



DAME FIONA REYNOLDS – MASTER, EMMANUEL COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

BEYOND £S - VALUING THE THINGS THAT REALLY MATTER

In the mid 1870s, a young woman who has been an inspiration to me all my life, was working with impoverished children in central London. Octavia Hill, who was to become the renowned housing campaigner and a co-founder of the National Trust, knew that these children needed a roof over their heads and enough to eat. But she also knew that this was not enough and she used to walk her pupils, ragged school children, out of London to Epping Forest on a Sunday so that they could experience nature at first hand. 'The need of quiet, the need of air, the need of exercise, the sight of sky and of things growing seem human needs, common to all' she wrote. She became a leading figure of her generation, a woman who made a difference.

By contrast with Octavia Hill, today's politicians and decision-makers have lost the plot. They talk and behave as though the only thing that matters is the economy – especially growth as measured by GDP. Yet we know that the world we live in is much more complex than that, and that what makes people happy and feel that life is worth living is a multitude of qualitative attributes and relationships, not least those that Octavia recognised.

As Bobby Kennedy said in 1968: '[GNP] measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country, it measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile'.

One of the many consequences of the focus on growth and economic progress that dominated the late 20th century is that we are consuming resources as if we lived on three planets, not one; and there is a continuing downward trajectory in terms of biodiversity and quality of life for many people. We can't go on as we are yet that, it seems, is just what we are being encouraged to do.

Indeed today we see not only focus but competition among politicians of all parties on the subject of the economy. Management of the economy lies at the heart of political credibility and it is assumed that this is the issue on which the next election will be fought. Yet will it – truly – be won on those issues? Aren't there other things in life that matter?

Because the real issues we face – unmeasured and largely undiscussed – are questions about the quality of our lives as humans and the environment on which we depend. Climate change poses the biggest threat to our long term habitation of the earth, yet it figures little in public and political discourse. Recent reports by the IPCC confirm that we now face forecasts of temperature rises well above the so-called 'tolerable' level of 2 degrees Celsius, with consequences that will be extremely serious.

So how can we change the nature of public discourse to embrace the things that really matter, the unquantifiable and longer term issues, and move away from the unrelenting focus on GDP and current economic performance as a judge of how successful we are? How can we go beyond £s to value the things that really matter?

Contd./...



Page 2
Contd./...

It is time to stretch our minds and imaginations, to engage people in ideas and dialogue about a different future.

It is also an opportunity to learn from history.

For in many ways we have been here before, at the height of 19th century imperialism. In the second half of the nineteenth century Britain witnessed the unprecedented exploitation of natural and imperial resources, intensive industrialisation and urbanisation. The consequences were extraordinary: huge wealth was generated for those engaged in industry and trade.

But for the vast majority the human costs were enormous.

Desperate living conditions, appalling housing, the spread of diseases such as cholera, and high mortality rates eventually reached such levels that they brought about a crisis in public policy and Parliamentary democracy, answered in part by the establishment of new political parties and eventually universal suffrage. It was not a coincidence that the same period saw the birth of many social, health and welfare charities eg Barnado's, NSPCC, National Trust, RSPB, RSPCA; and the welfare state and public health movements. Octavia Hill's remarkable work in establishing decent housing and co-founding the National Trust sprang directly from her desire to right the wrongs of extreme deprivation.

And in response came an emerging official recognition of the need to intervene to protect vulnerable people in society and legislate for the things the market won't provide. In spite of their ideological and historical differences (Tories – aristocratic paternalism, Whigs – liberal democratic reforms; the new Labour party – the role of the state) – all the parties recognised that certain public needs had to be met, or protected by intervention. Examples included early planning legislation, sanitation, housing, children's welfare, public health and education.

But the trigger for a more radical, more consensual approach was the tragedy of two world wars and the reconstruction programme which was being planned even as the second world war raged.

By the early 1940s two generations had laid down their lives for their country, there had been enormous social upheaval, and massive economic and social costs had been incurred. The Churchill-led cross-party War Ministry of 1940-45 was focused on winning the war. But other members of the coalition were determined that at least as much effort should be put into planning the peace: the post war reconstruction that should be for the benefit of the country as a whole and all members of society.

And when Labour won the 1945 election that was exactly what they did, driven by their determination to rebuild a fair and united Britain. The raft of post-war legislation included the universal right to education, the establishment of the free National Health Service, an industrial policy which consciously dispersed investment and jobs throughout the UK, investment in farming to feed a nation used to rationing, a major housing improvement and construction programme, the protection of the country's natural and historic sites and the designation of National Parks for spiritual and physical refreshment and safeguarding Britain's most beautiful landscapes. Taken as a whole, the post war reconstruction programme reflected a rounded view of what society needed, reflecting material and non-material needs.

Contd./...



Page 3
Contd./...

Let me quote from the 1944 White Paper The Control of Land Use:

'Provision for the right use of land, in accordance with a considered policy, is an essential requirement of the Government's programme of post-war reconstruction. New houses, whether of permanent or emergency construction; the new layout of areas devastated by enemy action or blighted by reason of age or bad living condition; the new schools which will be required in the Education Bill now before Parliament; the balanced distribution of industry which the Government's recently published proposals for maintaining active employment envisage; the requirements of a sound nutrition and of a healthy and well-balanced agriculture; the preservation of land for national parks and forests; and the assurance to the people of enjoyment of the sea and countryside in times of leisure; a new and safer highway system better adapted to modern industrial and other needs; the proper provision of airfields – all these related parts of a single reconstruction programme involve the use of land, and it is essential that their various claims of land should be so harmonised as to ensure for the people of this country the greatest possible measure of individual well-being and national prosperity'.

This is a remarkably public spirited, collectivist approach. It makes clear how the state intends to deliver public benefit and it also acknowledges the importance of unquantifiable measures: the value of people's leisure time and the protection of nature and national parks as well as those activities (jobs, roads, airfields) that would lead towards conventional economic success. It speaks specifically of harmonisation, a word rarely used in public policy today.

The White Paper might even, at a stretch, also be described as an early recognition of sustainability, identifying the multiple demands on land, and the need for its careful and harmonised management as a limited and precious resource. The long term goal is, moreover, couched in terms that are explicitly about more than money can buy: 'the greatest possible measure of individual well-being and national prosperity'.

These were heroic goals, at a time when heroic leadership was needed. But how successful was this harmonising programme? In practice, as we know, the post war period was a time of contradictions.

First, and remarkably quickly, Britain's population had its first real taste of growth not only trickling down but reaching the working population. It was only 1957 when the Prime Minister Harold Macmillan was telling the nation that they had 'never had it so good'. In the 1980s Margaret Thatcher brought material wealth to many working class families by enabling them to buy their council houses at discounted prices. Not least because of the post war reforms there was steadily improving public health and education: each generation was healthier, longer lived, and better educated than their parents.

But second, alongside these obvious material benefits, the cult of individualism began to develop. This, though attributed to Thatcher, had earlier origins, with the second half of the twentieth century coloured by a materialistic sense of competition: getting ahead, one-upmanship, and keeping up, if not outdoing the neighbours rather than the pursuit of collective well-being that had shaped the immediate post war period.

Contd./...



Page 4
Contd./...

It is hard for us to place ourselves in the shoes of those post war decision-makers, responsible for an unprecedented moment of renewal and reconstruction. Perhaps never before or since has motivation for a collective approach been stronger: Britain had survived the threat of invasion; its people had given so much, with so many lives lost or irreparably damaged; and Britain's society had, together, endured major stresses: rationing, evacuation, conscription. It was an extraordinary time.

But that mood was hard to sustain in the face of the 1950s economic boom, rapid social mobility and the rise of the individual.

Small wonder, then, that the emerging cause of environmentalism, a cause that sprang from recognising the things that matter but weren't recognised, faced many challenges. Conservation was part of the 1940s vision, but it was modest and protective rather than profound, and there was a slightly naïve assumption that land uses like farming and forestry would be compatible with the protection of nature and landscapes.

In practice the safeguards put in place in the 1940s proved inadequate to meet the pressures on land and natural resources that flowed from the accelerated pace of growth that took place from the 1950s onwards. Agriculture (even in National Parks) became industrialised, with farmers paid to take out hedges, ponds and semi-natural vegetation to grow intensive cereal crops and to plough up the heather-clad hills to enable ever more sheep to graze. Countryside was built over to provide homes, jobs, roads and factories. New forests of alien species were planted and ancient forests were felled or under-planted with commercial timber crops. Seas were over-fished. Rare or vulnerable species were pushed to the brink of and sometimes into extinction. Natural resources like coal and building materials were extracted at an ever faster rate and we started consuming energy faster than new sources were (then) being discovered.

The alarm was sounded, with increasing urgency. In 1972 the Club of Rome published Limits to Growth coinciding with the first oil crisis; and in the early 1970s the environmental movement was born in the UK: FOE in 1971, with its memorable returnable bottles campaign, and Greenpeace with the Rainbow Warrior taking on the commercial whalers.

The longer-established conservation bodies fell out with their traditional allies, the farmers, with Marion Shoard's *The Theft of the Countryside* setting the tone for a period of tension. '... the English landscape is under sentence of death' she wrote. 'Indeed, the sentence is already being carried out. The executioner is not the industrialist or the property speculator Instead, it is the figure traditionally viewed as the custodian of the rural scene – the farmer'.

And so the second half of the twentieth century was a time of fights: about waste and power stations, marine exploitation, against road expansion and quarries, against commercial agriculture and forestry, and for public access and the better protection of archaeology, historic buildings, nature and landscapes. I and many people here spent years fighting to protect places we loved from despoliation and to strengthen the law to protect our countryside and wider environment.

But it was also a time of learning, about the techniques of conservation and the skills needed to protect natural resources and our natural environment. Conservationists not only became expert in all manner of legal and policy matters, but learned – for example – how to design a grazing regime for sheep and cattle in the Yorkshire Dales that would sustain herb-rich hay meadows. National Park and local authorities, conservation charities and government agencies learned how to write conservation policies to meet a wide range of new aspirations and acquired the conservation skills needed to put them into practice.

Contd./...



Page 5
Contd./...

And we were by no means unsuccessful.

The environmental movement became increasingly professional and there was an increasingly responsive public policy framework. Some improved environmental protection was driven by the UK's membership of the European Union, which set increasingly rigorous standards, for example, clean air, clean water, measures for dealing with acid rain and CFCs. Having designed the increasingly commercial Common Agricultural Policy the EU was also responsible for its reform, introducing the principle of paying farmers for looking after the beauty of the countryside and nature alongside food production. Domestically, there were frequent arguments about land use planning policy and many attempts to weaken it, but Green Belts remained largely intact and John Gummer, as Secretary of State for the Environment, memorably put a stop to out-of-town superstores, switching supermarkets' commercial investment into high streets. In 1990 Chris Patten as Secretary of State authored the first ever White Paper on the Environment, introducing the concept of 'greening' as a policy that needed to be mainstreamed across government. And in the face of growing concern about climate change there was slow but nevertheless clear progress in the UK's commitments to control CO₂ emissions and invest in renewable energy, culminating in Labour's 2008 Climate Change Act which enshrined our domestic commitments in law. All parties, therefore, played their part in the gradual strengthening of environmental and conservation policy.

Looking back, none of us was satisfied or felt we had done enough, but progress was made. And for a period being 'green' was fashionable and even politically attractive: there was a record high Green vote of 15% in the 1989 European Elections; and all the political parties at various times established green think tanks and all had green policies in their manifestos.

This interest in and desire to demonstrate sensitivity to green issues actually lasted until very recently – most of us will recall David Cameron's photocall with the huskies in 2006, and his commitment as the incoming Prime Minister in 2010 to lead the 'greenest government ever'.

That, however, seems a long time ago now. Indeed the Prime Minister's latest comment on green issues, in November 2013 was reportedly to order his officials to 'get rid of all the green c**p' from energy bills in a drive to bring down costs.

So what happened? When and why did the economy assume such overwhelming importance to all the political parties?

One reason, I'm certain, is that the 2008 recession represented a much more serious challenge to the system than previous economic stumbles. This time it was not just that economic conditions became more difficult, but that the very foundations of the post war economy were challenged. The collapse of Northern Rock and Lehman Brothers and near-disaster for many other financial institutions due to sub-prime lending, over-borrowing and greed sent serious shock waves throughout the world.

The crash required serious structural adjustments to rein back expenditure and a profound overhaul of many of the things we had taken for granted. And while many urged those in government not to try simply to restore what had been in place before, in practice the imperative to get the economy back on its feet dominated everything, forcing an even more short term view.

Contd./...



Page 6
Contd./...

This left environmental arguments and non-quantifiable dimensions of policy exposed and vulnerable. Without consciously designing it so, much of the progress we had achieved was on the back of a growing and prosperous economy. When the economy collapsed, the case for being green – especially if it required expenditure – risked collapse too.

Yet if you ask them, all the politicians are very clear that what they are doing is right, and – quoting opinion polls – that it is also what people want them to do. How do we interpret this? Perhaps it is, at least in part, about the quality of the dialogue and the level of confidence people have in their elected representatives.

Because, perhaps ironically, politicians are also those in whom public trust is now most frail. Politicians have fallen to the bottom of the list of professions (below journalists and nudging bankers, whose ratings hover nearby) that people trust to tell the truth, according to a series of IPSOS Mori polls over the last thirty years.

But the questions I am raising are not so much about mistrust, or the truth, as about connectedness. Do people feel that politicians understand their lives and interests, and the wider things they care about? The figures on declining voter engagement (with the notable exception of the forthcoming Scotland referendum, for reasons we might discuss) bear examination.

And the Government's focus on the economy does not always resonate. For example, two proposals for reform in England in 2011 received a universal condemnation from the public, even though they were designed to generate money and economic growth. First, the plan to sell off the public forests which triggered an immediate and outraged response, after which the Government was obliged to perform a U-turn. And the proposals to weaken the planning system, against which I fought my last campaign at the National Trust, were also defeated, although that pressure has not gone away.

Moreover there has been a steady diminution in funding for things which have longer term goals: energy efficiency grants for households, resources for Natural England and National Parks, funding for long term environmentally friendly farming schemes.

And there are deeper human challenges too. After decades of improved quality of life indicators some of the progress made in the 20th century is now unravelling. As a nation we are predicting poorer health and shortening life spans, and we now expect the current generation to be the first to be less materially well off than their parents. There is a particular pressure on our children, with conditions such as rickets, obesity and mental health problems becoming more prevalent.

We know these problems are real, and we also know that they could be answered by a more integrated approach to policy and by longer term thinking. But the chances of achieving such changes seem elusive in the present circumstances.

So what might it take to create a movement for sustainability? A movement in which the things that really matter are given the recognition they deserve and stand centre stage rather than at the margins?

Contd./...



Page 7
Contd./...

This is a huge debate but I am convinced that the revolution in thinking and action has, in the end, to come from us.

From people, from us, asserting our human and environmental needs in terms that acknowledge the wider value to society and the planet of the non-material things that make life worthwhile. Top down, legislative and policy solutions are of course part of the answer, but it seems to me that the twenty first century challenge is no longer the technical question of sustainability but the human one. If we fail to engage people in the pursuit of more sustainable lifestyles we will not succeed.

And so we need to look to ourselves first. We learned a lot in the twentieth century about conservation and its technical needs and challenges. But the challenge for the twenty first century is different. It needs to be about people, about the need for more sustainable lifestyles, harmonising the multiple aspirations we have, and recognising the value of things that money can't buy: our health and wellbeing, the relationships on which we depend, the quality of our lives and the experiences that make our lives rewarding and interesting.

We need another paradigm, one that gets away from the focus on money, growth and material improvements.

And, drawing on the inspiration of that 1940s attempt to look ahead, and to harmonise, we need once again to pose a coherent, joined up and strategic response to the long term needs of our society and the planet. Can climate change provide that rallying cry for a different kind of reconstruction that was so evident at the end of the second world war? If not, why not? Perhaps because, up to now, we have couched it too much in technical, not human language?

So these are difficult questions. But there are people that can help us: in universities, the voluntary sector, public bodies, and within Government.

For example in 2005 Richard Layard demonstrated that more money, above a certain level, does not make people happier; and since then there have been various studies on the development of a possible alternative to GDP as the sole measure of success. In a recently published report chaired by Gus O'Donnell the Legatum Institute has proposed a 'well-being' index to substitute for GDP; and the OECD has proposed a measure to assess how a programme to end poverty and address inequality would aid society's wider well-being. These ideas are becoming steadily more mainstream.

Influencing people's behaviour around what and how much we eat, how much exercise we take and how we enhance our quality of life has been the subject of many campaigns by the voluntary sector and the Department of Health, with the Government's 'nudge' unit (now outsourced) drawing together some of the lessons learned. Many research reports have shown how giving people access to green space, beautiful countryside and the opportunity for regular exercise – remember Octavia Hill? – have improved life quality and expectancy. It does not seem inconceivable that these ideas could be put into practice.

Contd./...



Page 8
Contd./...

And people are realistic: perhaps more so than they are given credit for. Most of us know that we are unlikely to get materially richer over the next few years, and that our children are likely to be less well off than we are. So already people are adapting – taking up activities and seeking experiences that don't cost a fortune but are beyond price in their value to people and their families. It is no surprise to me that organisations like the National Trust, with 4m members when I left at the end of 2012, have attracted more support since the recession hit.

We need also of course to value the things we can measure but we have not previously recognised as important. In 2011 Defra published an ambitious National Ecosystem Assessment which identified the value and vulnerability of the natural capital: soils, peat, forests, water, habitat, on which we all depend. The Natural Capital Committee and Ecosystem Markets Taskforce are working their way towards inserting these values into mainstream decision-making. And Tony Juniper's *What has nature ever done for us?* puts numbers on the (almost) incalculable benefit that nature delivers for people through functions we barely notice but could not live without: pollination by bees, the work of the dung beetle and photosynthesis, to name but a few. Turn the telescope round and you see our world differently.

So what should we do? This is a huge debate of which I've only been able to scratch the surface, but fundamentally I am arguing that we need to reframe the way we value things and move towards a more integrated and qualitative approach to human and social development believing, as we tried to do in the 1940s, that there is a bigger prize for humanity than short term growth built on unsustainable foundations.

Drawing on some of the ideas I've already discussed, let me reflect on three ways in which change could start: progress, place and people.

Progress: clearly we need to remodel the way we manage and measure progress, and the first thing we need to do is value properly the resources on which our whole existence depends, taking nature as our frame and our guide. We need to protect and manage sustainably what is irreplaceable (land, natural resources, biodiversity) and the natural systems that sustain them. Adopting this approach would shape everything including how we manage and measure success, in which moving away from a reliance on GDP is the first essential step. Ultimately it would reshape the way businesses and organisations operate, valuing human and natural capital as much as conventional balance sheets and profit/loss accounts.

Place: the starting point for a more sustainable future and sustainable lifestyles must be vibrant, healthy, attractive places for people to live. People do not aspire to live less well, but living well is not all about material values. There's a huge opportunity to remodel and green our cities, suburbs and towns to give people better local access to housing, jobs, public services like education and healthcare, along with better access to nature and places to play. To achieve this means reconnecting people with place, starting at the local level. Place-making, love of place and the need for beauty in our surroundings are all integral to how people feel about their lives; we don't give this nearly enough weight at the moment

Contd./...



Page 9
Contd./...

People: finally we need to think about the needs and aspirations of people as partners in not observers or victims of the journey we're taking. People are citizens not consumers, and we can't achieve anything without them. Treating people as consumers is patronising, stereotypical and fuels the dependence on materialism and individualism that shaped much of the last century. Throughout my working life I have seen some of the millions of people who dedicate time and enthusiasm to volunteering and helping others: there's a huge untapped resource of people who are willing to help shape a better future, though we need to overhaul the way we engage with people in politics and decision-making to liberate it.

But I have one final plea, drawn once again from the inspiration of Octavia Hill. If we do nothing else, we owe it to the next generation to change the way we educate and bring up our children. We are the generation that has benefited from the enormous wealth that was generated over the last sixty years. We are the generation that has imposed a heavy responsibility on the next generation, and the next, to sort out the problems we will leave behind.

Yet, though the reasons are very different, our children are in some ways as deprived as those who suffered in the nineteenth century. Locked into electronic communications and frightened of the unfamiliar, today only a quarter of children play outside compared to half only a generation ago; and the area over which children roam unsupervised has collapsed by 90% in one generation. Educational ambitions have narrowed and in our effort to protect our children we have deprived them of the joy of playing outside, experiencing nature at first hand, and from the delight of self-discovery.

David Attenborough once said: 'people will only protect what they care about, and they will only care about what they have experienced'. If we don't give our children access to nature, they will not know that it matters. One of the most joyous moments of my time at the National Trust was our campaign 50 things to do before you're 11¾, celebrating the joys and benefits of a free-range childhood.

The looming crisis we face is real. Our current leaders are focused on only one goal; one we know is too narrow, and which I suspect they know too. An alternative approach is within our reach but it is harder: it requires imagination, connection, integration, harmonisation, and for people to work together. It requires us to value the things that matter but can't be measured as well as the things that we can easily count.

We will only achieve change if we engage people in designing our future around a broader definition of progress, one that is defined by sustainability and a recognition of the planet's finite resources. And the challenge starts at home, with the way we live our lives and the values and experiences we instil in the next generation.

The revolution, when it comes, because it must, will not come from our leaders but from us. From us demanding and securing a future that values things beyond £s – the things that money can't buy. Octavia Hill once said: 'new occasions teach new duties'. It's time, and the moment, for us to find those new duties and lead the change we know is necessary.

- Ends -