



David Cameron has finally been tempted out of his environmental purdah to talk about his Government's record on the environment. It has, he declared to assembled energy ministers from 23 leading economies, achieved its aim of being the 'greenest ever'.

That claim comes just a month after a poll showed only 2% of the population believed that to be true, and less than three months after the facilitator of his 'husky hugging' jaunt in 2006 – that signalled the change in branding of the Tories as 'nice, not nasty' – suggested the image was becoming 'retoxified'.

"There are huge challenges facing governments across the world today," said Mr Cameron, "and one of the most important of all is how we meet our growing energy demands in a way that protects our planet for our children and grandchildren."

There was a clue in the speech as to how it was nigh-on impossible for this government NOT to be the greenest ever. He went on to say: "Our commitment and investment in renewable energy has helped to make renewable energy possible. Now we have a different challenge. We need to make it financially sustainable."

Thus, he simultaneously admitted that previous governments didn't have the ability to promote renewable energy – because the means to produce viable quantities has only recently emerged – and nodded significantly towards the Chancellor, for whom being 'green' appears to be just a financial inconvenience.

That fact was picked up on by commentators on environment news almost immediately after the

speech was made.

Mark Kenber, chief executive of the Climate Group, said: "Today the PM sided with those in his government that feel that the green agenda is a 'burden'. It is not only a failure of leadership; it is nothing short of neglect of Britain's economy and future."

Martin Wright, chairman of the Renewable Energy Association, said: "There is a tendency to focus on the costs of renewables as opposed to the benefits. Renewables give us energy independence; they are totally sustainable; there is no waste, and over the long term they will provide low cost energy and, above all, price stability.

"Essentially, renewables represent a tremendous business opportunity now, and offer long term comparative advantage for the UK economy. In anyone's books that is a compelling proposition."

Dusty Gedge of livingroofs.org summed up most observers' view of the claim most succinctly. "Can you believe it," he Tweeted.

One aspect of attempting to go 'green' to be wary of, according to the RICS in its latest environment news story, is leasing out your roof for the solar energy produced by PVs on it. These so-called 'free' solar panels, wherein the installer leases the roofspace – typically over 25 years – and sells surplus energy back to the grid, are leading to mortgage applications being refused when properties are being sold.

RICS director of residential David Dalby said: "We fully support the use and production of sustainable energy; however, at a time when prospective buyers are finding it tough to secure mortgages, 'free' solar panels can cause a further barrier to homeownership. An inflexible PV panel lease, without a buy-out clause, could result in a failed transaction."

The ideal solution, according to the institution, is for the solar company to offer a 'buy-out' option to the prospective buyer who can purchase the installation at the price stated in the original lease agreement, less depreciation.

The worst case is where the company refuses to sell the installation to the new homeowner and seeks to charge them for removing the panels and the loss of income from the feed-in tariff, effectively prohibiting the sale of the property.

That approach would get renewables an even worse reputation than being endorsed by Dave, and is one which would not, I'm sure, be countenanced by those companies featured in the Environment Directory.

Chris Stokes