

# **Progress**

**Sustainable Development Commission  
Critique 2004**

# Contents

2

**UK REPORT CARD:  
How Are We Doing?**

6

**Chapter 1  
REDEFINING PROSPERITY**

10

**Chapter 2  
LIVING ON OVERDRAFT**

14

**Chapter 3  
OLD AILMENTS, NEW REMEDIES**

18

**Chapter 4  
PASTURES NEW**

22

**Chapter 5  
LOW CARB REVOLUTION**

26

**Chapter 6  
CRITICAL MASS**

30

**Chapter 7  
DELIVERING SUSTAINABILITY**

34

**Chapter 8  
OUR PLACE IN THE WORLD**

38

**Chapter 9  
WHERE NEXT?**

## **The Sustainable Development Commission is the government's independent advisory body on sustainable development**

### **Our principles for sustainable development are:**

- **Putting sustainable development at the centre**

Sustainable development must be the organising principle of all democratic societies, underpinning all other goals, policies and processes. It provides a framework for integrating economic, social and environmental concerns over time, not through crude trade-offs, but through the pursuit of mutually reinforcing benefits. It promotes good governance, healthy living, innovation, life-long learning and all forms of economic growth which secure the natural capital upon which we depend. It reinforces social harmony and seeks to secure each individual's prospects of leading a fulfilling life.
- **Valuing nature**

We are and always will be part of Nature, embedded in the natural world, and totally dependent for our own economic and social well-being on the resources and systems that sustain life on Earth. These systems have limits, which we breach at our peril. All economic activity must be constrained within those limits. We have an inescapable moral responsibility to pass on to future generations a healthy and diverse environment, and critical natural capital unimpaired by economic development. Even as we learn to manage our use of the natural world more efficiently, so we must affirm those individual beliefs and belief systems which revere Nature for its intrinsic value, regardless of its economic and aesthetic value to humankind.
- **Fair shares**

Sustainable economic development means 'fair shares for all', ensuring that people's basic needs are properly met across the world, whilst securing constant improvements in the quality of peoples' lives through efficient, inclusive economies. 'Efficient' simply means generating as much economic value as possible from the lowest possible throughput of raw materials and energy. 'Inclusive' means securing high levels of paid, high quality employment, with internationally recognised labour rights and fair trade principles vigorously defended, whilst properly acknowledging the value to our well-being of unpaid family work, caring, parenting, volunteering and other informal livelihoods. Once basic needs are met, the goal is to achieve the highest quality of life for individuals and communities, within the Earth's carrying capacity, through transparent, properly-regulated markets which promote both social equity and personal prosperity.

- **Polluter pays**  
Sustainable development requires that we make explicit the costs of pollution and inefficient resource use, and reflect those in the prices we pay for all products and services, recycling the revenues from higher prices to drive the sustainability revolution that is now so urgently needed, and compensating those whose environments have been damaged. In pursuit of environmental justice, no part of society should be disproportionately impacted by environmental pollution or blight, and all people should have the same right to pure water, clean air, nutritious food and other key attributes of a healthy, life-sustaining environment.
- **Good governance**  
There is no one blue-print for delivering sustainable development. It requires different strategies in different societies. But all strategies will depend on effective, participative institutions and systems of governance, engaging the interest, creativity and energy of all citizens. We must therefore celebrate diversity, and practise tolerance and respect. However, good governance is a two-way process. We should all take responsibility for promoting sustainability in our own lives and for engaging with others to secure more sustainable outcomes in society.
- **Adopting a precautionary approach**  
Scientists, innovators and wealth creators have a crucial part to play in creating genuinely sustainable economic progress. But human ingenuity and technological power is now so great that we are capable of causing serious damage to the environment or to people's health through unsustainable development that pays insufficient regard to wider impacts. Society needs to ensure that there is full evaluation of potentially damaging activities so as to avoid or minimise risks. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage to the environment or human health, the lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason to delay taking cost-effective action to prevent or minimise such damage.

**The Sustainable Development Commission's mission is to inspire government, the economy and society to embrace sustainable development as the central organising principle**

For those of us closely involved in the Sustainable Development Stakes, it's nail-biting stuff – even though this is a race being played out over decades rather than minutes. The stakes could hardly be higher: can we reach that point in our evolutionary history where we start to live sustainably on this Planet before we inflict irreversible damage on the life-support systems that sustain us? Or will we remain hell-bent on testing those systems to destruction (and beyond)?

Such questions aren't exactly at the front of the mind as the Commission sets about its daily tasks – lobbying Ministers and senior officials, commending best practice, building up networks of sustainable development practitioners and communicators (within and beyond government), marshalling the evidence, joining up the perniciously disconnected, exhorting the reluctant and indifferent – but they're never far away. Whenever the Commission meets – be it in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff or Belfast – to review progress in all the many different work areas covered in this Report, we inevitably end up asking ourselves why the pace of change is still so slow. Why so many in and around government still dwell so deep in denial. And what more can the Commission do to help win this all-important race?

Part of the problem is that most people in the UK just don't know whether or not we're moving in the right direction. If you look at our summary score card (on pages 2-3), you'll see just how difficult it is to get a clear snapshot of progress made over the last few years. Take employment, for example. On the one hand, unemployment is at its lowest in the UK for decades; on the other, people in the UK are working longer hours than their counterparts in Europe, gender wage-gaps are still substantial, and we simply don't know whether the work people do helps fashion more fulfilled lives.

Or climate change. It's generally recognised that the UK is doing at least as well (and probably better) than any other EU country to reduce emissions of the greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change. But the surge in growth in emissions from transport (both cars and planes) will make it literally impossible to maintain that record.

The adequacy of what's happening here in the UK (where at least things really are happening!) must then be set against the global picture. At that level, even the most fleeting of reality checks demonstrates that we're in big trouble. With 6 billion people (and another 3 billion to come) in hot pursuit of increased personal prosperity through an increasingly rapacious global economy, the natural world is coming under greater stress at every point – wetlands, grazing land, forest, fisheries, atmosphere, croplands, freshwater etc. You've heard it before, but sadly it isn't getting any better.

There's a limit to what we can do about that global picture here in the UK. Telling people that we would need to find the equivalent of three Planet Earths if all 6 billion of us were to live at the same material standard of living as we already do in the UK, doesn't necessarily make 'single planet living' any easier in our own backyard! For instance, as the Commission sets about its work on

'Redefining Prosperity' (see Chapter 1), the truth of it is that there is no popular movement to reduce our dependency on economic growth, let alone to reduce the damage that we're doing to the environment by paying a more realistic price for the products and services that are causing that damage. Cheap air travel, cheap food, cheap waste disposal, cheap homes and office buildings, cheap motoring, cheap domestic energy – as governments strive to keep prices low, environmental costs inexorably rise.

That particular problem is just one reason why many politicians continue to locate sustainable development in their 'only do it when you have to' box. Because they see it as hassle, electoral liability and a real threat to the status quo, it gets stuck in the wrong bit of the political brain. So a lot of our work is about opening up the opportunities agenda that lies at the heart of sustainable development: doing a better job meeting people's needs and expectations, with a far lower impact on the natural world; improving people's real quality of life at the local level by focusing on joined-up delivery; enabling people to lead healthier lives by up-front investments in public health; regenerating communities in such a way that the improvements really last rather than vanish in another whirl of wasted public money.

Such an approach demands more brain-space than politicians are currently prepared to give it. More forethought than afterthought. Take the Government's new drive for increased efficiency in the use of government expenditure, aiming at a 25% cut across the board. This will have a major impact on the way in which goods and services are procured by government departments and local authorities, with an inevitably narrow focus on 'lowest cost'. All the hard work the Government has already done on sustainable procurement (through Defra's Sustainable Food Procurement Strategy, the Office of Government Commerce's Guidelines on sustainable procurement, as well as ODPM's new Code for local authorities) is now at risk – simply because no thought was given to the concept of 'best sustainable value' as the Efficiency Review was being designed.

There are still far too many similar instances of 'two steps forward, one step back'. But at least steps are being taken, the political space is being opened up, and individual government departments are beginning to realise that sustainable development reinforces rather than undermines their own departmental remits and pursuit of quality. That makes the UK Sustainable Development Stakes a much more interesting race than it has been before – and betting on disaster (as the gloomier amongst us are inclined to do) might yet prove to be premature!

Jonathan Porritt  
Chairman  
June 2004

## REPORT CARD

Economic growth	<p>Poor</p> <p>Government doing well on conventional GDP measures; but no effort made to move beyond total dependence on GDP. Eco-taxation strategy seems to have got badly bogged down.</p>
Investment	<p>Poor</p> <p>Investment is low and there is growing evidence of a crumbling infrastructure which could have severe impacts on our future quality of life.</p>
Employment	<p>Disappointing</p> <p>More women are in employment, and ethnic minorities and people with disabilities are getting a fairer share of jobs. But we are working longer hours, there are still big gender wage-gaps, and we have no idea how fulfilled people are with their jobs.</p>
Poverty	<p>Shows promise</p> <p>Government policies have significantly reduced some kinds of poverty, but the UK still remains amongst the worst of developed countries on several measures.</p>
Education	<p>Shows promise</p> <p>DfES's new 'Action Plan' is already making a difference, but more needs to be done on the ground (in terms of better school design and so on).</p>
Health	<p>Disappointing</p> <p>Life expectancy continues to rise, but not among poorer communities. Obesity is becoming increasingly alarming. Still no real connection between public health and sustainable development.</p>
Housing	<p>Disappointing</p> <p>Fewer people living in low-quality housing, but rising house prices exclude many, and progress towards improving energy efficiency is very slow. Sustainable Communities Plan could provide the breakthrough.</p>
Crime	<p>Poor</p> <p>Vehicle crime and burglary are down, but robbery and violent crime are on the increase.</p>

Greenhouse gas emissions	Disappointing Road transport emissions are increasing, and projected increases in air travel will cancel out reductions in other areas.
Air quality	Good Air quality is improving in most areas.
Road traffic	Dreadful Britain has the most congested roads in Europe, and we spend more time commuting than any other European nation. The Government's response seems to be to alter targets rather than change policies to meet previous targets.
River water quality	Good There have been significant improvements, though massive housing development will increase the risk of flood and summer droughts.
Wildlife	Shows promise Decline of woodland and farmland birds has levelled off, though climate change is likely to cause major losses of biodiversity.
Land use	Shows promise More new homes have been built on developed land, but too many greenfield sites are still being built on.
Waste	Dreadful Municipal waste is rising faster than GDP and faster than in most other European countries. Recycling rates are rising, but are still among the lowest in Europe.

This is based on the UK Government indicator set; there is currently no separate Devolved Administration reporting on their headline sustainability indicators.

# UK REPORT CARD

## How are we doing?

'Government continues to be good at the talk, but not very good at the walk.'

Raymond Young, SDC Commissioner, Board member of Forward Scotland, a member of the Scottish Welfare to Work Advisory Task Force and Chair of the Environment Task Force in Scotland

'Northern Ireland needs its own sustainable development strategy, one which fits within the wider UK context.'

Brian Hanna, SDC Commissioner, President of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health

In May 2004 the UK Government launched a major national consultation on revising the 1999 UK Sustainable Development Strategy *A Better Quality of Life*. A new strategy, setting out the Government's vision and programme for the next five years, will be published in 2005.

With climate change now unmistakably upon us and our economy marked by unsustainable trends in consumption, waste, car and air travel, and energy use, this process offers a critical opportunity throughout the UK to get to grips with the huge task of embedding sustainable development into national life.

In April 2004, the Sustainable Development Commission published its own review of progress since 1999 and set out the radical agenda we believe the UK must embrace to succeed in this task.

*In Shows Promise. But Must Try Harder*, we applauded progress towards sustainability in food, agriculture and energy policy. But we warned that government commitment to sustainability has faltered in such crucial areas as road and air transport and the use of eco-taxes to affect consumer habits. In reaching these conclusions, we drew in part on an independent analysis of progress against the Government's 15 headline sustainability indicators, commissioned from consultants Levett-Therivel. The sobering findings are summarised left.<sup>1</sup>

## **Reaching Critical Mass: Our priorities for government**

Shows Promise also sets out 20 Challenges we believe the Government must face to lay the required foundations for a sustainable society. These are reproduced throughout this report in chapters based around our work programme – on economic growth and wellbeing, energy and transport, health, food, regeneration, local government, education and communicating sustainable development. Five over-arching Challenges, addressing the new strategy's content, the Government's sustainable development principles and indicators and the role of Whitehall departments are highlighted below. We believe that only by accepting and acting on these Challenges will the Government be able to steer our economy and society on to a truly sustainable path.

### **A Challenge for us all**

Our remit is to advise government and act as a 'critical friend' in promoting sustainability across Whitehall and the Devolved Administrations. Thus, Shows Promise focused primarily on how government measures up, five years on, against the commitments made in A Better Quality of Life.

Yet delivering sustainable development is not solely the remit of Ministers and civil servants. Far from it. Unless business, local and regional authorities, public sector organisations and, above all, UK citizens, embrace the need to re-think the way we live, work, travel and consume, government efforts to steer society in the right direction will inevitably fall short.

In our final chapter, Where Next?, we respond to the challenges the new UK Sustainable Development Strategy presents to government, society and to ourselves, as the government adviser on one of the central issues of our times. For more information contact [emma.downing@sd-commission.org.uk](mailto:emma.downing@sd-commission.org.uk)

## Challenge 1 New Sustainable Development Strategy

The Commission's first challenge to the Government is to create a new, unified Strategy, driven by a fundamental over-arching commitment to sustainability at all levels and in all parts of government. This must mainstream sustainable development principles and practices into all government programmes and policies, priority-setting and resource allocation, and actively engage all areas of society in the changes required.

## Challenge 2 Indicators

The Government should introduce a new set of headline indicators with key priorities that better reflect sustainability principles and policy, including a radically different approach to measuring economic progress; challenging targets; and more effective machinery for acting on adverse trends.

## Challenge 4 Principles

The Government's ten principles for sustainable development must be strengthened, particularly with regard to equity; made more operational; and applied more consistently and rigorously. They should be the subject of open reporting.

## Challenge 5 Departmental Challenges

Each Department needs to embed sustainable development at the heart of its goals, objectives and practices, including priority-setting, resource allocation and procurement strategies. It must establish its own sustainable development strategy, objectives and targets, monitored regularly at the highest level.

## Challenge 6 Cross-departmental Challenges

Central Departments must give a clear and consistent lead towards sustainable development throughout government and society. Sustainable development should be incorporated into key cross-departmental processes such as Public Service Agreements, common procurement strategies, the Comprehensive Spending Review and the Budget.

## **Devolved Administrations: How are they doing?**

'In Wales we have a real Ministerial commitment; our challenge is to deliver sustainable development on the ground.'

Rod Aspinwall, SDC Vice Chairman, Wales, Deputy Chairman of the Enviro Group and Professor of Environmental Management at Cardiff University

The Sustainable Development Commission has a UK-wide remit. We have appointed vice-chairmen for Wales (Rod Aspinwall) and Scotland (Maureen Child) and work closely with the Devolved Administrations on key policy areas including health, regeneration and local government (see chapters 3, 5 and 7). We divide our meetings mainly between London, Cardiff, Belfast and Edinburgh.

Although the 1999 UK Sustainable Development Strategy pre-dates devolution, the Devolved Administrations have made impressive strides towards putting sustainable development at the heart of policy-making.

In Wales, the National Assembly has a legal duty to make a Scheme setting out how it will promote sustainable development in exercising its functions. In March 2004 the Assembly Government adopted a revised Scheme aimed at embedding sustainable practice across the Welsh economy and society. The SDC applauds the strong leadership given by the First Minister, and the establishment of Cynnal Cymru, the Sustainable Development Forum for Wales, under the chairmanship of our own Vice-Chairman for Wales.

In Scotland, while the Parliament has a different duty to its Welsh counterpart, the First Minister has made a strong commitment to sustainable development and environmental justice. For example, he chairs a Cabinet Sub-Committee on sustainable development. The Scottish Executive has made sustainable development a key cross-cutting theme in its Programme for Government, while a Sustainable Development Forum of stakeholders involves a leading role for the SDC's own Vice-Chairman for Scotland. The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act also has sustainable development at its core, while at community level, Scottish local authorities now have a duty to deliver Best Value services in a way that contributes to sustainable development. Contact [jo.eady@sd-commission.org.uk](mailto:jo.eady@sd-commission.org.uk)

In Northern Ireland, the Executive's Programme for Government contains strong sustainable development themes, some of which have begun to filter through into frontline programmes, for example in promoting public health. District councils, NGOs and the business community have also done some good work, but the SDC would like to see delivery of a promised regional sustainable development strategy.

## Challenge 9 Devolved Administrations

The Administrations in Scotland and Wales should turn their initial sustainability strategies into central and effective drivers for change within five years. In Northern Ireland a similar strategy to those in Wales and Scotland should be formulated within a year.

### References:

- (1) Table featured in Sustainable Development Commission Press Notice April 4, 2004; Government Must Do More To Improve Quality of Life. Adapted from Levett-Therivel, Report to the Sustainable Development Commission: Assessment of Progress against the Headline Indicators, February 2004.
- (2) Shows Promise. But Must Try Harder: an assessment by the Sustainable Development Commission of the Government's reported progress on sustainable development over the past five years; Sustainable Development Commission, April 2004; p7.

# Redefining Prosperity

‘Redefining progress is not hair-shirt eco-fascism. It is the most promising avenue for renewing human development and improving our quality of life.’

Tim Jackson, SDC Commissioner, Professor of Sustainable Development, Centre for Environmental Strategy, University of Surrey

‘The UK was the factory of the world, now we need to be the sustainable development capital of the world.’

Rita Clifton, SDC Commissioner and Chairman, Interbrand

## WARNING SIGNS

- One in six UK employees works 60+ hours a week (1)
- Rates of stress-related illness have doubled since 1990, according to the Health and Safety Executive
- Income per person in the North East is nearly 40%, or £7000, below that in London (2)
- World GDP has quadrupled in 25 years to \$23 trillion (3)

## The Empty Promise

By conventional measures, Britain is booming. Many of today’s young adults have more money than their grandparents could dream of, employment is high, house prices have soared, foreign holidays are commonplace.

Yet our surfeit of possessions is marred by a deficit of happiness. Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the traditional barometer of a country’s wealth, is rising faster here than in any other European country, but at a price. The gap in wages between high and low earners is shamefully wide and our high pressure, workaholic culture is taking a huge toll on people’s health, relationships and general quality of life.

What’s more, our surface prosperity is built on unsustainable foundations – a sea of consumer debt, a widening gulf in lifestyles between rich and poor and wasteful over-use of the natural resources on which the prosperity of future generations depends.

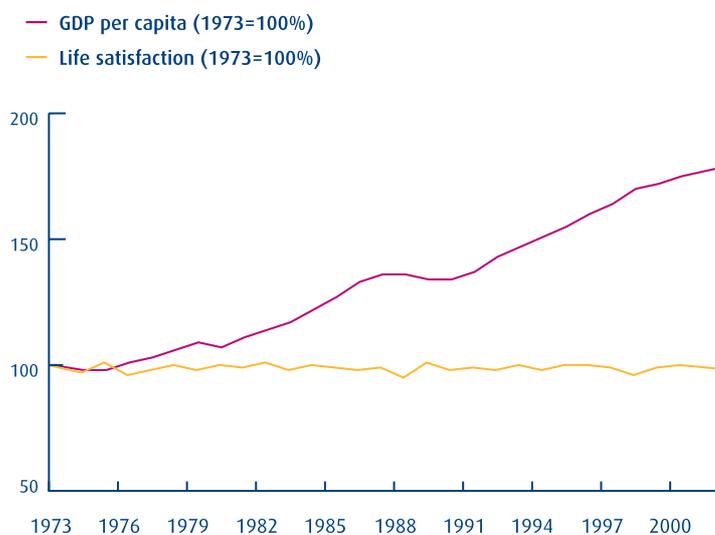
This may not be a popular message, but it is central to the mission and work of the Sustainable Development Commission. We believe it is essential to refocus national priorities on achieving only such economic growth as supports high employment, social progress and environmental protection. Our urgent priority is to persuade government to reformulate its key fourth objective for sustainable development – ‘maintenance of high and stable levels of economic

growth and employment'. We believe that the 4th objective should be enhanced to provide a more consistent set of sustainable development outcomes (see Challenge 3 and SDC Highlights on the next page).

While this message may make some people uncomfortable, we believe it chimes with other trends which belie the government's assertions of growing national prosperity. One of these is the happiness paradox. As our graph clearly shows, more money in our pockets is not translating into greater life satisfaction.

On the contrary, public dissatisfaction with high pressure modern lifestyles has driven an estimated 2.6 million Britons to downshift, trading stressful jobs and high maintenance lifestyles for less money, more time and a better quality of life. People are also realising that no-holds-barred economic growth can extract a high cost in their own backyards – including (as our UK Report Card highlights) pollution, congestion, inequity, violent crime and climate change-related floods and droughts. Alternative indicators of national prosperity, such as the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW) and the New Economic Foundation's Measure of Domestic Progress (MDP), which factor in these kinds of social and environmental costs, suggest that, while incomes are rising, overall quality of life for UK citizens is stable or falling. Encouragingly, the Chinese government has made a commitment to measure an alternative set of indicators and the Welsh Executive is considering following suit.

### The life satisfaction paradox



Reproduced from 'Chasing Progress', New Economics Foundation, 2004. Based on data from the World Database of Happiness, Erasmus University.

## Towards a Sustainable Society

So where do we go from here? The SDC believes the only prospect for genuine progress in the UK is to reinvent our notions of what 'prosperity' means and fully embrace sustainable development. This will be our main message to government in response to its consultation over the new Sustainable Development Strategy.

Redefining prosperity within a sustainability context means challenging and re-thinking both our consumption-driven society (see also Chapter 2: Living on Overdraft) and the traditional economic cycle whereby growth creates jobs creates growth. To prepare the way for such a seismic shift, the SDC believes the time is ripe for a wide-ranging national debate on how we define prosperity, what makes us happy and how we can overcome our structural reliance on rising consumption to supply jobs.

The Government has so far declined to launch such a fundamental debate. But it has taken some small, careful steps in the right direction. The incremental landfill tax is encouraging more recycling and the aggregates tax and Climate Change Levy are also useful eco-instruments. Last year saw the beginning of a welcome shift in Europe's Common Agricultural Policy, championed by the UK, away from unsustainable subsidies which produce wasteful food mountains in favour of rewarding farmers for good stewardship of the land. In Scotland, the Executive has published a green jobs and a green tourism strategy. And thanks to improvements in factory production methods, national use of some natural resources has held steady for 30 years, despite spiralling economic output.

Unfortunately, this piecemeal approach, while politically expedient, is wholly inadequate to the ecological challenge facing the UK and the world. In our two landmark reports, *Redefining Prosperity* (June 2003) and *Shows Promise. But Must Try Harder* (April 2004) the SDC has challenged the government to re-think its obsession with economic growth, broaden its definition of national wellbeing and embed sustainability principles into the central workings of national, regional and local government. We are already in discussions with the Treasury on factoring environmental and social concerns into all government planning, including the latest Spending Review.

We hope this will bear fruit in areas such as new communities. With cross-departmental effort and strong Ministerial leadership, for example, the flagship new Thames Gateway development could become a model sustainable community (see also Chapter 4). We are also working closely with the departments of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Health, Education and Skills and Trade and Industry.

Beyond Whitehall, the SDC is helping to pioneer sustainable policy and practice in key sectors including healthcare, food production, regeneration, transport, energy and local government.

Our message throughout is simple: more money and possessions are not making us happier. There is a better way forward; a path that would involve changing values and lifestyles, but would help avoid ecological disaster and social divisiveness while promoting good health, community rebirth and a better quality of life for all. The path to a prosperous, stable society and economy is rooted in sustainable development.

### **SDC Highlights: Redefining the prosperity objective**

The SDC is undertaking a high level consultation on the wording of the Government's key 4th objective for sustainable development.

We accept that high, stable levels of satisfying employment are a fundamental goal for a sustainable society and that, in today's economy, this goal is linked structurally to GDP growth. However, we do not believe that growth is a legitimate end in itself. Rather we see it as a means to an end, which can only serve that end if it does not conflict with the other key sustainability objectives: social progress, environmental protection and the prudent use of natural resources.

Our aim is to enhance the 4th 'prosperity objective' so that it offers a more coherent vision of how to deliver a better quality of national life. To this end, we are asking key economists and other policy makers questions such as the following. How could the 'prosperity objective' be improved? How would you rewrite it? Could 'growth' be replaced by 'prosperity' or 'development'? Should we qualify the kind of growth we want to see? The results will be fed into the national review of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy.

### **Redefining Prosperity Seminars**

The SDC is promoting a national debate in which politicians, academics, business and religious leaders, NGOs and media commentators grapple with the difficult issues thrown up by sustainable development. In 2003-4 we held several illuminating seminars with these opinion-makers who made practical suggestions for how we might reach different sectors and audiences. For more, please visit [www.sd-commission.org.uk](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk) or contact [philip.dale@sd-commission.org.uk](mailto:philip.dale@sd-commission.org.uk)

### **Sustainable UK plc**

Sustainable development is big business in the UK. The environmental technology and services market (including water, waste management and renewable energy) is currently worth around £14.8 billion per year and forecast to grow to £21 billion by 2010. The political and financial climate is focusing the minds of business people and innovators on the sustainability challenge to bring forward new technological solutions that are sustainably practical and profitable.

Taking just one of the sustainable technology streams, the demand for renewable energy is set to accelerate in the next eight years as a result of the Government's renewable energy obligations. By 2010, 10% of the UK's energy generation is scheduled to be renewable and by 2020 the Government are looking to double the renewable contribution to 20%.

The UK, with its unique coastline and strong tidal currents, is battered daily by high energy waves from the Atlantic and the North Sea, and as a result it is leading the world in the development of wave and tidal power technology. The island of Islay in Scotland is the home of Limpet 500, the world's first commercial-scale wave energy device selling power into the national grid.

The potential of waves is constantly being developed however, and a new technology company hoping to take wave power generation to the next level is Ocean WaveMaster Limited (OWL) formed in March 2002. The company is based in Manchester and is a partnership between inventor Alex Southcombe and

UMIST. OWL have developed a prototype submerged technology that uses the high and low pressures within wave peaks and troughs to drive turbines.

Some existing green technologies are being developed for use a bit closer to home, and consequently the UK population is starting to recognise and reap the rewards of clean renewable technologies.

Windsave in Glasgow has developed Plug 'n' Save, a buildings-mounted wind turbine that works at very low wind speeds. The turbine can be fitted to most homes and businesses to generate home grown electricity. The turbine reduces reliance on fossil fuels with each turbine expected to reduce CO2 emissions by 0.5 tonne a year at the same time as reducing annual electricity costs by approximately £60. Windsave believe their product has the potential to be marketed worldwide.

### Challenge 3 Over-arching Objectives

The Government's fourth objective for sustainable development should be reformulated to promote economic growth that supports social progress, high employment levels, environmental protection and prudent use of natural resources, and to discourage economic growth that does not meet all these requirements.

### Challenge 7 Taxation

The Government should make a determined effort to: build public awareness of major global environmental problems and the need for appropriate taxes or levies to encourage more sustainable patterns of behaviour; ensure such taxes are fiscally neutral and do not penalise poorer households.

### Challenge 12 Management of the Economy

The Government must ensure that sustainability plays a central role in managing all aspects of the economy, including data compilation, performance monitoring, Budget-setting and the Comprehensive Spending Review; and, in future years, is embedded in all Public Service Agreements and in public procurement and fiscal policy. Spend-to-save, employment training, reducing the need to travel and promoting healthy living are key areas of interest.

#### References:

- (1) Department of Trade and Industry, 2002 employment figures.
- (2) Office of the Deputy Prime Ministers; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/3043370.stm>

(3) Redefining Prosperity: Resource Productivity, Economic Growth and Sustainable Development, p21; Jonathon Porritt, Chairman, for the Sustainable Development Commission, June 2003.

# Living on Overdraft

'If we applied our supplier assessment criteria to Planet Earth we would discontinue it, because the Earth simply cannot support our growth.'

Alan Knight, SDC Commissioner and Head of Social Responsibility, Kingfisher

## WARNING SIGNS

UK debt owed on credit cards trebled between 1996 and 2003 (1)

In 2001 68% of men and 56% of women were overweight or obese (2)

English household waste volumes are set to double by 2020 (3)

It would take at least three earths to give every human alive today a western lifestyle (4)

## A Material World

How much is enough? Average UK incomes have almost tripled, in real terms, since 1950. Yet four in ten people earning £50,000+ a year still complain that they 'do not have enough money to buy essentials'.<sup>5</sup> As choice and advertising proliferate and social expectations rise, many of us are over-working or over-borrowing to increase our buying power. Meanwhile the poor – including the one in seven Britons living in workless households<sup>6</sup> – are left ever further behind.

Spiralling consumption – by individuals, organisations and governments – has become the engine that underpins and drives the entire global economy. DVDs, for example, are the fastest-selling electronic good of all time, while accelerating technology has condemned each new generation of computers to a three or four year shelf life. Billions of tonnes of food are transported around the world every day so consumers in rich nations can eat whatever they want whenever they want it. Here in Britain, Tesco stores stock 40,000 products, up from 5,000 in 1983.

Does all this matter? Yes, because consuming at this frenzied pace is simply not sustainable. It is eating up natural resources – trees, soil, oil, natural gas – faster than they can be replaced; widening the already yawning gap between rich and poor citizens and nations; and stoking global climate change – as real a threat to global security as international terrorism and HIV/AIDS.

Here at home, the effects of over-consuming are making themselves felt in unhealthy, sedentary lifestyles and rising levels of stress, debt and obesity. More and younger children are becoming overweight an alarming trend directly

linked by the Food Commission to TV advertising of sugary, fatty snacks. Childhood diabetes is on the rise.

The Government points to the decoupling of resource efficiency from rising GDP as proof that we can reconcile endless economic growth with sustainable use of natural resources. But the SDC believes this is far too complacent. The UK is unlikely to meet its goal of reducing CO2 emissions by 20% from 1990 levels by 2010, and we are fast running out of landfill sites. This country's total ecological footprint is a profligate 4.72 hectares per person, compared to 1.35ha for each Chinese citizen.<sup>7</sup> We are living on overdraft; using much more than our fair share of global resources.

### **When Less Is More**

As our Commissioner Alan Knight puts it in his pithy opening quote, our planet is the ultimate supplier of resources, yet even Earth cannot sustain indefinitely the growth in human demand. As we cannot switch to another planet, it follows that we must constrain our appetites. But how do we go about doing this?

The Sustainable Development Commission acknowledges that trying to influence people's buying habits and lifestyles is a very complex task. In our well-received 2003 report, *Policies for Sustainable Consumption*,<sup>8</sup> we recognised how important consumption has become not only to our individual status and self-worth, but also to our collective national identity. We also acknowledge that the transition to a more sustainable economy must be carefully managed. Our aim is to help society find a way to protect the sense of wellbeing generated by consumption, while restraining the unsustainable levels at which we consume. In our view, it is vital that businesses and citizens are made aware of the hidden costs of over-consumption – including the UK and overseas production cycles involved and the pollution and waste they generate. Without such knowledge, consumers are unlikely to change their buying habits and make more informed choices.

The SDC is not handing down prescriptions, although *Policies for Sustainable Consumption* does spell out the clear links between over-spending, anxiety and financial and ecological debt. What we seek is an urgent national debate on how to decouple our urge to consume from societal wellbeing. Clearly this is not an easy sell. We appreciate that there would be potential implications for jobs and public spending, for example, if millions more people downshifted, earned and consumed less and paid lower taxes.

On the other hand, polls suggest that many Britons already believe our society is too materialistic. Ethical shopping – including organic food and fair trade products – is now a significant niche market. Almost a fifth of us willingly pay more to buy from ethically responsible companies<sup>9</sup>. In the boardroom, too, there are signs of change. Corporate responsibility has become a big issue for large UK companies, whose environmental and social impacts are under increasing scrutiny by customers, shareholders and the media. European producer responsibility legislation is also beginning to have an impact, directing corporate energy into recycling, waste minimisation and product re-use.

Progress, however, is far too slow. In September 2003, the UK Government commendably became the first in Europe to publish a Sustainable Consumption

and Production Framework. However, this blueprint continued to focus almost entirely on increasing resource efficiency.

The SDC has since challenged Defra and the DTI to produce a specific strategy for government intervention to promote more ecologically and socially sustainable consumer decision-making by businesses, the public sector and citizens. We want to see consumer information campaigns, new regulations and standards, planning controls and economic instruments all used to this end. We are already working with national agencies and the public and private sectors to make purchasing policies more sustainable (see also Chapters 3, 7).

On a more conceptual level, we will continue our work analysing the underlying motivations for excessive consumption and exploring what changing buying habits might mean for society. For example, what might replace the pursuit of material possessions in giving people's lives and jobs meaning? How might more sustainable consumer patterns affect the communities in which we live?

### **SDC Hosts Sustainable Consumption Roundtable**

With funding from the Government, the SDC and the National Consumer Council have established and will co-host a new Sustainable Consumption Roundtable. We believe this is an important step towards bringing together key players and experts to influence fundamental government policies and challenge economic orthodoxy. The Roundtable will delve into how lifestyle and consumer behaviour are shaped, and will seek to develop a compelling business case for more sustainable consumption. Our goal is to use this forum to recommend practical measures to shift society on to a new, more sustainable path.

In addition to the Roundtable work, the SDC is committed to a continuing dialogue on the forces driving our consumer society and the development of policies for sustainable living. In September 2004, we will stage a series of seminars on sustainable consumption with the Economic and Social Research Council's Environment and Human Behaviour programme. Contact [scott.ghagan@sd-commission.org.uk](mailto:scott.ghagan@sd-commission.org.uk)

### **SDC Highlights: The future of food**

'If you want sustainable food chains, you have to get consumers to buy more wisely, so producers and retailers must provide more information about what's behind their products and services.'

Richard Wakeford, SDC Commissioner and Chief Executive, Countryside Agency

Every year, we spend at least £130 billion on food. The SDC wants consumers to receive much better information about the nutritional value and origins of foodstuffs and the production and transport methods used to get each product to

the supermarket shelf, to help them make healthier and more sustainable choices about what they eat.

We also want to see the food industry promoting healthier products and exploring the impacts of production and transport methods on health, communities and the environment.

The Food Industry Sustainability Strategy currently being developed by government and the food industry, with SDC support, should provide the framework to achieve this.

Our ultimate goal is to set standards for a more sustainable food chain covering all food consumed in this country. However, international agreements and regulations can present roadblocks. For example, the WTO Agreements on Agriculture, Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, and Technical Barriers to Trade only allow discrimination against food suppliers in order to protect human, animal or plant health, and not on the basis of (unsustainable) production and processing methods. And the European Public Procurement Directives do not allow public sector purchasers to specify that they want to buy locally produced goods, which can make it harder to ensure that the public sector promotes sustainability.

Despite these limitations, several European countries such as Italy are making good progress on sustainable procurement. Here, the Defra-led Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative and the Welsh Procurement Initiative are also making significant strides towards embedding sustainable development in purchasing decisions.

## **Eating more than words**

As the national debate about obesity continues, it's never been a better time to highlight the importance of consumer information about the wider sustainability impacts of our food.

Arguably the most immediate source of consumer information about food is found on packaging and labeling. Consumers are already offered some information about nutritional content, but this is often difficult to follow and it may sometimes be undermined by more prominent marketing claims. The Food Standards Agency reported in February 2004 that 40% of the 220 food brands sampled contravened its advice on the on-pack use of misleading words and phrases such as 'fresh', 'pure', 'natural', 'traditional', 'original', 'authentic', 'home-made' and 'farmhouse'. And with the rise in 'nutraceuticals' or functional foods that claim to offer health benefits such as lowering cholesterol, attention to the wording becomes even more important.

A number of initiatives aim to give the consumer clarity on nutrition issues. The Food Standards Agency is consulting on the labelling of fat, sugar and salt content and the Government has recently proposed a traffic light system warning of the net health impacts of a particular food, in addition to the 5 A DAY scheme promoting the benefits of eating more fruit and vegetables.

But nutritional content is not the only information consumers need to make a sustainable food choice. Quality marks such as the organic certification and Marine Stewardship brands guarantee high environmental standards of

production, as do the RSPCA's Freedom Foods for animal welfare and the Fair Trade mark for producers' livelihoods. And the Red Tractor label guarantees that the food has met certain British standards; the SDC hopes to work with Assured Food Standards (who administer the Red Tractor scheme) to help enhance its environmental and social outcomes.

But there are still information gaps. Whilst it's usually relatively easy to find out where fresh produce has come from, it's much more difficult if you want to know whether the chicken in your ready-made chicken sandwich is from Thailand, Brazil or the UK. Labeling often makes no reference to wider environmental and social impacts such as the food miles required to transport food to the consumer. And few of the quality marks above appear on processed food such as ready meals; the Co-op's frozen omelette is the only ready meal to be certified by Freedom Foods.

Happily it's not just about labeling. Pioneering retailers such as Marks and Spencer and the Co-op are taking pro-active steps to offer consumers a more sustainable choice. Marks and Spencer are the only retailer to guarantee the use of free range eggs in all their food products, including ready meals, and the Co-op has established an independent panel of experts – including the RSPCA's director general Jackie Ballard – to help define and implement new and higher ethical standards for its 4,500 own-brand product range, including frozen ranges and ready meals.

### Challenge 13 Business

The Government must explain more clearly to business the need for more sustainable methods of operation; set demanding targets for improved performance; plan regulatory and fiscal action to support those targets and require regular reporting by business on their progress.

### Challenge 14 Sustainable Production and Consumption

The Government should establish demanding targets and timetables for the transition to sustainable products and production processes; educate consumers about the need to choose sustainable products and services and generate debate on how consumption patterns can promote healthier, happier, safer communities.

### Challenge 16 Farming and Food

Working with industry, the Government must use the Food Industry Sustainability Strategy (and wider national and international policies) to encourage sustainable food consumption by ensuring consumers have access to information allowing them to make more sustainable choices.

References:

- (1) Gerald Seenan, Pity the Poor Struggling Middle Classes. The Guardian, September 5, 2003.
- (2) Levett-Therivel, p35, Assessment of Progress Against the Headline Indicators, report to the Sustainable Development Commission, February 2004.
- (3) Ibid, p75.
- (4) WWF Living Planet Report 2000.  
[http://www.wwf.org.uk/news/n\\_0000000129.asp](http://www.wwf.org.uk/news/n_0000000129.asp)
- (5) Clive Hamilton, visiting professor, Cambridge University. Study quoted in Pity the Poor Struggling Middle Classes by Gerard Seenan, The Guardian, September 5, 2003.
- (6) Levett-Therivel, table 13, p.28, Assessment of Progress against the Headline Indicators, February 2004.
- (7) Redefining Progress, Oakland, California, 2004 Footprint of Nations Report.
- (8) Policies for Sustainable Consumption, Tim Jackson and Laurie Michaelis for the Sustainable Development Commission 2003.
- (9) Consumers Need Help to Plug 'Good Intentions' Gap, Social Market Foundation, 2003.

# Old Ailments, New Remedies

'The NHS can do just as much to improve health through sustainable corporate activities – employment, purchasing, buildings – as it can by providing health services.'

Anna Coote, SDC Commissioner, Director of the Public Health Programme at the King's Fund

'Edinburgh's new state of the art hospital gets its cooked meals pre-prepared from Wales. A recently discharged patient told me that though he survived heart surgery, the frozen and re-heated omelette was an ordeal too far. Fresh and local food would be better for patients, staff, local food producers and the environment.'

Hugh Raven, SDC Commissioner, Consultant to the Soil Association as Scottish Policy Adviser and Aquaculture Adviser

## **WARNING SIGNS**

- Failure to give priority to preventing illness could cost the NHS an extra £30 billion a year within two decades (1)
- Obesity can reduce the life expectancy of diabetes patients by up to eight years (2)
- Families receiving benefits eat less fruit and vegetables and more sugar and processed foods than better-off households (3)
- UK life expectancy varies by almost 10 years, depending on background (4)

How can we enjoy better health and longer life? Cut NHS waiting lists or improve cancer survival rates? Those may be the first questions that spring to mind, and the Government is making progress on both fronts. But they are not the only ways, and perhaps not even the best ones, to improve health in our modern, ageing society.



the Department of Health's 5 A DAY Programme – to encourage more fruit and vegetable eating – and its Fruit in Schools scheme which will distribute a free piece of fruit or vegetable every day to every 4-6-year-old attending state school in England. The 2004 Wanless Report *Securing Good Health for the Whole Nation* explored how government could engage citizens in taking responsibility for their own health, for example by giving up smoking, eating a balanced diet and exercising regularly. Health Secretary John Reid's forthcoming Public Health White Paper, due this autumn, is expected to respond by setting out a blueprint for preventative public health policy.

In Wales:

The Assembly Government's *Well Being in Wales* report explicitly links public health, regeneration and building sustainable communities in addressing how government policy can improve quality of life for Welsh citizens. The Wanless Report also applies to Wales and in response, each county health area is preparing a Health and Wellbeing Strategy. A separate Welsh Assembly initiative aims to increase supplies of fresh, local food to the public sector.

In Northern Ireland:

The 2002 health strategy *Investing for Health*, is also based on sustainable development principles, focusing on preventing ill-health through public education, environmental improvements and anti-poverty measures.

In Scotland:

*Eating for Health: a Diet Action Plan for Scotland* was launched in 2003; the Scottish Executive, with NHS Scotland, also runs the Healthy Living Campaign to promote healthy eating and physical activity. Plans include distributing healthy eating booklets to every household and improved access to cheap, healthy food in poor neighbourhoods. The Executive is also considering a ban on smoking in public places and has published an alcohol strategy and an action plan to promote organic food.

## **The National Health Service: Seeking Sustainable Solutions**

The NHS's imprint on UK daily life is enormous. It has a million employees, a £65.4 billion budget and serves 300 million meals a year. Its annual environmental impact includes 600,000 tonnes of waste and 75% of hospital visits are made by car.

Likewise, the NHS has enormous potential for implementing sustainable practice nationwide: as an employer, a public service provider and a purchaser of goods and services. Doing so would not only reduce the environmental impacts of the UK's largest employer – it would also slash NHS costs, improve conditions for staff and patients and, in the longer term, improve health services and promote better health.

Progress is certainly being made in places. The NHS Environmental Assessment Tool, which enables hospitals to rate their buildings' eco-friendliness in order to improve environmental standards, is a positive step. So is the £40m

Better Hospital Food programme. (See SDC Highlights below). There are many examples, too, where inspirational individuals have understood the importance of sustainable development and health, and initiated practical programmes. Yet, in general, sustainable practice is rarely a priority for harassed NHS managers. And until sustainable development is used to measure their success, it is unlikely to become so.

### **Next Steps**

As our Warning Signs make clear, there remains a long way to go to reverse unhealthy lifestyle trends and entrench sustainability in health policy and practice. The SDC has urged the government explicitly to link public health and sustainable development in its forthcoming White Paper. We are also helping the Healthcare Commission, which audits NHS Trusts, to write sustainable development practice directly into healthcare standards. In an overstretched NHS, such levers will ensure managers give priority to sustainable development. The SDC also wants to see higher priority given to targeting health problems among those on low incomes. The shocking disparity in illness and premature death rates between rich and poor is unacceptable.

### **SDC Highlights: Healthy Futures Project**

The NHS spends £500m a year on food and its capital investment programme for 2003-4 alone was set at £4 billion. By buying healthy, fresh, locally sourced food, hospitals can send a powerful pro-sustainability message from a major employer to food wholesalers and producers, while improving the diets of patients, staff, visitors and local communities.

Likewise, sustainable building policies can significantly reduce hospitals' climate change impacts, while cutting their energy bills. By providing jobs for the unemployed, making facilities such as meeting rooms available for wider use, or ensuring surgeries are accessible by public transport, Trusts can also help improve local community life. Our Healthy Futures team works with NHS Trusts, health departments and local authorities to spread sustainability good practice, by:

- Collecting and disseminating (by electronic newsletter and our website), examples of NHS Progress in Practice in relation to food and capital development
- Exploring how these could be replicated across the UK
- Bringing NHS Trusts together to share knowledge and experience.

For more information please contact [susannah.senior@sd-commission.org.uk](mailto:susannah.senior@sd-commission.org.uk) or visit [www.sd-commission.org.uk](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk) to download our Healthy Futures publications and newsletters.

## Partners in promoting well being

Looking up your symptoms and seeking online medical advice won't faze you if you are part of the internet generation. The explosion in medical knowledge and the ability to access the very latest findings on causes, treatments and outcomes, by professional and layman alike, plus growing interest in alternative health therapies, might well suggest that we stand on the edge of a breakthrough in personal and communal health and well-being.

Yet there is growing concern about trends in public health – smoking, the culture of binge-drinking and, above all, the rising levels of obesity. We eat the wrong food, avoid exercise and take risks with our health in pursuit of pleasure. And whilst life expectancy overall in the UK is on the increase, there is still a huge health gap between the rich and the poor.

There is a plethora of initiatives aimed at improving public health, tackling inequalities and helping children, in particular, to develop healthier life styles from an early age. These include a project by Sustrans – a sustainable transport charity – to develop safe routes to schools, so that more children are able to work or cycle to school, and the Department of Health and Department for Education and Skills' Wired for Health initiative which helps schools implement health initiatives such as healthy tuckshops, drug education and exercise programmes.

Each year school canteens serve up 780 million meals, over 300 million meals are served by the NHS, 9 million meals on wheels are provided, and the armed forces eat 128 million meals. In each case, there is an enormous opportunity to improve the quality of the food served as well as to promote messages about health and how to eat a balanced diet.

In Wales, the Food for Thought programme (part of the Welsh Procurement Initiative) gives practical guidance to public sector purchasers on how they can promote sustainable development through the way they buy food, and ensure that healthy choices are available in public sector canteens. And the Department of Health's Fruit in Schools initiative provides a free piece of fruit or veg for all four to six year olds in state education in England.

Schemes such as these do not preclude individuals making their own informed choices about how they want to live their lives. But they do help to create an environment where the safe, healthy and sustainable option is as accessible as the unhealthy alternative and is affordable to all sectors of society.

In some English regions, the NHS is developing innovative ways to improve citizens' health. In 50 'green gyms' around the country, for example, low income families get fresh air and exercise working with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers on park improvement projects. Some 5 A DAY schemes include orchard planting using community volunteers, with the fruit distributed for free.

The Government must establish closer links between the Sustainable Development Strategy and the public health agenda, so that each can reinforce the other. The Department of Health should set the NHS explicit targets for contributing to sustainable development.

All new standards set by the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection should promote sustainable development.

References:

- (1) Securing our Future Health, Derek Wanless, Treasury report, 2002.
- (2) [www.defeatdiabetes.org/Articles/obesity040331.htm](http://www.defeatdiabetes.org/Articles/obesity040331.htm)
- (3) National Diet and Nutrition Survey, Food Standards Agency, 2002-04  
[www.foodstandards.gov.uk/science/101717/ndnsdocuments/](http://www.foodstandards.gov.uk/science/101717/ndnsdocuments/)
- (4) Tackling Health Inequalities: A Programme for Action Department of Health 2003.

# Pastures new

'If we don't regenerate sustainably, our children won't inherit communities worth living in.'

Anne Power, SDC Commissioner, Professor of Social Policy at the London School of Economics and Deputy Director of the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion

## WARNING SIGNS

Buildings account for 50% of UK energy consumption (1)

730,000 houses in England are empty, while construction sites produce 50% of landfill waste (2)

The UK ranks 3rd from bottom among 17 developed countries for poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and life expectancy (3)

Regeneration is big business. Billions of pounds a year are poured into renewing our inner cities, making public places more attractive and building affordable new homes.

The goals of all this activity – to provide decent homes, jobs and safe, friendly, well-serviced neighbourhoods – have widespread support. Yet a key element is missing. While environmental issues such as pollution, poor public transport and lack of green space drastically affect quality of life in poor communities, regeneration efforts remain largely driven by social and economic concerns.

In December 2003, the Sustainable Development Commission challenged the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Northern Ireland Office and the devolved administrations to shift sustainability from the margins to the mainstream of regeneration policy. Based on an 18 month SDC investigation which uncovered only patchy sustainable practice across the UK, we urged government to adopt three essential criteria for neighbourhood renewal:

- Put local people at the heart of the process, to combat social exclusion, strengthen community spirit and encourage equitable economic development
- Improve the local environment while minimising resource use
- Take an integrated, long-term approach, recognising that neighbourhood problems have interlinked social, economic and environmental causes.

Our report, *Mainstreaming Sustainable Regeneration: a Call to Action*, also proposed factoring national environmental targets into every

neighbourhood regeneration programme. If local authorities and developers had to meet targets to cap carbon emissions, minimise waste, improve home energy efficiency and public transport links, then sustainable practice would no longer be an afterthought. It would drive civic renewal.

### **Sustainable Cities: First Steps**

Such ideas have already been converted into successful practice in projects around the UK. *Mainstreaming Sustainable Regeneration* draws lessons from 46 pioneering projects including Home Zones (where pedestrians have priority over cars), community forests, city farms, credit unions, green tourism and housing refurbishment, self-build and renewable energy schemes.

Some of these initiatives are local authority-led, others driven by residents or NGOs. On a national level, too, things are moving. The SDC is working with English Heritage, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and the Environment Agency, to help government programmes to revitalise blighted housing in the Midlands and North shift towards sustainable design and refurbishment practices. The World Wide Fund for Nature's campaign for 'one million sustainable homes' is also bringing the issue some much-needed public attention, pressing for zero emissions housing in the Thames Gateway, the most ambitious of the Government's planned new communities.

North of the border, the national housing agency, Communities Scotland, has produced a guide to sustainable home design and Green Space Scotland is greening urban open spaces with funds from Scottish Natural Heritage and the National Lottery. And in Wales, the Communities First programme for neighbourhood renewal includes a requirement to help achieve sustainable development.

But there remains a long way to go. The urgent challenges ahead include halving the energy used in constructing buildings, using less land to provide new homes (in line with today's smaller households), and making urban neighbourhoods more liveable. Only by taking measures such as these will we avoid spreading sprawl, building over green fields and polarising communities.

### **New Model Communities?**

By 2016, two million new homes will be built in England to plug the gaps in affordable housing. While the SDC favours refurbishment over new build wherever possible, we recognise that these settlements present a major opportunity to avoid past mistakes, implement sustainable development good practice, and construct model 21st century communities.

In this vein, we welcome the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan (and the more recent Egan Review of professional skills needed to implement it) as steps in the right direction. While pledging to speed up house-building and reform the planning system, the Deputy Prime Minister's blueprint also promises to protect the countryside and minimise new settlements' resource use and environmental impacts.

The SDC is concerned, however, that sustainable development principles are not fully integrated into the Plan. There are no clear commitments, for example, to ensure that new housing in the flagship Thames Gateway and elsewhere will be high density, energy efficient and well served by public transport links. This despite the fact that inspiring communities such as the Greenwich Millennium Village have already proved what is possible, building high density housing surrounded by generous open space and achieving 60% reductions in waste, energy and water use. If a similar blueprint was followed in the Thames Gateway, 400,000 attractive, high quality, resource-efficient homes could be provided over the next 30 years.

In a review of the Sustainable Communities Plan, the SDC urged the adoption of our sustainability checklist (right) as a practical guide for development practitioners<sup>4</sup>. We also called for tighter sustainable building regulations, higher density housing, better supervision and management of green space, more frontline jobs such as park keepers and neighbourhood wardens and greater community involvement.

## **Next Steps**

The SDC believes there is enormous potential to increase the sustainability performance of buildings. Following the recent report of the Sustainable Building Task Group, we plan a new work programme on sustainable housing, looking at existing as well as new build homes (as these will still provide at least 80% of housing stock ten years from now). Builders, developers, government and agencies active in housing, regeneration and communities all support a shift to a more energy efficient, less wasteful approach to housing. We will also urge continued reform of the planning system to encourage higher density, mixed developments which reduce people's need to travel.

## **MAKING IT HAPPEN**

Regeneration and sustainable communities are well used concepts but there is no 'one size fits all' in achieving and building better neighbourhoods and communities for the future. Indeed often what works well in one area can cause problems in others.

Three communities based in London, Cornwall and Nottinghamshire have risen to the sustainable neighbourhood challenge. Although taking very different approaches, all embody the three essential criteria of sustainable regeneration as outlined in our publication, *Mainstreaming Sustainable Regeneration*.

Gallions Ecopark in London took a broad and inclusive approach to affordable housing in the third phase of the Urban Village project. All houses in the Ecopark incorporated environmental features to reduce both the carbon footprint and resource usage of the buildings. In the future, it is hoped that this will

dramatically reduce utility bills through a 50% decrease in energy consumption and water usage, a feature that is particularly valuable for low income families.

However, the project did not simply adopt the best environmental technologies. Before and after taking up residence in the Ecopark, tenants were given support to enable them to maximise the benefits from the environmental features of their homes. On-going projects also include a Community Partnership Team which works to reduce crime in the area.

An example of a large scale regeneration project comes from Falmouth in Cornwall where the Beacon Community Regeneration Project achieved dramatic improvements to the quality of life for residents on one troubled housing estate. Dialogue between residents and agencies was at the heart of the process and this was achieved through a number of representative forums. Improvements to the colour and landscaping of the estate were employed to make a visual statement about improvements and investment in the area. Energy efficiency improvements were also made to 900 homes.

The statistics speak for themselves with a noticeable improvement in general health, educational achievements and employment rates. Crime rates also halved.

Finally, Hockerton Housing Project in Nottinghamshire is the UK's first 'earth sheltered self-sufficient ecological housing development.' The development has neutralised its carbon footprint by utilising the highest environmental building standards and on-site renewable energy generation. Hockerton aspires to a supportive and cohesive community by sharing resources and giving time to community activities. The residents also grow organic produce on site and have established new wildlife habitats.

### **SDC Highlights: Regeneration roadshows**

In early 2004, SDC Commissioner Raymond Young took a 'regeneration roadshow' to Belfast, Manchester and several Scottish cities, to broadcast our messages in *Mainstreaming Sustainable Regeneration* to audiences of development practitioners and policy makers. More events are planned around the UK to encourage debate and promote greater understanding of the practical application of sustainability. In the longer term, we aim to help create a strong group of UK regeneration professionals who support sustainable development principles. See [www.sd-commission.org.uk](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk) for more details.

### **Sustainable Community Checklist**

- Do residents have a key role in deciding priorities, within available resources?
- Do homes, including refurbished buildings, have the highest energy efficiency rating?

- Are construction materials as locally sourced as possible, environmentally-friendly and easily and locally maintainable?
- Is there enough useable, supervised green space within 15 minutes walk from any home? Does it have trees and wildlife and assist urban drainage?
- Are the streets pedestrian and cycle-friendly?
- Is the community served by frequent, reliable, cheap public transport?
- Does its layout create a viable mix of people and uses, provide community facilities and encourage involvement?
- Are there meeting points – benches, cafes, community centres, churches?
- Are there frontline jobs to care for, protect and repair the neighbourhood?
- Is there proper security, street supervision, repair and maintenance?

References:

- (1) Mainstreaming Sustainable Regeneration: A Call to Action, Sustainable Development Commission; p33. 2003.
- (2) Ibid.
- (3) UN Human Poverty Index, quoted in Levett-Therivel; p29. 2004.
- (4) Sustainable Communities and Sustainable Development, Professor Anne Power for the Sustainable Development Commission, 2004; p17.

# Low carb revolution

'There is real benefit to the UK from being a leader in implementing efficient new technologies that promote growth whilst minimising fossil fuel use, in both transport and buildings.'

Bernie Bulkin, SDC Commissioner, Board Member of the UK Centre for Environment and Economic Development; Fellow of New Hall, Cambridge

'Moving to a low carbon economy will have different social and economic impacts – some positive, some negative – for different occupations, industries and parts of the country. Strategies to ensure a 'just transition' will be essential.'

Val Ellis, SDC Commissioner, Member of the Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee

'The complacency about air transport is going to get us into a bigger fix than roads.'

Maureen Child, SDC Vice Chairman, Scotland, Lead Member for Finance and Sustainability, Edinburgh City Council

## **WARNING SIGNS**

Four million UK homes are at risk from flooding as climate change triggers rising sea levels (1)

Britain has the most congested roads and longest commuting times in the European Union (2)

Department for Transport forecasts suggest that airport passenger numbers will rise from 160m in 1990 to 400m by 2020 (3)

Three in ten people who do not own a car have difficulty travelling to a hospital (4)

There is now a broad scientific consensus that the climate is changing due to human activity. Sir David King, the UK Government's Chief Scientific Adviser, recently warned that climate change poses a greater global threat than terrorism. The best that government, business and consumers can hope to do is mitigate its effects by reducing emissions of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and other 'man-made' greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

That's the bad news. The good news is that shifting to a low carbon economy will not only soften the impacts of climate change; it will also bring the UK major benefits in terms of resource efficiency, cost savings and improvements in fuel poverty and public health.

The UK has already taken the first steps along this path. Emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> have fallen significantly from 1990 levels, mostly as a by-product of the shift from coal to gas in power generation. The innovative Climate Change Levy has prompted a cut in energy use among some industrial consumers. Investment in renewable technologies is starting to pay dividends and in spring 2004, the UK signed up to an EU Emissions Trading Scheme which should have a wide-ranging impact.

The Sustainable Development Commission fears, however, that too little is being done too slowly to achieve the required energy revolution. Indeed the consumption patterns we flagged up in Chapter 2 threaten to drag the UK backwards. Rising aircraft emissions may soon cancel out the greenhouse gas reductions triggered by coal plant closures. Home energy efficiency improvements are being negated as the number of UK households increases and people keep computers, clocks, videos and other appliances running on standby. The application of clean technologies and building energy efficiency standards remains patchy at best.

### **Smart Power Signals**

Our message to Ministers on UK energy policy – shaped by our six sustainable development principles – is simple. In order to meet the UK target of a 60% cut in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2050, government and business must set the country on a clear course to a low carbon economy. To do this, they need to embrace the concept of 'absolute decoupling' as the key to progress. Put simply, this means taking action not only to use energy more efficiently, but also to reduce the total volume of materials and fossil fuels that UK organisations and households consume.

The new UK Energy Efficiency Plan is a step in the right direction. So are the welcome commitments to generate 20% of electricity in England and 40% of electricity in Scotland from renewable sources by 2020.

But we want to see the Government and the Devolved Administrations go further and adopt targets to ensure net reductions in consumption of energy and materials. We also believe supply side measures alone will not be enough; habit-changing demand management measures will also be needed to achieve big reductions in car travel and home energy use.

The current government reviews of progress against the Climate Change Programme 2000 and the Ten Year Transport Plan provide excellent opportunities to adopt timetabled programmes to achieve net reductions in UK consumption. The SDC will be pressing Ministers to take advantage of these opportunities, both in our input to these reviews, and through the new Roundtable on Sustainable Consumption which we co-host (see also Chapter 2).

## **Smarter Mobility**

Equally urgent is a shift to more sustainable transport policies. While cheap car and plane travel has brought previously undreamed of freedom of mobility to tens of millions, the negative consequences are increasingly apparent. Plane emissions are now the fastest growing source of UK greenhouse gases. Congestion and air pollution affect our quality of life and impact on employers and the NHS. As our Warning Signs highlight, the pervasive car culture is fostering unacceptable inequities between rich and poor families.

The absence of a clear policy lead from government, compounded by the abandonment of the annual fuel duty escalator in the wake of the 2000 fuel protests, threatens to derail positive initiatives, including tax breaks for LPG cars, graded tax discs and the growth in popular, successful urban light transit schemes. In Scotland, 70% of the national transport budget is now spent on providing public transport services, and off-peak local bus travel is free for the over-60s. In Wales last year there were 109 million passenger journeys on local bus services, an increase of nearly 5% on the previous year, thanks in part to Traffic Wales' sophisticated internet and text travel update services. Yet a July 2003 SDC submission to the Department of Transport estimated that five new Heathrow airports would be needed by 2030 to accommodate the predicted rise in UK air travel<sup>5</sup>.

While we acknowledge the obvious political difficulties involved in challenging the car culture or a consumer's demand for cheap flights, the SDC believes the Government must open up a fundamental national debate about the future nature of travel. As we state in Chapter 2, consumers need to know the full costs of their lifestyle and travel choices in order to make informed decisions – such as whether to drive, cycle or take the bus to work. The right infrastructure – cycle lanes, safer streets – also needs to be in place before citizens can realistically be expected to make more sustainable travel choices.

Again, the Department for Transport's review of its Ten Year Plan provides a timely opportunity to move the debate in the right direction and place transport policies firmly within a sustainable development framework. In practical terms, this means integrating central government decision-making on roads, airports, railways and bus services, with sustainability-driven policies on energy conservation, planning, regeneration and tax and investment regimes.

The SDC is taking this message direct to Ministers and key officials in the Department for Transport. We are pressing for policies to be linked directly to the 60% carbon dioxide emissions reduction target and to the reduction of national fuel consumption. We also want to see an urgent national debate on airport expansion and the future of air travel.

## **SDC Highlights: dCARB-uk**

dCARB-uk is an ambitious project initiated by the SDC to test practical programmes to cut greenhouse gas emissions to meet the 60% target. A pilot programme aims to create local low carbon economies in Yorkshire and Humberside. We are working closely with Yorkshire Forward, the Yorkshire and Humberside Assembly and the regional Government Office to identify programmes to reduce energy use in pilot cities, towns and villages. These include Barnsley, Hull, Sheffield, Axholme and Marsden Slaithwaite. Other partners include North Yorkshire Moors Community Energy, Yorkshire and Humberside Future Energy Company and Regional Spatial Strategy. The SDC will disseminate the good practice findings.

## **HOME ZONES**

During their recent plenary in Cardiff, the Sustainable Development Commission visited Magor village, a Home Zone pilot in Wales completed in November 2001. Home Zones are areas designed to open up residential roads for social use. This is done by addressing the needs of the wider community alongside the requirements of motorists.

The Magor scheme is set in the heart of rural Wales, covering 60 homes and 20 businesses and shops. The consultation process took over a year, but this ensured that the final design enjoyed widespread support. Specific design features included cycle stands, landscaping, and road humps, the initiation of a one-way system and the removal of raised footways. The result was an excellent example of how an infrastructure sympathetic to community needs can make large improvements to residents' quality of life.

Magor is one of nine pilot schemes offering valuable lessons for the future. The most successful schemes took an innovative approach to involving all sections of the community. Having 'champion' individuals within the Council and strong, committed residents' organisations also contributed significantly to the ease of design and implementation.

Home Zones are most often introduced in urban areas to encourage sustainable urban living and regeneration. Each scheme is unique because the design is developed by individual communities to their own requirements. However, many Home Zones include traffic calming and measures to encourage cycling and walking, features which often improve road safety, increase activity levels and ultimately improve health in the area. Home Zones can also provide children's play areas and new public spaces where residents can meet and talk to each other in attractive surroundings. Landscaping is also a big feature, with many schemes planting flowers and trees to improve the look of the area.

In April 2001 the Prime Minister launched the £30m Challenge Fund to provide funding for 61 schemes around England and Wales. Although the Challenge Fund did not cover Scotland, in February 2004 the Scottish Executive allocated £16.85 million to local authorities over two years for cycling, walking, and safer streets projects, which can include Home Zones.

For more information about Home Zones, see [www.homezonenews.org.uk](http://www.homezonenews.org.uk)

### Challenge 17 Transport

The Government must begin a fundamental debate with society about moving to a more sustainable pattern of transport. This debate must address the need to build long-term environmental costs into all forms of transport through taxes and charges, and use planning to improve access to facilities without increasing transport needs.

### Challenge 19 Climate Change

The Government must take further fiscal and regulatory steps over the next five years to improve the UK's climate change policy and performance, in order to secure a path to 60% CO<sub>2</sub> reduction by 2050.  
The Government must work with society to define the behavioural changes required.

#### References:

- (1) Future Flooding, Office of Science and Technology, April 2004.
- (2) Assessment of Progress against the Headline Indicators: Report to the Sustainable Development Commission, Levett-Therivel; p62, fig 19.
- (3) Air Traffic Forecasts for the UK, DETR, May 2000.
- (4) Assessment of Progress against the Headline Indicators: Report to the Sustainable Development Commission, Levett-Therivel; p64, 2004.
- (5) Aviation and the Environment: Using Economic Instruments: A response by the Sustainable Development Commission, July 2003.

# Critical mass

'One of the most powerful ways of making sustainable development happen is to talk about it in a compelling and inspiring way at every available opportunity.'

Lindsey Colbourne, SDC Commissioner, Coordinator, InterAct

'It's not enough just to whack an eco-label on products. Solar panels on schools, tax breaks for eco-friendly goods, and politicians talking green will all help to get people thinking – and acting – sustainably.'

Becky Willis, SDC Vice Chairman, Whitehall, Associate Director of Green Alliance

## WARNING SIGNS

85% of the public believe they will not witness the effects of climate change for decades, yet these effects can already be seen (1)

Although figures are improving, 5.4% of pupils still leave secondary school with no graded results and 18.4% with grades D to E (2)

While 28% of people polled in a Defra survey claimed awareness of the term 'sustainable development', 20% of them could not explain what it meant (3)

## On Message, But Who Cares?

With climate change on the big screen, status anxiety on the television, and factory food exposés in the bookshop, it looks like boom time for popular sustainable development communications. But is that enough to ensure we become more sustainable in our day-to-day lives?

Communicating sustainable development to Ministers, civil servants and opinion-leaders has always been an SDC priority, but what do we really mean by 'communicating sustainable development'? Simply increasing the frequency with which the term is used is a good, if basic start, and we are pleased to see a rise in usage across all levels of government. Encouragingly, our 2004 publications also received major media coverage, particularly *Shows Promise. But Must Try Harder*, which reached an audience of 51 million within 48 hours via print, radio and television outlets. (This despite the stance of the Plain English Campaign, which says it has yet to read a sufficiently jargon-free explanation to endorse the use of 'sustainable development' in local authority publications!)

To communicate sustainable development effectively, it is important to clarify what we mean by the term. For the SDC, sustainable development has a

twofold meaning. It is both a journey towards the end point where humankind has learnt to live sustainably on this planet, and a framework within which to achieve an equitable balance between potential economic, environmental and social benefits, between the wealthy and the poor, and between the interests of this generation and those to come.

We have developed a set of core principles to guide its practical application (see inside front cover) and are using various avenues, including our sustainable development communicators' forum, Combust, to help refine our approach (see SDC Highlights right). Yet as research by Defra and the Central Office of Information (COI) on sustainable development's impact on public behaviour shows, finding ways to explain the term's meaning without resorting to dry definitions is a real challenge. Promoting practical examples of sustainable development in action is one way to bring the concept to life – as our regeneration work confirms (see Chapter 4). But as leading think tanks Demos and the Green Alliance concluded in their 2003 report *Carrots, Sticks and Sermons*, simple information provision, however inspiring, is not necessarily enough to raise awareness. Nor does raised awareness always lead to a change in behaviour.

## **Communities of Interest and Action**

So what does? David Ballard of Bath University, drawing on his doctoral research, has highlighted how most people resist raising their awareness of, and involvement in, sustainable development because they believe they have no 'agency' or power to make a difference. Faced with the complexity of the issues and the powerful grip of the status quo, they feel helpless.

If the individual feels powerless, then perhaps communities of the like-minded, with their increased sense of collective agency, hold the key to sustainable development? Such communities could include any gathering, however loose, where a shared sense of interest or purpose is found – schools, reading groups, workplace canteens, neighbourhood associations, online chat sites. Many such groups already exist, often finding each other by word of mouth or online and sharing their ideas and actions across social, organisational and geographical boundaries.

How does the SDC tap into such communities? Old-fashioned communications techniques – honing a message and then trying to sell it – are unlikely to work; the best way to influence such groups, we believe, will be to join them, sharing ideas, experiences and strategies. We are taking our first steps in this direction with the initiatives described below in SDC Highlights.

But empowered communities aren't just limited to taking action themselves. They can also be powerful drivers for change nationally as they start to demand, or at least to understand, the need for significant policy shifts and government intervention to make sustainable development happen. They then become a source of active citizens who are able to influence and shape societal change. One inspiring example is the way People and Planet student groups have been running local campaigns to encourage UK universities to buy 100%

renewable energy. When it launched in 2001, only three UK universities bought any renewable energy. Now 51 are powered either wholly or partly by green electricity.

### **Education, Education, Education**

Schools, colleges, universities and other places of learning are among the most obvious examples of communities with enormous potential to advocate and implement sustainable practice. The SDC applauds Education Secretary Charles Clarke for his leadership in this area. We warmly welcome the DfES Sustainable Development Action Plan which focuses on 'giving people engaged in learning the opportunities and inspiration to think about and really appreciate their role as world citizens'.

The action plan covers four areas: education for sustainable development, the environmental impact of the Department and its partner bodies; the environmental impact of the education estate; and local partnership activity. It has already borne fruit. The Energy Certification for Schools programme, administered by the Energy Savings Trust, offers case studies of impressive financial and emissions savings achieved by pupil, staff and parent groups as young people take their energy-savvy ways back home. A web-based sustainability self-assessment tool will also be available from autumn 2004. And not only the formal education establishment is involved – the Sector Skills Development Agency will ensure sustainable development also features prominently in the skills and lifelong learning agenda.

### **Next Steps: DfES' Sustainable Development Action Plan**

The SDC will play a key role in helping to roll out the Sustainable Development Action Plan. With a new post, funded by DfES, we will seek to secure engagement and input from key players including the Council for Environmental Education. Our findings on making the NHS estate more sustainable (see Chapter 3) will be fed into the 2005-6 'Building Schools for the Future' programme, ensuring that the Government's £5.1 billion capital investment in secondary and primary schools is spent more sustainably. We will also continue to highlight DfES's central role in the Government's ongoing Sustainable Development Strategy Review (see also Introduction and Where Next?).

### **It's good to talk**

And there's no bigger issue to talk about than sustainable development. Whether in business, national or local government, interactive dialogue is increasingly acknowledged as a vital pre-cursor to deciding how to put sustainable development into practice.

Encouraging people to have their say whilst also listening to others is key. Dialogue by Design have pioneered an electronic engagement tool that does just that, offering an equal voice to all participants through each stage of deliberation, and leading to a more reflective, less polarised discussion between them. Working equally well when applied to a multi-national's global Environmental, Health and Safety report or the UK Government's Energy White Paper, participants can track their own and others' input in the journey towards a final decision.

Electronic engagement is also at the heart of Chronos. Developed by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development and the University of Cambridge Programme for Industry, Chronos is a new internet e-learning tutorial on the business case for sustainable development. But it's not just about conveying facts and figures to the corporate experts; quite the opposite, it values personal experience over technical expertise and encourages individuals to reach their own conclusions. Chronos is straightforward enough to help all employees reflect on the issues, talk about them and begin to experiment with more sustainable approaches in their own work. Used by Marks and Spencer, Novartis, Nokia and Rio Tinto to name but a few, the software is divided into six sections, exploring how personal values shape behaviour and offering role plays as a manager dealing with child labour, pollution and HIV/AIDS.

The New Economics Foundation (NEF) use an element of play to get people talking about sustainable development. Part card game, part policy making tool, Democs help groups of six – eight people to get to grips with the basic facts about complex issues, express their views and seek common ground with the other players. Democs games cover issues such as cloning, genetic testing and GM food; new games about homelessness, climate change and waste are in the pipeline. Over 1000 people have now played Democs, either in their own groups or at the open sessions hosted by NEF. Their feedback shows they enjoyed learning more about current issues in an informal social context, and that their interest in learning stuck as a result.

And there's a similar philosophy behind the RSA's 2004 Coffeehouse Challenge, during which Starbucks outlets played host to informal, action-oriented discussions about local issues such as waste, energy and cultural richness; the RSA will fund the best ideas from these groups to help them become a reality.

[www.dialoguebydesign.net](http://www.dialoguebydesign.net)

[www.sdchronos.org/](http://www.sdchronos.org/)

[www.neweconomics.org/gen/](http://www.neweconomics.org/gen/)

[www.rsa.org.uk/250/chc.asp](http://www.rsa.org.uk/250/chc.asp)

## SDC Highlights

The aim of the SDC's communications programme is to create new communities to further the principles and practices of sustainable development. To this end, our in-house communications expertise is supplemented by an online sounding board of 45 experts drawn from NGOs, the private sector and central and local government, who help us get the language and message right.

In 2004, we completely re-developed our website ([www.sd-commission.org.uk](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk)) to provide more space for others to inform our advice to government. We now host a listserv email club, [localsustuk](mailto:localsustuk), aimed at sustainable development practitioners, and have launched a bi-monthly electronic bulletin to enable people to read and discuss key issues. The SDC is also one of the first advisory bodies to harness the latest 'wiki' technology, allowing anyone free access to update or re-write a web document. We trialled this approach in developing alternative wording for the Government's fourth objective for sustainable development (see Chapter 1), and have recently been invited onto the Government's e-communications best practice group.

As engaged and vocal sustainable development communities grow, policymakers must have the skills and understanding to respond to the new expectations placed upon them. The Welsh Assembly Government is already rising to this challenge with comprehensive policy integration and training; to find out the best ways of communicating about sustainable development with Whitehall, the SDC is undertaking research supported by the Home Office and the Cabinet Office.

Combust, our action-oriented learning network of professionals whose job is to communicate sustainable development, is also growing. Individuals from all sectors are invited to join us in experimenting with new communications and engagement approaches, to reflect on their experiences and share their learning with other members.

## Challenge 8 Education

The DfES should carry forward its action plan vigorously to ensure that sustainable development is firmly embedded throughout the schools sector, in higher and further education and in the management of all educational estates.

### References:

- (1) Climate Change: A 21st Century Ark Energy Saving Trust 2003.
- (2) [www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme\\_compendia/Aa2004/6\\_05.xls](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_compendia/Aa2004/6_05.xls)
- (3) Defra, Adult Omnibus 2003.

# Delivering Sustainability

'There is excellence going on all over the place, but in an un-coordinated and therefore pretty invisible way.'

Walter Menzies,  
SDC Commissioner, Chief Executive of the Mersey Basin Campaign

## WARNING SIGNS

Of the 16 'excellent' rated councils in England, only 6 had the highest rating of 4/4 for the Environment, whilst nine had a rating of 2/4 (1)  
Sustainable development is not currently tackled across the CPA process

One third of all homes – about 7 million houses and flats – fail to meet the government's decent housing standard (2)

In 2002, 32% of unemployed people had had no educational training in the previous 3 years (3)

Local government across the UK spends £40 billion a year on services, products and salaries. Clearly, its potential for implementing sustainable development practice and transforming citizens' quality of life is enormous. Yet too few local agencies have made doing so a priority, or have developed joined-up policy and people-led sustainable development practice.

The problem is that while commitments to sustainable development principles exist at all levels of government – national, regional and local – they are often unclear or inconsistent, with the result that the delivery of frontline sustainable practice in communities is patchy at best.

Yet when local authorities do pioneer sustainable practice, the results can be striking. Take Bowbridge Primary School which serves one of the most deprived neighbourhoods in Nottinghamshire. After teachers alerted Newark and Sherwood District Council that pupils' clothes smelt of damp and mould, the council and local Tenants' Damp Action Group collaborated to deliver affordable energy to residents via efficiency improvements. When a follow-up survey revealed that 20% of families still suffered cold homes or high fuel bills because they didn't understand their heating controls, the council set up Family Eco-Teams through which its experts are helping Bowbridge parents and children learn good housekeeping skills, covering food, energy and water use and waste. Enthusiastic families are now saving money, keeping healthy and reducing local carbon emissions.

Such inspiring examples of joined-up policy and practice should be the rule, not the exception. In both England and Scotland, new legislative powers of

wellbeing give councils wide discretion to pursue sustainable development practice to enhance local quality of life. Although it is early days, these powers have been rarely used and their full potential remains untapped. To give them more substance, the SDC is working with the Audit Commission on the integration of sustainable development measures into the performance criteria it sets for local authorities.

In Wales and Scotland, stronger powers already exist. Scottish local councils have a duty to deliver Best Value services in a way that contributes to sustainable development, and the SDC has helped the Scottish Executive develop explicit practitioner guidance in areas such as whole life costing and efficient resource use. The Welsh Assembly, meanwhile, has built on its statutory duty to promote sustainable development by forming a compact with the Welsh Local Government Association to develop and implement best practice.

The Sustainable Development Commission regards governance as one of the six fundamental principles underpinning sustainable development. In 2003, we collaborated with Northumbria University's Sustainable Cities Research Unit and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to publish *The Bigger Picture* - a landmark report on how government can better support local delivery of sustainable development.

## **Regional Revival**

The English regions provide a key link between central and local government in delivering sustainable development. Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), with billions of pounds at their disposal, for example, have a statutory purpose to contribute to sustainable development. This has enabled some significant innovations, including the development of environmental technology clusters and the promotion of renewable energy. If elected regional assemblies are established in the north of England, following referenda in autumn 2004, they could also provide an important new conduit for more sustainable solutions in critical areas such as regional planning and regional waste strategies.

On the downside, however, regional Government Offices have accorded the sustainable development agenda little priority, while many RDAs focus one-dimensionally on job creation through traditional economic development. A plethora of regional agencies, assemblies, quangos and partnerships pursue overlapping and sometimes conflicting agendas.

The SDC is urging the government to cut through this confusion by setting out clear, integrated sustainability priorities and targets for the key regional bodies in its new UK Sustainable Development Strategy. It is vital, for example, that any new elected assemblies have unambiguous sustainable development duties, as the Welsh Assembly does. We also want to see decision-makers and opinion formers in the various regional bodies join forces and work urgently together to avoid unsustainable 'quick fixes' and develop smart, sustainable solutions to regional needs.

## **On the Right Track: Modernising Public Services**

The government's continuing drive to improve public services provides huge opportunities for local authorities to implement sustainable practice. Foremost among these are sustainable purchasing policies which, for example, enable local authorities to deliver healthier food to schools and to reduce fuel poverty by using energy efficient building materials.

Recent years have seen an encouraging range of public sector sustainable procurement initiatives launched, including the NHS food purchasing programme highlighted in chapter 3. However, these schemes are not yet widely applied, nor are the lessons learned being widely shared among practitioners.

To address this gap, the SDC is working with the local government Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) to demonstrate how to apply sustainable procurement principles to public services. Our target audience includes central and local government, public agencies and voluntary groups. The principles and measures we advocate include cutting costs, minimising waste, generating local jobs and training, purchasing online, and building local civic capacity.

We are also working with the Office of Government Commerce to interpret how complex EU procurement rules impact on sustainable development. And we are monitoring the implications for sustainable procurement policies of the Gershon Review, commissioned in 2004 by the Prime Minister and Chancellor, which calls for a 25% cut in the public sector's £120 billion annual spending.

## **Signposting the Way**

Clearly, local and regional government's role in delivering sustainable development is critical. Yet without strong direction from Whitehall, Edinburgh and Cardiff, committed local leaders are working with one hand tied behind their backs.

*In Shows Promise. But Must Try Harder* (see also UK Report Card), the SDC urges the Government to adopt a cross-departmental approach to creating a sustainable society. We argue that each department must incorporate sustainable development principles into its central objectives and into key cross-departmental processes including the Budget. (Encouragingly, in England and Scotland sustainable development is already a cross-cutting theme in government spending reviews). In Scotland and Wales, we want to see the assemblies develop their national strategies for sustainable development into central drivers of societal change.

Failure to act with one voice and to provide clear leadership on sustainable development results in contradictory policies where, for example, transport ministers plan new highways and airports while environment ministers draw up strategies to curb road and air emissions. For local and regional authorities, the result is policy signals which are confusing at best, paralysing at worst.

We believe central government needs to take a new approach: encouraging joined-up thinking and action by local councils to help them deliver improvements in health care, housing, education, local transport and energy

conservation in one integrated package – under the umbrella of sustainable development. We are working with both central and local government to achieve this.

## **Buying benefits**

‘Knowing, skilful, shrewd, lucky, careful in money matter, harmless.’ That’s the Chambers Dictionary definition of ‘canny’ which Aberdeen City Council and partners – including Scottish Executive, Chamber of Commerce and Friends of the Earth Scotland – have pressed into service for their sustainable purchasing initiative, The Canny Buyer.

Funded by a Sustainable Action Grant from the Scottish Executive, The Canny Buyer aims to encourage organisations in Scotland – particularly the North-East – to embed sustainable procurement into their normal business practice. There are three strands to the work: a conference held in February 2004 attended by over 80 procurement managers and executives from the public and private sectors, a web-based handbook (to be supplemented by a printed pocket guide) and, in response to demand, a number of case studies identifying good practice and the barriers to implementation. The case studies, which range from major oil companies, local authorities and universities to small businesses, show that high-level commitment combined with effective management processes and capacity building for budget holders are the ingredients for smart purchasing. It is early days yet, but The Canny Buyer has resulted already in new sustainable purchasing initiatives in local authorities and businesses and a demand for events in other parts of Scotland, and indeed the UK.

Down on the South coast, Portsmouth City Council (PCC) makes an important contribution to the local economy, spending around £270 million on goods, services and salaries every year. Launched in July 2003, the Council’s Common Values Partnership initiative harnesses this purchasing power to improve relations between employees, employers, customers and the local community and help deliver the Council’s sustainable development objectives. Partners achieve a star rating via a self-assessment tool demonstrating their achievements in five areas: training, employment, good client, good neighbour, customer care and quality, and environment. Practical help is available to improve on weaker areas, and four and five star winners have automatic notification of all new Council tenders. In less than a year, 30 organisations have achieved star ratings (six achieving four or five stars), with 11 about to start their self-assessment. PCC will be measuring the scheme’s success against its own key performance indicators such as new apprenticeships, disability employment and roads free of commercial vehicles at weekends. But the rewards for partner companies are already clear; one two-star partner won a contract with the London Fire Brigade on the strength of the new policies and practices the Common Values Partnership promotes.

[www.cannybuyer.com](http://www.cannybuyer.com)

[www.portsmouth.gov.uk/procurement/](http://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/procurement/)



## **SDC Highlights:**

### **Sustainable Procurement seminar**

In March 2004, the SDC co-hosted a seminar with IDeA to promote sustainable development procurement across the public sector. Best practice examples were shared by sustainable development practitioners and procurement professionals from NHS Trusts and local and central government in England and Wales.

### Challenge 10 English Regions

The Government needs to rationalise the present confusing pattern of regional structures so there is coherence for the pursuit of sustainable development throughout the regions; and place sustainable development at the heart of the new arrangements, including the RDAs' Performance Management Framework.

### Challenge 11 Local Government

Central and local government should launch a new drive to achieve sustainability at local level, with a community strategy in each area embracing specific sustainable development goals and targets for the next 5-10 years, spearheaded by effective local partnerships.

### Challenge 15 Waste

The Government should accelerate its guidance to industry and local authorities about how to achieve timetables and targets for increasing levels of waste minimisation, recycling and reuse; and put in place the required resources and incentives.

#### References:

- (1) The Audit Commission performance assessment of English Councils 2003.
- (2) Sustainable Communities and Sustainable Development: a Review of the Sustainable Communities Plan, p26, Professor Anne Power for the Sustainable Development Commission 2004.
- (3) Assessment of Progress against the Headline Indicators, Report to the Sustainable Development Commission, Levett-Therivel, 2004; p31.

# Our place in the world

'As holder of the G8 Presidency, the eyes of the world will be on the UK in 2005. The Government must seize this opportunity and take a lead in pushing sustainable development forward at a global level.'

Jess Worth, SDC Commissioner, Campaigner with People and Planet

'Kyoto has stalled, the trade debate has become very polarised, and terrorism is on the rise; it hasn't been a good year for the world on collectively addressing sustainable development issues.'

Derek Osborn, SDC Commissioner, Chairman of Stakeholder Forum for our Common Future

## **WARNING SIGNS**

The three richest people in the world have assets that exceed the combined gross domestic product of the 48 least developed countries (1)

Desertification directly affects 250 million people and a third of the earth's land surface (2)

More than 5000 animal species are threatened with extinction and almost 6,800 plant species are endangered or vulnerable (3)

Around 2.4 billion people lacked access to adequate sanitation in 2000 and 1.1 billion lacked access to safe drinking water (4)

The huge hurdles the UK faces in achieving sustainable development are magnified many times over on the world stage. Climate change, poverty, pollution, resource depletion: all are having a destructive, destabilising effect on our planet and its human population.

Many of these environmental problems are at their most acute in the world's poorest and most politically unstable countries. To add to the potent mix, the poverty gap between and within rich and poor nations is growing.

In 2000, world leaders committed themselves to a set of ambitious Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved by 2015 (see page 37). These were strengthened and reconfirmed at the Johannesburg Summit in 2002. But the world is already falling behind on implementation. UK Chancellor Gordon

Brown and World Bank president James Wolfensohn recently warned in *The Guardian* that on current trends, some MDGs will not be met until 2150.

To its credit, the UK government has embraced rather than shirked the global sustainable development agenda. It has actively promoted the Kyoto climate change treaty, argued in trade negotiations for effective integration of sustainable development principles, and pressed for debt relief for the world's poorest nations.

The SDC applauds these moves and the increases in official development assistance over the past five years. We also endorse the Government's commitment to increase the aid budget to 0.7% of GDP, although, given the extent of global poverty, we would like to see a firm timetable in place. We look to the revision of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy to set out in practical detail how the Government intends to implement these commitments and other Johannesburg goals.

### **2005: A Historic Opportunity**

Next year's international agenda offers a major opportunity for the UK to take a lead in galvanising action against global poverty, inequality and unsustainable development. The UK will hold the G8 and EU presidencies, and a UN summit of world leaders to measure progress on the Millennium Development Goals will be held in September. 2005 is also the 20th anniversary of Live Aid, which will give development issues a higher than usual media profile.

So far, all the right noises are being made. Environment Secretary Margaret Beckett, in launching the national consultation on the UK Sustainable Development Strategy, pledged to press the international community to work harder to meet the Millennium Development Goals. Gordon Brown has already flagged his intention to press the world's wealthiest nations to substantially increase aid budgets during the G8 summit to be held in the UK next summer.

The SDC welcomes these high profile efforts: the MDGs mirror our principles for sustainable development on a global scale, particularly those of fair shares for all and good governance. Indeed, 'fair shares' take on a whole new meaning when several billion people exist on less than two dollars a day.

However, the Government will need to deliver. 2005 will be an unprecedented year for popular mobilisation on international sustainable development issues. And not just in the UK – grassroots movements and NGOs across the world are looking to this country to deliver on the ambitious G8 aspirations of the Prime Minister and Chancellor to get the world back on track on climate change, finance the Millennium Development Goals through new borrowing mechanisms, and stem the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Also high on the UK's G8 presidency agenda is competitiveness. Some policymakers and opinion formers argue that the urgency of the competitiveness agenda requires a slowdown on action to combat climate change. The SDC considers this the worst kind of short-term thinking. There are enormous commercial opportunities emerging in new industries to develop renewable energy technologies and to promote energy efficiency (see page 9). Action on

climate change can and should be a spur to competitive entrepreneurship – not an obstacle to it. The SDC will be developing this theme in its work to help the Government prepare for the next year's events.

### **World Trade: A One Way Street?**

We would also like to see more recognition from the government that the impacts of rich countries on the developing world are far from universally benign. Terms of trade and investment agreements, for example, are often unfairly slanted in favour of Europe and the United States, and do not promote environmental protection and sustainable development as much as they should. Likewise, dogmatic structural adjustment programmes have exacerbated rather than relieved poverty in some African countries. The SDC will be pressing for these and other sustainability issues to be addressed by the Africa Commission chaired by the Prime Minister and taken into account in developing new forms of development assistance.

### **European Vanguard**

For 20 years, the European Union has been a significant force for environmental protection and the promotion of sustainable development. As its borders, economy and political influence expand, it has the potential to become a powerful engine driving sustainable practice across the wider world. In a timely move, the EU will shortly embark on a major consultation process to revise its own Sustainable Development Strategy.

The SDC looks to the Government to take a lead in this process.

With sister Commissions in other European countries, we have developed a collaborative policy statement on the European strategy review. Known as the Kinsale Challenge, this urges governments to use the opportunity to galvanise action on sustainability throughout the 25-member Union and to set in place the machinery for establishing national and regional strategies, and the means for implementing them. The statement also calls for the EU's annual stocktaking of progress across all member states to include a review on sustainability, and not focus solely on economic issues. The SDC intends to press this agenda both in Brussels and with the UK Government and Devolved Administrations.

## Millennium Development Goals

In September 2000, all 189 member states of the United Nations pledged to meet the following commitments. From 1990 levels, by 2015:

- Halve the proportion of people living on less than one dollar a day
- Ensure that all girls and boys complete primary school
- Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education
- Reduce by two-thirds the mortality rate among children under five
- Reduce by three-quarters the ratio of women dying in childbirth
- Halt the spread of HIV/AIDS and the incidence of malaria
- Reduce by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and sanitation
- Develop further an open trading and financial system that includes a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction; deal comprehensively with developing countries' debt problems.

### Challenge 20

#### Official Development Assistance

The Government must set out a firm timetable for achieving the long-standing goal of committing 0.7% of GDP to official development assistance, and effectively integrate sustainable development into the national poverty reduction strategies used to manage development assistance.

#### References:

- (1) UN Statistics Division 2002; <http://www.unep.org/Geo/yearbook/109.htm>
- (2) United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification; [www.unccd.entico.com/english/facts-faq.htm#link3](http://www.unccd.entico.com/english/facts-faq.htm#link3)
- (3) United Nations Environment Programme; [www.unep.org/Geo/yearbook/107.htm](http://www.unep.org/Geo/yearbook/107.htm)
- (4) United Nations Development Report 1997 and WHO 1998. [www.jca.apc.org/asia-apec/msg00557.html](http://www.jca.apc.org/asia-apec/msg00557.html)

# Where next?

'A real ecological democracy, thinking way ahead and involving all citizens, is just not happening.'

Tim O'Riordan, SDC Commissioner and Professor of Environmental Sciences at the University of East Anglia

## Where Next for Government?

As these pages have shown, there is much good work on sustainable policy and practice underway around the UK. Yet the play safe, piecemeal approach so far favoured by government has left the country far adrift of meeting its national and international responsibilities to consume resources within sustainable limits. And there is a worrying lack of urgency among Ministers about tackling one of the central challenges of our times.

The next 12 to 18 months will be a critical time for setting the UK on a path to truly sustainable development. On 21 April 2004, UK, Scottish and Welsh Ministers launched *Taking It On: Developing UK Sustainable Development Strategy Together*, a three month nationwide consultation on a new national Sustainable Development Strategy. This revised strategy, to be published in 2005, will provide the proof of how serious the Government is about its commitment to embed sustainable development at the heart of all its policymaking and programmes.

The omens are better than some might imagine. In launching the consultation process, Margaret Beckett, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, said the following: 'We as government, and we as society, have much more to do. The Sustainable Development Commission [has] challenged us to 'try harder'. That is a challenge we are determined to rise to collectively.'

*In Shows Promise. But Must Try Harder*, the SDC not only urged the government to respond to the 20 Challenges reproduced throughout this publication. We also urged the adoption of the following key policy priorities for the revised UK Sustainable Development Strategy:

- **redefining economic progress** to avoid the very obvious social and environmental penalties of the current economic growth model
- **an accelerated programme to reduce greenhouse gas emissions** and tackle the threat of climate change at home and abroad
- **promotion of innovation and market transformation** to support more sustainable production and encourage much more sustainable consumption patterns
- **vigorous efforts to promote healthier environments and lifestyles** at both national and local level

- **stronger focus on area renewal and regeneration, sustainable communities and sustainable housing**
  - **much stronger focus on more sustainable natural resource management**, including more sustainable transport, waste minimisation and waste management policies
  - **greater effort to manage overseas policies on trade, aid and investment** to encourage sustainable development in developing countries and reduce the adverse impact of our activities on prospects for sustainability elsewhere.
- We hope the Government will embrace these priorities with urgency and look forward to working with Whitehall and with the Devolved Administrations on their practical implementation.

### **Where Next?**

#### **Snapshots of the Sustainable Development Commission's Work Plan**

Our priorities and activities in 2004-5 will include:

- Working closely with Defra and other departments to shape the new Sustainable Development Strategy, in the light of the consultation process that ended in July 2004
- Working on key policy issues like housing, aviation and the modernisation of public services
- Helping Defra and DTI to review the Climate Change Programme, to ensure that measures are in place to meet the goal of a 20% reduction in CO2 emissions by 2010
- Continuing to work with the Department of Health and the NHS to ensure that health services become more sustainable
- Developing action on sustainable consumption through the Roundtable
- Working with DfES to implement their Sustainable Development Action Plan
- Developing our relationship with the Devolved Administrations, in order to contribute more effectively to policy development in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
- Launching our first annual conference
- Recruiting 10,000 subscribers to our e-bulletin
- Doubling usage of our website and IT communications.

### **Where Next:**

#### **Your News and Views**

As we said in our Introduction, sustainable development presents a challenge and an opportunity not just for government, business and NGOs, but for every UK citizen. We welcome feedback on this report from anyone and everyone interested in sustainable development policy and practice. Comments may be

sent to [kay.west@sd-commission.org.uk](mailto:kay.west@sd-commission.org.uk). Sustainable development communicators are also invited to join our learning network, Combust. Contact [esther.maughan@sd-commission.org.uk](mailto:esther.maughan@sd-commission.org.uk).

## **Countdown to Sustainable Development**

1992

Earth Summit, Rio de Janeiro

World governments, including the UK, adopt Agenda 21, a wide-ranging programme of national and local action towards sustainability.

1994

UK Strategy for Sustainable Development published

Provided a policy framework for initial steps towards sustainable development.

1999

A Better Quality of Life published

Updated UK strategy; integrated the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development; set out headline indicators and measures of progress.

2002

World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg

UK Prime Minister Tony Blair plays a leading role; world leaders prioritise action on drinking water, sanitation, protecting natural resources and consumption.

2004

Government launches review of UK Sustainable Development Strategy Sustainable Development Commission publishes critique of progress against A Better Quality of Life.

2005

New five-year UK strategy to be launched; UK to hold G8 and EU presidencies.

## **Members of the Sustainable Development Commission**

Jonathon Porritt (Chairman)  
Director of Forum for the Future

Rod Aspinwall (Vice Chairman, Wales)  
Deputy Chairman of the Enviro Group and Professor of Environmental  
Management at Cardiff University

Bernard Bulkin  
Board Member of the UK Centre for Environment and Economic Development;  
Fellow of New Hall, Cambridge

Councillor Maureen Child  
(Vice Chairman, Scotland)  
Lead Member for Finance and Sustainability,  
Edinburgh City Council

Rita Clifton  
Chairman of Interbrand

Lindsey Colbourne  
Coordinator of InterAct

Anna Coote  
Director of the Public Health Programme at the King's Fund

Val Ellis  
Member of the Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee

Councillor Nicky Gavron  
The Mayor's Adviser on Planning and Spatial Development (on one year leave of  
absence)

Brian Hanna  
President of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health

Tim Jackson  
Professor of Sustainable Development, Centre for Environmental Strategy at the  
University of Surrey

Alan Knight  
Head of Social Responsibility, Kingfisher

Walter Menzies  
Chief Executive of the Mersey Basin Campaign

Tim O’Riordan  
Professor of Environmental Sciences at the University of East Anglia and Associate  
Director of the Centre for Social and Economic Research on the Global Environment

Derek Osborn  
Chairman of Stakeholder Forum for our Common Future

Anne Power  
Professor of Social Policy at the London School of Economics and Deputy Director  
of the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion

Hugh Raven  
Consultant to the Soil Association as Scottish Policy Adviser and Aquaculture  
Adviser

Richard Wakeford  
Chief Executive of the Countryside Agency

Rebecca Willis  
(Vice Chairman, Whitehall) Associate Director of Green Alliance

Jess Worth  
Campaigner with People and Planet

Raymond Young  
Board member of Forward Scotland, a member of the Scottish Welfare to Work  
Advisory Task Force and Chair of the Environment Task Force in Scotland

Sustainable Development Commission, Ground Floor, Ergon House, Horseferry  
Road, London, SW1P 2AL  
Telephone: 020 7238 4999 Email: [enquiries@sd-commission.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@sd-commission.org.uk)

[www.sd-commission.org.uk](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk)