Priorities for DEFRA's departmental sustainable development strategy

A summary of views and ideas from stakeholder seminars

March 2002
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**Background**

In Spring 2002, DEFRA will be producing a departmental sustainable development (SD) strategy with the overall aim of exploring the contribution that DEFRA policies can make to the achievement of an improved quality of life. The SD strategy will set out how DEFRA policies will achieve integrated economic, social and environmental objectives, and

- aim to identify policy areas which pose the greatest challenges or can make the greatest contribution to sustainable development;
- set down the principles which DEFRA needs to adopt to ensure all its policies address social, economic and environmental objectives;
- look at the scope the department has to contribute to sustainable development through its own operations (e.g. energy, waste, travel, procurement).

DEFRA’s departmental SD strategy follows on from its recent consultation on the aims and objectives for the new department. The SD strategy will build on these aims and objectives and will address concrete issues and processes to ensure the department is able to deliver its overall aim of sustainable development. The strategy is intended to be long term and therefore will require measurable outcomes.

Over the past few months DEFRA have been preparing this strategy in consultation with stakeholders, the public and staff. In addition to a public consultation exercise, conducted by IPPR, and DEFRA’s internet discussion forum for stakeholder input, Green Alliance has carried out an external stakeholder exercise to inform the strategy. Green Alliance’s project aims to draw out and explore cross-cutting themes for the strategy through discussions with key players from government, business and NGOs.

**Methodology**

As a starting point for stimulating discussion on DEFRA’s departmental SD strategy, Green Alliance asked seven key commentators for their personal views of the priorities, opportunities and pitfalls for the strategy (annex 1). This initial commentator exercise, which was a stimulus for thinking on the strategy, fed into the first seminar on 18 October with representatives from NGOs, business and government (participants list-annex 2).

At this initial seminar with stakeholders in October, three issues emerged as potential cross-cutting themes for the departmental SD strategy. These themes were then explored further in a second series of seminars (participants lists-annex 3). The themes suggested by Green Alliance after this first seminar and agreed with DEFRA were localism, innovation and social exclusion/environmental justice.

The purpose of the seminar series in December was to brainstorm some concrete policy and process recommendations on these three themes. Small, focused seminars were held
with experts on each of the three issues. The report, which follows, is the summary of views and ideas which emerged from the three seminars on localism, innovation and social inclusion/environmental justice. There are recommendations under each of the three themes for DEFRA to take forward in the development of the strategy.
Executive Summary

The first seminar in the series as part of this Green Alliance project was held on 18th October with representatives from NGOs, business and government.

The purpose of this initial seminar was to provide DEFRA with some challenging new perspectives to assist the department in thinking creatively on the direction of the strategy at an early stage in the process. The aim was not to arrive at any formal consensus but to brainstorm on some key issues, which could be distilled into overall themes to be taken forward into the second seminar series in December 2001.

These views of participants sought during the seminar were analysed by Green Alliance who agreed together with DEFRA on the following themes to take forward in the second series of seminars- localism, innovation and social inclusion/environmental justice. These themes are cross cutting, relevant to all areas of DEFRA’s remit and encourage linkages between policy areas.

Specific seminars were held on each of these three cross cutting themes. Below are the key conclusions and policy recommendations, which resulted from these three seminars.

1. Supporting the right local and regional initiatives

Although there was a specific seminar on localism, issues relating to the divisions between the local, regional and national were raised at all three seminars. By using the SD strategy to demonstrate that change is both possible and desirable at the local level, DEFRA can make the links to the broader sustainable development agenda and secure greater public support for ‘bigger picture’ issues.

Recommendations

- DEFRA needs to identify where good local/regional initiatives exist and develop national polices, which meet sustainability criteria, to encourage and support them.
- Tackling some issues at the local level now (e.g. waste and recycling) will provide some quick wins for the department.
- The regional level is crucial to creating better links between the local and the national – DEFRA must aim for better partnerships with RDAs.
- DEFRA cannot solve the local/regional/national debate on its own. The department will need to build connections with other government departments to make real progress on this issue - especially DTI and DTLR.

2. Public participation and inclusion

There was broad agreement amongst the three stakeholder groups that DEFRA needs to ensure a more active involvement in public participation which will result in better decision-making. To be able to tackle the challenges facing the new department
effectively, DEFRA will need to speak to and learn from a much wider group of people and organisations than at present.

**Recommendations**

- Minimum standards for public participation, including making funding available for people to attend meetings and supplying adequate feedback to participants.
- DEFRA needs to run pilot schemes of innovative new projects, drawing in experience from other sectors and from outside Britain.
- DEFRA needs to consult more widely, particularly focusing on those groups within society not normally consulted.
- The consultation processes themselves need to be made more accountable, transparent and accessible.
- There is a role for DEFRA to work with the Social Exclusion Unit to bring the sustainable development agenda into the current debate on social exclusion.

### 3. Research and Evaluation

The stakeholders consulted for this exercise were chosen to represent a variety of sectors. Their views are valuable but views alone will not be enough. To ensure better policymaking, more research and policy analysis is required. This does not necessarily need to mean lengthy (and costly) research, but looking at existing data with fresh perspectives. However, the call for more research can quickly be transformed into a justification for inaction and the focus of the strategy must be on outcomes, not processes. For this reason, evaluation and monitoring need to be used to check on progress towards meeting concrete and challenging sustainability targets.

**Recommendations**

- DEFRA needs to develop more sophisticated accounting mechanisms which capture the real costs and benefits of projects (social and environmental as well as economic).
- DEFRA needs to have in place an auditing framework to guide the development of policy, sound sustainability indicators and concrete statements about how this will be monitored.

### 4. Transforming the internal culture of DEFRA

A new organisational strategy which reaches across the entire remit of DEFRA is a bold move and should be commended. However, without a shared vision of where the department needs to go, change will not happen. DEFRA needs to ensure that sufficient focus is placed on the education and awareness of its own staff, who will have responsibility for delivering the strategy. There was broad agreement that for the SD strategy to have a chance of delivering some concrete benefits, issues of sustainability, social inclusion and localism will need to be communicated, understood and supported throughout the department.
Recommendations

• DEFRA should have an internal awareness raising programme for all staff on the issues raised by the seminars and implied within sustainable development.
• DEFRA needs to tackle the tendency for the civil service to become more risk averse with seniority by rewarding innovation and experimentation (by pay and promotion) and creating a culture where occasional failure is accepted as the inevitable consequence of new ideas.
• The creation of an Innovation Unit which brings in people from outside the department to provide challenging perspectives.
• More flexible structures and funding to allow DEFRA to be more fleet of foot and be able to seize new opportunities.
• DEFRA should be prepared to recognise outcomes beyond the remit of the department and recognise how those policy areas can be furthered by its own work.
• DEFRA needs to take the lead within government on sustainable public sector procurement.

5. Working with business

Many exciting and innovative solutions come from the business sector, and both government and NGOs could learn a great deal from the ways in which business responds to the challenges facing it. As the sponsor of several large businesses, DEFRA is in a position to learn from successful innovative practices as well as to use its influence to drive change.

Recommendations

• To be effective, DEFRA needs to work with innovative business direct rather than just through the trade associations.
• DEFRA can learn from business to develop more strategic thinking about the future, for example using Shell’s future scenarios as a model.
• DEFRA should encourage compulsory environmental reporting and level the playing field between big and small businesses.

The report which follows sets out in greater detail the conclusions of each of the three seminars.
General seminar: 18 October 2001

The first seminar in the series as part of this Green Alliance project was held on 18th October with representatives from NGOs, business and government.

The purpose of this initial seminar was to provide DEFRA with some challenging new perspectives to assist the department in thinking creatively on the direction of the strategy at an early stage in the process. The aim was not to arrive at any formal consensus but to brainstorm on some key issues, which could be distilled into overall themes to be taken forward into the second seminar series in December 2001.

These views of participants sought during the seminar were analysed by Green Alliance who agreed together with DEFRA on the following themes to take forward in the second series of seminars- localism, innovation and social inclusion/environmental justice. These themes are cross cutting, relevant to all areas of DEFRA’s remit, and encourage linkages between policy areas.

Localism : 6 December 2001

This theme was selected at the first seminar by a number of participants. There was a need identified to examine issues of service delivery at a local and a national level and to look in more detail about the policy barriers that might prevent the development of local initiatives. The focus of this seminar was to examine what kinds of local initiatives should be encouraged, and how DEFRA could best support these through the development of the SD strategy.

Localism would be a useful cross-cutting theme, to bind the different parts of DEFRA more closely together. To be effective, this will require a significant rethink. Currently, local connections across the department are patchy and do not reflect back to the national level.

Better policy-making processes (development, monitoring, appraisal and communication) could be achieved through the development of the strategy. Although not all policy-making can be improved by refocusing on the local, there are some obvious quick wins to be had – for example, on waste and recycling issues. As a starting point, the strategy needs a general statement of the Department’s commitment to localism followed by concrete policy actions, as well as additional research to decide how and where to best demonstrate that commitment.

The following two questions were used to structure the discussion:

1. Why is localism important for DEFRA’s sustainable development strategy? What issues does it involve? What do we want to achieve?
2. What does DEFRA do well and what does it need to do differently to promote localism?
**Issues arising from discussion**

**Importance of localism**

Localism encompasses the practical improvements in people’s lives, linking to the Government’s *liveability* agenda, and also provides a context for thinking differently on policy formation, with regard to regeneration, local recycling and so on. Through the strategy, DEFRA can use the theme of localism to demonstrate to the public that change is both possible and desirable at the local level. For example, DEFRA can make the link between economic efficiency through local initiatives, and local environmental and social benefits. By creating concrete improvements at the local level, DEFRA can enable people to more easily link up to the regional and the national picture.

There are a number of quick wins for DEFRA in tackling certain issues, like waste and recycling, at the local level. National policies need to be developed with the aim of supporting good local initiatives which meet sustainability criteria. DEFRA needs to ensure that more resources are available to support these. Given the separation of environment from local regions, following the creation of DEFRA, a concrete suggestion was made that DEFRA consider creating a specific unit on local environmental quality. This would give a clear signal that DEFRA is taking local issues seriously.

Many participants felt that the regional level could provide better links between national policies and local initiatives. Regional Sustainability Fora were suggested as the best way of ensuring this happens. A particular example of where steps are being made in the right direction is the shift of CAP from a pan-European to a regionalised approach. Originally a rigid mechanism which set the same rules and systems across Europe, the second pillar of CAP provided a new flexibility. Under the England Rural Development Plan, this has led to the establishment of regional chapters, allowing for more flexibility.

**Public participation**

DEFRA needs to ensure an active involvement in public participation, and needs to develop better listening and learning approaches. Some felt that DEFRA’s website is underdeveloped and provides only limited opportunities for involvement and transparency. Even a good website will only involve those who already have some level of awareness of the department and its remit.

Concrete suggestions for improving public participation include the need to develop minimum standards for public participation; and the logistics and funding of public consultation meetings, such as varying the times of day/evening they are held and covering attendees expenses. DEFRA also needs to communicate more effectively and clarify its role and remit, as distinct from other organisations (e.g. The Countryside Agency), as this lack of clarity is a barrier to effective public participation. DEFRA needs to ensure that participants have feedback on the results of their consultation, clarifying the links between their participation and the eventual outcomes of the process.

To enable this to happen, DEFRA needs to develop a more open culture. There are a number of good initiatives currently happening at local and regional level, and
DEFRA needs to establish effective mechanisms for capturing and learning from that experience. Concrete examples of good community based projects which realise a combination of benefits-social, economic and environmental -include Hartcliffe health and environment action group (near Bristol) and Renfrewshire sustainable communities project. Both these projects are extremely good examples, linking together social, environmental and health benefits in the renewal of deprived communities. A report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Thinking locally, acting nationally to be launched in early May, will focus on the lessons for national policy development from local actions on sustainable development.

In relation to food, there are also positive examples of good local initiatives. These include Somerset Food Links, and other South West initiatives, the many farmers markets which are doing both a highly lucrative and sustainable business and Growing Communities in Hackney, which is a positive example of community enterprise and sustainability as it involves community food growing and links with health, education and economic benefits in a problematic area of London. The message from all of these initiatives is that it is possible to realise economic, social and environmental goals in conjunction, and that this is already being achieved at the local and regional level.

Stronger partnerships with Regional Development Agencies should be fostered to profit from the experience of coordinating national programmes with local and regional initiatives. RDAs can provide the mediation between the local and the national, coordinating national programmes at the regional and local level as well as having an obligation to promote sustainable development. DEFRA also needs to build greater partnerships with other government departments (especially DTI and DTLR), to learn from best practice elsewhere.

The department also needs to develop an internal culture, which is aware of and supports issues of localism and the importance of effective public participation. Concrete suggestions for helping to create this culture within DEFRA include an internal awareness raising programme for all staff; and a secondment programme for DEFRA staff to gain practical experience of the challenges of operating at local level.

Research
More research is needed of what does and does not work at the local level; and how best to respond to peoples needs. The New Economics Foundation report Plugging the Leaks was cited as a good example of this type of research, but there needs to be much more. In addition to research, DEFRA needs to ensure proper evaluation and appraisal of projects. This would include the development of more sophisticated accounting mechanisms, to capture the real costs of projects – the environmental and social benefits/costs, as well as economic benefits and costs.

Working with business
As the sponsor of several large businesses, DEFRA is in a position to influence and drive change. There was a strong feeling that DEFRA needs to use this position to level the playing field between big and small business, and to develop greater awareness of their
respective strengths and weaknesses. DEFRA should encourage major businesses to justify their role in sustainable development, through, for example, compulsory environmental reporting. To achieve this, DEFRA will need to work with business directly, rather than through the trade associations. In addition to improving existing regulation, it should develop and enforce minimum sustainability standards.

Conclusions/Summary of Recommendations
In terms of concrete recommendations to promote localism, participants proposed the following:

- DEFRA needs to identify where good local/regional initiatives exist and develop national polices, which meet sustainability criteria, to encourage and support them.

- Tackling some issues at the local level now (e.g. waste and recycling) will provide some quick wins for the department.

- The regional level is crucial to creating better links between the local and the national – DEFRA must aim for better partnerships with RDAs.

- DEFRA cannot solve the local/regional/national debate on its own. The department will need to build connections with other government departments to make real progress on this issue - especially DTI and DTLR.

- DEFRA should consider whether a specific unit on local environmental quality is needed, to act as a signal the local is being taken seriously.

- There is a need to work with businesses directly rather than only relying on trade associations.
Innovation: 6 December 2001

This theme was selected at the first seminar by a number of participants on the basis of a paper from Michael Jacobs of The Fabian Society, which argued that small incremental steps forward would be insufficient to generate the large scale changes required to address current environmental challenges. Some of the areas within DEFRA’s remit, such as industrial waste and agriculture, require radically different approaches. Innovation defined in this way is not the same as invention, but is instead the development of new ways of doing things. The focus for this seminar was how DEFRA can create a culture which encourages innovative responses.

There was broad agreement from participants that innovative solutions are needed to move towards truly integrated polices which deliver economic, environmental and social sustainability. DEFRA’s departmental SD strategy is the right place to champion this aim. One participant noted that as increasingly policy comes from Brussels, there may be less scope within DEFRA for innovation in policy development, than in ways of delivering it. If this is the case, the focus will need to be on developing innovative responses to meet policy challenges, and on creating an internal culture within the department, which encourages and rewards this. New approaches to policy delivery are required, including radical and long-term targets supported by fiscal incentives - taxes and subsidies.

Concrete examples of where innovation is badly needed are food production, resource productivity, agriculture and waste management. To address these challenges in an effective way, DEFRA will be required to forge new partnerships and actively seek more joint initiatives across government.

The following two questions were used to structure the discussion:

1. Why is innovation an important theme for the DEFRA departmental SD strategy? How can it lead to a better quality of life?
2. How can DEFRA promote innovation both internally and externally? Who does the department need to work with to realise this aim?

Issues arising from discussion

Importance of innovation
There was broad agreement amongst participants that, like localism, innovation could be a horizontal aim across the department. The aim of developing innovative solutions is to raise the overall level and distribution of quality of life. Within the remit of sustainable development, innovative solutions could include food production which enhances the countryside, promoting a more holistic view which signals a new start, distinct from MAFF. To achieve this, DEFRA will need to develop a culture which encourages innovative solutions. Promoting innovation within the SD strategy is a vehicle to move things in the right direction.
Incentives to innovate
Participants considered the real problem to be lack of incentives to deliver innovative solutions, rather the lack of solutions themselves. To create a culture which fosters innovation, DEFRA will need to reward it in concrete ways – for example, by pay and promotion. This will require internal cultural change, as people naturally tend to become more risk averse as they move upwards through organisations. A specific suggestion is the creation of an Innovation Unit within DEFRA, which brings in people from outside the department as well. Part of encouraging innovation will be the switch from focusing on processes to outcomes. There are innovative solutions available for issues such as waste, but there are blockages within the policy process, which prevent their delivery. The current waste strategy was cited as an example of a non-innovative solution, involving small incremental change, where huge change is required

Some innovative solutions will not succeed, as innovation is by its nature risky, and DEFRA will need to learn to accept the inevitable failures and admit them openly. To realise innovation, more challenging targets are needed. Appropriate use of tax breaks or financial support is a method of encouraging innovation, and taxes have to be formulated in ways which encourage innovative solutions (e.g. increases in landfill tax).

DEFRA needs to encourage more flexible structures and funding, which will in turn facilitate innovation.

Talking to others
DEFRA needs to run pilot schemes of innovative projects, and needs to draw in experience from other sectors and from outside Britain. This will involve speaking to and learning from a much wider group of people /organisations than at present. DEFRA needs to have vision to push innovative ideas forward, and act as a leader and model of best practice for encouraging innovative solutions within government.

DEFRA has to encourage innovation in others. Innovation requires longer timescales, greater ambition and a willingness to try new approaches. The climate change levy is one example where such change would be beneficial. The levy, as it stands, encourages incremental change rather than acting as an incentive to the development of truly innovative responses to climate change by government and business.

Business
Many innovative ideas come from the business community, and DEFRA needs to speak directly with innovative companies, rather than working through trade associations. A concrete recommendation is to develop more strategic thinking about the future, by using Shell’s future scenarios as a model. These future scenarios, which are used by innovative businesses to plan ahead act as a radar enabling responses to be developed to future events.

Conclusions/Summary of recommendations
In terms of concrete recommendations to encourage innovation, participants proposed the following:

- To be effective, DEFRA needs to work with innovative business direct rather than just through the trade associations.
- DEFRA can learn from business to develop more strategic thinking about the future, for example using Shell’s future scenarios as a model.
- DEFRA needs to tackle the tendency for the civil service to become more risk averse with seniority by rewarding innovation and experimentation (by pay and promotion) and creating a culture where occasional failure is accepted as the inevitable consequence of new ideas.
- The creation of an Innovation Unit which brings in people from outside the department to provide challenging perspectives.
- More flexible structures and funding to allow DEFRA to be more fleet of foot and be able to seize new opportunities.
Social inclusion/environmental justice: 11 December 2001

This was the final theme to come out of the original seminar and, despite the work by DEFRA on the Aarhus convention on public participation and access to environmental justice, it needs to be embedded to a greater extent throughout the department. This seminar looked at how issues of social inclusion/environmental justice could be used in the strategy, to move away from focusing on traditional policy areas and instead develop themes which reach across the department’s entire remit. In her initial commentator piece, Maria Adebowale defined social inclusion/environmental justice as policies or initiatives which do not have a detrimental effect on one particular group within society.

There was support amongst participants for DEFRA to address these issues of social inclusion/environmental justice within the departmental SD strategy. These issues link directly to the goal of improving quality of life as broadly as possible, and can be tied to European as well as national government priorities.

Bilateral relationships with DTLR would be beneficial to realise these aims, e.g. by addressing issues such as access to services, and there needs to be effective partnership with other organisations and other government departments. DEFRA remains largely focused on the rural, but has large policy areas under its control which are linked to the urban e.g. air quality and waste. There is a strong message for DEFRA that the department needs to be more aspirational and to promote these issues across government where it is unable to lead on them itself. Both cure and prevention are needed in policy making, to redress the existing negative impacts of social exclusion, and to avoid policies which impact disproportionately upon vulnerable and excluded communities in the future.

The following two questions were used to structure the discussion:

1. Why is social inclusion/environmental justice an important theme for DEFRA’s SD strategy, and what do we want to achieve in this area by means of the strategy?

2. What are the main issues of social inclusion/environmental justice that DEFRA needs to tackle? What will DEFRA need to do differently to do this effectively?

Issues arising from discussion

Importance of social inclusion/environmental justice
Participants felt that social inclusion/environmental justice could act to bind the strategy together and make it more representative of all the UK’s communities. Participants saw the strategy as a good opportunity for DEFRA to engage more with those affected by the department’s policies and consult more widely on issues, particularly with those groups not normally consulted. This will have a direct impact on meeting goals to improve the
quality of life for both rural and urban communities, and will help ensure that environmental policies do not have a negative effect on vulnerable and excluded communities. Some issues, such as food poverty and fuel poverty, can be tackled directly by DEFRA, whilst other issues will need to be addressed by joint ventures with other organisations and government departments.

Solid connections are needed between DEFRA and DTLR. The two departments should link their SD strategies, with shared themes and challenging targets. A concrete suggestion is a joint departmental initiative from DEFRA/DTLR on urban and rural social inclusion, which could be reflected in the strategic priorities of each department. This would provide the opportunity for DEFRA’s SD strategy to mesh with the Government’s overall *quality of life* objectives.

**Participation**

At a process level, there is much that DEFRA can do to ensure more meaningful participation. In addition to those concrete suggestions mentioned in earlier seminars, DEFRA needs to ensure that groups not normally consulted can be involved in decision-making. This requires processes which are accountable, transparent and accessible. DEFRA needs to do further work to establish what prevents information from being available, and how best to tackle these blockages. Without effective participation, DEFRA will be unable to meet its goals. The most carefully designed policies will not work without community involvement and backing.

There are many positive examples of participation working well. DEFRA needs to ensure that these are built on and learned from. To achieve positive change on issues of social inclusion, DEFRA will need help from stakeholders. Links could be made more effectively with other organisations (a concrete suggestion was The Environment Agency) and a further suggestion was that if DEFRA is serious about tackling this issue, the department will need to engage with the Social Exclusion Unit. There was some concern expressed that the SEU tackles social exclusion in a narrow way, rather than seeing the links with other agendas, such as sustainable development.

It was suggested that the planned timeframe for the strategy was too short, and the focus should be as much on future stakeholders (future generations) as present stakeholders. Refocusing in this way would ensure that issues of environmental justice have longer term reach and to do that, the strategy needs to talk about future generations as having rights equal to our own.

To be able to ensure effective participation, DEFRA will need an internal awareness raising programme on issues of social inclusion/environmental justice. The department also needs to be prepared to recognise outcomes beyond its own brief, and to recognise how policy areas outside the remit of the department can be furthered by DEFRA’s work.

**Monitoring and Assessment**

DEFRA needs to establish improved measuring and monitoring of progress towards meeting social inclusion targets. An auditing framework is needed to guide the
development of policy, and a statement which says how this will be monitored. DEFRA needs to lead on developing sound sustainability indicators and needs to ensure that those with a social/environmental justice focus are drawn out. A concrete suggestion is for DEFRA to establish an internal requirement for every paper reviewing new policy initiatives, to outline the positive and negative consequences for social inclusion/environmental justice. As well as leading to better policy making, this will have an internal awareness-raising function, making the implications of poor policy making more visible. Looking at the real costs of policies (e.g. agricultural policies) would provide DEFRA with a tool for looking at the impacts of policy making on current and future generations.

Research
A research programme is needed to enable more evidence-based policy making. This does not necessarily mean the collection of more data. Rather, existing data should be looked at through a new perspective. The social/distributional effects of environmental policy are not well researched. Looking at environmental policies from a social perspective would enable DEFRA to highlight where social effects are positive, and to learn from and build on this.

The need to stress the positive is also a more general message for DEFRA. Where there are successes in moving towards improvements in social inclusion/environmental justice, these should be highlighted. A concrete example of this is energy policy, where steps in the right direction are being taken, but more solid facts are needed to promote this (e.g. facts such as how many jobs have been created by renewables). Another example of where research is lacking is waste, where further work looking at the effects of legal/illegal disposal of waste is needed.

More research is needed on how best to implement policies to ensure maximum effectiveness. In particular, further work is needed to look at urban/rural issues from a regional perspective as well as a national and local one. Regional Development Agencies will be key to this as they have explicit responsibility for rural as well as urban issues. There is still a question for DEFRA on what the departments relationship with regional structures should be, and projects aimed at clarifying this would be beneficial.

Conclusions/Summary of recommendations
In terms of concrete policy recommendations participants proposed the following:

- The Government should be implementing the end of life vehicle directive as the effects of abandoned vehicles disproportionately impacts those living in lower income communities.
- Procurement is a powerful lever. DEFRA needs to take the lead within government on sustainable public sector procurement.
- If DEFRA is able to draw out the links between rural affairs and sustainability in the separate agricultural strategy paper then huge progress will have been made.

More general recommendations for tackling social inclusion included:
• Minimum standards for public participation, including making funding available for people to attend meetings and supplying adequate feedback to participants.
• DEFRA needs to consult more widely, particularly focusing on those groups within society not normally consulted.
• The consultation processes themselves need to be made more accountable, transparent and accessible.
• There is a role for DEFRA to work with the Social Exclusion Unit to bring the sustainable development agenda into the current debate on social exclusion.

Next steps

DEFRA are planning to launch the SD strategy in May 2002. Green Alliance will hold a final follow up seminar after the launch with selected stakeholders. The purpose of this seminar will be to provide feedback on the strategy once it is published as well as discussing the future action required by DEFRA and external stakeholders to take forward the commitments made in the strategy.

For further information on Green Alliance’s involvement in DEFRA’s SD strategy, please contact Charlotte Marples (cmarples@green-alliance.org.uk)
Annex 1

Commentator Papers

Andrew Clark          National Farmers Union
Chris Hewett/Lisa Harker   Institute of Public Policy Research
David Wilkinson/David Baldock  Institute of European Environmental Policy
Ian Christie              Local Futures Group
Maria Adebowale           Capacity
Michael Jacobs            The Fabian Society
Tom Burke                 Rio Tinto
DEFRA's Sustainable Development Strategy- An agricultural perspective

Andrew Clark - NFU

Farming shapes our landscape, can create and maintain wildlife habitats and has a strong influence over the nation’s psyche. Farmers have long been involved in the management of primary resources, indeed these are the primary requirements for sustainable farming systems. Therefore the farming community must take a close interest in sustainable development policies and especially in the DEFRA's proposed sustainable development strategy.

The essence of the sustainable development debate is how today’s use of natural resources will affect their future quality and availability and what actions are needed to conserve those resources for future generation. As many of the key components in this debate are the raw materials by which farmers make a living, sustainable development must also embrace the challenge of balancing environmental goals with economic realities.

Our interest in sustainable development, however, is not confined solely to concerns about economic self interest in a national context. The sustainability of UK agriculture is also influenced by international considerations. Indeed agricultural policy is now determined on European and world stages as much as on the domestic agenda. This presents real challenges to the integration of sustainable objectives as other countries interpret differently the balance between domestic economic development, social and environmental concerns. Ultimately, however, the agreements derived in the international and European arenas define the economic viability and therefore the cultural and environmental impacts on the UK farming practice.

Overlaying the economic fundamentals, public preference and political choices within the UK also impact on domestic farm policies. As agricultural policy making becomes more global, so the direction of future policy making becomes, for farmers, less certain and more distant. This will also pose serious challenges for the domestic sustainable development debate.

In developing its Strategy the Department must draw on four key parameters:

- The definition of sustainable development.
- The measurement of sustainable development.
- Planning for sustainable development.
- Implementation of sustainable development policies and plans.

**a). Definition of sustainable development**

The definition of sustainable development contains four essentials; it is a conceptual approach to better resource use and management (i.e. a process), not a clearly defined end state; it is a *partnership* of Government, NGOs and industry; it must acknowledge the
interlinkage of resource use, provision and consumption across all sectors of society together; but foremost it is an economic activity, in which concerns over the environment are balanced alongside social and economic welfare.

b). Measuring sustainable development
Assessing the costs and benefits of the use or conservation of environmental capital is not an easy task. In some cases, as in cultural sustainability of landscapes, such benefits or costs are virtually impossible to measure. It is inevitable that activities such as farming will have an impact but the nature of that impact can vary. Impacts may be beneficial, creating and managing wildlife habitats and/or cherished landscapes; they may be harmful, causing pollution or destruction of valued resources; or may be uncertain or unknown, because the interaction of ecosystems and human activities is not fully understood.

In all cases, where the implications of resource use are uncertain, the best available scientific analysis and monitoring should be applied. Risk assessment will play a key role in this process but it must be applied in a transparent, objective and rigorous manner, This is especially important in circumstances where the precautionary principle is being used to control the level of resource use.

c). Planning for sustainable development
Too often the sustainable development debate has been a restricted dialogue which by language and practice excludes the majority of citizens. Although the widespread public consultation in the preparation of the UK strategy was a welcome opportunity for organisations to engage with the process, it failed to engage individual stakeholders in ways which are meaningful to them. It is equally important that policies for sustainable development do not become something that is devised by Government alone for “others” to implement. Sustainable development policies and practices must gain widespread ownership amongst key communities in order to succeed. Government also has its own lead role to play by ensuring and demonstrating that its own work is underpinned by sustainable development principles and that these are compatible across government departments.

d). Implementation of Sustainable Development Policies and Plans
Sustainable development must be concerned with more than just environmental aspects; its as much an issue of social change as of environmental capacity. It must also recognise that the ability to implement sustainable development policies depends on economic viability. From a farming perspective this means that objectives set domestically are comparable to those set elsewhere. Our competitive position should be retained.

Clearly, research and development and advisory services will have a key role during implementation effectively both building awareness of the potential for more sustainable practices and promoting their uptake. Sadly, with the loss of a national agricultural extension service, there is a significant dislocation in technology transfer - a serious shortcoming if we expect farm practice to change as fundamentally over the next 50 years as they have other the previous 50.
Mechanisms for sustainable development also need to be applied flexibly and appropriately. Incentive mechanisms and, in some situations, policy change may provide more suitable and flexible approaches to integrating sustainable objectives within agricultural policy than does regulation.

**Key issues for DEFRA’s Sustainable Development Strategy**

DEFRA must resolve its use of the term itself: "Sustainable development", "sustainability" and "sustainable" are being used interchangeably and are often widely misunderstood. Too often the “sustainable” and “development” aspects become separated negating its central economic logic. Frequently, discussions are ill-defined without established clear parameters or a goal. Substantial efforts are still required to better understand man’s impact on the environment and to promulgate best practice.

Therefore the Strategy should not be an initiative concerned only with environmental aspects of sustainable development; it must provide a comprehensive range of actions across economic, social and environmental dimensions. The Strategy must also acknowledge the temporal dimensions of the concept (choices made now have implications for future decisions).

As a Departmental initiative the Strategy will have to work on a number of dimensions. It must have an internal logic, how is the Department itself improving its contribution? It must have an inter departmental / agency logic, how does the Strategy fit with the policies and practices of other departments and agencies? And it must have an external engagement with stakeholders at both institutional and individual level and with others critical to achieving the Strategy's aims (for example the European Commission, other member states).

Current concerns and plans for the future direction of agriculture and discussion about alternative futures (the Food and Farming Commission and the Government's Rural White Paper being but two) set a critical context for this Strategy. The Strategy should add value and cohesion to existing initiatives and define a clear role for DEFRA's contribution to their success, rather than duplicate this existing work.

Finally the Department's strategy must gain widespread ownership not just internally in the way the Department conducts its own affairs and demonstrates it leadership in this field within Government, but also externally so that stakeholders and especially farmers and growers feel that the policies espoused are consistent, practical and attainable. This challenge cannot be underestimated - recent series crises within the farming community has resulted in significant levels of mistrust towards 'officialdom' and pending environmental regulations present significant challenges to current farming practice. These attitudes need to be overcome as part of the Department's strategy development and implementation.
Ideas for the DEFRA Sustainable Development Strategy

Chris Hewett, Senior Research Fellow
Lisa Harker, Deputy Director
Institute for Public Policy Research

Context of the National Sustainable Development Strategy
The DEFRA Sustainable Development strategy, will be written in the context of the national Sustainable Development Strategy, drawn up by DETR, which is now also in the custody of DEFRA. This document is about integrating economic, social and environmental objectives across all government policy, and continuing to promote the Strategy across Whitehall must remain one of DEFRA’s most important roles. With the Deputy Prime Minister in the lead at Cabinet level on this issue, DETR was in a reasonable position to carry out this role. DEFRA is a less significant department in Whitehall terms and, regardless of the individual who holds it, the post of Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will be seen as a lower to middle ranking minister in the Cabinet.

It appears, therefore, that the national Sustainable Development Strategy has been downgraded as a result of the Whitehall restructuring. The Government needs to rectify this perception and could do so in one of three ways:

- Move the Sustainable Development Unit to the Cabinet Office, ensuring its is once more the Deputy Prime Minister who enforces the SD Strategy across Whitehall.
- Create another Cabinet ranking post within DEFRA, which would have responsibility for the SD Strategy.
- Spread the responsibility for the SD Strategy across a formal cross departmental group of Cabinet ministers, including the Treasury and Cabinet Office.

DEFRA Sustainable Development Strategy
What DEFRA can do is lead by example, and properly integrate economic, social and environmental objectives across its departmental work through its own Sustainable Development Strategy. In particular it can demonstrate how, in its main areas of environment, food and rural affairs, the policies it is pursuing are contributing to the 15 quality of life indicators of the national Sustainable Development Strategy.

Environmental Protection
The SD Strategy needs fully integrate economic and social concerns into the environmental protection functions. The Climate Change Strategy is the centrepiece of environmental policy and it clearly already has strong economic and social themes in terms of reducing fuel poverty and stimulating the growth of a low carbon economy. Many local environmental protection issues affect low income groups in different ways to middle or high income groups. Policy should be aimed at ensuring, as much as possible, that benefits of better local environmental are at least proportionately felt by low income
groups. This will mean addressing issues of environmental justice, where it is often found that the worst polluting sites are built in or near low income areas. Air and noise pollution from traffic is worse on main roads where housing is often cheaper. In addition, a new Joseph Rowntree Foundation report has highlighted the fact that policy makers can ignore the environmental issues of greatest concern to low income groups: litter, dog fouling and issues of liveability in local streets.

On the economic side, the positive impact of a clean environment on local business and the economic development opportunities offered by environmental industries are two themes that could be further developed, in conjunction with the DTI’s own sustainable development strategy.

**Food**

There is a growing sense that food policy has been dominated for too long by the retailers and producers of food and largely disregarded the needs and concerns of consumers and citizens. A clear priority for DEFRA, after the BSE, GM and Foot & Mouth crises, will be to redirect the subsidies and support going to food production to the increasing demands from taxpayers and food consumers to improve environmental performance and health standards. Much of this is obviously tied up with the CAP, but there is still much that Britain could do, particularly in terms of using the modulation option up to the full 20 per cent of CAP subsidies for low input agriculture and rural development.

Another area where more work could be carried out is to increase the access to affordable, healthy food for socially excluded groups. This could mean increasing the diversity of food outlets or helping local farmer’s markets locate in low income areas, for example, and should contribute to reducing health inequalities.

**Rural Affairs**

It is hard to pin down what is covered by the ‘rural affairs’ brief, much of which overlaps with other departments. The SD strategy can pick up themes, which illustrate the merging of economic, social and environmental objectives. Diversification of rural economies will be essential for economic and social reasons, but should be carried out in an environmentally sensitive fashion. One of the largest rural industries is tourism, which relies on a protected environment, be it clean towns or beautiful countryside, for its long term existence. Any package to help the tourist industry, post-Foot & Mouth must bear this in mind and also seek to ensure the economic benefits are spread throughout an area, rather than creating a mix ‘honeypots’ and rural social exclusion. Similarly, the prospects for renewable energy in rural areas are great, but need to be handled correctly to ensure biodiversity and scenic beauty are also properly considered.

The Social Exclusion Unit is already carrying out work on transport, which is bound to reflect on issues of rural social exclusion, accessibility to essential services in rural areas for those without access to a car. The SD strategy should draw on that work, ensuring a balance is struck between economic, social and environmental objectives is struck.
**DEFRA Departmental Sustainable Development Strategy**

**Integrating the EU dimension**

David Wilkinson and David Baldock  
Institute for European Environmental Policy

**1. Introduction**  
The Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) is an independent, not-for-profit centre for the analysis and development of environmental, and environment-related, policies in Europe. A major focus of IEEP’s work is the environmental legislation of the EU, and approaches towards integrating environment and sustainable development into EU sectoral policies.

From this perspective, we would argue strongly that DEFRA’s sustainable development strategy will not be effective unless it takes full account of the EU dimension. EU policies in relation to eg the environment, agriculture, fisheries and regional development are major determinants of environmental quality in the UK. The EU’s own Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS) and the procedure for its regular review agreed at June’s Gothenburg summit are also likely to have increasing significance for every Member State.

In recent years the UK has been one of the leading proponents in the EU of a more robust approach towards advancing environmental integration and sustainable development within Community policies. It is important therefore for DEFRA to identify objectives that will need to be pursued at a European level, and at the same time to develop the capacity for influencing other policy actors - both at EU and UK levels - in order to secure those objectives.

Specifically, IEEP wishes to highlight three key areas:

- Two major forthcoming challenges for sustainable development in Europe: reform of the common agricultural policy (CAP) and the common fisheries policy (CFP);
- The need to influence the EU SDS ‘process’ launched at Gothenburg;
- The importance of developing an effective system of sustainability impact assessment of major Commission proposals, and of implementing effectively the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive.

**2. Reforming the CAP and CFP**  
In agriculture policy, the mid-term review of the CAP will get underway in 2002. This is an important opportunity to set new directions for the policy as a whole as well as to
improve the workings of some of those sectors for which a formal review is required, such as beef and cereals. Its significance is all the greater because of the enlargement of the EU due to take place from 2004 onwards. Clear signals need to be given about the transformation of the CAP in the long term, including the growth of the second pillar, even if the results of the mid term review are less fundamental than many would wish. The British government has been ambiguous in the past about the priority to be given to the second pillar as opposed to budgetary savings. A stronger commitment to effective agri-environment and rural development measures is required, not least to convince other Member States that a viable alternative to the present CAP can be agreed. In any case, the UK’s share of the current second pillar is unrealistically small and insufficient to meet both environmental and social requirements in the countryside. An assessment of national needs and a bid for a more ambitious set of Rural Development Plans would help to generate the resources and policy mechanisms required to address pressing needs in the wake of foot and mouth as well as help to build a more sustainable CAP.

In fisheries policy too, there is a crucial short term opportunity. The current Common Fisheries Policy clearly fails the sustainability test, as is recognised in the European Commission’s recent Green Paper. The UK will need to work with the Commission and sympathetic Member States to ensure that the less palatable proposals in the Green Paper are not diluted in an attempt to preserve short term national interests. There is a growing consensus that the CFP needs to be based on a far broader ‘ecosystems approach’ to managing the marine environment and a commitment to workable partnerships involving the fishing sector and environmental interests as well as established institutions. This wider agenda will need to be pursued during 2002 but developed further in the crafting of a new approach a sustainable fisheries policy over the coming decade. This will be one of DEFRA’s toughest challenges.

3. The EU’s Sustainable Development Strategy: Influencing a new policy process
The European Council meetings in Stockholm and Gothenburg earlier this year launched a new process for developing and reviewing an EU Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS). The heads of government agreed to add an environmental dimension to the existing ‘Lisbon process’, aimed at steering the economic and employment policies of the EU and the Member States. The aim of the Lisbon process is to make the EU ‘the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion’. The addition of an environmental dimension seeks to broaden the Lisbon process to cover all three elements of SD.

The full significance of this development for the UK and other Member States has been obscured by the arcane jargon of European Council conclusions. Essentially what it means is:

1. Sustainable development strategies within the Member States are likely in future to have to take greater account of the EU SDS;
2. A new policy process has been introduced by which priorities for the EU SDS will be set regularly by the European Council at each of their regular Spring summits. But economic and finance ministers and officials will play the leading role in this process. DG Environment and the Environment Council will provide only one input among many.

3. Thus, for DEFRA to make an effective contribution to the development of what will be an increasingly significant EU SDS, it will need to establish and resource an influencing strategy, targeted at

- other UK government departments, and their contributions to sectoral EU Council meetings;
- strengthening the role of the Environment Council in relation to other Council formations.

These points are developed further below.

The Lisbon process is an example of the so-called ‘open method of co-ordination’ in which the EU and Member States agree to co-ordinate their policies in order to achieve EU-wide goals, in areas where there may be little or no Community competence. The Lisbon process brings together separate, but similar, Treaty-based procedures for the co-ordination of economic and employment policies respectively. Annex 1 sets out the elements of this ‘open method’. In simple terms, it involves

- the production of policy guidelines for the development of Member States’ and EU policies;
- regular reporting by Member States to the Commission using these guidelines as a benchmark;
- regular review and priority setting by EU heads of government.

In contrast to economic and employment policies, there are currently no Treaty provisions covering the co-ordination of environment and SD policies. Nevertheless, the de facto extension of the Lisbon process to include environment means that at each future Spring meeting of the European Council, EU leaders will begin to set priorities and issue instructions both to EU institutions and to Member States in relation to environment and sustainable development. Member States could also soon be expected to report to the Commission on the implementation of their own national sustainable development strategies.

At the core of the Lisbon process is the original system established by the Maastricht Treaty for co-ordinating Member States’ economic policies to prepare for the introduction of the euro. This centres on the annual production by DG ECFIN and ECOFIN (the Economic and Finance Council) of the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines (BEPGs) that Member States are expected to follow. The BEPGs have now been extended in scope to incorporate an employment element, and will shortly have an added environmental dimension to reflect their role in the development of the EU’s SDS. The key point is that both the BEPGs and the so-called ‘synthesis report’ to the heads of
government suggesting future policy priorities remain the responsibility of Economic and Finance Ministers. Other Councils, including the Environment Council, are consulted, but their input is not necessarily decisive.

Given the increasing future significance for the UK’s own sustainable development strategy of the EU SDS, DEFRA will need to ensure that environmental priorities are properly reflected both in the BEPGs and in the Commission’s annual synthesis report. This will require the development and resourcing of a strategy to ensure that the voice of the Environment Council is not drowned out by the noise from economic and sectoral Councils. Within the UK, DEFRA will also need to influence what other UK government departments are saying in relation to the EU SDS within their respective Councils in Brussels - in other words, greening government at a European level.

4 Taking forward SEA and SIA

For the past ten years, the UK Government has had a formal commitment to the ex ante environmental appraisal of its significant policy proposals, and at local level, the environmental appraisal of UK development plans is particularly well developed. The EU’s Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive, which came into effect in July this year, now gives DEFRA the opportunity to strengthen a process that can play a key role in improving the environmental sustainability of key public plans and programmes. However, the effective implementation of the Directive by the 2004 deadline will require a major effort from DEFRA, across government, in relation to

- the provision of guidance and training in SEA techniques;
- clarification of the role of environmental statutory agencies in the SEA process;
- the establishment of a quality insurance mechanism;
- the establishment of a system for the ex post monitoring of the environmental impact of those plans and programmes subject to SEA.

Inevitably, this will be resource intensive.

Meanwhile, at EU level, the Commission’s Secretariat-General has promised to present to the Laeken European Council later this year proposals for the sustainability impact assessment (SIA) of major Commission proposals. The Commission’s record so far in relation to its internal environmental integration mechanisms has not been impressive, and DEFRA should offer the Commission assistance in developing appropriate methodologies and procedures in SIA. This is particularly important since the SEA Directive is likely to prove the precursor of an eventual SIA Directive.

ANNEX 1

Implementing a new open method of co-ordination

‘….Implementation of the strategic goal will be facilitated by applying a new open method of co-ordination as a means of spreading best practice and achieving greater convergence towards the main EU goals. This method, which is designed to help Member States to progressively develop their own policies, involves:'
• Fixing guidelines for the Union with specific timetables for achieving the goals which they set in the short, medium and long terms;
• Establishing, where appropriate, quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks against the best in the world and tailored to the needs of different Member States and sectors as a means of comparing best practice;
• Translating these European guidelines into national and regional policies policies by setting specific targets and adopting measures, taking into account national and regional differences;
• Periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review organised as a mutual learning process.’

_Lisbon European Council 23-24 March 2000: Presidency Conclusions._

**Comments on the DEFRA agenda**

_Ian Christie (Associate Director, Local Futures Group)_

**1. Introduction**
The decision to break up DETR opens up some important opportunities for better policy-making on environmental issues and the countryside. But it also throws up serious risks that ‘joining up’ policy for action in pursuit of sustainable development, already hard to do, will become still more difficult in Government. The opportunity is for long overdue integration of environmental stewardship with policy on food and farming, and for a far more rounded policy on the rural economy and society. But the potential downside of the creation of DEFRA is alarming: the association of ‘environment’ principally with rural affairs, and the sidelining of the goal of sustainable development as one responsibility among others in the Department, rather than a fundamental objective for Government across the board. The DEFRA consultation paper is not reassuring on these concerns, and a vision for the new Department and its relationship with the rest of Whitehall needs to confront and overcome them. Below are some thoughts on the potential gains from, and the evident weaknesses in, the present position of DEFRA in relation to environmental policy and sustainable development. The paper ends with one proposal that could help.

**2. Why DEFRA could be a sign of progress on rural policy**
On the potentially positive side, the creation of DEFRA could mean that policy on food and farming is at long last integrated effectively with environmental protection and a strategy for the wider rural economy. The disastrous failure of the old MAFF to take the environment seriously and to consider the economy and society of the countryside as a whole, rather than just the farming sector, has been plain for all to see in recent years. The integration of policy on food and farming in a framework for strategy that connects environmental protection and enhancement with a strategy against social exclusion in the countryside should be a central goal for DEFRA. If this is to be done then establishing a ‘new culture’ in the Department, as mentioned in its consultation paper, is a priority: the danger is that the discredited MAFF culture will dominate DEFRA.
3. Sustainable Development and DEFRA

Several issues about the definition of and responsibility for sustainable development arise from the draft consultation paper on DEFRA’s aim and objectives.

DEFRA’s statement that its aim is ‘promoting sustainable development’, needs clarification. This should simply mean that DEFRA, like all Government Departments, is or should be in the business of sustainable development. In fact, given the Department’s ‘lead responsibility’ for sustainable development, it must mean that DEFRA is responsible for promoting sustainable development across the rest of Government and society in general. How can this be done with any cross-Whitehall clout from a Department which is concerned above all with a relatively minor part of the economy and with a minority of the population? The greatest impacts on the countryside, the environment in general, and on prospects for sustainable development overall, are generated by people, technologies and organisations in urban areas. And the major levers of policy for affecting all these are located in much weightier Departments. So the decision to make DEFRA carry the burden of championing sustainable development throughout government and the rest of society is a strange one, which risks the marginalisation of sustainability thinking in Whitehall unless very strong measures are in place to join DEFRA up with other Departments and processes. (A related point: DEFRA’s first draft objective ‘to protect and improve the environment’ should make it clear that this just means ‘the rural environment’, and that protecting and enhancing the urban environments where most people live and work is a cross-Departmental task.)

The definition provided of sustainable development in DEFRA’s draft aim simply repeats the Government’s four-fold definition. But this does not take full account of the global and inter-generational aspects of sustainable development – of vital importance in relation to food production, consumption and sustainable harvesting of resources. DEFRA should aim to improve on the Government’s definition and make clear reference to the need to develop environmentally sustainable policies on food production, consumption and trade that serve the interests not only of the UK but also of developing countries and of future generations.

DEFRA’s aims for its specific role as a rural department also need clarification. First, in what sense can its goal of promoting ‘competitive’ food chains be connected to the aim to make them also sustainable? One clear message from the spate of scandals and disasters in the intensive farming sector is that the attempt to be globally competitive under existing market rules and in the CAP framework is often a short cut to unsustainable development and bad public health outcomes. DEFRA should emphasise that its goal is a sustainable food system that produces good outcomes for consumers, a fair deal for producers and a healthy, diverse rural environment – and that this requires it to focus on radical and rapid reform of the CAP and progress internationally in making agricultural trade fairer and environmentally sustainable. Second, some recognition of the aesthetic and spiritual dimension of the countryside and our care for our landscapes would be
welcome – these are after all vital aspects of the interest that the mass of the population takes in the rural world.

**4. Joining Up DEFRA – a suggestion**

The new Department needs to make clear how it and its partners across Government and beyond Whitehall will pursue sustainable development as a ‘cross-cutting’ and fundamental aim of all governmental activity, and how they will treat ‘the environment’ as a set of issues that transcends departments. At the moment the Sustainable Development Unit (SDU) established in DETR sits in DEFRA. This seems to be a recipe for marginalisation. The SDU should become a *cross-Departmental strategy and progress-chasing unit* on the lines of the Social Exclusion Unit, either based in the Cabinet Office like the SEU or rotating its meetings between key Departments which should all provide staff and resources to it. The SDU should contain people from, and should have powerful links with, DEFRA, DTLR, DTI, DoH, DfID, Cabinet Office and Treasury. It would also be the main liaison unit for the Sustainable Development Commission. Such a measure would reinforce the point that sustainable development depends on truly joined-up policy making and delivery, and is not one corporate goal among others but rather a new model of development towards which all of Government is striving. Without such measures, fears will grow that sustainable development is being sidelined. Similar steps towards strong inter-departmental working on ‘the environment’ will also be needed to allay fears that this area has been identified with ‘the countryside’.

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**Putting Environmental Equity & Social Inclusion at the Heart of DEFRA's Sustainable Development Strategy**

**Maria Adebowale, Capacity**

This paper provides a brief response to DEFRA’s consultation on its Sustainable Development strategy. It concentrates on one crucial element of sustainable development - the ethic of 'environmental and social equity'.

The paper is written in four parts: Part I - Background, Part II - Identifying Principle Objectives and Priorities, Part III - Measuring Progress and Part IV -Summary.

**Part I: Background**

Both The Brundtland report¹ and Agenda 21² embrace, environmental equity and social inclusion as central to the operation of sustainable development. These concepts are often articulated, as (1) the recognition of an individual's right to a healthy environment and their corresponding responsibility to protect the environment, for present and future

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² Agenda 21, Action Plan for the Next Century (The Earth Summit) 1992
generations, and (2) the need to prioritise policies and actions which redress the disproportionate impact of a degraded environment on excluded groups.

Environmental equity and social inclusion are comprised of a number of similar components, encompassing substantive, civil and political norms. If the DEFRA's sustainable development strategy is to be meaningful, inclusion and equity need to play a major role in shaping it.

Some inclusion and equity principles are already part of the UK Government's Sustainable Development strategy key commitments and actions\(^3\). For example:

- Reducing the level of social exclusion.
- Putting people at the centre of sustainable development.
- Transparency of information, participation and access to justice.
- Reduction of child poverty.

Crucially, two principles are missing. These are:

- Operating a system which provides a fair share of natural resources for everyone.
- Combating the disproportionate effect of environmental policies on socially and economically excluded communities.

Yet they are fundamental in making environmental equity and social inclusion a driver for change in any sustainable development strategy.

**Part 1 - Identifying Principle Objectives and Priorities**

At present DEFRA is not the only government department which neglects social and environmental equality as part of its governing principles of sustainable development. The very nature of DEFRA's remit would suggest that it is one of the first government departments that should have inclusion and equity at the heart of its work. For this purpose the strategy needs to be robust and progressive with objectives and priorities that embody the above principles. A primary concern should be to ensure that its work is made meaningful and as such has the ability to improve the quality of life of vulnerable people and communities. DEFRA has to some extent already identified inclusion as a key objective. In its recent consultation its aims and objectives it stated one of its objectives as being:

'to enhance the opportunity and tackle social exclusion '..\(^4\)

\(^3\) A Better Quality of Life - A Strategy for Sustainable Development for the UK, May 1999
\(^4\) DEFRA, UK: Consultation on DEFRA aim and objectives - Objective 2, pg 4
However, it then continues

'in the countryside by leading the development of a dynamic, inclusive and sustainable economy in rural areas.

To concentrate solely on rural issues, ignores the realities of social inequity and exclusion for a large percentage of the poorest people in the UK living in urban areas. The objective of enhancing opportunity and tackling social exclusion requires application within rural affairs and also urban affairs. For example, black, Asian and ethnic communities are four times more likely than white communities to live in the poorest estates in Britain\(^5\). The pattern of geographical distribution reflects the ‘over concentration’ within the deprived inner-city cores of a few urban areas. In particular people of Bangladeshi (54%), Caribbean (40%) and Pakistani (19%) origin are disproportionately concentrated within inner-city areas.\(^6\). Social and environmental inequity is not exclusive. It operates in villages and cities. By ignoring the strategy's impact on people living in urban areas DEFRA will fail to operate a joined up strategic framework and exclude from its remit a whole section of society.

To develop a pioneering strategy of inclusion and equity two objectives need to be prioritised:

(1) 'To integrate social and environmental equity within Sustainable Development strategies across government and society'

(2) 'To ensure that policies and actions do not have a disproportionately high and or adverse human health or environmental effects any one community'\(^7\)

Similar objectives for sustainable development strategies can be found outside of the UK. For example, the US, South Africa and India operate a voluntary or legislative duty on government, relevant government agencies or departments to ensure their policies do not have an adverse impact on any one community\(^8\). Closer to home the UK government, under the remit of the Department for International Development, supports progressive social and environmental equity policies, as instruments of sustainable development in eliminating poverty\(^9\). There is little reason why these policies would not work as effectively in Britain as abroad.

Identifying the priorities and principles of the strategy is the first step and perhaps the easiest. The more difficult part is developing the appropriate strategy. The next step is establishing a process by which its effectiveness can be monitored and measured in keeping with its defined principles.

\(^5\) Bringing Britain Together - Social Exclusion Unit Report, 1995  
\(^7\) Environmental factors such as pollution, poor housing are major contributions to health inequalities. See Acheson Report: Independent Enquiry into Inequalities in Health Report, 1998  
\(^8\) Human Rights Approaches to Environmental Protection, Ed. Anderson, M, Blackwells 1995  
\(^9\) Achieving Sustainability: Poverty Elimination and the Environment & Realising Human Rights for Poor People, DFID Strategy Papers
Part II: Measuring Progress

Operating principles of equity and social inclusion means having appropriate mechanisms that support public governance. Thus allowing for meaningful participation in decision-making and access to information. In addition choosing processes that are transparent, quantifiable and accountable.

The starting point for monitoring the strategy will be to agree a baseline and set of key indicators against which implementation and performance can be measured. A number of these indicators, are likely to be found in national and regionally sustainable development strategies. The final choice of indicators, however, should be part of a consultation across departments, agencies, relevant non-governmental organisations and community groups. For example, the Environment Agency's Local Environment Agency Plans provide opportunities for stakeholders to participate in local environmental strategies.

The review process should encourage meaningful public consultation, where appropriate. In keeping with its remit of putting people at the centre of sustainable development, public consultation over and beyond the traditional written consultation paper process is required. People, in particular those within socially and economically excluded groups are more likely to participate if they are provided with a choice of processes relevant to their circumstances. For example: citizen forums, focus groups or community meetings in places of worship or local schools. Careful attention ought to be given to supporting the participation within regions; cities and villages with a high percentage of socially and economically excluded communities. As a result of proper public participation DEFRA is more likely to develop an inclusive strategy and work programme that meet real needs.

DEFRA should review the strategy on an annual basis. The results of the review should provide a clearer picture of its impact on social inclusion and environmental equity, within the UK and abroad. To allow for full transparency and accountability an independent review should also be made every three to four years. This said, the strategy will need to be flexible allowing for amendments identified by DEFRA, government or the public to be made.

Part III - Summary

Developing a new sustainable development strategy to guide DEFRA’s work provides a host of opportunities. Most importantly to put social inclusion and environmental equity at the heart of environment, food, rural and (urban) affairs. To do this the strategy needs to be guided by principles of inclusion and equity. Equally as important those principles need to operate in the way it reviews, monitors and develops it policies and programmes.
One question precedes all others. What exactly is the purpose of a 'DEFRA sustainable
development strategy'? This concept only makes sense to me if such a strategy is
designed to be, in fact, DEFRA's overall departmental strategy. (Or at least its
substantive part. A complete departmental strategy will also presumably have 'non-
substantive' elements, eg personnel, finance, property, etc.) If this is not the case, and
there are parts of DEFRA's policy and implementation work which are conceived of as
outside the sustainable development strategy, then we have failure built in from the start.
Sustainable development is either an overarching framework for policy as a whole; or, for
a department of environment, food and rural affairs, it serves no purpose whatsoever. I
can conceive why the DTI, or Treasury, or Ministry of Defence, might have a sustainable
development strategy that did not cover all its substantive work. But I cannot understand
how this could be so for DEFRA.

Why cast a departmental policy and implementation strategy in terms of sustainable
development (SD)? There are two possible reasons. One, because this will buy off the
SD lobby and make it look as if you are doing the right thing. Alternatively, because SD
provides an integrated framework for, and a progressive approach to, the different areas
covered by the department.

By integration I mean, policies which genuinely promote economic, social and
environmental benefits. Not which promote one or two of these things, but all three of
them. True integration of this kind is not easy. What is easy is to say that the department
has economic, social and environmental aims, and then to say that a policy promotes
sustainable development if it meets at least one of those aims. This is not integration; and
it's not sustainable development except in the most useless sense. (If SD is simply the
sum of the three aims, then something has to be a particularly awful policy not to
contribute to it.) Too much SD talk in government is just a cover for old-style single-aim
policy of this kind.

Integration in policy design requires immense creativity and innovation. How can
agricultural reform simultaneously promote economic development and raise farm
incomes, benefit poorer farmers and support rural communities, and improve soil and
water quality and landscapes? How can waste management simultaneously reduce waste
going to landfill, and create jobs for people on low incomes and in deprived areas?

There are no procedures which can generate the answers. Procedures - environmental
and social impact assessment, auditing, etc - can be important. But these only act as
negative checks. Generating integrated policy requires positive imagination. The first
task of the SD strategy is therefore to create the conditions under which imaginative,
integrated solutions can be developed. Who knows what can be done? Who will be responsible for implementation? What will stimulate them to produce possible solutions?

**Innovation** should therefore in my view be the key goal of the SD strategy. In most of the areas with which DEFRA deals, we have to do things differently. This is true for farming, rural economic development, energy production and use, pollution control, waste management. But innovation is not generated by most current policy approaches. A policy (e.g., an environmental regulation or tax) may start out quite radical, but it is soon watered down in negotiation with the regulated; so that in the end it simply imposes costs without fundamentally changing techniques. And the timescales of change are too short: a few years, during which there isn’t time to innovate, simply to adapt.

If the key principle of the sustainable development strategy is innovation, then new policy approaches follow. Most important is the need for long range (e.g., ten year) radical policy targets which drive market actors, not to short-term costly adaptation but to long-term (and often cost saving) innovation. Long term regulatory approaches can be supported by fiscal incentives - both taxes and subsidies. A recent Imperial College/Fabian Society report set out the arguments in detail.(1)

In the environmental field, the strategy should have the goal of raising key indicators of environmental (resource) productivity by specified amounts over a twenty year period - 2-fold, 4-fold, etc. The aim should specifically be to gain economic benefits from this as well as environmental ones. And the work should be carried out jointly by DEFRA with the DTI and Treasury.

The same is true in those areas where much of the innovation needs to be done within government - e.g., over waste management and rural planning and countryside management. In the latter cases the SD strategy needs to be a genuinely joint one between DEFRA and DTLGR.

In terms of the environment, there is widespread agreement that the key objective is raising environmental (resource) productivity. On the rural side, the key objective should be improving the level and distribution of quality of life. But this has to be defined. For the purpose of the strategy ‘quality of life’ should refer to the overall standard of living people enjoy, including those non-income factors which make for a fulfilling life: health, educational services, crime, environment, community facilities, etc. Drawing on existing work, indicators of rural quality of life should be developed, paralleled by DTLGR by those for urban quality of life. This could be a valuable participative exercise.

Again, innovation is the key to improvements in quality of life. What forms of economic development can provide jobs, incomes for local people and environmental benefits? What fiscal policies can support rural services and amenities? The distribution of quality of life must be measured and targeted: different groups of people can enjoy very different qualities of life within the same area.
If DEFRA can develop a convincing discourse of quality of life this could play a very important role in wider political debate. For this too must be one of the aims of the strategy. If sustainable development is going to be retained as a political and policy discourse it will need much greater understanding and acceptance by the public - and by politicians. What it must not be, in the hands of the lead government department promoting it, is a mushy fudge of good intentions, empty words, and business as usual.

The central challenge of the transition to sustainable development is to find ways of delivering rising real incomes to a rapidly growing population without collapsing the ecological base of the economy. Without the rising real incomes social development is not possible for very large numbers of people. A collapsing ecological base undermines the productivity of the economy and thus inhibits the delivery of rising real incomes. It is often overlooked that essentially every material resource in our economy that is not provided by fossil fuels and non-fossil minerals is provided by the six bio-geophysical systems that make up the ecological foundation of the economy: croplands, rangelands, forestlands, freshwaters, oceans and the atmosphere.

Britain’s sustainable development strategy needs to address this challenge at three levels: the global level, the EU level and the national level. At a global level the key priority is to move beyond the texts. There is now a very considerable body of global environmental legislation which is complemented by the policy prescriptions contained in Agenda 21, the corpus of work undertaken on sectoral issues since the Earth Summit by the CSD and the ideas and commitments flowing from the series of global conferences on diverse topics many of which have a bearing on the transition to sustainable development.

Important though this work has been, it is clear that these global policy aspirations far exceed the accomplishment of behavioural change on the ground. Further refining of the texts on sustainable development is far less important than the development of practical delivery vehicles to give operational expression to those aspirations. It is becoming increasingly clear that this will involve the systematic development of solution focused global public policy networks that involve governments, businesses, inter-governmental agencies and non-governmental organisations into delivery partnerships for which real world outcomes are a higher priority than formal statements of agreement.

The development of networks of this kind have played a significant role in efforts to address such global problems as HIV/Aids, landmines and malaria. In a sustainable development context there is a clear need to create both issue based networks, addressing topics such as water stress, access to clean electricity or sustainable fisheries, for example, as well as sectoral networks addressing topics such as agriculture, mining or transport.

Britain is well placed to make a distinctive contribution in this area. British companies, such as BP, Rio Tinto, Shell and Unilever are widely recognised as global leaders in developing the corporate world’s response to the challenges of sustainable development. Many of the best known and most successful global NGOs engaged in sustainable development issues had their origins in Britain, including Oxfam, Amnesty, WWF, SCF and a host of others. Successive British governments have taken a leading role in the
global effort to promote sustainable development in the numerous channels available through the UN system, the Commonwealth, the OECD and the EU.

The Prime Minister, like his predecessor before him, was the first world leader to make a commitment to personally attend a world summit on sustainable development. DEFRA should develop an ambitious and comprehensive initiative to promote the development of sustainable development solutions networks to take to the World Summit on Sustainable Development next year.

International initiatives, if they are to be credible and supported, must however be supported by national actions. In this respect, the changes in the machinery of government following the recent election have had mixed results. The separation of the environment and sustainable development functions from those of transport and local government has been a major setback for the British government’s ability to bring about an effective transition to sustainable development.

The Local Agenda 21 process has been one of the most dynamic and innovative responses to the challenges posed at the Earth Summit. In Britain with it very high populations density heavily concentrated in a relatively small part of the national territory, transport issues play a uniquely important role in shaping possibilities for more sustainable development. Good intentions are rarely sufficient to overcome institutional barriers. There needs to be an explicit and public memorandum of understanding between DEFRA and the DTLR as to how sustainable development considerations are to be properly accommodated in the future development of transport and local government policy.

However, the absorption of MAFF into DEFRA, combined with the reassessment of agricultural policy promoted by the two recent crises of BSE and FMD, has created a unique, and welcome, opportunity to reverse the current unsustainability of agricultural practice in Britain. With the results of the overdrive to produce for human health, the economy and the environment all too tragically, and expensively, clear Britain’s sustainable development strategy will be widely judged what it has to say about agriculture. The challenge is to describe a forward path for the development of agriculture in Britain that maintains the viability of farm incomes while diversifying greatly the extent of goods and services from which that income is generated.
Annex 2

Participants

General seminar: 18 October 2001

Adrian Hallett    DTI
Alison Miller     LGA
Allan Buckwell    Country Land and Business Association
Andrea Young     DEFRA Sustainable Development Unit
Brian McLaughlin  NFU
Charlotte Granville West  CBI
Charlotte Marples  Green Alliance
Chris Hewett      IPPR
David Drew        MP Stroud
David Wilkinson   IEEP
Fiona Palmer      Consultant Palmer Ethical
Gerard Lyden      Thames Water
Guy Thompson      RSPB
Helen Doran       English Nature
Jenny Mainland    DEFRA Sustainable Development Unit
Jiggy Lloyd       Severn Trent Group
Jo Collins        Forum for the Future
John Adams        DEFRA Sustainable Development Unit
Michael Jacobs    The Fabian Society
Paul Hamblin      CPRE
Rebecca Willis    Green Alliance
Richard Findon   DEFRA Sustainable Agriculture Branch
Annex 3

Participants

Localism: 6 December 2001

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Andrea Young   DEFRA Sustainable Development Unit
Bill Scriven   DEFRA
Charlotte Marples   Green Alliance
Chris Church   ANPED
Fiona Palmer   Palmer Ethical
Gregor Hutcheon   CPRE
James Pavitt   National Association of Farmers Markets
Jeff Merry   Barnet Council
Jenny Mainland   DEFRA Sustainable Development Unit
John Adams   DEFRA Sustainable Development Unit
Rebecca Willis   Green Alliance
Simon Michels   Foundation for Local Food Initiatives
Vicki Hird   Sustain

Innovation: 6 December 2001

Alan Knight   Kingfisher
Andrea Young   DEFRA Sustainable Development Unit
Charlotte Marples   Green Alliance
Fiona Palmer   Palmer Ethical
Ian Coates   PIU - Cabinet Office
Jenny Mainland   DEFRA Sustainable Development Unit
John McElroy   Innogy
Michael Jacobs   The Fabian Society
Peter Madden   DEFRA
Rebecca Willis   Green Alliance
Steve Parry   Unilever
Terence Ilott   DEFRA
Tim Foxon   Imperial College London

Social Inclusion: 11 December 2001

Charlotte Marples   Green Alliance
Chit Chong   Green Party - Hackney Council
Chris Hewett   IPPR
Dave Moorcroft   BP
Fiona Palmer   Palmer Ethical
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