

HVO or not to HVO

Steve Hill Photography



By Andy Blackwell

The “Warm Homes Plan” is the Government’s extension of previous schemes, all designed to help and encourage people to move to more sustainable and affordable

home heating. It covers things like grants for heat pumps and - for low-income households - things like better insulation, solar panels etc. One of the downsides of the scheme is that it’s got quite a narrow vision of what passes for low-carbon. For example, a hybrid heating system, where a heat pump does most of the hard work but a gas boiler kicks in on very cold days to just help out, isn’t on the scheme. Another omission is HVO.

HVO stands for “Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil”, which in real life means “old cooking oil and animal fat”. On the face of it, this seems like a good fuel. It’s using what is currently a waste product and reduces overall emissions by about 88%. Even better, most modern oil boilers can be quickly adapted to use HVO! Prices will no doubt vary, but those pushing the scheme reckon most oil boiler users will be able to convert for about £500. I wouldn’t be at all surprised if this turned out to be closer to £1,500, but that’s still cheaper than a heat pump and the conversion process is far less disruptive.

Is it cheaper than Kerosene? Well, I’ve never heard any of the groups pushing the scheme mention price, so I think it’s fair to say it’s going to be more expensive – it’s currently almost twice as expensive. However, that price is because it’s taxed the same as a fossil fuel, it’s almost all imported, and the market for it is currently very small. With the right government incentives, there’s no reason this can’t be turned into a home-grown market, delivering a more sustainable fuel for much the same price, or cheaper, than Kerosene.

The primary reason it’s not currently included in the schemes run by the Government is that it’s seen as a transitional, rather than permanent, solution to high emissions. This is true, but what’s wrong with offering people a transition, especially when it’s a relatively quick and cheap transition? Granted it does release CO₂, but the entire process is far less polluting and the oil itself is a sustainable product. Yes, there will always be people looking to grow crops just as a fuel source, but the groups



campaigning for HVO generally insist it must be a waste product to be included in any schemes. All in all, I can’t see what harm it would do to bring this into the Warm Homes scheme, even if it’s just for a few years, in order to create a sustainable market for a waste product. If you feel the same you can find more information at a number of places, but this might be a good one to start with: <https://futurereadyfuel.info/>

If you want to find out more about the Warm Homes Scheme try here: <https://www.gov.uk/check-if-youre-eligible-for-warm-home-discount> - The next incarnation of this scheme starts in October.

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