

# Changing landscapes: Nothing comes for free

*We all love to buy new stuff, but do we really need it or simply want it? This is the question that Ted Leeming has been grappling with, as he reappraises his spending habits and finds a new approach that yields unexpected benefits*

While it may not always feel like it, we have been born into times of incredible social improvement and technological advance. Less than 100 years ago, there was no national grid in the UK – the presumption of electricity

in your home, and all it brought with it, was yet to arrive. Colour television programmes wouldn't grace our screens until 1967, and I remember in the early 1990s borrowing the company's only mobile phone, a device bigger

and heavier than a brick. I didn't buy my first digital camera until 2004. Imagine all that electricity we suddenly needed!

A couple of years ago I had a unique opportunity to research our insatiable appetite

for this incredible product more deeply as part of an artist residency exploring our local hydro-electric power scheme, its relationship to supply and demand and the resultant impacts. My findings were pretty stark, for the consequences of all this convenience, which today we simply take for granted, has been sustainability. Half the gases leading to anthropogenic climate change have been emitted into the atmosphere since 1990, with electricity generation responsible for over a third.

The cause is simple: we are all constantly bombarded with encouragement and advertisements to consume, upgrade and improve everything we own. Our houses, cameras, cars and televisions. Bigger. Better. Brighter. 'That extra 2MP on our latest model will totally transform your photography.' It's hard to resist the relentless offers and the momentary 'hit' each new purchase gives, and I don't know about you, but I still get a buzz every time the post arrives with a box for me.

But the truth is that none of this comes for free and cannot continue. Any promises that offsetting will address endless consumption are simply untrue and as the old adage says, if it sounds too good to be true, it's because it is. Our beautiful planet simply cannot absorb our every desire and one way or another we simply have to reduce consumption.

But it turns out that doing so doesn't have to be a negative, for as I attempt to moderate my own consumer cravings, I have noticed some unexpected and satisfying benefits. I have realised that I don't need to give anything up entirely, but simply to consider each purchase more carefully. For each purchase, I ask myself, 'Do I need it or simply want it?' Instantly, half are discarded. But if I decide I do need the item, I then also check for quality, for I increasingly want things that will last (I have bought several 'eco' items that have simply fallen apart and then had to go out and buy another one, which defeats the whole point). I also check to see if I can buy the item secondhand (usually avoiding 'no returns' sellers), which works really well for some items and less so for others. The approach has led me to buying far fewer things, though interestingly, each item is almost always of higher quality than it would otherwise have been, and as a result, I value, cherish and keep each one for longer, negating the need to continuously upgrade.

We don't just consume tangible items, however. Two huge positive purchasing 'wins' you can adopt today at no cost are to change your electricity supplier to one from guaranteed renewable sources and to transfer your pension (if you are lucky enough to have one) into an 'environmental' fund. Each takes about 15-30 minutes and costs nothing. And why not set yourself a further challenge and calculate your own carbon footprint? The GikiZero app is one of many easy intros that helps you identify the 'big wins', and you can tailor it to your own lifestyle. As your journey continues, I warn you it can become addictive and the results can be immensely satisfying, as well as saving you money. While I do miss the consumer 'hit' of constantly buying things, I ultimately feel I have found a simple and practical approach that is even more rewarding.

*For further information, ideas and learnings, visit 'Wanderings of a Photographic Duo' at [leemingpaterson.com](http://leemingpaterson.com), the website Ted shares with his wife Morag, who has her own approach to exploring local environments. If you have any questions or comments, Ted would love to hear them at [tedleeming@me.com](mailto:tedleeming@me.com).*

## **Nothing Comes for Free**

Nothing comes for free, but some things are better than others. Electricity generation accounts for a third of all greenhouse gas emissions.

