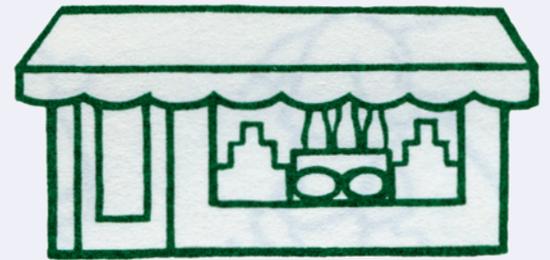




# Making

# Sustainable

# Lives



# Easier



## **Acknowledgements**

### **Drafting team:**

This report was written by Claire Monkhouse and Sue Dibb.

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## Foreword

Living within our means is not tomorrow's luxury. It is today's necessity. Climate change, species loss, habitat destruction, resource depletion, water quality, food security: the roll-call of concerns from unsustainable living is mounting. To ignore these impacts today is to create an unpayable mortgage on our children's wellbeing tomorrow. The time for concerted action is now.

As the evidence in this report shows, the challenge of enabling sustainable lives is not straightforward. Nor can it be left to the vagaries of the market. Individual behaviours are deeply embedded in a social context. We are guided as much by what others around us say and do and by the 'rules of the game', as we are by personal choice. We often find ourselves 'locked in' to unsustainable ways of living by the physical and institutional constraints around us.

Those who do make an effort to live more sustainably often find themselves swimming against the tide or, worse still, cast as second class citizens in a society hooked on unsustainable growth and seduced by material expansion. Good intentions are continually undermined by relentless signals to consume and the absence of real opportunities for people to flourish in less materialistic ways.

Ultimately, of course, all sectors of the 'big society' must take some responsibility for change. Business, the media, community groups and citizens all have a role to play. But many of the respondents in our study made one thing very clear: Change will be impossible without strong leadership and investment from governments.

Individuals are too exposed to social signals. Businesses operate in competitive markets. A transition from unsustainable self-interest to socially and ecologically responsible living requires urgent changes in underlying structures. Changes that strengthen long-term commitment. Changes that support the infrastructure of sustainable living. Investments in low-carbon transport, effective recycling, energy efficient

dwelling. Maintenance and protection of common assets, public buildings and green spaces. Fiscal and institutional frameworks that send consistent signals to businesses and consumers about sustainable living.

Policymakers may be uncomfortable with the idea that they have a role in influencing people's lives and values. But it is fanciful to suppose that Government can ever be entirely neutral in the social context.

A myriad of different signals are sent out. For example by the importance accorded to economic indicators, the way education is structured, guidelines for public sector performance, public procurement policies, the impact of planning on public and social spaces, the influence of wage policy on the work-life balance, the impact of employment policy on economic mobility (and hence on family structure and stability), the effect of trading standards on consumer behaviour, the nature of regulation of advertising and the media and the support offered to community initiatives and faith groups. In all these arenas, policy shapes and helps to create the social world.

The transition to sustainable living demands changes in underlying structures – changes that strengthen social behaviour and support the social good. Government is the principal agent in this task. Our evidence confirms a mandate for this role which extends across the business community, third sector organisations and the public. A new vision of governance which embraces this role is vital.

### **Tim Jackson**

Economics Commissioner  
Sustainable Development Commission

## Executive summary

*'Convey what sustainable lifestyles are about and how great it is to live them. The changes don't require drastic personal sacrifices or huge expense, nor do they hinder individual freedoms or compromise national development. They create healthier, better connected, more stable communities and environments. It has got to be a positive message. It has got to be about what we gain, not what we give up'. United Nations Environment Programme (2010)<sup>1</sup>*

An increasing number of us recycle, insulate our lofts and choose more 'green' products but we are far from living lives that are 'sustainable' for future generations. It's a well quoted statistic but still a powerful one – if the whole world consumed as we do in the UK we would need three planets to sustain everyone<sup>2</sup>. The economic, environmental and social consequences for people and the planet from this excessive and unequal resource use make the goal of sustainable lives not a 'nice to have' some day but an essential priority for governments right now.

This report sets out what is needed, from governments and others, to help enable us all to live sustainable lives in our homes and communities. The evidence we present to support our recommendations reflects the views of over fifty officials across the four governments in the UK and experts from business, civil society and academia that the SDC interviewed in 2010. The interviews focussed on the challenges for government and others in putting us onto a sustainable pathway. Our advice also draws on the SDC's expertise and experience from ten years of providing sustainability advice to the governments of the UK, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

This report is timely given current interest in behaviour change and the role of government, business and the Big Society to deliver. Participants in our study, including government officials, welcomed the opportunity to share their views. They also wanted to be part of future conversations and activities to enable people to live more sustainable lives. There was a strong sense from participants inside and outside of government that *'we all need to be in this together'*.

Our advice and recommendations are intended to assist the UK Government and the governments of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to

develop strategies that enable more sustainable living in our homes and communities, in the way that we travel, the food we eat, the products and services we buy and our health, education and overall wellbeing. We advise on strategies to enable people towards sustainable behaviours and investigate the benefits and limitations of the Coalition Government's favoured 'nudge' approach. We show how the infrastructure we use – the 'choice architecture' in which we live – often limits or restricts our freedom to make sustainable choices. We also propose a new approach to mainstreaming sustainability, one in which government, business, communities and civil society organisations work in partnership to make sustainable choices the norm, the default choice for all.

The SDC is not seeking to prescribe individual lifestyles. Nor do we expect government or others to tell people how to live their lives. Yet the increasing number of people who try to 'do the right thing' often find themselves swimming against the tide of society's norms. Our research shows the need for more concerted approaches to addressing our behaviours: fundamentally changing the context in which we live our lives so that sustainable choices can become the norm. Hence the focus of our work is on exploring how every one of us – not just 'green' pioneers – can be 'enabled' or helped in a range of ways to live more sustainable lives now, and in the future.

Our research shows that the concept of 'sustainable lives' is not yet well understood by government officials or the experts we talked to. Joined-up policy, policy implementation and public participation will be very difficult without an agreed, consistent and practical understanding. The SDC uses the term 'sustainable lives' to encompass a broad and positive vision of living within the limits of the planet's capacity while providing health, wellbeing and quality of life for this generation

(throughout its lifetime) and for future generations.

Environmental elements such as low-carbon, energy efficiency, waste, recycling and efficient resource use, are increasingly the focus of action. Still, few government officials and experts that we interviewed recognised the opportunities presented by the concept of sustainable lives to create social benefits such as health, equity, fairness, happiness or quality of life. To fully mainstream sustainability approaches government needs a better understanding of the mutually reinforcing nature of various activities and the potential for additional benefits. These effects also need to be communicated more effectively.

### Government's challenge

The participants in our research identified a number of challenges for government to address.

- The lack of definition, clear direction of travel or 'vision' for sustainable lives is a challenge. Business participants in particular talked of the need to have a clear steer from government, to help them feel more confident in moving further and faster; while government officials talked of the challenge of designing policy when there is no clear end goal. As one business participant put it: *'There is a crying lack of strategic vision of where we want to get to.'*
- The overwhelming predominance of consumerism within our society and economy is a further significant challenge to motivating sustainable behaviours.
- Mixed messages from inconsistent or contradictory policy decisions creates confusion and undermine existing buy-in. VAT reductions by the last government to kick-start the economy and the former decision to build a third runway at Heathrow were cited as such examples. The low level of public acceptance was further attributed to the perception that sustainable behaviours cost more, that people are simply not convinced of the case for change and to poor government communications.

- Government behaviour change initiatives – such as the Act on CO<sub>2</sub> campaign - focuses too heavily on approaching the public as individuals and consumers, rather than as citizens engaged within communities. This was a recurring theme raised by academics and NGO's. SDC's previous work in this area, *I Will If You Will*<sup>6</sup> (the report of the UK government's Sustainable Consumption Roundtable in 2006) made clear that the scale of transformation needed to address the major challenges of climate change, obesity and global sustainability will not be achieved solely by the personal choice of willing 'green' consumers.

Participants were positive to some of the plethora of activities geared towards encouraging sustainable behaviours from government, business and civil society, but considered that current activity is too fragmented and insufficient to meet the scale of the challenge. Government initiatives in particular were considered far too timid given the scale and urgency of the challenge. The narrow consumer-based approach ignores some of the most powerful levers of all, such as embedding sustainability at all levels of the formal education system.

Our research identified an essential role for governments to provide leadership by setting out a clear strategic direction in the realisation of more sustainable lives. We make specific recommendations to all governments on realising this in practice including the need to show how it intends to work effectively across departments, and with communities, businesses and civil society organisations to deliver real change.

Government officials in our research were unsure what the UK Coalition Government's policies of 'nudge', Big Society, localism, the financial cuts and new ways of working – with less emphasis on regulation and more delivery by business and civil society – will mean for their work and the enabling sustainable lives agenda. They asked *'will nudge be sufficient?', 'where will funding and capacity for Big Society come from?', 'will localism mean inequalities between areas?', 'will business deliver without incentives?'*. We recommend that all four governments clarify how these political agendas can be used to support and enable sustainable lives.

We welcome the current political interest in behaviour change and the potential opportunities this opens up for enabling people to live more sustainable lives. The UK Coalition Government has enthusiastically endorsed 'nudge' and has set up a Behavioural Science Unit within the Cabinet Office. This unit will explore 'non-bureaucratic alternatives to regulation' to promote 'more responsible' business and consumer behaviour. Using behavioural science to understand how people behave in the real world to develop ways of engaging and motivating behaviour change is essential to enabling sustainable lives. However, it is unclear how Government intends to use the nudge approach in practice and to which 'policy areas' it is to be applied. Further, it is vital for Government to ensure that investment is made in altering the choice architecture – i.e. the structural context in which we live our lives – without which it will be impossible to deliver the scale of transformation necessary.

In our day-to-day lives few of us are able to make sustainable choices easily. We live in poorly insulated homes, find it difficult to leave our cars behind without affordable, accessible, convenient and safe alternatives, and are surrounded by unhealthy food choices which are relentlessly promoted as desirable and attractive. Creating environments and communities where sustainable choices are the norm is simply impossible without determined and systematic use of the full range of levers that governments have at their disposal to encourage behaviour change (as illustrated by the 4E's model of behaviour change of engaging, exemplifying, enabling and encouraging<sup>4</sup>). This means being prepared to use appropriate interventions – including regulation, the provision of incentives, economic levers and standard setting – wherever the evidence shows that they are effective.

Ruling out mandatory approaches ignores the evidence of what has driven change towards sustainable behaviours to date. For example, uptake of energy efficient white goods such as fridges and washing machines has been driven by mandatory A-G energy efficiency standards coupled with legislative requirements on business (through the Carbon Emissions Reduction Target – or 'CERT') to subsidise the price of more energy efficient models to consumers. Similarly, improvements in rates of household recycling have been driven by European targets and escalating costs to local authorities from the mandatory Landfill Tax. Vehicle emissions only showed significant improvement when mandatory targets were introduced – after a voluntary agreement with Europe's car makers failed to deliver.

Interventions – or packages of interventions – need to be 'fit for purpose'. They need to be designed according to the audience and intended outcome and based on evidence of what works. Our research identified an essential role for governments to provide a framework that requires, supports, or allows others (business, communities and civil society as well as individuals) to take action.

Participants in our research wanted to see government develop more effective partnerships with business, local government and civil society. SDC has strongly advocated the need for these sectors to work collaboratively in the widely accepted 'triangle of change' approach in *I Will if You Will*<sup>5</sup>. Government needs to harness the energy and influence of these players by providing strategic oversight, setting the overall direction of travel, bringing players together, and enabling and supporting others to play a full and effective role in enabling change. The example of CERT illustrates this partnership approach in practice, as identified by one business participant in our research:

*'All have a role to play. For example, on CERT (Carbon Emissions Reductions Target) it's a government requirement, delivered by energy companies, in partnership with local authorities, and needs engagement with customers and with housing companies/landlords...'* (Business participant)

'Softer' policy options, for example responsibility deals with business (such as the Courtauld Commitment on waste reduction and resource efficiency<sup>6</sup>) can help deliver within such a framework, provided that government and business jointly agree stretching targets, against which progress is monitored, reviewed and reported transparently. We recommend that such deals – for example those currently being developed with business by the UK Secretary of State for Health on obesity and other public health issues – reflect these best practice principles.

Government needs to engage with the third and community sectors to identify how these organisations can play a fuller role in enabling sustainable lives. There must be capacity and funding to enable them to take on new responsibilities effectively and efficiently. It is also important to identify instances where there is no substitute for government action.

The wider public sector, most notably health and education, has enormous potential to help enable sustainable lives. This includes harnessing the significant power of public sector spending. With the shift towards 'localism' new structures, such as Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), will need to recognise the scope for supporting sustainable lives in local areas.

Behaviour change is complex. Enabling sustainable behaviours is particularly challenging because of the disconnect people feel between the immediate benefits of unsustainable lifestyles, for example being able to fly to a beach holiday in the winter, and the longer term negative impacts on the environment, society and themselves. Social science can help policy makers understand why people behave as they do and help design more effective policies and interventions to support behavioural goals. Yet our research found that there is a lack of political support to use the body of evidence which exists in designing interventions. Our research identifies a lack of relevant behaviour change skills and capabilities within government. We make a number of recommendations to build governments' capabilities, ensure better evaluation of behaviour change interventions and to develop cross government learning.

Our research shows the need for new approaches that shift our fundamental behaviours. It means not placing too much emphasis on any one mechanism, but using an appropriate combination of levers. We advocate an approach that uses four key pillars to underpin the transition to more sustainable lives:

- **A clear positive vision for sustainable lives** that engages all players and is clear about the priorities for action to achieve the goal of sustainable lives.
- **Making it easy** by providing a framework that uses the full spectrum of levers and incentives to 'enable' us to do the 'right thing' more easily.
- **Working with others** through better collaboration and better partnerships between national and local governments, civil society organisations, businesses, communities and people themselves. They all play a vital role in the transition to sustainable lives.
- **Building capabilities and using evidence** to create better understanding of what works in practice, and using this knowledge in policy making.

## Recommendations

We make a number of specific recommendations to UK and Devolved Governments.

### All four administrations

- We recommend that the UK and Devolved Administration Governments set out their own cross-government action plans for enabling sustainable lives by December 2011. Building on existing work, these need to go beyond action on climate change, state the level of ambition, provide strategic direction and detail how all players will work together to deliver policies and programmes that enable people to live sustainable lives. They must reflect the SDC's four key pillars for enabling sustainable lives and make full use of the wide range of interventions illustrated in the 4Es model for behaviour change – engaging, exemplifying, enabling and encouraging. Their scope needs to include policies on greater energy efficiency in the home and in the workplace,

sustainable travel and food, waste reduction, sustainable products and supply chains, education, health and wellbeing and sustainable communities.

For effective traction across government these plans need to be led from the centre of the respective governments. In Whitehall, this will require the Cabinet Office to lead, working closely with Defra and other key departments. In Scotland we recommend the Greener Directorate. In Wales it should continue to be the Department for the Environment, Sustainability and Housing. In both Scotland and Wales there will need to be appropriate transfer within any restructuring post the elections in May 2011. In Northern Ireland the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister in Northern Ireland should lead. Systems also need to be in place to support collaboration and shared learning between the four administrations.

### **Specific recommendations to UK Government**

- Defra, DECC and BIS must embed commitment and action towards enabling sustainable lives in the business-focussed 'Roadmap to a Green Economy'<sup>7</sup>, which is expected by April 2011. This needs to identify how the Government intends to work with businesses including domestic energy suppliers, the food industry, retailers, manufacturing, transport providers and the home improvement sector to develop roadmaps for sustainable lives.
- DECC, DH, Defra, BIS and DfT need to ensure that responsibility deals with business adhere to best practice principles by agreeing stretching goals and having procedures in place to monitor, review and transparently report on progress.
- The Office for Civil Society (Big Society) and CLG (localism), in collaboration with other government departments including Defra, DECC and DfT, must embed support for sustainable lives in these policies and engage with the voluntary sector and community groups to identify how such organisations can play a fuller role.
- Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) need to support sustainable lives if they are to be successful in achieving their remit of strengthening local economies, creating the right environment for business to grow and rebalancing local economies towards the private sector. To facilitate this, the Regional Growth Fund should consider how to maximise the impact on enabling sustainable lives through stimulating private sector investment for long term economic growth and creating additional sustainable private sector jobs.
- HM Treasury and the Cabinet Office need to include details on how the delivery of public services will support the achievement of wider societal goals, specifically sustainable lives, in the forthcoming White Paper on public service reform (expected in early 2011).
- The Office of Government Commerce (OGC), supported by Defra, needs to actively promote the delivery of sustainable lives objectives through procurement across the public sector, provide guidance to support delivery and review progress. This should include identifying opportunities to achieve wider benefits through pan government framework contracts. These benefits should also be included in Value for Money assessments.
- OGC should introduce robust demand management procedures across government. Where there is a need for procurement, only goods and services that meet the minimum standards of the mandatory Government Buying Standards – which are designed to make it easier to support sustainability through procurement practices – should be available to buyers. The OGC should enforce the standards, monitor compliance and report on progress. In addition, Defra – who lead on the technical specifications – should ensure that Government Buying Standards are designed to drive forward the market for more sustainable goods and services, improve sustainability in public sector supply chains, as well as helping Government meet its own operations and procurement targets to become the 'Greenest Government ever'. The Buying Standards should also be

actively promoted to the wider public sector.

- The Cabinet Office working with the Head of Profession of Social Science in Government and the National School of Government must provide details of how Government will develop capability of staff across departments for advising on behaviour change and its application in policy making. This needs to include the means to co-ordinate and share learning across government. We recommend that the remit of Treasury's Behavioural Science in Government Network is widened to include expertise from outside government. Defra's newly established 'Centre of Excellence' on sustainable behaviours should also have a formal role to share its learning and expertise across government.
- The National Audit Office (NAO) must work with experts in behaviour change inside and outside of government to establish robust evaluation methodologies for behaviour change interventions. It should publish guidance by end 2011 and promote its use across government. NAO should use the guidance in its Value for Money evaluations.

#### **Specific recommendations to the Northern Ireland Executive:**

- The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) to include enabling sustainable lives as the central principle of its forthcoming Sustainable Consumption Action Plan. This should form a key part of the Government's plans to implement its sustainable development strategy.

#### **Specific recommendations to Welsh Assembly Government**

- The new sustainable development body in Wales will have a key role in enabling sustainable lives. It should build on the work already begun by the Welsh Assembly Government, the SDC and Cynnal Cymru-Sustain Wales to support civil society in taking action, develop partnerships to

tackle difficult issues, convene stakeholders and advise Ministers on the policies required across government to enable citizens to make sustainable choices.

#### **Specific recommendations to Scottish Government**

We recommend that after the elections in May 2011 the new Scottish Government must build on the progress to date and the recommendations in SDC Scotland's Fourth Annual Assessment<sup>8</sup> to:

- Develop a set of progress measures that clearly sets out a long term vision for a sustainable Scotland.
- Ensure the correct structures and arrangements are in place to embed the Public Bodies Duties across all work of the public sector in Scotland and ensure all public bodies 'lead by example'.
- Launch a new programme of support for communities interested in carbon reduction and sustainable development drawing on the lessons of the Climate Challenge Fund and other programmes such as the Scottish Sustainable Communities Initiative and 'Smarter Choices – Smarter Places'.
- Develop a programme of active engagement on climate change and sustainable development with the public and all sectors of Scottish society.
- Actively use the Scottish Government's Climate Change Behaviours Research Programme, due to report in February 2011, in policy development across all policy areas, especially transport, energy efficiency, food, consumption and planning.
- The Scottish Government needs to refine the National Performance Framework (NPF) to better take sustainable development principles into account. More work is needed to ensure these are effectively translated to local action, through for example Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs) which set out agreed strategic priorities between government and each community planning partnership.

## 1. Introduction

Since 2000 the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) has been the independent advisor on sustainable development to the UK government and the governments of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In 2009 our stakeholders inside and outside of government told us that the need to enable people to live more sustainable lives was one of a number of sustainability priorities that any future government will need to address. This resulted in Enabling Sustainable Lives becoming one of our work programme priorities for 2010/11. This work aims to increase knowledge and confidence within key government teams (e.g. sustainable homes, food, transport, energy, education) and across government to act in ways which support and promote more sustainable ways of living.

The SDC seeks to ensure that its advice and capability building support to government is based on evidence of the needs and challenges that governments face. We have therefore undertaken a programme of work for the Enabling Sustainable Lives project that includes semi-structured interviews with over fifty government officials and experts from business, civil society organisations and academia<sup>9</sup>. In addition we undertook desk based research to map current government, business and civil society initiatives aimed at enabling sustainable lives, and to collate existing evidence on behaviour change theory and practice. We also hosted two workshops with seventeen government officials from ten Whitehall departments to share initial findings from our research, to identify opportunities in the UK Coalition's agenda and to prioritise next steps. In Scotland we participated in discussions with community groups engaged in Scotland's Climate Challenge Fund around enabling behaviour change at the local level.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in summer 2010 and covered:

- understanding of 'sustainable lives' and what it means to 'enable'
- views on how government and others are currently enabling people to live more sustainable lives

- the challenges that government and others face
- roles for government, business and others; and
- views on what is needed to move progress forward.

The subject had a high degree of salience for those we talked with. Participants, including government officials, welcomed the opportunity to talk with us and share their views. They were interested in being part of future conversations and activities to enable people to live more sustainable lives. There was a strong sense from participants inside and outside of government that '*we all need to be in this together*'.

The findings from this research provide the basis for this report. They also informed a separate submission that the SDC made to the House of Lords Enquiry on Behaviour Change in October 2010<sup>10</sup>.

As government's advisors, our primary audience is leaders within government, including Ministers and officials, from departments with responsibilities where our daily lives have most impact: the environment, food, transport, homes and communities, infrastructure, business and energy, health and education. Many of these policy areas are devolved in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. We also work with departments such as the Cabinet Office responsible for co-ordinating across government and building government capabilities.

Our research will be valuable to the many leaders in businesses, civil society organisations, academia, local government and communities who are engaged with the challenge of enabling more sustainable ways of living, in the UK and elsewhere.

### Our track record

The SDC has a strong track record of developing evidence-based advice to Government on enabling people to live more sustainable lives as part of a society that is just, healthy and fair and lives within environmental limits.

This body of evidence includes Professor Tim Jackson's landmark report for the SDC, *Prosperity without Growth? (2009)*<sup>17</sup>. It identifies the need for a new model of consumption within a sustainable economy by reconciling our aspirations for 'the good life' with the constraints of a finite planet. Commissioner Alan Knight's thinkpiece, *Sustainable Lives (2009)*<sup>12</sup> discussed what a sustainable life might look. *I Will if You Will (2006)*<sup>13</sup> - the report of the UK Sustainable Consumption Roundtable which SDC co-hosted - identified peoples' homes, travel and food as the priority areas for reducing environmental impacts (including climate change), while also improving social outcomes such as health and wellbeing. It also made clear that the scale of transformation needed to address the major challenges of climate change, obesity and global sustainability cannot be achieved by 'green' consumers alone: Government policies and business practices need to ensure that sustainable choices are the easy choices for everyone. This message was reinforced by SDC Wales in its 2009 report *Low Carbon Wales (2009)*<sup>14</sup>. It called for a focus on improved quality of life through making low carbon lifestyles 'citizen easy'.

Our work has advised on sustainable diets (*Setting the Table, 2009*<sup>15</sup>); sustainable travel (*Smarter Moves, 2010*<sup>16</sup>; *Getting There, 2010*<sup>17</sup>), homes and communities (*Stock Take, 2006*<sup>18</sup>; *The Future is Local, 2010*<sup>19</sup>) and sustainable products and supply chains (*You Are What You Sell, 2007*<sup>20</sup>). We have also showcased ideas that could have a transformative effect on the sustainability of the economy, places and people's lives (*Breakthroughs for the 21st Century, 2009*<sup>21</sup>) and advised DECC on a public facing narrative on climate change. On a more 'hands on' level, SDC Scotland was commissioned by Scottish Government to provide advice and support and encourage networking between community projects funded through the Climate Challenge Fund<sup>22</sup>. More recently, we have published work on transport and fairness (*Fairness in a Car Dependent Society, 2011*<sup>23</sup>), stressing the vital need for policy to impact equitably across society, and provided advice to local governance bodies and community groups on living within environmental limits (*Environmental Limits: A Local Leaders' Guide, 2011*).<sup>24</sup>

## Our approach to enabling sustainable lives

We use the term 'sustainable lives' to encompass a broad and positive vision of lives lived within the limits of the planet's carrying capacity which also provide health, wellbeing and quality of life for this and future generations.

We found this concept of 'sustainable lives' is unfamiliar and not well understood among those we talked with. In our research participants most commonly linked the term to reducing the negative environmental impacts of our lifestyles, carbon in particular, and to recycling, resource and energy efficiency or 'doing more with less'. While these are important elements, far fewer government officials and experts that we interviewed recognised the opportunities within this concept for maximising benefits such as health, equity, fairness, happiness or quality of life. Having a more 'sustainable lifestyle' was predominantly seen to involve giving things up that you enjoy or value, rather than a different lifestyle with positive benefits to offer. It was also seen as something to be communicated *to* people, rather than building their capacity and offering the opportunity for them to develop their own new practices and helping them to sustain these changes for longer.

This highlights the need for sustainability approaches to be mainstreamed throughout government to ensure these connections and positive benefits are more widely communicated and recognised in policy making. Key points in communicating the concept are that it is more than carbon, and more than the environment; it is about healthy and fair societies that live within environmental limits.

It's about the way we all live our lives, in our homes and communities, the way that we get around, the food that we eat, the products and services we use, and our health and wellbeing. It's also not just about people as individuals. It is about social interaction and how we come together as communities, in our neighbourhoods, in our workplaces and schools and in our societies, at all stages of our lives. Equity and fairness are core elements – these are lives that need to be available to everyone in society, not just now but also for future generations. Sustainable lives are best framed positively – emphasising the gains for individuals and wider

society – as illustrated by the UNEP Sustainable Lifestyles Taskforce Manifesto<sup>25</sup>:

*'Convey what sustainable lifestyles are about and how great it is to live them. The changes don't require drastic personal sacrifices or huge expense, nor do they hinder individual freedoms or compromise national development. They create healthier, better connected, more stable communities and environments. It has got to be a positive message. It has got to be about what we gain, not what we give up.'*

### What we mean by 'enabling'

When we use the term 'enabling' in our work and in this report we mean making it *easy and desirable* for people to live sustainable lives. In

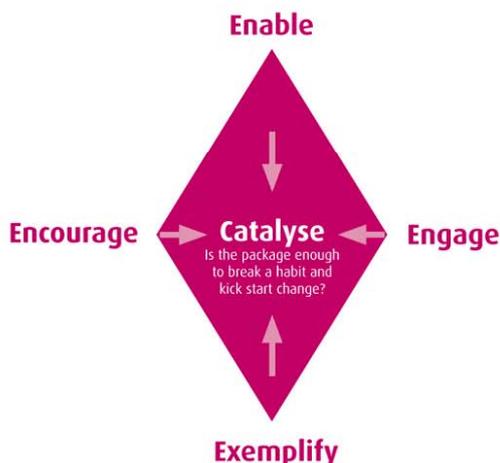
this context it is about having the right incentives, approaches and structures in place that support, encourage and make sustainable lives the easiest and most accessible choice for everyone (individuals, communities, businesses, etc). Through education, training and developing new skills people can identify what that means for them.

Government has described this approach in its '4Es model of behaviour change' (Figure 1) which was introduced in the UK Sustainable Development Strategy (2005)<sup>26</sup>. This identifies the different levers and approaches available to influence behaviour. It takes account of some of the social and practical factors that influence and limit our choices.

**Figure 1: 4Es Model**

Approach evolves as attitudes and behaviours change over time.

- Tax system
- Expenditure – grants
- Reward schemes
- Recognition/social pressure – league tables
- Penalties, fines and enforcement action



- Remove barriers
- Give information
- Provide facilities
- Provide viable alternatives
- Educate/train/provide skills
- Provide capacity

- Community action
- Co-production
- Deliberative fora
- Personal contacts/enthusiasts
- Media campaigns/opinion formers
- Use networks

- Leading by example
- Achieving consistency in policies

The model illustrates an active approach to influencing behaviour by identifying different interventions that can be used to reinforce each other; each contributing to the overall impact.

Many of the participants in our research identified with this spectrum of ways in which people can be enabled to live sustainable lives, from providing information and ‘choice editing’ to providing supportive infrastructure and incentives, removing barriers and demonstrating (exemplifying) how it can be done. There was general recognition that it is complex – there are no magic bullets – and success requires a range of approaches delivered by different actors, including government, business, individuals and communities.

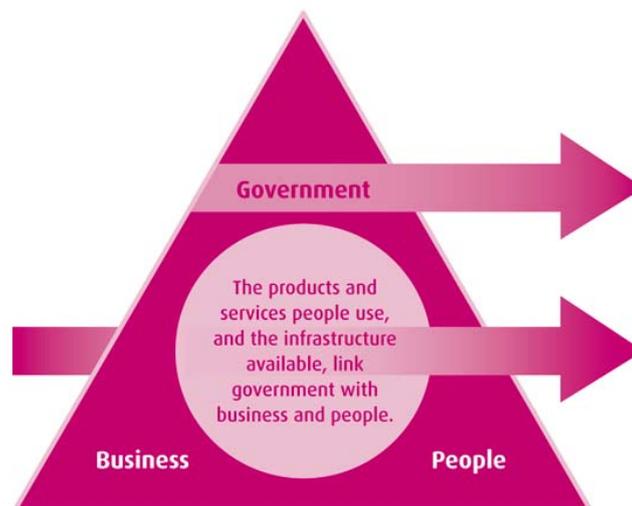
This approach to delivery is illustrated by SDC’s ‘Triangle of Change’ (Figure 2) model introduced in *I Will if You Will*<sup>7</sup>. It recognises the important roles for government, business and civil society to work together in synergy to enable the transition to more sustainable lives. This is highly topical given the current debate about the extent to

which government should act and how much can be handed over to businesses and civil society to deliver.

What the triangle of change model makes clear is that **all** have a role to play – dependent on what each is best able and best placed to deliver. Government, for example, is best placed to deliver regulatory frameworks and incentives while removing barriers. Businesses can develop and market more sustainable products and services. Approaches to encourage individuals to change behaviour are often best delivered at a community or organisational level, making use of networks of trust and influence. People are at the heart of both domestic and workplace behaviour changes. As a quote from our research illustrates:

*‘All have a role to play, for example, on CERT (Carbon Emissions Reductions Target) it’s a government requirement, delivered by energy companies, in partnership with local authorities, and needs engagement with customers and with housing companies/landlords...’ (Business participant)*

**Figure 2: Triangle of Change**



## The policy context

The need for the transition to more sustainable lives and for government and others to enable this transition is not a new challenge. The UK's Shared Framework for Sustainable Development (2005)<sup>28</sup> recognised the severity of impact associated with patterns of production and consumption and identified it as one of four priority areas for immediate action. The UK's strategy<sup>29</sup> committed the four UK governments to 'helping people make better choices' and achieving a 'one planet economy' through sustainable consumption and production. It also identified that the fastest and largest growing pressures on the global environment come from household energy and water consumption (including the products we use within our homes), food consumption, travel and tourism. This still holds true today. It set out a number of actions for addressing these challenges, including initiating the Sustainable Consumption Roundtable. The Roundtable was co-hosted by the SDC and published its recommendations in the report *I Will if you Will*<sup>30</sup>. Although the Government's Strategy now needs updating, the need for sustainable lives and for government and others to work together to bring about the changes needed continues to be highly significant.

International leaders have also recognised the challenges of 'unsustainable lives', and following the 2002 UN World Summit on Sustainable Development signed up to the 'Marrakech Process'<sup>31</sup> to support the elaboration of a '10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Production and Consumption'. The Marrakech Process aims to assist countries in their efforts to green their economies, help corporations develop greener business models, and encourage consumers to adopt more sustainable lifestyles. The programme will be reviewed by the UN Commission on Sustainable Development during 2010/11, and at the Rio+20 Earth Summit in May 2012. At the European Union level the 2009 Review of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy<sup>32</sup> identified the shift towards more sustainable consumption behaviours as a priority area for any future strategy to consider.

The UK has initiated policies that start to respond to the challenge. Most notably the Climate Change Act (2008) made it the first country in the world to set legally binding

'carbon budgets', with targets to cut emissions by 34% by 2020, and by at least 80% by 2050. A number of flagship policies have been identified to help deliver these targets. This has included

- proposals for a 'Green Deal'<sup>33</sup> to help households and businesses finance energy efficiency improvements;
- a new obligation on energy companies to support energy efficiency measures for their customers (to succeed the Carbon Emissions Reduction Target) which supports vulnerable low-income consumers and hard-to-treat homes;
- the roll out of smart meters to enable better home energy management;
- establishing a Green Investment Bank to lever private investment in clean energy and green technologies;
- and launching a 'Roadmap to a green economy'.

Scotland wants to go further faster and has set out its aim to achieve 42% cuts by 2020<sup>34</sup>. This will be delivered in part through its new Energy Efficiency Action Plan<sup>35</sup> which aims to reduce Scottish final energy consumption by 12% by 2020. The plan relies heavily on behaviour change. The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to making 3% annual cuts in emissions in areas of devolved responsibility from 2011<sup>36</sup>. It is also making sustainable development its 'central organising principle'<sup>37</sup>. As part of its delivery plan for emissions reduction the Welsh Assembly Government is beginning a nationally-led, locally implemented behaviour change programme based on a social marketing approach. It has established a framework contract for services to support this<sup>38</sup>. The Northern Ireland Executive has committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 25% by 2025. It has established a cross departmental working group on greenhouse gas emissions which will produce an agreed mitigation programme to support its existing measures<sup>39</sup>.

Looking beyond carbon to the wider sustainable lives agenda, the UK Coalition Government<sup>40</sup> has set out its aim to be 'the greenest government ever', and has made commitments including setting the path towards a 'zero waste' economy through a review of waste policies; encouraging

sustainable food production; and various measures outlined in a White Paper on public health<sup>41</sup>. This includes plans to tackle issues such as obesity through responsibility deals with business, voluntary and community sector organisations and local government. The plans also look at food, alcohol, physical activity and health in the workplace.

Many initiatives and campaigns geared towards enabling people to live more sustainable lives are already underway. Our mapping of current activity identified a wide range of actors involved in a variety of ways, from national and local government, to businesses, NGOs, community groups and the wider public sector. These often work in partnership. Box 1 illustrates examples of the different kinds of activities we found. However, participants in our research were concerned that these initiatives do not yet address the totality of the challenge, are often developed in a piecemeal, compartmentalised way and are limited in scope.

Despite all the policy and practical activity aimed at enabling people to live more sustainable lives there remain three key challenges. Firstly individual commitments do not yet address the totality of the problem, and instead deal with issues in a piecemeal way. Secondly delivering on the political commitments, including clarifying detailed policies and targets. Thirdly the uncertainty of whether all the existing activity will be effective as a whole.

This context provides both opportunities, and challenges for progressing the sustainable lives agenda. We discuss the challenges faced by government and others in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3 we outline a new approach for enabling sustainable lives and make a number of specific recommendations to government departments in Whitehall and to the governments of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

### **Box 1: Examples of interventions and initiatives relevant to enabling sustainable lives**

#### **Government/EU**

- Regulatory e.g. Energy Performance Certificates, Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT)
- Standard setting e.g. product standards such as energy efficiency of white goods, vehicle standards
- Fiscal incentives e.g. boiler scrappage scheme, landfill tax, feed-in tariffs, reconnect grant (NI)
- Responsibility agreements with business e.g. Courtauld Commitment on packaging and waste
- Government funded community-based initiatives e.g. DECC's Low Carbon Communities Challenge, Sustainable Travel Towns, Scottish Government's Climate Challenge Fund
- Government funded 'Greener Living Fund' for third sector organisations
- Government funded public health campaigns e.g. Change4Life.
- Government mass media campaigns e.g. Act on CO<sub>2</sub>, THINK! Road safety campaign, Mr Earth and Go Greener campaigns in Scotland.
- Labelling schemes e.g. A-G energy labels, front of pack food nutrition labelling
- Information provision e.g. DirectGov Greener Living pages

#### **Local authority initiatives**

- City initiatives e.g. European Covenant of Mayors, Newry City Low Carbon City Project (NI)
- Local authority initiatives e.g. waste and recycling schemes, Smarter Choices Smarter Places travel initiatives

#### **Private sector initiatives**

- Business initiatives e.g. Marks and Spencer's Plan A, EDF Energy Team Green Britain
- Product and supply chain initiatives e.g. Defra's product roadmapping, industry product developments
- Assurance schemes e.g. Fairtrade, Marine Stewardship Council, Forestry Stewardship Council

#### **Civil society**

- NGO initiatives e.g. 10:10, We Are What We Do, Transition Towns, Global Action Plan 'EcoTeams'
- Partnerships e.g. We Will if You Will, National Children's Bureau Young Activists programme
- School-based initiatives e.g. Sustainable Schools, Eco-schools, Healthy schools, Soil Association Food4Life partnership.

## 2. The challenges

No-one should underestimate the scale of the transformation required to move us from our current unsustainable path onto a more sustainable one. The challenges are not just about the hard facts and figures on the risk of dangerous climate change, population growth, biodiversity loss, or on ill-health. These help tell us why we need to act but the most significant challenges reflect the human and societal elements of change – the issues of political will and leadership coupled with our responses as human beings to the sustainability challenges.

These two elements – the ‘politics’ and ‘people’ came out clearly in our research as two of the main challenges experienced by government and others in enabling people to lead sustainable lives. Our research also identified two further significant challenges: the lack of a clear, positive vision and leadership around ‘sustainable lives’; and the need to know more about what works to bring about the changes needed.

We explore each of these challenges below.

### 2.1 The politics

Mention behaviour change to most politicians and the fear of being seen as the ‘nanny state’ looms large. A number of Government officials in our research saw this as a major challenge for enabling sustainable lives.

*‘One of the main challenges is that politicians are very nervous of telling people what they can and can’t do’ (Government official)*

*‘Ministers are nervous about preaching to people about what to do with their lives in case they get caught doing the opposite’ (Government official)*

*‘People don’t want to hear it and politicians don’t want to say it.’ (Government official)*

This is not a simple challenge. Some participants recognised the difficulty of balancing people’s expectations for government to take action with their rejection of government ‘interference’. Getting this balance right is difficult and not always successful.

*‘Balancing the fact that people do expect government to be doing something about it, but at the same time don’t welcome interference from government’ (Government official)*

*‘There was a backlash against Home Improvement Packs... It’s a challenge in cases where people are asking for legislation as a solution, but then if there is a backlash it’s hard to get policy levers, even though there’s a clear understanding that we need to do something’ (Government official)*

These concerns are not new but participants in our research recognised that the current economic and political circumstances provide a new context. The UK Coalition Government has made clear its position on the role of the state and its intended approaches to deliver societal goals. Out, it says, are the ‘bureaucratic levers of the past’. In are ‘alternatives’ to regulation, a greater emphasis on ‘personal responsibility’, behaviour change through ‘nudge’ techniques and an enhanced role for the private and third sectors.

*‘There has been the assumption that central government can only change people’s behaviour through rules and regulations. Our government will be a much smarter one, shunning the bureaucratic levers of the past and finding intelligent ways to encourage, support and enable people to make better choices for themselves’*

*‘We need to promote more responsible corporate and consumer behaviour through greater transparency and by harnessing the insights from behavioural economics and social psychology’.*

*‘The Government believes that we need action to promote public health, and encourage behaviour change to help people live healthier lives. We need an ambitious strategy to prevent ill-health which harnesses innovative techniques that help people take responsibility for their own health’.* (Coalition programme<sup>42</sup>)

Within this context our research identified five political priorities and policies that all have implications for the enabling sustainable lives agenda in the UK.

- Fiscal constraints
- The 'nudge' approach to behaviour change
- Different ways of working i.e. less regulation, more delivery by the private and third sectors
- Big Society
- Localism

The first – the challenge of fiscal constraints – applies across the whole of the UK with all four UK governments implementing budget cuts. The other four priorities primarily relate to policies and approaches of the Coalition Government in Whitehall. While the language used to describe these approaches in Whitehall may not resonate with the differing politics in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the question about how best to enable sustainable lives, such as though working in partnership with business, communities and the third sector to deliver, are no less relevant.

When we interviewed government officials during the early days of the Coalition Government in Summer 2010 they were uncertain about these agenda and their impacts.

*'How you manage the transition without any money and very little appetite for regulatory intervention is quite a challenge.'* (Government official)

*'Departments are finding it easy to move to a world where their first thought is how not to spend money. They're finding it harder to understand the philosophical implications of moving to a society where government has a smaller role.'* (Government official)

*'What does nudge look like in my policy area? And will nudge be enough?'* (Government official)

*'Civil servants aren't sure whether behaviour change is the latest passing fad or whether it's here to stay. With the new government focused on cutting funding, will departments see behaviour change theory as a route to delivering more for less or retreat into more tried and tested delivery methods?'* (Government official)

*'One in one out on regulation means that government has fewer levers available to it.'* (Government official)

*'Big Society idea opens up possibilities Con-Lib Coalition seem more prepared to devolve power down to a local level but it might get washed away by the mammoth focus on cuts.'* (Business participant)

The potential impact of these agendas on the challenges and the opportunities for enabling sustainable lives were explored in more depth with seventeen government officials at two workshops in July 2010.

### ***Fiscal constraints***

There was agreement among officials that budget cuts mean that behaviour change programmes, as with all public sector activity, will need to demonstrate their cost effectiveness. In Whitehall communication budgets were one of the early casualties of the Coalition Government including curtailing the *Act on CO<sub>2</sub>*<sup>43</sup> campaign and the *Change4Life*<sup>44</sup> health advertising campaigns.

Government officials in our workshops spoke of the challenges of 'doing more with less'. They pointed out that lower cost options are not necessarily going to be the more sustainable option. Some suggested that regulation may be a lower cost option to achieve desired goals, even if it is less politically popular. There were concerns about how the review of public bodies and reductions in funding would impact on the ability of Government delivery bodies, such as WRAP, the Energy Savings Trust and the Carbon Trust, to deliver on activities relevant to sustainable lives. This includes important areas like waste and resource efficiency, energy use in the home and business sustainability.

Participants also identified potential opportunities. In particular they pointed out that budget cuts provide a greater impetus for government to be more creative and work with others to deliver on behaviour change goals. Support for joint working will be essential. They also identified synergies for individuals between more sustainable behaviours and saving money e.g. wasting less, consuming less, more reuse and repair.

### ***The 'nudge' approach to behaviour change***

Behaviour change is currently highly salient within the UK Government. The rhetoric is not as prominent in the devolved governments but it is clearly recognised as key to achieving certain

policy goals, in particular carbon reduction targets. The UK Coalition Government is placing considerable emphasis on the 'nudge' approach. This utilises behavioural economics and social psychology to promote what it calls 'more responsible' business and consumer behaviour. Thaler and Sunstein define 'nudge' as '*any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people's behaviour in a predictable way without forbidding any option or significantly changing their economic incentives. To count as a mere nudge, the intervention must be easy and cheap to avoid. Nudges are not mandates. Putting fruit at eye level counts a nudge. Banning junk food does not.*'<sup>45</sup>

A Behavioural Insights Unit (more popularly known as the 'nudge' unit) has been set up within the Cabinet Office. It is charged with pursuing 'non-bureaucratic alternatives to regulation' to develop ideas for achieving and delivering behaviour change through partnerships between government, business, media and the third sector. The unit will put a particular emphasis on finding more cost effective ways of achieving behaviour change. Their focus is not specifically examining sustainable behaviours but includes initiatives such as encouraging charitable donations when withdrawing cash from ATMs or increasing the number of people registered as organ donors by making use of the vehicle registration system.

Government officials in our discussions were positive about using a greater understanding of how people behave in the real world to inform policy. They saw opportunities for encouraging the uptake of sustainable behaviours using this insight but there was much uncertainty about what 'nudge' would mean in practice and whether it was more than 'flavour of the month'. They also recognised that successful 'nudge' techniques require a good choice architecture (i.e. what is available to people). It is also important to distinguish between cases where a nudge approach would be appropriate and cases where other interventions are necessary.

### ***Different ways of working***

The Coalition Government has been explicit about its emphasis on less regulation, greater individual responsibility and an enhanced delivery role for the private and third sectors. For example, Health Secretary Andrew Lansley has stated that future

initiatives would be '*less a government campaign, more a social movement; less paid for by government, more backed by business*'<sup>46</sup>, and is developing 'responsibility deals' with business on public health programmes, including food and obesity, alcohol and smoking<sup>47</sup>. Similarly, DECC's 'Green Deal'<sup>48</sup> encourages greater home insulation anticipates delivery by energy companies and high street retailers. Defra is considering voluntary rather than regulatory approaches on waste reduction among businesses and how to encourage food retailers and producers to voluntarily provide more detail on the origins of their produce<sup>49</sup>.

Government officials in our workshops saw opportunities in partnerships with business, civil society and community organisations for better delivery of messages and support to the public and in reducing the cost to the public sector. However, some questioned whether business would participate without incentives and shared objectives and whether business and the third sector organisations had the resources at a time when they were also feeling the financial squeeze. They highlighted the need to ensure that markets do deliver. Government must understand what will help this, including the need for clarity on the goals to be achieved. They also recognised that government was often inexperienced in developing successful partnerships and often unwilling to give up control.

### ***Big Society***

Big Society – another UK Coalition Government flagship policy – aims to foster a civil society rather than public sector response to a range of social challenges. Polls show the policy has yet to resonate with the public<sup>50</sup>. Half those asked feared that the initiative might well result in government and public services doing little to help people in the future. That said, two out of three agreed that people should take responsibility for their own lives. People were more convinced that Big Society would be a good thing for them, their local area and Britain as a whole when it was presented as 'being supported' to do things differently, rather than 'required'.

The main challenge identified by government officials in our workshops was the lack of clarity over what Big Society means in practice and how

it fits with the 'localism' agenda. Some expressed concerns that the policy was driven by cost cutting. This raises questions about the capacity of community groups, potential conflicts of interest for businesses and NGOs and issues of how to scale up activity sufficiently. More positively, some officials saw opportunities for enabling sustainable lives within the Big Society agenda to engage more widely with society. It can also create more partnerships with organisations that are considered to be better at reaching people than government.

### **Localism**

The commitment to 'a radical devolution of power and greater financial autonomy to local government and community groups'<sup>51</sup> is being driven in Whitehall by the Department of Communities and Local Government. The Localism Bill<sup>52</sup>, published in December 2010, aims to lay the foundations for the Big Society. It makes clear that local councils will be expected to provide more for less.

Government officials in our workshops cited many examples where local government and community groups are already active in enabling more sustainable lives. They saw further opportunities for local delivery of national policy, in particular the ability to tailor approaches to local conditions. They also recognised the importance of local infrastructure to enable more sustainable behaviours, for example the transport network, and recycling services. Participants also expressed confusion around how this agenda would be taken forward. They identified concerns about accountability, sufficient capability at the local level, inefficiencies though lack of economies of scale and whether differences from area to area would lead to inequalities. To overcome some of these challenges participants identified the need for national frameworks to support the localism agenda.

### **2.2 People – the challenge of motivating behaviour change**

The second significant area of challenge identified by participants in our research was that of people and the challenge of motivating behaviour change.

Both government and non-government participants in our research recognised that motivating more sustainable behaviours,

including securing public buy-in to more sustainable lifestyles, is a challenge for government. Officials themselves felt getting public buy-in was particularly important given the fear that if they initiate change without buy-in the interventions would fail or be repealed.

The low level of public acceptance was perceived to be due to a number of factors:

- That sustainable behaviours can cost more

*'It's a challenge getting acceptability of policies from the public, especially getting buy-in for policies which are economically detrimental'* (Government official)

- that people are simply not convinced

*'Huge swathes of people aren't persuaded by the case'* (Government official)

*'How many people are really bought into the issues?'* (NGO participant)

- poor government communication

Advertising campaigns such as Act on CO2 came in for particular criticism for failing to communicate effectively with the public and for being too negative in its messages.

*'What they've done on health and nutrition has been good, but on environmental issues they've tended to shock and scare people and we know this doesn't work.'* (Business participant)

- failure to provide simple messages

*'A real challenge when it comes to making change is the sheer noise in people's lives. So asking people to change too much at once won't work. Ask them to change 5 things before moving on. The environmental movement can be sneering about that, and want everyone to do 100 things – this is more of a turn off.'* (Business participant)

- and the role of the media

*'We have a terribly difficult media in this country. People are always looking for more sinister reasons behind anything that you do. It's very difficult to go out with transparent messages'* (Government official)

A recurrent theme raised by several academics and NGOs was that government and others had focused too heavily on approaching the public as individuals and consumers rather than as citizens engaged within communities.

*'Government policy focuses too much on the 'individual' as a rational sovereign consumer, this has resulted in an over emphasis on price mechanisms and information campaigns to change behaviour.'* (Research participant)

*'There has been too much focus on individuals changing. The government is not doing enough elsewhere to create the infrastructure to enable people.'* (NGO participant)

Government mass media campaigns have focussed too simply on providing information rather than on supporting behaviour change.

*'Too many mass media information campaigns and not enough behaviour change programmes. The previous Government used them as a means to be seen to be doing something – easy to get mass reach and relatively cheap on a per capita basis.'* (NGO participant)

*'The Act of CO<sub>2</sub> campaign was a regressive step because it's a typical broad brush campaign that really hits nobody.'* (Research participant)

*'Government has focused so far on marketing and advertising which has been effective at raising awareness of specific issues such as climate change. It has been less effective at making it easier for people to change their behaviour.'* (Government official)

The most commonly cited challenge to motivating people, mentioned in particular by NGOs and academics, was the dominance of consumerism and the challenge of moving our cultural value systems away from this.

*'The real challenge is the market economy. When we started the recession, the Government's message was 'go out and spend'... economic growth is how we measure our success.'* (Academic participant)

*'Over consumption – it's difficult to change the mood music.'* (NGO participant)

*'Our social values are currently around the importance of what you own.'* (Business participant)

*'Government is attached to idea of growth... It's challenging for people to create new mental foundations to replace consumerist identity given the level of advertising.'* (NGO participant)

*'The biggest challenge is an ethos based on financial success and having more stuff. If we are to be more sustainable people will need to have less and do less – it's an enormous challenge.'* (Government official)

The dominance of 'consumerism' was seen to create a clash between sustainable behaviours and the lifestyles people want to lead:

*'People sign up in principle to sustainable lives but are not prepared to make any sacrifices. The consumer mentality is having your cake and eating it.'* (Business participant)

Changing behaviour is difficult. Motivating sustainable behaviours is particularly difficult. There are many reasons why people find it difficult to 'do the right thing'. Too often we are berated for our lack of personal responsibility, our laziness or even worse for our ignorance, irrationality and selfishness. The resulting view among some politicians and policy makers (including some in our survey) is that 'people are difficult': If only we behaved how they wanted us to, rather than how we do, policy makers' jobs would be far easier.

The problem is that we are human. There is now a growing body of research on understanding human behaviour and how this is influenced. Much of this evidence is summarised in Thaler and Sunstein's book *Nudge*<sup>53</sup> which succinctly distinguishes between 'humans' and 'econs' – the textbook picture of human beings offered by economists which has dominated behaviour change thinking and approaches in the past.

The key is to understand that human behaviour is complex. Individual behaviours are deeply embedded in social and institutional contexts<sup>54</sup>. We are influenced by a wide range of motivations and barriers such as social norms, self esteem,

habit as well as the circumstances in which we live and the incentives and choices available.

Pro-environmental behaviours are particularly challenging to encourage. The environment is not top of our concerns. Only 5% of us say the environment is the most important issue facing the UK today compared with 65% citing 'the economy'. This has been a fairly stable trend over the last twenty years. People think this concern will grow over the next twenty years but, for the time being, the environment is very much a secondary priority for most<sup>55</sup>. It appears we are becoming weary and more sceptical about climate change and hence less likely to act.

It is difficult too because of the disconnect people face between the perceived benefits of our current behaviours and lifestyles and the longer term consequences. The decision to 'put off' pension investments, is one simple illustration of how we struggle to think longer term. This disconnect is magnified when people are asked to change behaviours that they may not obviously personally benefit from. Actions that address climate change suffer badly from both of these disconnections given that many of the benefits (and the impacts) are not immediate. The benefits and impacts will be felt some time in the future and most directly by people other than the individual taking action right now.

While awareness of the need 'to do the right thing' is increasing, too few of us are able to easily make sustainable choices in our day-to-day lives. We live in poorly insulated homes, find it difficult to leave our cars behind without affordable, accessible, convenient and safe alternatives, and are surrounded by unhealthy food choices which are relentlessly promoted as desirable and attractive. Even when awareness is high it doesn't necessarily translate into action. While seven out of ten people in 2010 say they are very or fairly concerned about climate change<sup>56</sup>, 'green' consumers remain a small minority.<sup>57</sup> This 'value-action' gap requires understanding of how and why people behave as they do in the real world and is fundamental to thinking about how to enable people to live more sustainable lives. What is now increasingly understood is that 'changing contexts' is more effective than 'changing minds'. Many more of us recycle since the introduction of kerbside collections. Safe cycle routes get more of us on

our bikes and good public transport helps persuade us to leave our cars at home.

There are also questions about where responsibility for more sustainable behaviours should lie. According to market research most of us think – on climate change at least – that governments and the international community should be mainly responsible for taking action. Only one in ten think the responsibility mainly lies with individuals. That's not to abdicate any responsibility as people accept that some responsibility must lie with individuals. This is affected by a lack of belief that they can actually make a difference<sup>58</sup>.

All of this evidence tells us we cannot simply hope to persuade the whole of the population to act in the way that 'green' consumers do when many sustainable behaviours are more difficult, expensive or outside the norm. The challenge therefore is how can sustainable behaviours be made easier for people? We address this question in section 3.2.

### 2.3 Lack of a clear positive vision and goals

A third area of challenge identified by participants in our research is the lack of a definition, clear direction of travel or 'vision' for sustainable lives. What does it look like, how does it feel and how does it differ to the lifestyles we have now?

*'There isn't a clear vision for sustainable lives and what would lifestyles in a lower consumption look like?' (Government official)*

*'I could articulate a sustainable lifestyle, you could articulate one, but it probably wouldn't be the same.'* (Research participant)

*'People are not really getting a clear message about sustainability and what they need to do in their lives.'* (NGO participant)

Businesses participants in particular talked of the need to have a clear steer from government to make them more confident in moving further and faster. Government officials talked of the challenge of designing policy when there is no clear end goal.

*'There is a crying lack of strategic vision of where we want to get to.'* (Business participant)

*'We don't know what a sustainable lifestyle looks like – what's the target – what are we trying to sell. Once we know the direction we can then move towards selling the positive aspects.'* (Business participant)

We asked participants in our research what they thought about government activity towards sustainable lives. While we heard examples of some successful interventions and initiatives, participants tended to be more critical rather than positive about government's performance. In particular they cited central government's timidity and lack of ambition. Many considered that government has not provided the leadership or impetus needed on this agenda and that current solutions don't address the scale of the challenge.

*'There's a huge mismatch between the challenges we face and the solutions proposed. Currently most of what government is doing is timid.'* (NGO participant)

*'Government home energy efficiency measures are not having the impact. It's certainly not inspiring or far reaching enough.'* (Business participant)

*'Government moves from one pilot scheme to another without ever scaling them up.'* (Public body participant)

Participants clearly saw a leadership role for government:

*'We need a big message from government on the need to act.'* (Government official)

*'Government has a key role in telling people why they should bother.'* (Business participant)

A further challenge is the perception that policy decisions from government are often inconsistent or contradictory. Examples cited by participants in our research included the decisions of the previous government to reduce VAT to encourage consumers to buy more to 'kick start' the economy, and the decision to build a third runway at Heathrow. Both these decisions were perceived to be contradictory to 'sustainable' behaviours. Such mixed messages create more confusion about exactly what it is that government thinks we should be taking seriously.

It threatens to undermine the buy-in that already exists.

*'We need consistency in the way they talk about sustainable lives as a government, so that when business and others do certain things to help deliver on commitments, they have a greater buy in from people.'* (Business participant)

The way government is organised – with numerous departments, each with their own targets and objectives and the lack of 'joining up' between them – is a commonly cited cause of mixed policy messages. The absence of a coherent framework to guide government's work on sustainable lives makes it more difficult to overcome apparent conflicts, or to identify potential synergies.

*'Government needs to be clear in its messages and those messages must also be integrated.'* (Government official)

*'The problem is everyone has their own policies. Ministers are only interested in their narrowly defined departments – they're not joining up themselves.'* (Government official)

*'Why is government so single issue?...At the moment it's like trying to selling the ingredients of the Mars Bar rather than selling the brand and the bigger package to go with it.'* (Government official)

## **2.4 Knowledge and evidence of what works**

One of the most commonly cited challenges, particularly for government officials in our research, was knowing what works in practice. Many participants considered there is a lack of evidence on the impact of different interventions and where the biggest gains could be made. This is a significant challenge. Government will now be looking for proof of impact more than ever before committing money to behaviour change initiatives.

*'Changing people's lives will need a better handle on what works and what doesn't'* (Government official)

*'Under the current economic circumstance you need to be pretty convinced that the benefits at worth the investment.'* (Government official)

Government participants cited numerous examples of where they wanted greater understanding. This included an understanding of what motivates people, how to engage better, how to incentivise people to change and how to drive the market.

*'Are we reaching the right people? Are they the ones that can make the most difference?'*  
(Government official)

*'I'm interested in how you can best get people to change – how can you best incentivise.'*  
(Government official)

*'Further customer insight to understand what people are doing and understand the gap between what householders say they will do and what they actually do.'* (Government official)

*'How do we get people engaged... People have to want this as much as they want the new i-phone.'* (Business participant)

Participants from all sectors expressed concerns that it is not easy to measure and evaluate the outcome of behaviour change interventions.

*'It is difficult to measure the impact of sustainable behaviours. At one level this is a row with HMT, not just about economics but about proof, evidence and outcome based measurements... Some things can be evaluated, but not all.'* (Research participant)

*'One difficulty is proving and measuring the impact of our work.'* (NGO participant)

*'The cost of monitoring cycling schemes is traditionally more expensive than the schemes themselves – but being unable to demonstrate impact of schemes reduces the scope for investment.'* (Government participant)

*'We have difficulty tracking the impact we've made... we're just measuring volume of sign up rather than value... We can model it based on assumptions and do surveys, but there isn't really a science behind that.'* (Business participant)

Participants highlighted the need to share the learning and identify best practice in order to scale up initiatives. Academics in particular felt there was a gap between existing evidence and

its use by policy makers. They wanted to see closer dialogue and better connections between government departments, policy making and academics. They also wanted better management systems for commissioning and sharing research.

*'Need to have systems for capturing best practice and lessons learnt from local initiatives and disseminating them across the country.'* (Research participant)

*'We do a lot of research that is indirectly funded by government through research councils. That research has to be published and we know that some people from government departments occasionally read it. But we are concerned that sometimes government funds research that has already been done. Either they don't know it's been done, or they don't perhaps understand how it's been done. We need to get a closer dialogue between government departments and ourselves to simply say 'we know A and B have been done – and here it is and what it means, but we accept that C and D haven't been done.'*  
(Research participant)

The need to share and use research across government better was also raised by a small number of government officials.

*'A lot of research isn't shared – needs to be more coming together'* (Government participant)

The lack of relevant skills and capabilities within government was also identified:

*'Skills and capacity on behaviour change is lacking in government – the most relevant expertise is comms and marketing.'*  
(Research participant)

*'What skills would be required to deliver an effective suite of nudge type policies to direct people towards the kind of behaviours that are needed?'* (Government participant)

*'There is a need to do something around skills of policy leads on behavioural approaches – what does it mean to their work?'* (Government participant)

In the following chapter we put forward a new approach and specific recommendations to government to address these challenges.

### 3. A new approach to enabling sustainable lives

Participants in our research were keen to share their views with us on what is needed to address the challenges identified in Section 2. They also propose practical solutions for moving forward. Based on this evidence we recommend a new approach for enabling sustainable lives.

This new approach builds on four key pillars for the transition to more sustainable lives. In this chapter we explore each of these pillars in more depth.



### 3.1 A clear positive vision for sustainable lives

**Governments must raise the profile of the sustainable lives agenda and set out high level ambitions that go beyond targets on CO<sub>2</sub> and beyond the focus on individuals. Governments have a key enabling role to play in the realisation of more sustainable lives. This includes providing leadership, setting out a clear overall strategic direction and providing the right framework that requires, supports or encourages others to take action. It also includes exemplifying sustainable behaviours through their own actions. Messages need to be communicated clearly, consistently and positively.**

The political noise around smaller government, Big Society and greater personal responsibility implies a more hands-off role for the UK Coalition Government. The Prime Minister has recognised the key role that government plays in behaviour change:

*'My belief in social responsibility is not a laissez-faire manifesto. I believe that government has a vital role to play in changing social behaviour.'*<sup>59</sup>

Non-government and government participants in our survey did not hold back from sharing their views on what they perceived to be the UK Government's shortcomings to date. They felt strongly that the state does have an important role to play towards enabling sustainable lives. They were also clear that government needs to provide more leadership and set out a clear strategic direction on this agenda, bring people together and enable others to play their own part in enabling change. This means setting out why the transition to more sustainable lifestyles is not only desirable but essential. It should be treated with the same level of gravity as other significant challenges like solving the budget deficit or national security. These messages need to extend beyond climate change and embrace the totality of our lives.

Participants wanted government to be clear about what it wants businesses and individuals to do. This would give everyone the confidence and reassurance to go further. Many identified the need for a shared understanding or 'vision', in particular across government.

*'Everyone has their own definition of sustainability and sustainable lives, but*

*there must be some things where we can sing from the same hymn sheet so that every department has their bit of the narrative that supports it, and reinforces their own work.'* (Government participant)

*'We need a clear vision for business and consumers.'* (Business participant)

There was also a desire for more positive messages. Sustainable lives need to be seen as desirable and accessible and as something that people and organisations want to support and enable.

*'Government needs to paint a positive picture in its messages around the environment. Politicians in the past have been quite gloomy, saying what people can't do.'* (Business participant)

That is not to say that Government should always communicate these messages to the public. Behavioural science tells us that the messenger can be as important as the message itself. Most people we spoke to thought that others, like local authorities, NGOs, businesses, civil society organisations and our peers, were often better placed and more trusted communicators than central government.

*'Government is not necessarily the best messenger. But it needs the big over-arching message from government so others can deliver. People need to see a great big, visible public plan.'* (NGO participant)

Participants also felt strongly that government needs to act in ways that reinforce its policy messages. This can be done by exemplifying sustainable behaviours in the way that it organises itself and in the policy and programmes that it delivers.

*'Government must lead by example. The government not getting its own house in order positively discourages activity and undermines any other government messages.'* (Government official)

Government departments should work more closely in identifying synergies and areas of conflict. Currently government policies that in some way help enable sustainable lives are not sufficiently co-ordinated and joined up across government. For example, policies towards travel, home energy use, sustainable products,

education, health, food, waste and relationships with business and civil society are developed by many separate departments. Greater co-ordination of policies towards enabling sustainable lives would provide clearer focus, identify synergies and the sharing of expertise and evidence.

Government also needs to get better at telling people the good things it has done, so others can see that it is taking its responsibilities seriously.

*'Government needs to lead by example and exemplify the good work it has already done'*  
(NGO participant)

**We recommend that the UK and Devolved Administration governments set out their own cross-government action plans for enabling sustainable lives by December 2011.** Building on existing work, these need to go beyond action on climate change, state the level of ambition, provide strategic direction and detail how all players will work together to deliver policies and programmes that enable people to live sustainable lives. They must reflect the SDC's four key pillars for enabling sustainable lives and make full use of the wide range of interventions illustrated in the 4Es model for behaviour change – engaging, exemplifying, enabling and encouraging. Their scope needs to include policies on greater energy efficiency in the home and in the workplace, sustainable travel and food, waste reduction, sustainable products and supply chains, education, health and wellbeing and sustainable communities.

**These plans need to be led from the centre of the respective governments if they are to have effective traction across all policy areas.** In Whitehall, this will require the Cabinet Office to lead, working closely with Defra and other key departments. In Scotland we recommend the Greener Directorate lead. In Wales it should continue to be the Department for the Environment, Sustainability and Housing. In both Scotland and Wales there will need to be appropriate transfer within any restructuring post the elections in May 2011. In Northern Ireland the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) should lead. Systems also need to be in place to support collaboration and shared learning between the four administrations.

**In Northern Ireland we recommend that OFMDFM includes enabling sustainable lives as the central principle of its forthcoming Sustainable Consumption Action Plan. This should form a key part of the Government's plans to implement its sustainable development strategy.**

**Within Scotland and Wales, where elections are due in Spring 2011, we recommend that Government priorities for the new electoral terms include development of policies to enable sustainable lives. We recommend that the next Scottish Government develop a set of measures that clearly set out a long term vision for a sustainable Scotland in accordance with the Measuring Progress Roundtable SDC Scotland has convened. The Roundtable will report in spring 2011.**

### **3.2 Making it easy: providing the right incentive framework**

**The whole spectrum of interventions needs to be used to create behaviour change (as illustrated by the 4E's model of behaviour change of engaging, exemplifying, enabling and encouraging). This includes a role for government through regulation, the provision of incentives, supporting the development of capability, economic levers, standard setting; interventions by businesses and communities and public facing campaigns. Interventions – or packages of interventions – need to be 'fit for purpose'. They need to be designed according to the audience and intended outcome and based on evidence of what works, including insights from behavioural science. The current focus of 'nudge' should not crowd out the use of other interventions.**

Our research identified an essential role for governments to provide a framework that requires, supports, or allows others (including business, communities and civil society, as well as individuals) to take action.

*'Government's role is to provide an enabling policy environment, to send the right signals to the market and to be joined up in its approach. Its role is to communicate much more clearly, incentivise and to provide a policy framework that encourages sustainable lives'* (Business participant)

*'Legislate where necessary – businesses only follow what consumers want or what the law tells them to do.'* (Regional government participant)

*'Regulation is needed to give business the confidence to go further and faster.'* (Business participant)

*'You can nudge manufacturers and retailers in the right direction, but the constant feedback from customers is that if government was serious they wouldn't give them the choice.'* (Public Body participant)

*'If we're serious about carbon, and reducing emissions etc, then we need sticks and carrots at the same time.'* (NGO participant)

It was felt that when the regulatory framework is in place government can step back and let others (business, third sector organisations, communities) deliver. As one participant in our research put it:

*'Government's role is getting things done behind the scenes to enable front of house changes to happen. It has to look down on the market place and see what it needs to do to let others get on with it, and step back.'* (Business participant).

But what is the 'right' incentive framework? A range of approaches can be applied.

*'You could just leave people to get on with it and give them the right information, you can positively incentivise, or you can have legislation.'* (Government official)

In reality, this is not an 'either/or' choice. A whole range of interventions are available, as illustrated by Defra's 4E's model to modify the systems and environments which determine our choices and behaviours. Governments need to use the full range of levers it has at its disposal to encourage behaviour change and create environments and communities where sustainable choices are the norm. The different approaches usually work best when delivered as part of a package. The temptation to rely on information provision and awareness-raising is misplaced. They can be important elements to support wider structural change but by themselves they are poor motivators of behaviour change.

Most success in the field of enabling sustainable lives has come from the setting of mandatory standards, targets and fiscal incentives. Participants in our research provided a range of examples to illustrate the value of having a legislative framework. These included:

- Vehicle emission reduction targets which the EU made mandatory after a voluntary approach had failed to drive sufficient change. Within this framework the car industry is able to innovate and bring new products to the market. Vehicle carbon emission standards have also been linked to road tax rates to encourage the purchase of 'greener' vehicles.
- The Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (or CERT) – a Government requirement on energy companies to work with their customers to make savings in the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> emitted by their homes.
- Mandatory A-G energy efficiency standards for refrigerators and other white goods, where intervention agreed at the EU level and delivered by member states has helped to shift the market towards more energy efficient products over the last decade.
- Rates of recycling have increased dramatically since the introduction of kerb-side collection schemes by local authorities, driven by EU targets and the mandatory Landfill Tax.
- The mandatory phasing out of incandescent light bulbs means that inefficient lighting will no longer be an option.
- Feed in tariffs to make it more financially attractive for householders to generate renewable energy.

Despite this evidence the UK Coalition Government has enthusiastically endorsed one particular approach to behaviour change – nudge (see section 2.1) – as a cheaper way of delivering policy goals and furthering its agenda of increased personal responsibility and less state intervention.

Nudge, as with social marketing, is based on a welcome use of behavioural science. Nudges are already in place – in that everything that Government and others do provides the context for the behaviours we adopt and it is helpful to consider how they can be used to deliver societal goals. This approach presents many opportunities but it is not a magic bullet. The limitations need to be recognised particularly in the context of enabling sustainable lives.

Nudge approaches that are only aimed at individuals cannot overcome structural barriers to sustainable behaviours. Experience shows that an approach which does not change the choice architecture, i.e. the structural context and physical infrastructure in which we live our lives, will fail to deliver the scale of transformation necessary. For example the Sustainable Travel Demonstration Towns<sup>60</sup> used social marketing approaches with some success to ‘nudge’ citizens towards more sustainable travel options. But the ultimate success of such interventions depends on the availability of safe, accessible and affordable sustainable travel options. Government needs to ensure that there is sufficient investment to change the choice architecture as part of its application of nudge.

‘Nudge’ is also based on the principle of retaining personal choice. As a society we have decided there are many choices that we no longer allow, from smoking in public places to not wearing seat belts. We need to consider when it is appropriate to restrict unsustainable choices, as has been agreed for the phasing out of incandescent light bulbs, and where the ‘shove’ of regulation is a more effective approach. Many retailers already voluntarily choice-edit the products they sell on the basis of sustainability criteria. There is also the question of whether temporary nudge approaches – such as supermarket vouchers for healthier foods proposed in the Public Health White Paper<sup>61</sup> will be sufficient to sustain behaviours once the incentive is removed.

The debate around where responsibility for behaviour change lies has become unnecessarily politicised with a danger of policies being driven by ideology rather than sound evidence of what works. **We recommend that governments make full use of the whole spectrum of interventions to enable sustainable lives, as illustrated by the 4E’s model of behaviour change of engaging, exemplifying, enabling**

**and encouraging.** This means being prepared to use appropriate interventions - including regulation, the provision of incentives, economic levers and standard setting – wherever the evidence shows that they are effective. Ruling out mandatory approaches ignores the evidence of what has driven much change towards sustainable behaviours to date. Interventions – or packages of interventions – need to be ‘fit for purpose’, be designed according to the audience and intended outcome and based on evidence of what works.

### 3.3 Working with others

**Government, business and civil society need to work together, forming a ‘triangle of change’ and a collective coherent response to the challenges of enabling sustainable lives. Governments need to retain strategic oversight, set out the overall direction of travel, bring people together, and enable and support others to play a full and effective role in enabling change. As more responsibility is devolved to others outside central government, those groups and individuals still need support so that they can take on these responsibilities effectively and efficiently, which implies an important and continuing role for Government. In particular, meaningful engagement with the third and community sector is essential to identify what prevents such organisations playing a fuller role, and how to overcome these barriers. Finally, Government must recognise the significant potential of the wider public sector in developing and delivering sustainable lives, in particular the health and education sectors, and the huge influence of public buying power.**

Participants in our research identified working in partnership with others as a key role for Government, including the private and public sectors, NGOs and civil society organisations and local authorities and communities. As discussed in section 2.1, there are many challenges to overcome in order to develop ‘real’ partnerships, where power is shared and the partners work collaboratively and effectively.

SDC has strongly advocated the need for these sectors to work collaboratively in the widely accepted ‘triangle of change’ approach set out in *Will if You Will* (see Section 1). Government has a

key role to play in harnessing the energy and influence of others by providing strategic oversight, setting the overall direction of travel, bringing people together, developing shared solutions and enabling and supporting others to act.

People's acceptance of change is often dependant on how involved they feel they have been in the decision. Insights and acceptance can be gained from meaningful and early engagement with people, such as via pilots, field trials, capacity building, local innovation, consultation and co-design of schemes. Good engagement can enable significant shifts in policy and action, generate shared ownership and responsibility and increase the likelihood of successful outcomes.

We discuss the opportunities for working more effectively with partners in the following sections.

## Business

Businesses can contribute to the sustainability of people's lives through the products and services that they provide, their relationships with their customers and suppliers, and their role as responsible employers and community members.

A number of leading businesses are already engaged with enabling sustainable lives. For example Marks and Spencer's Plan A<sup>62</sup> includes a commitment to 'help our customers live a more sustainable life'. This is done by selling products that meet Plan A principles, labelling and information campaigns to nudge consumer behaviour and asking consumers to sign up to a number of simple pledges. There is also help for customers to set out their own personal Plan A. B&Q's One Planet Home<sup>63</sup> scheme has trained 'eco advisors' in store to advise customers. It provides information on its website and sells a range of independently assessed 'eco' products. EDF Energy's 'Team Green Britain'<sup>64</sup> aims to help people reduce their carbon footprint, use less energy, live healthier lives and save money.

These examples illustrate the potential for business to do more. To facilitate this participants in our research wanted to see government develop more effective partnerships with business.

*'If you're going to have a creative partnership, it has to be on the basis – not of government saying 'we want you to do this' but of government saying we're all in this together. It's not teacher/pupil, parent/child - the old paradigm of government patronising business, it's 'we're in this together', let's develop a joint solution.'* (Government official)

*'We need to have better links with business - to understand the business drivers better and work out how we can sell sustainability to them. Unless we change the offer available to people, at the same time as increasing their understanding and buying wants, then it's not going to work.'* (Government official)

Business participants in our research were keen to work with Government on some of the 'trickier' issues.

*'We need Government to enable strategic conversations with others, like in Love Food Hate Waste.'* (Business participant')

*'We would like to work together with government to look strategically at the whole value chain of retail – e.g. with farmers, with consumers, to look at what are we doing at the different places along the chain, and where are there gaps.'* (Business participant)

There were also words of caution from some business participants. In a difficult economic climate fiscal constraints do not only apply to the public purse, the squeeze is also being felt in the private sector. Government and business will therefore need to work together to identify real shared priorities to tackle.

Government has some track record of convening businesses towards shared sustainability goals. For example, Defra initiated a number of 'product roadmaps' as recommended by the SDC and National Consumer Council in *I Will if You Will*<sup>65</sup>. It developed shared visions and action plans, most notably the Milk Roadmap<sup>66</sup> and Clothing Roadmap<sup>67</sup>. Levels of ambition have not been as high as some hoped for and the roadmaps have yet to be fully evaluated but they have provided useful platforms for bringing sectors together to consider shared challenges.

Businesses are also engaged on other government sponsored platforms. For example Scotland's 2020 Climate Group<sup>68</sup> brings Scotland's

business, voluntary and public sectors together to help achieve the targets in the Scottish Government's Climate Change Delivery Plan<sup>69</sup>. The Welsh Assembly Government is encouraging organisations to sign up to its Sustainable Development Charter 'One Wales: One Planet', thereby committing to make sustainable development their central organising principle and promoting and delivering wellbeing through their decisions and operations<sup>70</sup>. In Northern Ireland, the Green New Deal Group – Partners for Change<sup>71</sup> is a coalition of over 40 organisations and individuals, including representatives of leading businesses, public sector agencies and community and voluntary organisations working with government to address the challenges of energy security, unemployment and climate change.

The UK Coalition Government is developing new voluntary 'responsibility deals' with business to tackle public health priorities including obesity. DECC is also developing partnerships with business to deliver its flagship Green New Deal policy to improve home energy efficiency<sup>72</sup>. Defra has committed to do the same on waste<sup>73</sup>. Responsibility deals are not new. Businesses, including leading supermarkets and manufacturers have signed up to the Government funded Courtauld Commitment on reducing packaging and food waste and are already delivering reductions and efficiencies<sup>74</sup>. The strength of this Commitment is that government and business jointly agreed stretching targets, against which progress is monitored, reviewed and reported transparently. Support is provided by the Waste Resources Action Programme (WRAP). Some critics fear these 'soft' 'policy options will be too weak to drive sufficient change<sup>75</sup>. Where agreement cannot be reached, where the level of ambition does not meet the challenge, or where there is an urgent need for action, regulatory approaches may be more appropriate. This was the case when the European car industry failed to improve efficiency standards under a voluntary agreement and the EU introduced mandatory targets.

**We therefore recommend that DECC, DH, Defra, BIS, DfT ensure that 'responsibility deals' with business adhere to best practice principles by agreeing stretching goals and having procedures in place to monitor, review and transparently report on progress.**

Within Whitehall, Defra, DECC and BIS are developing a 'Roadmap to a Green Economy. **We recommend that Defra, DECC and BIS embed commitment and action towards enabling sustainable lives in the business-focussed 'Roadmap to a Green Economy' expected by April 2011.** This needs to identify how the Government intends to work with businesses including domestic energy suppliers, the food industry, retailers, manufacturing, transport providers and the home improvement sector to develop roadmaps towards sustainable lives.

### **Engaging civil society and communities**

The vast array of voluntary and community groups operating at local and national level is well placed to inspire, promote, support and deliver results on sustainable lives through their membership and networks. They can inspire collective action, strengthen civil society and its ability to cope with and respond to significant challenges, address local priorities and improve local quality of life. They can help develop and support the political mandate for some of the trickier issues that society faces, such as the shift needed towards more sustainable lives. The third sector is also collectively responsible for the delivery of £12.1 billion worth of public services, including health, social care, environmental, educational and housing services that reach some of the most disadvantaged groups in society<sup>76</sup>. Embedding sustainability objectives within the commissioning of these services could fundamentally impact the ability of their clients and communities to lead more sustainable lives.

This clearly chimes with the UK Coalition's focus on Big Society and localism. Participants in our research saw potential opportunities for greater collaboration and partnership delivery. They also raised concerns that disparate action at a community level would not add up to the goals and targets that we need to achieve. They saw a role for government to retain strategic oversight.

Government has yet to demonstrate how these flagship policies can be designed and delivered in ways which support more sustainable lives. **We recommend that the Office for Civil Society (Big Society) and CLG (localism) work with other government departments including Defra, DECC and DfT to embed support for sustainable lives in these policies.**

There is growing recognition that long-term shifts in behaviour are most likely to be achieved when communities have a strong role<sup>77</sup>. Community organisations are too often hindered by a lack of support and poor access to finance<sup>78</sup>. Government will need to be more active in creating the conditions within which community leadership can flourish. In devolving more responsibility to others within the third and community sector, government needs to ensure that the capacity and funding exists for them to take on these responsibilities effectively and efficiently. **We recommend engagement with the sector to identify exactly how such organisations can play a fuller role and what support they will need from central government.**

**The new sustainable development body in Wales will have a key role in enabling sustainable lives. It should build on the work already begun by the Welsh Assembly Government, the SDC and Cynnal Cymru- Sustain Wales to support civil society in taking**

**action, develop partnerships to tackle difficult issues, convene stakeholders and advise Ministers on the policies required across government to enable citizens to make sustainable choices.**

**Following the election in Scotland, we recommend that government launches a new programme of support for communities interested in carbon reduction and sustainable development drawing on the lessons of the Climate Challenge Fund and other programmes such as the Scottish Sustainable Communities Initiative and ‘Smarter Choices – Smarter Places’. It should also develop a programme of active engagement on climate change and sustainable development with the public and all sectors of Scottish society.**

Government is already supporting a number of civil society and community initiatives (see Box 2). Evaluation will provide useful evidence of their impact for future policy development and scaling up of initiatives.

#### **Box 2: Examples of civil society organisations as partners in enabling sustainable lives**

Defra funded the ‘Greener Living Fund’<sup>79</sup> from 2009 to March 2011. This is a selection of action-based research projects delivered in partnership with third sector organisations and aimed at promoting greener living across England. Projects include: Global Action Plan’s Eco Teams; National Trust’s ‘Eat into Greener Living’; Waterwise’s ‘Tap into Savings’ and Sustrans’s ‘Broadening the Reach of TravelSmart’.

DECC’s **Low Carbon Communities Challenge**<sup>80</sup> is the UK’s largest experiment in sustainable living involving 22 communities with total funding of £11-12m. The project encompasses 100,000 people in pilots of community-led approaches to sustainable lives, often in partnership with local authorities. It looks at how households can benefit from joined-up ‘packages’ of support, delivered locally in the community, to help them reduce home energy consumption and make deep cuts in their carbon emissions.

**Scotland’s Climate Challenge Fund**<sup>81</sup> has engaged and funded around 260 community groups in Scotland on over 300 projects to cut carbon emissions.

## Local government

Participants in our research recognised the important role of local government to enable sustainable lives, given their role in shaping the local context of people's lives through the planning and provision of infrastructure and services, including education, social services, transport and waste management. They also acknowledged the potential for local government to deliver more targeted, tailored interventions that recognise and respond to the needs of the communities they serve. One size does not fit all, as the Coalition's drive for 'localism' recognises. It needs to be recognised that while they can be more effective, targeted and tailored approaches are not necessarily cheaper.

There were real concerns about the capacity of local government to take on more responsibilities without additional financial support at this time of budget reductions. Would localised delivery be too costly and patchy and collectively not achieve the magnitude of changes we require to deliver sustainable lives? One government official wondered whether we are all being seduced by localism and have not factored in that it might not work.

*'Localism is great if there is the money to do it. But it's a myth that all local authorities are good – some are, some aren't. I don't expect a revolution overnight without more money being available – local authorities won't have the capacity. For example it took a long time for them to make progress on recycling. People like the idea of a bespoke solution, but not of a postcode lottery – but that's what localism is – a bit of a lottery.'*  
(Government official)

SDC has highlighted how 'postcode lotteries' may undermine the UK Government's objective of 'fairness' and the need for an assessment system to benchmark performance to guard against this. In its review of regulatory bodies the SDC recognised the strong progress made by the Audit Commission towards embedding sustainable development into its assessment of Local Government performance<sup>82</sup>. Their Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAA) looked at local authority spend across the full range of their activities, in order to highlight potential synergies that would lead to more effective and efficient long term service delivery. The CAA process has since been

abolished and it is currently unclear what assessment framework will replace it.

It is unclear what the governance landscape at local level will look like under the UK Coalition Government. For example, whether the requirement on local authorities to develop long term community-led Sustainable Community Strategies will be retained. Nor is it clear how new Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), with their focus on employment and growth, will support the delivery of sustainable lives in their areas in the same way that Regional Development Agencies were required to do. **LEPs need to recognise that supporting sustainable lives is essential** if they are to be successful in achieving their remit of strengthening local economies, creating the right environment for business to grow and rebalancing local economies towards the private sector. To facilitate this, **the Regional Growth Fund should consider how to maximise the impact on enabling sustainable lives through stimulating private sector investment for long term economic growth and the creation of additional sustainable private sector jobs.**

In Scotland one of the major obstacles to sustainability is the apparent disconnect between national policy objectives and local decisions. **The National Performance Framework (NPF) needs refinement to better take sustainable development principles into account and more work is needed to ensure these are effectively translated to local action. This can for example be done through Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs)** which set out agreed strategic priorities between government and each community planning partnership.<sup>83</sup>

If local government is to have a greater role in service delivery going forward – as outlined in the Public Health White Paper<sup>84</sup> in relation to health services for example – it will still require a central framework that sets overall strategic goals, enables them to perform their role effectively and removes barriers to action.

## Public sector

There are significant opportunities for enabling sustainable lives by harnessing the power of public service delivery and public procurement. In particular, this includes the health and education

sectors given their direct contact with people in their everyday lives.

Substantial gains can be made where sustainability is embedded in the design of services from the outset rather than seeing it as an 'add on' further down the line. This 'systems approach', which takes account of linkages across society and generations, has been proven to be the best and often the most cost effective approach. Examples include focusing on preventing obesity rather than treating it, or exemplifying sustainability through schools programmes so that it is seen as the norm by younger people, rather than something that needs to be 'taught' at a later age (see Box 3 and Box 4).

The National Health Service, with the largest workforce and property portfolio in Europe provides a huge range of services to over 60 million people in the UK and has an annual budget of over £100 billion<sup>85</sup>. It has the potential to make a significant contribution to people's health by supporting strong local economies, social cohesion and a healthy environment. Box 3 illustrates ways in which the health sector can be a partner in enabling sustainable lives.

### **Box 3: The health sector as a partner in enabling sustainable lives**

**Sandwell PCT** is the first Primary Care Trust (PCT) in England to introduce National Standards BikeAbility cycle training for staff and the public. In addition to employee benefits such as cycle and bus schemes, car sharing days and a discount for their leisure centre, Sandwell has engaged over 20,000 people in their physical activity programme, helping to combat the 9000 premature deaths caused by obesity every year in England. Winner of the 2010 HSJ Good Corporate Citizenship Award, Sandwell PCT has explored all aspects of the SDC's Good Corporate Citizenship Assessment Model (GCC), particularly impressing judges with their wide-ranging programme which increased physical activity among the population and improved career opportunities for local people<sup>86</sup>.

The **James Wigg GP Practice in North London**<sup>87</sup> found that long term unemployed patients often presented with mental health problems such as depression. To address the root cause of this illness the practice joined forces with Tomorrow's People, a charity specialising in breaking the cycle of unemployment. They set up an in-house counselling service to help patients their confidence and get back to work. The service has produced excellent results with a marked decrease in mental health problems, an average of five fewer GP consultations per referred patient per year and fewer consultations from patients' families. Helping patients into employment has helped prevent ongoing illness, and reduced demand for further consultations and treatment with expensive, carbon intensive drugs.

The Department of Health's **Change4Life**<sup>88</sup> campaign to encourage the uptake of healthier lifestyles was developed by government and delivered through partner organisations, including local authorities, supermarkets, energy companies, schools, community groups, hospitals, etc, with the aim of creating a societal movement. The campaign represents a good example of how different partners have worked with government to address the challenge of obesity; and how behavioural science has been integrated into the design of the different interventions. The campaign's messages were delivered through trusted individuals including 30,000 doctors and health visitors across the country. Retailers and manufacturers also signed up to promote products and services to encourage more healthy lifestyles e.g. selling bikes at reduced cost.

#### **Box 4: The education sector as a partner in enabling sustainable lives – Sustainable Schools**

'Sustainable Schools' is a voluntary programme introduced by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) under the Labour administration. It is a continuous process of integrating high standards of achievement and behaviour with the goals of healthy living, environmental awareness, community engagement and citizenship. It demonstrates an effective partnership between the central department – whose role was to provide leadership, non prescriptive guidance and a small amount of funding – and individual schools who delivered the programme on the ground, in turn in partnership with their own communities and the third sector. It also exemplifies how Big Society can be utilised to deliver more sustainable lives, as the model is now being led by three NGO umbrella groups in the education sector.

DCSF's own evaluation of the Sustainable Schools programme<sup>89</sup> reported that multiple sources of evidence now show that being a sustainable school raises standards and enhances well-being. This is because sustainable schools engage young people in their learning on a topic of concern and relevance to their future lives therefore improving motivation and behaviour. They also promote healthy school environments and lifestyles. The evidence shows that sustainable schools advance community cohesion by making valuable connections between the school and its parents, carers and the wider community.

The education sector also has a vital role to play in influencing young people's adoption of sustainable behaviours. It can extend this reach to parents and the local community<sup>90</sup>. Schools are uniquely placed, given that everyone in the UK comes into contact with them from the age of 4-16. Many adults also engage with the education system as their own children enter the schooling system or as members of the teaching profession. The Department for Education's guidance on Sustainable Schools<sup>91</sup> recognises that 'as places of learning, they can help pupils understand our impact on the planet and encourage them to weigh up the evidence themselves. As models of good practice, they can offer young people the chance to contribute to sustainable living, and demonstrate good practices to others. Empowering young people to take responsibility for their own future is not only desirable: it is a crucial feature of their education.'

It is also important for Government and researchers to take a long term view of how to build the capacity of society to take on driving, innovating and adopting new sustainable behaviours. This requires opportunities for students, young people and communities to build their own capacity.

**HM Treasury and the Cabinet Office need to include details on how the delivery of public services will support the achievement of wider societal goals, specifically sustainable lives, in the forthcoming White Paper on public service reform (expected in early 2011).**

**In Scotland the new government will need to ensure the correct structures and arrangements are in place to embed the Public Bodies Duties under the Climate Change Scotland Act<sup>92</sup> across all work of the public sector, and ensure all public bodies 'lead by example'.**

The whole public sector has considerable potential to help enable sustainable lives through maximising the potential of around £220 billion of annual spend on the procurement of goods and services<sup>93</sup>. The first option should always be to question whether goods and services are needed. As such, **OGC should introduce robust demand management procedures across Government.**

Where there is an identified need to procure goods and services the Government Buying Standards (formerly known as Buy Sustainable Quick Wins) currently provide minimum and best practice standards for over 50 product groups. The standards are designed to make it easier for government buyers to buy sustainably and are mandatory for all Whitehall departments and their related organisations. Buyers must ensure that they meet minimum specifications when buying products and services. The SDC has found that the standards are not always followed<sup>94</sup>. **We recommend choice-editing, so that only goods and services that meet the minimum standards of the mandatory Government Buying Standards are available to buyers. The Office of Government Commerce (OGC) should enforce the standards, monitor compliance and report on progress. In addition, Defra – who lead on the technical specifications –**

**should ensure that Government Buying Standards are designed to drive forward the market for more sustainable goods and services, improve sustainability in public sector supply chains and help the Government meet its own operations and procurement targets to become the 'Greenest Government ever'. The Buying Standards should also be actively promoted to the wider public sector.**

In Whitehall there are a number of policy agendas, including environmental performance that the public sector plans to deliver through the 'Policy through Procurement' initiative. This utilises government spend to support wider policy goals. The initiative is led by the OGC. **We recommend that OGC, supported by Defra, actively promotes the delivery of sustainable lives objectives through procurement across Government and the public sector, and that it provides guidance to support delivery and reviews progress. This should include identifying opportunities to achieve wider benefits through pan-government framework contracts and include these benefits in Value for Money assessments.**

### **3.4 Building capabilities and using evidence**

**Government must have the right skills and capabilities in place to support the effective application of behavioural science to policymaking and embed thinking about the sustainability of people's lives into everything that it does. There is a need for better evaluation of what works (and what doesn't) to influence behaviour. Structures need to be in place to ensure that information and expertise is shared inside and outside government.**

Behaviour change is complex and enabling sustainable behaviours is particularly challenging. We welcome the current political interest in understanding people and the potential opportunities this opens up for enabling people to live more sustainable lives. Social science can help policy makers understand why people behave as they do and help design more effective policies and interventions to support behaviour goals. Yet as our research demonstrates (see section 2.4) that there is an apparent 'gap' between the body of evidence and expertise that already exists and political support for its use by policy makers in designing

interventions. Government officials considered they did not have good evidence of what works in practice, while academic participants considered evidence exists but is not well understood or used by policy makers.

To address this gap, participants recognised the need for government to have better understanding of behavioural sciences and how to apply these insights to the design of interventions. Specifically our research identified a lack of relevant behaviour change skills and capabilities within government. To support the effective application of evidence-based policy making government needs to have the right skills and capabilities in place. **We recommend that departments have adequate social science expertise available within departments to support the development of policy.** The Cabinet Office is responsible for ensuring capabilities across government as a whole. We specifically recommend that the **Cabinet Office work with the Head of Profession of Social Science in Government and the National School of Government to provide details of how to develop capability of staff across departments for advising on behaviour change and its application in policy making.**

This capability needs to be supported by a robust evidence base of what works and what doesn't. While there is a growing body of literature on what is considered to be 'good practice' we found a lack of hard evidence on the effectiveness of different interventions. Government and others will need to develop suitable evaluation frameworks and develop clever ways of overcoming the problems inherent in evaluating such interventions. For example: how do you know what has had the greatest effect; how do you know if any changes in behaviour will be sustained; how can you measure the 'difficult to measure' like community cohesion and quality of life? The National Audit Office, having recognised the trend towards the use of interventions aimed at influencing behaviour, is looking at how to evaluate such approaches as part of its Value for Money assessments. Government will also need to ensure that evaluation is adequately resourced, so that the effectiveness of initiatives can be assessed and lessons fed back in to the revision of measures and development of future interventions. The *Change4Life* campaign by the Department for Health reportedly allocated 10%

of its budget to evaluation. This is in line with practice in the private sector<sup>95</sup>.

**We specifically recommend that the NAO works with experts in behaviour change inside and outside of government to establish robust evaluation methodologies for behaviour change interventions. It should publish guidance by the end of 2011 and promote its use across government. NAO should use the guidance in its Value for Money evaluations.**

Our research also identified the need for better sharing of evidence inside and outside Government to enable access and understanding of evidence to the policy profession and to facilitate communication between policy makers and researchers. Government officials in our research felt that academic research is not always designed or communicated in ways that support them and there is a need for greater awareness in the research profession of the questions that Government is looking to answer. Both require a closer dialogue between policy makers and the research community.

The Behavioural Science in Government Network has been established by HM Treasury to provide a forum across government for social scientists and policy professionals to share evidence around behavioural science and its application to policy. It includes an online community and a programme of events. This network could prove valuable for sharing evidence and expertise across government. **We recommend that its remit is widened to include expertise from outside Government.**

Defra has established its own Centre of Excellence on Influencing Behaviours to advise and support policy on behaviour change across the department. This should strengthen Defra's expertise and influence in developing evidence-based policy approaches. Its weakness in the context of enabling sustainable lives is that it has no remit to work with other departments relevant to helping deliver this goal. **We recommend that Defra's Centre of Excellence has a formal role to share its learning and expertise across government.**

It is also not clear how both of these intend to collaborate with the newly established Behavioural Insights Unit (more popularly known as the 'nudge' unit) within the Cabinet Office. This unit is charged with finding cost effective, 'non-

bureaucratic alternatives to regulation' for delivering behaviour change through partnerships between government, business, media and the third sector. We welcome this growing interest in behaviour change within government but both these newly established networks and unit appear uncoordinated and need to ensure they are working more collaboratively.

Defra (together with Economic and Social Research Council and the Scottish Government) also funds two academic Sustainable Behaviours Research Groups to explore a range of aspects relating to sustainable living. The Sustainable Lifestyles Research Group<sup>96</sup>, at Sussex University will develop new and relevant understandings of the processes which lead to changes in people's behaviours and practices and build a sound conceptual basis for understanding and influencing change processes aimed at sustainable living. The Sustainable Practices Research Group hosted by the Sustainable Consumption Institute at Manchester University<sup>97</sup> will deliver a multi-level analysis of three environmentally-sensitive practices - eating, water-use and sheltering. Its research will answer central questions on how habits operate and what the drivers of change are.

It will be essential that Defra and the research groups facilitate close dialogue between policy makers and these research communities.

In Scotland, implementation of the Report on Proposals and Policies (RPP<sup>98</sup>) will depend on successful use of behavioural science. SDC believes it is particularly important to identifying barriers to the uptake of certain behaviours.

**Findings from the Scottish Government's Climate Change Behaviours Research Programme, due in February 2011, must be used to develop effective behaviour change strategies across all policy areas, especially transport, energy efficiency, food, consumption and planning.** Similarly, Welsh Assembly Government and the Northern Ireland Executive must also build behavioural science capabilities within their team.

## Conclusion

Our research has identified the critical need for governments to *enable* people to live more sustainable lives.

We welcome the current political interest in behaviour change and the potential opportunities this opens up but this must be supported by the right choice-architecture and regulatory framework to deliver transformation at scale. We need to fundamentally change the context in which we live our lives so that sustainable choices can become the norm. Every one of us – not just ‘green’ pioneers – must be ‘enabled’ or helped in a variety of ways to live more sustainable lives now and in the future.

Our research identified four key areas of challenge that currently hold back progress in this area:

- The politics - uncertainties around the current political backdrop – most notably that of the Coalition Government in Whitehall around ‘nudge’, Big Society, localism, the financial cuts and new ways of working and what all of these mean in practice for progressing this agenda.
- People – the challenge of understanding people and motivating behaviour change and having the right knowledge and skills in government to apply this understanding.
- That the concept of ‘sustainable lives’ is not yet well understood.
- Knowledge and evidence of what works in practice.

Governments clearly have a vital role to play. They must provide leadership and set out a clear strategic direction in the realisation of more sustainable lives. Government must also show

how it intends to work effectively across departments, with communities, businesses and civil society organisations to deliver real change.

We make a number of specific recommendations which are intended to assist the UK Government and the governments of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland with developing strategies to enable more sustainable living in our homes and communities, the way that we travel, the food we eat, the products and services we buy and our health, education and wellbeing.

Our research shows the need for new approaches that shift our fundamental behaviours. It means not placing too much emphasis on any one mechanism but using an appropriate combination of levers. We advocate an approach that uses four key pillars to underpin the transition to more sustainable lives:

- **A clear positive vision for sustainable lives** that engages all players and is clear about the priorities for action to achieve the goal of sustainable lives.
- **Making it easy** by providing a framework that uses the full spectrum of levers and incentives to ‘enable’ us to do the ‘right thing’ more easily.
- **Working with others** through better collaboration and better partnerships between national and local governments, civil society organisations, businesses, communities and people themselves – All play a vital role in the transition to sustainable lives.
- **Building capabilities and using evidence** to create better understanding of what works in practice, and using this knowledge in policy making.

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