

Mind the gap

One of the dangers of a political world that expects absolute loyalty to fixed views of the world and roundly condemns dissenting or sceptical voices is it creates a bigger and bigger gap between what people say they believe and what they imply they believe by what they actually do.

Today we see this in the long term issue of green transformation, and in the shorter term issue of how we should respond to the virus. Polls show a high degree of agreement with the Green movement propositions that climate change is real and a serious threat to our lives and livelihoods. There is also agreement with governments pursuing policies to lower carbon dioxide output.

This makes it curious that most people are not rushing out to buy an electric car or to trade in their diesel for a bicycle. There are no queues to replace the gas or oil boiler in the home with an electric system based on renewable power or heat pumps. Those who do take up cycling – and many do – are usually doing so as a leisure or keep fit activity, not as a way of getting children to school, going to work or picking up food from the shops. Prior to the virus many MPs and others were happy both to tell pollsters something more needed to be done about climate change, whilst continuing to book their foreign holiday jet flights, renew their internal combustion engine vehicle, continue with a meat and dairy based diet and buy products that had been shipped half way round the world to get to them.

I remember the ultimate irony when I went to a pre CV 19 meeting in London to hear the case for more electric cars. I asked the leading advocate about his own car buying habits. Without any sense of shame he told me he had not got around to buying an electric vehicle and had no plans to.

All this suggests that people do not think the threat of climate change is so great that they need to make much if any change in their own behaviours.

The polls on CV 19 show that 71% of the UK public are concerned or very concerned about CV 19 for themselves, and 87% are similarly concerned about CV 19's impact on the country as a whole. There has been majority support for lock downs, quarantines and early closing of hospitality venues.

Yet the recently released Kings College London study of public responses to the measures from March to August shows that only 18% of those suspecting they have the virus did actually self isolate, and only 11% of those contacted by Test and Trace to alert them to recent exposure to the virus stayed at home as requested. The study concludes that many people just find the need to stay at home with no ability to go to work, go to the shops or see friends and relatives too difficult. It may not be affordable, it may prevent looking after the people they care for, or it may be too stressful. Clearly whilst acknowledging CV 19 is a threat they do not think their own chances of getting the serious form of the disease are high enough to require them to comply with the isolation guidance.