Opinion… Green improvements must come faster

barrell
TREE CONSULTANCY

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Green improvements must come faster

The Government has bold ambitions in the proposed environment bill. One of its five target areas for improvement is to "*restore and enhance nature*", resulting in a burst of consultations, including protecting and enhancing trees and woodlands.

The aspiration is admirable, but time is running out to get this right because nature is being blitzed from all directions. Toxic chemical sprays of big agriculture are degrading rural ecosystems, suitably complemented by urban environments resembling slums from planning policies obsessed with quantity rather than quality.

Emerging research and practice-based evidence confirm that we can have efficient agriculture and nature as well as dense housing in high-quality green surroundings. However, dispelling the myths and adopting new ideas is painfully slow. The challenge for the Government is how to deliver environmental sustainability in years, not decades.

Accepting the need for change is a promising start, but progress will not happen unless politicians can change mindsets. Conventionally, national policies describe lists of rules for local interpretation, but the process is slow. Intelligent management demands a psychological dimension to probe deep into the minds of local decision makers.

Referencing examples of what has been done elsewhere is powerfully persuasive in rebutting common naysayer claims such as "it *can't be done*", "*it's too expensive*" or "*it doesn't comply*". Also, if the barrier to change is lack of knowledge, then published case studies empower those receptive to improvement.

Ordinary people doing their daily jobs regularly find great original ideas. It is an untapped resource with the potential to drive change fast and efficiently. This is demonstrated in the Trees & Design Action Group publication *Trees in Hard Landscapes*, which promotes 32 case studies showcasing effective solutions to built-environment problems.

"*Can't-do*" is a pervasive mindset, inviting negativity and failure. Intelligent policies intent on change for the better will seek out good ideas and innovative solutions, assess them, publish the best and promote their adoption.

History shows that "*can-do*" never happens unless the Government proactively drives change through a mix of legislation, persuasion, penalties and incentives. Standing back and relying on passive lists of rules is too slow. It is time to find a better way.