



# Mainstreaming low-carbon lifestyles



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## About Climate Outreach

Climate Outreach is a team of social scientists and communication specialists working to widen and deepen public engagement with climate change. Through our research, practical guides and consultancy services, our charity helps organisations communicate about climate change in ways that resonate with the values of their audiences. We have 15 years' experience working with a wide range of international partners including central, regional and local governments, international bodies, charities, businesses, faith organisations, academic organisations and youth groups.

[climateoutreach.org](https://climateoutreach.org) [@ClimateOutreach](https://twitter.com/ClimateOutreach) [info@climateoutreach.org](mailto:info@climateoutreach.org)

## About CASPI

The CASPI (Low-carbon Lifestyles and Behavioural Spillover) project at Cardiff University is a five year (2014-2019) programme of research spanning seven countries: Brazil, China, Denmark, India, Poland, South Africa and the UK. Its focus is to explore how - and under what conditions - taking up one new green behaviour leads on to other green behaviours.

[sites.cardiff.ac.uk/caspi](https://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/caspi)

## Project Team

### AUTHORS

**Niall McLoughlin**, Post Graduate Research Placement Student, Climate Outreach

**Dr Adam Corner**, Research Director, Climate Outreach

**Jamie Clarke**, Executive Director, Climate Outreach

**Professor Lorraine Whitmarsh**, School of Psychology, Cardiff University

**Dr Stuart Capstick**, Research Fellow, School of Psychology, Cardiff University

**Dr Nick Nash**, Research Fellow, School of Psychology, Cardiff University

### EDITING AND PRODUCTION

**Anna Stone**, Project Manager, Climate Outreach

**Léane de Laigue**, Head of Communications, Climate Outreach

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# Contents

Executive Summary	4
1. Changing course on behaviour change	10
2. Spillover: When does one behaviour lead to another?	13
3. The crucial role of values and identity - the building blocks of public engagement	16
4. Comparisons across cultures: The importance of social norms & 'talking climate'	18
5. Telling an authentically positive story: Building self-efficacy & promoting the co-benefits of low-carbon lifestyles	21
6. Learning from the past: Why 'nudge' is not enough	23
7. Where do I start? Mainstreaming low-carbon lifestyles	27
References	31



## Executive Summary

As the most recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)<sup>1</sup> makes resoundingly clear, rapid societal transitions – including significant shifts in the lifestyles of ordinary people in high-carbon countries like the UK – must take place over the coming years to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

Three-quarters of the UK's carbon emissions are attributable to households.<sup>2</sup> From the way we travel, to the food we eat and the way we use energy at home, achieving a '1.5 degrees' world means mainstreaming low-carbon lifestyles, in tandem with the structural and policy changes required to decarbonise quickly.

Commissioned by the Low-carbon Lifestyles & Behavioural Spillover (CASPI) team at Cardiff University, this report draws on key findings from the CASPI programme of work, that has spanned five years and seven countries, exploring how to move beyond small-scale and piecemeal approaches to behaviour change. We present these findings in the context of wider social science research on low-carbon lifestyles. How can they move from the margins into the mainstream?

The report is designed for the wide range of individuals and organisations involved in influencing sustainable behaviours, including national policy-makers, local authorities, professional campaigners, and those leading community-level initiatives. It argues that while the social science on how to catalyse low-carbon lifestyles is increasingly robust, behaviour change campaigns that are consistent with both the research and the scale and urgency of the challenge are thin on the ground.

While this report draws on international evidence about behaviour change, the recommendations are largely focused on the UK context (with implications for other high-income/high-carbon economies). In the UK, key developments such as the phasing out of coal from the energy mix have happened mostly behind-the-scenes, and have required only limited public engagement. Many of the challenges that remain involve public support for more far-reaching policy shifts, and the active participation in low-carbon lifestyles. But while there is some evidence of limited shifts in behaviours (e.g. reusing plastic bags), low-carbon lifestyles are very far from being the norm. Many of the most significant behaviours in the carbon footprint of a typical British citizen – such as flying, or eating red meat – show few signs of progress.

Fresh and evidence-based approaches are required. What this means, and our recommendations for changing course on behaviour change are as follows:


### When does one behaviour lead to another? Why values and identity are crucial for lifestyle change

Implicit in many campaigns and interventions is a questionable assumption: that one behavioural change (e.g. avoiding disposable coffee cups) is likely to lead to other, more impactful ones (in terms of carbon emissions saved). With more than a decade

of research focused on when and how this process of ‘spillover’ between behaviours occurs, it is clear that a simple causal chain between one behaviour and another is rare. But if the bad news is that one behaviour change doesn’t automatically lead to another, it is now possible—in part through the findings of the CASPI project—to identify the conditions under which spillover will be more or less likely to occur.

People’s values (guiding principles in their lives), and their sense of identity (how they define themselves) are crucial to how they engage with climate change, and are broadly consistent between different contexts and situations. This consistency is important in establishing low-carbon lifestyles (rather than a cluster of more disparate behavioural changes). The reasons and motivations behind changes in behaviour really matter. When an action is perceived to be driven by a sense of conviction (‘I want to do this’), rather than the result of coercion (‘I’m being told I should do this’), spillover to other behaviours is more likely to occur.

Behavioural changes need to be about more than just money if they are to add to a shift in low-carbon lifestyles. The point is not that people don’t care about how low-carbon choices will impact on their wallet (they do), but that this is not enough to sustain a low-carbon lifestyle. There is evidence that economic measures can actually undermine behavioural spillover – through the ‘rebound effect’, low-carbon choices in one situation may be cancelled out by high-carbon choices in another, where the financial incentives are absent. Campaigns should encourage people to view low-carbon choices as being consistent with their own values, and wherever possible as an altruistic decision, or important for its own sake – tapping into the kinds of ‘self-transcending’ values that underpin positive engagement with climate change. The CASPI project has established that the same cluster of ‘self-transcendent’ values predicts positive engagement with climate change, and the likelihood of spillover, in each of the seven countries surveyed.




**Recommendation:** Campaigns should aim to build consistency between behaviours, by focusing on the motivations and values that underpin them. Thinking carefully about the values an audience holds, and finding ways to craft messages about behaviour change that don’t focus (at least not exclusively) on economic rationales, is critical.

## Promoting positive social norms around low-carbon lifestyles & the power of peer-to-peer engagement

There are few influences more powerful than someone’s social network and the social norms they are surrounded by. Where there is no social or cultural norm around a particular low-carbon behaviour, it sends a signal: this type of behaviour is not typical or widespread. The CASPI project found that the frequency of different types of low-carbon behaviours—partly reflecting the prevailing social norms in each country—varied a great deal in the seven nations surveyed. And because there is typically a social silence around climate change, many people are not aware of the positive norms that do exist. For example, several studies have shown that while most people in the UK are in favour of renewable energy technologies, they don’t think other people are.<sup>106</sup>

Conversations about climate change—a space for people to reflect on their own and others’ views and lifestyle choices—are crucial. Peer-to-peer engagement helps not only to dispel negative misperceptions around others’ views, but to reassure people that low-carbon lifestyles are not a wasted effort (because more people care than they might have realised, or are already taking actions in their own lives).




**Recommendation:** *‘Talking climate’, allowing the links between different low-carbon behaviours to be made ‘conscious’, and positively influencing the perception of social norms in the process, is a crucial element in mainstreaming low-carbon lifestyles in any cultural context.*

## Telling an authentically positive story about low-carbon lifestyles

There is nothing to be gained from downplaying the seriousness of the risks of climate change, or in trying to shield public audiences from the negative emotions they are likely to be experiencing when reflecting on what climate change means for their own lives, or the wellbeing of people around the world. But there are also well-documented risks in framing climate change in a strongly negative way: people may switch off, or dismiss the messages altogether, and the notion of low-carbon lifestyles as a ‘sacrifice’ is an especially challenging example of the ‘hope vs fear’ conundrum in climate communication.

Telling an authentically positive story<sup>3</sup> about low-carbon lifestyles is crucial, highlighting the many and varied genuine ‘co-benefits’ to low-carbon choices (e.g. for people’s health, wellbeing, or for community cohesion). If behaviour change campaigns undermine people’s sense of control and freedom over their own lives, they are likely to backfire, and climate change policies that are seen as being ‘forced’ on people are problematic. Building a sense of ‘efficacy’ (people’s belief that they can personally make a difference) is essential.



**Recommendation:** *Behaviour change campaigns should build people’s confidence and ‘self-efficacy’, and highlight the genuine ‘co-benefits’ to health, wellbeing and community cohesion that come from low-carbon choices.*

## Learning from the past - moving from ‘nudge’ to ‘think’ as the strategy for mainstreaming low-carbon lifestyles

One idea above all others has gained traction with policy makers in the UK around behaviour change: ‘Nudge’. The core idea behind the nudge approach is that rather than persuading people to change their behaviours, campaigns and interventions should instead subtly change the context within which people make decisions. The nudge approach can point to successes in changing easily compartmentalised (and low-impact) individual behaviours. But nudge is a passive, ‘unthinking’ approach to behaviour change – and the CASPI project adds to a growing amount of research that shows the opposite (an active, conscious process of reflection on what building

a societal response to climate change means) is required for mainstreaming low-carbon lifestyles.

Plus, reflection on previous rapid shifts in behaviours—such as the reduction of rates of smoking in the UK—suggests that nudge-based approaches are unlikely to be sufficient to bring about changes commensurate with the scale of the challenge. As well as the familiar strategies of emphasising the link between smoking and individual health outcomes, the change in ‘individual’ behaviours was very much a social shift, with concerns about passive smoking driving the discourse towards a discussion of shared responsibilities, rather than simply an individual cost/benefit analysis. In achieving this shift, peer-to-peer educational initiatives sat alongside more traditional ‘top down’ advertising campaigns. A range of multi-level (individual, social and structural) interventions was required, alongside a public-facing communications and engagement infrastructure maintained by campaigners, statutory bodies and government agencies over many decades. Changes in individual smoking behaviours required shifts in social norms, a recognition of the issue as transcending self-interest, interpreted as being a question of shared responsibility for collective health outcomes.



**Recommendation:** *Reflecting the lessons from the rapid reduction of rates of smoking in the UK, the focus of campaigns to promote low-carbon lifestyles must shift from ‘nudge’ to ‘think’ as a strategy for public engagement, including peer-to-peer as well as top-down communication approaches.*

## Focusing on the behaviours and audiences that really matter

Low-carbon lifestyles are comprised of dozens of different actions and choices. But not all low-carbon behaviours are equal—some have much bigger impacts than others—and not all potential audiences are equal either. Carbon emissions increase sharply with income: the top 10% of emitters are responsible for close to half of all emissions; and much of this difference is underpinned by household income.<sup>4,5</sup>

Research from the CASPI team shows clearly that there can be a mismatch between people’s beliefs about what is effective, and the things that will actually make a difference. But the kinds of high-impact changes that (most) people can make to their lives include switching to a plant-based diet, flying less and avoiding personal car use, campaigning and political engagement for decarbonisation, and switching to renewable energy providers.



**Recommendation:** *Focus on the audiences and behaviours where intervention can make the most difference. By developing values-based, peer-led campaigns that build on positive social norms and maximise the chance of ‘spillover’, low-carbon lifestyles can move from the margins to the mainstream.*

# CASE STUDY

## Mainstreaming low-carbon lifestyles - engaging centre-right audiences around reducing flying

Homeowners and with some degree of disposable income, a centre-right suburban family is likely to have fewer structural/financial barriers than, for example, young couples renting in a city-centre. The number of flights they take per year means this will account for a significant amount of their carbon footprint.

**Audience:** A suburban centre-right/conservative family, owning two cars, and taking one winter holiday (European flight), one summer holiday (European flight), one domestic (UK) and one transatlantic flight per year.

**Target lifestyle change:** Reducing the amount of annual flying

**Policy context:** The aviation industry is lightly taxed and regulated – the majority of flights are taken by a small proportion of frequent flyers with high disposable incomes. But research suggests there is some public support for a ‘frequent flyer levy’, which is more popular than a direct tax on aviation fuel.

When asked to choose which policy options (from a list) would help tackle environmental damage caused by air travel, a frequent flyer levy is the most popular choice by a large margin.

**Example of values-based messaging:**

Climate change - rather than climate action - is the threat to the status quo (an important centre-right value).

*The climate is now changing around us – the responsible thing to do is to ask how we can protect ourselves against these risks, and stay in control.*

Responsibility is a key centre-right value.

Making clear the relative impact of this behaviour.

*Compared to other forms of transport, flying has one of the biggest impacts on our environment. But most people in the UK rarely use an aeroplane, so most of the flying is done by a small minority, who can have a huge impact by making some manageable changes.*

Building confidence and efficacy.

Keeping things in balance is an important centre-right value.

*It’s about striking a balance – reducing the amount we fly not eliminating it altogether. A ‘frequent flyer levy’ is a fair way to account for the environmental costs of flying - more people prefer this option than adding tax to aviation fuel.*

Linking to policy (structural) changes and emphasising the centre-right value of ‘fairness’.

Avoiding presenting changes as radically threatening the status quo.

*Surveys show that more people agree than disagree with the idea of reducing the amount they fly to protect the environment – its about taking reasonable steps to not waste the resources we have. Talking to friends and family about the things you’re doing is another important way of amplifying the impact of your choices.*

As taxation tends to be unpopular among conservatives, showing that the frequent flyer levy is distinct from a tax is important.

Promoting positive social norms.

Avoiding waste is a key centre-right value.

*Flying less has some real advantages too – you can’t take in the beautiful countryside from an aeroplane, in the way you can on a train. Fewer flights means cleaner air. And slowing down a little in these hectic modern times, is good for us all.*

Talking climate to further positive build social norms.

Introducing co-benefits.

A nostalgia/longing for simpler times is something that Climate Outreach research has identified as important for this audience.

Love for natural landscapes and the countryside is a key centre-right value.

Note: This draws on multiple studies of effectively engaging centre-right audiences on climate change conducted by [Climate Outreach](#), and recently published [polling by 10:10](#) on perceptions of the environmental impact of aviation.



## About the Low-carbon Lifestyles and Behavioural Spillover (CASPI) project

The CASPI (Low-carbon Lifestyles and Behavioural Spillover) project at Cardiff University was a five year programme of research spanning seven countries, exploring how environmentally-friendly behaviour, lifestyles and spillover are understood and develop within different cultures. A key focus was how—and under what conditions—behavioural ‘spillover’ occurs, in other words, whether taking up one new green behaviour (e.g. recycling) leads on to other green behaviours (e.g. eating less red meat). This research was prompted by the need to make profound changes to individual behaviour in order to tackle climate change, but where policies to achieve these changes have so far met with limited success. The CASPI project had three objectives:

- 1. To examine ways in which environmentally-friendly behaviour, lifestyles and spillover are understood and develop within different cultures;**
- 2. To understand drivers of behavioural consistency and (positive and negative) spillover effects across contexts, including home and work, roles, and cultures; and**
- 3. To develop a theoretical framework for behavioural spillover and test interventions to promote spillover across different contexts and cultures**

In order to address these questions, research was carried out in a diverse set of nations (Brazil, China, Denmark, India, Poland, South Africa, United Kingdom) involving interviews with several hundred people, and responses to surveys from around 7,000 individuals. Visit the [CASPI website](#) for more information.

## Changing course on behaviour change

Climate change is a global public concern: In line with a growing body of international evidence, the CASPI project found that a clear majority across the seven countries surveyed (including the UK) accepted the role of human influence on climate change, and were personally worried about it.

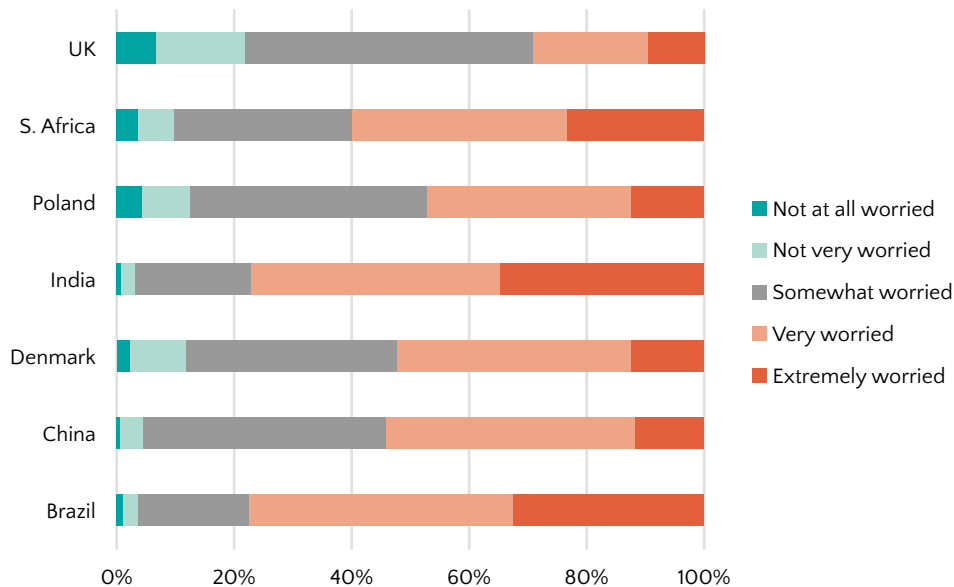


Figure 1.1: Responses to the question “How worried are you about climate change?” in seven nations. Sample size of respondents was around 1,000 in each nation.

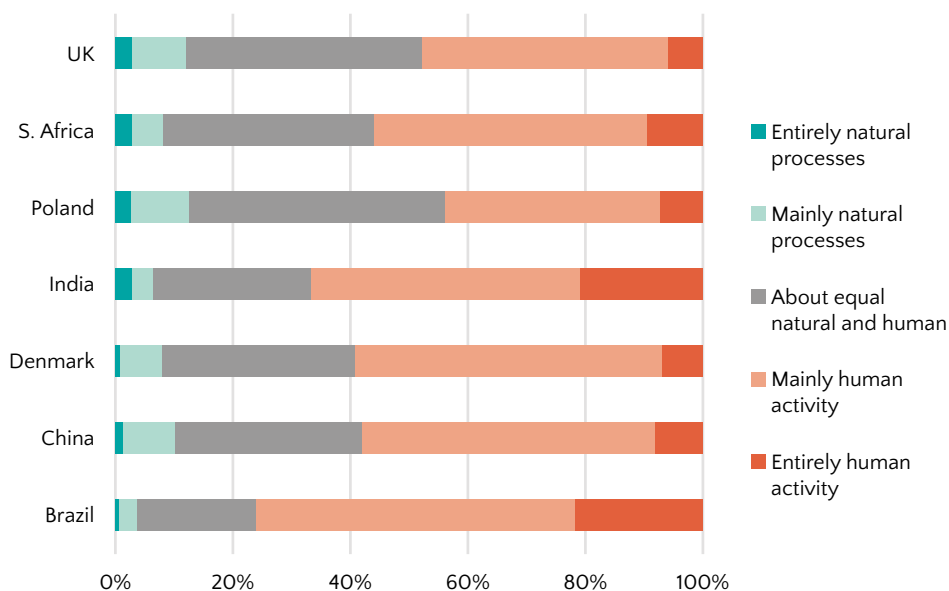


Figure 1.2: Responses to the question “What do you believe to be the cause of climate change?” in seven nations. Sample size of respondents was around 1,000 in each nation.

The majority of Britons support renewable energy and, to an extent, low-carbon changes in behaviours and lifestyles.<sup>6,7</sup> But low-carbon lifestyles are not yet the norm in the highest emitting, developed nations where the biggest changes must take place. This situation must change if the UK’s targets for decarbonisation, and global goals to manage temperature rise are to be achieved.

From the earliest campaigns to the present day, the idea of changing the ‘way we live’—our behaviours, lifestyles and social practices—has played a central but controversial role. Many campaigns in the 1990s and 2000s focused on ordinary citizens ‘doing their bit’ through reducing their personal carbon-footprints.<sup>8</sup> But there was then a concerted shift away from openly talking about the role of individual behaviours, in part reflecting the failure of most campaigns to bring about meaningful changes in people’s behaviours (and more importantly their carbon footprints).<sup>9,10</sup>

Some—especially policy-makers—shifted their attention to alternative approaches to behaviour change, applying principles of ‘behavioural economics’ to ‘nudge’ people towards low-carbon choices (more on this in Section 6). Others argued behavioural approaches were flawed because they distracted from the more fundamental causes of the problem (i.e. the extraction of fossil fuels to feed a growth-based economic system).<sup>11-13</sup> It is certainly true that there is only so far any individual can go in terms of getting their own house in order, without the societal institutions around them keeping pace.

Research shows that while some behaviours (such as turning off lights, and recycling) are carried out regularly by the majority of the UK public, many more challenging low-carbon behaviours, such as avoiding buying new things (e.g. clothes and luxury items) or reducing meat consumption, are much rarer.<sup>7</sup> Although it has been possible to bring about some limited reductions in personal and household emissions, the longevity and endurance of these changes is unclear, and they do not come close to the scale of change required to meet rapid decarbonisation targets.<sup>14</sup> It isn’t hard to understand why many communicators and campaigners seemed to ‘give up’ on behaviour change.



Shopping for local fruit and vegetables at a Greengrocer in Oxford, UK.  
Photo by [John M](#) (CC BY-SA 2.0)

While the popularity of behaviour change approaches waxed and waned for campaigners, the psychological evidence base was steadily accumulating.<sup>15,16</sup> Recent academic reviews point to the same cluster of influences, including:

- ▶ The values people hold.<sup>17</sup>
- ▶ The extent to which they ‘identify’ as pro-environmental.<sup>18</sup>
- ▶ The social norms they are surrounded by.<sup>19</sup>
- ▶ Opportunistically timing behavioural interventions to make them easier to accommodate.<sup>20</sup>
- ▶ People’s sense that their actions make a difference (‘efficacy’).<sup>21</sup>

As we explore in more detail in Section 2, there has been a lot of interest in the idea of catalysing positive ‘spillover’ between low-carbon behaviours.<sup>22–24</sup> This has been borne out of a recognition that unless ‘one behaviour leads to another’, the cumulative impact of behavioural change interventions—even if they were successful—would be too slow, and too inconsequential to justify the time, effort and expense required to implement them. It is crucial that behaviour changes can ‘scale up’ if they are to make a difference.

But as key recent reports from the IPCC and the UK Committee on Climate Change underscore, public engagement and lifestyle change is a non-negotiable piece of the puzzle if we are serious about achieving a ‘1.5 degrees’ world. The discourse on the importance of behaviour change has shifted once again.<sup>1,25,26,107</sup>

In the UK at least, much of the the progress so far on decarbonisation (e.g. phasing out coal from the energy mix)<sup>27</sup> has happened ‘behind the scenes’, but building energy efficiency, decarbonising the transport sector, and addressing the large environmental footprint of food and farming will require widespread and ongoing public engagement.<sup>1,26</sup>

There are signs that the research community is treating the challenge of low-carbon behaviour increasingly urgently. Leading environmental behaviour specialists have argued that research should focus more on effective ways to encourage rapid and wide-scale changes in climate mitigation actions, and less on understanding the structure of climate change beliefs.<sup>28</sup> From the ‘practitioner’ side of the equation, communications can (and should) play a much bigger role in boosting citizen engagement with positive, low-carbon behaviours, as well as forward-thinking adaptation in the face of climate impacts.<sup>29</sup>

But if (as this report argues) campaigns to change behaviours in a piecemeal way,<sup>23,30</sup> or nudge people into making different choices have so far failed to mainstream low-carbon lifestyles, then more ambitious approaches—aligned with structural interventions that enable people to move in the right direction—are required.

## Spillover: When does one behaviour lead to another?

Across home energy use, travel, consumption of goods, and dietary choices, there are dozens of ways in which campaigns can seek to influence behaviours. But implicit in many campaigns and interventions is a questionable assumption: that one behavioural change is likely to lead to other, more impactful ones. This basic concept – ‘spillover’ – has been the focus of numerous reports and analyses,<sup>24,30,31</sup> and was the central focus of the CASPI project, which investigated spillover in low-carbon behaviours on an unprecedented international scale.<sup>24</sup>

In surveys of around 1000 people in 7 countries (UK, Brazil, Poland, South Africa, Denmark, India, China), certain ‘difficult’ behaviours—such as making ‘green’ purchasing decisions, and encouraging other people to save energy (‘interpersonal activism’)—were found to be linked in people’s minds.<sup>32</sup> But evidence for the simplistic idea of ‘linear spillover’ (literally one behavioural change causing another) was scarce. In-depth interviews with 219 citizens in the same 7 countries were carried out (including those very engaged with pro-environmental causes and lifestyles). Very few people in any of the countries reported behavioural spillover in their own lives, and most had trouble recalling spillover as a motivation for their pro-environmental behaviours.<sup>33</sup>

In further evidence from the UK, the introduction of a small charge for carrier bags in Wales produced a rapid and significant rise in the number of people reusing bags, rather than purchasing new ones, but there was little evidence of this behaviour change spilling over into other, more impactful actions.<sup>22</sup> To make things even more challenging, there is evidence that ‘negative spillover’ exists – for example, people might feel morally ‘licensed’ to indulge in a high-carbon holiday because they’ve cycled to work more in the past year.<sup>31</sup>

With the benefit of hindsight, and a decade of research, it perhaps isn’t surprising that very different behaviours are not automatically clustered together under the banner of a ‘low-carbon lifestyle’ for most people. The way people use energy is highly context dependent, and this poses serious barriers for spillover from one situation to another (e.g. work-home or transport-household energy). Beyond a small number of committed activists, willing and able to view their daily lives through the prism of environmental sustainability, the notion of a coherent ‘low-carbon lifestyle’ is not yet commonplace.<sup>34</sup>

There are plenty of campaigns which have been completely oblivious to the relationship between one pro-environmental behaviour and another. One striking and bizarre initiative saw consumers encouraged by a supermarket marketing campaign to “turn lights into flights” by earning “air miles” through the purchase of energy-efficient lightbulbs.<sup>35</sup> It is a particularly nonsensical example, but the lesson is clear: if individual low-carbon behaviours are treated as compartmentalised and discrete, there is a risk that positive environmental actions will be undermined by carbon-intensive activities elsewhere.

But if the bad news is that one behaviour change doesn't automatically lead to another, it is now possible—in part through the findings of the CASPI project—to be more confident about the conditions under which spillover is more or less likely occur.

**Firstly**, the reasons and motivations behind changes in behaviour really matter. When an action is perceived to be freely chosen, rather than the result of external pressure or coercion, spillover to other behaviours is more likely to occur. In practice, this means that while financial savings might motivate people in some circumstances, this isn't a communications strategy for the longer term. Indeed, there is evidence that economic measures can actually undermine behavioural spillover. One study found that where a carrier bag charge was introduced, there was less spillover from reusing carrier bags to other green behaviours than in countries where a charge had not yet been introduced (in which people were reusing bags without the threat of a financial penalty).<sup>36</sup> Making low-carbon choices affordable is necessary, but not sufficient to catalyse behaviour change.

**Secondly**, to activate a wider range of behavioural changes, research suggests that people should be encouraged to understand the ways in which their low-carbon choices are an altruistic decision, or important for their own sake – i.e. tapping into the kinds of 'self-transcending' values that underpin existing positive engagement with climate change (see Section 3). Previous work by Climate Outreach has focused on developing narratives that build a bridge between these pro-environmental values and the values of a range of audiences not yet engaged on climate change.<sup>29,37-40</sup> These values are the 'glue' motivating clusters of low-carbon behaviours, transcending different situations and circumstances.<sup>41-44</sup>

**Thirdly**, 'spillover' is only likely to occur when different behaviours are seen as 'similar'. This means they need to be linked in people's minds as being part of a low-carbon lifestyle, not separated into individual boxes. Communications should explicitly frame behaviours as being part of a suite of actions that comprise a low-carbon lifestyle, and their impactfulness clearly flagged (i.e. how much do they matter – see Section 7). A clear, coherent narrative must be in place that sets out how different behaviours relate to each other. Providing an opportunity to engage with and reflect on the 'big picture' is crucial. Without a clear sense of what climate change means for people's lives—how the energy system is changing and why; and how different behavioural actions could relate to national-level policy—even the best intentioned individuals are unlikely to be able to achieve much consistency in low-carbon behaviours.

**Finally**, there has been debate about whether spillover is more likely to occur if it starts with an easy behaviour (the 'foot-in-the-door' effect) or a hard behaviour first.<sup>45</sup> The CASPI research suggests that spillover is more likely to occur between harder than easier behaviours<sup>32</sup> probably because more demanding actions tend to have a bigger impact on identity, building a sense of commitment and confidence that can inspire further lifestyle change (see Section 6).



A woman installs wall insulation. Photo by [Nick Nguyen](#) (CC BY-SA 2.0).

## Disrupting habits & spillover: Making low-carbon behaviour 'conscious' at key moments of change

Because many (perhaps most) behaviours are habitual, it is sometimes argued that expecting people to intentionally alter (or reflect on) their decision-making is unrealistic. But even the most ingrained habitual behaviours can be altered by making the behaviours 'conscious' and targeting the context in which they occur (crucial for spillover). When habits are disrupted by events/decisions (e.g. through relocation or a new job), the reasons behind habitual behaviours become more salient and influential, providing an important window of opportunity to intervene.<sup>20,46,47</sup>

## The crucial role of values and identity - the building blocks of public engagement

As the previous section makes clear, whether or not spillover between behaviours occurs has a lot to do with people's values and identities. Drawing on new CASPI data, this section takes a deeper dive into why people's values (guiding principles in their lives)<sup>48,49</sup> and their cultural identities<sup>50,51</sup> are so important for cultivating low-carbon lifestyles.

People's attitudes on different topics may morph and shift over time, but there are certain aspects of people's psychological makeup that are relatively consistent. Most surveys of public opinion tend to capture and compare public attitudes towards specific topics (e.g. climate change), but values are the 'bedrock' on which specific attitudes are founded,<sup>17,43,48</sup> and this is important for understanding their role in behaviour change. As the CASPI team concluded in a review of the evidence on spillover in low-carbon lifestyles, "given the sheer number of factors influencing an individual within a given context, predicting how they might act in the moment is somewhat complicated. However, as a foundation for behavioural spillover, prior values and goals might offer a feasible target for interventions."<sup>31</sup> In other words, values are consistent between contexts and situations, and that consistency is important in establishing low-carbon lifestyles (rather than a cluster of dislocated behavioural changes).

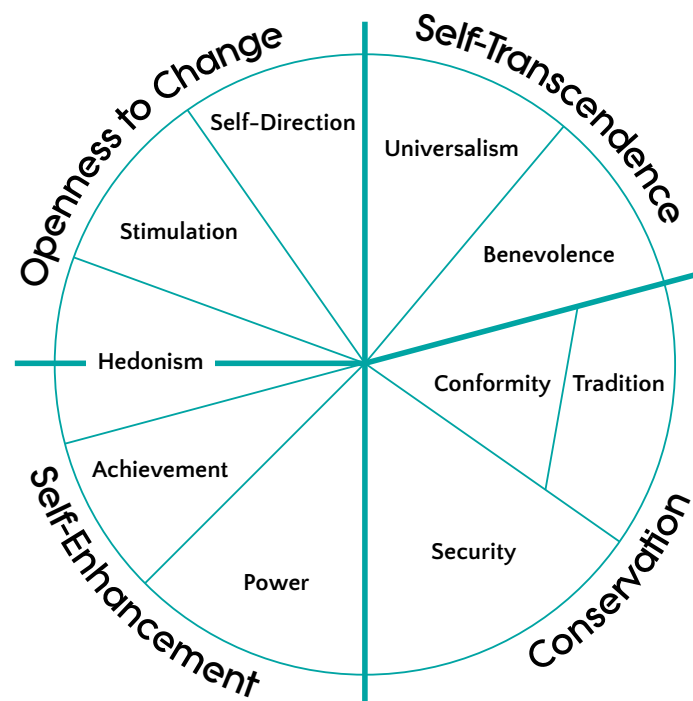


Figure 3.1: Schwartz Values Circumplex showing the relations among ten motivational types of value.<sup>53</sup> Values that share similarities and often are prioritised together by individuals (e.g. 'Power' and 'Achievement') are closer together within the circle. Opposing values are placed on the opposite plane of the model (e.g. 'Power' vs. 'Universalism'). Four broader categories ('Self-Enhancement', 'Conservation', 'Self-Transcendence' and 'Openness to Change') incorporate the ten values.



It is now well-understood that certain values consistently predict positive engagement with climate change.<sup>17,52</sup> People who favour so-called ‘self-transcending’ values (which go beyond self-interest, such as altruism or forgiveness) tend to be more likely to be concerned about climate change and support low-carbon policies. People who lean towards ‘self-enhancing’ values (i.e. self-focused values such as power, ambition and materialism) tend to be less engaged.

In new data from the seven countries surveyed, the CASPI project<sup>50</sup> has confirmed that these relationships hold across each of the countries included in the research programme, and especially in developed, high emitting nations. The study provides strong evidence that values are what underpin many pro-environmental behaviours (such as taking shorter showers, donating to environmental causes, or doing something with friends, family or neighbours about an environmental problem). Investigating the connection between self-transcendent values and pro-environmental behaviour, the research showed “significant and pronounced effects across all seven countries”. The influence of values in each of these countries (except China and India) was substantially stronger than the influence of income. So the notion that pro-environmental values underpin low-carbon behaviours is something that rings true from Brazil to Sweden (for more on international comparisons see Section 4).

Although people possess a range of different and sometimes conflicting values, the way that different values are used when communicating about energy and climate change matters, because promoting or ‘priming’ one type of value (e.g. by talking about the economic rationale for energy saving – a self-enhancing value) is likely to weaken the prominence of opposing values (e.g. the environmental benefits of energy saving – a self-transcending value), and therefore the potential for spillover between behaviours.<sup>29,30,54</sup>

What this means for communicating around low-carbon lifestyles is that there is a choice to be made about the language (self-transcending or self-enhancing?) used to frame messages about behaviour change. Thinking carefully about the values different audiences hold, and finding ways to craft messages about behaviour change that don’t focus (at least not exclusively) on economic rationales, is critical. For example, emphasising the potential for energy saving measures to minimise wastefulness (a common sense, practical, and widely-shared value), might be a better approach than focusing on how much money can be saved.<sup>54,55</sup> The point is not that people don’t care about how low-carbon choices will impact on their wallet (they do), but that this is not enough to sustain a low-carbon lifestyle, and that all audiences (across the world) are likely to identify with self-transcending values of some kind.

## Comparisons across cultures: The importance of social norms & ‘talking climate’

A key contribution of the CASPI project is its international scope, exploring low-carbon lifestyles in seven very different countries. It is well-understood that perceptions of climate change and other environmental issues are filtered through different cultural contexts and people’s worldviews, which differ between (as well as within) nations.<sup>52,56</sup> So, while considering how to mainstream low-carbon lifestyles in the UK, it makes sense to explore what can be learnt from research across nations, cultures and diverse groups, and how norms around low-carbon lifestyles differ between nations.

Cross-cultural investigations have revealed lots of similarities across diverse nations and societies. For instance, research spanning several decades by Shalom Schwartz and his colleagues has uncovered remarkable levels of consistency in the structure of human values across 44 nations and over 25,000 respondents.<sup>48,49</sup> As discussed in Section 3, the CASPI project has established that the same cluster of ‘self-transcendent’ values predicts positive engagement with climate change, and the likelihood of spillover, in each of the seven countries surveyed. Additionally, acting in environmentally positive ways was associated with greater well-being across the seven studied countries.

But as well as these similarities, there was also a fair amount of variation between the environmental ‘norms’ in different nations. For instance, comparing across seven countries, the proportion of individuals who were ‘extremely worried’ about climate change was found to be much higher in Brazil and India, than in the UK, Poland, Denmark and China. More localised environmental issues were viewed with greater urgency than climate change in Brazil, China and South Africa.<sup>51</sup> In South Africa, energy conservation was set against an ongoing energy crisis. In Brazil, water shortages caused by drought dominated concerns. Meanwhile, in China, air pollution affected human health and wellbeing.

The CASPI interviews also found that citizens’ perceived motivations to take pro-environmental actions extended beyond having simple environmental concerns, incorporating factors like frugality, patriotism and energy security. This chimes with work in the UK that points to a similar cluster of motivations and values underpinning positive engagement with renewable energy, and energy efficiency among audiences with conservative political values.<sup>39,55,57</sup>

The prevalence of some low-carbon behaviours varied significantly between nations – for example, 30% of people in the UK said they never avoided buying new things as an environmental measure, compared with 17% in Brazil.<sup>7</sup> Recycling household waste was much more commonplace amongst UK households, and much less common in Poland and India. Using public transport, cycling or walking for longer journeys was

far less common in South Africa than in places like Poland, India, or China. In addition, purchasing new environmentally friendly products was not as common a practice in Brazil as it was in Poland, India, Denmark and China (see Figure 4.1).

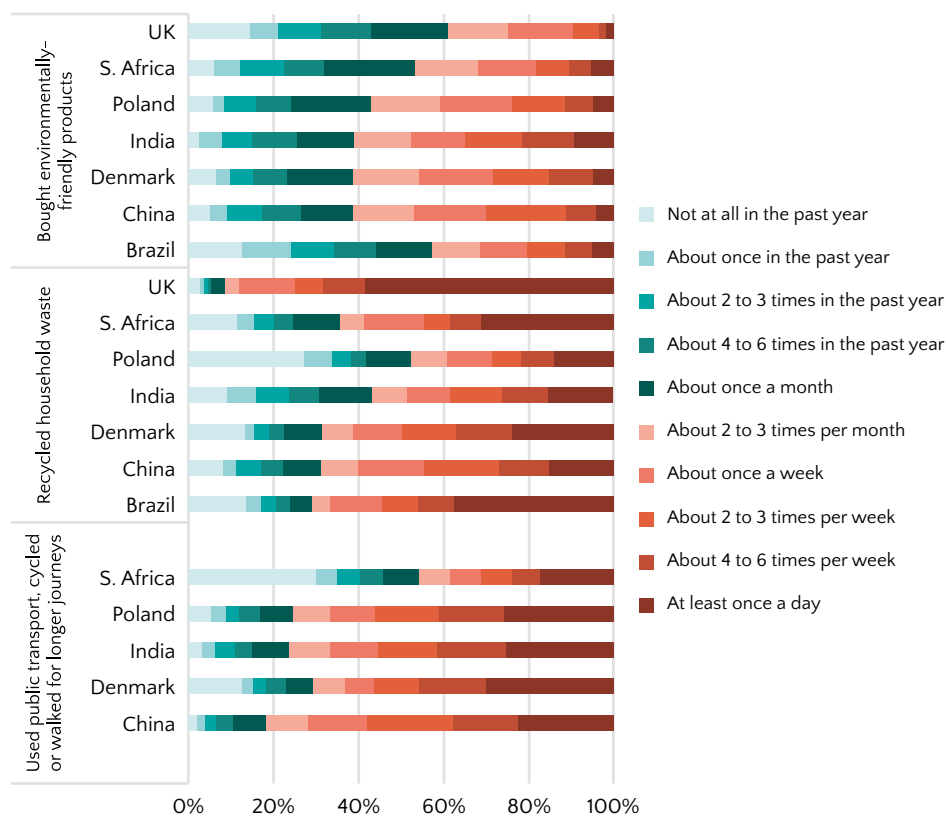


Figure 4.1: Variations in low-carbon behaviours across seven countries. Sample size of respondents was around 1,000 in each nation. Please note: The question about ‘transport’ was not asked in Brazil or the UK.

Reflecting on the low percentage of people who avoided buying new items in the UK, the CASPI team concluded that it “reflects a general social norm to consume – or at least, the absence of a social norm to avoid consuming”. But taken together, the differences between the perceptions and behaviours in the seven different nations speak to the importance of norms in mainstreaming low-carbon lifestyles more generally.

There are few influences more powerful than an individual’s social network and the social norms that people are surrounded by.<sup>58</sup> As Section 5 discusses, campaigns around health behaviours often target peer groups and existing social networks for exactly this reason, in the hope that the spreading of positive behaviours will be more likely within groups of individuals who trust each other and pay attention to each other’s behaviour.<sup>59</sup>

Where there is no social or cultural norm around a particular low-carbon behaviour (e.g. avoiding buying new products), it sends a powerful signal: this type of behaviour is not typical or widespread.<sup>60</sup>



An energy solar set demonstration to a community in Uttar Pradesh, India. Photo by [ADB](#) (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0).

So while promoting positive social norms is a tried-and-tested method of influencing behaviour, its effectiveness hinges on positive norms being available for promoting in the first place. For many low-carbon behaviours, the problem is not that positive social norms aren't being highlighted, but that the norms are simply not there to promote. Car use is a pertinent example in the UK: it is difficult to imagine how a campaign to reduce private car use could harness the power of social norms when the vast majority of people regularly choose this method of transportation. Plus—because there is typically a social silence around climate change<sup>61</sup>—many people are unaware of the positive norms that do exist around climate change. Several studies have shown that while most people in the UK are in favour of renewable energy technologies, they don't think other people are.<sup>62</sup>

Conversations about climate change—a space for people to reflect on their own and others' views and lifestyle choices—are crucial. Peer-to-peer engagement helps not only to dispel negative misperceptions around others' views, but to reassure people that low-carbon lifestyles are not a wasted effort (because more people care than they might have realised, or are already taking actions in their own lives). The CASPI findings show that the social/cultural norms around low-carbon behaviour vary across cultures. But talking climate, allowing the links between different low-carbon behaviours to be made 'conscious', and positively influencing the perception of social norms in the process, is a crucial element in mainstreaming low-carbon lifestyles in any cultural context.<sup>29</sup>

## Telling an authentically positive story: Building self-efficacy & promoting the co-benefits of low-carbon lifestyles

There is nothing to be gained from downplaying the seriousness of the risks of climate change, or in trying to shield public audiences from the negative emotions they are likely to experience when reflecting on what climate change means for their own lives, or the wellbeing of people around the world. But there are also well-documented risks in framing climate change in a strongly negative way: people may switch off, or dismiss the messages altogether, and the notion of low-carbon lifestyles as a ‘sacrifice’ is an especially challenging example of the ‘hope vs fear’ conundrum in climate communication.<sup>63</sup>

It seems clear that it is important to get away from framings that make the prospect of taking action on climate change appear to be daunting, unreasonably effortful, or unmanageably costly.

But the obvious alternative, highlighting the gains and benefits that can be achieved by adopting a new behaviour, isn’t straightforward either. Messages promoting energy conservation, for example, are more effective when framed as being about avoiding losses (energy wastage, pouring money down the drain etc.), rather than about potential gains.<sup>64,65</sup> So there are risks in ‘brightsiding’ (making unrealistically optimistic claims about how straightforward the low-carbon transition will be) too.

Nevertheless, work emerging from the CASPI project suggests that low-carbon lifestyles are linked to higher personal wellbeing across countries, even taking into account people’s income. So making an ‘authentically positive’ case for low-carbon lifestyles is important.<sup>66</sup>

Across the seven countries surveyed by the CASPI team, a clear link emerged between people’s wellbeing and the extent to which they engaged in low-carbon behaviours: people who were ‘greener’ also tended to be happier, even taking into account their own personal income.<sup>50</sup> While it is difficult to draw conclusions about cause and effect from this work (it could be the case that happy people are drawn towards low-carbon behaviours, not the other way around), the CASPI findings add to a growing body of work that suggests it is possible—and desirable—to “live better by consuming less”.<sup>67</sup>

Interestingly, the extent to which the culture of the country surveyed was ‘individualist’ or ‘collectivist’ influenced the association between types of behaviours and wellbeing.<sup>50</sup> Broadly speaking, this individualism–collectivism distinction refers to the extent that people within a country generally prioritise individual aspirations, or strive for the betterment of groups and communities.<sup>68</sup> So-called ‘public-sphere’ behaviours (e.g. encouraging others to save energy) were more closely linked to wellbeing in more collectivistic cultures (such as China and Brazil) than in the more individualistic cultures (such as the UK and Denmark).

As well as the link between wellbeing and low-carbon lifestyles evidenced in the CASPI work, there is a strong argument for grounding messages about behaviour change in the 'co-benefits' that low-carbon lifestyles can bring. Connecting with self-transcending values in messages about behaviour change is critical, and these might involve talking about the benefits for wellbeing, community cohesion, or people's health.

For example, low-carbon, active travel choices are associated with positive health outcomes. Opting to walk and cycle, rather than drive, can reduce healthcare costs, increase the general health of entire populations, and bring an array of societal benefits like reduced noise pollution, congestion, and improved social interaction.<sup>69-73</sup> And the benefits are not just around transportation: low-carbon buildings can improve the physical and mental health of its occupants,<sup>73</sup> changes in diets away from high consumption of dairy and red meat can also bring health benefits<sup>74</sup> and shifting towards locally produced food can improve social cohesion by bringing communities together.<sup>75</sup>

It is important to make an 'authentically positive' case for low-carbon lifestyles—one that does not downplay the risks of a changing climate, or the challenges that changing behaviours brings, but one that constructively points to the co-benefits of behavioural changes. It is also important to build a sense of 'efficacy' among members of the public who may be hesitant about the impact changes in their own life can have, in the context of a challenge as enormous as climate change.

Beliefs about self-efficacy ('am I capable of accomplishing the action?') and response efficacy ('will it be effective?') are particularly crucial. Psychologists have long known that individuals are less likely to follow the behaviour change recommendations if they do not believe the changes will have an impact, or feel little personal control over the action.<sup>76-80</sup> These feelings aren't just important for individual scale behaviours, but also for acceptance of policies and new infrastructures. For instance, renewable energy systems are viewed more positively when they are able to guarantee people a sense of independence, autonomy, control and security of supply as well.<sup>81</sup>

All of this underscores the importance of building a shared, social, sense of what low-carbon lifestyles mean, and the importance of peer-to-peer engagement discussed earlier in this report. Making positive social norms visible, and cultivating a shared sense of how low-carbon lifestyles form part of the wider transition towards sustainability, is crucial for people to feel their energies are not wasted.

## Learning from the past: Why ‘nudge’ is not enough

This report has so far focused on the need to anchor behaviour change strategies in people’s ‘self transcendent’ values, the role of social norms and climate conversations in making low-carbon lifestyles visible, and the importance of building a holistic, coherent sense of how different behaviours and actions can add up to a low-carbon lifestyle – creating the conditions under which ‘spillover’ is more likely to occur.

But although there are examples of organisations and campaigns working hard to put these principles into practice (e.g. 10:10, Carbon Literacy, Hubbub), over the last decade, one idea above all others has gained traction with policy makers in the UK around behaviour change: ‘Nudge’.<sup>82</sup>

The core idea behind the nudge approach is that rather than persuading people to change their behaviours, or building a sense of pro-environmental identity among different public audiences, campaigns and interventions should instead change the context within which people make decisions.<sup>82</sup> For instance, in a study of over 40,000 households in Germany,<sup>83</sup> there was a significant jump in the percentage of people choosing the ‘100% renewable’ green energy tariff when the default was nudged to ‘opt-in’: 6%, compared with less than 1% when they had to opt in themselves. Nudge has also achieved a phenomenal level of policy capture, with ‘nudge units’ established in more than fifty nations around the world, which offer behavioural changes that don’t require public-facing campaigns, or unwieldy budgets to support them.<sup>82</sup>

But while nudge-based approaches can point to some significant successes, they are problematic from the point of view of the research discussed in this report (including the international evidence from the CASPI project) on what drives low-carbon lifestyles. Previous examples of social transitions and behavioural transformations, where a multitude of approaches and interventions have been required to bring about rapid change, point to the same conclusion: nudge is not enough.

As the evidence from the CASPI project makes clear, ‘spillover’ is only likely to happen when people internalise the reasons for their low-carbon decision-making. Plainly put, the reasons behind the behaviours matter, not just the behaviours themselves. Nudge actively avoids encouraging people to consciously reflect on their behavioural choices. But with only financial incentives and subtle nudges to guide behaviour, there is limited scope for people to ‘join the dots’ between behaviours, and develop a coherent idea of a low-carbon lifestyle. When behaviours are not linked together, but instead treated as discrete, individual activities, there is a risk that positive low-carbon changes can be cancelled out by high-carbon choices elsewhere (sometimes described as ‘rebound effects’ or ‘negative spillover’<sup>31</sup>).



Cyclists commuting all year round in Copenhagen, Denmark. Photo by [Mikael Colville-Anderson](#) (CC BY-NC 2.0).

Plus, acceptance of large-scale societal/structural changes to address climate change (e.g. the electrification of home heating systems) requires active public consent and support.<sup>84,85</sup> This cannot be achieved through nudges alone. Nudge is not the right approach for bringing about structural change, like improvements in public transport or urban design to encourage low-carbon forms of transport: you can't nudge a car driver to start cycling to work.

Nudge is a passive, 'unthinking' approach to (incremental) behaviour change, when in fact—as the CASPI project findings suggest—the opposite is required (an active, conscious process of reflection on what building a transformational societal response to climate change means).

In order to reflect on what holds the dozens of different behavioural choices that comprise a 'low-carbon lifestyle' together (and how these behaviours in turn are only one part of a suite of responses to climate change that encompass everything from energy infrastructure to 'divesting' from fossil fuel companies<sup>66</sup>), the focus of behaviour change campaigns must shift from 'nudge' to 'think' as a strategy for public engagement.<sup>86,87</sup> Studies of the limited number of people who have consistently adopted low-carbon lifestyles support this approach: their low-carbon lifestyles were impacted more by campaigns that actively made connections with societal concerns to promote a holistic view of a lower-carbon future, than 'to-do' lists of behaviour changes.<sup>34</sup>

Climate change is in many ways a unique problem, and the challenge of rapid low-carbon lifestyle change is arguably unprecedented. But that doesn't mean it isn't possible to learn from other rapid behavioural transitions that have taken place in the past. As initiatives like the Rapid Transition Alliance show,<sup>88</sup> unpicking the dynamics of other transitions can help to inform how low-carbon lifestyles can be mainstreamed. Here we focus on one significant social transition that has taken place in the UK, that is often cited as holding lessons for promoting sustainable behaviours: the reduction and cessation of smoking.





## Case study: How smoking behaviours changed in Britain

Across just a few decades in the UK and Ireland, smoking has gone from being a widespread practice, to the custom of an apologetic minority forced to stand outside in the cold. Despite the workings of a powerful tobacco industry, which continually denied the health risks of smoking and spread misinformation,<sup>89</sup> smoking has gone from being a common habit (50% of men and over 40% of women), to a behaviour carried out by less than 15% of the population in 2017.<sup>88,90</sup> Once the link between smoking and health impacts became clearly evidenced by scientists in the 1950s,<sup>91</sup> what drove these changes?

Campaign efforts were many and varied.<sup>88,90,92</sup> **Graphic imagery on packaging**, and **increasing the size of health warnings**—what might now be described as nudge-based approaches—certainly played a role. But as well as the familiar strategies of **emphasising the link between smoking and individual health outcomes**, the change in ‘individual’ behaviours was very much a social shift, with concerns about passive smoking driving the discourse towards **a discussion of shared responsibilities**, rather than simply an individual cost-benefit analysis. **Peer-to-peer educational initiatives** sat alongside more traditional **‘top down’ advertising** campaigns, reinforced by a **consistent and diverse communications infrastructure** (from national to local government, and statutory bodies like Public Health England).

**Resources** made available via the NHS continue to enable smokers to take control, break their habit, and quickly reduce their risk, with the support of professionals. Breaking habits by **making behaviours ‘conscious’ and reflecting on them** was important for smoking campaigns, as it is for promoting low-carbon lifestyles, and as the previous section discussed, nurturing a sense of confidence and control is crucial).

But importantly, **changes in public attitudes** and social norms<sup>93</sup> opened up **space for structural policy changes**: changes in pricing and taxation, bans on smoking in public spaces, and ultimately the **removal of public advertising for tobacco** altogether are often held up as proof that ‘only regulation and structural changes get things done’. But these structural shifts were only possible because of the multi-pronged campaigns focused on individual and social dynamics that preceded them.

If gradual changes in public attitudes and practices around smoking appear to have set the stage for public acceptance of more radical policies, then this was a two-way process. The smoking ban in workplaces and public places dramatically shifted the norms of smoking behaviour even further – for instance, encouraging a 23% increase in quit attempts made via NHS stop-smoking services in the years immediately following the policy change.<sup>94</sup> Additionally, the ban also seemed to open the floodgates for other legislation, such as raising the purchase age, standardised packaging and banning smoking in cars with young children.<sup>94</sup> **Without the prior changes to attitudes it’s hard to imagine such policies being accepted, highlighting the importance of public attitudes as gateways to pivotal policy making as well.**

What's clear from this brief analysis of lessons and learning from the cessation of smoking among large numbers of the UK public is that a shift of this magnitude—arguably nowhere near as complex as decarbonising lifestyles—required a range of multi-level (individual, social and structural) interventions, a public-facing communications and engagement infrastructure maintained by campaigners, statutory bodies and government agencies over many decades, shifts in social norms, a recognition of the issue as transcending self-interest, and for the issue to become a question of shared responsibility for collective health outcomes.

All of this resonates strongly with the analyses presented in this report. The path towards low-carbon lifestyles and a low-carbon society is impossible to predict and prescribe in detail, but if there is one clear lesson from the (relatively) rapid shifts around smoking behaviours, it is that nudge-based approaches are not enough. In the final section, we bring all of the evidence presented in this report together and show how to apply it, moving beyond nudge to an approach that offers the potential to create meaningful behavioural shifts and the mainstreaming of low-carbon lifestyles.

## Where do I start? Mainstreaming low-carbon lifestyles

The final section of this report shifts in focus, moving from asking how to most effectively bring about lifestyle change, to the more practical but equally important questions of which behaviours to focus on first. Low-carbon lifestyles are comprised of dozens of different actions and choices. But not all low-carbon behaviours are equal – some have much bigger impacts than others. So if you’re designing a behaviour change campaign or intervention, where should you start?

The first important consideration is not in fact ‘which behaviour?’ but ‘which audience?’. Carbon emissions increase sharply with income: People living in “prospering suburbs” have the highest per-capita emissions, when comparing the impacts of different socioeconomic groups.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the top 10% of emitters are responsible for close to half of all emissions; and much of this difference is underpinned by household income.<sup>5,14</sup> It therefore makes sense to target engagement efforts towards these high emitting groups when aiming to mainstream low-carbon behaviours, in order to make the biggest gains.<sup>14</sup>

The next consideration is ‘which behaviour’ to focus on. There is no one-size-fits all answer to this, and research from the CASPI team shows clearly that there can be a mismatch between people’s beliefs about what is effective; and the things that will actually make a difference. For example, across the countries surveyed, people consistently rated ‘turning off the tap when brushing your teeth’ as highly-impactful, more so than ‘avoiding eating meat’ or ‘avoiding buying new things’ (A selection of actions are shown in Figure 7.1). While it is not possible directly to compare a measurable impact of ‘contacting a politician’ it is notable that this is seen as relatively less valuable as an action across countries.

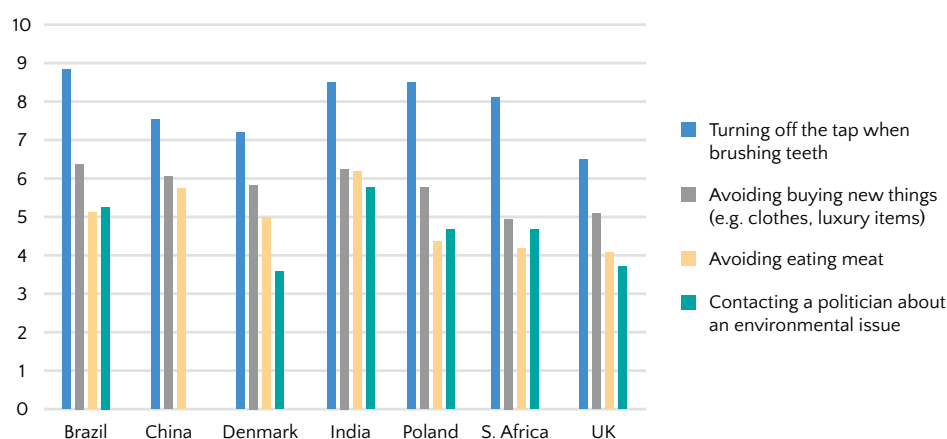
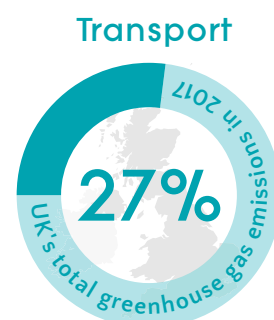


Figure 7.1: Responses across seven countries to the question: “To what extent do you feel that the following actions have an impact in terms of protecting the environment?”. Around 1,000 participants in each country indicated their answers for five different behaviours (e.g. avoiding eating meat) using a score of ‘0’ for ‘no impact at all’ (makes no difference taking this action) to ‘10’ for ‘very large impact’ (makes a very great difference). The chart’s Y-axis relates to this scoring system.

The aim of behaviour-change campaigns should not be for everyone to live identical, low-carbon existences, but for individuals' behaviours to be as consistent as possible with a low-carbon lifestyle, within the constraints they face. As set out in previous sections of this report, taking a values-led approach, building people's sense of confidence and self-efficacy, and encouraging people to undertake changes in their lives that are consistent with their own identity and motivations (rather than imposed on them from the outside) are all crucial. But with these considerations in mind, the kinds of high-impact changes that (most) people can make to their lives include:

## Transport

Following reductions in emissions within the energy sector, transport (particularly passenger cars) is now the biggest source of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the UK. One study analysing<sup>148</sup> behavioural scenarios in ten countries found that living car free and avoiding air travel were the most impactful actions that an individual could take (aside from having one less child).<sup>97</sup> Changing such behaviours also has the potential to contribute to systemic change (e.g. living car-free reduces the need to build more roads)<sup>96</sup> as well as offering various co-benefits (see Section 5).



## Agriculture



## Diet

As an increasing number of studies show eating a plant based diet is one of the most impactful behaviours that individuals can take.<sup>96</sup> According to one estimate,<sup>98</sup> if everyone in the US did not eat meat or cheese for just one day of the week, it would be equivalent to taking 7.6 million cars of the road. Going vegan can reduce emissions from food by up to 90%,<sup>99</sup> but even just cutting down on meat (especially red meat) and dairy can contribute to a sustainable diet.<sup>100</sup>



ADOPTING A  
PLANT-BASED DIET

**300-1600kg**

approximate CO<sub>2</sub>e reduced per year.<sup>96</sup>



## Household energy

In the EU, heating and hot water account for 79% of total final energy use of households, and 84% of energy for heating and cooling comes from fossil fuels.<sup>101</sup> Curbing this energy use is one of the most important areas for low-carbon lifestyle change. Switching to green energy providers, use of smart-meters and intelligent thermostats, installing high-performance insulation, and upgrading household equipment to the most efficient technologies, are all good examples of actions that can be taken as part of a low-carbon lifestyle.<sup>101</sup>

PURCHASING GREEN ENERGY

**100-2500kg**

approximate CO<sub>2</sub>e reduced per year.<sup>96</sup>



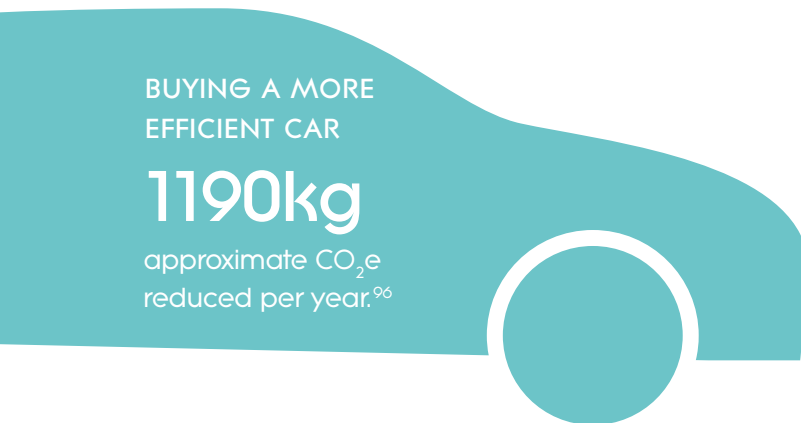
Residences



BUYING A MORE EFFICIENT CAR

**1190kg**

approximate CO<sub>2</sub>e reduced per year.<sup>96</sup>



## 'Investment' decisions

Moments where people 'invest' in something new (e.g. a new car, or a household appliance) are excellent opportunities to influence changes that have long-term implications. For instance, influencing a decision to buy an energy efficient appliance is likely to be more impactful than trying to change an individual's use of a non-efficient appliance.<sup>102</sup>

## Civic actions and political engagement

Civic actions and political engagement are hard to measure and therefore typically do not feature in charts and lists comparing the impacts of different behaviours. However, these types of behaviours cumulatively have huge importance in how we transition towards low-carbon societies, having the potential to influence long lasting impacts through policy and structural changes, and are still 'behaviours' in the sense of being things individuals can choose to do (or not). Members of the public play a major role through exercising their rights as citizens. Examples of actions include: writing to locally elected representatives, voting for candidates who have strong climate credentials, engaging in demonstrations, rallies and strikes, and fossil fuel divestment campaigns.<sup>21,103-105</sup>



As earlier sections of this report make clear, communicating about multiple behaviours at the same time—painting a picture of a low-carbon lifestyle rather than a set of disjointed decisions—is crucial. Spillover between behaviours is more likely to occur when the links between behaviours are understood, and the similarities between them recognised, and when targeting more impactful behaviours.

After deciding which behaviours to target (and the links between them), a next consideration is ‘when’ best to intervene. As noted above, moments when habits are disrupted also provide a unique opportunity to influence behaviours, as these provide windows of opportunity where there is greater potential for adjustment.<sup>47</sup> And finally, we can think about ‘how’ to intervene - which, as we’ve discussed in the rest of this report, involves values-based interventions that build confidence and exploit the positive influence of social norms.

So what does all of this look like, bringing together all of the advice in this report with some illustrations of behaviour change communication in practice?

**Example of values-based messaging:**

Climate change - rather than climate action - is the threat to the status quo (an important centre-right value).

*The climate is now changing around us – the responsible thing to do is to ask how we can protect ourselves against these risks, and stay in control.*

Responsibility is a key centre-right value.

Making clear the relative impact of this behaviour.

*Compared to other forms of transport, flying has one of the biggest impacts on our environment. But most people in the UK rarely use an aeroplane, so most of the flying is done by a small minority, who can have a huge impact by making some manageable changes.*

Building confidence and efficacy.

Keeping things in balance is an important centre-right value.

*It’s about striking a balance – reducing the amount we fly not eliminating it altogether. A ‘frequent flyer levy’ is a fair way to account for the environmental costs of flying - more people prefer this option than adding tax to aviation fuel.*

Linking to policy (structural) changes and emphasising the centre-right value of ‘fairness’.

Avoiding presenting changes as radically threatening the status quo.

*Surveys show that more people agree than disagree with the idea of reducing the amount they fly to protect the environment – its about taking reasonable steps to not waste the resources we have. Talking to friends and family about the things you’re doing is another important way of amplifying the impact of your choices.*

As taxation tends to be unpopular among conservatives, showing that the frequent flyer levy is distinct from a tax is important.

Promoting positive social norms.

Avoiding waste is a key centre-right value.

Talking climate to further positive build social norms.

Introducing co-benefits.

*Flying less has some real advantages too – you can’t take in the beautiful countryside from an aeroplane, in the way you can on a train. Fewer flights means cleaner air. And slowing down a little in these hectic modern times, is good for us all.*

Love for natural landscapes and the countryside is a key centre-right value.

A nostalgia/longing for simpler times is something that Climate Outreach research has identified as important for this audience.

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