

Flood defences? It is we that need containing

We are into newly hazarded territory; now predictably unpredictable extreme weather. Northern England's unprecedented floods quickly generated a hefty wave of media interviews with victims, politicians, action groups and technical experts. 'Something must be done' is the common message, though the tones vary.

Better flood defences and environmental sinks have taken centre-stage in the public discourses, with renewable energies relegated to the wings – currently lesser players.

What has been absent is serious consideration of our increasingly unsustainable but 'normal' lifestyles. For example, most of us now depend increasingly on seamless electronic guidance and signalling, conditioned and heated air, or myriad disposable objects and the mechanisation of previously manual activities. Yet these all contribute massively to global warming.

As the world's population grows in number, longevity and economic equality, we will have much to renounce and rescind. But our wish for instant convenience, expedience and comfort relegates such realisation: this self-serving oblivion may be understandable now but will be unforgivable in the future.

Yes, flood defences may deflect our environmental consequences for a short time. Beside and beyond that it is *us* – our presumptuously resourced lives – that need to change direction.