon homes will reap the benefit of producing their own energy, instead of an offset policy where it disappears into a black hole known as the grid.

We need commitment across the political landscape, but I don't necessarily mean agreement on every issue. Political fisticuffs can be a good thing because if the government isn't sticking to a plan then rival parties should be quick to crack the whip and point out its deficiencies.

Policies alone won't get us where we want to be, we also need a commitment from government

and industry to keep pushing the simple messages.

Like Kennedy we need to turn something very challenging and complex into a simple and united message, because there is still a lot of confusion out there.

Let's take the recent furore in the media about energy saving light bulbs. Government has made a commitment to phase out traditional ones which is a good thing, but there still remain many misconceptions about energy saving ones. For example, some people claim that they take ages to light up and they don't fit many lamp shades. Our simple light bulb challenge – two identical booths, one with a traditional light bulb and one with an energy saving one – has managed to shatter thousands of people's misconceptions. This holds the key: getting people to experience things first hand. It's chicken and egg.

We need policy intervention to increase the uptake on things like renewables, but we also need an industry creating more opportunities for people to experience them.

When we reach that halcyon point of living in zero carbon homes we will need to continue providing support to householders living in those greener homes. This is because that home will not remain zero or even low carbon for very long as people start to switch off the mechanical heat recovery ventilation, open windows, turn heating up to a maximum, use the electric panel heater instead of the biomass boiler and have a power shower installed. And that's not to mention leaving things on standby, buying electrical gadgets they don't need and leaving lights on when they are not at home.

I keep hearing the words: we have reached a tipping point. It's time to start taking action. We are not short of policies and we know what needs to be done. As with Kennedy, we just need to make sure that we do it. Now. ●