



**Sustainable**  
Development Commission

# **Governing for the Future**

The opportunities for mainstreaming  
sustainable development

March 2011



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## The SDC

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The Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) is the Government's independent adviser on sustainable development (SD), reporting to the Prime Minister, the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales and the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland.

Following the statement by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 22 July 2010 stating that Government wants "to mainstream sustainability, strengthen the Government's performance in this area and put processes in place to join-up activity across Government much more effectively", the SDC's funding has been withdrawn by the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) effective from 31 March 2011.

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# Foreword

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## Chair's Foreword

For several decades, scientists, demographers and advisors around the world have been alerting their governments, and the wider public, to the emergence and implications of a set of interlocking global trends that will require prompt, large scale and profound decisions to be taken if their potentially devastating effects are to be averted or minimised. Over the years, the UK government has received advice and information of the highest quality from its various advisory bodies, alerting it to the consequences of increasing environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, natural resource depletion, rapid urbanisation, a warming climate, and so on. Sir John Beddington, the Government Chief Scientific Advisor, attracted considerable public and political attention by his description of the gathering strength of a 'Perfect Storm' of interlinked issues. Critically, the natural resource and environmental trends that scientists and NGOs have been measuring and increasingly agitating about are in many cases exacerbated by a set of social and demographic trends. These trends include the profoundly political issues of poverty and wellbeing, taxation and equity, infrastructure strain, population growth and the quality and quantity of our current consumption patterns and model of economic growth.

The question, in the light of such consistent advice, and the daunting implications of doing nothing, is what can and should be done, and by whom; and critically, how can government operate to deliver this change?

The establishment of the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) was, in part at least, a recognition that government is not structured, or necessarily expert enough, to be able to rise above the limitations of short-term political and budgetary cycles and narrowly focused departmental remits, to make the kinds of long-term decisions and connected responses that these major challenges demand. What was needed was a body, independent of government, but close enough to be sympathetic to the realities of working within its constraints, that could both challenge and support the development of policy and the practical realities of implementation and the capabilities that underpin and enable effective and efficient delivery.

There is a growing recognition that our political, environmental and commercial discourse, traditionally carried out separately, can no longer be so. And yet the mechanisms and tools at our disposal, within government or the private sector, often limit the discourse to managerial or departmental silos, often competitive, that deal with

issues in isolation and miss the opportunity to be both more effective and efficient in the delivery of services.

While domestic politics and government action will be the mechanism by which a sustainable future is delivered in the UK, few if any of those trends that underpin our current unsustainability are solely domestic in nature. This provides the UK government with both a challenge and an opportunity. On the one hand, the perception that possibly uncomfortable political decisions may only make a modest contribution to the scale of change that is required, and that if others don't follow a similar path the UK may be put at a disadvantage. On the other hand, real opportunities will accompany the achievement of a low carbon, high employment and more equitable, genuinely sustainable, economy.

The firm conclusion of the Sustainable Development Commission, on the basis of ten years of experience of working with government, is that sustainability works. But given the scale and nature of the gap between where we are and where we need to be, the need for a better definition of a sustainable future, and a step change in progress towards it, is both urgent and vital. Whatever language is used, natural resource depletion, biodiversity loss, fairness, human dignity, inclusion, economic development, and more equitable prosperity for an expected nine billion people by 2050 cannot be ignored, and will only be managed by a better recognition of their interconnectedness, and of the need for responses to reflect that fact.

This report, one of the last to be produced by the Sustainable Development Commission, is a summary of the major lessons learned by the Commission – its Commissioners and staff – after years of working with Ministers and officials across government to better understand some of the 'How' and 'What'. It outlines a set of principles and approaches and illustrates, with practical examples, what has worked. It is intended as a guide for those who are seeking to better understand how to approach and deliver more sustainable practices that are needed to address the world's intractable problems. While this Guide is aimed at government ministers and officials, we hope that anyone seeking a brighter future will find it helpful in his or her sustainability journey.

**Will Day**  
Chair

## CEO's Foreword

More than twenty years after the Bruntland Commission,<sup>1</sup> governments still struggle to place sustainable development at the heart of what they do. It is not as if politicians and civil servants do not care – there are a great many who have devoted substantial portions of their careers to trying to tackle at least one of the specific issues listed in the Chair's Foreword. So too have Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), businesses, community groups and individuals from all walks of life. Yet there seems to be something buried deep in human nature which finds it hard to treat the future as if it really is as important as the present, and seeks to tackle each problem separately from the others.

Yet a great deal of evidence shows that attempts to solve issues in isolation all too often result in perverse consequences elsewhere. For example, the interaction between decades of policies on food, out-of-town planning, and mobility/transport has had unforeseen consequences in terms of obesity, carbon emissions and loss of biodiversity. Sustainable development is about seeing this bigger picture. Its basic premise is that we need a different way of thinking about problems, one starting from the fact that we live in a finite, complex, interconnected world. Increasingly, we face new types of problems – “wicked issues” – which will require new types of response – flexible, adaptive, using systems thinking, seeing the whole picture not just a part of it. One of the watchwords will be creating “resilience”.

Sustainable development is a hugely powerful toolkit for finding new solutions to old problems, an operating system which has the potential to sit behind everything that our government departments, companies, schools, hospitals, local authorities and grassroots organisations do, delivering

better economic, social and environmental outcomes. Such a profound change of thinking is hard, and it is therefore perhaps not surprising that it seems likely to take us a generation or two to do it. There are so very many ways in which the institutions we have built appear hard-wired to resist such a shift. Nowhere is this more evident than within government. In the decade of its existence, the SDC has worked to help embed sustainable development as the operating system of choice for decision-makers and advisors in Whitehall, Holyrood, Cardiff and Belfast. Have there been successes? Of course: due to the hard work of many officials and some enlightened Ministers. Has the job been done? Emphatically not, in fact it has barely reached the “end of the beginning” to paraphrase Churchill.

This document looks at the experiences the SDC has had over the last ten years in working with parts of government and shares successes and barriers, challenges and opportunities. At its heart are links to case studies and examples from those who have made sustainable development work for them. We hope that it is of value to the current UK Government and to those in the three Devolved Administrations. But its themes and messages inevitably compete with proximal concerns about the economic downturn, the public deficit and spending cuts. This is ironic, since making these macro decisions through the lens of sustainable development would help to ensure that decisions taken under pressure in the short term do not put the future at risk. We therefore hope it will also be of value to future decision makers as they continue on the journey.

**Andrew Lee**  
Chief Executive Officer



# Sustainable Development and Government

The most widely-used interpretation of the term 'sustainable development' is probably that defined within the Brundtland Report in 1987, which stated that:

**"...humanity has the ability to make development sustainable – to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs..."<sup>2</sup>**

Formed under the previous Conservative Government, the UK Roundtable on Sustainable Development observed that:

**"sustainable development is a continuous process – a journey, not a destination. The key requirement is that we should all be moving in the right direction..."<sup>3</sup>**

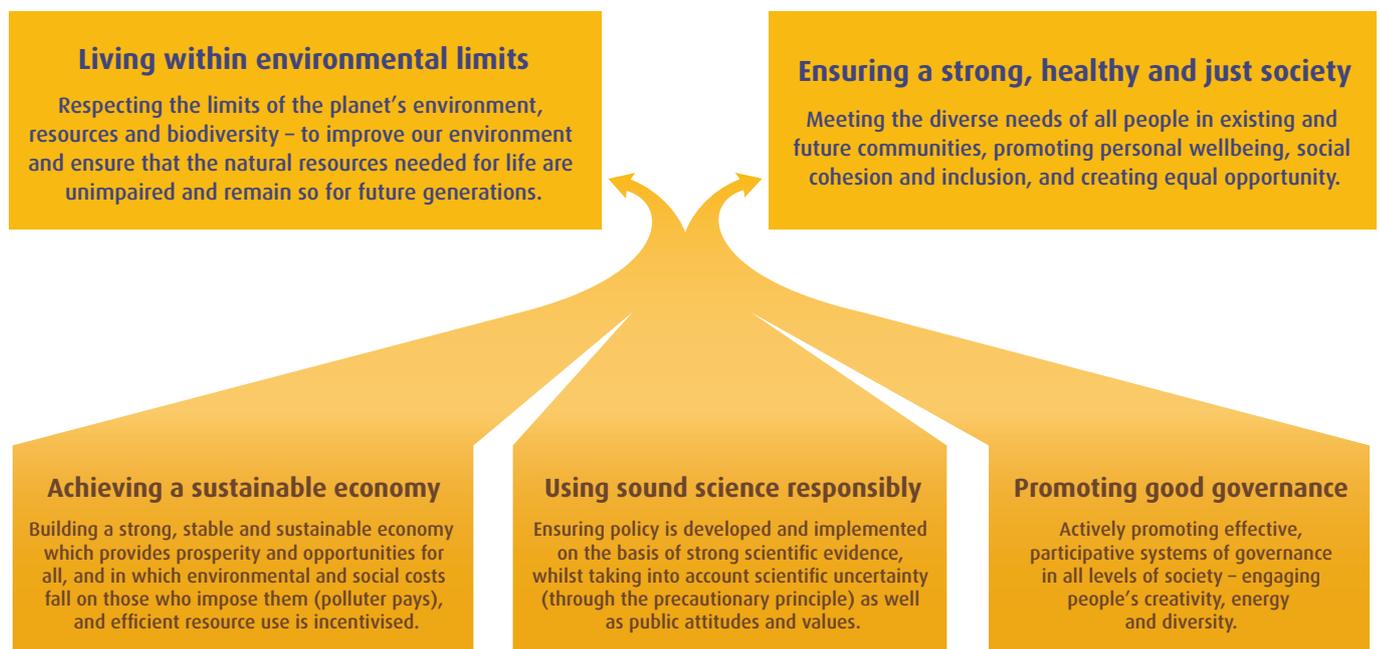
In other words, sustainable development is not a singular, prescribed outcome. It is an approach that requires many steps, trial and error, openness and learning – a continuous process to ensure the best available path is taken to achieve benefits for all, at any given time. The metaphor of sustainable development as a 'journey' is useful in explaining the way in which different organisations seek to embed principles of sustainable development in all aspects of their business, including policy, operations, procurement and people. This involves:

- Setting a clear direction for your organisation,
- Ensuring all stakeholders understand the benefits of undertaking the journey,
- Making sure you have the right tools and processes,
- Delivering on goals and ambitions,
- Learning along the way from successes and failures,
- Using that learning to plan the next steps of your journey.

**Equally important is that we work together in this journey. Government has a key role to ensure this, by setting the right direction, enabling all parts of society to contribute effectively, and ensuring we are all moving in that same direction.**

In 2005, the then UK Labour Government launched a renewed strategy for sustainable development entitled *Securing the Future*.<sup>4</sup> Along with the First Ministers of the Devolved Administrations, the shared framework *One Future: Different Paths*<sup>5</sup> was also launched. This framework document set out the common goals and challenges of the UK Government and devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Together, these documents sought to make sustainable development the central organising principle for government, and introduced the five principles set out below:

Figure 1 The Five Principles of Sustainable Development



In February 2011 the Coalition Government published its own vision: Mainstreaming Sustainable Development<sup>6</sup> to deliver their intention to:

**“stimulate economic growth and tackle the deficit, maximise wellbeing and protect our environment, without negatively impacting on the ability of future generations to do the same”.**<sup>7</sup>

With this came a different approach to that of the previous administration, centred around the role of the Department of Food, Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Cabinet Office (CO) in reviewing and “sustainability proofing” departmental business plans and looking to Parliament’s Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) to provide independent scrutiny. The challenge now will be putting this vision and approach into practice.

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## The Wider Context

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Since the original ‘Earth Summit’ in Rio de Janeiro in 1992,<sup>8</sup> international work and developments such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change,<sup>9</sup> President Sarkozy’s Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress,<sup>10</sup> the Millennium Ecosystems Assessment<sup>11</sup> and *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity* (TEEB)<sup>12</sup> have considerably advanced our thinking on sustainable development, and laid out the case for a change of pace and scale. In 2012, the third United Nations Conference on Sustainable

Development (UNCSD)<sup>13</sup> will again take place in Rio de Janeiro. Known as the *Rio+20 Summit*, its objectives are to secure renewed political commitment to sustainable development; assess progress towards internationally agreed goals on sustainable development; and address new and emerging challenges.<sup>14</sup> The UK has a vital role to play in ensuring this conference is a success by demonstrating its own commitment through ambitious and thoughtful leadership and action.

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## Using this Guide

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**This Guide provides information and advice for governments now and in the future who wish to reflect on progress and find more systemic ways of responding to the biggest challenges of the day. While successive UK Governments have made progress towards a more sustainable future, there is still much to do.**

“Government” in this document is henceforth used as shorthand for the UK Government, including its Departments, Executive Agencies, Non-Departmental Public Bodies and Non-Ministerial Departments. However, there are specific references to the Devolved Administrations. While the sub-national governance level is out of the scope of this report it remains vitally important to sustainable development. In a context where policy goals include localism and the Big Society, Local Enterprise Partnerships, Local Authorities, Local Strategic Partnerships, community groups and parish councils all have a crucial role to play.

While this Guide deals primarily with the experiences of parts of Government and the public sector, we hope that a broader audience will be able to learn from it as well, and that the case studies and examples are applicable to other sectors including business and civil society. It seeks to

provide advice for both leaders and practitioners, whether their organisations are already some way along the sustainability journey or just starting out.

In **Section 2** we look at how the principles of sustainable development can be embedded in the architecture of government to drive a cycle of continuous improvement. We also outline some of the benefits of, and barriers to adopting this approach, and how to build a business case for sustainable development.

In **Section 3** – the heart of the Guide – we examine in detail eleven components, under four areas, which as a whole should constitute the mainstreaming of sustainable development. Each is illustrated with examples. The components are then summarised in a checklist of principles of good practice against which Government and other organisations can assess progress towards sustainability in the future.

In **Section 4** we bring the discussion back to the strategic and long-term level and look at the wider context in which the UK Government and the wider world take the next steps on the journey of sustainable development.

# The Sustainable Development Approach

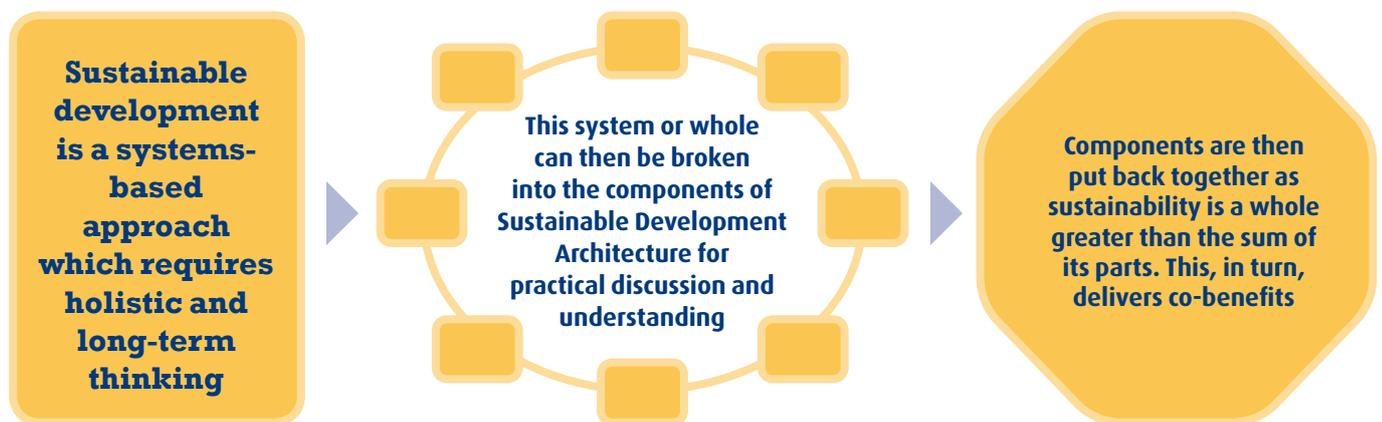
Sustainable development is a practical approach which maximises positive outcomes by recognising the interdependencies between the economy, the environment, and society. It is about securing long-term success in all three of these areas through working across sectors to deliver integrated solutions with multiple benefits. When appropriately applied, it is a concept which allows creative thinking about the interrelatedness of complex, far-reaching problems and generates new and innovative solutions.

Sustainable development is therefore a systems-based approach for achieving positive, enduring change. In Government, as in our everyday lives, the problems we face are often perceived as isolated situations or events not connected to each other, the world around us and that of future generations. Often the everyday pressures faced by officials and Ministers, coupled with the intense media and public pressure to respond instantly to events, can encourage a siloed approach to dealing with issues.

A systems approach does not mean tackling every aspect of a complex problem at the same time, but looking first at the big picture to identify specific steps to effect an improvement throughout the entire system. Sustainable development allows us to think big and act effectively.

Getting the right high-level plans in place to leverage change is essential for sustainable development to be properly embedded in any organisation, but so too is a 'bottom up' approach to particular topics or cross-cutting issues. This guide offers advice on how to do both 'top down' and 'bottom up'. It describes how the principles of sustainable development can be embedded in the overall 'architecture' of Government; focuses on specific aspects of that architecture and the structures and processes around them – with practical guidance for practitioners; and, finally, provides an overview of how all these structures and activities can be integrated into a genuinely holistic approach. This is outlined in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Understanding the Sustainable Development Approach

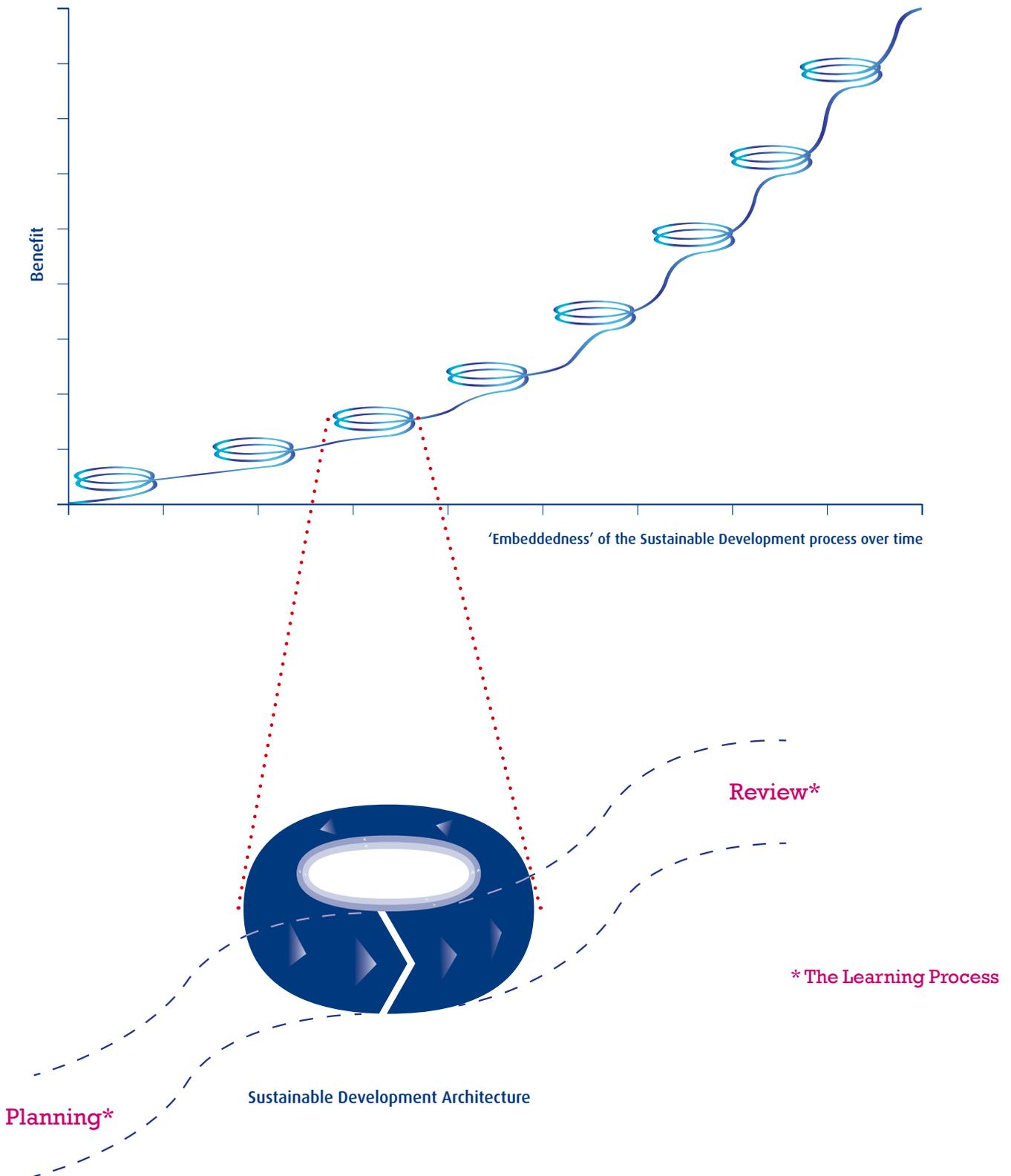


## 2.1 The Holistic Nature and Benefits of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development allows us to think holistically and for the long-term. 'Development' implies progress and improvement, while 'sustainable' suggests resilience, long-termism and future-proofing. Short-term thinking is the biggest risk to sustainable development. Progress is made through a cyclical approach of planning, delivery, reflection

and learning within the organisational strategy and culture. **Embedding the principles of sustainable development** into all aspects of an organisation's business will, in turn, result in increasing, long-term **benefits** not just for that organisation, but for the economy, environment and society as a whole. Figure 3 illustrates this concept.

Figure 3 Driving continuous improvement and increasing positive economic, environmental and social outcomes by embedding a sustainable development approach



Progress is ensured by having built-in mechanisms to ensure continuous improvement, particularly at the end of each “cycle”, where learning is reviewed, reflected upon and incorporated in the planning for the next cycle. Transparent reporting of progress and any missed opportunities is imperative if all parts of society – government, business and civil society – are to be engaged in the sustainable development journey and meaningful progress is to be made. Being honest about progress, any aids or hindrances to progress, and applying that learning to future practice builds trust and helps accelerate improvements.

This approach makes it possible to look back at the journey to date to understand where you have come from and how you arrived at your current position so that you can plan the next stages. For example, the former Government’s Sustainable Development Action Plan (SDAP) process required regular reports on progress towards individual goals which enabled Departments to reflect on their progress – aided by support from the SDC as an independent expert – and to take the next steps in their respective journeys.

This cyclical process of action and reflection has been applied with some success at UK Government level on improving the sustainability of its operations and procurement.<sup>15</sup> Notable benefits here include more efficient energy consumption, which in turn has saved taxpayers’ money and reduced carbon emissions. However, the challenge now is to take this same approach to public policy, where major, tangible benefits can be realised; both in the short-term and in the long-term. This has already begun in some areas. The Department of Health (DH)-led White Paper on Public Health, for example, recognises

environmental determinants of health, in particular the positive impact that these can have on reducing health inequalities. However, this sort of approach is very far from being embedded in policy-making processes across the whole of Government. Adopting a consistent sustainable development approach to policy development will yield joined-up solutions that address multiple problems and their root causes.

A powerful example comes from the development of policy to tackle the UK’s ageing population. Good public policy should seek to promote fairness and social justice while keeping activity and growth within environmental limits and creating a more prosperous economy. Opportunities for older people to avoid isolation, remain active, be connected to key services and contribute to society are vital in ensuring the wellbeing of the ageing population and society at large. Furthermore, a healthy and active elderly population can be key to delivering prosperity to both society and the economy through non-market activities (e.g. by becoming carers and volunteers); particularly given the shifting demographics of our society as the baby boomers age. However, historically there has been a missed opportunity in tackling the environmental factors that affect the lives of the elderly. The Audit Commission report *Under Pressure* states that a poor local external environment is one of the key factors driving the demand for social care for the elderly.<sup>16</sup> Encouraging Government Departments to work more closely to align environmental policy with socio-economic policy in this instance can provide the local external environments required to improve wellbeing and reduce demand for, and the pressures associated with, social care. Working in such a holistic way will achieve better outcomes for all of society, including the elderly.<sup>17</sup>

## The Risk of Fragmentation

Sustainable development is a central organising principle which requires central coordination for its delivery. An inability to approach the implementation of sustainable development in a strategic and joined-up manner creates a risk of fragmentation and siloed thinking. In such an approach, the multiple- and co-benefits of sustainable development would be lost. Therefore, there is an urgent need for cohesive oversight and coordination to ensure that the activities of the different players in Government – and the functions they are inheriting from the SDC – are carried

forward with a unity and thoughtfulness to drive sustainability into the heart of Government.

Defra remains the lead Department for sustainable development in Government. However it is not a central, coordinating department in the way that Cabinet Office or Treasury are, for example. The appropriate architecture must therefore be installed to ensure that there is strategic coordination of this cross-cutting agenda, so that sustainable development is indeed mainstreamed and not fragmented.

## 2.2 The Business Case for Sustainable Development

Before beginning the sustainable development journey, it is necessary to create a clear and persuasive argument for the benefits that this approach will bring in the specific context of the organisation. A sustainable development approach will yield reduced risks to organisations, enhanced resilience and responsiveness to economic and environmental shocks, cost savings and efficiencies, enhanced wellbeing of the workforce and a more positive

environmental impact of the organisation itself. The extent of these benefits will depend on the organisation's situation, and the means of achieving them will be adaptable to circumstances and requirements. Figure 4 outlines some useful issues to think about when framing the business case for Government, a Department or any organisation.

Figure 4 The Business Case for Sustainable Development



In preparing the business case, engaging the necessary stakeholders in its development from the earliest stages will help create buy-in and support. Bringing together the right people to set priorities and make key decisions will increase the probability of success. As sustainable development is a whole organisation approach, a lack of engagement across staff and associated departments or bodies risks failure through fragmentation. For further

details, see *The Risk of Fragmentation* and Section 3.1.4.2 on *Engagement*. The business case does not need to be a stand-alone document, rather a clear articulation of the benefits of a sustainable development approach in the context of your organisation, why action should be taken and what that action looks like. It is a means of getting others involved and supportive of the need to undertake the journey together.

## 2.3 Barriers to a More Sustainable Government

Over the decade in which the SDC has worked to embed sustainable development across Government it has encountered a number of barriers, such as the perceived complexity of the concept, a confusion that it relates solely to “green” or environmental issues or siloed departmental working. Figure 5 summarises these and other barriers. Some are directly within Government’s power to change, such as the quality of sustainable development toolkits available to officials; and some are more challenging, such as securing public understanding and support for sustainable development as an approach which will improve quality of life now and for future generations.

A key factor in enabling more sustainable outcomes through public policy is to establish the right architecture and processes within Government, as explained in Section 3.

A clear vision and definition of sustainable development will overcome the conceptual barriers, especially when accompanied by capability building within Government and effective engagement with the wider the public to make it easy and desirable for people to live more sustainable lives.<sup>18</sup> Many of the institutional and operational barriers to sustainability would be minimised by strong governance arrangements and effective mechanisms for delivery, reporting and learning. It will be easier to engage local governance bodies and community groups on sustainable development if a clear vision and the benefits of sustainability are apparent in every policy, regulation and piece of guidance that relates to the local level. Governments need to take long-term decisions beyond their immediate electoral value.

Figure 5 Barriers to Embedding Sustainable Development in Government



Every organisation on the journey towards sustainability encounters some or all of these barriers. Once aware of the barriers, Government should plan to avoid them, learn from mistakes along the way, identify any missed opportunities and share this experience with others to help each other along.

Exploring the potential barriers and identifying potential solutions should feed into organisational planning (see Section 3.1.1.1 – *Strategy and Vision*) and delivery (see Section 3.1.2.2 – *Delivery Plans and Tools*).

# Sustainable Development Architecture – Planning, Delivering and Learning

## 3.1 Embedding sustainable development in the architecture of Government

Sustainable development is not an ‘add-on’. To mainstream sustainable development it should be embedded in, not attached to, the existing organisational architecture of Government and its public bodies (and indeed any other organisation). In order to enhance and promote effective leadership, enable delivery and provide accountability to the public, four broad areas need to be tackled:

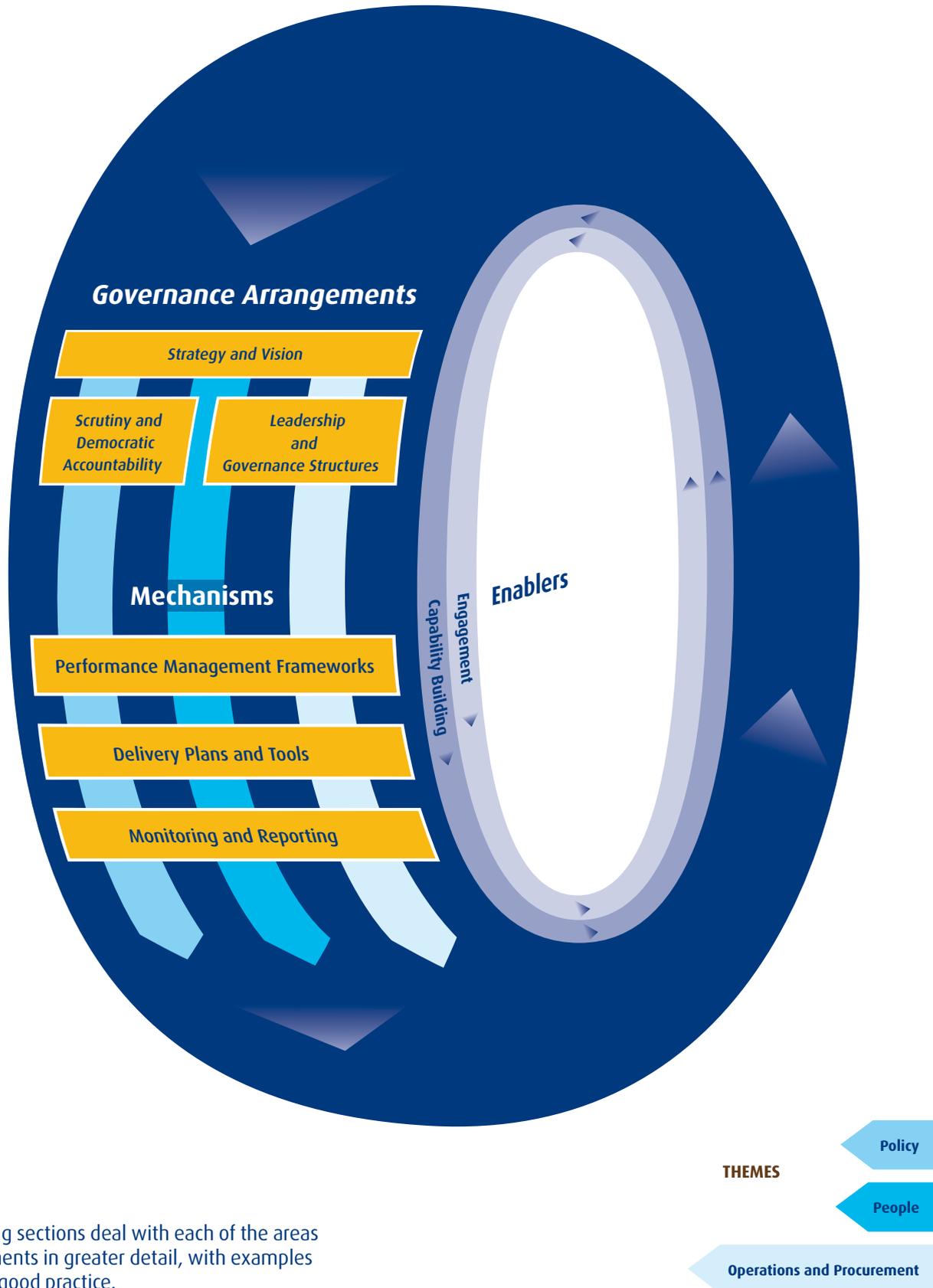
- 1 **Governance Arrangements** provide the leadership and direction required to drive the sustainability agenda, ensure the systems and processes are in place to make it happen, and also provide accountability for progress. They consist of:
  - Strategy and Vision
  - Leadership and Governance Structures
  - Scrutiny and Accountability.
- 2 **Mechanisms** provide the means to get things done. The following mechanisms are key to successfully embedding sustainability across the organisation:
  - Performance Management Frameworks
  - Delivery Plans and Tools
  - Monitoring and Reporting.
- 3 The following **Themes** run through both Governance Arrangements and Mechanisms, and should be considered at all stages along the sustainable development journey:
  - Operations & Procurement
  - People
  - Policy.

4 **Enablers** seek to create momentum, deliver action and constructively use learning:

- Capability Building develops and improves the knowledge, attitude, skills, behaviour, leadership and culture that are needed to apply the principles of sustainable development to an organisation’s core business
- Engagement deepens the understanding and commitment of both decision-makers and participants to deliver more sustainable outcomes and achieve cost and time savings. This includes engagement of staff at all levels as well as key ‘customers’ and external stakeholders (e.g. suppliers and private and third sector organisations). Engagement is about developing shared goals and getting buy-in internally and externally.

To achieve optimum progress, these four areas and their components must be considered together. This holistic approach can be applied and replicated at the macro-organisational level (e.g. pan-government or multi-national company) as well as the micro-organisational (e.g. departments and teams). A feedback loop of performance information drives continuous improvement and democratic accountability, as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6 Sustainable Development Architecture



The following sections deal with each of the areas and components in greater detail, with examples to illustrate good practice.

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## 3.1.1 Governance Arrangements

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### 3.1.1.1 Strategy and Vision

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#### Outcome

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A public statement of the Government's priorities (i.e. how it will deliver its core business for the long-term in order to achieve better and mutually reinforcing social, economic and environmental outcomes) and principles (i.e. the central organising principles through which all activities are viewed to limit adverse effects and maximise efficiency), which will enable an improved quality of life for all now and in the future, while living within environmental limits.

#### Examples

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- The UK Government has had a national strategy for sustainable development since 1994, becoming the first government to produce such a strategy following the 'Earth Summit' of 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, when governments around the world committed to sustainable development.
- The previous administration's sustainable development strategy, *Securing the Future*,<sup>19</sup> was launched by the Prime Minister in 2005, along with the framework *One Future Different Paths*,<sup>20</sup> which committed the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to achieve the goals of "living within environmental limits and a just society... by means of a sustainable economy, good governance and sound science" though a shared set of principles and priorities. This strategy gave a greater focus to environmental limits than previous strategies and brought together Government and business, civil society and local government to achieve combined action domestically and internationally. It also committed each UK Government Department and Executive Agency to producing a *Sustainable Development Action Plan (SDAP)*, setting out their individual commitment to, and priorities for, sustainable development based on their areas of responsibility (See Section 3.1.2.2 – Delivery Plans and Tools).
- In February 2011 the Coalition Government published its vision and commitment to "mainstream sustainable development".<sup>21</sup> The vision states that the Coalition will "build on the principles that underpinned the UK's 2005 SD strategy, by recognising the needs of the economy, society and the natural environment, alongside the use of good governance and sound science." The vision makes particular reference to measuring the UK's progress on quality of life, in addition to economic measures. A key challenge for the Coalition will be ensuring the principles of sustainable development are put into practice in all areas of its business by building on the work of the Government Economics Service (See Section 3.1.3.3 – Policy).
- The Welsh Assembly Government was founded with a statutory duty with regard to sustainable development. In 2009 this was further strengthened by committing to make sustainable development the 'central organising principle' of Government in Wales in its *One Wales: One Planet Strategy*.<sup>22</sup> Wales also has a Sustainable Development Charter which to date has been signed by the Welsh Assembly Government and 22 leading organisations from the public, private and third sector.

## Useful Links

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- **European Union 2006 Sustainable Development Strategy**  
<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/06/st10/st10917.en06.pdf>  
**2009 Review:** <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2009:0400:FIN:EN:PDF>
- **France's 2010 Sustainable Development Strategy**  
[www.developpement-durable.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/EN\\_-\\_dossier\\_presse\\_CIDD\\_-SNDD.pdf](http://www.developpement-durable.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/EN_-_dossier_presse_CIDD_-SNDD.pdf)
- **Department of Health's 2009-2011 Sustainable Development Action Plan**  
[www.dh.gov.uk/prod\\_consum\\_dh/groups/dh\\_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh\\_102243.pdf](http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_102243.pdf)
- **Food, Environment and Research Agency's 2009-2011 Sustainable Development Action Plan**  
[www.fera.defra.gov.uk/news/documents/sustainableDevelopmentPlanV2.pdf](http://www.fera.defra.gov.uk/news/documents/sustainableDevelopmentPlanV2.pdf)

## Case study **M&S's Plan A**

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Marks and Spencer (M&S) launched *Plan A* in January 2007 – 'committing to change 100 things over five years, because we've only got one world and time is running out'. This came from a realisation that acceptance of the status quo was not working, and that the world was changing. Three years on, *Plan A* is making a difference to the environment and its customers, employees and people working in its supply chains.

Through *Plan A* M&S introduced products and services to help customers live more sustainably, increased its contribution to local communities, and generated £50m additional profit in 2010 which has been invested back into the business.

This process began with an in-depth stakeholder engagement process to figure out what the issues were, determine what the solutions might be and provide support along the journey. This planning allowed for risk and the possibility for mistakes. M&S decided that it wanted to lead the market. Its business is predicated on leadership, and while it cannot lead on price, it can lead other things. In this case, M&S decided that sustainable development offered a competitive advantage and that it is the only way to do business.

What was then needed was a plan; Plan A as there is no Plan B.

The aim is to go beyond simple compliance with legal requirements and tackle intangibles such as bringing together traditional siloes within the organisation in order to provide integrated solutions which benefit the business and the larger world around it and seeking constant measures of performance. The benefit to the business in the short-term is a lower cost base through greater efficiencies and high resilience to commodity shocks. However, in the longer-term the benefit is a greater trust base with its customers who value a more considered and ethical way of doing business.

M&S has now extended *Plan A* to 180 commitments to achieve by 2015, with the ultimate goal of becoming the world's most sustainable major retailer.

Through *Plan A*, M&S is working with its customers and its suppliers to combat climate change, reduce waste, use sustainable raw materials, trade ethically, and help its customers to lead healthier lifestyles. To understand more of what this means in practice, explore M&S's Plan A at <http://plana.marksandspencer.com>

### 3.1.1.2 Leadership and Governance Structures

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#### Outcome

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A formal lead for sustainable development at the top of Government and each Department and division, supported by structures, staff and mechanisms which together deliver the sustainable development strategy. The aim is to ensure more effective and informed decisions which lead to improved sustainability performance and outcomes.

#### Examples

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- At UK Government level all departmental Permanent Secretaries have personal objectives related to Government operations and procurement targets. This mechanism has been key to improving the sustainability of Government operations. For details of this performance improvement, see Section 3.1.3.1 – Operations and Procurement. To drive the same success in policy outcomes, Permanent Secretaries' and Ministers' personal objectives should include objectives to embed sustainable development in policy as well as operations.<sup>23</sup>
- Governance bodies created to drive sustainable development must have complementary purposes, clear remits and strong leadership. Under the previous UK administration, separate mechanisms were established to drive the objectives of *Securing the Future* under sustainable operations and cross-departmental coordination of policy. The latter was less effective and the lack of integration between policy and operations limited effectiveness in both. Both Parliament and the current Government have noted this issue as part of the Environmental Audit Committee's inquiry into sustainable development.<sup>24</sup> For further discussion on governance and leadership barriers, see Section 2.2.

#### Useful Links

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- Jordan, Andrew – University of East Anglia, **The Governance of Sustainable Development: Taking stock and looking forwards, December 2007.**
- **Leadership for Environment and Development** (LEAD International) is the world largest not for profit organisation focused on leadership and sustainable development. [www.lead.org](http://www.lead.org)

### 3.1.1.3 Scrutiny and Accountability

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#### Outcome

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The public is able to hold the Government to account on the sustainability of its policy and operations based on regular disclosure of independently verified information, both at the level of individual departments and of the Government as a whole.

#### Examples

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- In 2005, the remit of the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) was strengthened to include the formal “watchdog” function to carry out scrutiny of Government’s sustainability performance.<sup>25</sup> This was a conscious move by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to make the SDC’s work more and establish independent external scrutiny and therefore increase the accountability of wider Government. Over the next five years this move, along with specific tools given to the SDC such the power to produce an annual report on operations and review Departmental Sustainable Development Action Plans (SDAPs), played an important role in driving up performance across Government. The SDC worked closely with the two other main central government sustainability ‘scrutineers’ of Government – Parliament’s Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) and the National Audit Office (NAO) – to provide effective scrutiny. The Government’s new vision for *Sustainable Development – Mainstreaming Sustainable Development* – states that new measures to promote “transparency and independent scrutiny” in this area will include “independent monitoring of sustainability in Government operations, procurement and policies by the Environmental Audit Committee”.<sup>26</sup> However, it is unclear what Government expects of the EAC, nor is Government able to dictate to Parliament or Parliamentary bodies how to carry out functions to hold Government to account. The Vision relies on the EAC being the key public scrutiny body, and Government will simply publish relevant data and information online “so that the public and Parliament can hold [Government] to account”.<sup>27</sup>
  - Separate sustainable development scrutiny processes are particularly useful during the initial stages of installing sustainable development architecture.
- However, at a more advanced stage, integrating sustainable development into existing internal audit processes ensures that it is hardwired into the core of business activities and allow for better monitoring. The Treasury’s Sustainability Reporting is a good example of this integration; for further details see Section 3.1.2.3 – Monitoring and Reporting. The findings of this monitoring can then be fed into subsequent rounds of activity to improve performance.
- Scrutiny can take many different forms. It can be either in-depth or light-touch, specific to a theme or all-encompassing. What is important is that it has constructive ends and is tailored to the needs of the organisation that is being assessed. Furthermore, scrutiny is not a one-off application. To be done properly it requires on-going interaction. The SDC’s pilot assessment with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the Departmental Sustainability Assessment (DSA)<sup>28</sup> model, was an evolution in the SDC’s scrutiny work developed to provide tailored advice to individual organisations in order to build their capability.
  - Government Departments have often benefitted from peer reviewing the draft SDAPs of other Departments. DWP, for example, exchanged drafts with Defra and the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) in order to learn from each others’ experience in working towards their shared ambitions for more sustainable communities and a just society. DWP benefitted from constructive advice and gained insight into how other Departments approach sustainable development. Each of the Departments were also able to cross-check targets to ensure they attaining efficiencies by cross-referencing each others’ efforts in similar areas of work.<sup>29</sup>

## Useful Links

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- The **UK Parliament's Environmental Audit Committee** (EAC):  
[www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environmental-audit-committee/](http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environmental-audit-committee/)
- The **National Audit Office** (NAO) work on sustainable development:  
[www.nao.org.uk/our\\_work\\_by\\_sector/environment\\_sustainability.aspx](http://www.nao.org.uk/our_work_by_sector/environment_sustainability.aspx)

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## 3.1.2 Mechanisms

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### 3.1.2.1 Performance Management Frameworks

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#### Outcome

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A holistic set of indicators, targets or goals against which to measure impacts to ensure progress is made towards the agreed strategy and vision, as well as making Government's progress transparent and accountable.

## Examples

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- The Coalition Government has set out its overall aims in the Coalition Programme,<sup>30</sup> which is underpinned by Departmental Business Plans with input/output metrics and outcome milestones. The Coalition Government intends to assess the sustainability of Departmental Business Plans in a regular process which will be undertaken by Defra and overseen by the Cabinet Office. Defra, the Office for National Statistics and the Cabinet Office are developing a new set of sustainable development indicators, taking account of advice from the SDC. These indicators will include a measure for wellbeing. As part of its new vision for sustainable development, the Coalition Government has reaffirmed its aim to lead by example with new "Greening Government commitments"<sup>31</sup> from 2011-12 to replace the SOGE Framework which expires in March 2011. The challenge will be ensure that any new internal commitment match and support policy ambitions which drive sustainable development.

## Useful Links

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- **Sustainable Development Indicators in your Pocket 2009** (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs 2009)  
[http://collections.europarchive.org/tna/20090810002953/http://defra.gov.uk/sustainable/government/progress/documents/SDIYP2009\\_a9.pdf](http://collections.europarchive.org/tna/20090810002953/http://defra.gov.uk/sustainable/government/progress/documents/SDIYP2009_a9.pdf)
- **Departmental Business Plans 2010:**  
[www.number10.gov.uk/news/latest-news/2010/11/business-plans-published-2-56688](http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/latest-news/2010/11/business-plans-published-2-56688)

### 3.1.2.2 Delivery Plans and Tool

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#### Outcome

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Publicly available documents which clearly set out how each Government Department will meet the commitments set out in its performance management frameworks, through specific actions within a prescribed timeframe, across Operations and Procurement, People and Policy, together with the range of tools and processes that will be used to deliver these actions.

#### Examples

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Government Departments have a variety of plans and tools to deliver their business across the themes of *Operations and Procurement* (e.g. estate management strategies), *People* (e.g. recruitment plans) and *Policy* (e.g. White Papers).

The previous administration committed all Government Departments and Executive Agencies to produce SDAPs setting out how they would deliver all their activities more sustainably and make their contribution to *Securing the Future*. Two organisations had begun to look beyond these delivery plans to better integrate sustainable development into their organisational business:

- The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has, over the past eighteen months, focused attention on integrating sustainable development into its business planning processes through department-wide engagement to examine each of the Department's business areas through a sustainability lens, identifying and addressing gaps and opportunities

- The Driver Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) took the decision not to produce an SDAP for the financial year 2009/2010 but to produce a single Business Plan/SDAP i.e. a 'sustainable' Business Plan. The Agency's Sustainability Team were largely responsible for ensuring this transition was carefully managed. Their ongoing work involved regular monitoring to ensure the success of the transition, maintaining a list of sustainability actions and priorities to ensure wider sustainable development concerns were still clear and prominent.

The Coalition Government has taken the decision to discontinue the SDAP planning and reporting process in favour of proposals to "mainstream sustainable development" in Departmental Business Plans (DBPs).

#### Useful Links

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- The **FCO's 2008-2009 SDAP progress report** outlines their progress and future plans for integrating sustainability into business planning (p 44-45 and p 53 report on business planning progress and next steps) [www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/4103709/5476465/5550005/5550012/sust-dev-progress-report-0809](http://www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/4103709/5476465/5550005/5550012/sust-dev-progress-report-0809)
- **DVLA's 2010-2011 business plan**

### 3.1.2.3 Monitoring and Reporting

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#### Outcome

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A streamlined and timely process of monitoring and reporting progress against performance management frameworks for all elements of Government's business. The ambition should be for simplified reporting that integrates sustainable development and focuses on outcomes, thus providing transparency for staff, stakeholders and the public.

#### Examples

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- For organisations starting out on their sustainable development journey, the SDC's SDAP Progress Reporting guidance will prove useful in developing their own sustainable development reporting methods. It may be useful to begin monitoring sustainable development as a separate but complementary reporting stream to core business reporting, particularly for an organisation beginning its sustainable development journey. Though these streams can operate separately for a time they should always be complementary. This will ensure that strengths and weaknesses are easily identifiable and can be targeted more effectively, and as lessons are learnt and fed back, and reporting becomes more sophisticated, the organisation can begin considering integrating it into core business reporting. The ultimate aim should always be to integrate sustainable development monitoring and reporting into a single reporting stream through the organisation's business plan, and to create more simplified reporting which focuses on outcomes
- Her Majesty's Treasury (HMT) Sustainability Reporting<sup>32</sup> – This Treasury-led guidance is an excellent step towards integrated reporting. It requires all public sector organisations to report information relating to sustainability performance in annual reports, which should also lead to improved performance management in relation to sustainability. By using a format which covers both financial and non-financial performance, it is expected that the cost and benefits of embedding sustainability will be more visible. A dry-run is underway for 2010/11 with Central Government departments before extending to all public bodies. The extension could be further improved by incorporating wider aspects of sustainability such as social impacts, beyond simply environmental issues.

#### Useful Links

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- SDAP Progress Reporting guidance – [www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=625](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=625)
- HMT guidance on sustainability and environmental reporting – [www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/frem\\_sustainability.htm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/frem_sustainability.htm)

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### 3.1.3 Themes

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#### 3.1.3.1 Operations and Procurement

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##### Outcome

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Ensuring that all aspects of Government operations, including direct management of its estate and assets and other activities supporting its work – such as travel and procurement – are carried out in ways which maximise economic, environmental and social value in the long-term.

##### Examples

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- By 2008/09, the Sustainable Operations on the Government Estate (SOGE) framework targets had helped Government improve its energy efficiency by 7.9%; reduce carbon emissions from offices by 10% and from administrative vehicles by 17%; reduce waste by 13.7% and water use by 19.9%; and increase recycling by 48.4% against their respective baselines. While this is good progress, the recent carbon footprint of Government indicated that 77% of Government's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions come from the supply chain.<sup>33</sup> Currently operations and procurement are largely seen as separate issues, which can result in the impacts of operations being shifted off the estate to external suppliers without taking action to reduce them in real terms. It needs to be clear that more sustainable procurement will help deliver more sustainable operations. While exact figures do not exist, the estimated value of the benefits from better management of carbon, energy, travel, waste and water across Government in 2008/09 can be estimated to lie somewhere between £62.3 million and £66.1 million per annum.<sup>34</sup> However, operations and procurement activity must focus on more than carbon or the usual environmental impacts of waste, water and energy, by looking to improve social issues such as local employment, living wage, work-life balance and opportunities for volunteering that come from the way Government chooses to operate internally and procure goods and services
- In 2008/2009 DWP made a significant absolute reduction of 8,000 tonnes of office-based carbon emissions against the previous year. This has shifted progress from the poor performance of a one per cent increase in emissions above the baseline year, to making progress by reducing its emissions by 2.3% below the baseline. As the second largest carbon-emitting department, this turnaround is significant for pan-Government performance as the reduction accounts for over 11% of Government-wide reduction in the same period. In addition, DWP uses the Sustainable Procurement Risk Assessment Methodology (SPRAM), a tool developed in-house for ensuring that the department's sustainable procurement targets and objectives are factored in to contract programs. All suppliers can expect to be subject to a SPRAM assessment.

##### Useful Links

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- The **Coalition Government's Greening Government commitments: Operations and Procurement**: <http://sd.defra.gov.uk/documents/Greening-Government-commitments.pdf>
- The SDC's **Sustainable Development in Government (SDiG) assessment**: [www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/sustainable-development-in-government-sdig-assessment.html](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/sustainable-development-in-government-sdig-assessment.html)

- The **Centre of Expertise in Sustainable Procurement (CESP)** within the Cabinet Office seeks to provide leadership focusing on environmental sustainability across government: [www.ogc.gov.uk/cesp.asp](http://www.ogc.gov.uk/cesp.asp)
- **Carbon Trust** provides specialist support to help organisations save energy and reduce carbon emissions: [www.carbontrust.co.uk](http://www.carbontrust.co.uk)

### 3.1.3.2 People

#### Outcomes

The development of staffing and human resources tools, processes and policies (including competency frameworks, training, induction and recruitment procedures) with the aim of ensuring:

- A working culture that recognises diversity and equality, supports a flexible working environment where appropriate, and promotes learning and development opportunities to ensure happier, healthier and more productive staff
- All staff have the awareness, understanding and skills to apply the principles of sustainable development in their working practices and in their wider community.

#### Examples

- It is important that a balance is struck between progress on the ‘formal’ elements organisational management (i.e. processes, frameworks and competencies) and the less formal aspects (i.e. encouragement of debate on sustainable development issues and general awareness raising) to ensure that people genuinely improve their capability to make more sustainable decisions rather than just complete tick-box exercises. DWP has struck this balance well by integrating sustainability into its competency framework and, similarly to the Ministry of Defence (MOD), using awards programmes to reward individual staff for sustainable behaviours:
  - Sustainability in the Department for Work and Pensions (SID) awards encourage staff to use their initiative and challenge themselves and others to act more sustainably,
  - MOD’s Sanctuary Awards provide recognition for both individual and group efforts for projects on conservation and sustainability on MOD land in the UK and overseas.
- The Coalition Government’s decision to discontinue Sustainable Development Action Plans leaves a gap in the ‘People’ aspect of its sustainability approach. As yet, there is no agreed replacement method for Departments to set out their plans in this area, or to measure cross-Government performance on how well staff understand sustainability and put it into practice in their day to day jobs, at home and in their local communities.
  - All too often sustainable development is equated with environmental issues. Therefore ensuring that competency frameworks, induction and recruitment procedures make clear that sustainable development is about the interrelations between the economic, environmental and social issues with examples specific to the organisation is a good starting point to overcome this barrier. This can then be built on through training, seminars and debates to further develop staff understanding. Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs (HMRC) Outreach Programme is an example of how staff have been encouraged to use their skills in the wider community, thereby enhancing staff understanding of sustainable development and what it means in their work:

- HMRC began the Outreach Programme to ensure that the public fully understood their potential entitlement to tax credits following research that identified low take-up in certain areas. Internal advertisements were placed for volunteers (called

Outreach Support workers) from within HMRC to go out to supermarkets, children’s centres and community groups to speak to people in the course of their daily lives and seek to improve their economic situation.

## Useful Links

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- **DWP’s SID Awards** – see page 23 of DWP’s 2009 SDAP progress report:  
[www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/sd-annual-report2009.pdf](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/sd-annual-report2009.pdf)
- **MOD Sanctuary awards**  
[www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/MicroSite/DE/WhatWeDo/Property/SanctuaryMagazineAndAwards.htm](http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/MicroSite/DE/WhatWeDo/Property/SanctuaryMagazineAndAwards.htm)  
  
<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/EstateAndEnvironment/BadgersAndBonesWinModConservationAward.htm>

## Case study **Unilever – Sustainable Living Plan**

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In 2010 Unilever, the consumer goods group, launched its Sustainable Living Plan which set out ambitious aims to grow its business “in a way which helps improve people’s health and wellbeing, reducing environmental impact and enhances livelihoods.” In addition to examining and addressing the impacts Unilever has on its customers and consumers the Plan also comprises a ‘People – creating a better workplace’ section which recognises the importance of its employees in driving forward the success and the sustainability of its business.

The Plan sets out a number of ‘People’ targets to reduce employee travel, reduce workplace injuries and reduce office waste. In addition an employee health programme has been developed “to improve the nutrition, fitness and mental resilience of employees”. Unilever’s eventual aim is to extend this programme out to all of the countries in which it operates. The programme is already beginning to show benefits for employees, with an 18% increase in the number of

people who exercised during the initial six month pilot, and for the company in terms of reducing healthcare costs and absenteeism.

Any organisation seeking to be more sustainable should recognise the impacts its business has on people; whether they are customers, consumers, suppliers or its own employees. Unilever’s comprehensive approach demonstrates a step forward in the thinking of business to better understand all the social impacts of its activities and how to become more productive and sustainable through creating the conditions for a healthier, happier workforce.

The people section of the Sustainable Living Plan:  
[www.sustainable-living.unilever.com/the-plan/people/](http://www.sustainable-living.unilever.com/the-plan/people/)

The full Sustainable Living Plan: [www.sustainable-living.unilever.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/UnileverSustainabilityPlan2.pdf](http://www.sustainable-living.unilever.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/UnileverSustainabilityPlan2.pdf)

### 3.1.3.3 Policy

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#### Outcome

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A longer-term, broader-based approach to policy-making that identifies and mitigates unintended consequences and tackles underlying causes rather than moderating symptoms. This involves examining significant impacts, understanding their linkages and improving economic, environmental and social impacts using appropriate analysis, tools and guidance.

#### Examples

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- In 2010 the Government Economics Service (GES) published their *Review of the Economics of Sustainable Development*<sup>35</sup> which explored how the sustainable development principles could be used as a framework for decision-making in government. One particular output of this work is the existence of a Social Impacts Task Force, jointly chaired by Defra and DWP, which is reviewing how social impacts will be defined and measured and will be producing its view on “macro-level” indicators of wellbeing. The intention is that this will form supplementary guidance for the Green Book<sup>36</sup> to enable policy-makers to better understand the social impacts of the policies they develop
- In 2009-2010 the Better Regulation Executive which sits within the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS) undertook a consultation to seek feedback on how the Government-owned Impact Assessment process could be improved.<sup>37</sup> As part of its contribution to this consultation the SDC coordinated a working group of sustainability practitioners to share ideas on how the process could better integrate sustainable development and enable policy-makers to make more sustainable decisions. A refresh of the entire Impact Assessment process was published in March 2010 with some progress made on highlighting the importance of sustainable development in decision-making. Although this was not the overhaul that the working group had called for, Defra have committed to continuing the work of this group in subsequent reviews as part of its Departmental Business Plan
- The Impact Assessment process also includes a Sustainable Development Specific Impact Test (SD SIT – owned by Defra) which the SDC has been working with Defra to improve. The latest version indicates that some progress has been made in creating a more user-friendly test to guide policy-makers through considering the sustainable development impacts of their policies. However, the social impacts section is largely underdeveloped and Defra have acknowledged that this is a work in progress. Defra plan to use the work and findings of the Social Impacts Task Force to build on the social impacts section of the Test over time
- The Department of Health (DH) has a centrally located analyst who supports colleagues across the department with carbon and sustainability appraisals of policy options
- The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has developed its own tool – The Approach to Sustainable Development in Policy-making – for measuring the sustainability of policies and programmes developed through the Impact Assessment process, as well as establishing mechanisms for monitoring progress.

#### Useful Links

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- **GES Review of the Economics of Sustainable Development:** [www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/economics/susdev/documents/esd-review-report.pdf](http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/economics/susdev/documents/esd-review-report.pdf)
- **The HMT Green Book:** [www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/green\\_book\\_complete.pdf](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/green_book_complete.pdf)

- **Sustainable Development Specific Impact Test (SD SIT):** [www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/policy/guidance/sd-impact/](http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/policy/guidance/sd-impact/)
- **The FSA Approach to Sustainable Development in Policy-making:** [www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/board/fsa080904a.pdf](http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/board/fsa080904a.pdf)
- **The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) reference manual** providing guidance on Integrated Policymaking (IP) with a view to promoting sustainable development.

## Case study **DfE – Embedding SD in policy**

Over the period 2004-2010 the UK Department for Education (DfE), whose remit covers children, young people and schools in England, entered into a unique partnership with the UK Sustainable Development Commission (SDC), the Government’s advisory body on sustainability issues. SDC advisers were embedded in the Department to evolve ideas that were ambitious for sustainable development and which also would improve the lives of children and young people – and hence were supportable politically by an education ministry. The partnership was highly successful, twice gaining recognition from the Government as a whole through its Civil Service Awards programme.

In the very early stages of the partnership many parts of the stakeholder community across England were mistrustful and unbelieving about the DfE’s commitment to sustainable development. They argued that sustainability was not a priority for DfE; that any support it did give amounted to warm words and the occasional ‘random act of kindness’. Over the last five years, however, perceptions have shifted greatly. Putting the Department’s relationship with stakeholders onto a strong and positive footing has been crucial to driving forward a shared agenda and improving cooperation between voluntary sector organisations.

Internally within DfE, the greatest challenge was to reframe sustainable development as a positive opportunity for children and young people; in other words to show how it could enable the Department to deliver its objectives more effectively through it than without it. The technical language of sustainable development was getting in the way so a new way of describing it was invented: “care for oneself, care for each other (across cultures, distances and generations) and care for the environment (both far and near)”. This simple message was understandable by teachers and built on what they thought they were already doing, but extended their horizons to the environment. It was also sellable internally as it was a ‘good thing’

for children and elicited a positive response from the education community.

Eight sustainable schools “doorways” were chosen to cover a broad social and environmental spectrum. Thus, alongside energy, water and waste (but not biodiversity which in retrospect would have been well received by stakeholders) there were inclusion, participation, local wellbeing and the global dimension. The resulting National Framework for Sustainable Schools was holistic and far-reaching – it urged schools to consider SD in teaching and learning, school management and community engagement (‘curriculum, campus, community’).

The framework offered schools recommendations on where they should be by 2020, encouraging them to set their own path to success without central prescription. The doorways could be tackled one by one, in groups, and in any order, based on local needs and priorities. They are all interconnected and progress in one area could open up opportunities to tackle others.

DfE realised from the start that schools could not meet the recommendations without considerable support from the wider education system in which they are situated, including local government, school inspection, teacher training, leadership development, national curriculum, architects and building contractors, and of course children and parents themselves. This has been the focus of much of DfE’s work on sustainable schools since the framework was originally launched.

When UK charity Groundwork surveyed the uptake of sustainable schools in 2008, they found that around 70% of schools in England had travel plans, 70% had obtained the healthy schools mark, and 50% were registered with Eco-Schools.<sup>i</sup> This indicated that a large number of schools were engaged in some aspect of sustainable development, as countless school case studies across the country also suggested.

School action on sustainability made a vital contribution to local efforts to secure sustainable communities, both through tangible outcomes such as reduced carbon emissions and social cohesion, as well as through the formation of positive sustainable behaviours in young people and their families. The

concept of the school as an engine of social change in communities was central to the sustainable schools vision.

- Progress Summary for Mainstreaming Sustainable Schools, Groundwork UK, March 2009.

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## 3.1.4 Enablers

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### 3.1.4.1 Capability Building

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#### Outcome

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Enhanced capability of individuals, team or department to address sustainability in their work, demonstrated by co-development of policies and strategies across an organisation and continuous learning and improvement.

#### Examples

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- Department of Health (DH) – the SDC has taken an active role in helping to integrate sustainability in DH policy through embedding SDC staff within the department to assist with general projects, and also providing more targeted support for individual policy teams.
- Department for Education (DfE) – Over the period 2004-2010 the UK Department for Education (responsible for children, young people and schools in England) entered into a partnership with the SDC to build its staff capability for sustainable development. Capability building exercises should cover skills, tools, and cultural change, all of which require constant work to achieve alongside embedding sustainable development in the architecture of an organisation. In particular, capability building should focus on the people within an organisation (see Section 3.1.3.2 – People for further details). SDC advisers were embedded in the Department to produce ideas and encourage new and ambitious ways of thinking to build the Department’s capability to improve the lives of children and young people.
- Over the past few years, the SDC has worked closely with Government to improve internal institutional arrangements, governance structures and capabilities for delivery of sustainable operations and procurement. Responding to recommendations made by the SDC, the Government announced a new Centre of Expertise in Sustainable Procurement (CESP) within the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) in 2008, and also appointed a Chief Sustainability Officer to lead this agenda in Government. Both have now moved to the Cabinet Office (CO). CESP is tasked with ensuring appropriate government action and delivery around sustainable operations and procurement. CESP produced the first government operations and procurement Delivery Plan in August 2008 and have published annual updates since. The Delivery Plan set out the trajectories and initiatives government and departments have developed to achieve the SOGE targets. The SDC provided support and advice during the drafting of the Plan. In addition, the Permanent Secretaries of the government departments also now have sustainable operations targets in their personal objectives, which has helped raise the priority level of this agenda across government and turned performance into positive progress. For further details on Operations and Procurement, see Section 3.1.3.1.

## Useful Links

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- The SDC's webpage on capability building: [www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/capability-building.html](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/capability-building.html)

## Case Study **The Good Corporate Citizen (GCC) Model**

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The Good Corporate Citizenship Assessment Model (GCC Model) is an online resource developed by the Sustainable Development Commission, and funded by the Department of Health, for NHS organisations. It contains a self-assessment test that allows organisations to rate their progress according to sustainability criteria in six key areas: procurement, buildings, facilities management, travel, community engagement, and workforce. In addition to the strategic and challenging self-assessment test, the GCC Model includes: guidance on integrating sustainable practice in NHS organisations, cutting-edge case studies, a calendar of events, and a networking forum to share best practice.

The GCC Model encourages organisations to take the test (establishing a baseline), and continue to do so on a regular basis (e.g. every six months), monitoring progress over time. This enables organisations to pinpoint areas of work and develop future policy and action plans to address their individual issues of sustainable development, ultimately improve sustainability performance. Trusts which use the GCC Model are encouraged to use a variety of approaches to establish and communicate their work on corporate citizenship within their organisations. As such, the Model has been used as a platform for launching sustainable development-focused staff inductions, staff health initiatives/schemes and internal communications channels to raise awareness and encourage involvement.

Moreover, in carrying out the assessment, in addition to the greater collection of tools on the website, NHS organisations have reported improved capability to deliver on sustainable development goals. The assessment outlines clear achievements for trusts to strive towards. This gives managers, many unfamiliar with sustainable development, the confidence to know what needs to be achieved, helps them set goals, with the website library of resources enabling them to realise these aspirations.

Quickly being established as the leading sustainability

benchmarking and learning tool, by September 2010 over 80% of all NHS Trusts were registered as users on the GCC Model, exceeding the 2010-11 target after only six months.

Inspired by the Good Corporate Citizenship Assessment Model, **Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust** developed a corporate environmental strategy, a training and awareness raising programme for staff and service users, and new projects to improve efficiency. They first completed a baseline with the GCC assessment test, involving up to 20 employees, organised into sub-groups dependant on their relevancy to the six sections of the Model. Board buy-in was established partly due to the analysis gap identified through this process. In addition to a new programme of training, in which over 1400 employees have been trained in energy and environmental efficiencies, Birmingham and Solihull have an active GCC element in their on-going communications strategy. In the first year, the Trust had reduced energy consumption by 3%, and saved over £150,000 by diverting waste from landfill and income generated from waste metal (2007-2009).

Extending engagement to the outer community, **University Hospitals Birmingham Foundation Trust (UHB)** has developed a range of programmes to help it engage with the local community and tackle long-term unemployment – a key determinant of health. With 6,900 employees and a budget of over £400 million, the Trust has recognised the potential of acting as a Good Corporate Citizen – reducing inequalities and improving health and wellbeing in its local area, while at the same time, reducing its carbon footprint. Their Building Health training programme has helped nearly 300 people into jobs and nearly 900 people have progressed into further training or learning.

Aiming for the “excellence” level in all six areas of the GCC Model, **Sandwell PCT** has demonstrated active prevention and investment in the future of its community. In addition to employee benefits such as cycle and bus schemes, car sharing days and so on,

Sandwell PCT is the first PCT in England to introduce National Standards BikeAbility cycle training for staff and the public. Improvement to staff health and satisfaction is demonstrated through a decrease in staff sick days by 1.95 in comparison to other PCT sites. Engaging staff in sustainable awareness, such as hot-desking, reduced use in meeting rooms, light sensors and decreased use of printers, this PCT has reduced annual energy costs per person by 18.5% in one year.

Trusts have said that the GCC Model is useful for establishing baselines, identifying policy gaps, providing future direction and reporting:

**“Our Trust monitors itself against the GCC assessment tool... this has helped us reduce carbon emissions and gives us guidance in addressing gaps against government targets... Numerous improvements have been made using the toolkit and it also helps develop business cases.”**

Director of Nursing and Governance  
Foundation Trust

Senior involvement and responsibility was regarded to be vital in driving forward corporate citizenship, and it was accepted that there is much work to do in raising awareness and interest amongst Board members:

**“Each of our board members are calculating their own carbon footprint. This gets them involved and interested in carbon reduction and has paved the way for those within the Trust to start thinking about sustainable development in their own work and personal lives.”**

Director of Strategy and Planning  
Hospital Trust

**“The GCC toolkit has not only helped ensure our baseline performance, but also we were able to use it as a framework for developing the Trust’s action plan for performance improvement.”**

Director of Facilities  
Foundation Trust

### 3.1.4.2 Engagement

#### Outcome

Engagement on sustainable development should bring together the necessary stakeholders to improve resource efficiencies, minimise environmental and wider impacts and support common social needs for a prosperous, healthy and just society. It is important for an organisation to identify its stakeholder (partner/interest) groups and establish a programme of engagement to feed into its prioritisation and decision-making processes, garnering support while identifying risks and opportunities, and building transparency around its efforts.

#### Examples

- Government is a key potential influencer on sustainable development across the UK and internationally. It is important that it engages fully with a wide variety of interest groups on a wide variety of SD issues in order to improve awareness, understanding and practice as well as enable other groups to act as sustainably as possible. *Breaking the holding pattern: a new approach to aviation*

*policy-making in the UK*<sup>38</sup> – brought together key stakeholders in the aviation and environment sector to reveal widespread controversy over the basic data on air travel in the UK. The report concludes that a new evidence base establishing the true benefits and impacts of aviation must be created before any decisions on major airport expansion can take place

- The SDC’s project on infrastructure and place regeneration, *The Future is Local: Empowering communities to improve their neighbourhoods*,<sup>39</sup> benefitted significantly through extensive, prolonged engagement over a year-long research period. By collecting and holding regular meetings between ‘task groups’ of over fifty experts in total from government, industry, business and community groups, the project team amassed a bank of wide and impartial opinion and analysis, and tested their hypotheses and findings with those well-qualified in a range of relevant fields. Three task groups of 15-20 members were gathered regularly to discuss the core project themes of financial viability, technical viability and community engagement, and a steering group of 18 met a further four times to oversee the direction of the project’s objectives and outcomes. More informal

consultations were also undertaken on specific themes and outputs. The project team also engaged with over 30 community groups, local authorities and businesses to provide case studies for the final project report, learning from and providing lessons to others on key ‘hands-on’ issues.

- This range of expert analysis gained through in-depth discussion and direct feedback provided information and evidence which could not have been amassed in such detail and with such authority with the time and human resources available to the project team alone. It ensured that the project met the aims and needs of the audience and of project sponsors (including central Government departments), and provided a clear level of reliability and authority on publication.

## Useful Links

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- The SDC’s webpage on engagement, including tools, guidance and examples:  
[www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/engagement.html](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/engagement.html)

- The SDC’s report, *The Future is Local: Empowering communities to improve their neighbourhoods*  
[www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/the-future-is-local.html](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/the-future-is-local.html)

## 3.2 Checklist – Principles of Good Practice and Government's Plans

The table below summarises the components of sustainable development architecture presented in Section 3.1. It highlights the key audience for each component and distils the outcomes and examples into principles of good practice. The last column maps the Coalitions Government's

February 2011 plan for mainstreaming sustainable development against this structure. This checklist is meant to be a tool with which Government and others can assess the progress of Government's current plans for sustainable development in the future.

For Leaders			
Area	Component	Principles of Good Practice	Coalition Government's Plans <sup>40</sup>
Governance Arrangements	<b>Strategy and Vision</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A public statement sustainable development: what does it mean to your organisation, your objectives, your staff and how you do business? Develop your business case.</li> <li>• A clear set of high-level priorities and principles.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vision for sustainable development published February 2011.</li> </ul>
	<b>Leadership and Governance Structures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A formal lead for sustainable development at the top of the organisation who is also accountable for the delivery of sustainable development.</li> <li>• A high level group of organisation leaders (e.g. government ministers or corporate executives) to oversee the delivery of a new or refreshed sustainable development strategy.</li> <li>• Appropriate levers for change, people and processes identified and assigned to specific parts of your organisation who will help deliver sustainable development.</li> <li>• Senior leaders who have in their objectives the aim of providing support and guidance for those below to deliver more sustainable outcomes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "The Environment Secretary will sit on the key domestic policy Cabinet committees, including the Economic Affairs Committee, to enforce the Government's commitment to sustainability across policy making."</li> <li>• "A Ministerial Steering Group will oversee delivery of new Commitments for Greening Government's Operations and Procurement."</li> </ul>
	<b>Scrutiny and Accountability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A transparent and accessible system which holds the organisation to account for its performance on sustainable development together with an ability to independently verify self-assessments – this could be a requirement as you make further progress, rather than initially, as the organisation develops along the journey.</li> <li>• Access to impartial expert advice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Developing real and measurable indicators to monitor sustainability across Government and report results publicly."</li> <li>• "Independent monitoring of sustainability in Government operations, procurement and policies by the Environmental Audit Committee."</li> <li>• "More frequent and up-to-date publishing of information and statistics online will replace annual reports on sustainability to allow constant scrutiny of progress and performance."</li> </ul>

For Practitioners			
Area	Component	Principles of Good Practice	Coalition Government's Plans <sup>40</sup>
Mechanisms	<b>Performance Management Framework</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Systems which set the strategic direction for performance through indicators and targets to enable monitoring and reporting on progress and feed into future planning and monitoring.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Developing real and measurable indicators to monitor sustainability across Government and report results publicly."</li> </ul>
	<b>Delivery Plans and Tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear objectives supported by specific, measurable, accountable, realistic and time-related actions.</li> <li>Actions that cover the totality of an organisation's business.</li> <li>Integration with business planning processes and support longer-term goals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustainable development objectives to be delivered through Departmental Business Plans.</li> <li>Government has reaffirmed its aim to lead by example with new "Greening Government commitments" for operations and procurement from 2011-12 to replace to old target framework which expires in March 2011.</li> </ul>
	<b>Monitoring and Reporting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effective monitoring systems to gather information in a timely and efficient way.</li> <li>Reporting of data which is transparent and accessible to allow accountability</li> <li>The ambition for better, more simplified, integrated reporting which seeks to minimise the reporting burden.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Developing real and measurable indicators to monitor sustainability across Government and report results publicly."</li> <li>"Independent monitoring of sustainability in Government operations, procurement and policies by the Environmental Audit Committee."</li> </ul>

## For Leaders and Practitioners

Area	Component	Principles of Good Practice	Coalition Government's Plans <sup>40</sup>
Themes	<b>Operations and Procurement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leading by example.</li> <li>• Consideration of both direct and indirect impacts, including those from your supply chain.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Reducing Government's waste generation, water use and greenhouse gas emissions. Waste will be cut by 25 per cent (approximately 74,000 tonnes) by the end of this Parliament. Best practice water efficiency methods will be put in place across Government, as well as a new stretching commitment on greenhouse gas reduction which builds on the current 10 per cent announced by the Prime Minister in May 2010."</li> <li>• "Ensuring the Government buys more sustainable and efficient products and engages with its suppliers to understand and reduce the impacts of supply chains."</li> </ul>
	<b>People</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable development principles embedded into competency frameworks, tools and processes, including recruitment procedures.</li> <li>• Identifying champions for sustainable development who can support others in developing their understanding of sustainable development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government's vision does not provide clear plans in this area.</li> </ul>
	<b>Policy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A cross-government, approach which is broad-based and long-term.</li> <li>• Investment for the long-term to reduce the need for future spending.</li> <li>• Integrated decision-making across organisations which have similar goals and interests.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Defra will take the lead responsibility for reviewing departmental business plans in relation to SD principles. The Minister for Government Policy will then hold departments to account through the quarterly business plan review process."</li> </ul>

## For Leaders and Practitioners

Area	Component	Principles of Good Practice	Coalition Government's Plans <sup>40</sup>
Enablers	<b>Capability Building</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capability building that tackles causes rather than treating symptoms.</li> <li>• Engagement with leaders and practitioners to develop their understanding of sustainable development, but fundamentally targets whole teams and entire organisations not just the champions.</li> <li>• A centrally-coordinated, systematic approach to incorporating capability into the organisation.</li> <li>• Embedded in skills, knowledge and people, i.e. human resources policy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government's vision does not provide clear plans in this area.</li> </ul>
	<b>Engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A programme of engagement which brings together the necessary stakeholders to improve resource efficiencies, minimise environmental impacts and support of common social needs.</li> <li>• Create staff buy-in at different levels for implementation of sustainable development approach and delivery of improved performance.</li> <li>• Engagement which is linked to capability building so that learning is an integral part of participation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government's vision does not provide clear plans in this area.</li> </ul>

# 4 Conclusion

## Putting It Back Together and Looking Forward

One of the benefits of globalisation has been a better understanding of the inter-relatedness of our world. A full understanding of the components of the system is vital, but must be seen as part of the bigger picture which is created by the interplay of different impacts and outcomes. The Earth is a system in a fine and delicate balance.

At both a political, economic and ecological level, we know that an action in one part of the globe may cause an effect in another, far-removed place. From the shrinking of ice caps, to the decline of species populations, to a changing and increasingly unpredictable global climate, it is now commonly agreed that the impacts humans have on the planet are not only growing in magnitude, they are growing in consequence. These problems are compounded by a world slowly recovering from a global financial crisis, in which the transition to a more sustainable economy must be an overriding imperative.

Over the past ten years the SDC has found increasing and encouraging evidence of sustainability action at grass roots and individual level, in each sector of business and amongst Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and academic institutions. Some of these potential 'breakthroughs' were highlighted in the SDC's 2010 report *Breakthroughs for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*.<sup>41</sup> These activities, if scaled up and rolled out, could take us a long way towards a more sustainable future. Linking together such actions and people is part of the solution, but so too is reforming the way our institutions work. Embedding sustainable development into organisational architecture is essential if we are to tackle the biggest and most pressing issues of the day in a more joined-up way. Nowhere is this more the case than with Government itself and the public sector. Multiple benefits can be achieved simply through joined-up thinking and approaches. To give one example, improving access to, and the quality of, green space can improve local infrastructure for active travel while also improving health (including reducing health inequalities), wellbeing, biodiversity and the appearance of the local environment. However, individuals must be given rights and responsibilities in equal measure. The ability for personal action must be coupled with the understanding of what is the right thing to do.

We have shown in this report that sustainable development is a central organising principle which, if properly adopted, offers a systems-based approach to understanding impacts (both positive and negative), their underlying factors and

gives insight into ways to minimise dangerous activities while maximising positive outcomes. In times of increasing austerity this makes sense for governments, businesses, community groups and individuals alike.

It will also be essential to find ways of hard-wiring this approach over successive political cycles, or we will run the risk that the changes that have been made, and the benefits that have been so hard won, step by step, will unravel. There is as yet no equivalent for sustainable development of the Climate Change Act, carbon budgets and the reporting role of the Climate Change Committee. These mechanisms do bind successive UK Parliaments and Governments to a clear overall direction of travel even if the specific policies vary. Therefore, do we need a Sustainable Development Act? A Commissioner for the Long Term? An Office for Future Generations? All have been suggested for the UK and have been established, or are being planned, in other countries. With the closure of the SDC, this is unfinished business on a grand scale – how to take the future wellbeing of people and planet out of short-term parliamentary cycles and partisan politics. If ever there was a candidate for cross-party consensus this is surely it.

It is therefore in our best interest to ensure that all development is sustainable. The productivity and health of our home relies on it. Sustainable development is a journey of discovery, and that journey includes self-discovery. We are lucky to be alive at a time when our understanding of the world, our place in it and the fragility of it all is greater than ever. But, with this knowledge comes great responsibility. High levels of consumption of fossil fuels could possibly be excused when the impacts were not understood. That ignorance is no longer an excuse; humanity is at a cross-road in its journey and decisions must be made. Rio+20 represents one of these watershed moments where humanity has a choice. Do we continue a path of ill health for the planet and its species – with rising prices, increased scarcity of resources and greater injustice? Or do we choose a greener, healthier and fairer world? The development that has come in the past has

provided exceptional and unprecedented advancement for the human race. It has brought much good, and while it has been at a high cost, our own evolution as a species is directly linked to it. We must now consider the next stage of human development. And we have the chance to do so with a higher degree of awareness, understanding and sensitivity than our predecessors ever had.

We can no longer simply think of existing from generation to generation, but must ensure that fairness and equality is passed through generations and that the world we leave is as good as, if not better than, the one we found. In other words, we must govern for the future.

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