

Noise campaigners do not fit into the green movement

There is no getting away from the fact the green movement is pretty silent on noise. A campaign on noise by an environmental NGO is so rare that it stands out. The last national one I remember in the UK was the admirable rural tranquillity campaign by the Countryside Charity (CPRE).

Equally, many noise campaigners, lobbyists and noise sufferers are not instinctive environmentalists. Some, indeed, may be actively opposed to some of the environmental and climate change policies advocated by the green movement. Of course, I'm at the risk of stereotyping. There are people and organisations which straddle both camps. But they are the exception rather than the rule.

The silence on noise from much of the environmental movement is so profound that it goes beyond the fact that it deprioritizes it in favour of what it sees as more important issues.

It stems from a different mind-set to that of most noise activists. Noise campaigners tend to assess policies and technologies for their noise impact on people; not how they impact the planet. This is a different from the dominant thinking in today's environmental movement.

Mark Lynas, the leading British climate expert, put it well in his book, *The God Species – How Humans Can Really Save The Planet* (1). He identified nine 'planetary boundaries' of environmentalism: biodiversity, climate change, nitrogen, land use, freshwater, toxics, aerosols, ocean acidification and ozone layer. But not noise. When I spoke to him about this, Mark said he saw noise as a local concern.

What drives so many environmentalists is the impact of policies and practices on the planet. They do not see noise as having any lasting impact on the planet. It is therefore outside their framework; outside their terms of reference; beyond the focus of their campaigning or even, in many cases, of their interest.

Noise campaigners are not disinterested in its impact on the planet. In *Why Noise Matters* (2), I devote a chapter to assessing the impact of noise on the planet, and in particular how noise affects

mammals and animals. **But for the most part what drives noise campaigners is its impact on people.** They are very directly seeking measures which improve what Alex Epstein in his new book, *Fossil Future* (3), calls 'human flourishing'.

There are some areas of overlap: less traffic on our streets; slower speeds; a switch from air to rail for short-distance flights. But this is a marriage of convenience. It doesn't mean noise and green issues 'are in a relationship. Their different mind-sets will not allow that to happen.

References:

(1). *The God Species – How Humans Can Really Save The Planet*, Mark Lynas, published by the Fourth Estate, 2011

(2). *Why Noise Matters*, John Stewart et al, published by Earthscan, 2011

(3). *Fossil Future*, Alex Epstein, published by Penguinrandom, 2022