



Opinion... A wish list for unblinkered thinking

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Generations of ordinary British people have been let down by weak, visionless leaders – politicians more engaged by the next election than our national best interest.

We wallow daily in the debris of failure — struggling social services, our natural environment in tatters, a polluting transport system, and unforgivably depleted armed forces. All driven by a silo mentality that refuses to recognise or overcome an inability to understand the wider picture, choosing short-term gain at the expense of long-term success and prosperity.

A recurring thread is the reluctance of politicians and professionals to see beyond their own comfortable rut to initiate communication with other "rut inhabitants" to start getting it right. We are swamped by it and told to tolerate chaos, inefficiency, incompetence, and exploitation.

For example, urban roads are a source of great harm to people, but most are managed in isolation from surrounding communities. Roadside trees are often treated as an inconvenient cost and routinely removed without any consideration of the good they do for nearby residents. Within that rut, the highway books are balanced, at the expense of locals being deprived of tree benefits.

Flooding is another example of mindless mismanagement in one sector causing untold misery in another. An agricultural frenzy to maximise food production has increased rainwater run-off from catchment areas, drowning settlements downstream. This illogical obsession with meagre livings for farmers from marginal land is directly causing massive harm to communities at the other end of the river.

Intelligent governance requires an integrated approach, with an emphasis on understanding the wider impacts of local decisions. Looking beyond the ruts, trees offer multiple low-cost, high-value solutions.

My 2018 wish list for unblinkered thinking includes: plant pollution-busting hedges next to roads to ameliorate exhaust fumes at the point of origin; incentivise farmers to re-wild linear strips of land along roads to link fragmented habitats; bring highway trees under planning control; streamline outdated statutory tree protection; plant more street trees for nicer urban places; and let trees grow back in catchment areas to slow rainwater run-off.

In short, abandon the silos and make nature an equal partner in decision-making, not the poor relation to profit and personal agendas. National implementation of just one of these would make 2018 special, but I doubt whether we will get any.

