

Comments back from the Sustainable Communities Summit Workshop - Creating Communities with Low Environmental Impact

February 14th 2005

The Sustainable Development Commission and Defra's challenging and inspiring workshop at the ODPM's Delivering Sustainable Communities Summit brought together policy makers, developers, practitioners, environmental organisations and LAs to discuss how to deliver a step change in the delivery of communities with low environmental impacts.

During the workshop, we asked participants to give us their 'three top ideas' to contribute to this agenda. They were requested to contribute ideas on:

- how to address the environmental performance of the existing building stock
- what measures would improve local environments
- what would accelerate the pace of change in these areas.

Please see below for a collation of the excellent comments we received.

Existing Homes

- Keep it simple - Information for easy/ideal free loft insulation. Not more complex like double glazing, cavity wall insulation etc.
- Scrap income tax. Replace with a tax based on Carbon Emissions, Waste Emissions, Water Consumption
- Generation of electricity through wind turbines or PV.
- Grants to all homeowners for improved insulation in roofs, walls, doors and windows. Problem of doing this for tenanted properties because grants will have to go landlords who - in the private sector - may just pocket the grants
- Buyers packs with sustainability ratings. Energy, air permeability etc. Integral waste reduction for householder - payment.
- Must address supply chain for water and energy efficient goods and make efficient products the default in all retail sectors supplying public and commercial customers
- Tax incentives/stamp duty concessions for home efficiency improvements.
- Require efficiency measures on extending property/on change of ownership
- Invest in renewable energy infrastructure in large-scale regeneration projects - use ESCOs to share benefits between supplier and users.
- Put stamp duty from house sale into fund that can be used by homeowner to improve energy efficiency of their home
- Seed a visible way of showing the difference - a stark one. TH three planets is OK but doesn't hit home hard enough
- Tax incentives for thermal, air tightness upgrading measures
- Provide Home owners with info - a change that will make a significant difference at reasonable cost
- The code for sustainable buildings should apply to existing buildings
- Annual 'home environmental/resource efficiency day'. With education and info to help people assess env/res efficiency of their home and show them ways they could improve it
- Impose solutions - remove local member decision making once strategic plan approved.
- More dissemination of best practice
- Factor in Eco rating in council tax calculations/banding so it's revenue neutral but people with environmentally inefficient homes pay more.

- Water conservation measures - fittings, water save products, low flush WCs, and on up to grey water recycling and rainwater harvesting
- Include sustainable construction features in public housing refurbishment - through decent Homes standard. But funding must come with it. Successful refurbishment scheme in Lambeth
- Develop plausible, attractive, affordable design ideas for improving typical features of existing stock without destroying their character - e.g. double glazing sash windows or multi paned windows without ripping them out and replacing with ugly picture windows.
- Industrial warm water waste for house heating
- Lower rate of VAT on construction products that contribute to making buildings more energy efficient
- Use stamp duty to stimulate improvements to housing at point that ownership changes
- Home Information Pack - expanded to cover range of environmental issues
- Stamp duty relief on environmental houses
- Tax efficiency - not sure how?
- Investment - grant incentives
- Domestic utility bills should show trends in consumption in units compared to a norm.
- Zero VAT for energy/resource efficient building work.
- Allow councils to use our housing capital receipts to revitalise areas of poor housing stock. Unless you have major investment its impossible to work up partnerships with anyone in the private sector or other funding streams
- Consumers must drive the process, especially for existing stock improvements. We need a massive PR campaign to build fear about climate change - TV, Newspapers.
- All buildings to receive an energy rating that brings fiscal benefits - e.g. stamp duty reduction or Council Tax reduction.
- Remove VAT from 'energy efficient' products and services for retrofit.
- Tax! Low tax or zero tax on refurbishment for environmental impact improvements on existing housing stock
- Need for practical, applicable guidance to show how energy efficiency and renewable energy can be built in to new communities or retrofitted into existing ones. To clearly demonstrate how various methods could be implemented.
- Government funding - preference in favour of stock transfer - Government funding regime distorted in favour of private sector, why no 'fourth option'?
- Economic instruments - e.g. VAT on housing improvements, recycled recovered materials
- Existing stock should be fully maintained. Clear any building that cannot be brought up to an acceptable level.
- Zero VAT for improving existing stock to EcoHomes good/very good.
- Possible private landlord incentives.
- Mandatory in public housing stock improvements programmes (e.g. estate regeneration)
- Instigate a nationwide energy conservation programme with grants for lower income people and tax exemption for monies spent by high-income people.
- Fiscal incentives e.g. VAT.
- Tax benefits for buildings 'incorporating' good practice in renovations - VAT possibly.

- Grant/financial incentives for 'private' householders to enable them to improve environmental efficiencies i.e. reduction in council tax for those homes achieving recycling.
- Reduced stamp duty for homes that meet the Code, including rebates on second hand houses where buyers improve efficiency within 6 months.
- Rural communities continue to be ignored. Few new build, many improvements, sustainable redevelopment essential. Must enforce through legislation and building control.
- Equalise VAT regime.
- Fiscal incentives required to address existing stock

Local Environments

- Reform communities around better schools, social amenities etc.
- Focus on homes first. Compulsory labelling of 'green cred' of homes within x years. Based mainly on actual CO2 - to introduce peer pressure
- Lighting (low energy of course!) to encourage use of public spaces
- To improve neighbourhoods, require all local authorities to produce proposals for Home Zones - but these need to be explained to residents more persuasively than they have been to date, and Home Zones I have seen need higher standards of design and - especially - long term maintenance
- Not sure, most things seem to have been addressed
- All new commercial buildings to be designed with the ability to be converted into domestic dwellings and thus reduce need for new build homes outside the neighbourhood
- Mixed housing - give ability to people to move up as family circumstances change. Allow room for properties to be extended.
- Make Ecohomes 'excellent' and energy efficiency 'best practice' the minimum standard for all new build projects
- Make it compulsory for local authorities to coordinate with schools (public and private) to provide free transport to schools would reduce congestion hugely
- Make neighbourhoods compete against each other for some real reward - not a plaque perhaps a playground
- Selective demolition and new build to zero carbon standard - regionalised carbon indexing
- The Government should apply the CSB to all the council housing transfers - retrofit as part of the refurbishments
- Transport - make it harder/less convenient to drive rather than walk/cycle
- Government must forward fund enabling projects properly and recover through charge on developments
- Explain further to consumers what the benefits are and what they can do
- High demand areas where high density units are constructed - acoustic privacy, fire resistance and energy efficiency and durability, robustness are key elements to ensure a community is sustainable and people continue to want to live there
- Low Demand - Create community anchors: libraries, schools, police, fire stations etc to generate community identity.
- Green roofs mandatory and flat roof new build such as supermarkets, leisure centres etc. Provide amenity, habitats/biodiversity, storm water run off amelioration etc.
- More green roofs, More green corridors, Keep cars out of the centres of estates

- Explore ways for developing attractive public/private bargains whereby the public sector commits to significant expenditure on uplifting public spaces and facilities in return for private individuals and communities committing their resources and commitment to uplifting homes.
- More coordinated investment in public services
- Green streets initiative - building community awareness of the potential of the public realm - but the process also involves community development and changed perceptions
- Improve inner city schools to prevent families moving out.
- Carbon and resource declaration/accounting for neighbourhoods
- Create more Home Zones - Plymouth had money for pilot scheme - Transport initiative that produced increased community cohesion, environmental improvements, reduced crime rate and produced all transport outcomes from the scheme.
- Encourage community events - sport, drama, fun stuff
- Major financial incentives for micro-renewable and neighbourhood CHP systems/ESCOs - risks underwritten by Government.
- Lottery funding for bursary (capital) pot of money for interest to be drawn down for maintenance and regeneration costs for our public open spaces around homes.
- Community-based planning at neighbourhood level that establishes where the community is now, where it wants to be in 10 years time and how development is going to play its part in bringing that about.
- Increase people's connection with nature and the health and lifestyle benefits of green space and green infrastructure.
- Public space improvements - education of commitment and behavioural change. Major campaign required to change public habits e.g. litter dropping, chewing gum etc.
- Make public realm maintenance worthy and aspirational e.g. road sweepers no longer the lowest status - make it a job to be proud of.
- Public transport please! Any new developments car impact on existing in not acceptable. Public transport a must to enable high demand movements without congestion.
- Tree planting and green roofs. More money for better management of parks joined up with health and education programmes.
- Make sure the local people can really take responsibility for local decision-making and instigate a local income tax.
- Improved public transport/cycling provision (public transport only works in urban setting).
- Water to provide an attractive feature.
- Car sharing - huge tax reductions for people who don't use cars.
- Create 'Vision for One Planet Living' for existing communities as a participative movement to create a sustainable place.
- Must work to minimise movement and the need to travel. Too many wealthy people live in small rural communities and travel significant distances to work. Increased rural house prices are destroying rural communities. Tax heavily home to work travel.
- All about education - in schools and adult education. E.g. about lifetime costs of housing not just new build cost.
- Litter to be addressed for improvement of local environments.

Pace of Change

- Learn from the rest of the developed world regarding energy conservation in buildings: 70% timber frame; 63% in Scotland; 10% in England and Wales
- Innovative smart fiscal measures - stamp duty rebates, council tax bands based on eco rating, tax breaks on green products. No VAT on refurbishment, cash incentives on energy efficient products (low e lamps, insulation, draft stripping, condensing boilers, solar panels).
- Financial incentives
- Change can only be seeded up by making the Government make higher standards mandatory
- Not just sustainability checklists, what about CEEQUAL standards also. If government policy is published, make sure it is followed through.
- Sharing of good/best practice examples within the planning and the house building and design sectors - learn how easy it is to build efficient homes without reinventing the wheel.
- Make CSB mandatory - level playing field. Provide tax concessions/incentives for developers hitting targets.
- Government needs to be very clear about the timescales we are working to in terms of climate change imperatives
- What needs to be done in order to mitigate climate change impacts
- Set very high minimum standards and provide fiscal and planning incentives for them to be met
- Government should invest significantly in developing tools to enable building designers to design more energy efficient buildings.
- The pace of change will only be driven across the board by regulation
- Early issue of Code for public awareness to create political imperative.
- Investment in sustainable transport and incentives to use it.
- Lead by example, use carrots and sticks
- Make CSB compulsory for all new build and major refurbishments.
- Remove VAT from refurbishment projects that improve (i.e. use less energy)
- Consider whole life energy consumption of buildings while considering the impact of the changing climate on summer time temperatures - we must not allow lightweight highly insulated housing to continue to be built, which will overheat and require mechanical air conditioning units - this will increase CO2 massively
- Code to be referenced in all regional spatial and housing strategies
- Regional energy strategy (where exists) to be referenced in all RSS & RHS
- Set vision of zero emission homes by 2010-2015 in Government policy.
- Make the code a progressive mechanism where every 5 years the standards in the code become mandatory and code itself is revised
- Standards such as CSB to be made mandatory for new build and timetable agreed for extension to existing stock
- Insist on EcoHomes excellent as the minimum standard of new build
- Progressive tightening of building standards over a number of years ahead so that all concerned can see the goal, and prepare themselves accordingly in good time.
- Make a real life animation of the world in 2050 (what happens when we go on like this)
- Government procurement must adopt the higher standard and insist on this on all public sector projects.
- CSB to be mandatory for all Government business.
- Need to make climate change strategy part of CPA of local authorities - will ensure it becomes local priority affecting both awareness and action.

- Beef up building regulations - step change - common regulation through country. Developers will then cost new regulations and reduce land price paid - comes off land value.
- National commitment to carbon declaration/accounting
- Make bidding for funding streams much easier, allow councils in particular extra resources to manage large projects therefore get things done! Bite the bullet.
- Do climate change PR campaign now to speed up the process. Consumers barely care at the moment, they may say they do but is this real -if they did then they would only use low energy light bulbs. Consumers have the power - forget politics and just do it!
- Adopt the Code and use it to require improved performance.
- Make the Code mandatory for Government contractors
- 'Labelling' approach to existing housing stock - cost to be born by increase in stamp duty on more expensive homes.
- Plan green infrastructure as part of the strategic planning process: install it where it's needed and invest where social benefits are greatest.
- Closer links with Europe will quicken the pace: Europe is more intent on improving environmental performance than GB.
- Tax exemption for retrofitting existing stock.
- Enforce EcoHomes very good or excellent for all new developments.
- Publicise grants and tax benefits for owners improving energy rating of their homes.
- Strengthen the role of local authorities as the nucleus of creating sustainable communities.
- Democratic renewal - local engagement - local accountability - local vision - local delivery. To foster a renaissance of community/civic spirit.
- Environmental impact studies. Existing brownfield should all have flood and impact on the existing protected.
- Pool the resources of all the various bodies arguing for sustainability to campaign on the single issue of climate change and sustainability.
- Insist that the Government bring in statutory sustainable building regulations.
- Making 'very good' level of building performance mandatory.
- Infrastructure: Get the infrastructure right, CHP, water systems on all new developments over 50 homes.
- Adopt the Code now!
- Tax unsustainable development.
- Development that doesn't deliver EcoHome 'excellent' and more. To address NPV calcs that undermines value of future savings.
- Storm platform and demand Government commits to a carbon neutral Thames Gateway!
- Incentives to create jobs (good houses would follow)
- Sort out contradictory fiscal incentives.
- Replace most of the civil servants with people who believe in this stuff.
- Incentive based mechanisms.