



Opinion...Individuals can drive climate action

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### Individuals can drive climate action

The Oxford English Dictionary defines "*greenwashing*" as: "*Disinformation disseminated by an organisation so as to present an environmentally responsible public image.*" We have all been tree-greenwashed for years, with mounting evidence to prove it.

In 2013, the National Trust cut down one of Britain's most valuable heritage trees, the 186-year-old Duke of Wellington Cedar at Kingston Lacy, saying it was unsafe and dying. On a more industrial scale, Sheffield City Council unnecessarily felled 5,000-plus street trees, amid misinformation about life expectancy and highway damage. Wandsworth Council felled an historic avenue of 50-plus horse chestnuts on Tooting Bec Common, citing safety concerns.

Powerful organisations and local politicians have tried to get away with misleading statements, despite significant public opposition and professional advice to the contrary. There is an undeniable movement for change from communities, but many political leaders and institutions seem hamstrung, paralysed by a system designed to keep the local status quo at any cost.

To date, nearly 75% of UK councils have declared a climate emergency. Some are delivering change. Stroud District Council was the first in Europe to become carbon neutral for emissions in its control and has demonstrated leadership by unanimously adopting a master plan for the entire district to become carbon neutral by 2030.

However, the norm seems to be local politicians riding the climate emergency bandwagon to gain positive publicity but then quietly slipping back into "*business as usual*", hoping that the lapse will go unnoticed behind the COVID-19 and financial smokescreens.

At the national level, there is an emerging campaign for a Climate & Ecological Emergency (CEE) Bill because politicians at all levels are failing to act and lagging so far behind public opinion. But this top-down strategic approach is not enough in isolation. Success also requires bottom-up support from each of us as individual stakeholders in a better future.

There is a huge reservoir of goodwill from enthusiasts and professionals backing this endeavour. Many people support planting new trees and conserving existing canopy, but the framework for action to release and co-ordinate this untapped resource is missing.

Change is always a scary prospect, but business as usual is even more frightening. Politicians cannot do this alone. They need strong public pressure to drive action. Small pushes from each individual are the only way to get a big result, and supporting the CEE Bill (at [www.cebill.uk](http://www.cebill.uk)) will be a good start.

