

Briefing: A Clean Energy Advertising and Sponsorship policy for Britain

A crucial step towards energy independence, public health, and better places

Key points

- The promotion of fossil fuels through advertising and sponsorship in the UK threatens to undermine the energy security, public health, and pride in place agendas at the heart of this government.
- Over 20 years after Labour's successful tobacco promotion ban, the World Health Organisation, the UN Secretary General, and the Faculty of Public Health have called for the promotion of fossil fuels to follow suit.
- There is growing precedent: fossil fuel advertising restrictions are being enacted by councils in the UK and at a national level in France.

Clean energy objective

The UK government has set out a plan to end the country's reliance on the fossil fuel rollercoaster. Achieving true energy security requires a transition to clean, homegrown renewables.

However, fossil fuel advertising and sponsorship is pushing in the opposite direction.

Continuing to allow fossil fuel companies to promote themselves supports Reform's 'drill, baby, drill' message for them, for free.

Public health and clean air objective

Fossil fuels are responsible for over 8.1 million deaths per year through air pollution alone - more than tobacco, ultra-processed foods or alcohol.¹ The economy-wide effects of climate change have even further-reaching health and mortality impacts, which will continue to worsen.²

Expert voices including the Faculty of Public Health have strongly advocated for a fossil fuel advertising ban based on the tobacco advertising ban model.³

The precedents

Tobacco: Comprehensive national bans on tobacco advertising, including in the UK,⁴ have been effective in reducing consumption and mortality.⁵

Fossil fuels: UK and EU municipalities (including Edinburgh, Sheffield, and Amsterdam) have begun implementing their own fossil fuel promotion bans in the absence of national policy. France is taking steps towards their own national ban.

High Fat, Salt and Sugar food and drink:⁶ Sales of unhealthy food and drinks were lower than expected after Transport for London (TfL) restricted advertising of these products.⁷

What is fossil fuel advertising?

Fossil fuel advertising is close to home. Between 2018-2024, Transport for London (TfL) hosted more than 240 advertising campaigns by oil and gas companies including Shell, BP, and ExxonMobil. The number rises to 1,275 when including companies that supply energy from fossil fuels, such as E.ON, British Gas, and Scottish and Southern Energy.⁸

Fossil fuel companies use advertising to influence politicians. Of nine campaigns that Shell placed on the TfL network between April 2021 and April 2023, four targeted Westminster specifically.⁹ Equinor, the Norwegian oil major, admitted that its Westminster adverts placed ahead of the UK government's Rosebank oilfield decision were "not aimed at the general public, but at decision-makers and their influencers, a group that included politicians in government and opposition."¹⁰

Fossil fuel companies use advertising to promote their role in a clean energy transition, but this does not match reality, with negligible spending on renewables.¹¹

Fossil fuel companies target children and young people through social media and gaming,¹² as well as sponsoring classrooms in the UK.¹³ They also sponsor cultural and sporting institutions, many with young audiences, for example the Equinor Gallery at the Science Museum.¹⁴

The role of the advertising industry

Over 100 advertising agencies have called for a national fossil fuel advertising and sponsorship ban.¹⁵

Voluntary commitments to sustainability by advertising agencies have not been enough to decarbonise the sector.¹⁶ "Advertised emissions", the emissions attributable to the uplift in consumption due to advertising, rose by 11% from 2019 to 2022 to 208 millions tonnes of CO₂e.¹⁷

The solution: a Clean Energy Advertising and Sponsorship policy for Britain

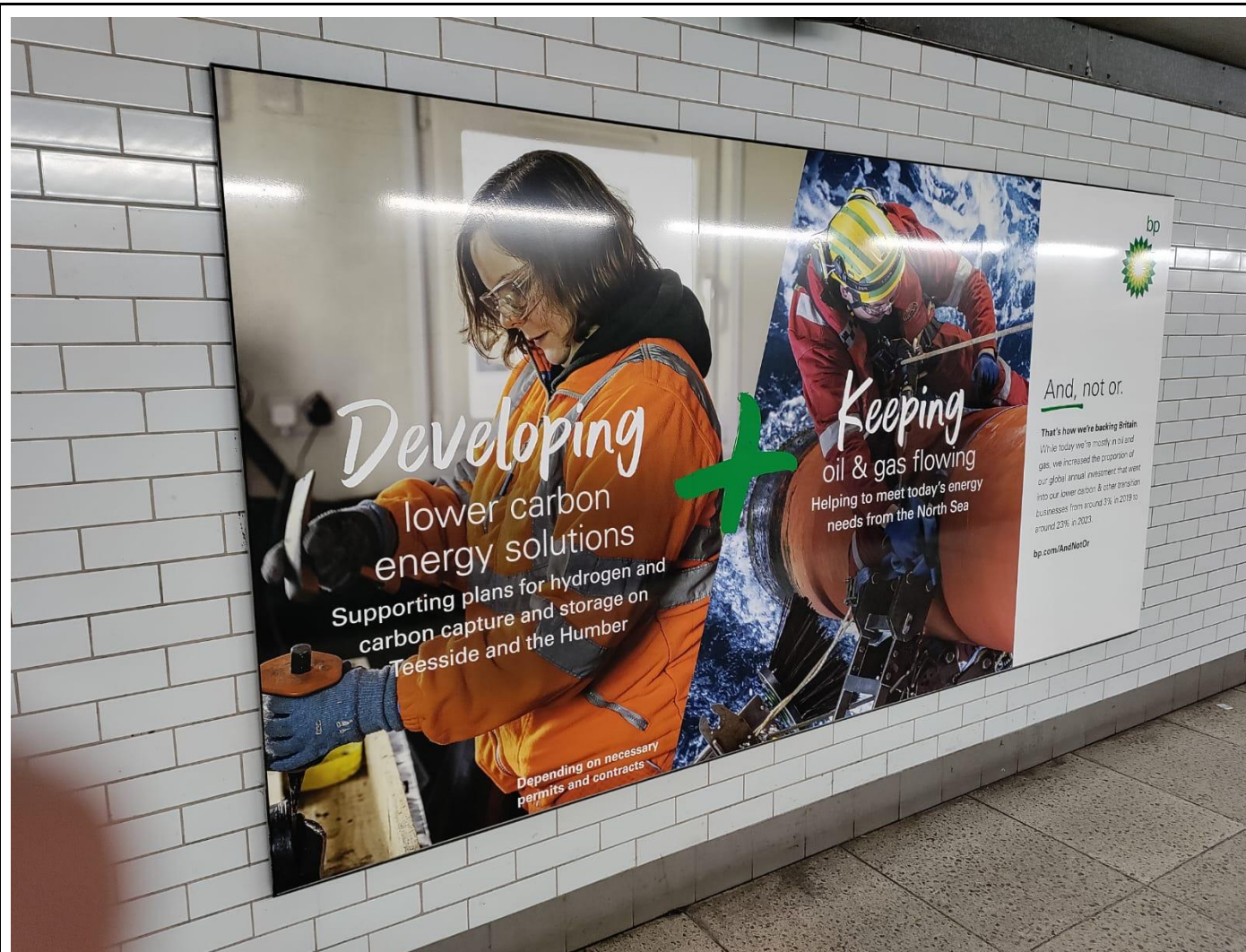
- The government should enact legislation, modelled on the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Act 2002, that ends fossil fuel products and brand advertising and sponsorship.
- The policy should set thresholds to define fossil fuel brands that tighten year-on-year based on the nation's Carbon Budgets.
- This policy may be implemented through primary legislation, amendments to existing Acts, or through delegated powers (including statutory instruments).

Please contact mair@promotethefuture.uk to find out more.

Endnotes

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Glossary of fossil fuel advertising and sponsorship



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Westminster tube
station, October
2024

ESSO bus stop advert, Bristol,
November 2024





bp digital
billboard, Canary
Wharf, June 2022

Aramco billboard, Bristol,
February 2020





Shell bus stop ad, Bristol,
June 2022

bp Meta ad

May 2026

Targeted to London

<https://www.facebook.com/ads/library/?id=1284572080417192>



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