

Larry Elliott rightly directs our attention to the impending perils of climate change and to some of the impediments to their avoidance (Capitalism can crack climate change. But it must take risks, 16 August). His suggested solution “that the world needs to wage war against climate change” misses the most important component. Climate change is driven by climate changers: you and me and 7.6 billion fellow humans, increasing by 83 million a year and with effects on much more than climate change.

Benign and non-coercive means to reverse that growth, to achieve something like the 2.5 to 3 billion that experts estimate the planet could sustainably support, are well known. They include the much wider and free provision of reproductive health services, including family planning, to all who need them, and of both general and health education especially to the large number of the world’s girls currently denied them.

Larry Elliott is right about much in his article, but he also demonstrates why capitalism remains a major inhibitor to addressing climate change meaningfully. He distinguishes between different types of economic growth, refusing to acknowledge that it is moderating appetites for consumption and redistributing assets and resources that are fundamental to remaining within requisite limits. That squeamishness around saying “enough” alone may prove fatal.

The massive scaling up of investment in clean technology is needed, not because the amount spent on it worldwide last year merely matched the cost of climate-related losses in the US, but because without it, and many other interventions we are writing the death sentences of billions as this century progresses.

As Elliott suggests, it wasn’t capitalism, but states funding the best brains when the need (or, in the case of the space race, the policy) required, that delivered profound innovation in the past. The motivation to act must be humanitarian, not capitalist, if there is to be any prospect of success.

Larry Elliott rightly recommends we learn from the Chinese model of managed and directed capitalism. He might also have mentioned the 1,000 new towns that China is planning to build or the 100 smart cities the Indian government is backing. The overwhelming need to double housing output in the UK provides an exceptional opportunity here to use the demand to rebuild our economy and overstretched local infrastructure, and reduce carbon emissions.

Here we should be learning from the rest of Europe on how to mobilise appropriate land and share the uplift in land values. A new report for the Greater London Assembly – Capital gains: a better land assembly model for London – shows what can be done, provided we join up infrastructure and development.

Your article (What would a heat-proof city look like? [theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com), 15 August) has some good and workable ideas about making roofs and roads reflect more sunlight. But the modifications to tall buildings by adding planting and “dynamic shades” are just tinkering with problems that shouldn’t be created in the first place.

Recent research in Hong Kong and London has shown that energy use increases very sharply with increasing height of buildings. British offices on 20 storeys have twice the carbon emissions of comparable offices on five storeys. The property industry assumes that tall buildings have to be air conditioned. And the popular wisdom is that building high is necessary to save land. But just look at the two Al Bahr towers in Abu Dhabi pictured in the article, surrounded by acres of open space. In fact high densities can be achieved in low-rise developments in streets or courtyards.

Traditional cities are kept cool without air conditioning by their tree-lined streets and parks and gardens providing much greater benefits than bits of token greenery wrapped around high-rises.

Source: [theguardian](https://www.theguardian.com)