

Bates Wells' response to climate and ecological breakdown



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David's focus is on the social economy, spanning everything from how businesses can flourish while acting more responsibly, to how the state can improve procurement of services for the public good; from how investors can achieve social as well as financial returns from their investments, to how civil society organisations can prosper. In the midst of the climate emergency, the sixth extinction and imminent soil and water crises, David is committed to working with organisations actively looking to implement paradigmatic change, not just modest amelioration of the current system.

And so, we find ourselves living the parable of *The Emperor's New Clothes*, with a young Swedish girl speaking truth to power and shattering the social convention that while climate change might be grudgingly acknowledged, it does not demand we make significant changes to how we live – yet.

Of course, it is not just a case of clear-sighted youth. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change spelt the position out starkly in their report of October 2018: we have 12 years to reduce our carbon emissions by 45% or we fail to contain temperature increases to 1.5 degrees and risk moving into the territory of feedback loops causing accelerating climate breakdown and all the social consequences that will flow from that.

2030 is not far off. It is about as far into the future as the financial crisis is in the past – and that does not feel long ago at all so, to use a legal phrase, time is of the essence.

Bates Wells is committed to positive impact: supporting our clients and colleagues to achieve it and to deliver it ourselves. It was quickly apparent to us that failure to respond urgently to the climate emergency would undermine any positive impact we might be creating in other ways. We did ask ourselves who are we to presume we can make a difference? We also asked whether it is possible to adopt meaningful and consistent positions on this issue when so much of our lives is already driven by energy sources, technologies and behaviours which are contributing to the problem we are seeking to address?

Our answer to the first of these was that we won't make a significant difference on our own, but if we wait for others to take the lead we are sleepwalking to disaster. If we do what we can – with humility, but with an invitation for others to do likewise – the collective impact may matter. On the second, we have to acknowledge that it will not be possible (in the short term) always to be consistent, but engaging with these challenges with good intent

is preferable to avoiding them, given the consequences.

In either case, if we consider what we want the world to be like in 2030, there is an overwhelming preference for somewhere that has clean air and water, flourishing flora and fauna, sufficient food and healthy people, and peace and harmony. So, what can we do to help that happen?

Bates Wells' answer is the commitments contained in our Climate Emergency Declaration. This includes reducing our own carbon emissions to net zero in 2019; using the law to deliver positive change; and actively collaborating with others to have greater impact. We will involve all our people in decision making, support them in making changes in their personal lives and report on how effective we are being. Underpinning all of this is a recognition that business as usual is the road to failure and we have to seek actively and be open to new ways of living and working.

The Emperor's New Clothes moves swiftly from the child's intervention to a happy ever after. It won't be so straightforward in real life, but already we share the sense of relief and a weight lifted that comes across in the story that now we can engage seriously with the reality we face.

Bates Wells' Climate Emergency Declaration can be seen here <https://bateswells.co.uk/2019/09/bates-wells-formally-recognises-climate-emergency/>