

# GOING GREEN AND BEATING THE BLUES

*THE LOCAL APPROACH TO  
IMPROVING WELLBEING AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY*



THE LOCAL WELLBEING PROJECT

## **ABOUT THE LOCAL WELLBEING PROJECT**

The Local Wellbeing Project is a unique initiative to explore how local government can practically improve the happiness and wellbeing of their citizens. This project brings together three very different local authorities – Manchester City Council, Hertfordshire County Council and South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council – with the Young Foundation; Professor Lord Richard Layard from the London School of Economics, who has led much debate about happiness and public policy; and the Improvement and Development Agency, who are leaders in local government innovation.

The project is funded by the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG), Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Department of Health, the Audit Commission, the Young Foundation/NESTA Health Innovation Accelerator and the National Apprenticeships Service.

The findings and recommendations in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views or proposed policies of any government department.

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## SUMMARY

All over the world communities and agencies from all sectors, including local government, are grappling with two very different agendas: on the one hand how to make their areas environmentally sustainable; on the other how to promote the wellbeing of local residents. Sometimes these two agendas reinforce each other. But sometimes they clash.

This discussion paper explores ways in which local government can use practical initiatives that support wellbeing tactically as a way of accelerating pro-environmental initiatives and behaviour change. It is based on a review of activities in three very different parts of England — Hertfordshire, Manchester and South Tyneside — and discussions with a number of local government representatives and environmental sustainability experts.

There are many ways in which action to promote wellbeing can also help promote environmentally sustainable lifestyles, and vice versa. The clearest 'win-win' actions at the local level centre on health, and in particular mental health. There are also benefits when 'green' initiatives build on neighbourhood structures and promote belonging and community engagement. The development of new settlements and communities is another area of opportunity.

Although there is some research evidence that people with 'green' lifestyles and higher awareness of environmental issues score higher when asked about their wellbeing, the experience of local government officers is that proposals that are positive in terms of environmental sustainability can often be perceived by the public to be damaging to their wellbeing. For example, curtailing car use generates protests that this is a restriction of personal

freedom, or accusations that it is a back door method for local authorities to generate income; encouraging people to eat local food is vulnerable to attacks on the basis of expense, especially at times of falling household incomes. At the extremes, it was reported that there is a perception that the sustainability agenda is inherently a 'hair shirt', thwarting people's efforts to find happiness through consumption or by taking long haul holidays; and that environmental sustainability is a luxury for the few who can afford it a view possibly increasing against the backdrop of recession.

At the national policy level, there is a clear and explicit link between environmental sustainability and wellbeing. In the UK, wellbeing is now an explicit aim within environmental sustainability policy. The 2005 sustainable development strategy, *Securing the Future*, recognized that wellbeing is at the heart of sustainable development: 'the goal of sustainable development ... will be pursued in an integrated way through a sustainable, innovative and productive economy that delivers high levels of employment; and a just society that promotes social inclusion, sustainable communities and personal wellbeing'.<sup>1</sup> Wellbeing is now part of the UK's sustainable development indicator set. This policy draws on a long tradition within debates about sustainable development about the need to measure progress beyond growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and disposable incomes.

Local government has a vital role in supporting both wellbeing and sustainability, through its statutory duties, the myriad of public services it provides and funds, and because of its key local strategic role as an influencer of other key agencies.

However, councils often struggle with the sustainability agenda. Although many local authority elected members embrace green priorities, and the majority of local authorities fund officers and initiatives to take forward this work, these issues can be sensitive and high risk. While those officers tasked with specialist responsibilities were clear about their remit, others with broader responsibilities reported that they found the agenda more challenging. This was because of the need for a multi agency response; a fear of public resistance, particularly to changes that could inconvenience

individuals such as less regular refuse collections or restricting car use; and the fact that the timescale of actions stretch beyond electoral cycles. Progress on wellbeing among local authorities faces similar barriers – although some councils have signed up to this agenda, this is still the exception rather than the rule. Here again, multi-agency action and commitment to wellbeing as a core priority is vital if policy intentions are to be implemented.

Local government faces difficult times: the credit crunch and downturn have directly affected the availability of local authority resources, and increasing worklessness and associated social problems will place new demands on budgets. Together with the sharp drop in public spending due after 2010, the question for many at the local level is whether local government can afford to maintain action on 'softer' issues such as wellbeing and environmental sustainability, or whether these will be added 'extras' that will wither away as priorities harden in the face of budget cuts.

External imperatives will however continue to focus local government energies. The framework, set by central government, within which local government operates now reinforces the focus on the environmental sustainability agenda. A new and more direct stimulus for local authority action will come from the government's new mandatory emissions trading scheme to be introduced in 2010, the Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC).

If local government is to successfully promote behaviour and initiatives that promote environmental sustainability, then the sector will need to develop a good practical understanding of how this can be achieved, at a time of decreasing resources. The starting point of this work was to explore the extent to which linking activities that promote environmental sustainability and wellbeing can encourage more people to change their behaviour and attitudes.

## THE FINDINGS

Our review of practice suggests that local authorities' key instrument in delivering wellbeing and pro-environmental outcomes is their role as service providers and commissioners, and that for initiatives to succeed in changing behaviour, they need to make it as easy as possible for residents to participate so that the desired activity becomes the default option. Examples suggest that as pro-environmental behaviour becomes embedded in everyday practice, the wellbeing benefit can grow. For example, allotments are becoming more mainstream and increasingly seen as being positive in terms of the food produced and because of the benefits of gardening and outdoor activity.

Our exploration of local action in the three areas – Manchester, South Tyneside and Hertfordshire — found clear links between the two agendas at the local level. These tended to focus on activities around mental and physical health – such as 'green gyms' – or activities focused on particular geographical areas that set out to improve the public realm or engage people in collective actions around the environment. The positive examples impacted primarily on individuals, communities or the wider context.

### INITIATIVES FOCUSED ON *INDIVIDUALS*

The projects highlighted under this category offer residents opportunities to volunteer to take responsibility for an aspect of their own environment, ranging from protecting local biodiversity to helping to maintain the quality of their local public spaces. One example, South Tyneside's Green Gyms, has been designed specifically to engage with people affected by mental health problems. These gyms contribute towards environmental and wellbeing outcomes through:

- giving residents the chance to gain new skills and knowledge
- empowering people to take control of their local environment informally, allowing people to become as involved as they wished to be
- encouraging residents to make the connection between their own lifestyles and wider, less tangible environmental issues.

### INITIATIVES FOCUSED ON *COMMUNITIES*

The projects which involve community action to improve the environment tend to involve transforming derelict and unusable areas of land into community assets, such as allotments and gardens: places which local people can use as leisure and educational resources. The majority of these initiatives reported significant increases in the wellbeing in the people taking part, as a result of:

- bringing people together across their communities, especially from different generations
- residents taking more control of how neighbourhoods looked and being able to see the positive effects of their hard work.

Not all these schemes explicitly promote wider environmental issues; some encourage participation by stressing the benefit to health and wider wellbeing. However, regardless of the overt aim, participants reported that environmentally friendly behaviours, particularly those that preserved the quality of public spaces such as involvement in local greening initiatives, had become embedded within their day-to-day lifestyles.

### *WIDER INITIATIVES*

The local authority initiatives, which aim to promote environmental issues to a wider geographic area, spanned a range of approaches, including promoting public transport and encouraging recycling. These initiatives highlighted the need:

- to work with the grain of what residents were willing to change
- for local authorities to 'walk the talk', and demonstrate best practice to other employers and service providers
- to tackle the substantial environmental impact from local infrastructure (such as local transport) which individuals cannot necessarily reduce themselves
- to think creatively about the ways in which new developments and public spaces can maximise the wellbeing of future users or residents, as well as environmental sustainability.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION BY COUNCILS AND THEIR LOCAL PARTNERS: WHAT CAN BE DONE?**

### **MAXIMISE THE 'WIN-WINS'**

1. Grow the number of initiatives that increase wellbeing and promote pro-environmental behaviour.
2. Explore how the wellbeing benefit of all environmental sustainability measures can be maximised, and promote this.
3. Add a wellbeing 'lens' to the development of big ambitious plans that are likely to generate public and political opposition: start small, use wellbeing as a tactic to drive through contentious issues, find the enthusiasts and work with them, celebrate success.

### **GALVANISE ACTIVITY**

4. Political leadership is key, setting the direction, mobilising support and calming fears about risks.
5. Use government targets to bring other agencies on board – eg local development frameworks that prioritise low carbon futures, the Comprehensive Area Assessment process.
6. Use local voluntary sector and faith groups as key partners and delivery agencies. They can often reach communities in a different way to formal agencies.
7. Check that local authorities' own actions model the behaviours that they wish to promote – councils' actions have potential to reduce emissions and encourage workforces, for example by encouraging working practices that reduce car use.
8. Use communications and campaigns wisely – often how services are delivered and personally tailored is more effective than traditional mass campaigns.

### **BE PRAGMATIC**

9. There will be some 'win-wins' that also save money – very attractive against a backdrop of recession and shrinking household incomes. These include:
  - promoting allotments
  - encouraging cycling
  - promote walking and outdoor activities.
10. Make it as easy as possible to be green. People are most likely to change behaviour when services make it nearly effortless as possible for people to do so. Evidence suggests that inertia is surprisingly strong.
11. Approach behaviour change subtly. Residents may change behaviour because they enjoy the activity, not because they are driven by any personal mission. This has an implication for how activities – particularly community based activities – are promoted and marketed.

### **THE PROJECT**

This discussion paper is based on a series of interviews with local authority officers in three areas: Manchester, South Tyneside and Hertfordshire. This includes officers with specific responsibility for environmental sustainability, as well as those with broader remits. The research snapshot was informed by an initial seminar of relevant experts, and a further seminar to discuss the findings. The initial focus of the work was to explore the overlap between activities that promote wellbeing and those that promote environmental sustainability. Following discussion with partner local authorities, the focus shifted to exploring ways in which wellbeing could be used tactically as a way of progressing action on environmental sustainability.

This report is based on a snapshot of opinion in three areas. Further detailed research in this area would help clarify the emerging messages.

A close-up photograph of a child's hands holding a small amount of dark soil. The child is wearing a light-colored, short-sleeved shirt. The background is a blurred garden with green foliage and a wooden fence. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day.

## **SECTION ONE: THE LINKS BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND WELLBEING**

Over the past 30 years, Britain's gross domestic product has more than doubled, yet there has been no corresponding increase in life satisfaction. This situation, mirrored across developed countries, has compelled academics, policy makers and politicians to question the role of economic growth in improving wellbeing. A parallel, yet overlapping and associated debate about how to tackle the emerging and urgent problems of climate change has put a spotlight on the need to change individual's behaviour and to introduce new ways to tackle CO2 emissions. Wellbeing is now frequently cited as one of the central pillars of environmental sustainability.

This section explores the link between these two agendas at the local level and the scope for local government action to promote change in this area.

A growing body of academic research has sought to explore the relationship between national prosperity and reported levels of life satisfaction within the population. Over the past thirty years, while national prosperity measured by traditionally economic measures has grown, there has been no parallel increase in people's satisfaction with their lives. This trend is mirrored in other similar developed countries.<sup>2</sup> Some measures suggest that life in the 21st century is stressful and difficult, and Britain fares poorly in comparison with other European countries, coming 13th out of 22 countries on both social wellbeing — measuring people's experiences of supportive relationships and sense of trust and belonging with others — and personal wellbeing, measuring people's experiences of their positive and negative emotions, satisfaction, vitality, resilience and self-esteem and sense of positive functioning in the world.<sup>3</sup> British 16-24 year olds report the lowest level of trust and belonging — a key element of social wellbeing — in Europe; it has been suggested that this could be a result of high levels of individualism in the UK.<sup>4</sup>

Running alongside these debates has been a growing consensus amongst the international scientific community on the level of danger posed by climate change and other forms of environmental degradation. Though no one is able to exactly predict what the effects of climate change will be, it now seems inevitable that global temperatures will rise and that this will have severe impacts on the UK and other countries. The government has acknowledged the need to both try to prevent climate change and to adapt to its effects, introducing specific strategies and legislation, most recently the Climate Change Act 2008, as well as local initiatives such as the Sustainable Schools Programme.

Local authorities in the UK are in a unique position to influence both agendas. Many of the key areas that evidence tells us have a critical impact on wellbeing – relationships within communities, with neighbours and in the family – fall within their remit.<sup>5</sup> And as big employers and providers and commissioners of services, as well as in their role of 'place shapers' and influencers of local opinion, they have an enormous potential to take forward action on environmental sustainability. As employers they can be encouraging home working, cycling and public transport use; they have considerable purchasing power to influence the behaviour of their suppliers; they lead local strategic partnerships; and control significant amounts of funding that can be used to prime green activities.

This report looks at the complex relationship between wellbeing and environmental sustainability from a local authority perspective, exploring where the promotion of one can support the achievement of the other. The report aims to:

- explore the overlap between activities that encourage wellbeing and those that are environmentally sustainable
- understand how behavioural change can be promoted by demonstrating that sustainable behaviour is in the interests of individual and community wellbeing.

The evidence suggests that there can be a link between environmental knowledge, attitudes and behaviours and personal wellbeing. Research from Imperial College London found that people who live a more eco-friendly lifestyle, based on an assessment of their lifestyle and attitudes, tend to score significantly higher in subjective wellbeing assessments.<sup>6</sup>

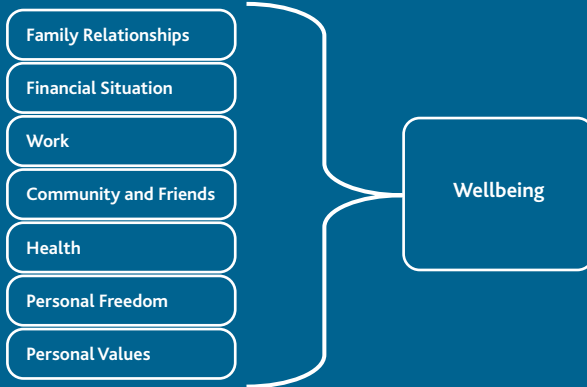
There can, however, be a tension between the wellbeing and sustainability agendas. Local authority officers voiced concerns that policies to improve environmental sustainability are often perceived to result in lower levels of wellbeing, and that this can lead to significant resident resistance. This can happen when the effect is to restrict individuals' autonomy, eg, to travel in the way they choose or consume the goods they prefer.

The report draws on the experience of the Local Wellbeing Project's partner local authorities – South Tyneside, Manchester and Hertfordshire – to explore the implications of their current activities and to consider the potential for future action. It suggests a new approach for the local government community, placing wellbeing at the heart of strategies to tackle environmental issues.

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY WELLBEING?

There have been extensive debates over the definitions of both wellbeing and happiness, and whether they are a single item or clusters of different items; for example, should pleasure, meaning and fulfilment be included? There also distinctions between more immediate pleasure and long lasting and profound satisfaction. Whatever definitions are used, it is clear that wellbeing is influenced by a myriad of factors. Academics have attempted to categorise the most significant influences. Lord Richard Layard, a leading British economist specialising in the study of happiness and public policy, has identified seven factors.<sup>7</sup> Each of these factors represents a web of other influences and experiences. To give one example: personal values tend to be shaped by upbringing, education and the political and cultural climate of the time. An individual's values in turn influence other factors such as family relationships or working life.





Running alongside these social factors is the role played by an individual's genetic make-up, and the interaction between what is inherited and personal experience. Evidence suggests that some people are born less able to cope emotionally with difficult life circumstances. Though this in itself will not necessarily lead to low levels of life satisfaction, it can mean that these individuals are less resilient to difficulties and setbacks in their lives.<sup>8</sup>

The study of happiness is nothing new. For centuries philosophers and thinkers have debated the issue. Aristotle concluded that happiness, or more broadly speaking, wellbeing, was an appropriate goal for society.<sup>9</sup> Utilitarian philosophers in 18th century England, among them Jeremy Bentham, argued that actions that brought the most happiness to the maximum number of people were of greatest value.<sup>10</sup> More recently a resurgence of academic interest in wellbeing has been influenced by a range of disciplines, including economics, psychology and political science. Much of this work has followed the recognition that happiness in societies does not necessarily rise in proportion to increased economic wealth once the basic needs of the population have been met. This has since become known as the 'Easterlin paradox' after the economist who first identified it.<sup>11</sup> The Easterlin paradox argues that individual wellbeing is more closely related to the relative position of their income in relation to that of their peers rather than the absolute amount they earn.<sup>12</sup>

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY?

There is a strong consensus in the international scientific community that accelerated climate change is happening and that it is the result of human activity. What remains unknown are the consequences of climate change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published a report in 2007, which brought together the latest and most comprehensive climatic data. It predicted that by the end of the 21st century average global land temperatures are likely to rise somewhere between 1.6 to 4.0 degrees centigrade.<sup>13</sup>

In the face of this disturbing evidence, the British government has recently made the decision to increase the UK's commitment to reduce CO2 emissions – the most significant of the greenhouse gases driving climate change – from 60 per cent of 1990 levels to 80 per cent by 2050.<sup>14</sup> The implications of this are significant; vast changes will be needed in how people live, work, and travel in order to achieve these targets. This will end the easy access to some consumer 'luxuries' that people have become used to in recent decades: a shift that will be challenging for those who experience the increased costs of long haul holidays or exotic foods as a decrease in quality of life.

As well as climate change, the way people live generates other risks to the environment.

Pollution impacts on biodiversity, and the destruction of natural habitats and competition is also exacerbated by the growing numbers of 'alien' species coming to the UK through trade and tourism. Increasing development in our urban areas, plus demand for land for housing and job creation, have reduced the acreage of parks and green spaces in some places, important for the survival of our indigenous wildlife.

The quality of public space and the local environment consistently emerge as priorities for local communities.<sup>15</sup> This includes problems caused by people – including fly tipping, litter and dog fouling. Noise pollution caused by heavy car use in densely populated areas is believed to have significantly damaging effects, triggering the body's stress response, which over time can affect

health;<sup>16</sup> pollution and poor air quality also damage physical health: a quarter of all preventable ill health is thought to be caused by poor environmental quality. Areas of socio-economic deprivation tend to be disproportionately affected by this sort of environmental blight.<sup>17</sup>

## THE LINKS BETWEEN WELLBEING AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

At the national policy level, there is a clear and explicit link between environmental sustainability and wellbeing. The government’s five principles of sustainable development include ‘ensuring a strong, healthy and just society’ which covers ‘meeting the diverse needs of all people in existing and future communities, promoting personal well-being, social cohesion and inclusion, and creating equal opportunity for all’.

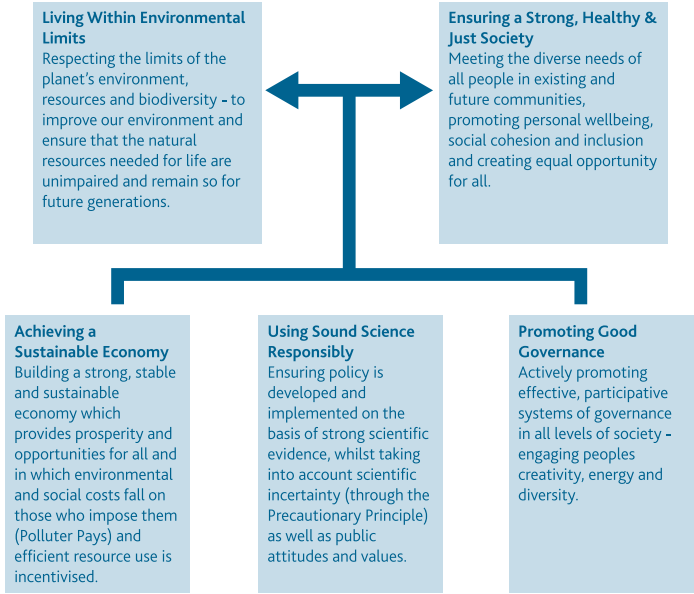


Fig 1: The shared UK principles of sustainable development (Source: Defra<sup>18</sup>)

Locating wellbeing as part of the environmental sustainability agenda draws on a long tradition within debates on sustainable development about the need to quantify progress beyond growth in GDP and disposable incomes, to take account of the wider effects of development on society. This is best articulated through the work of Amartya Sen, who in 1999 wrote ‘growth of GNP can, of course, be very important as a means to expanding the freedoms enjoyed by the members of the society. But freedom depends also on other determinants, such as social and economic arrangements, as well as political and civil rights’. In the same book, he concluded ‘to compete with GNP, there is a need for another – broader – measure with the *same level of crudeness* as the GNP’.<sup>19</sup>

The starting point for this work was to think about the overlap between sustainability and wellbeing. What activities could we plot as falling within this overlap? Could the link between sustainability and wellbeing persuade more people to change their behaviour? How could local authorities demonstrate that by acting sustainably local residents can increase their wellbeing as well as the collective long-term future?

This was set against the backdrop of what was reported from the local level. There was a perception amongst many involved in this work that people advocating behaviour change or other environmental actions are often portrayed as being ‘hair shirt’, ‘kill joys’, stopping people using their cars, or going on long haul holidays, or demanding that people on already low incomes spend a greater proportion of their money on organic or locally sourced food.

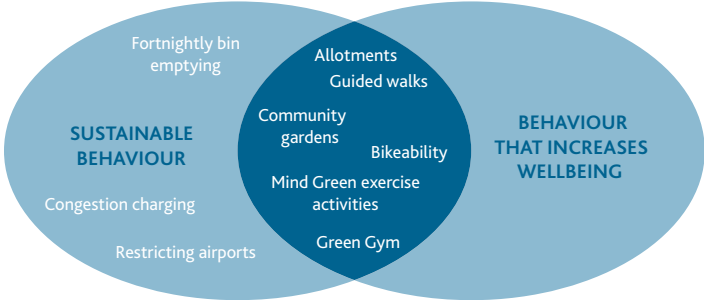


Fig 2: The overlap between activities that promote wellbeing and sustainable behaviour

The measures that fuel public opposition to environmental sustainability are perceived to fall outside the overlap where the interests of increasing wellbeing and environmental sustainability coincide. Congestion charging, restricting airport growth, reducing the frequency of rubbish collections and making recycling compulsory can all contribute strongly to the reduction in carbon, but have been controversial at the local level. Local government officers who have been involved in these initiatives recalled vivid memories about the difficulties of fronting the pro-environmental arguments in the face of public opposition.

However, beyond the stark examples that often appear in popular debate — including protests against fortnightly refuse collection, and the fierce debates about the merits of building new runways at airports — more nuanced approaches illustrate a more complex relationship between increasing wellbeing and environmental benefits.

In the longer term, many of measures to reduce carbon emissions can yield a wellbeing benefit. For example restricting car use can lead to an increase in cycling, which has strong mental and physical health outcomes for individuals. But debate over the value, and the role of the state, in these areas is lively; examples were cited of ambiguities over air travel — has the 30 per cent increase in air travel over the past five years<sup>20</sup> contributed to the growth of greenhouse gas emission? Or is this outweighed by the benefits of greater opportunities for leisure and for experiencing different cultures? Is it fair to pursue policies to restrict car use in rural areas where there is little public transport?

Our exploration of local action in the three areas – Manchester, South Tyneside and Hertfordshire — found clear links between the two agendas at the local level. These tended to focus on activities around mental and physical health – such as ‘green gyms’ – or activities focused on geographical neighbourhoods that set out to improve the public realm or engage people in collective actions around the environment. The Green Gym is a health initiative offering individuals an outdoor alternative to conventional gyms - the opportunity to increase their physical activity levels through direct involvement in practical conservation activities.

#### Mind Green Exercise Activities<sup>21</sup>

Across the UK, local Mind associations endorse a number of green exercise activities and projects, which aim to benefit both the environment and the mental health of those involved. These include walking, gardening (especially on allotments), social and therapeutic horticulture, conservation, bush craft (such as exploring local woodlands) and dog walking.

Staff members, service users, and volunteers are encouraged to both grow and learn about the plants and flowers in local allotments and help garden teams to improve green spaces. In an evaluation of the activities, participants said that they felt mentally healthier, more motivated and more positive. The activities helped to reduce depression levels and, participants reported an increase in feelings of calm and peacefulness alongside a rise in confidence and self-esteem.

The availability of green spaces has been linked with higher levels of social interaction and cohesion at a community level, as well as improved psychological wellbeing.<sup>22</sup>

#### Bikeability<sup>23</sup>

Around one-fifth of rush hour journeys are thought to be parents driving their children to school.<sup>24</sup> Bikeability is a central government initiative aimed at reviving the cycling proficiency test and increasing the numbers of children and young people who make their journey to school by bike. In March 2007, Cycling England awarded £1.25 million of funding to various local authorities to run a Bikeability initiative in their area. Bikeability has now been adopted by half the local authorities in England, with 40,000 badges awarded in its first year.

Bikeability schemes offer children an alternative mode of transport, which is fun and contributes to healthier lifestyles. Parents can save money and (sometimes) time through using their cars less. Bikeability also helps local authorities meet a number of their other targets including those in such as Every Child Matters, Healthy Schools, and Local Transport Plan objectives of reducing pollution and congestion.

Regular media campaigns like Bike to School Week have maintained the high public profile generated by the national and regional launches of 2007. By 2012, half a million children are expected to have taken part.<sup>25</sup>

At the core of the relationship between wellbeing and environmental sustainability is the contested question of the implications of increasing material consumption, undoubtedly linked to environmental damage. Beyond the point of meeting basic human needs, such as access to health care, many argue that consumption is linked to negative effects on wellbeing. Evidence shows that people who are most exposed to material culture through the media are more likely to be dissatisfied with their life.<sup>26</sup> Commentators differ on whether a switch away from our current levels of consumption is likely to arise organically as people perceive the negative consequences of current lifestyles,<sup>27</sup> or whether navigating this territory will involve more complex trade offs between individual aspiration and the long-term collective good.

### A DYNAMIC RELATIONSHIP

Many of the perceived relationships between environmentally sustainable behaviours and wellbeing are heavily influenced by personal attitudes and beliefs, which themselves are likely to change over time. Individuals have widely differing attitudes towards using public transport or cycling. Some people may make the switch relatively quickly if there are easily accessible alternatives, welcoming the opportunity to save money or to take more exercise, while others may resent the loss of autonomy. A different group from these 'early adopters' may change attitudes more slowly over time, as the benefits of changing behaviour are recognised, or because as the new behaviour becomes embedded it becomes 'normal', a default setting.

Many restrictions to behaviour imposed by the central and local state initially provoke hostility but then support grows as the debate becomes public. During 2004 and 2005, for example, discussion about smoking bans intensified. Between Spring 2004 and December 2005, support for smoke-free pubs and bars rose from one-half to two-thirds of the English population. Campaigners point to the Scottish experience, which highlights the influence of political leadership. In Scotland, where there was cross-party political support for a smoking ban, the percentage of those in favour rose more dramatically from just under forty per cent to seventy per cent of the population.<sup>28</sup>

Plotting a number of behaviours against two spectrums: negative to positive environmental outcomes and a negative to positive wellbeing outcomes, demonstrates how these changes can take place. The diagram below, developed within a discussion seminar convened as part of this project, illustrates the reaction to the introduction of recycling. In its early days it was often seen as a chore; however it has become increasingly easy as services have responded to users' wants. Similarly, buying local food might initially be experienced as a reduction of choice, but increased awareness of the benefits of supporting the local economy and reducing food miles may over time make consumers feel that it contributes to their quality of life.

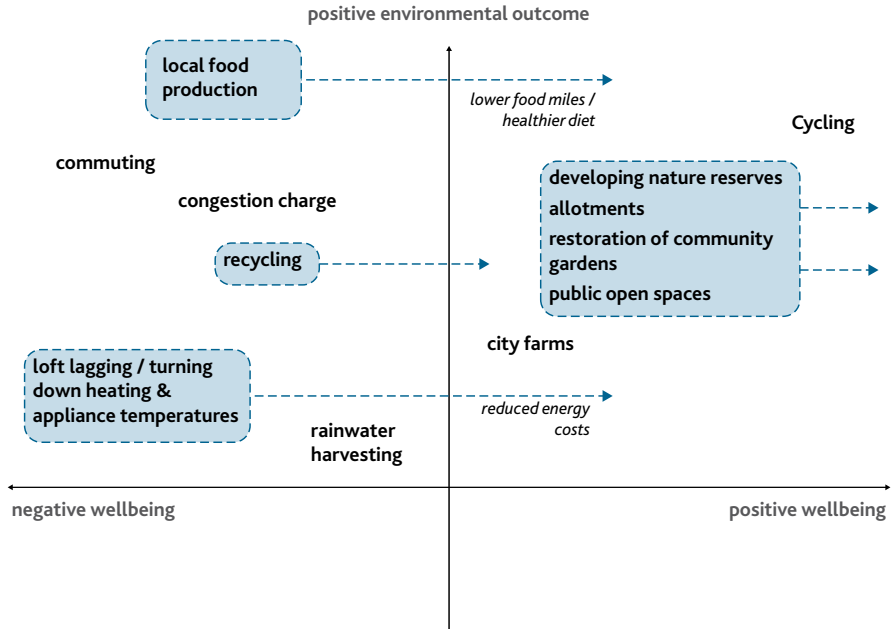


Fig 3: The changing relationship between wellbeing and environmental sustainability

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT'S POTENTIAL

Local government in the UK is in a unique position to encourage and support initiatives that can improve individual and community wellbeing and environmental sustainability. Local authorities design and deliver many of the public services and facilities that are crucial to the achievement of both, including waste collection services or land for community gardens. They are critical to the operation of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), which bring together the key local public and private sector agencies to jointly sign up to an overall strategy, the local area agreement.

However, although many local authority elected members embrace green priorities, and the majority of local authorities fund officers to take forward this work, these issues can be highly sensitive at the local level. Measures that curtail car use in particular often generate significant criticism and can be difficult for local politicians and officers to manage. The December 2008 referendum in Manchester over congestion charging resulted in a 'four to one' defeat for the proposals in spite of significant support from local authorities, substantial resources spent on campaigning for the proposition, and the offer of increased investment in public transport should the congestion charge go ahead. Several local pressure groups organised high profile campaigns against the introduction of the scheme. The campaign group Manchester Against Road Tolls, argued it would penalise low income drivers and small businesses unable to afford the daily toll, calculating an average annual cost of £1,200 per commuter.<sup>29</sup> In 2005 the population of Edinburgh rejected congestion charging by a three to one majority. However, the London experience shows that congestion charging can be introduced and can become popular. Rather than being the subject of a referendum, London's congestion charge was mandated as part of a wider programme of measures and tangible improvements in the bus service were quick to follow its introduction.

For local authorities, major initiatives to tackle CO2 emissions involve high levels of risk, and although London's experience shows what can be done, local politicians in particular may perceive the risks as outweighing the potential gains. Added to this is the fact that bigger initiatives to promote environmental sustainability are longer term than UK electoral cycles, both

locally and nationally, and that action is often the responsibility of many agencies working together, rather than one clear lead, then the levels of inertia grows. Progress on wellbeing amongst local authorities faces similar barriers – although some councils have signed up to this agenda this may still be the exception rather than the rule, public reactions (especially in the local media) may be hostile to local government spending money on 'happiness' and again, multi-agency action and sign up to a core priority is vital if policy intentions are to be implemented.

## RECESSION AND RESILIENCE

Local government faces difficult times: the credit crunch and downturn have directly affected the availability of local authority resources: interest and other income from the financial markets has fallen, local tax bases have shrunk, and the demand of increasing worklessness and associated social problems will put new pressures on budgets. Together with sharp drop in public spending due after 2011, the question for many at the local level will be whether local government can afford to take action on 'softer' issues such as wellbeing and environmental sustainability. Or will these will be added extras that will wither away as priorities harden in the face of budget cuts?

Regardless of public spending pressures, external imperatives will continue to focus local government energies on environmental sustainability. The framework, set by central government, within which local government operates, now includes several measures that will reinforce focus on the environmental sustainability agenda. The Local Government White Paper 2006 set out a refreshed role for local government through sustainable community strategies, local area agreements and local strategic partnerships. The Audit Commission's 2007 statement of intent on sustainable development consolidated this direction, putting it in the context of the new Comprehensive Area Assessment. Another push comes from the new planning framework, with moves towards more integrated spatial planning and local development frameworks (LDFs) placing sustainable development at the heart of planning.

A new and more direct stimulus for local authority action will come from the Government's new mandatory emissions trading scheme to be introduced in 2010. The Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC) will cover large business and public sector organisations. Agencies which spend more than £1,000,000 a year in the UK on electricity, will fall under the CCRC, and will have to produce annual reports on emissions and plans to reduce them. Most of English local authorities are likely to fall within this threshold.

A recent think piece by the Young Foundation argues that recession can also be a time of opportunity for the advancement of sustainability agenda. If the current crisis is seen as a symptom of the need for wider systematic change, then there is a need to look for the growth sectors of the future and to invest in these as a route to recovery. It is forecast that the biggest sectors by both value and employment of Western economies in 2020 and beyond will not be cars, ships, steel, computer manufacturing or personal finance, but rather health, education, care and environmental services.<sup>30</sup>

And the prospect of cuts in services have given discussions about behaviour change a new imperative. It may be more cost effective to aim for behaviour change to reduce obesity, improve public health, reduce waste, than to focus on conventional service-led responses. There are implications here for environmental sustainability (particularly promoting recycling and reducing landfill, and in encouraging walking, cycling and other activities that reduce carbon emissions).

A recent think piece for the Sustainable Development Commission argued that one way of repositioning sustainable development in a time of recession is to use a resilience lens. 'Sustainable development suffers from being seen by many as an expendable objective with limited relevance to everyday lives: as soon as the credit crunch and fuel price rises occur it has no immediacy. The concept of resilience however, can be promoted as not only relevant but central to everyday lives'.<sup>31</sup> The think piece quotes the Swedish Environmental Council: 'resilience in social-ecological systems is the key to sustainable development. To sustain development in a world in transformation, policy must enhance resilience and sustain social-ecological systems in the face of surprise, unpredictability and complexity'.<sup>32</sup>

The interest in resilience is mirrored in debate about wellbeing policy. Public policy makers – including the Local Wellbeing Project partner authorities Manchester, South Tyneside and Hertfordshire – are showing a growing interest in the ways that attitudes shape individuals' response to the recession, to the loss of work, income and opportunities. The interest is in resilience, how people 'bounce back' in the face of adversity, and why it is that some people appear to be better equipped to weather difficulties than others. The Young Foundation is beginning work with these partner authorities on ways in which wellbeing and resilience can be measured by local agencies. The factors that drive resilience are linked to those that underpin wellbeing: the quality of relationships, attitudes to local neighbourhoods, social capital and cohesion. As public policy in coming years focuses on the ways in which individuals can overcome worklessness and other consequences of the recession, resilience may become an increasingly important factor.

## WHAT CAN LOCAL AUTHORITIES DO?

However difficult this agenda is for local authorities, they will be under continued pressures to act to reduce CO2 emissions. Where 'pro-environmental' measures increase wellbeing, the potential to both change residents' actions and gain public support will clearly be greater. Local authorities are able to influence:

- **Individuals** – through positive messages and communications, and by encouraging behaviour change by designing public services which make an environmentally sustainable behaviour the 'default' or easiest option
- **Communities** – by supporting the initiatives or facilities that contribute to improving community cohesion and pro-environmental behaviours
- **Other organisations and agencies** – including businesses, landlords the wider public sector, the local third sector.
- **The wider culture of an area** – by demonstrating a commitment to both wellbeing and environmental sustainability, which over time will influence local social and cultural norms.

There are a number of tools and tactics open to local authorities to promote environmentally friendly lifestyles and local wellbeing:

## PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

Evidence from many councils suggests that mass campaigns can be less effective than changes to the design and implementation of services. Local government, and their key local partner agencies together control waste collection, public transport, and maintain public spaces. Agencies report that the key to persuading people to change behaviour is to make it easy to do so, making 'green' behaviour the mainstream choice rather than the exception. In the London Borough of Sutton, for example, 'personalised transport planners' – people who go door to door to discuss public transport with residents – have been successfully deployed as part of Smarter Travel Sutton, a joint initiative by the London Borough of Sutton, Transport for London and the Mayor of London. In 2009 this led to a 50 per cent increase in cycling, a seven per cent increase in bus use and a 17 per cent reduction in reported cycle theft in the borough.<sup>33</sup>

Recycling is an example where this approach has been successful in the UK. The gradual expansion of options and increase in doorstep collections and other ways that enable households to recycle with minimal effort has led to a 20 per cent increase in national recycling rates.<sup>34</sup>

Many of the services that local authorities provide are influenced and shaped by regulatory requirements. However, there is also considerable scope to maximise both the environmental and wellbeing benefits that services provide to the community. For example, all local authorities are required to provide allotments for residents. Combining provision of allotments with a campaign to promote community gardening clubs can both reduce food miles and build local social capital. Allotments and local food production can provide a good way for different communities to mingle – also improving residents' sense of belonging and community cohesion.

In Haringey, the community allotment project Living Under One Sun is inspiring local residents to grow and cook their own produce – while building friendships, skills and communities. Since 2009, it has used three community garden plots at East Hale Allotment sites to design and construct raised beds in the shape of the sun. Participating community groups were allocated an individual sun ray to grow their chosen produce, and share responsibility for the care and running of the overall site. The third plot features taller planter beds to enable those with back pain or in a wheelchair to participate. A greenhouse is also being set up to facilitate the growing of more sensitive produce and provide a space for community meetings and events<sup>35</sup>

Local authorities' operational role also brings the sector into contact with other public sector agencies – including health, transport and education providers; with local businesses and industries, and with the local third sector. Sometimes these relationships come together on informal initiatives, at other times joint working is formalised through structures like Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). There is potential here to share joint targets and actions in implementing formal government-required strategies like the Local Development Plans and Sustainable Communities Strategies. This can include action with the private sector, for example working with retailers on pedestrianisation of town centres, or with private landlords on loft lagging and other sorts of emissions reduction mechanisms.

## COMMUNICATIONS

Campaigns and communications can be effective in influencing local opinions and behavioural norms. Members of the public hold very diverse views on the environment, ranging from intense scepticism to deep commitment. The effectiveness of environmental campaigns will depend on how these different groups respond to the messages they receive.

To have the greatest impact, local authorities need to tailor their messages about pro-environmental behaviour to their own local populations. Highlighting how positive changes can also help individuals to feel happier is likely to have a wider appeal than simply urging individuals to reduce consumption.

Recent research by Defra explored the views held by the British population, analysing this into seven groups:<sup>36</sup>

**Positive Greens** – with the highest self-reported knowledge of environmental issues, they are the most likely group to try to influence those around them. This group tends to respond positively to communication campaigns and could act as opinion leaders and influencers.

**Waste watchers** – tend to be driven by an urge to avoid waste and damage to the countryside. This group is most likely to respond to information about the relative efficiency of products and to advice about reducing waste.

**Concerned consumers** – broadly supportive of pro-environmental initiatives, may have made some small changes to their behaviour. However this group probably think they do more for the environment than they actually do. Effective campaigns could help them to associate their own personal actions with environmental issues.

**Sideline supporters** – tend to have a supportive attitude towards the environment and acknowledge the seriousness of the situation, but are more likely to think a technological solution to the problem will emerge. They are unlikely to change their behaviour if it will affect their lifestyle. They may respond best to messages coming from outside government.

**Cautious participants** – generally agree that there is a significant risk to the environment but feel pessimistic about their ability to change the situation. This group would respond best to information about what action government is taking at all levels and to advice about how to incorporate small changes into their daily life.

**Stalled starters** – are people who feel the threat of environmental degradation is exaggerated, and may also claim their behaviour has no impact on climate change. The best way to influence this group may be by targeting mass audience media.

**Honestly disengaged** – are people who frequently lack any interest in the issue. Environmental issues do not appear to touch their lives.

## LOCAL AUTHORITIES' INTERNAL OPERATIONS

A significant proportion of each individual's ecological footprint is generated as a result of the services and infrastructure provided by government on their behalf, for example, public transport, healthcare and education.<sup>37</sup>

Local authorities can reduce this impact by promoting environmentally friendly behaviours with their own employees. Either directly or indirectly, local authorities often employ a significant proportion of a local workforce. There is potential here to adopt formal pro-environmental initiatives such as the 'Cycle to Work' scheme<sup>38</sup>, encourage flexible work and home working to reduce travel to work, and instigate schemes to promote recycling or reduce wasted energy.

## DESIGN OF INFRASTRUCTURE

The measures that local authorities can potentially take in designing new infrastructure and reconfiguring existing places through regeneration and renewal are far reaching and ambitious, with potential high impact on both wellbeing and environmental sustainability – designing town centres to minimise car use, restricting airport use, building trams and trains, and building and promoting the construction of zero carbon buildings.

The built environment is responsible for a significant proportion of carbon emissions produced in this country. Emissions from the construction, ongoing maintenance and heating of housing make up around 30 per cent of each individual's total emissions, with almost a quarter of that a result of transport use.<sup>39</sup> Transport also contributes substantially to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions: in 2004, the transport sector was responsible for around 27 percent of total UK carbon dioxide emissions, and most of this came from road traffic. Emissions had risen by about 10 per cent since 1990.<sup>40</sup>

Some of the initiatives in this area are costly in financial terms, others, particularly those that aim to change transport habits can be costly both financially and in local political capital – often these are the measures that generate the biggest levels of hostility from the public and from local business.





The wellbeing impact of new developments has been well documented in the UK, from concern about the 'New Town blues', focusing on post war housing developments<sup>41</sup> to the more recent experience of new developments such as Cambourne in Cambridgeshire, where levels of mental distress were so high that local health practitioners and the local authority established an investigation.<sup>42</sup> It is now accepted that new developments, if designed without enough care to social networks, community development and quality of life, can be difficult places for new residents to thrive and prosper.

The government's ambitious target of three million new homes by 2020 offers local authorities and their partners a key opportunity to influence the shape and character of their local built environment. The majority of these new homes will be situated in extensions to urban areas, although proposed Eco-towns will largely be in wholly new settlements. The challenge is to make sure that the experience for new residents is both positive in terms of their wellbeing and encouraging of pro-environmental behaviour.

Local authorities and their strategic partners have considerable influence on decisions around the provision of public transport and bicycle lanes, the energy efficiency of the new buildings and the provision of green spaces and community facilities, all of which have a significant impact on longer-term sustainability and more immediate wellbeing. The powers that local authorities have through section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 allows them to ensure that developments include facilities and provision for the long-term social and environmental sustainability of the future community.

### Dings Home Zone

The Dings is a neighbourhood of seven streets in central Bristol, which for many years had suffered from excessive commuter parking, rat running and a general decline of the streetscape. The neighbourhood falls within Bristol's 'Temple Quarter' regeneration area, and in recent years new housing developments have emerged on the once derelict land immediately surrounding it. The partners involved in the new development, including the city council and the housing developer Barratt Homes, have worked with the sustainable transport charity, Sustrans, to incorporate a Home Zone into both the existing community and the new developments.

A Home Zone is a street or group of streets where pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles share the space on equal terms, with cars travelling at little more than walking pace. The final design of the Home Zone in the Dings incorporated shared surfaces between the road and the pavement; 20mph speed limit in surrounding areas; planting of trees and other greenery; public art reflecting local events and history; a new cycle and walkway through the site linking to the pre-existing National Cycle Network and promotion of walking, cycling and public transport. The design of the Dings Home Zone now means that drivers automatically lower their speed; the streets are safer and there are now more attractive spaces for people to meet. Local residents, who were previously isolated by poor public transport, now have more transport options and are less dependent on the car.

Regular meetings were held on the Dings between residents, Bristol City Council, Sustrans and Barratt Homes during the development. Barratt Homes were extremely proud of the fact that they did not receive a single letter of complaint from local residents over the three years they were building property nearby in 2004-2006. They attributed this to the fact that they were able to build good relationships between their staff and local residents through the process of jointly planning the Home Zone.

Local residents are satisfied with the results of the Home Zone and are much happier with the Dings as a place to live. Before the Home Zone, only 10 per cent of residents felt safe in the area; now 45 per cent feel safe. Perceptions of fast traffic, safety of children playing in the street, noise from traffic and anti-social behaviour have all improved.<sup>43</sup>

Many countries are building entirely new towns and cities. Some of these projects use groundbreaking technology to build environmentally sustainable communities, learning from the lessons of previous attempts to build new settlements with wider social goals. The following case studies demonstrate the full extent of the possibilities open to local governments in their role as 'place shapers' for their local communities:

#### Masdar

Masdar in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi is an 'eco-city', due to be completed in eight years from now with a projected population of 50,000. The aim is that Masdar – which means 'the source' in Arabic – will be 'zero carbon and zero waste'.

The Masdar site is surrounded by high carbon developments in the wider region, which is largely in development. The intention is that this development will lead to the creation of new sustainable energy industries, establishing Abu Dhabi as a centre for expertise in this area, having a catalytic impact to drive adoption of low carbon technologies in the region. Achieving this requires a combination of high and low technological solutions as well as making pro-environmental behaviour an easy option for future inhabitants.

Sustainable solutions have been found through simple design features, many of which are commonly found in traditional architecture. For example, the city of Masdar is orientated so that cool sea breezes will provide the city with natural ventilation, and a city wall will shield residents from harsh desert winds. Masdar's narrow streets will provide shade from oppressive heat as well as being an attractive public space for pedestrians.

#### Hammarby Sjöstad, Sweden

The Hammarby Sjöstad development in Stockholm, which should be completed by 2015, will include 11,000 residential apartments, along with comprehensive provision of new public transport links, leisure facilities and green public spaces. Nearly 7,000 homes have been built, and the area has been transformed from a polluted ex-industrial site to a popular neighbourhood for young families. The land on which Hammarby Sjöstad is built was formerly privately owned, left as derelict and home to industrial squatters who contributed to dangerously high levels of pollution.

Recognising both the problems of pollution and the need for sustainable housing developments in the city, public authorities purchased the land and, working with architects and developers, created a masterplan for the area. At the heart of the masterplan are ambitious environmental targets, such as average car ownership of 0.3 cars per home. The development is designed as a complete infrastructure project, of which housing is just one part. The heating, transport and waste collection systems work together to reduce the amount of energy and resources needed in the long term. The project meets very high environmental standards in comparison with many developments in the UK.

The starting point was that design of housing and infrastructure is not enough to meet ambitious environment targets. Pro-environmental design needed to be complimented by pro-environmental behaviour. To help achieve changes in behaviour and attitudes, Hammarby Sjöstad has an education centre, which showcases environmental technologies and hosts regular exhibitions to explain and encourage pro-environmental behaviour. This has led to some success, for example average water use per person is a quarter less than the city average.<sup>44</sup>

## WELLBEING AS A TACTIC TO PROMOTE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Local authorities are under pressures from voters, from interest groups, and from government to take action on climate change. The framework that sets out the responsibilities of local government, including the Audit Commission's performance framework, is increasingly pushing councils to be proactive in this field. This has been seized on by some political leaders and administrations, and is in other places more of a minority interest.





However, the level of risk in this is high: the risk of losing popularity, of starting long term action that will not deliver within relatively short political cycles, and of high profile failure. The Manchester referendum on congestion charging suggested that when people are directly asked to choose between stark options, they tend to favour self-interest.

Local authorities and other agencies report that the best way to encourage people to change their behaviour is to offer them flexible and appropriate services so it becomes easier to change than to stay in old habits. This is

evidenced in the increasing success of recycling as curb side collections become the norm. Agencies offering domestic energy savings programmes, like loft lagging, report that it is very difficult to attract householders unless they can access the benefits of the scheme with minimal effort. In practice the inconvenience of clearing a loft appears to outweigh the benefits of cost savings from lower bills.

The next section of this report explores a number of initiatives that both increase personal wellbeing and tackle climate change in three particular local authorities. These demonstrate that where it is possible, increasing participants' wellbeing can make them more likely to change their behaviour. And that people can change behaviour because it makes them happier, without consciously signing up to the sustainability agenda.

Wellbeing can be used as a tactic to change behaviour. It has potential to encourage individuals to embrace incremental change, be that greening their neighbourhood, growing their own food or taking part in communal activities to improve public spaces. The more that local authorities can do to maximize the wellbeing benefit in their behaviour change strategies, the more successful they are likely to be. This could be by looking for ways in which social networks can be built through community 'greening' projects, or by promoting healthy 'green' lifestyles in mental health initiatives. The options are many and varied.



## SECTION TWO: REVIEW OF PRACTICE



The Local Wellbeing Project works with three local authority partners: South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council, Manchester City Council and Hertfordshire County Council. This section explores the activity these three councils are engaged in which both promote environmental sustainability and improve local wellbeing. These have been separated into three clusters:

- environmental initiatives where the primary focus is the *individual*, in terms of behaviour change and personal wellbeing
- environmental initiatives where the focus is a local *community*, both in terms of a physical neighbourhood and a community of residents
- environmental initiatives where the focus is *wider*, both in terms of physical area or broader community of people.

### THE THREE LOCAL AUTHORITIES

#### SOUTH TYNESIDE METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

South Tyneside is England's smallest metropolitan borough council with a population of around 153,000 people and a geographical area covering 64 square kilometres. A former centre of shipbuilding and mining, the area has suffered from industrial decline. However, a growing service sector is bringing employment back into the area.

South Tyneside Council's overall vision is driven by 'Spirit of South Tyneside', the Local Strategic Partnership's Sustainable Community Strategy. 'Spirit' has underpinning themes of Promoting a Sense of Place, Cultural Opportunities and Wellbeing.

Setting out how this priority theme will be delivered is the Culture and Wellbeing strategy - this lays out its aims for social, economic and environmental wellbeing. At the heart of this strategy is the idea that creating a real physical sense of space can impact positively on community and individual wellbeing. The strategy also makes explicit links between involvement in local neighbourhood projects and improving the local environment, and personal wellbeing.

Alongside neighbourhood working in the 71 'natural neighbourhoods' which local residents identified, the borough has set up community area forums, which meet once a month and hold public topical debates, run petitions, and allocate funds for environmental campaigns. Each area is working toward the development of an Area Action Plan.

## MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

The northwest of England is the country's largest growth area outside of London and at its heart is Manchester. With a population of around 440,000, a growing economy and cultural sector, Manchester aims to be a 'world class' city by 2015. However, despite its success, Manchester continues to experience significant levels of deprivation; 27 of the city's 32 electoral wards are in the top 10 per cent most deprived in the country.

Manchester City Council takes a proactive approach to its environmental activity, with a core of major events supported by other initiatives spread at intervals throughout the year. This approach was developed following the 2002 Commonwealth Games. The intention has been to capitalise on the motivation and pride of the local volunteers who helped make this event a success. The City's approach to encouraging communities to actively engage in tackling anti-social behaviour – including littering, refuse dumping and other environmental degradation – also informs its approach.

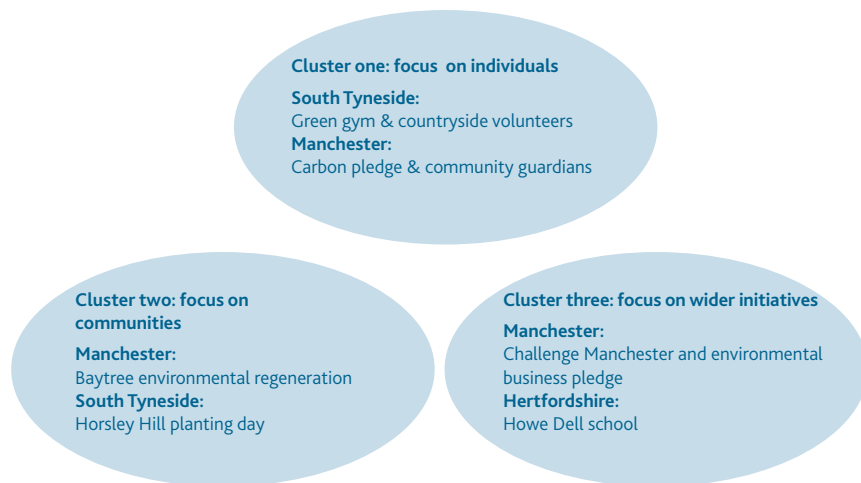
All the city's environmental campaigns focus on encouraging communities to come together to make a difference to Manchester. Their aim is to achieve behaviour change by encouraging involvement and action. Campaigns are

flexible and connected to a variety of mainstream issues, for example crime and disorder or education. Central to all the city's campaigns is the belief, stated in Manchester's LAA, that self respect and respect for others are intrinsic to a sense of personal wellbeing.

## HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Hertfordshire is located in the north of London and is a county with diverse geographic areas. The county has about one million residents who live in small to medium-sized towns and a large number of scattered villages. The county is made up of 70 per cent 'green belt' land and has 15 local nature reserves as well as 43 Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Chiltern Hills to the west and northwest of the county are designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Natural heritage is an important aspect for the county and to many local residents.





**Fig 4: The examples**

Hertfordshire County Council has a broad environmental remit, covering everything from highways, transport planning and waste to sustainability, planning and countryside management. The council is currently concentrating on the development of its Climate Change Strategy. The first part of this – its Carbon Management Strategy – was published in March 2008 and focuses on reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the council’s own estates and operations. The other aspect is to develop a Resilience Strategy for all of the council’s services and 35,000 staff, which assess vulnerability to the impacts of future climate change and proposes ways in which the council can adapt to them.

## **CLUSTER ONE – INITIATIVES FOCUSED ON INDIVIDUALS**

The next four case studies focus on environmental initiatives where the primary focus is the *individual*, in terms of behaviour change and personal wellbeing.

### South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council: Green Gym

South Tyneside’s Green Gym initiative is run in partnership with the charity Groundwork. It is a health and personal development project specifically designed to support local people with mental health vulnerabilities. Based around an environmental theme, it works on the concept that engagement with nature and the outdoors can lead to both an appreciation of the importance of environmental sustainability and have a positive effect on personal wellbeing. Green Gym sessions offer a range of activities including allotment development, nature reserve conservation and restoration of community gardens and public open spaces. The Green Gym project aims to:

- improve individuals’ psychological health and wellbeing
- reduce isolation
- increase voluntary and community group activity
- increase physical activity
- help reduce the unemployment rate and engage people in decision making for the services they use.

These outcomes are achieved by promoting fitness and personal wellbeing and attempting to reduce stress and depression.

Sessions involve vulnerable members of the community in South Tyneside’s deprived wards. They are community-led and the project liaises closely with other local organisations, including local community centres, community-based mental health teams, South Tyneside Primary Care Trust, BTCV JobCentre Plus and the Shaw Trust.

#### Key points

- the Green Gym demonstrates how an environmentally themed project can promote physical, mental, economic and community wellbeing
- it offers numerous ways to engage with the local environment enabling participants to choose their own course of activity and development
- it demonstrates how improving individual wellbeing can act as a route to engaging with others and building contact with other people in the community
- the benefit is however only directly experienced by relatively few in the community: although publicity about the existence of such initiatives may indirectly influence a wider group of people.

### Manchester City Council: The Carbon Pledge and Personal Carbon Trading

Manchester City Council is a partner in the Manchester is my Planet (MimP) initiative, which involves all of Greater Manchester's 10 borough councils. MimP runs a climate change pledge scheme, where residents and households in the region can take the following pledge:

*'I pledge to play my part in reducing Greater Manchester's greenhouse gas emissions by 20 per cent before 2010, to help the UK meet its international commitment on climate change.'*

Once on the pledge database, those taking part are sent information and given support to reduce their individual carbon footprints by, for example, energy saving in the home and using more environmentally friendly transport options. Manchester City Council currently has more residents taking part than any other borough with over 6,411 pledges.

In 2007, MimP partnered with the Royal Society of the Arts' Carbon *Limited* to create an event to explore how personal carbon trading could work if it was introduced in the UK. Residents of the Greater Manchester area and MimP pledgers were invited to a public discussion to explore the role of personal carbon trading as a method of reducing carbon emissions. This was followed up by Manchester Carbon Trading Week which took place in September 2007.

People were invited to register for the public discussion and provide information on their lifestyle. This information was then used to calculate their carbon usage for a week, providing each individual or household with a carbon profile that they could then use to 'trade' with others taking part in the public discussion.

#### Key points

- the climate change pledge encourages awareness and action at an individual household level. The carbon trading event built on this, and helped individuals to see how their lifestyle relates to others living in their community
- this is most likely to appeal to those who are already supportive of the green agenda
- the climate change pledge scheme helps to build a sense that supporting the environment is a shared endeavour and that it is socially 'normal' for people to play their part
- there is no compulsion to take part and so those who do are choosing to engage with pro-environmental activities because of the positive impact they will have on their city's efforts to reduce its overall emissions

- across the 10 authorities over 20,000 people have signed up to the pledge, demonstrating to politicians that a significant constituency is backing bold leadership and the tough decisions needed as we work to develop a low-carbon city regional economy.

### Manchester City Council: Community Guardians

Residents in Manchester are able to become Community Guardians by volunteering to 'adopt' their local area and work with the city council to ensure that any problems with the quality of local public spaces are dealt with promptly.

The role of Community Guardians can include:

- organising and/or participating in clean ups or litter picks
- identifying necessary local environmental improvements
- generally reporting anything wrong with the environment or council services in their area, particularly graffiti, litter, a broken light, etc.
- monitoring potential dog fouling problems and reporting offenders
- keeping trees in their street watered
- unlocking and locking alley gates on bin emptying days.

The Community Guardian scheme started as a pilot in 2004 in the Newton Heath ward of Manchester. There are now over 300 active Community Guardians in the city, ranging in age from 18 to 84 years old. Many of these volunteers have played an active role in their neighbourhoods, and have helped to enlist other like-minded residents to volunteer in improvement schemes. There are three 'levels' of Guardian: guardian, guardian plus and mentor level, with the last two requiring CRB checks. A small group of Guardians have played a role in the success of the Blackley Forest project, where local residents have made a commitment to help the council develop and maintain their local forest, for the benefit of the local community.

Guardians are able to report any problems to the council's 'Environment On Call' centre using a freephone number. After joining the scheme all volunteers receive an information pack and supporting materials. They then also meet the Street Environment Manager for their ward on a regular basis to discuss longer-term environmental improvements for their area or to raise any problems that they may have encountered.

#### Key points:

- the Community Guardian scheme has helped local people to improve the quality of their local area. Tackling this sort of environmental degradation can increase people's satisfaction with the area they live in and increase use of public spaces by local people
- the scheme empowers local people to take control of a problem affecting their area and in so doing builds community capacity and a sense of wellbeing
- the scheme uses 'light touch' environmental enforcement through peer pressure rather than enforcement by outside agencies, aiming to incrementally encourage behaviour change within the community
- the initiative demonstrates the value of promoting behaviour change by example: 'enthusiasm can breed enthusiasm' by showing others the benefits that come from volunteering.

#### South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council: Countryside Volunteers South Tyneside

Countryside Volunteers South Tyneside (CVST) is an independent community group that works to improve wildlife and countryside sites across the area, undertaking a wide range of tasks throughout the year. The group works closely with officers from South Tyneside Council's Countryside Team, who have provided training in new skills such as wildflower identification, bat detecting and traditional hedge-laying techniques. The group is informal and open all their activities to other members of the public. Volunteers can choose to be involved as little or as much as they wish to. Since the group was established in the early 1990s activities have included:

- pond management
- badger watching
- tree coppicing
- clean ups
- bat surveys
- hedge laying
- bird and hedgehog box making
- green wood working
- willow weaving
- glow-worm surveys.

CVST were recently instrumental in rescuing hundreds of smooth newts which were endangered by building works at Boldon Comprehensive School. The group was responsible for collecting the animals and safely transferring them to other locations across the borough. CVST have also obtained funding to buy bat detectors and have built and installed bat boxes in their area along with collecting valuable records of foraging and roosting bats.

The members of CVST have benefited from the social interaction and the sense of 'making a difference' that their involvement has brought. Many of the group have initiated new projects and gained qualifications such as bat workers and great crested newt licences.

#### Key points

- this project has a specialist aim of building knowledge and appreciation of the natural environment. It has concentrated on protecting local biodiversity
- CVST has enhanced the wellbeing of those taking part by providing them with opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge, to take part in new activities, and to make new friends
- Like the earlier example, the benefit of this – in changing behaviour and increasing wellbeing – is likely to be felt only by a relatively number of service users.





## FOOD FOR THOUGHT ....

The four schemes discussed in this section reflect the value in engaging with individuals to promote awareness of the environment and encourage behaviour change. All the schemes included opportunities for volunteers to come together and work with others in their community to achieve a common goal. This was reported to be beneficial to participants' health and happiness, allowing the development of new skills, new social contacts with different people, and giving volunteers a sense of achievement in having improved their neighbourhood. As with the experience of many volunteer initiatives, the benefits were as much for the volunteers as the wider community.

Common themes that can be drawn from these examples are:

- **The schemes are flexible and informal** – many people perceive environmentally friendly behaviours as being restrictive to their personal freedoms or lifestyle. All these schemes rely on volunteers, who are encouraged to contribute in a way that suits their circumstances and interests. In all the cases discussed, the projects have developed their own momentum as participants have opted to do more and encouraged others to also volunteer.
- **Promoting personal development** – the Community Guardians, Green Gym and CVST schemes all allow volunteers to learn new skills and take responsibility for issues they feel passionately about in their local area. This demonstrates that there can be a direct link between developing awareness and engagement with the environment and personal feelings of empowerment and wellbeing.
- **Behaviour change may happen with out a specific awareness of the wider purpose:** participants appear to have changed their behaviour as much because of the wellbeing benefit as because of any intention to benefit the environment. For some, the environmental benefit was of little importance; they stayed involved because the initiatives improved the quality of their lives — others were more committed to 'green' outcomes. This shows how wellbeing can be used as a tactic to encourage behaviour change among those who are not signed up to any wider environmental awareness.

## CLUSTER TWO – INITIATIVES FOCUSED ON COMMUNITIES

The two case studies below focus of environmental initiatives where the focus is a local community: a physical neighbourhood and a *community* of residents.

Manchester City Council: Baytree environmental regeneration

Manchester City Council had originally intended to demolish the Edwardian terraces in the Baytree area of North Manchester. However local residents objected to the idea strongly and encouraged the council to consider other options.

Residents worked with local housing officers to develop ideas for a sustainable community. Following the demolition of 40 homes deemed beyond repair, landscaping, a communal garden and an allotment were created. The remaining 82 homes were refurbished with new roofs, with 61 homes being fitted with electricity-generating photovoltaic panels.

A result of this project, a new set of rules for dealing with contractors and consultants were set out. Residents are now introduced to contractors before work begins and the council now insists that contractors use more environmentally-sustainable building materials.

Key points

- this regeneration project demonstrates how a community was able to develop its own vision for a sustainable future despite the significant threat of demolition
- the community regained a sense of control over its future and was able instead to influence the way in which the council operates and such control has been found to generally increase personal wellbeing.



South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council: Horsley Hill Estate Planting Day June 2008

Horsley Hill Estate in South Shields has been identified as one of South Tyneside Council's 'priority neighbourhoods'. Since 2006, local residents have worked together with the council's Community Services and other organisations on a neighbourhood action plan, which involved volunteers giving over 1,000 hours of their time to talk with friends and neighbours to identify the main issues that affect their quality of life.

The residents of the neighbourhood felt that the appearance of the estate had declined, contributing to negative perceptions of the area. Working in partnership with the council and South Tyneside Homes, the residents' association set about reversing this. A planting day and garden competition was organised with the council's Streetscape service to complement 'Northumbria in Bloom'. Financial support and donations from the council, South Tyneside Homes and B&Q allowed the association to arrange a day for local people to plant hanging baskets and pots which they could then take home to their own gardens. Children who came along sowed sunflower seeds as part of a competition to grow the tallest flower on the estate.

Around 40 households signed up to the garden competition. Over the summer, these homes were monitored and judged by an expert panel. The money raised at the planting day was used to purchase prizes for the garden competition.

This approach ran alongside regular estate walkabouts used by agencies to identify issues of concern and address them, often through enforcement. The residents' association's hope is that if people take pride in where they live, this will help to improve the local environment and quality of life as well as increase demand for housing on the estate.

#### Key points

- Horsley Hill's experience demonstrates how a poor quality physical environment can have a significant negative impact on the quality of life in a neighbourhood
- the scheme drew on the resources of local volunteers across the neighbourhood to positively transform the area in which they live
- the project allowed residents to draw their own links between their environment and their own sense of community wellbeing.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT ....

The schemes discussed in this section illustrate the effectiveness of tackling environmental issues through community action. The schemes have allowed people of all ages to work together to improve their area, and has helped to break down negative stereotypes of the neighbourhoods and of other local residents. Common themes that can be drawn from these examples are:

- **the relationship between local social contact and wellbeing is very real** – the strong theoretical evidence for this appears to translate directly into practice
- **The quality of the environment matters** – in these examples, a poor quality environment had a significant detrimental effect on the community's sense of self-esteem and wellbeing
- **Making the sum greater than its parts** – all the projects discussed were successful because of the contributions of people across the community. Working together allows people to build relationships with

others living nearby, and to increase a sense of belonging and wellbeing. Feedback from project workers and residents taking part in these initiatives was that the schemes engendered a sense of purpose and good feeling from:

- working together
- achieving something both individually and collectively
- seeing the fruits of their labours.
- **Wellbeing aims took precedence** — the environmental sustainability dimension of these projects was secondary to the need to promote wellbeing. Those interviewed did not speak explicitly of a greater appreciation of environmental issues.

## CLUSTER THREE – WIDER INITIATIVES

The next three case studies look at environmental initiatives where the focus is *wider*, both in terms of physical area or broader community of people.

### Challenge Manchester: 100 days to a cleaner, greener city 2008

Manchester's annual 'Challenge Manchester' campaign took place last year between 14 February and 24 May 2008, and featured 100 days of intense activity across the city. The first 50 days focused specifically on environmental sustainability issues, in particular, on minimising waste, encouraging recycling and increasing understanding of climate change. The following 50 days focused on community clean ups, local environmental improvements and planting schemes.

The campaign included:

- handing out free low energy lightbulbs and 'top tips' handbooks
- encouraging Chorlton residents to pledge not to use plastic bags, signed by more than 500 people
- 'Own Your Streets Day' on 25 April which challenged the public to throw away litter responsibly when all street cleaning services were removed from the city centre
- the planting of 2,250 new trees by the half-way point of the campaign

- more than 9,000 people taking part in over 280 events across the city.

The city council used the campaign as an opportunity to consult residents about the future of recycling services across the city by recruiting a team of canvassers to engage residents. More than 11,000 people across the city have responded to the consultation by visiting the initiative's website, calling a free-phone line or attending focus groups. More than 100 businesses also responded.

Manchester City Council's environmental campaigns' team argue that these initiatives need to be repeated on a regular basis in order to embed behaviour change and environmental messages. The impact of the annual campaign over the past five years has been felt across a number of services:

- while only a handful of schools were involved the city's eco-schools project in 2004, the city now has a high number of eco-schools. 27 per cent of English schools are eco-schools; the comparable figure for Manchester is 70 per cent
- there were just four Manchester in Bloom entries in 2004. By 2009 there were 34 from entries towards similar national competitions.

Key points

- The Challenge Manchester campaign helps to connect action to improve the physical quality of the local environment, with action to increase understanding of climate change and other environmental issues which are far less tangible and immediate
- The campaign helps to draw links between individual behaviour change, action at a community level, such as tree planting and Eco School initiatives and efforts to meet city wide and national emissions targets. This can help individuals to see the value in making small changes to their own lifestyles
- The campaign helps residents to make some immediate changes, such as using low energy lightbulbs or reusing shopping bags. These can help build momentum for environmental behaviour change, which is encouraged over the long term by repeating environmental messages in an annual campaign.

#### Manchester City Council: Environmental Business Pledge

- The Environmental Business Pledge project was launched at the first Manchester Challenge event in 2004. Over the past five years the scheme has expanded to involve partners including Groundwork, Mersey Basin Campaign, ENCAMS and the Environment Agency. The pledge aims to:
  - improve the environmental performance of local businesses
  - achieve cost savings for the businesses involved
  - increase their competitiveness.

The three levels of award are:

- Bronze - awarded for raising awareness of environment issues. The businesses must comply with all relevant environmental legislation and must ensure that the area around their premises is kept clean and free of litter.
- Silver - awarded for taking action on environmental issues. Businesses must reduce their water and energy usage. They must calculate how much waste they produce and commit to recycle a proportion of it.
- Gold - awarded for lasting achievement. Businesses must have undertaken action which has demonstrated an impact on three of the following issues: continual recycling, green purchasing, environmental management, community activities, waste minimisation, green travel plans and investment in more environmentally friendly equipment.

The majority of the businesses signed up are clothing retailers, newsagents, supermarkets, department stores, chemists, restaurants, cafes, bars and pubs. Manchester City FC, the two universities in Manchester and the Manchester Evening News Arena are amongst the larger organisations to have taken the pledge.

Key points

- the scheme aims to demonstrate to businesses how they can reduce their environmental impact and save money, helping to highlight how environmentally friendly behaviours can be beneficial in other ways
- the scheme helps to promote messages about the environment in the workplace which, when combined with similar messages aimed at households, contributes to create a culture where environmentally friendly behaviours seen as the norm
- this scheme impacts directly on wellbeing by improving the quality of the public realm, and by encouraging community activities.

#### Hertfordshire County Council: Howe Dell school

The Howe Dell School in Hatfield was rebuilt as one of the UK's first Eco-Schools in 2007. The £10 million project incorporated a new school, children's centre, nursery provision, a community centre and a child day care facility.

The school was specifically built to incorporate a number of environmentally sustainable design elements and technologies, including:

- solar heating and heat recovery system
- photovoltaic cells and wind turbine
- inter-seasonal heat store (and was the first building in the world to incorporate this technology)
- rainwater harvesting
- recycled building materials and furniture
- natural ventilation.

The school's emphasis on sustainability also extends to the curriculum, which firmly embraces the Education for Sustainable Development agenda. The building is linked to the pupils' IT network so that they can see how much energy is being used or stored at any given moment. Landscaping around the building is designed to provide a variety of external environments to stimulate learning and play.

Although to date, Howe Dell is the only project on this scale, Hertfordshire has overseen other energy awareness and action projects. Astley Cooper School in Hemel Hempstead undertook its own Energy Governor Project in 2002, resulting in the installation of a building energy management system, new pool hall lighting, modification to some of the hot water system and associated engineering works. It also installed a wind turbine which was funded by the county council and a 'Clear Skies' grant. The turbine's contribution to electricity production is minimal but has helped to raise awareness of the need to reduce energy wastage in the school.

A range of programmes in Hertfordshire's schools aims to raise awareness of energy efficiency:

- Action for Energy: a pilot programme held in two primary schools in 2006, where a theatre group led a day of drama activities culminating in a play for students and parents about energy and water wastage. Each school held an 'energy week' following this day. The programme has now been rolled out to 15 primary schools with grant assistance from the Climate Challenge Fund.

- Schools energy awareness campaign: set up in 2006 with the aim of encouraging better environmental behaviour in schools. A short film was produced for local schools with simple messages to switch off lights, computers and any other equipment not in use.
- Water Audits: commenced in 15 primary schools in 2006. Three Valleys Water education officers spent a day at each school working with a class and their teacher. Water use and waste was identified in the school, with a teaching pack provided for the schools' future use.

#### Key points

- buildings that rely on natural daylight and ventilation support more comfortable learning environments and better health for children. Exciting landscaping which encourages children to play outside encourages physical exercise for young people, all of which contribute to children's improved physical wellbeing
- providing low carbon infrastructure, such as school buildings, can be one of the most effective avenues open to local authorities in supporting environmentally friendly lifestyles. However, it can be expensive and disruptive to put into place.
- children are among the most effective advocates for the environment and educating them to appreciate the importance of behaviour change also helps to spread environmental messages to families. As children mature and age, their appreciation of the environment can help support a wider culture of environmental awareness
- co-locating a community centre, children's centre and nursery on the site with the school maximises the impact on attitudes and behaviour.

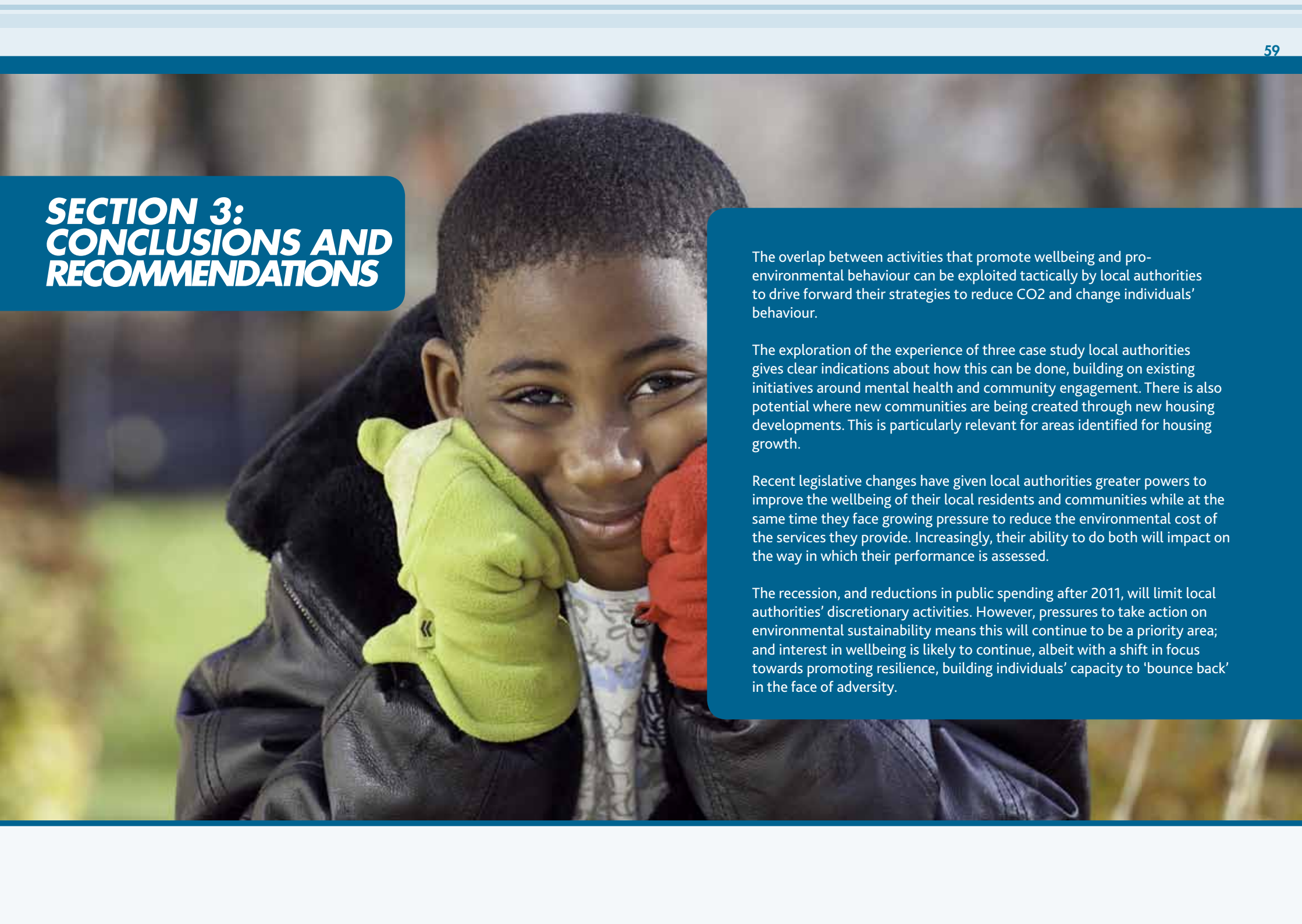
local environmental quality with broader issues like climate change, the campaign helps to build links between immediate behaviour change and longer-term global change.

- **practise what you preach** – promoting support for behaviour change will be encouraged if local agencies are seen to 'walk the talk' and promote examples of low carbon living at the community level.
- **target the potential advocates** – children and young people are open to pro-environmental behaviour and are often strong advocates of behaviour change in the family home. Targeting children and young people is a good tactic for influencing family behaviour, and also educates the activists, consumers and voters of the future.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT ....

The initiatives discussed in this final section explore how local authorities have been able to support the development of environmental awareness and action with a wide focus across a large geographical area or broad community of residents. Common themes that can be drawn from these are:

- **building momentum** – behaviour change is a slow process and is best encouraged by a variety of messages repeated at regular intervals over time. Campaigns like 'Challenge Manchester' help to reach a large proportion of people in a region each year. By combining action on

A young boy with short dark hair, wearing a black jacket, is smiling and holding a green and red stuffed animal. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting.

## SECTION 3: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The overlap between activities that promote wellbeing and pro-environmental behaviour can be exploited tactically by local authorities to drive forward their strategies to reduce CO2 and change individuals' behaviour.

The exploration of the experience of three case study local authorities gives clear indications about how this can be done, building on existing initiatives around mental health and community engagement. There is also potential where new communities are being created through new housing developments. This is particularly relevant for areas identified for housing growth.

Recent legislative changes have given local authorities greater powers to improve the wellbeing of their local residents and communities while at the same time they face growing pressure to reduce the environmental cost of the services they provide. Increasingly, their ability to do both will impact on the way in which their performance is assessed.

The recession, and reductions in public spending after 2011, will limit local authorities' discretionary activities. However, pressures to take action on environmental sustainability means this will continue to be a priority area; and interest in wellbeing is likely to continue, albeit with a shift in focus towards promoting resilience, building individuals' capacity to 'bounce back' in the face of adversity.

To achieve ambitious and necessary targets on climate change, it is inevitable that some key measures that will have to be introduced may generate public hostility. Local government should explore how wellbeing can be used as a tactic to prepare residents for the more difficult measures — congestion charging, town centre pedestrianisation, restricting airport growth, building eco-towns – by normalising pro-environmental behaviour as the default, the expected standard, rather than the exception, and by working with enthusiasts and advocates of change in small-scale pilots.

This report has looked at the experience of three English local authorities facing different demographic and economic realities. Their experience shows that local government can build on the activities and approaches that it has already established. While this is a difficult and challenging agenda, and is likely to continue to be so, there is scope to move forward creatively, building community support, by demonstrating that acting to save the planet need not be hard and can be rewarding, even fun.



## **SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION BY COUNCILS AND THEIR LOCAL PARTNERS: WHAT CAN BE DONE?**

### **MAXIMISE THE 'WIN-WINS'**

1. Grow the number of initiatives that increase wellbeing and promote pro-environmental behaviour:
  - look at the potential of community based activities, mental health services, and substantial new housing developments to deliver the 'win-wins'.
2. Explore how, within overall strategies, the wellbeing benefit of all environmental sustainability measures is being maximised, and promote this.
  - For example explore the wellbeing potential of pedestrianisation and traffic calming. How can new social spaces be included in public space? How can individuals and communities become involved in environmental improvements?
3. Add a wellbeing 'lens' to big ambitious plans that are likely to generate public and political opposition: start small, use it as a tactic to drive through contentious issues, find the enthusiasts and work with them, celebrate success.
  - For example, some areas may have local populations that will be more likely to embrace energy saving improvements to their homes. Start in these areas and sell the successes, and the impact on wellbeing, particularly reduced bills.

### **GALVANISE ACTIVITY**

4. Political leadership is key, setting the direction, mobilising support and calming fears about risks.
5. Use government targets to bring other agencies on board – eg local development frameworks that prioritise a low carbon future; the new Comprehensive Area Assessment could be a useful lever.

6. Use local voluntary sector and faith groups as key partners and delivery agencies, they can often reach communities in a different way to formal agencies.
7. Check that local authorities' own actions model the behaviour that they wish to promote – councils have potential to reduce emissions, encourage their workforces to change behaviour and encourage working practices that reduce car use.
8. Use communications and campaigns wisely – often how services are delivered and personally tailored is more effective than traditional mass campaigns. Any campaigns need to recognise that different communities and groups respond differently to environmental messages, and within these groups there will be great differences in opinion and receptiveness to green messages.

## BE PRAGMATIC

9. There will be some 'win-wins' that also save money – very attractive against a backdrop of recession and shrinking household incomes. These 'win-win-wins' include:
  - promoting allotments: they are cheaper, good for personal wellbeing (gardening consistently emerges in studies as being strongly associated with wellbeing); and reduce food miles
  - encouraging cycling – saves fares, promotes good mental and physical health, reduces car use
  - promote walking and outdoor activities as exercise – saves gym fees, promotes mental health and wellbeing, encourages appreciation of the natural environment
10. Make it as easy as possible to be green:
  - people are most likely to change behaviour when services make it as easy as possible for people to do so. Evidence suggests that inertia is surprisingly strong.
11. Approach behaviour change subtly:
  - people may change how they act because they enjoy the activity, not because they are driven by any personal mission. This has an implication for how activities – particularly community based activities – are promoted and marketed.



A photograph showing two individuals in winter attire working in a field. One person, wearing a dark jacket and a dark beanie, stands on the left. The other person, wearing a dark jacket, a white fur hat, and a grey scarf, is leaning over a tall, conical structure made of thin, light-colored sticks. The background shows a wooden fence and bare trees under an overcast sky.

## APPENDIX

### **AN OVERVIEW OF GOVERNMENT POLICY AND RESPONSIBILITY ON WELLBEING AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

#### **CENTRAL GOVERNMENT**

In October 2008 the government announced that a new Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) will be created. DECC takes over from the two departments that currently spearhead activity around wellbeing and environmental sustainability, the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and Communities and Local Government (CLG). DECC will also replace Defra as the lead government agency for climate change.

#### **DEFRA**

Much of Defra's work has focused on sustainable food and farming, fisheries, animal health and welfare. The cross-government Sustainable Development Unit is currently housed within Defra, the role of which is to 'embed, monitor and report on sustainable development' across government and the country.<sup>45</sup>

Defra has also worked with CLG, the IDeA and the LGA (Local Government Association) to provide guidance and materials to local communities aimed at strengthening the delivery of sustainable development in Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and Local Area Agreements (LAAs).

### **DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

CLG leads the government's work on sustainable communities, with much of its attention focused on giving communities more influence in decisions that affect them. It has an explicit environmental sustainability strand to its remit, including:

- putting sustainable development at the heart of local planning
- working to develop greener public spaces and improving the quality of the built environment
- making housing sustainable and resource efficient while reducing waste.

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE CONTEXT IN WHICH IT OPERATES**

Local government is directly responsible for delivering many of the services and facilities that are crucial to community wellbeing and sustainability. There are many pieces of legislation which regulate how local authorities are able to do this. Below are set out the key legislative and regulatory measures that impact on this agenda.

### **THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2000**

The Local Government Act includes discretionary power to promote the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of communities through community strategies. These strategies allow greater freedom for authorities to improve public services and to look beyond their immediate service delivery responsibilities to develop holistic approaches to the wider wellbeing of their areas.<sup>46</sup>

### **COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT (CAA)**

The Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAA) has replaced the Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA) for local authorities. Unlike CPA which focused on services provided by individual institutions, CAA examines the public services in an area delivered by councils and their partners.<sup>47</sup> Part of the CAA framework examines local performance against a set of originally 198 national indicators (NIs), a significant number of which relate to Public

Service Agreements to 'improve the health and well-being of children and young people' and 'promote better health and well-being for all'.<sup>48</sup>

### **EU LANDFILL DIRECTIVE, 1999**

In order to meet the national goals set by the 1999 European Union (EU) Landfill Directive, central government in the UK set local government the target of recycling or composting at least 25 per cent of household waste by 2005. This will increase to 30 per cent by 2010, and 33 per cent by 2015.<sup>49</sup> Countries that do not meet their targets face fines from the EU. Central government is taxing councils to dump rubbish in landfill sites as part of their Waste Strategy 2000. The landfill tax escalator will increase by £8 a ton per year from 2008 until at least 2010, when the cost will be £48 a ton, giving greater incentives to reduce, reuse and recycle waste.<sup>50</sup>

### **TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT, 1990 - SECTION 106**

Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 enables a local planning authority (LPA) to enter into a legally-binding planning obligation with a land developer over a particular issue. The land developer is committed to lessen the harm caused by their development proposals, usually by providing funds for environmental and wellbeing initiatives such as traffic calming measures, new play facilities, public art, tree planting, cycle paths, meeting places, development of local schools and affordable housing. Planning obligations are an extremely useful way for LPAs to improve local communities.<sup>51</sup>

### **THE NOISE ACT, 1996**

The Noise Act 1996 introduced an offence of emitting excessive noise from a dwelling between eleven o'clock at night and seven o'clock in the morning. If noise levels remain unacceptable after a complaint and warning notice has been issued, local authorities may prosecute, and confiscate any equipment which is producing the noise. Local authorities also have a duty under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to inspect their areas every so often to detect statutory nuisances and to serve an abatement notice on the person responsible.<sup>52</sup>

### ALLOTMENT PROVISION

Together, a number of acts from the Small Holdings and Allotments Act (1908) to the most recent Allotment Act (1950), place a duty on local authorities to provide enough allotments to meet local demand.<sup>53</sup> In 2002 the government strengthened the policies and protections afforded to allotments with the planning system through PPG17 (Planning for open space, sport and recreation), which provides a robust framework for the protection of urban green spaces, including allotments, and sets out that allotments should not be considered as previously developed land.<sup>54</sup>

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 Beverley Taylor and Steve Higgins, Manchester CC

## THE PROJECT

The project covers five main strands: emotional resilience for 11 to 13 year olds; wellbeing of older people; guaranteed apprenticeships; neighbourhoods and community empowerment; and parenting. In each of these areas it is testing out new approaches; measuring their impact; developing replicable methods and looking at their cost effectiveness. Two underpinning themes are to investigate the relationship between wellbeing and environmental sustainability, and how best to measure wellbeing at a local level.

## THIS PAPER

This discussion paper is part of the wellbeing and environmental sustainability strand, which aims to explore the practical steps that local authorities can make to improve the environmental sustainability of local communities while at the same time helping to improve the wellbeing of their residents. It focuses on the ways in which local authorities can exploit the overlap between activities that improve people's wellbeing, and those that promote pro-environmental behaviour change and progress plans to tackle carbon emissions and climate change. It is based on interviews with local authority officers in Hertfordshire, Manchester and South Tyneside, and two seminars bringing together various experts in the field. The paper has been written by Nicola Bacon and Liz Bartlett, with input from Mandeep Hothi and Marcia Brophy, all from the Young Foundation, plus further input from Ruth Townsley, an independent consultant.

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### Project Partners:



South Tyneside Council

### Core Partners:

