



Net Zero will be good for us and the planet

It's scorching! Well, on and off it has been. The climate and weather records for the UK may not give a clear picture of climate change but research centres around the world gather data and produce averages that show the trends.

Some interesting results have been published recently showing where we're going. The National Aeronautical and Space Administration (NASA) in the USA have produced a graphic that shows the *increase* in monthly global surface temperatures since 1880 until May 2024 (the most recent data). It is clear that so far, 2024 has been the warmest for 144 years (<https://www.nasa.gov/earth/nasa-analysis-confirms-a-year-of-monthly-temperature-records/> see Figure 1). That might change if the El Niño event subsides and La Niña arrives, which will have a cooling effect in the Tropical Pacific. This could mean that the latter half of 2024 is a bit cooler.

If these numbers are turned sideways (Figure 2), it is easy to see how the averages have increased over the years. What is worrying is that there seems to be no let up in the rise in temperatures and we are heading for 1.5 °C above the pre-industrial level.

Some sections of the popular press and some politicians are sceptical about climate change and argue that we shouldn't be doing anything about it. Sceptics often grab onto the fact whilst over 97 % of scientists working in and around the subject totally agree that it's happening, there are 3 % who don't. This is interpreted as a lack of consensus in the scientific world, whereas in reality such a level of agreement is unprecedented. In fact the latest figures show that 99.9 % of these scientists are in agreement. That is absolutely amazing in the world of science!

The other brickbat that is thrown at acting on climate change is that it will cost too much, will degrade our life styles and why should the UK be one of the few nations to take action. In fact a recent report by the Carbon Brief organisation

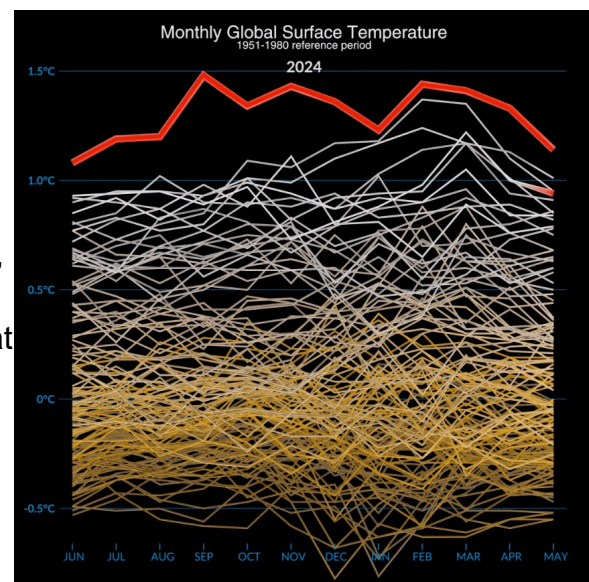


Figure 1. Monthly average global temperatures since 1880. Each line represents a year, June - May

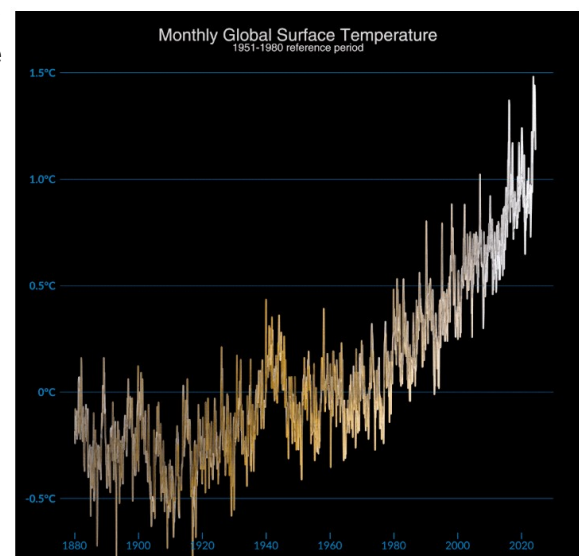


Figure 2. Yearly average global temperatures since 1880.

(in a peer-reviewed journal) shows clearly that cutting emissions from buildings and transport will leave people better off and healthier. The study calculates that the financial benefit could amount to £164 bn in six urban regions. It is estimated that for an investment of £14.5 bn in carbon-cutting policies, £23.2 bn would be saved. Already, the UK government has shown that the running costs of clean technologies and cutting out fossil fuels will save money. Then there are the so-called social aspects of net zero – the gain from these is much higher and include improving insulation in buildings, reducing traffic accidents, electrifying cars and the rail network, reducing car trips, better freight logistics, less air pollution so better health.

Already we can see the benefits of moving towards net zero. The independent Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit has shown that the net zero economy in the UK grew by 9 % in 2023 and contributed £74 bn in gross added value, which is about 3.8 % of the UK overall economy. There were over 750,000 full time jobs in this area, which is close to 3 % of total employment.

The science is clear and the economic benefits are clear. But there is still a lot of misinformation about. It is often generated by just a few people but gets repeated, especially on social media, and that repetition gains more recognition, so that even those who endorse the scientific consensus can be swayed. If you are not totally convinced about climate change and the damage it is doing, or you have friends and acquaintances who are sceptical, the science can help you. There are so many measurements that show it is happening – temperature rising, rates of ice melting at the north and south poles, loss of glaciers, changes in seasons, loss of biodiversity etc. And it's not just the fact that these things are happening at all but they are happening so very much faster than at anytime in the history of the whole world.

We will have to live with climate change for many years now but we have to take steps to make sure that future generations, our grandchildren, great grandchildren and great-great grandchildren have a world in which they can live, where food is plentiful and there is social justice for all. Of course governments have the most important role to play in setting the right conditions but it is up to all of us to play our part and reduce carbon emissions, cut pollution and cut out waste.

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