



Barrell on ... a positive way to make a difference

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If ever there was a word so overused that its real meaning was lost, it was "sustainability". A perpetual bombardment has numbed our senses to its real meaning, blurring the connection between the word and the actions.

The Prince's Charities Foundation has recognised this in a new national initiative with a difference. Focusing on what individuals can do, the goal of Start (www.startuk.org) is to "help people across the UK take clear, positive and practical steps towards a better future".

Deep down, most of us want to help. But how can ordinary people make any difference? Bullying banks and fat politicians have bludgeoned us into a mindset that their way is the only way and we are just passengers along for the ride. The beauty of Start is that it exposes this failed wisdom, placing small people where they belong - at the heart of the action.

Growing your own vegetables, choosing local produce, saving water, thinking about travel, efficient energy use, supporting fair trade and recycling can seem rather mundane at first glance. But they are the real substance of progress - lots of small changes in the way we live that will add up to a big result in the way we survive.

Faced with the current funding crisis, these principles should be of more than passing interest to a green sector, corpulent from a decade of prosperity. Why is there so much cut grass when meadow management is cheaper, with significant ecological benefits? Why are autumn leaves collected when they can be mown back in as mulch? Why is the valuable habitat of dead tree trunks being removed when it could be retained? These are all practices that used to be mainstream but have become increasingly sidelined by the complacency of affluence.

Start is a timely reminder that the power to effect change is not the sole domain of the mighty and established wisdom is dismissed at our peril. The start of sustainability is individuals believing that small people doing simple things can make a big difference.

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