It’s A Small World
Local Government’s Role as a Steward of the Environment
The Audit Commission

. . . promotes proper stewardship

of public finances and helps those

responsible for public services

to achieve economy, efficiency

and effectiveness.
It's A Small World

1 The Challenge of Environmental Stewardship

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Preface

Around the world, concern is growing for the environment. In 1992, the United Nations (UN) held a world conference in Rio de Janeiro, the Earth Summit. A plan of action called "Agenda 21" was agreed. It asked every local authority to play its part in creating "sustainable development" by working with their communities to implement a Local Agenda 21. It is timely, therefore, to assess the direction which this theme has taken in British local government, to applaud the success stories and to ensure that the goodwill that this issue attracts is translated into effective local action.

Environmental stewardship is an extensive subject, and local authorities are but one piece in the overall jigsaw. Yet they have a vital role to play, being able to translate debate at supra-national and national level into practical local action. An extensive range of functions contributes to their overall environmental stewardship role. This report focuses on what might be seen as the more traditional environmental stewardship activities, such as refuse management and energy conservation, which coincide with the areas to be examined by local auditors. Local government must put its own house in order and establish a clear practical and strategic focus for its environmental activities before it can legitimately take its place as steward of the environment. This report therefore leaves the wider agenda of tax policy, business strategy, open space, education, employment and pollution for others; and the detail of planning and transport for another day.

The attention given recently to environmental stewardship has generated much semantic debate about what exactly is meant by "sustainable development". These are academic concerns and, while they are by no means unimportant, this report adopts the most commonly used definition of sustainable development as: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".¹

The study involved fieldwork in 23 local authorities, a postal survey of 150 authorities and a special survey of 30 authorities that recycle domestic waste from the kerbside. Consultancy advice was received from CAG Consultants on environmental impact, from European Environment Policy Unit on European case studies and from Coopers and Lybrand on waste management. The study team, under the early direction of Doug Edmonds, comprised Paul Orrett, Barbara Jones, Mike Port and latterly Nick Mapstone. Assistance was received from David Vallance, Simon Rose and Phil Kuehnle of District Audit and from Helmut Lusser of Global to Local Ltd.

'This report focuses on what might be seen as the more traditional environmental stewardship activities...'

The study was guided by an advisory group comprising local authority officers and others drawn from the Local Government Management Board, the ADC, the CBI, academia and Friends of the Earth. The members of the Advisory Group are named at Appendix 1. The Commission is grateful for their assistance and to others who have commented on drafts of this report. As always, however, responsibility for the conclusions and recommendations remains with the Commission.
Pressure on the Earth’s natural resources is growing inexorably, posing the greatest single challenge to the international community.

Although the developed world has the technical capacity to produce a sustainable future, a general willingness to tolerate the necessary restraints on lifestyle is not yet evident.

Local authorities worldwide have a major responsibility in achieving the changes that are necessary, because of the services they manage and through their ability to mobilise popular support.

In the UK, many councils have responded positively to the challenge, developing local Agenda 21 strategies. But many of these plans now need to be put into effect.
Introduction

1. A near-silent gas-powered refuse freighter goes about its business collecting the weekly segregated waste. Home composters are waiting to be fed garden and food waste, while paper and card is being collected and put back into production without being touched again by a human hand. On rooftops, solar power collectors support combined heat and power plants to provide low-cost energy. An electric tram passes, taking travellers to the car-free city centre. Passengers alight to use flourishing local shops selling local produce, while children walk or cycle home from school. At the local town hall, people gather to attend the monthly forum with the council to discuss their community’s sustainable development.

2. This is not a vision for the future. These ideas are becoming a reality in Britain, where some local authorities are working in partnership with their communities to bring about a more sustainable future. These partnerships are looking at innovative ways of reducing the pressure on the planet by using resources better, by supporting and encouraging the local economy, by taking greater care of the natural environment, and by developing lifestyles that can be sustained within the Earth’s resources.

3. Concern for the future, shared by the UN, the European Union, national and local government and many organisations and individuals, drives this work in the knowledge that collectively the planet is overexploited. Throughout history, most cultures have consumed resources with little thought for the consequences. Only recently has the realisation grown that exponential increases in the consumption of resources cannot continue forever and something significant must be done.

The environmental impact of growth

4. The pressure on the Earth’s capacity is growing (Exhibit 1). The population has doubled in the last 40 years; fossil fuel energy consumption has almost quadrupled in the same period; and the world vehicle fleet has increased more than fivefold. Such pressure creates huge problems. About 1.3 billion people do not have access to even minimally adequate amounts of drinking water and one billion rural residents are at risk from deforestation and soil exhaustion.1 While 17 per cent of the world’s population lived in cities in 1950, half will in 2010. And by the turn of the century, 300 cities in the developing world alone will have a population in excess of 1 million and 25 cities worldwide will each contain more than 10 million people.2

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2 UNESCO, UNEP, UNICEF and UNDP.
5. Environmental deterioration is the insidious consequence of these trends. It manifests itself in threats such as global warming and an accelerating rate of species destruction. At the UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro over 100 nations, including the UK, committed themselves to an action plan for the 21st Century – Agenda 21. The action plan stressed how environmental problems and solutions are interdependent with those of poverty, health, trade, debt, consumption and population.
6. The most acute problems of poverty and health affect the developing countries of the world. But, closer to home, pressures can be observed on fresh water and natural food resources, such as fish stocks. Within Europe, waste keeps growing in spite of years of effort in recycling. And the impact of the car is reaching worrying dimensions. In the UK, car travel per person doubled in the last 20 years (Exhibit 2); and trips of all lengths, even the very shortest, are increasingly made by cars.

7. Projections for the growth in car traffic in the UK suggest an increase of at least 60 per cent in the next 20 years. These projected increases are driven by increases in GDP, and by demand from the rising number of households, which are predicted to grow by over 4.4 million in the next 25 years. The need to house the population will put pressure on the countryside. The destruction of traditional habitats is further evidence of environmental damage – the UK has lost one-third of its hedgerows since 1984.

Exhibit 2
Transport-related sustainability indicators for Great Britain 1970-2025

Car travel in the UK has doubled in the last 20 years, and is forecast to continue rising.

Source: Department of the Environment 1996; Transport Statistics Great Britain, HMSO, 1996
8. Experiments are underway in many parts of the world to bring about a more sustainable future. Large-scale district heating and combined heat and power plants aim to make better use of energy resources; the extensive segregation of waste, followed by incineration to provide homes with electricity and heat, is becoming more common; and work is in progress that will virtually eliminate toxic residues from such processes. Wind power has become increasingly common and solar power is becoming a serious option, even in colder climates. Construction techniques are developing for harnessing scarce water resources and to allow buildings to become increasingly self-sufficient in energy.

9. But these initiatives are often novel and localised. Their general introduction requires a combination of legislative capability, resources and – above all – public interest and consent which is rarely present. Although there has been a shift of public attitudes over the last decade, a general willingness to tolerate the sort of restraints on lifestyle needed to achieve telling improvements in the environment is not yet evident. Generating an interest in sustainability, and then facilitating and leading a reappraisal of the collective effects of personal lifestyles on the environment, are roles that local government can undertake.

10. Over two-thirds of the actions set out in the report of the Earth Summit involve local government. In 1996, Habitat II¹ again recognised, at UN level, that local government is the steward for the environment at the local level. Local authorities worldwide are crucial in the move towards a more sustainable way of life because of their functions and ability to mobilise popular support.

¹ Habitat II was the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, which took place in Istanbul in June 1996.
...councils can influence the environment through their policies, the services that they provide and through their regulatory powers over the activities of individuals and organisations.

11. This emphasis sits comfortably in the UK, where councils can influence the environment through their policies, the services that they provide and through their regulatory powers over the activities of individuals and organisations. Councils, from county to parish, have well-established environmental responsibilities within an extensive statutory framework, well-defined departmental and professional interests, and they command substantial resources for environmental functions (Exhibit 3). And, as democratic institutions, councils have a key role in articulating and responding to the public interest.

12. The use of councils' powers and resources has been stimulated by an increase in new EU environmental legislation (Exhibit 4). Many of these new regulations will directly affect local government, and further changes are planned at European level to secure a higher degree of sustainability. Recent examples include the EC Waste Incineration Directives, which set stringent air emission standards. Other regulations affect industry. The EC Packaging Directive requires the recovery of half of packaging waste by 2001, of which 25 per cent is to be recycled. Much of the new legislation is concerned with the practical aspects of environmental policy, such as Directive 80/68, which controls the discharge of polluted ground water, or the Hazardous Waste Directive, which introduces more stringent controls over waste.

13. Despite central regulations, environmental services remain an area where local authorities retain considerable discretion; both for the way in which they interpret regulations and their scope to develop distinctive policies and programmes to tackle problems. For example, leading councils see environmental problems and solutions within an economic and social context. Poor environmental conditions are part of a wider problem, often associated with areas of economic and social deprivation.

14. But local authorities can sometimes be part of the problem, as well as a vehicle for possible solutions. Each activity produces a combination of economic, social and environmental effects. A council may build a new school in order to fulfil social objectives, but that school will have an economic impact, creating jobs in its construction and operation; and it will have an environmental impact, using land, increasing traffic flows and consuming energy and other resources. Achievement of one objective is often at the expense of another. The role of the local authority planning system is to strike a difficult balance between meeting the needs of a growing and competitive economy, while protecting the environment. Ingenuity and imagination are needed to minimise environmental damage from economically advantageous investment. But win-win scenarios sometimes exist. For example, by investing in energy conservation measures in their council housing stock, authorities can reduce carbon dioxide emissions, put money into the pockets of some of their poorest residents, reduce illness associated with cold and damp living conditions and create jobs in the local economy.
Exhibit 3
Local government annual expenditure on environmental functions

Councils command substantial resources in this area, totalling almost £5 billion.


Exhibit 4
New EU environmental legislation

There has been an increase in EU environmental legislation.

Source: Institute for European Environmental Policy, 1996
15. 'Single issue' politics is a growing feature of local democracy and environmental concerns typify this. There is general public concern for the environmental problems facing the world, but people typically do not see it as a local issue (Exhibit 5). Few are willing to tolerate the disadvantages associated with green policies – for example, restrictions on economic growth, higher prices, taxes or changes in their personal behaviour in relation to their use of cars (Exhibit 6). Developed countries have the technical capability to deliver sustainable development, but most people lack the will or grasp the importance. A political balancing act is necessary, but not easy. Politicians at all levels of government need to seek out win-win solutions, inform their communities about the issues and manage conflicting desires and objectives.

The new agenda

16. There is a new agenda before local councils:
- help 'save the planet' by becoming more sustainable;
- think global and act local;
- balance economic, social and environmental considerations in policies and service delivery to achieve this aim;
- rally public support; and
- advocate best practice and develop partnerships with business and the wider community.

Exhibit 5

Public perception of the most important problems facing the world and the United Kingdom

There is considerable public concern for the world's environment but people typically do not see it as a local issue.

Note: People were asked to choose the two-three most important problems facing the world and the UK.

17. National bodies representing local government recognise that the developing role of councils is to provide community leadership on issues such as environmental stewardship (Box A, overleaf). Local Agenda 21 (LA21) is an important vehicle for change. It provides councils with a framework that identifies actions for local authorities, both inside and outside town or county hall, and for developing and delivering the new agenda of more sustainable policies and practices (Exhibit 7, overleaf). The Local Government Management Board (LGMB) and Department of the Environment (DoE) have developed the UN framework into a practical toolkit, widely used in local authorities across the UK. Some councils are advanced in the implementation of LA21, but the majority are only just beginning. And some have not yet reached the starting point—only 40 per cent of UK local authorities produced a local sustainable development strategy by the 1996 deadline set by the Rio treaty. However, it showed that 91 per cent of authorities are committed to participating in the LA21 process, compared with 71 per cent in 1995.

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Exhibit 6
Public attitudes to aspects of a green transport policy

Few people wish to tolerate the disadvantages associated with green policies.

Source: DoE survey of public attitudes to the environment, 1993
In September 1996, the ACC, ADC and AMA published a joint manifesto, setting out key policy objectives for local government. These assert that:

- local government has the lead role at the local level as environmental steward, protector and enabler;
- local government cannot succeed if it is not supported by central government;
- the partnership between central and local government should be extended to include representatives of other sections of the community, such as business and the voluntary sector; and
- the sustainable development agenda extends beyond primary environmental issues to encompass social, equity and economic concerns.

'...strategies alone are not enough; they must be translated into effective action.'

18. Achieving sustainability needs persistence. Solutions to carbon dioxide reduction, reduction of emissions and waste minimisation require changes in the behaviour of many players and will take time. And although many councils can and want to drive the LA21 process, they are only one of many key actors, all of whom have to develop consensus on the way forward. Partnership is a key feature of the LA21 process.

19. Although most councils could do more within their present circumstances, there are already many good examples of environmental stewardship. As the next chapter shows, it is not beyond the ability and means of local authorities to aspire to, and achieve, these aims.
Local Agenda 21 provides councils with a management framework for developing sustainable policies for all their activities.

Source: LGMB, Audit Commission
Local authorities can make progress on a wide front, by putting their own houses in order; by using their regulatory powers to enforce good practice; and by involving the wider community.

There are excellent examples of local practice to be applauded, especially in the areas of waste management, energy conservation, transport and pollution control.

Such innovation and imagination needs to become commonplace if local government is effectively to discharge its responsibilities for environmental stewardship.
20. Councils can be major players in exerting environmental influence because of the variety of roles that they perform. This includes managing their own activities as well as working with the wider community, either through regulation or through an enabling role (Exhibit 8):

- as providers, councils have greatest control where they directly manage an activity; where activities have been contracted out, they can influence sustainability through permitted contract conditions; and they can use their purchasing power to require suppliers to behave in an environmentally friendly manner.

- as regulators, councils have the greatest control where their enforcement powers are applied to every incidence of an activity (for example, through granting planning permissions). Their degree of control reduces where they audit activities, investigating only a proportion of incidents (for example, environmental health inspections of food establishments); and they can encourage a change in behaviour by monitoring and providing information on environmental damage (for example, some aspects of air pollution).

Exhibit 8
Types of influence

Councils have a range of influences on the local environment.

Source: Audit Commission
♦ as enablers, councils have most influence when working in partnership with other organisations (for example, helping to recycle waste by working with businesses and the voluntary sector). They have less direct influence where they only support community action (for example, through making grants and facilities available to nature conservation groups). They can also increase public awareness of environmental issues by promoting particular behaviour (for example, by encouraging school children to save energy and recycle waste, councils can influence the behaviour of parents). As community leaders, local authorities are more than the sum of the functions which they perform. They can provide a voice for, and give a lead to, their communities; they can both raise awareness of environmental issues and articulate their citizens’ concerns.

21. Local authorities’ approaches to LA21 requires a genuinely corporate approach across a range of activities. Effective performance review is of central importance. The DoE and LGMB have recently provided guidance for local authorities in their *Eco-Management and Audit Scheme for UK Local Government* (EMAS).\(^1\) DoE Circular 2/95 described EMAS as a critical step in delivering LA21 – and its development has attracted considerable interest from the rest of Europe and beyond. The scheme provides external validation to help authorities identify the principal components of their environmental performance and, through periodic review, to achieve a cycle of continuous improvement. Progressive authorities will wish to use EMAS as a cornerstone of their LA21 initiatives.

22. Local authorities’ capacity to make a practical impact is particularly important in four areas:
- waste management;
- energy conservation;
- planning and transport; and
- pollution control.

Innovative practice by leading councils offers examples for others to follow.

### Waste management

23. Local government is responsible for the collection and disposal of household waste at an annual cost of around £850 million. The recently introduced landfill tax will increase this to £1 billion. Almost all of this waste is disposed through landfill sites which can be environmentally damaging, although careful management can ensure that their potential for pollution is minimised. Councils have a major role to play in minimising waste (for example, by encouraging home composting of perishable waste); and through ‘bring’ (for example, bottle banks) and ‘kerbside’ (door-to-door collection) recycling schemes. A number of innovative projects are already in place enabling authorities like the London Borough of Sutton to achieve a high volume of recycling (Case Study 1).

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Case Study 1  
Recycling in the London Borough of Sutton

**Background**
In 1990, the London Borough of Sutton set a target to increase the amount of recycled household waste from 8 per cent to 25 per cent in five years.

**Action**
Sutton's recycling strategy comprises three initiatives:

(i) ‘Bring’ recycling – 32 neighbourhood recycling centres were set up – roughly one site for every 5,000 residents. Community groups were invited to keep the centres in a clean and tidy state and in return the Council paid a nominal sum for every tonne of material collected. Each year, the number of ‘bring’ sites has increased and special mini-recycling centres have been established to service blocks of flats. By 1996, Sutton had 176 recycling centres – about one site for every 426 households.

(ii) ‘Kerbside’ collection – a fortnightly kerbside collection of paper and card began in 1991; and since 1993, a weekly collection has been organised throughout the whole borough. Approximately 5,500 tonnes of paper and card are collected annually (including that collected at ‘bring’ sites) – 12 per cent of the borough's domestic waste.

(iii) Home composting – during 1992/93, community groups were employed in a door-knocking exercise which invited residents to buy a compost bin at a heavily subsidised price. Workshops and demonstration sites were held to tell people how to use the bins. There are now 18,000 households with home composting units, which contribute 5 per cent to the borough's overall recycling rate.

Schools were also actively involved in Sutton's recycling campaign. Talks and other awareness-raising events were held along with practical recycling activities and recycling competitions.

Sutton achieved its target in February 1996.

**Good practice**
- enlisting community support – Sutton involved the community through the ‘adopt-a-site’ bring recycling programme; and community members promoted and sold home composters through the neighbourhood door-to-door campaign;
- emphasising waste minimisation as well as recycling;
- persuading the public of the benefits of recycling – publicity and education programmes underpin each of Sutton's recycling initiatives;
- operating a high density 'bring' scheme and a paper 'kerbside' collection – an efficient means of recycling in urban areas (approximately £3 per household after allowing for income from recycled materials and saved disposal costs); and
- adopting a step-by-step approach – progressive introduction of the 'bring' scheme, increased density of 'bring' sites, paper 'kerbside' collection, then the home composting programme.
Case Study 2
Direct charging of household waste in America

A number of towns in Maine introduced a 'pay-by-bag' system for waste collection in an effort to reduce the quantity of waste and cost of disposal. Under this scheme, residents buy special 'pre-paid' refuse sacks or stickers to attach to conventional sacks set out for collection. The stickers can be purchased from council offices, local shops or sent by post to householders.

A comparison of 29 towns using the 'pay-by-bag' scheme was made with 28 similar towns that were using traditional indirect methods of paying for refuse collection. Those using the 'pay-by-bag' scheme were collecting less than half the amount of waste due to an increase in recycling and composting activities.

A modest increase in fly-tipping and garden bonfires was reported in many towns following the introduction of the direct-charging schemes, but it generally decreased as the scheme became established.

Conclusions
♦ direct charging encourages householders to reduce the quantity of waste by recycling and composting;
♦ charging for rubbish bags or bag tags is inexpensive; and
♦ the problems of fly-tipping and garden bonfires were not serious enough to outweigh the benefits of the direct-charging scheme.

Source: WARMER Bulletins Nos. 41-48 (1994/95)

Energy conservation

24. But despite such successes in recycling, other countries have been more successful. Germany has extensive 'kerbside' recycling, while some states in the USA use their powers to charge directly for collected waste (Case Study 2). Direct charging is not lawful in the UK at present, but could be appropriate in settings where the risk of fly-tipping is not severe.

25. Another area where councils can have a direct impact on the environment is through reduced energy consumption. Most energy in the UK is generated by burning fossil fuels, which produces carbon dioxide and sulphur dioxide – the principal cause of acid rain. Every second, over 200 tonnes of carbon dioxide is released into the atmosphere. UK local authorities contribute to this problem: even excluding council housing, local government is a major landlord. Its schools, offices and other buildings have an annual energy bill of over £400 million. In 1985, an Audit Commission study recommended that councils should survey their buildings and develop energy conservation programmes. Many councils have, over the years, made substantial savings. For example, Woking Borough Council has recently carried out a range of measures (Case Study 3).

Case Study 3
Woking Borough Council wakes up to energy efficiency

Background
In the early 1990s, Woking Borough Council set a target to reduce energy consumption by 20 per cent within five years to improve its environmental performance and save money.

Action
Woking appointed an energy manager and set up an energy efficiency fund. Efficiency savings were reinvested in the programme – only when the cost of the investment has been recouped is the revenue saving passed to the service department. The Council also used tariff savings to make additional investments in energy efficiency.

Efficiency measures adopted by the Council include:
♦ energy efficient boilers
♦ improved insulation
♦ energy efficient lighting
♦ daylight controls
♦ movement detectors

Results
Woking has invested £1.1 million in energy conservation and has achieved continuing annual savings of £0.4 million. As well as saving money, the Council has spared the environment 16,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide and 51 tonnes of nitrogen oxide. The Council’s approach has maximised the sums available from government funding schemes. In recognition of the Council’s achievements, Woking recently became one of only 30 organisations in the UK to achieve recognition from the Energy Efficiency Accreditation scheme, scoring the highest accreditation ever.

Good practice
♦ top-level commitment to savings and environmental improvements is needed if strategies are to be implemented successfully;
♦ funding can be found, both from a council’s existing resources and by targeting special funding schemes; and
♦ environmental gain and financial savings often go hand-in-hand – a win-win scenario.

26. Even when councils do not have direct control through running services or regulatory powers, they can still enable the community to be environmentally friendly. For example, a number of councils provide energy efficiency advice and financial support to private households, including energy surveys of properties and the provision of grants. Barrow, South Lakeland, Lancaster and Wyre councils combine to promote energy efficiency among householders through their Bay Energy Watch programme. They launched a marketing campaign using radio, the press and direct mailing and encouraged householders to invest in energy efficiency and good housekeeping. The councils developed a partnership with a local firm, which offered homeowners 30 per cent discounts on
energy efficiency products. Councils can also increase community awareness through tenants’ associations and schools. A council’s enabling role lacks the teeth of regulatory functions and it is likely that only a proportion of the population will respond. But the aggregate impact of enabling measures may be greater than in-house activity, because of the wider participation achieved by engaging the entire community.

27. Win-win solutions, which provide economic, social and environmental benefits to the local community, are a key objective of LA21. A particularly attractive example is energy conservation in council housing. Council housing accommodates one fifth of the nation’s households. Tenants spend nearly £2.5 billion a year on their gas and electricity bills. Because many are on low incomes, they need to spend more than 10 per cent of their income to remain reasonably warm. Homes with poor standards of thermal efficiency can take up to 30 per cent of a tenant’s income to heat. Thus, conserving energy not only reduces carbon dioxide emissions, but also takes less from the pockets of some of the poorest members of society. York City Council has made energy efficiency a key policy objective (Case Study 4).

Case Study 4
Improving energy efficiency in council housing – York City Council

| Background | York wanted to improve the energy efficiency of its housing stock to improve the comfort levels of its tenants, and to create local jobs. |
| Action | To ensure that the investment generated the best environmental gain for every pound spent, the Council worked closely with Leeds Metropolitan University on a project to identify which measures would produce the best payback. The Council concluded that, given the character of its stock, cavity wall insulation would be the most effective measure. By 1995, cavity wall insulation had been installed in 7,500 homes. The Council expected to insulate all suitable homes by April 1997. By concentrating on this single measure, the Council brought unit costs down to £100 per property, which typically generates continuing saving for tenants of £88 per year. |

| Good practice |
| ♦ councils should develop improvement programmes that take account of the condition and type of stock as well as the benefits to be derived; |
| ♦ priorities should be set on the basis of impact rather than, for example, a crude sequence of streets; and |
| ♦ unit costs can be minimised by concentrating on particular efficiency measures. |
28. Local authorities have limited powers to encourage environmentally friendly public transport systems. They can subsidise particular rail and bus routes but, outside London, deregulation has removed their power to co-ordinate public transport. Nevertheless, they are not without influence over non-trunk roads, which comprise 97 per cent of the network by mileage. There is also an allocation of £1.6 billion included in the Rate Support Grant calculation for discretionary transport expenditure by local authorities.

29. Despite the rise in car ownership, local authorities can improve the environment of inner city areas while still promoting economic wellbeing (Case Study 5). Among the measures promoted by local authorities as part of their transport strategies are:

(i) creating cycle ways: using lanes on highways, canal paths, and redundant rail lines;

(ii) traffic management: maximising the capacity of the existing road network (for example, through computer-controlled traffic lights) while protecting environmentally sensitive areas through traffic calming and the pedestrianisation of town centres;

(iii) introducing 'park and ride' schemes and bus lanes; and

(iv) introducing and enforcing further roadside parking restrictions.

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**Case Study 5**

**An integrated transport strategy – Oxford City Council**

**Background**

Like many councils, Oxford City recognised that it cannot solve the city's traffic problems simply by building more roads and car parks. The historic city centre (with over 1,000 listed buildings and five million visitors a year) made the option of building roads unacceptable. Walking and cycling in Oxford had become an unpleasant experience because of the congestion and pollution generated by vehicles using the city streets. The city faced a 'Catch 22' – to relieve congestion it needed to encourage walking, cycling and more use of public transport, but the congestion discouraged people from changing their means of travelling.

**Action**

In 1973, the Council introduced a concept called 'Balanced Transport Policy'. This had the objectives of expanding public transport, restraining the use of private cars, encouraging cycling, improving the environment and reducing road injuries. The Council set a series of road-use priorities with the environment and pedestrians at the top and the car-user at the bottom. The Council has taken the following steps:

**Off-street parking controls**

Variable charges were introduced to favour the short-stay user. Simultaneously, policies were adopted to ensure that there would be no increase in off-street parking. To cope with tourists and car commuters, the council established four carparks on the edge of the city served by a high frequency 'park and ride' bus service.

*cont.*
Case Study 5 (cont.)

**On-street parking controls**
Many on-street parking places were removed. Others were converted to short stay. A system of 'pay and display' was introduced in most city centre streets. To stop commuters parking in the ring of residential streets off the city centre, a system of resident's priority parking zones was introduced.

**Public transport**
To encourage the use of public transport, eight kilometres of bus lanes were introduced with selective vehicle detection systems at appropriate traffic lights. Buses are allowed access to streets closed to general traffic, and the council has followed a policy of promoting and providing financial support to non-profitable bus routes.

**Traffic management**
There has been no increase in highway capacity and certain roads have been closed to general traffic. In recent years, the Council has introduced traffic-calming measures and local improvements to prevent 'rat-running'. Action has been taken to encourage cycling, by creating cycle routes, providing cycle stands and exempting cycles from some traffic restrictions.

**Planning controls**
Controls have been imposed on the provision of parking places, and section 106 agreements used to finance the Council's 'park and ride' schemes.

**Conclusion**
While the number of motor vehicles entering the city centre remains below the 1973 level, cycle journeys have doubled and the downward trend in road accidents is running ahead of the national trend. In 1974, 30 per cent of carpark users stayed in the city for more than six hours (ie, commuters) – that figure is now less than 7 per cent. Releasing this parking space has increased the intensity of use of the carparks, and although the average stay is now only two hours, the parks are generally full. Control over commuting has not adversely affected city-centre shopping.

**Good practice**
- the need to reduce car commuting has been balanced with an increase in the provision and flow of public transport;
- walking and cycling have also been encouraged; and
- high carparking charges in the city centre and section 106 agreements have helped to finance the 'park and ride' scheme.

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Section 106 of the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act permits local authorities to enter into legally binding agreements with developers to restrict or regulate the development or use of land. One application of this provision is to oblige the developer to fund some off-site work connected with the development.
Councils have also sought to promote the reintroduction of abandoned rail services, and create new transport systems such as the Manchester tram system. No single measure can solve a city’s traffic problems, but when developed as part of an integrated system (Case Study 6), there is some possibility of reducing car movements without damaging the local economy.

### Case Study 6
**West Midlands – a partnership approach to sustainable transport**

#### Background
In 1993, the seven West Midlands local authorities formed a partnership with the West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority. The partnership has three objectives:

- to develop and promote public transport across the metropolitan area;
- to redress the balance between public transport, particularly bus travel, and the private car; and
- to support the outcome of the Rio Summit of 1992 by directing resources towards more sustainable transport.

The partnership developed out of a series of transport studies across the area in the late 1980s which concluded that an integrated transport strategy offered the best solution to transport problems. Accordingly, an annual package bid to the DoT is prepared jointly by the authorities.

#### Problems facing the region
The West Midlands Metropolitan region has a population of 2.6 million and is one of the most diverse major urban environments in Europe. Within the UK, it has the highest concentrations of people, industry and commerce outside London.

In order to maintain the attractiveness of the region as a place to live, work, visit and invest in, it must offer both the right business opportunities and an environment viewed by potential investors as attractive. But the competitiveness of the area had been eroded by:

- decentralisation of the population and employment from the metropolitan areas to the surrounding shire counties;
- traffic congestion – the West Midlands has the highest peak hour traffic flows in the UK outside London; and
- a significant increase in car usage and dependency – over one million cars are now registered in the West Midlands, and the number is increasing by 100 each day.

The CBI estimates that traffic congestion is costing business and commerce in the West Midlands £1.5 billion each year, while congestion results in serious environmental and safety problems, affecting the quality of life of the people of the region.

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1 Birmingham City Council, Coventry City Council, and the Metropolitan Borough Councils of Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton.
Addressing the problems
The partnership reviewed the pattern of investment in the regional transport infrastructure and identified the following objectives to:
♦ improve the quality and attractiveness of public transport;
♦ introduce measures to improve safety and security when using the transport system;
♦ encourage integration between different forms of transport;
♦ remove barriers to mobility and improve accessibility for everyone;
♦ improve facilities for pedestrians and cyclists;
♦ manage traffic growth and demand more effectively;
♦ minimise the effects of transport on the environment; and
♦ inform people of the consequences of their travel decisions.

A key element of the strategy is the development of the 'Bus Showcase' concept. In 1996, the partnership started work on improving bus services for one of the main transport corridors in the conurbation. The partnership obtained the support of bus operators for the concept and the first Showcase route included the main operator, Travel West Midlands, which is providing £1.7 million of private money in support of £1.9 million worth of public money. This joint approach has improved the quality of the bus infrastructure with the route having new low flat-floor buses, an integrated programme of bus priority and traffic management measures to ensure bus reliability, special kerbs to give level boarding, and new high-quality passenger shelters and real time information. The police have also worked closely with the funding partners on scheme design, inception and operation.

The partnership authorities’ bid to the DoT for 1997/98 was focused solely on further improvements to bus services over the next five years. No other major schemes were promoted. The aim is to develop a comprehensive public transport system in the West Midlands, one that is easy to use and which reduces car dependency.

Targets for the strategy
This programme will help to achieve the following milestones:
♦ halt the decline of public transport, with a view to increasing its overall share of trips from 25 per cent to 30 per cent by 2005;
♦ improve average bus speeds in the morning peak hour to closer to the private vehicles’ average speed by 2000;
♦ double the amount of cycle usage by 2002 and again by 2011;
♦ reduce the current, high level of private long-stay car parks in centres by an average of 3 per cent per year while maintaining short-stay spaces;
♦ double the amount of ‘park and ride’ spaces by 2005; and
♦ reduce the severity and number of traffic accidents by greater than the national average by 2000.
31. The planning system is recognised as playing a key role in the pursuit of sustainability and all Government Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) are now underpinned by the objective of sustainable development. However, there is a distinct lack of practical guidance for authorities to help carry out their environmental stewardship role through their planning function generally, and their development control functions in particular. The ACC, ADC and AMA together with the LGMB have jointly funded a research project which is intended to provide a framework to link sustainable objectives with development control practice. It pulls together good practice gleaned from local authorities on the incorporation of sustainability objectives in the development control process through the use of negotiation, planning briefs, conditions, planning obligations and advisory guides and checklists. The final report is due to be published in June 1997.

32. Planning also has to be concerned with jobs as well as the environment. Urban regeneration is justified by the creation of job opportunities in the inner city as well as by the need to protect the countryside. Along with transport, these issues merit a full study in their own right. They are given passing attention in this report, but are on the schedule of prospective studies by the Audit Commission.
Pollution

33. Local authorities have powers to control the pollution created by their own activities and those of others in the community. They can make sure that their own vehicles are in a good state of repair and use low-sulphur diesel and other low-pollutant fuels (Case Study 7). Councils can also incorporate transport-related environmental criteria in tender documentation and in the criteria for adding firms to their approved lists.

34. Councils also have control over others through their powers under the Environmental Protection Act and Clean Air Act. These powers enable councils to establish smoke control areas; regulate some 12,000 ‘medium’ air polluting industrial processes; control smoke, grit and dust from combustion plant and approve chimney heights; and they have a duty to inspect their area for statutory nuisances and to take action where such nuisances are found. Local authorities are a statutory consultee for the most polluting industrial processes which are authorised by the Environment Agency.

35. Considerations of air quality should be a natural component of any relevant decision – planning, transport and parking provision, choice of vehicle fleet – taken by an authority. Many councils have extended their role. Coventry City Council, for example, uses environmental health officers to provide advice to businesses as well as to enforce pollution controls (Case Study 8).

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**Case Study 7**

**Rugby switches to gas**

**Background**

When Rugby Council needed to replace a refuse vehicle, it sought an environmentally friendly alternative.

**Action**

After trials, Rugby became one of the first councils in Britain to take delivery of a gas-powered refuse compactor. The vehicle provides a significantly quieter and more environmentally friendly operation which produces 40 per cent fewer emissions than any comparable diesel engine.

There are nearly one million gas-powered vehicles in the world but few are used in Britain. Rugby is committed to greening its fleet and has since taken delivery of a gas-powered van.

**Good practice**

- councils must put their own house in order if they are to convince business and the wider community of the need to change current practice;
- councils should be prepared to investigate new and innovative approaches; and
- councils and others can reduce the environmental damage caused by their work, while providing efficient and effective services.
Case Study 8
Environmental advice unit–Coventry City Council

Background
One-third of Coventry’s jobs are in the manufacturing sector. In the late 1980s, the Council realised that an adversarial approach to enforcement was having only limited success in promoting good environmental practice. Such enforcement meant that relationships between local businesses and the Council were strained. The Council wanted to ensure that local businesses were successful, while minimising the damage they did to the environment. Flagrant breaches of the regulations were challenged robustly but, where breaches resulted from ignorance, a better approach was to educate businesses of the need to improve their environmental practices.

Action
With the help of a European Social Fund grant, the Council started to provide general advice to local businesses to help them be more environmentally friendly. In 1992, a review by the City Council and Warwickshire County Council concluded that small and medium-sized manufacturing and engineering firms were under pressure from:
- increasingly stringent legislation;
- the costs of pollution control; and
- increasing expectations of local community groups and their own customers.

Many of the smaller firms did not have the expertise to respond to these new demands. The Council consequently focused on providing support by:
- providing advice to companies on recycling or waste minimisation;
- accumulating and disseminating good practice;
- developing good practice case studies;
- providing a reference library;
- servicing a business panel; and
- developing links with major companies.

The policy aim was to improve the environmental performance of industry, thereby reducing pollution while assisting economic growth.

Good practice
- councils can minimise environmental impact by working in partnership with local business;
- councils can secure greater environmental gain when acting as an enabler rather than a regulator; and
- local business will work with local authorities on schemes that can be tailored to offer benefits to all parties.
36. Local authorities will have a further role under Part IV of the Environment Act 1995. The DoE will set targets for a range of common pollutants. In locations where such targets are not met by 2005, local authorities will be obliged to establish Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) and to prepare local strategies to improve air quality. The DoE intends to create a national network of monitoring stations, starting with 10 to 12 pilot areas. The experience gained will be passed to local authorities before their duties come into effect.

37. The 1997 Road Traffic Reduction Act provides additional legislative muscle. The Secretary of State may order councils to prepare reports containing an assessment of local road traffic in their area; and a forecast of the growth of traffic levels. The reports must also specify targets for a reduction in road traffic levels in the area, or a reduction in the rate of growth in the levels of such traffic.

Summary

38. In each of the four themes – waste management; energy conservation; planning and transport; and pollution control – innovative practice in some local authorities shows what is possible. But such initiatives will have a telling impact on the environment only if they become commonplace. The next chapter assesses the extent of general progress on those aspects of the environmental agenda which are capable of ready measurement.
Each council faces a different local environmental challenge, so there is no straightforward, universal solution to the problems that they all face. But the current variation in their performance reflects differences in understanding, enthusiasm and commitment.

Even the best can do better, and most councils could do more to raise the environmental agenda on their list of corporate priorities.

Too much waste is sent to landfill sites, when there is significant scope to reduce waste production and increase recycling; despite years of emphasis on energy conservation, many councils could save more money and protect the environment; more could be done to reduce the damaging effects of car commuting; and many local authorities must move away from their traditional emphasis on the motor car towards more sustainable forms of transport.
Introduction

39. Chapter 2 illustrated many initiatives found in local government. Such good practice is by no means universal. Different councils face different environmental circumstances. Their response reflects geographical differences, most obviously between rural and urban areas; historic patterns of land use, such as previous population movements or industrial activity associated with local natural resources; and differing development pressures. But responses also reflect differences in understanding, enthusiasm and commitment.

40. Councils are most active in areas where they have greatest control. This is particularly true where there has traditionally been a 'green' focus to policy – for example, nature conservation; or where financial savings are available – for example, energy conservation in council buildings. But even councils with a good record still have potential for improvement.

Waste management

41. Waste management is one of the most important environmental services carried out by councils. Almost all of the waste collected – 83 per cent – is buried at landfill sites (Exhibit 9). The UK currently sends enough waste to landfill sites to fill Lake Windermere in 18 months. One alternative to landfill is incineration, but councils with large-scale incineration facilities are the exception. In December 1996, only five municipal waste incinerators met the new air emission standards imposed under the 1989 EC Directive and Environment Agency limits. The Private Finance Initiative (PFI) offers an obvious way forward to provide new facilities, particularly incinerators.

42. Recycling is a better alternative to waste disposal than landfill or incineration. But in 1995/96, the amount of waste recycled was just 5.4 per cent (excluding home composting) (Box B). Local authorities therefore have a long way to go to achieve the DoE's target of 25 per cent by 2000. Increases in recycling are not keeping pace with increases in waste generation. The best strategy is to reduce waste generation – this is an area where local authorities have less control but where they nevertheless do have influence.
Most councils send the vast majority of waste to landfill.

Note: 1. London boroughs, metropolitan and Welsh districts are both Waste Collection Authorities and Waste Disposal Authorities. Some London boroughs and metropolitan districts dispose of waste on behalf of their peers. There are also disposal consortia. As a result, there are fewer disposal authorities than there are councils.

Source: 1994/95 Local Authority Performance Indicators, Audit Commission
There is a clear distinction between leaders and the laggards.

43. On most environmental issues, local government is typified by a few leading authorities, with a rump of authorities yet to take effective action. For example, the 'kerbside' collection of paper (Exhibit 10) is well established in some authorities, but partial or absent in others.1

44. Energy conservation was introduced to most local authorities’ agendas in the early 1970s. There are many success stories, but some councils have failed to achieve much progress despite the efforts of the Energy Efficiency Office, Building Research Establishment, Audit Commission and others to provide support. Many investment programmes remain a low priority and energy efficiency units often concentrate on tariff analysis. This is essential work, but should complement efforts on conservation. To be successful, energy management requires constant attention. Managers need to establish a cycle of constant review and improvement – energy management can never be removed from the ‘to do’ list.

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1 The sample upon which Exhibit 10 is based consists of those authorities that were visited as part of this study because they displayed exemplary practice in some aspect of environmental stewardship. But when compared on this one common aspect of good practice, there was wide variation in performance.
45. Leading authorities have databases of their energy usage which enable comparison of energy efficiency in council premises. Analysis of these databases shows that even councils with a good record in energy conservation have the potential for improvement (Exhibit 11). Under Local Management of Schools (LMS), the delegation of budgets has encouraged schools to tighten their energy 'housekeeping', but some schools have been reluctant to invest in conservation because of uncertainties about longer-term funding. At one county council, more than £1 million could be saved – 20 per cent of the fuel bill. Generally speaking, schools that can make the largest savings are those which use electricity for space heating. But replacing such systems would entail substantial capital investment.
46. A similar picture emerges for another service area – energy conservation in council housing. The nature of the housing stock and the extent of backlog in maintenance programmes will affect progress. Even so, the DoE expects every authority to demonstrate an effective energy efficiency policy and programme of work.\(^1\) While most council dwellings have loft and hotwater tank insulation, much of the council housing stock would benefit from further conservation measures (Exhibit 12) – often at very modest unit costs. Despite decades of emphasis on conserving energy, there remains a sizeable number of properties without basic energy efficiency measures. There is a considerable variation in the attention given by individual councils to such measures (Exhibit 13).

\(^1\) *The Housing Investment Programme 1996: Guidance Note, DoE, March 1996.*

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**Exhibit 12**

**Energy efficiency measures in council homes**

Many council homes would benefit from further conservation measures.

Note: Draught stripping, double glazing and hot-tank insulation would be possible in all 4.6 million council homes; cavity wall insulation is possible in 3.8 million; and loft insulation possible in 3 million.

*Source: Building Research Establishment Domestic Energy Factfile; LA Homes 1994 and DoE circular 296*
3 How Well are Councils Doing?

There is wide variation in the activity of individual councils.

Source: DoE HIP returns (excludes authorities which have transferred their stock)

Exhibit 13
Energy conservation in council dwellings 1995/96

Planning and transport

47. Transport has a major impact on the environment, and increases in car ownership seem relentless. This is an area in which progress has to be achieved if sustainability is to be delivered. Councils have only a limited range of powers, particularly in relation to the provision of attractive public transport alternatives to the private car and the introduction of restraint measures. A starting point has to be a strategic transport policy which is linked with, and is complementary to, a broader land use and sustainable development strategy, and which seeks to strike a balance between the need for movement, economic activity and environmental protection.

48. Achieving a more environmentally sustainable transport policy has been a Department of Transport (DoT) objective since 1994, when it published the UK Strategy for Sustainable Development. DoT support for major road building schemes has fallen from £451 million in 1995/96 to £401 million in 1996/97. This is in keeping with the DoT’s policy focus of managing demand, reducing reliance upon the car\(^1\) and promoting public transport, cycling and walking as alternatives. The local authority associations have been active in promoting package deals which take an integrated and environmentally friendly approach to transport. But in many local authorities, the emphasis is still on roads and cars, as demonstrated by their bids for capital finance under the Transport Policies and Programmes (TPP) system (Exhibit 14, overleaf). Only 30 per cent of the money sought is for public transport and other non-car transport.

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49. There are big differences in the extent to which councils are prepared to tackle the dominant 'car culture'. Despite claiming to have sustainable transport policies, many councils still behave as if their primary role is to accommodate the car through more and better roads. New and enlarged roads are often unavoidable, but they should be part of a strategy which includes restraint as well. Councils can improve the environment of city centres by pedestrianisation schemes, 'park and ride' arrangements, traffic restrictions and higher parking charges. Many have done so, but only to a partial extent. Councils face a significant challenge in taking their communities with them, including major retailers and investors who often press for cheaper and better parking provision. Councils' aspirations in the field of economic development also make them feel that they are competing with neighbouring towns to attract shoppers and businesses. This element of competition inhibits their commitment to environmental stewardship.

50. The emphasis given to major roads by councils in their TPP submissions varies. Derbyshire and Leeds devoted only 12 and 19 per cent respectively of their 1996/97 bid to this purpose, whereas for other councils it was as high as 78 per cent (Exhibit 15). Many schemes were resubmissions of major road proposals which had previously been rejected by the DoT. Such perseverance not only ignores the adverse comment of the DoT, but fails to follow the good practice set by others (Box C).

Many councils continue to emphasise major roads in their bids for TPP funding.

**Note 1:** Major roads are schemes costing more than £2 million.

*Source: Audit Commission*

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### Exhibit 15
Proportion of Transport Policies and Programmes bids devoted to major roads

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**Box C**
**Sustainable transport policies**

**Background**

In March 1994, the DoE/DoT issued new planning guidance to cover transport matters which placed the emphasis on managing demand and planning to reduce growth in the length and number of motorised journeys; encourage alternative means of travel with less environmental impact; and hence reduce reliance on the private car. *(Policy Planning Guidance 13: Transport, March 1994).*

The TPP circular for 1996/97 notified local authorities that DoT support for road building would continue to decline. The 1996 Transport Green Paper consolidated the new approach to transport policy by recognising 'the need to take far greater account of environmental impacts of transport, and the need for tougher measures to solve problems of congestion and pollution without relying on more and bigger roads'.

**'Problem' authorities**

**Case 1**

The DoT rejected one council's package bid on the grounds that 'it contained a number of proposals for radical highway improvements which seem likely to undermine the aim of promotion of public transport'.

**Case 2**

A bid was rejected because 'The problems of XXX cannot be solved by road construction and traffic management alone ... there is relatively little emphasis on encouragement of alternatives to the car and complementary restraint'.

*cont./
Case 3

The DoT rejected a bid because ‘The road would not apparently relieve the town of XXX of traffic; its effect would seem to be to make access by car easier... a programme of traffic management and calming... appears to be a more logical approach for a route of this kind.’

Good practice authorities

Winchester

Winchester is working towards a traffic-free centre with pedestrian priority throughout, with good accessibility maintained by public transport and a network of on-road and off-road cycle routes. Proposals for 1997/98 include an extension to the existing ‘park and ride’ system and more traffic management; environmental improvements; and pedestrian / cyclist facilities.

Brighton

The foundation of Brighton's strategy is a balanced and integrated transport package which is designed to create better access to the area. Particular efforts are being made to improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists and the package is strong on bus priority measures. Use of buses has increased year-on-year since 1994.

Hull

One of Hull's key objectives is to maintain and, where possible, improve the environment through investment in transport systems that are sensitive to the environment. Hull's approach particularly looks to build on the comparatively high level of cycling in the town. Work has so far been created largely on one corridor where cycle facilities, junction improvements, bus priority measures and traffic calming – designed as an anti-rat running measure – have been introduced.

Exeter

Exeter’s approach contains a wide range of measures, including schemes designed to aid pedestrians and disabled people, cycle schemes, public transport schemes, traffic calming and local safety schemes. The importance that demand management plays in the strategy is recognised.

51. The classifications used in TPP bids are not perfect and make measurement of sustainable transport initiatives difficult. While some of the current bids may have some emphasis on sustainable transport policies, the apparent concentration on major roads at some councils is cause for concern. More meaningful data need to be collected to identify the extent of 'green' investment in roads. This issue will be addressed in the Commission's forthcoming study of transport capital investment.
52. The control of pollution is a regulatory function, subject to the recent establishment of the Environment Agency. At present, it is not possible to offer a measured assessment of authorities’ performance. However, anecdotal evidence from visits to councils suggests that, as with other aspects of the environmental agenda, performance is very variable.

53. Councils are doing better at the things they know well and more falteringly in some of the less traditional areas of activity. No council rejects the importance of the environment; and a growing majority have prepared initial policy statements. But in too many cases, those policies have not changed traditional behaviour. Such councils are failing to take an effective corporate approach and could stand accused of paying only lip service to the environmental agenda. Managing the change agenda is a task in itself. It is not surprising that councils are at different stages on the learning curve. Although this chapter has concentrated on exposing variations in council performance, councils can – and many are – raising their game. Sustainable development presents an enormous challenge to local government – just about every key policy area is affected.

54. Sustainable development obliges councils to confront complex interdepartmental and partnership tensions. Councils need to develop management arrangements that enable them to work across internal and external boundaries and develop integrated solutions. Meeting the costs of sustainable development can be a barrier to progress. In a tight financial environment councils need, now more than ever, to co-ordinate the financial and environmental aspects of their work. However, many environmental initiatives have little or no cost, or can even generate savings within a reasonable payback period. In other settings, volunteers would readily come forward, if only the council could offer a means of harnessing their contribution. Sometimes councils are funding environmental co-ordinators but failing to provide them with the influence necessary to achieve beneficial change. There is no simple blueprint for councils to follow. The next chapter reviews some of the difficulties that councils face and ways in which they may be able to overcome them.
Local authorities should concentrate on local environmental initiatives that will provide the greatest benefit to their communities, focusing first on 'win-win' scenarios.

Reducing the use of large wheeled refuse bins, increasing the number of 'bring' sites, introducing home composting and kerbside paper collections are obvious first steps to take.

Water and energy conservation are areas where councils can save money and natural resources.

Councillors need effective management arrangements to deliver their local agendas: leadership from members, a genuine corporate approach, adequate support for environmental co-ordinators and a constructive dialogue with the wider community are essential.

Central government must play its part – sometimes taking unpopular decisions – to provide the right framework and incentives to enable local government to deliver on its environmental responsibilities.
4 The Way Ahead

Introduction

55. Previous chapters have described the performance of councils in their role as stewards of the environment. There is substantial variation in their success, even against modest environment targets. To construct and manage an effective environmental programme, councils need to give attention to:

- **Doing the right things**: Environmental stewardship is a wide-ranging responsibility encompassing many aspects – waste and energy management, planning and transport and pollution control. Councils have limited time and money and must choose their priorities in the light of local circumstances.

- **Doing things right**: Having chosen their priorities, councils must organise themselves to best effect and find ways of involving local business and the community. In this way, councils can ensure that they stretch the value obtained from their effort and resources.

Doing the right things

56. The environmental agenda is so wide-ranging and interconnected that it can confound precise action. Because it involves almost everything, it sometimes identifies nothing, with some councils uncertain about where to start. Certainly, priorities will often differ from one council to another, depending on their particular economic history and geography. For example, because landfill costs vary across the country, the balance of the economic advantage of incineration with energy recovery will vary.

57. Local authorities face questions such as: 'Which environmental initiative should we pursue to achieve the greatest environmental benefit: a 'kerbside' recycling scheme, additional insulation in council houses or a 'park and ride' scheme?' Clear answers are extraordinarily elusive. Studies have been undertaken which attempt to identify the best choice. For example, the environmental lifecycle costs of differing forms of waste disposal have been assessed (Box D).

| Box D |
| Lifecycle assessment of the cost of landfill, incineration and recycling |

The Centre for Social and Economic Research at the Universities of East Anglia and University College London undertook a lifecycle assessment of alternative waste management options:

- landfill by itself;
- incineration by itself; and
- both landfill and incineration coupled with either 'bring' or 'kerbside' recycling.

Where relevant, disposal methods included energy recovery in the form of electricity. The electricity was assumed to be generated either from landfill gas or directly by burning waste. It was assumed that both the 'bring' and 'kerbside' schemes involved 20 per cent materials recovery.

cont./
The impacts examined include emissions from the transport, processing and disposal of waste and from recovered materials. The electricity recovered is assumed to displace electricity generated by old coal fired power stations and therefore the emissions associated with this electricity are also displaced. Other impacts include casualties from road traffic accidents and road congestion.

In order to assess and compare the results of the lifecycle, two techniques were used: economic evaluation and multi-criteria evaluation.

**Economic evaluation**

The economic valuation showed the ‘best’ option, given the various assumptions, to be incineration coupled with ‘bring’ recycling.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Benefit/Cost per tonne</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Bring’ recycling scheme plus incineration of residual waste</td>
<td>£27.09 benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Kerbside’ recycling scheme plus incineration of residual waste</td>
<td>£26.88 benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Kerbside’ recycling scheme plus landfill of residual waste</td>
<td>£17.62 benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Bring’ recycling scheme plus landfill of residual waste</td>
<td>£17.40 benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incineration</td>
<td>£7.20 benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landfill</td>
<td>£4.39 cost</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Multi-criteria evaluation**

A broader assessment was possible with each waste management option being judged against 13 separate criteria which referred to costs, resources and environmental impact. When equal weight is given to each of these sets of criteria, the results differed from the economic valuation. Landfill combined with a kerbside collection scheme proved to be the best option, and incineration the worst.

This was partly due to the weighting scheme and partly due to the fact that additional criteria were included in the assessment. Sensitivity analysis was used to determine the effect of varying the weights attached to the three criteria. This showed that the choice of ultimate disposal method (landfill or incineration) and the presence of recycling have a greater effect on the ranking of the waste management options than does the method of collecting recyclables.

**Conclusions**

The results highlight the importance of the criteria used to judge the alternatives. The study also showed the results to be very sensitive to the assumptions made and the locality of the study. The conclusion, therefore, is that there is no one best method of waste disposal. Recycling was shown to be good for the environment, and better than either landfill disposal or incineration on its own, even if energy recovery takes place. But large transport distances can quickly undermine these benefits, and in some cases the social and environmental costs of collecting, sorting and transporting recovered material may actually be greater than the savings that can be achieved by avoiding the production of primary materials.

*Source: Global Environmental Change Programme Briefings No. 11, March 1997*
58. Lifecycle studies like this can reveal the effect of assumptions on the solution for waste management in a given location. But the results of such a study can differ greatly depending on local facilities and conditions, so considerable local information is needed (such as quantities of recyclables taken to 'bring' sites) for the results to be relevant. Otherwise, gross assumptions have to be made which make the results less accurate. Nevertheless, certain issues are almost universally advisable as top priorities. They may not be optimum solutions, but they are certainly better than traditional practice. Experience across a range of councils shows that there are initiatives proven to offer the prospect of improving local environments while still allowing authorities to contain expenditure within their limited budgets. There are immediate objectives that every council should look to achieve before progressing to more advanced initiatives.

59. The immediate objectives that all councils should consider fall into four key areas:
- waste management
- water conservation
- energy conservation
- car commuting

Waste management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immediate objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>promote home composting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>limit the further introduction of large wheeled bins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provide more 'bring' sites (one per thousand householders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organise the home collection of newspapers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

60. Councils’ waste management policies are best formulated with reference to the waste hierarchy which tracks the use of materials from their creation to their disposal (Exhibit 16, overleaf). This perspective emphasises the scope of waste management. The policy issues are not just about recycling and reducing landfill; they need, particularly, to reduce the amount of waste that is generated and collected, as well as recycling usable materials and extracting harmful substances – especially CFCs from redundant fridges and freezers.
61. The amount of waste that councils collect varies from an annual average of half a tonne to 1.25 tonnes per household.¹ The amount generated appears to be independent of the social mix of residents (as measured by the DoE’s index of local conditions). The variation in the waste collected is much greater than the variation in the amount recycled (Exhibit 17). There is more scope to reduce waste by minimising the amount generated than by increasing recycling. Councils have focused on recycling because they have more control over it than waste generation; but they should not underestimate their influence over waste generation.

¹ The main categories of ‘household’ waste include collection rounds, street sweepings and bulky wastes.
Exhibit 17
Waste collection

The variation in the waste collected is much greater than the variation in the amount recycled.

Source: 1994/95 Local Authority Performance Indicators, Audit Commission

62. The contents of the typical household dustbin provide the clue to local action. About one-fifth of household waste is organic matter suitable for composting (Exhibit 18). Householders with gardens can be encouraged to compost this material for themselves and reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill. Composting waste also benefits the environment as methane may be generated at landfill sites – home composting avoids the problem because the organic matter has access to oxygen. A number of councils have encouraged home composting by offering free or subsidised composters to households with gardens (Box E, overleaf).

Exhibit 18
The composition of household dustbin waste (by weight)

One-fifth of household waste is organic matter suitable for composting.

Each household generates an average of 0.8 tonnes of refuse each year. Home composting could reduce this by 20 per cent = 0.16 tonnes per annum. With disposal costs of £18 per tonne (including landfill tax), this would save about £2.85 per household per annum. So subsidising home composting – by a once-only subsidy on a composter of £5 per household – represents a worthwhile investment. And as landfill costs rise, the payback will improve.

63. A council’s choice of waste collection method exerts a strong influence over the weight of waste collected. In particular, large wheeled bins with a capacity of 240 litres or more increase the amount of waste collected by 25 per cent (Exhibit 19). Not only is there an initial burst in the amount collected, as residents clear out their garages and lofts; there is also a continuing increase in the amount of garden waste put in bins and a reduction in the amount of waste that is recycled or taken to civic amenity sites. In councils where more than 90 per cent of collection is by wheeled bin, only 3.4 per cent is recycled; but when less than 10 per cent is collected by wheeled bin, the recycling rate is 5.1 per cent.

Exhibit 19
Methods of waste collection

Collection by wheeled bins leads to a 25 per cent increase in the amount of household waste collected.

Source: CIPFA Statistics 1994/95
64. Councils have introduced wheeled bins for a number of reasons:
♦ greater efficiency of collection;
♦ to encourage people to dispose of garden clippings other than by burning;
♦ less temptation to 'fly tip'; and
♦ their popularity with householders.

Many shire district councils have introduced such systems, perhaps because disposal costs are borne by the county council. Whatever the reason, the increase in tonnage collected through large wheeled bins exceeds the tonnage recycled by almost every council, thereby nullifying any initial environmental or financial benefit.

65. Councils that have introduced wheeled bins will find it difficult to withdraw them. The alternative is less frequent collection rounds, complemented by the encouragement of home composting. When new bins are introduced they should be of a smaller size (Case Study 9).

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**Case Study 9**

**Horsham District Council**

**Background**

In 1996, Horsham's waste collection contract was due for renewal. The authority considered the option of 240-litre wheeled bins. However, the experience of other local authorities which had introduced such a service was a substantial increase in waste. This outcome would be incompatible with the district council's objective to reduce waste. At the same time, Horsham recognised the benefits associated with wheeled bins:
♦ no manual handling required by the collector;
♦ more efficient than backdoor collection; and
♦ tidier streets and vermin cannot penetrate the bins.

**Action**

Before inviting tenders for the waste collection service, Horsham carried out a trial collection service supplying 2,500 households with 140-litre wheeled bins and two 30-litre recycling baskets. Paper and magazines, mixed cans and plastics were collected on alternate weeks and the residual refuse weekly. Garden waste was not accepted for collection – home composting was promoted instead.

Throughout the trial period, few complaints were received about the size of the wheeled bins. About 100 households with large families found the bins too small to cope with their waste, so were allowed to exchange their smaller bins for 240-litre bins. The district council monitored the quantity of waste collected before and after the trial period. It remained stable.

After the six-month trial, all householders were sent a questionnaire to assess the scheme's effectiveness. A 50 per cent response rate was achieved. Of the respondents, 87 per cent preferred the new 140-litre wheeled bin service to the old collection system and 88 per cent said they were recycling more waste than with the previous collection system. A decision was made to proceed with the introduction of 140-litre wheeled bins on an authority-wide basis,
Horsham is now delivering the 140-litre bins, free of charge, to every household in the district. Households needing their 140-litre bins exchanged for the larger 240-litre variety have to pay an administrative and delivery fee of £14. In rural areas, a split-vehicle is being used to collect the recyclables and refuse in a single collection round while in urban areas, the recyclables and refuse are collected using two separate, standard compaction vehicles.

**Good practice**

- 240-litre wheeled bins were rejected on the basis that their waste-generating impact was incompatible with waste reduction objectives;
- by providing smaller bins and recycling baskets, householders were given the incentive to recycle and compost waste;
- the fully integrated recycling and refuse collection system in rural areas provides both environmental and financial benefits; and
- the wheeled bins are made from recycled plastic: purchasing recycled products sets a good example for others to follow; furthermore, it 'completes the recycling loop' and helps to create markets for recycled goods.

66. Government could do more to encourage the reduction of waste that is sent to landfill. Landfill tax has already been introduced, but other steps could be considered. First, it could consider providing districts with an incentive to minimise waste collection by making them bear the whole of the cost of disposal. Second, it could provide councils with powers to charge directly for waste collection.

67. Some councils recycle much more than others. The relative wealth of the residents has some effect – for example, the use of cars to take bottles and paper to the bank. But council policy has an important influence. In particular, a pattern of local 'bring' sites increases the tonnage collected, albeit at some extra cost (Exhibit 20).
Exhibit 20
‘Bring’ sites – density and cost

More local ‘bring’ sites increases the tonnage collected...

....but the extra cost is a problem.

Source: Audit Commission survey of 21 local authorities (1996)
Some councils have increased recycling by collecting items from people’s homes. This can be expensive. On average, the net cost per tonne exceeds £100 in contrast to the cost of ‘bring’ recycling of only £17 per tonne. The cost of ‘kerbside’ recycling varies enormously between 23p and £15.31 per household per annum.\(^1\) There are many factors influencing this wide variation in costs:

- the more that is collected for recycling from each household, the higher the gross cost;
- the more that is collected for recycling, the less refuse there is per household that remains to be disposed of;
- sorting at the kerbside (e.g., bluebox schemes) tends to be more expensive than sorting centrally at a material recovery facility (MRF);
- and
- the more households covered by a ‘kerbside’ scheme, the lower the unit costs.

The costs of ‘kerbside’ collection rise when a wider range of materials is collected (Exhibit 21). Councils have to separate the material from general waste collection and then sort items into categories – cans, bottles, different types of plastics, etc, either at a central facility or in the course of material collections. Some material such as plastics has limited market value compared to the cost of producing new plastic.

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\(^1\) Audit Commission survey of 21 local authorities, 1996.
One-third of the contents of the typical dustbin comprises paper and board – perhaps one-half of which is recyclable. This makes household waste paper collection an obvious next step in waste reduction. It is difficult to make a firm assessment of the economics of this policy because the price of waste paper is so volatile. In the spring of 1995, mixed papers could be sold for £40 per tonne, but in December 1996 they were accepted only if free of charge. During the period, prices for news and magazine paper fell by 95 per cent. Councils can even out such fluctuations by longer term agreements, but variation will still exist. The Local Government Association (LGA) may have a role in negotiating with the recycling industry and with central government over ways of ironing out short-term fluctuations.

There are other ways of decreasing the material sent to landfill. Recycling facilities are often present at civic amenity sites, but a few councils are going further by processing garden waste to produce compost or wood chippings. At present, there is only a limited market for this material and councils are using it on their own parks and verges. In time, a market may develop.

There are cost limits to the amount that councils can recycle economically. If the volume of landfill is to be substantially reduced, more material must be incinerated. Incineration is inhibited because of stringent new emissions standards resulting from the 1989 EC Directives on the incineration of municipal waste. Obtaining planning permission for new ones is difficult. In 1997, there will be only eight to ten operational incinerators in England and Wales – including the five incinerators in use in 1996. New ones require considerable capital investment and they are likely to be developed only by the private sector or through the PFI. Such investment is often marginal because many parts of the country currently enjoy low landfill costs – they range from £7.50 to £22.50 per tonne (before tax), whereas incineration – with energy recovery – costs between £21 and £29 per tonne. In such cases, environmental and financial benefits may result from recovering energy during the incineration process. However, landfill prices have risen as a result of the new landfill tax and as current sites are filled, more authorities will find incineration increasingly attractive, although they will still face difficulties in obtaining planning permission. If the UK is to emulate the level of energy recovery achieved in ‘combined heat and power’ plants in Denmark and Holland, a review of the planning criteria for incinerators will be required.

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I EC Directives 89/368/EEC and 89/429/EEC on the prevention of air pollution from new and existing municipal waste incineration plants respectively came into force on 1 December 1996.


III Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution Seventeenth Report: Incineration of Waste, p134, HMSO, CM218-1, 1993. These costs have increased with the introduction of EU air emission standards.

IV Initial tax rates are £2 per tonne for inert material, but most household waste is not inert, attracting a £7 per tonne tax rate.
Water conservation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immediate objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♦ reduce water in toilet cisterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ check for leaks by analysing monthly meter readings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ check meter sizes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ install and use pool covers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

72. The volume of water consumed per head is rising inexorably, as is its price. In cash terms, prices rose by 78 per cent between 1989/90 and 1995/96 inclusive. Household consumption is expected to rise by an eighth over the next 20 years. Increased consumption adversely affects the environment by:
- taking more land for reservoirs;
- using more chemicals to treat sewage;
- using more energy for processing and pumping; and
- damaging water courses through over-abstraction.

Water consumption in schools, pools and other council buildings (excluding housing) costs more than £100 million annually. Controlling this consumption offers councils another win-win option – both saving money and benefitting the environment.

73. Water in schools and other public buildings is lost through pipe leaks, overflowing tanks, running taps and continuously flushing urinals. The remedies are primarily a matter of good housekeeping:
- installing urinal flush controls; so that water is used only when necessary;
- fitting taps with flow constrictors;
- regular inspection for cistern overflows; and
- monthly monitoring of meters to identify leaks to underground pipes.

73. Water is also lost through evaporation when swimming pool covers are not installed – or not used each night – or when the water in the pool is changed too frequently.

74. Local performance should be compared against certain benchmarks (Box F). Schools that exceed these targets should take meter readings when the school closes and again in the morning before it opens and any significant consumption should be investigated. High consumption may be due to poor controls, overflows or underground leaks. In one London local education authority (LEA), external auditors identified an annual saving opportunity of over £100,000.

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The investment required to control consumption is generally small and the payback is often less than a year (Case Study 10). Auditors have identified substantial potential savings at many councils. At one county, half of the schools exceeded the water consumption benchmarks and, as a consequence, an annual saving opportunity of about £300,000 was available.

Other measures can save money without necessarily reducing consumption. Councils can often reduce their bills by reducing the size of meters to match demand and by analysing their bills. They can seek a rebate on sewage charges where water is used for playing fields, or is lost through leaks. In neither case does the water reach the sewage system and so incur a disposal charge.

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**Case Study 10**

**Water conservation in Coventry**

**Background**

In 1992/93, Coventry’s auditors carried out a review of the council’s water management systems.

**Results**

The review found that schools in Coventry could save £177,000 per annum through reduced water consumption and £40,600 per annum by reducing meter sizes. As a first step to realising these savings, the Council invested £50,000 in reducing water consumption. The treasurer estimated that this investment would result in annual savings of £95,000 per annum.

**Water saving action plan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
<th>Estimated annual savings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meter size reductions</td>
<td>£8,000</td>
<td>£10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urinal control devices</td>
<td>£25,000</td>
<td>£15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Push taps</td>
<td>£15,000</td>
<td>£5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity material</td>
<td>£2,000</td>
<td>£65,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>£50,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>£95,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Good practice**

- undertake systematic monitoring of consumption against benchmarks;
- undertake analysis of monthly bill to identify sudden large increases in consumption that may denote leaks; and
- ringfence investment money.
Energy conservation

Immediate objectives

♦ check consumption in schools and other council buildings against benchmarks
♦ install lagging, insulation and thermostatic radiators where not already in place
♦ survey council housing stock
♦ prioritise investments according to payback period

77. Local management of schools (LMS) has made schools responsible for their utility bills. This has encouraged good housekeeping campaigns; for example, switching off unwanted lights and adjusting radiators. Conversely, LMS seems to have reduced investment in energy conservation measures. Many schools could still benefit from thermostatic radiators, zonal controls, and the replacement of expensive electric space heating but are inhibited by uncertainty about future funding, and by the competing priorities for any available money.

78. Few councils have central funds to invest in schools and many have reduced the number of energy advisers. Most councils still provide a central service to check on bills and advise on tariffs but this is often the limit of their activity. Yet investment in energy conservation should remain a key feature of environmental and economic stewardship. As a first step, councils should check the energy consumption at their schools and other buildings against good practice benchmarks which have been set by the Building Research Establishment (Box G).

79. Reducing tenants’ fuel bills brings many advantages. The DoE expects local authorities to make energy efficiency an integral part of their housing strategies and investment programmes. An energy conservation element in special housing programmes – for example, Estate Action and Single Regeneration Budget bids – is also encouraged.

80. What money is available should be used incrementally, making sure all suitable dwellings have basic insulation:

♦ insulated hot-water tanks;
♦ 200mm of roof insulation; and
♦ cavity wall insulation (where appropriate).

However, while many councils invest in energy efficiency in council housing, not all set priorities according to the best financial and environmental payback (Exhibit 22, overleaf). Such a programme requires a detailed knowledge of the stock so that appropriate programmes can be prepared.
Box G
Schedule of energy benchmarks

Electricity and fossil fuels are shown separately because of their different thermal efficiencies. Electricity at the point of consumption is more efficient, but its price reflects this. It is misleading, therefore, to add together the two energy sources.

1 Kilowatt hours produced per unit of fuel
2 ‘Headquarters type office’ includes provision of major computer room.

Source: Building Research Establishment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Fossil fuels</th>
<th>Electricity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school (pool)</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry sports centre</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry &amp; wet sports centre</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming pool only</td>
<td>775</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller office</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naturally-ventilated; open-plan office</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air-conditioned; open-plan office</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headquarters type office</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Benchmark (Kilowatthours per square metre per year)
Not all councils base investment in energy conservation on payback periods.

Source: Audit Commission survey, 1996

81. The cause of energy conservation is hampered by competing demands for capital investment. The PFI may offer some relief.

(i) PFI could be useful for energy conservation measures – for example, in schools. The 'spend to save' measures introduced by the Government in October 1996 can be applied to the maintenance and improvement of heating systems, provided they are linked to the supply of power or a longer term contract to maintain and repair the heating system itself. These measures reduce the call on the capital budget by not less than 30 per cent because of the expected revenue savings.

(ii) The scope for investment in the housing stock is substantial. Many urban council estates are grappling with out-of-date district heating systems. Competition between energy suppliers may indicate a way forward. Councils could approach alternative suppliers on the tenants' behalf to see if they would finance capital improvements, funded out of fuel bills. The cost of these improvements could be met by the reduction in energy prices which is usually achievable in a competitive situation. Such an approach is consistent with PFI principles, since it would not add to the local authority costs and would transfer the risk to the energy supplier who would finance the upgrade of the heating system by installing more efficient boilers, better pipe insulation and local heating controls.
82. The 1995 Home Energy Conservation Act highlights the role of local authorities both as agents of change in respect of their own properties and as catalysts to encourage others to take action. The Act requires housing authorities to prepare a report identifying measures to bring about significant improvements (overall 30 per cent) in the energy efficiency of all the housing stock in their area, not just that which they own. The Act recognises that councils are particularly well placed to co-ordinate activity in their administrative areas.

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Car commuting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>immediate objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♦ limit carparking in new office buildings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ use the TPP process to promote alternatives to car travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ raise long-stay carparking charges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ environmental assessment of planning policies and adoption of statutory plans that minimise traffic volumes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

83. Most people recognise that the growth in car usage cannot be sustained, yet few would voluntarily surrender their personal car usage. Progressively, society will have to deal with the issue. It is a matter not of whether, but of when. While government, both central and local, may choose to follow public attitudes on car usage, they can also lead opinion by taking steps to curb usage. In some settings, congestion may be sufficiently acute to create public acceptance of considerable restraint; in others, the time may not yet be ripe. The possibility of taxing vehicle congestion is not available as an option for those councils willing to contemplate such a step. But all councils can pursue certain basic approaches.

84.Councils should review their TPP bids, reconsidering those proposals that will increase car capacity rather than improve traffic management. Councils need to respond to the new policies of sustainability set out by the DoT. In particular, they should place greater emphasis on demand management, promoting alternatives such as public transport, cycling and even walking (particularly during rush hours as cars in traffic jams are one of the most significant causes of air pollution). While reviewing policies on carparking provision in new developments is necessarily a long-term strategy, it should nevertheless feature in an environmental strategy as a device to limit the growth of the problem.

85. A more immediate approach, that councils can use to limit car traffic in city centres, is the introduction of variable carparking charges. By raising long-stay charges, local authorities can discourage commuter traffic. Lower carparking rates for short-stay shoppers can help to ensure that local businesses continue to prosper.
86. One of the biggest causes of short-distance traffic movements is car journeys to schools. Parents are reluctant to let children walk or cycle in today's traffic conditions and suitable bus routes do not exist in many areas. The percentage of school journeys by car has risen from 10 per cent in 1975/76 to over 30 per cent in 1993. Most home-to-school transport is provided by councils in rural areas but is less common in urban areas. Councils can respond by promoting car sharing, creating safe cycle routes and even phasing the school day to reduce the environmental damage that traffic jams cause. The London Boroughs of Sutton, Kingston-upon-Thames and Richmond recently collaborated in a campaign to encourage walking to school. With the co-operation of local primary schools, leaflets were distributed to parents and children. During the campaign period of approximately six weeks, an average of 32 per cent of pupils changed to walking to school on at least five days.

87. Other local authorities are bidding for Cycle Challenge money to finance the creation of safe routes to school. The cycle path charity, Sustrans, is working in partnership with York City, Hampshire County and Colchester Borough Councils to promote safe routes to school and change attitudes to the 'school run'.

Summary

88. There are a number of immediate objectives which all councils should achieve. Once the basics are in place, there are some further initiatives which they should pursue when and if the necessary resources become available. These are included in the principal recommendations of this report and are listed at the end of this chapter.

Doing things right

89. The environmental agenda presents local government members and officers with a substantial management challenge. Sustainable development policies cannot be restricted to a single department or public sector agency. Traditional approaches for setting policies and organising and delivering front-line services are not normally designed around corporate principles. Getting different parts of the council to work together, as well as collaborating with other public services and with the private and voluntary sectors, is a major challenge. Furthermore, methods of measuring performance and value for money do not readily take account of many environmental and social factors. Measurement needs to be improved, otherwise councils will find it difficult to know how well they are doing and whether they are progressing towards a higher degree of sustainability. The task is to produce viable LA 21 programmes based on an assessment of local environmental risks. LA 21 is a process – it does not prescribe specific targets. Instead it provides a framework (Exhibit 23) which will guide councils through the issues to be considered.

LA 21 provides councils with a management framework for developing sustainable policies for all their activities.

Source: LGMB, Audit Commission

**Exhibit 23**
**Local Agenda 21**

Getting organised

90. If councils are to harness the energies of the wider community in furthering the environmental cause they must, first, put their own house in order. Lack of member commitment is seen as a major barrier to progress (Exhibit 24, overleaf). Those councils that have reduced the amount of waste that is sent to landfill, made progress in achieving targets of affordable warmth for their tenants, or are introducing measures to limit the effects of vehicle traffic on their communities succeed because such goals reflect member priorities. This commitment energises chief officers to change the way in which council services are delivered and to obtain the commitment of others in the community.
More than half of councils have appointed environmental co-ordinators to drive the LA21 process. Such appointees have had varying degrees of success. However, 60 per cent are graded as middle managers or less.\(^1\) They risk becoming dominated by procedures such as the preparation of position statements and monitoring statistics, and can be remote from the council’s key decision-making processes. To be successful they need to:

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\(^1\) Middle managers are defined as PO1 grade or less. See *A New Profession for a New Agenda*, LGMB, 1996.
have clear member sponsorship;

♦ have a power base in the chief executive’s office or a major technical department, which gives credibility and clout to compensate for their often junior status;

♦ provide a technical service which is not available within departments, thereby affording them professional respect; and

♦ raise awareness within departments, generating ownership and support for corporate objectives.

92. Above all, councils should ensure that concern for the environment and the drive for a sustainable society permeates mainstream council activities. Auditors have conducted staff awareness surveys that ask a sample of members and staff at various levels about their knowledge and opinions. Even the most environmentally committed councils are having difficulty enthusing staff lower down the hierarchy (Exhibit 25). It is too easy to see environmental stewardship as a low-budget adjunct, irrelevant to everyday work rather than an issue deserving of a central position in the corporate planning process. Many councils ensure the proper consideration of equal opportunities issues by requiring that every council report includes a section on the subject – why not do the same for sustainability?

Exhibit 25

Staff attitudes towards their council’s commitment to sustainability

Councils are having difficulty enthusing staff lower down the hierarchy (survey responses to the statement: ‘My committee’s policy/department’s approach includes relevant targets and objectives on the environment’).

Source: Audit results at one authority
93. Councils should also evaluate carefully the consequences of their environmental initiatives. Environmental issues are usually complex and intervention can produce unexpected side-effects. Some apparently worthy environmental protection measures have been found to have negative environmental consequences, once audited. For example, some paper made from recycled material has a more adverse impact on the environment than paper made from virgin pulp, particularly from forests managed in a sustainable way. Or the switch to diesel fuel is often seen as a conservation measure, but needs to be set alongside the production of noxious particulates. Councils will make honest mistakes as they acquire expertise and experience. Some of the good practice case studies in this report may, one day, be re-assessed adversely. Such recognition should not paralyse councils with uncertainty. Rather, it argues for the establishment of clear objectives for any environmental initiative, as well as for a continuing evaluation of the environmental, social and economic effects. It also argues for a questioning approach to all environmental initiatives and the sharing of learning between councils.

Sustainable policies and activities

94. While councils need to show an example to others by putting their own house in order, they will achieve significant influence only by involving the wider community (Exhibit 26). Even if councils adopt all the approaches advocated in this report in respect of their own activities, they will relieve their local environment of only a very small proportion of the burden which modern life imposes. Many small improvements are worthwhile in their own right. But such activities have a deeper resonance. Not only do environmentally sensitive councils establish their credentials as advocates within their communities; the voicing of such issues helps to adjust public expectations and attitudes, so that more radical proposals, often needing new statutory powers, become possible. Public tolerance of lifestyle restraint may have a long way to go, but it has already come some way. Local councils are ideally positioned to prepare the ground for future initiatives, particularly through their regulatory and enabling activities.

95. Any strategy must involve clear aims, quantified targets and regular monitoring. Some councils are publishing sustainability indicators that track the state of the local environment. The chosen indicators will reflect the local situation and local policies. Many councils have broadened their perspective to include all aspects of sustainability – equity, jobs and the environment (Case Study 11).
Exhibit 26
Environmental influences

Councils will achieve significant influence only by involving the wider community.

Background

In the late 1980s, North West Water Authority's plans to continue the sea disposal of sewage led Lancashire County Council to develop a campaigning and co-operative approach to environmental matters. To tackle coastal and other issues, the Council set up an Environmental Forum consisting of councillors, voluntary groups, government and local business people. The Council carried out an audit of Lancashire's environment and, using its findings, developed an Environmental Action Programme for the county, published in 1993.

Following this work other initiatives carried out by the Council include the establishment of a computerised Environmental Information Service containing data from the audit. Encouragement of community-based environmental action has been focused at nine Centres for Environmental Excellence established across Lancashire. Individual action has been encouraged through a lifestyle awareness campaign called 'Go Green for Good' and through pilot projects for the Going for Green Campaign.

Following the 1992 Earth Summit, the Council has been reviewing and rolling forward its environmental strategies to embrace the concept of sustainable development more fully.

cont.1
A new Sustainable Development Charter has been adopted by the Council which reaffirms its commitment to working with the Lancashire Environmental Forum. This partnership is now working to a sustainable development agenda and has identified 11 goals which together promote integrated environmental, economic and social development.

Lancashire’s sustainability indicators

♦ a more efficient use of resources and less waste;
♦ lower levels of pollution;
♦ a more diverse natural environment;
♦ basic needs for everyone which are met locally;
♦ more opportunities for work in a diverse economy;
♦ improvements in health;
♦ access to facilities, goods, services and people while protecting the environment;
♦ less fear of crime and persecution;
♦ access to education, training and information;
♦ people having a say in decision-making; and
♦ people valuing the neighbourhoods and communities in which they live.

These goals are based on the 13 identifiers in the national LGMB-supported Sustainability Indicators project. Many other local authorities are adopting goals like these to guide their Local Agenda 21 work.

Environmental issues and concerns change over time – councils should be prepared to adapt their approach and strategy accordingly;

the concept of sustainable development is difficult to comprehend and plan for – long-term sustainability goals and indicators can help set priorities and focus action; and

sustainability indicators should measure not only technical performance, they should report on things that people can relate to on a human level.

The implications of sustainable development go well beyond councils’ self-management. The ‘public interest’ is evolving and there are demands from ordinary people for more information. Some want to know what they can do to help. Concerns include how much ‘going green’ might cost them and what impact new rules and regulations might have on their everyday lives. As the LA21 process positively encourages more involvement, consensus-building and partnership, so expectations that councils listen to suggestions and drive forward the sustainability agenda will rise.
Raising awareness

97. Successful environmental strategies involve the wider community. If citizens are to participate fully, both now and in the future, councils must take steps to raise their awareness; many still believe that the environment is someone else’s problem (Exhibit 5, page 12). In part this involves consulting the community on plans and publicising sustainability indicators. It also involves wider education, particularly in schools. Encouraging people to reduce waste, to recycle, and to find alternatives to the car all require active and persistent marketing by the council. A ‘one-off’ push is never sufficient if continuous improvement is to be achieved.

98. Nearly half of local government’s expenditure is on education. Councils are finding environmentally friendly ways of managing the education estate and raising the environmental awareness of future generations. Cambridgeshire County Council is developing a range of such measures (Case Study 12).

Case Study 12
Raising awareness – Cambridgeshire County Council

Background

Today’s children are the environmentalists – and polluters – of tomorrow. LEAs are in a unique position to raise awareness through their schools. Realising this, Cambridgeshire County Council, as part of its LA21 programme, developed a range of initiatives for schools. The Council’s aim was not just to influence the adults of the next generation, but through them their parents as well.

Action

Demands on time and practicality mean that environmental messages need to be delivered through the national curriculum. The Council developed a series of courses at its field centres that addressed issues in the national curriculum. They helped teachers through in-service education training and by supplying up-to-date support packs for use within the curriculum and in support of specific environmental sites. Finally, the Council supported both teachers and pupils by promoting loan schemes of learning resources.

Other initiatives pursued by the Council include:

♦ an environmental newsletter produced jointly with the City Council;
♦ information packs on access to Council-owned wildlife conservation sites (now Charter-marked for excellence);
♦ a ‘how Green is your school?’ leaflet to allow schools and pupils to carry out their own environmental audit and develop an action plan for the school;
♦ the launching in 1995 of a ‘recycling bus’ supported by the County Council, City and District Councils and private companies;
♦ promoting the identification of a governor with responsibilities for environmental initiatives;
♦ setting up a school twinning programme to link schools in different environments; and
♦ promoting support programmes with schools in other EU countries,

cont./
Case Study 12 (cont.)

Future work involves the development of a youth parliament to enable young people to understand and influence the democratic process.

**Good practice**

- LEAs have a unique opportunity to influence the next generation of adults. By using the resources of different council service departments they can provide material and initiatives to schools and pupils that enrich the learning experience.
- The LEA can provide resources on the environment that an individual school could not hope to afford. LEAs should review what support they provide to schools and seek to work with them to raise awareness on environmental matters.

**Partnerships**

99. Raising awareness should help to create effective partnerships with the wider community. Many councils have created forums to discuss policy, decide priorities and monitor progress. However, few have succeeded in reaching industrialists and other key players who must be involved if progress is to be made in many areas.

100. Partnerships within local government are also important. Counties must work with districts and districts with parishes. Particularly in the field of waste management, counties must work with local districts to create a county-wide disposal strategy, integrating recycling operations at 'bring' and civic amenity sites and ensuring that landfill is minimised. Districts may increase the waste that they collect for disposal, but it is the counties that must bear the costs of disposal and the new landfill tax.

101. More generally, counties and districts should co-operate in formulating their LA21 strategies. Local business and voluntary group interests will object to being involved in two forums, two sets of meetings and two sets of paper. Counties can also work with districts in publishing a single set of sustainability indicators. In turn, principal councils should work with their parishes as a means of involving local communities and as a focus for awareness raising and voluntary work (Case Study 13).
Case Study 13
Tideswell 2000

Background
Derbyshire Dales District Council and Tideswell Town Council, working with a variety of local organisations (including the Peak District National Park, the County Council, the Training and Enterprise Council and East Midlands Electricity) developed a LA21 strategy.

Action
A short ‘state of the environment’ report was prepared following an initial technical scoping to identify issues that affected the area. Four focus groups were held with villagers giving them the opportunity to identify their needs and priorities.

From this work, community agendas for action on sustainability were developed. These reflected the issues that people had discussed at the meetings and the technical problems facing the parish environment. The close involvement of local communities in developing their Local Agenda 21 strategy means that villagers are committed to it from the start. The key targets included:

♦ promotion of energy-saving and recycling schemes;
♦ setting up self-help groups for young families;
♦ starting a community composting scheme; and
♦ establishing a campaign to encourage the use of local shops.

Good practice

♦ higher-tier councils should work with parishes to facilitate action at a community level;
♦ support and funding for environmental initiatives will come from a variety of sources – local authorities should be prepared to work with a whole range of partners; and
♦ local communities have their own (often unique) priorities – when developing strategies, these concerns should be given primacy if the commitment and involvement of local people is to be secured.

Where to next?

102. Local government can make considerable advances down the path of sustainability but it faces two particular difficulties – public opinion and legislative constraint. The two are linked. Central government can legislate only at a pace that will be tolerated by substantial sections of the population and only when it has confidence in the competence of local government to respond. Some argue that local authorities should have a new duty to promote, encourage and foster sustainable development and the integration of environmental, economic and social priorities, and be given the commensurate power and resources. Although some councils have reached the limit of their existing powers, many have not yet made full use of their existing capabilities.
103. Councils will argue for more resources to tackle these issues. Well-organised councils that adopt a corporate approach to LA21 could unquestionably make good use of more resources to meet environmental objectives. But the case for more resources would be stronger if more councils could demonstrate – particularly through their annual reports and community newsletters – that existing resources are being used well and that they have put their own houses in order. The environmental agenda needs to become auditable to be convincing. Additionally, although local improvements are worthwhile, collectively they represent only a small fraction of what is needed to sustain the environment. Local government can help to prepare the ground through its capacity to network local communities, with the aim of building the understanding that is needed to make people tolerate the necessary adjustments to their lifestyles. Some initiatives are both environmentally and economically attractive; others require spending without economic payback, but that spending should still represent environmental value for money; many possibilities require a significant revision in economic incentives. Central government could develop its own prospective agenda, particularly through the use of environmental taxation and financial incentives, to create the right environment to encourage local authorities, businesses and individuals to support the environmental agenda (Box H).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box H</th>
<th>Possible action by central government to support environmental issues</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waste</td>
<td>Improve economic incentives to reduce waste; for example, by:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ providing local authorities with powers to charge directly for waste collection and compensate people who recycle;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ progressively increasing land-fill taxes;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ introducing financial incentives to reduce packaging; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ using the PFI to pay for incineration plants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>Revitalise the drive for greater efficiency; for example, by:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ increasing taxes on fuel while ensuring protection for those on low incomes;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ mounting a national campaign to promote cavity wall insulation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ using the windfall tax to provide a training scheme for the unemployed to undertake energy conservation works in council houses and in the homes of those on low incomes;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ removing VAT from energy conservation materials; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ increasing energy efficiency standards in Building Regulations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

cont.
Box H (cont.)

Pollution
- review the causes of pollution and consider methods including taxation to inhibit the use of herbicides and pesticides.

Water
Review the current operation of the water industry to:
- require water regulators to take tougher action on water companies to reduce leakage; and
- change Building Regulations to require all new homes to have showers, water meters and smaller toilet cisterns.

Transport and planning
Commission a series of studies to:
- provide local authorities with powers to regulate buses and other forms of local transport;
- strengthen local authorities’ roles in compiling multi-modal timetables;
- increase local authority control over highways, roads and parking;
- discourage car travel through financial measures; and
- provide tax incentives for brownfield development.

'...councils are a critical link in the chain from global to local.'

104. The case for environmental issues to attract higher priority is compelling. Conferences in Rio may seem remote from daily council business. But councils are a critical link in the chain from global to local. They are big enough to observe and understand the global debate; they are small enough to translate that debate into sensitive initiatives that engage local communities. 'It’s a small world', in which councils play a primary leadership and communication role.
Summary of Recommendations for Local Government

Doing the Right Things – Immediate Objectives

Waste management

1. Promote home composting.
2. Limit the further introduction of large wheeled bins.
3. Create more 'bring' sites (one per thousand households).
4. Organise the home collection of newspapers.

Water conservation

5. Reduce water in toilet cisterns.
6. Check for leaks by analysing monthly meter readings.
7. Check meter sizes.
8. Install and use pool covers.
Summary of Recommendations

**Energy conservation**

9. Check consumption in schools and other council buildings against benchmarks.

10. Install lagging, insulation and thermostatic radiators where not in place.

11. Survey council housing stock.

12. Prioritise investments according to payback period.

**Carcommuting**


14. Use the TPP process to promote alternatives to car travel.

15. Raise long-stay carparking charges.

16. Undertake an environmental assessment of planning policies and adopt statutory plans that minimise traffic volumes.
Doing Things Right

Overall management

17 Establish a corporate approach to LA21 agendas, cutting across traditional service department and committee lines.

18 Establish an appropriate process specifically to co-ordinate policy, programmes and undertake performance review.

Environmental co-ordinators

19 Provide senior support for environmental co-ordinators to afford the necessary status and influence.

Staff

20 Involve and enthuse staff lower down the organisational hierarchy about environmental issues.

Monitoring

21 Monitor the impact of environmental initiatives, using EMAS.

Partnerships

22 Establish effective partnerships with the business and the wider community.
Summary of Recommendations

Once the above 'Immediate Objectives' have been achieved, the following 'Further Initiatives' can be considered.

**Doing the Right Things – Further Initiatives**

**Waste management**

23 Process garden waste at 'bring' sites.

24 Create a 'bring' site for every 500 households.

25 Compare incineration costs with forecast landfill costs.

26 Advise businesses on waste reduction.

27 Introduce 'kerbside' recycling.

**Energy conservation**

28 Use the PFI to finance zonal controls and the replacement of electric space heating.

29 Evaluate local lighting controls.

30 Evaluate the use of the PFI to replace out-of-date district heating schemes.

**Carcommuting**

31 Introduce 'park and ride' schemes.

32 Promote alternatives to car travel for the 'school run'.

33 Create more cycle paths.

34 Ensure that cycle paths are present in new housing developments.
Appendix 1: Advisory Group

Michael Ashley – Under Secretary for Planning, Housing and Transport, Association of County Councils.
Graham Bell – County Planning Officer, Lancashire County Council.
Nigel Burdett – Manager, Corporate Environment Unit, National Power.
Sue Charteris – Chief Executive, London Borough of Merton.
Edward Chorlton – Head of Environment, Devon County Council.
Michael Cooke – Chief Executive, Chartered Institute of Environmental Health.
John Foster – Former Chief Executive, Middlesborough Borough Council.
Tony Hams – Head of Environment Unit, Local Government Management Board.
Martyn Hayes – Director of Environmental Services, Hereford and Worcester County Council.
David Heath – Councillor (elected MP for Somerton and Frome in May, 1997), Somerset County Council.
Janice Morphet – Chief Executive, Rutland County Council.
Tim O’Riordan – Associate Director, Centre for Social and Economic Research on the Global Environment, University of East Anglia.
Charles Secrett – UK Director, Friends of the Earth.
Peter Soulsby – Councillor, Leicester City Council.
John Staton – Director of Housing and Environmental Health, Newark and Sherwood District Council.
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Andrew Foster, Controller
The Audit Commission
1 Vincent Square
London
SW1P 2PN
Tel: 0171 828 1212
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