

CLIMATE CHANGE AND NOISE

Climate is dominating the news. Extinction rebellion is taking to the streets across the world. Children are bunking off school to protest about climate. The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) latest report, released last year, warned of dire consequences unless urgent action is taken. Last week the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) called for the UK to be 'zero net-carbon' by 2050.

This has all created an urgency to tackle climate change. And yet I can't help feeling there is a danger that a headlong rush into finding climate solutions could create or exacerbate problems elsewhere.

It has happened before. The rush to build onshore wind farms created real noise problems for many residents. The replacement of petrol cars with diesel caused major air pollution problems.

There are signs the pattern could be repeated.

- The Government has said by 2025 all new homes should not have fossil-fuel heating systems. This will mean a surge in the use of **heat-pumps**. In essence these are air conditioners which run the other way round except they operate outside. They will create noise, potentially on a widespread scale. What thought has been given to this?
- The Committee on Climate Change wants us to eat less meat and dairy to be replaced by an increase in consumption of pork, poultry and plant-based products. Does this mean more factory farming of pigs and chickens? It may not be the role of the CCC to spell this out but Government needs to think through the implications for **animal welfare** of the recommendations.
- **Electric planes** may well work for CO₂ emissions. Manufacturers also say they will cut noise. But will noise and emissions be given equal priority in the development of electric aircraft? Electric planes will be of no comfort to communities under flight paths if their lives are still blighted by noise.
- **Electric cars** are seen as critical to cutting CO₂ from traffic. But a new transport policy needs to be about more than electric cars. They don't solve congestion, road danger or, when travelling at higher speeds, noise. They don't tackle the dominance of the car and indeed may reinforce it. Of course, most people understand all this but there is the risk in the rush to get electric cars on to the roads other transport issues become secondary.
- The Committee on Climate Change quite rightly talked about the need for much **better insulation** as part of a programme to cut CO₂ but for many people – particularly those living in social housing or private rented accommodation – improved sound insulation is as important since they are being driven crazy by their noisy neighbours. Will acoustic insulation get equal importance to thermal insulation?

In conclusion any measures to tackle climate change must be assessed for their wider implications before being implemented. It is not a call for inaction but for careful reflection.

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