



New Horizons 2004

**Liveability & Sustainable Development:
Bad Habits & Hard Choices**

**Final Report for
the ODPM**

July 2004

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1 Introduction

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) commissioned Brook Lyndhurst, under the New Horizons Research Programme, to explore potential conflicts and synergies between the liveability and sustainable development agendas.

The New Horizons programme aims to introduce new research ideas, develop innovative, cross-cutting approaches to research and offer a forward-thinking perspective on medium- to long-term policy issues pertaining to the ODPM.

1.1 Research objectives

The purpose of the research was as follows:

- to identify and highlight emerging areas where there appear to be conflicts & synergies between “liveability” and “sustainability”;
- to explore and understand the behavioural underpinnings of these conflicts – considering (different kinds of) consumers, citizens and organisations;
- to place these behavioural underpinnings in the context of the emerging research and policy discussion of “sustainable consumption & lifestyles”;
- to identify tools available to policy makers to manage conflicts and promote synergies;
- to identify potential research and policy avenues – including those associated with the planning of towns and town centres – for further work.

The research is timely for a number of reasons. Firstly, the liveability agenda is the subject of increasing attention. Along with a direct manifestation through the *Liveability Fund*, it is central to the anti-social behaviour agenda, the *Living Places Report* (ODPM, 2002), and the *Sustainable Communities plan* (ODPM, 2002). Furthermore, liveability is a cross cutting issue relevant to a number of other government departments, most notably the Home Office, Department for Food, Farming & Rural Affairs (Defra) and Department of Health (DoH).

From the perspective of sustainable development, this research is particularly relevant given the current review of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy, *Taking it on* (Defra, 2004). It is also a salient issue given the emerging focus upon sustainable consumption and production, and the UK Sustainable Development Commission’s work in this area, most notably their *Mainstreaming Sustainable Regeneration Report* (SDC, 2003).

1.2 Scope of the research

Both liveability and sustainable development are wide ranging and multi-faceted issues. It is not, therefore, the intention of the project to endeavour to explore all of the issues, but rather to focus on key strategic policy questions that are speculative, exploratory and forward looking.

The research has been approached from the perspective of liveability; specifically, in terms of how it can be developed as a concept to improve both its own outcomes and contribution towards the pursuit of sustainable development. This decision has been taken to ensure the study highlights the policy implications for the ODPM in their pursuit of the ‘liveability’, ‘Living Places’ and ‘Sustainable Communities’ agendas.

Although we have not approached the work from the starting point of the UK sustainable development strategy - for example how it could more explicitly embrace liveability - the report invariably considers these issues.

1.3 Methodology

The research programme was undertaken from January - April 2004. It was conducted in three phases:

(1) Literature review

The purpose of this phase of the research was to establish the current background and context for the relationship between liveability and sustainable development, identify practical examples of synergies and conflicts, and establish key issues for policy attention.

The literature review has drawn on a range of sources including government strategies, such as the *Living Places* Report and the *Sustainable Communities Plan*, work undertaken by the UK Sustainable Development Commission, commentary from NGOs in both the UK and US, and academic research.

(2) In-depth interviews with key stakeholders

10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with experts in the fields of liveability and sustainable development, from both government departments (Defra, ODPM) and NGOs (Encams, Groundwork, the National Consumer Council, and so on). The purpose was to assess the conceptual relationship between liveability and sustainable development and to talk more widely about interviewees' own experience of the relationship 'on the ground'.

In gathering stakeholder opinion through interviews, the research did not seek to be 'representative' in the statistical sense, but used qualitative methods to achieve a greater depth of understanding of the relevant issues. A topic guide was designed by Brook Lyndhurst to guide the nature of the discussions with interviewees.

(3) Seminar event with key stakeholders

Having established through the individual depth interviews a series of practical perspectives and conceptual models about liveability and sustainable development, a group seminar was held to which all participating stakeholders were invited.

The purpose of this phase was to develop the debate further in a deliberative and collaborative environment. Material from both the literature review and in-depth interviews was presented to the participants, who then discussed the implications for policy & practice.

An Interim report was submitted to ODPM at the end of the literature review phase. Discussion between the ODPM research managers informed subsequent phases, including the selection of key stakeholders.

1.4 Overview of the report structure

This report proceeds as follows:

- Section 2 - ways in which liveability and sustainability are understood – as policy agendas - by the public and at a conceptual level;
- Section 3 - the nature of choices that the public makes in pursuit of a 'liveable' life; where these conflict with collective sustainable development ambitions; and the tools available to policy makers to manage conflicts;
- Section 4 - a presentation of conclusions on how liveability and sustainability can be "joined up" effectively, followed by recommendations on how the liveability agenda might make a stronger, deeper and – potentially - broader contribution to sustainable communities;
- Section 5 - concluding comments on the links between liveability and adjacent policy discourses, including a discussion of broader questions raised during the research that could conceivably be the subject of further research.

1.5 Acknowledgements

Brook Lyndhurst would like to thank all those who contributed to our research, the results of which are presented in this report. We would also like to thank the ODPM New Horizons Research Steering Group, whose feedback and advice at the various stages of the work proved invaluable. The views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily the ODPM. Responsibility for this report, including any errors, lies with Brook Lyndhurst Ltd.

2 Liveability and Sustainability – Context & Concepts

To set the context for later discussion of the potential conflicts and synergies, this section explores the contextual and conceptual relationship between liveability and sustainability, as follows:

- The policy context (2.1);
- The public's view (2.2);
- The links between the two agendas at a conceptual level (2.3).

2.1 The Policy Context

Both concepts – sustainable development and liveability – have their own academic, policy and linguistic histories. These histories are not merely of intellectual interest, they inform how practitioners, policy makers and the general public interpret and act upon the concepts. They are now discussed in turn.

Sustainability

The origins of the terms “sustainability” and “sustainable development” are well known [at least to the audience for this research!], and are not reiterated here.

However, from the point of view of this particular research study, it is useful to note that the conceptualisation of sustainable development at the time of the Rio Summit in 1992 included a very powerful commitment to the “local”, spawning Local Agenda 21. These concerns for the local dimension of sustainable development fed directly into the Habitat II agenda, where the creation and maintenance of “liveable and sustainable” cities was the primary objective. At international level during the 1990s, the terms were at least intertwined and, in some senses, synonymous.

More recent developments in the UK highlight an emerging distinction between “liveability” and “sustainability”. The UK Sustainable Development Strategy, *Achieving a better quality of life: a strategy for sustainable development for the UK* (Defra, 1999), outlines four complementary objectives for sustainable development:

- Social progress that meets the needs of everyone;
- Effective protection of the environment;
- Prudent use of natural resources;
- Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

The absence of any mention of spatial scale in these top level objectives is noteworthy (as is the appearance of “community” as a high-order objective in the current consultation on the revised Sustainable Development Strategy). The extent to which the strategy did or did not contribute to the failure of LA21 in the UK – a failure which has been informally recognised within the sustainable development “community” for some while, and now formally recognised in research from Blair & Evans¹ – is a moot point.

What is more important, however, is the space created (in policy terms) into which firstly the Urban White Paper and then the *Sustainable Communities* plan

¹ *Seeing the Bigger Picture: Delivering Local Sustainable Development*, Fay Blair and Bob Evans, for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the SD Commission, March 2004

moved. The former clearly identified public space and green space as key issues for urban policy (and in turn gave rise to the Urban Green Spaces Task Force and then the Living Places work); and the latter, reinforced most recently by the Egan work, interprets liveability in terms of a good quality local environment, and decent housing.

This evolution illustrates the fact that - while in many ways the UK is leading the way in operationalising the concept of sustainable development - it nonetheless remains a difficult concept to grasp and apply, and it remains the case that many and various definitions are used in practice. The research literature suggests that it can often become confused with terms like 'well being' and 'quality of life', which in turn can allow policy makers - especially at local level - to cherry-pick issues that best fit their political priorities (Cox, Fell & Thurstain Goodwin, 2002)².

Liveability

At international level, liveability has tended to be treated in a very broad sense, and with only limited distinction between it and sustainable development. In the US, for example, 'liveability' encompasses a wide array of issues relating to overall 'quality of life' and 'well being':

*"Satisfying human need in an urban, communal and environmentally sound context"*³

In the UK, liveability instead has been adopted in a much narrower and more operational sense; the "cleaner, safer, greener" agenda. Although it is still considered an 'umbrella' term that refers to a number of interrelated concerns, its focus is strictly upon the local environment. Indeed, one of the interviewees from ODPM succinctly describes liveability as "*the things that people see when they walk out the front door*", while the *Sustainable Communities Report* (ODPM, 2003) says it is "*essentially about quality local environments*".

While the emergence of liveability in the UK is recent in comparison to the US, it is nonetheless a prominent issue for both the public - who consistently identify local environmental issues as key problems and priorities⁴ - and the government.

As a result, £89 million has been allocated through the *Liveability Fund* to pilot new approaches to addressing public space issues. The Fund is itself part of a £201 million package to improve the local environment announced in the *Sustainable Communities Report*.

The Current Connection

Broadly speaking, liveability and sustainable development have the notions of "quality of life", "well being" and "life satisfaction" in common. What is less clear - and is the subject of Section 2.3 - is the extent to which the connection is real and/or valid.

Of particular relevance is the process by which "liveability" has come to be defined in a progressively narrower fashion in the UK in recent years; a process which, whilst potentially increasing salience and deliverability, carries with it a risk that the term - and any associated policies - becomes detached from sustainable development.

² *"Red Man, Green Man: Performance Indicators for Urban Sustainability"*, Cox, Fell & Thurstain Goodwin for RICS Foundation, 2002

³ *Understanding Liveability*, Groundwork, www.groundwork.org.uk

⁴ *The Rising Prominence of Liveability: Are we condemned to a life of grime*, MORI, 2002

Our research suggests there is a general lack of discussion in the recent research and policy literature about the possible interplay between liveability and sustainable development. While each agenda is increasingly discussed in its own right, little attention is paid to whether they are mutually reinforcing or whether they potentially conflict. Indeed, in many instances we note that they are taken to be synonymous and interchangeable terms.

Similarly, interviewees within Government report little interaction between liveability and sustainable development policy. Although sustainable development is acknowledged as an implicit and overarching government principle, *specific* links to the liveability agenda do not appear to be explicitly being made.

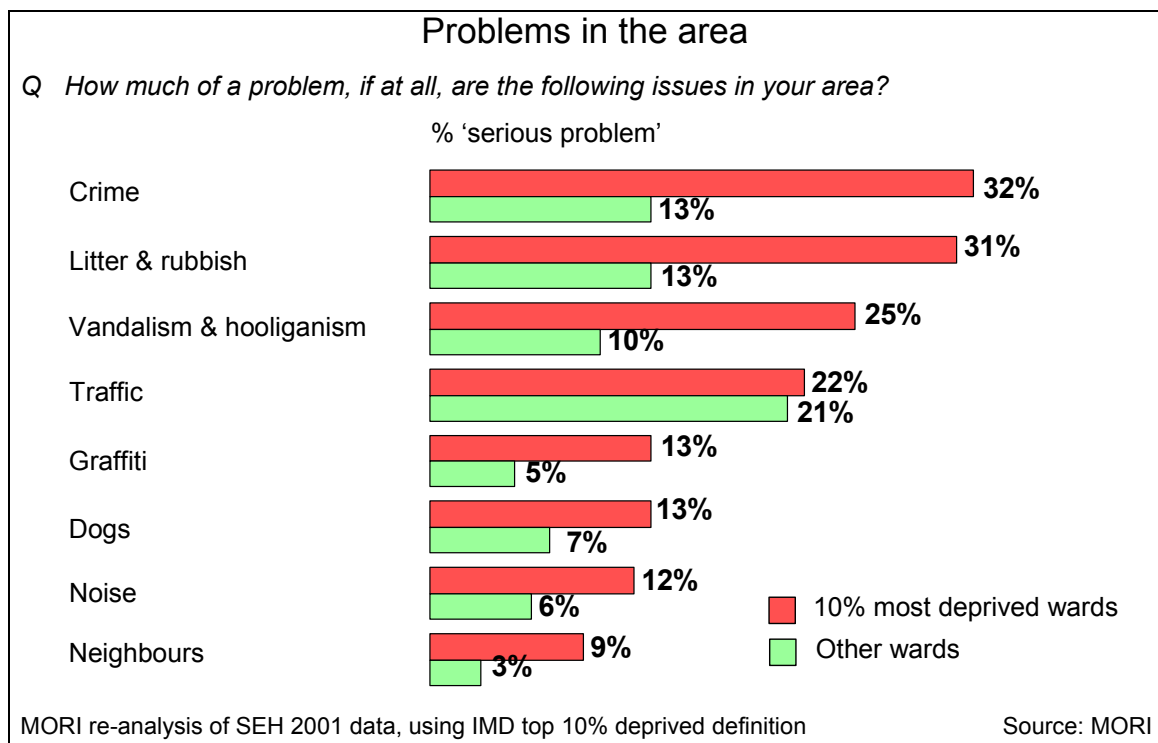
Interviewees from the ODPM, for example, noted that they have very little practical involvement with sustainable development on a day-to-day basis. This was echoed by the interviewees from Defra’s Local Environmental Quality and Sustainable Development Units, who acknowledged that joined up work between them on this issue has been relatively limited to date.

Instead, there is an assumption that liveability is inherently contributing to the wider pursuit of sustainable development, although one interviewee thought that they had not been challenged to prove this is indeed the case.

2.2 The public view

Liveability

As already noted, the liveability agenda in the UK has been driven very strongly by an interest in addressing people’s immediate concerns about their local environments, and is part of a wider move in government to be responsive to the stated concerns of the public. These concerns are typically identified through opinion surveys that ask people to identify what they think would make their local area a better place to live.



Such surveys have been reviewed and assessed most recently on behalf of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) by Brook Lyndhurst⁵. The most frequently mentioned issues – albeit in deprived neighbourhoods – are illustrated in the chart above.

The research also shows that two fundamental issues underpin perceptions of local environmental quality in deprived areas: *public safety* and *public health*. For example, providing new parks, public spaces or play areas may not be enough on its own if residents do not feel the new space is *secure* from crime (often residents' overriding concern), is *clean* (e.g. from litter, broken glass, dog fouling or drug needles), and *safe* from road traffic.

Sustainable Communities

In focus groups also conducted by MORI for ODPM around the Egan work on sustainable communities⁶, the public particularly stressed the 'people' dimension to their thinking on what makes sustainable communities. Physical and/or environmental features, whilst relevant, were generally considered to be less significant.

More generally, the public seem to relate to the *component parts* of "sustainable communities". They tend not to have an holistic sense of the term, indeed they tend to see it as both jargon and "government speak".

A key warning sounded by MORI – and reinforcing similar messages in recent years, including from Brook Lyndhurst – is the importance of the language in securing engagement. Terms such as "sustainability", "sustainable communities", even "liveability" may serve to deter or even alienate the public; whilst concepts such as "decent homes", "healthy living" and "clean neighbourhood" are much more appealing and engaging.

Sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles

Brook Lyndhurst's own work on individual sustainable behaviours (e.g. on recycling, renewable energy, and sustainable food) suggest that:

- 'Sustainability' or 'sustainable development' as terms are poorly understood by the public;
- That people often have strong feelings about individual issues that policy makers would identify as relating to 'sustainability';
- People are often selective about which pro-environmental behaviours they adopt, often driven by relative cost or difficulty of an activity balanced against opportunity for personal gain;
- But that in many cases, the public can be encouraged to behave more sustainably by appealing to more immediate or personal concerns. In relation to recycling, for example, making it easier to do is a bigger motivator than an appeal to protecting the environment; in relation to food, personal health benefits can be more persuasive than environmental gains from sustainable production.

⁵ *A Review of Environmental Exclusion*, Brook Lyndhurst for NRU, 2004

⁶ "Sustainable communities: a programme of focus groups to support the Egan review of skills" from www.odpm.gov.uk

More remains to be done in this area. Work on sustainable lifestyles (Walker et al, 2004⁷) for the previous round of New Horizons research, for example, needs to be considered and disseminated; Defra's review of evidence on public attitudes to sustainable development⁸ needs to be treated similarly; and projects such as Defra's work in progress on more theoretical review of behavioural models will need careful consideration in due course.

In broad terms, however, it appears that many elements of individual behaviour are stubbornly entrenched; and interventions intended to encourage (or even require) more sustainable lifestyles will need to be designed in the light of the kind of research just mentioned if they are not simply to "bounce off" the public (or, even worse, produce fuel-tax-style protests).

2.3 The conceptual relationship

In the light of our commentary on the policy and public perspectives, this subsection sets out a more detailed discussion of the linkages between liveability and sustainability.

Opinion appears mixed on the conceptual relationship. It is worth noting that among most interviewees there was a feeling that liveability and sustainable development need not conflict. From the research literature though, there is a suggestion of the potential for tensions. For example, the extracts below demonstrate the different positions:

"Liveability sounds like a step towards true sustainable development" (Understanding Liveability, Groundwork)

"The Local Government Act focuses on liveability, raising concerns that the UK Government equates well-being with local quality of life rather than considering the wider picture of global sustainability" (UNED Forum 2001)

We feel there are three key components to this conceptual discussion:

- (i) a proposition that liveability is/could be the short-term, local manifestation of sustainable development;
- (ii) an alternative proposition that liveability is an on-going component part of sustainable development;
- (iii) a proposition that liveability in fact conflicts with sustainable development.

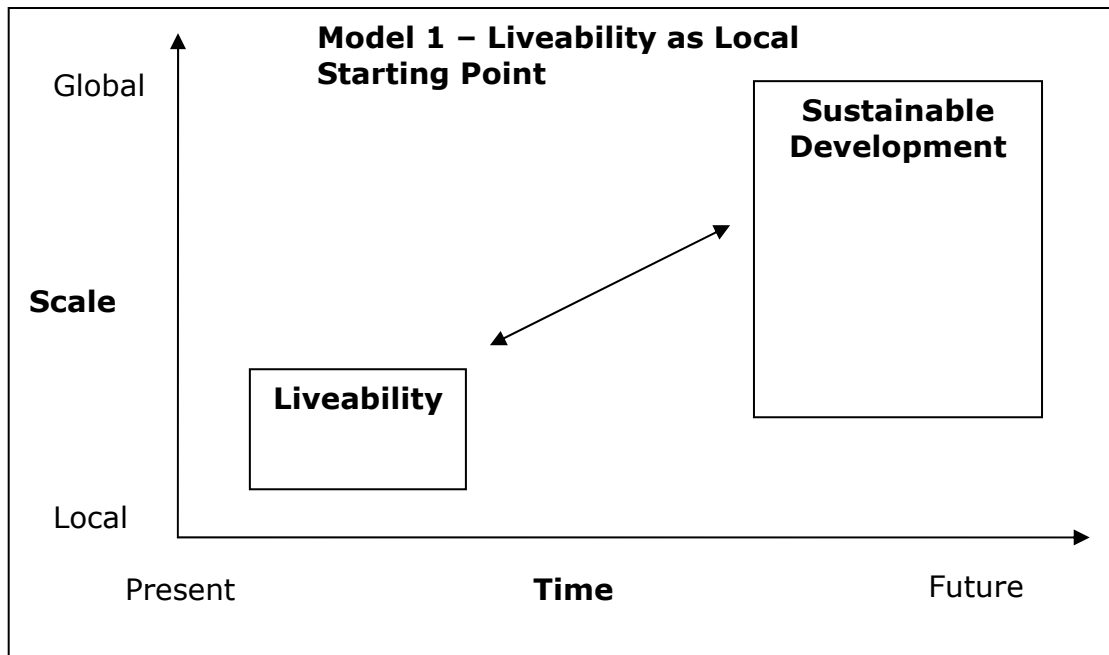
In Section 2.4 we draw these arguments together.

(i) Liveability is a short term manifestation of sustainable development

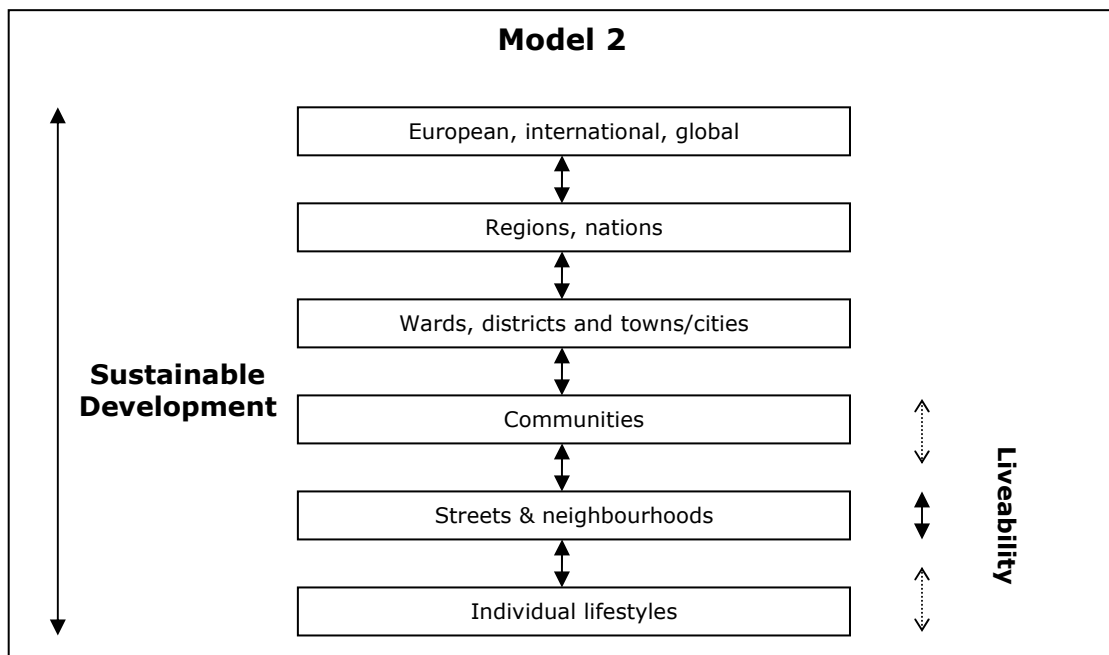
A possible model was developed during internal Brook Lyndhurst discussions, whereby sustainability focuses on transboundary, global issues over a long time horizon, while liveability is simply its local "here and now" manifestation. Thus conceived, liveability would simply be a *means* to securing a (sustainable) *end*, consistent with the "think globally, act locally" mantra of Local Agenda 21.

⁷ "Sustainable Lifestyles", Walker et al, Centre for Sustainable Development, University of Westminster for DfT/ODPM New Horizons, unpublished 2002/3

⁸ *The Impact of Sustainable Development on Public Behaviour, Reports 1 & 2*, Defra (2004)



Another interviewee proposed a similar model with a greater emphasis on the spatial dimension, as follows:



These conceptual models were discussed with interviewees to test whether their interpretations – with the positive belief in the inter-connectedness of liveability and sustainable development – hold in reality. The discussions suggested that the conceptual understandings are useful in explaining some aspects.

One interviewee, for example, thought that people have little idea what environmental impact they have, and so efforts to promote sustainable development might benefit from a focus on measures that are more tangible; that is, those which are both “closer to home” and “here and now”.

Given this, it is not surprising that the 'cleaner, safer, greener' liveability agenda is considered in the research literature as an important means of engaging the public in a way that sustainable development cannot:

"Liveability offers a framework within which less tangible notions such as sustainable development and social inclusion, can be woven into a narrative"⁹

"Using the pragmatic approaches that liveability entails could be an effective way of communicating how sustainable development can be achievable at the neighbourhood level"¹⁰

Indeed, organisations like Encams, for example, have made a conscious decision to move away from a 'green' agenda in favour of liveability - based on their own research which casts doubt on the effectiveness of sustainable development to engage the public and bring about behaviour change. The issues encompassed by liveability, on the other hand, are considered much more salient.

However, it is worth noting that liveability itself is also increasingly subject to varying interpretations. Indeed, as Brook Lyndhurst's research for the NRU (2004) noted, there is concern that different Government departments are using liveability to mean different things. In some respects, therefore, it is suffering from similar problems faced by sustainable development.

Therefore, clarification of what is meant by the term 'liveability' appears to be warranted on the basis of the multiplicity of definitions in circulation and the ubiquity with which the term is being used.

(ii) Liveability is one component contributing to sustainable development

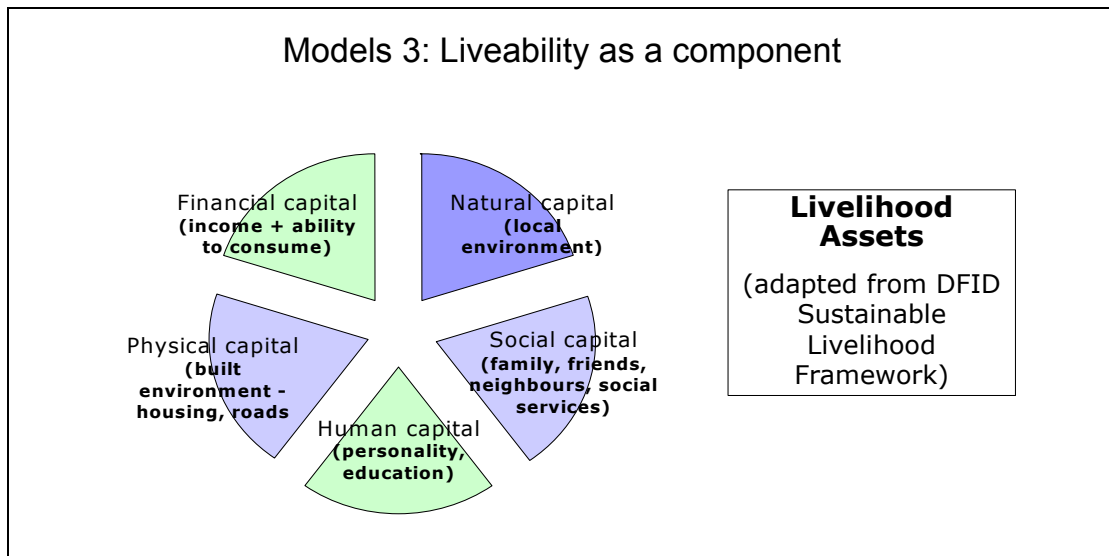
An alternative model positions liveability as one, single, contributory element of sustainable development. In this sense, the relationship can be considered in terms of a policy 'hierarchy'; it begins narrowly in terms of liveability, which itself is a constituent of 'well-being', 'quality of life' and 'life satisfaction', which are themselves elements of sustainable development.

Liveability thus conceived is a necessary but not sufficient element of sustainable development.

This relationship can be illustrated as in the chart below, in which the liveability agenda as currently defined (cleaner, greener, safer) contributes predominantly to "Natural Capital" (local environment):

⁹ Fabian Commentary: *What's the big idea?* Harvey (2002) at www.fabian-society.org.uk

¹⁰ *Understanding Liveability: Opportunities for Sustainable Regeneration?* Sustainable Development Commission (2002)



(iii) Liveability is different from – and could conflict - with sustainable development

In our view there are three main reasons for having a concern that current policies in pursuit of liveability may conflict with sustainable development objectives:

Liveability is predominantly “end of pipe” – that is to say, the pursuit of “cleaner, greener, safer” tackles issues of clearing up litter and graffiti, improving the quality of parks and green spaces, and attempting to reduce crime (and the fear of crime) in specific local areas; but does not tackle the underlying causes of these phenomena. To borrow from the current debates in the domain of public health, liveability appears not to tackle “the determinants” of poor neighbourhood quality, concentrating instead on the results. In the world of public health, the debate is conceptualised as attempting to deliver a shift from the treatment of sickness (i.e. end of pipe phenomena) to the delivery of health (i.e. tackling the determinants, such as lifestyle, quality of housing, employment and so forth).

Liveability does not necessarily address bad habits – closely related to but separate from the first point, this point refers to the fact that (environmentally) “bad habits” – driving in cars, producing too much waste, consuming too much energy and so forth – are not generally the main focus of the liveability agenda, even though they have liveability implications or effects. Liveability as a policy agenda may therefore provide an opportunity to sidestep some hard behavioural choices, to the direct detriment of sustainable development

Liveability might teach some bad lessons – there is a risk that cleaner streets, greener neighbourhoods and safer estates (if and when they are delivered) will create the *illusion*, in the minds of both policy makers and the public, that the right things are being done, that somehow the really difficult elements of sustainable development were just hyperbole. This would particularly be the case if liveability is delivered by means that are unsustainable, for example by restricting access to public space or using environmentally-damaging cleaning materials in the clean up process.

Some of the key differences between liveability and sustainable development can be summarised as follows:

Liveability vs Sustainable Development	
• The "Good life"	• Carrying capacity
• Immediate	• Long term
• Local	• National/global
• <i>About</i> the environment	• <i>For</i> the environment
• Individual/community wants	• Collective/societal goals

2.4 Concluding Remarks

In our view, from the perspective of sustainable development, liveability presents both an opportunity and a challenge. In one sense there is an opportunity to capitalise on the success of the liveability agenda and 'catch the wave' of political interest in the local environment and, in doing so, draw attention to wider social and environmental components of sustainable development.

However, it also presents a challenge in the sense that sustainable development *in the round* might be politically 'trumped' by liveability's narrower and more tangible appeal. Indeed, it is worth considering how and why liveability has emerged as such a strong agenda in the UK in the first place. One interviewee suggested that it was a result of the difficulties associated with Local Agenda 21 – considered a rather "nebulous" concept - which has now, in effect, been subsumed within community strategies. It may also reflect the long term nature of sustainable development, which sits less easily with the political cycle than liveability, which can provide quick wins and short term gains.

Reviewing the nature of the relationship – at both a practical and conceptual level - between sustainable development & liveability suggests there is nothing inherent about the relationship; addressing local environmental problems does not *automatically* promote sustainable development.

For example, improvement to the liveability of neighbourhoods could quite possibly be achieved (and quite possibly is being achieved¹¹) by *unsustainable means*. For example, fuel poverty can be reduced by rising incomes and falling fuel prices rather than by providing energy efficiency and insulation measures. Similarly, local environments can be cleaned with harmful chemicals, litter can be sent to landfill rather than recycled, and mobility can be improved through greater car ownership rather than through better public transport.

In this respect, managing relationship between the two agendas and, in particular, identifying the practical steps through which synergies can be achieved, is critical. Such steps are the focus of Section 4 of this report.

Before that, however, Section 3 considers in more detail the nature of the behavioural dimension to this issue, that is to say the bad habits and the hard choices with which we are concerned.

¹¹ *Mainstreaming Sustainable Regeneration*, Sustainable Development Commission (December 2003)

3 Bad Habits and Hard Choices – Behaviour & Policy

In this Section of the report, we discuss the behavioural dimension of our research enquiry. There are three main sub-sections:

- A review of the relationship between individual choice, bad habits and sustainable lifestyles insofar as they apply at the local level;
- A consideration of the kinds of policy conflicts that do or could arise between liveability and sustainable development as a result of these behaviours;
- A discussion of the kinds of tools that are available to government to address these conflicts.

We have chosen to be broad in these discussions: not all of what follows appears at first sight to be directly relevant to a consideration of “Cleaner, Safer, Greener” as narrowly defined. However, our judgment is that a deep understanding of the behavioural dimension will be essential if liveability and sustainability are to function as mutually reinforcing agendas in the future.

3.1 Bad Habits, individual choice, and sustainable lifestyles

In thinking about a people-led approach to delivering simultaneously *liveable* and *sustainable* communities, we have identified a number of key themes related to choice and behaviour that need to be borne in mind:

(1) Concern and willingness of the public to support sustainable development - An almost incalculable range of public opinion surveys¹² have consistently reported that the public are concerned about environmental issues and think them important. However, this bears little resemblance to reality; consumer lifestyles and behaviour remain far from sustainable. Barriers are clearly in operation that prevent the translation of concern into action.

(2) Significance versus salience - Recent research by the National Consumer Council¹³ offers some initial clues on the barriers preventing the public from choosing sustainable lifestyles. For example, the research notes that even though the vast majority say they are willing to do their bit, when attitudes, actions and reactions to possible policy measures were discussed qualitatively, “consumers generally reveal a passive attitude to sustainable behaviour”.

Indeed, Brook Lyndhurst’s research consistently shows that while environmental issues may be significant, they are not salient. For the public, sustainable development is simply not sufficiently *important* or *visible* on a day to day basis. In contrast, “Cleaner, Safer, Greener” issues are salient and ‘top of mind’.

(3) Ability of the public to recognise what is important - Our own focus group research¹⁴, as well as the wider literature, suggest that the public often have little accurate knowledge about environmental impacts, even if they themselves feel well informed. The “Living Smarter” work by Incpen¹⁵, for example, asserts that peoples’ recognition of what they could do to protect the environment is in fact quite different from what ‘objectively’ could be done.

¹² For example, *Business and the environment*, MORI, 1999

¹³ *Green Choice: What Choice*, National Consumer Council, 2003

¹⁴ For example, *Attitudes to renewable energy in London*, Brook Lyndhurst (2003)

¹⁵ *Towards Greener Households*, INCPEN, further details at www.living-smarter.org

(4) Individual v collective choice - One of the key potential conflicts between liveability and sustainable development is the balance between choice and individualism on the one hand, and collective objectives or public 'goods' on the other.

When residents' own choices coincide with outcomes that improve both liveability and sustainability – for example reductions in litter & graffiti and improved public space – then there is no conflict. However, as we showed in Section 2, there is nothing inherent about positive community outcomes from meeting individuals' aspirations for a good quality of life.

Research for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation¹⁶, for example, suggests that residents in deprived areas can aspire to an *unsustainable* path of development (such as higher car use and the consumption patterns of more affluent residents). Indeed, one of the interviewees noted that many things are 'double-edged swords'. For example, the choice by someone to drive reduces the choice for others not to, or for others to enjoy unpolluted air and traffic-free streets.

Travel and transport is in fact one of the key areas in which individual choice and the pursuit of personal 'liveability' can conflict with the liveability of whole neighbourhoods and the community, and more widely with that of sustainable development.

(5) Constrained choices - Every choice we make is conditioned and constrained by the choices others have already made, and in turn conditions future choices. Each consumption choice that individuals make is not autonomous but in fact part of a certain consumption 'pathway' or package deal. Each 'choice set' (the choices that are available) comes with a 'constraint set' (the choices and options which it excludes)¹⁷.

Furthermore, choice sets develop in time through *co-evolution*; so that, for example, the car is now deeply entrenched in our lifestyles, since choices made earlier now frame subsequent choices, like the location of our housing, the fact we shop at out-of-town superstores, and so on. Each of these developments has not occurred in isolation, but as part of an evolving package of choices.

(6) Short-termism - It is also widely recognised that the public may not make choices that favour sustainable development – even if in principle these are considered to be a good idea – because short term personal gains are more important. The concept of 'discounting the future' is well established¹⁸ and a rational part of decision making; people generally prefer £1 now rather than (say) £1.50 next week. This inherent short termist approach is in stark contrast to the objectives of sustainable development, which is about protecting, not discounting, the future.

(7) Irrational choices and hidden wants - There is increasingly some discussion about the irrational nature of human decision making, based on both the flaws of the "rational man" assumptions (e.g. perfect information, everyone seeks to maximise utility) alongside a wider set of social, psychological and cultural norms and influences. The suggestion here is that people can make poor choices that are inconsistent with their own needs, let alone the needs of others.

¹⁶ *Environment and equity concerns about transport*, JRF, 2001

¹⁷ *Redefining Prosperity: Resource Productivity, economic growth and sustainable development*, Sustainable Development Commission, 2003

¹⁸ see for example, *Valuing the Future*, Pearce et al, World Economics, 2:2003

Recent work for the Strategy Unit¹⁹ suggests this is caused in part by both 'discounting' and 'heuristics', in which people deviate from rational courses by applying rules of thumb like 'it won't happen to me'.

(8) Social barriers & fear of difference - Individual decisions in pursuit of "a good life" have a powerful social grounding. Recent MORI research²⁰, for example, is useful in highlighting the way in which residents often blame liveability problems on 'outsiders' or 'other' communities in the area. The research notes in focus groups that suburban/rural respondents tend to talk about liveability problems as the fault of outsiders coming in, while those in urban areas tend to focus on the liveability problems of a lot of different types of people forced to get along together. From the perspective of sustainable communities this leads to problematic aspirations for living in 'like' communities and 'like' social groupings, in particular along cultural/ethnic lines and housing tenure lines.

(9) Unexpressed quality of life drivers - Finally, there are intriguing and challenging issues arising from the fact that individuals are sometimes simply unable to say what it is they do or will want. Our research on "Ageing Society" for the ODPM²¹, for example, found that local environmental quality was only one of the factors underpinning self-perceived quality of life, other key factors being an optimistic outlook, personal health, quality of social networks, the family home, and local social capital (e.g. neighbourliness and feelings of 'sameness' with other residents). More widely, personal health and the quality of an individual's social relations are commonly cited in the research literature as key contributors to life satisfaction, but are difficult for people to express.

3.2 Hard choices – potential areas of conflict

This section explores examples of potential *conflicts* between liveability (in its broader sense of meeting resident's aspirations for a good life) and sustainable development. The purpose here is to be illustrative rather than comprehensive; and to outline issues that require further consideration if sustainability is to be properly embedded in local communities. Two types of conflict are illustrated:

- Specific conflicts;
- Generic conflicts.

(i) Specific conflicts

Examples that relate to specific aspects of community planning and development include:

- 'Gated' Communities (GCs) represent a positive liveability choice for those living within such areas, but contradict the social criteria of sustainability in terms of the impact on social cohesiveness. Indeed, Atkinson *et al* (2003)²² note that a number of serious tensions and concerns need to be addressed if GCs are to be reconciled with wider government aims relating to social cohesion, mixed neighbourhoods and the promotion of affordable housing;

¹⁹ *Personal Responsibility and Changing Behaviour: the state of knowledge and its implications for public policy*, Strategy Unit, 2004

²⁰ *The Language of Liveability*, MORI/ODPM, 2004

²¹ *"Sustainable Cities & the Ageing Society"*, Brook Lyndhurst for the ODPM New Horizons programme, 2004

²² *Gated Communities in England*, Atkinson & Flint (2003) for ODPM "New Horizons" Programme

- The growth in “second homes” increases liveability for owners but contradicts several of the social and environmental criteria of sustainability – for example, by pricing local communities out of the local housing market, increasing demand for transport, and adding to the pressure for new housing developments. Research by the estate agents FPD Savills²³ shows that there are 206,000 such properties - as many as outlined in the government’s sustainable communities plan for the South East. The market is worth £40bn and has doubled in value in six years, with key pressure areas including the South West (which has almost a quarter of all second homes in the UK) – and the City of London;
- The migration of people from high density urban centres to low density suburbs has a number of negative implications for sustainable development, including greater reliance on private transport and pressures on the green belt. However, there is little doubting that people currently aspire to move to the suburbs: when people were asked where they would most like to live in a recent survey²⁴, a bungalow and a village house were rated highest, followed by a Victorian terrace and a modern semi. Only one in fifty choose a modern loft style apartment and no one at all opted for high rise living in a tower block;
- In terms of private transport, how does the Government reconcile the significant quality of life benefits for individuals of being able to drive whenever and wherever they want with the negative impacts on others and on local environmental quality? In this example *individual liveability* aspirations clearly have negative impacts on *community liveability*;
- Taking a very specific example of this, our “Ageing Society” work concluded that, before older people become dependent on state services, the car plays a central role in their ability to maintain their own quality of life and independence. Many of those no longer able to drive suffer severe detriment to their quality of life because their communities are designed around the needs of car users, and public transport may not be an effective substitute. In this case, what is a fair balance between maintaining quality of life for a particular group on the one hand and achieving environmentally sustainable transport solutions on the other?

There are, of course, many more specific examples that could be cited here. The purpose of the above illustrations is to make the point that, if the liveability agenda was defined beyond a narrow focus on Cleaner, Safer, Greener – on which there is public consensus and clear ‘win-wins’ for virtually everyone – then trade-offs would almost inevitably be required. This is certainly the case in terms of the wider pursuit of sustainable communities.

(ii) Generic conflicts

We have also identified a number of generic considerations where conflicts between the two agendas may arise.

• Unintended consequences of policy

Several examples exist of policies instigated to pursue sustainable development that result in various negative impacts upon the liveability of the local environment, and vice versa. For example:

²³ www.fpd Savills.com/research/content.asp?section=uk

²⁴ *But would you like to live there? Shaping attitudes to urban living*, URBED, MORI and the University of Bristol for the Urban Task Force

- EU directives regulating the disposal of fridges and waste and electrical appliances have led to disposal problems and an increase in illegal fly tipping;
- 'Bring sites' for recycling waste have often been sited badly or emptied too infrequently, creating an eyesore, source of litter, and attraction for vermin. All of these reduce the liveability of the area, and in doing so actually result in a 'negative feedback' that reduces residents' propensity to recycle;
- There was a suggestion by one interviewee that the Congestion Charge has increased the number of abandoned cars in London, since owners cannot (or are unwilling), to pay the fines they have accumulated;
- Security in the design of public space can lead to less usable and attractive public spaces, and even social exclusion of some (e.g. teenagers) from areas which were previously public space (e.g. shopping centres). Indeed, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) recently launched a campaign to highlight the need for liveable open spaces; they assert that local authorities' concerns over crime and litigation is turning urban areas into "fun-free, soulless" places²⁵.

Much depends on the policies that are implemented to counter unintended consequences; for example, in terms of the landfill tax new powers are being proposed to combat fly-tipping, including the power to issue fixed penalty notices and higher fines:

*"With the landfill tax, which is itself a worthy fiscal system, there are more temptations for illegal fly-tipping. If we do not keep deterrents ahead of temptations we are never going to win"*²⁶

We note that existing and planned methodologies - for example sustainability appraisals, Strategic Environmental Assessment and Regulatory Impact Assessment - also offer policy makers the ability to consider second- and third-order consequences.

• **Potential for regressive impacts**

There are some instances where the pursuit of sustainable development may have a disproportionate impact on poorer households (or older households, or BME households). For instance, in our example above on older people and transport, it could be argued that restricting car access to town centres on sustainable development grounds would have a disproportionate impact on older people's quality of life, or liveability.

Taking a further example - the issue of electricity consumption - from the perspective of promoting energy conservation and efficiency, increases in the price of electricity are one of the most effective interventions in changing household behaviour. However, increases will have the greatest impact on poorer households who spend a higher proportion of their income on fuel, and so increase the number of households at risk from 'fuel poverty'. Therefore, this represents a potential conflict between social and environmental objectives.

²⁵ www.cabespace.org.uk

²⁶ David Williams, vice chair of the Local Government Association's environment & regeneration executive, as reported in *bin there, dumped that*, New Start, 5 March 2004

Once again, the scope for conflict will be dependent on *how* policies are implemented, and the extent to which they take into account difference in liveability needs of various groups. There is, for example, nothing *inherently* regressive about tackling domestic energy issues, and there are equally many options available that can simultaneously promote liveability and sustainability.

One interviewee in this research, for example, used the example of fuel poverty measures (e.g. Warm Front and Warm Zones) that provide additional support to those households on low incomes and therefore who are most at risk. Instances where fuel poverty and energy efficiency measures are consistent with liveability *and* sustainable development are considered further in relation to 'Synergies' in Section 4.3.

3.3 Policy tools for liveable & sustainable lifestyles

In each of the examples above, the intervention by the state – in some form or another – is implicitly required to manage conflict and/or change behaviour. One interviewee asserted there is a need to better understand human behaviour, specifically what people will do and what they won't. At that point, government interventions can be better targeted; both at enabling residents to make better decisions and, in situations where this is unlikely, compelling them to do so.

Indeed, the research literature suggests that 'choice-sets' need to be framed so as to promote those which are sustainable over and above those which maximise individual but not societal benefits.

*"Creating liveable cities involves the management of conflict. It is not a 'win-win' game and cannot be achieved through 'adding' alone; some things require others to be given up, some behaviour changed, if wider benefits are to be obtained"*²⁷

*"Romantic visions in which individual communities can somehow resolve problems of livelihood and sustainability on their own are analytically misguided and a political disservice"*²⁸

While people are capable of making liveability choices that are consistent with the pursuit of sustainable development, the question becomes what happens when they make liveability choices that are at odds with it? Indeed, Rydin (2004) notes²⁹:

"It is if they don't think that there is any conflict between what people want; they just need to recognise their inherently green desires. But what if, in the course of the debate, what people actually want is growth, consumption and unsustainable lifestyles?"

Given this, the remainder of the section briefly touches upon four possible areas for intervention that are available to policy makers, highlighting the relationship between the intervention area and the liveability/sustainable development nexus:

- The planning system;
- Regulation;

²⁷ Fabian Commentary: *What's the big idea?* Harvey (2002) at www.fabian-society.org.uk

²⁸ *Political Strategies for more livable cities*, Evans (2002), University of California

²⁹ Rydin (2004), reviewing *A Better Choice of Choice* (Levett et al, 2003) in *Town & Country Planning*, February 2004

- Information;
- Fiscal intervention.

The Planning System

- There is a broad consensus – at international level (e.g. UNECE), national level (e.g. TCPA), regional level (e.g. “The London Plan”) and local level – that land use planning has a vital role to play in delivering sustainable development and ensuring the existence of liveable places;
- Recent policy developments – the overhaul of the UK planning system, the Sustainable Communities plan, regional spatial and economic development strategies and so forth – increasingly position sustainable development as a key tenet of the purpose of planning;
- Many issues remain contested, however, including models of the compact city, the social and environmental pros and cons of high density development, the extent to which suburbia can/should be built on floodplains and so on;
- Techniques such as “planning for real” exercises, and other forms of community engagement can be expected to bring to the fore some of the underlying potential conflicts between liveability (“what people want”) and sustainable development (“what is strategically necessary”).

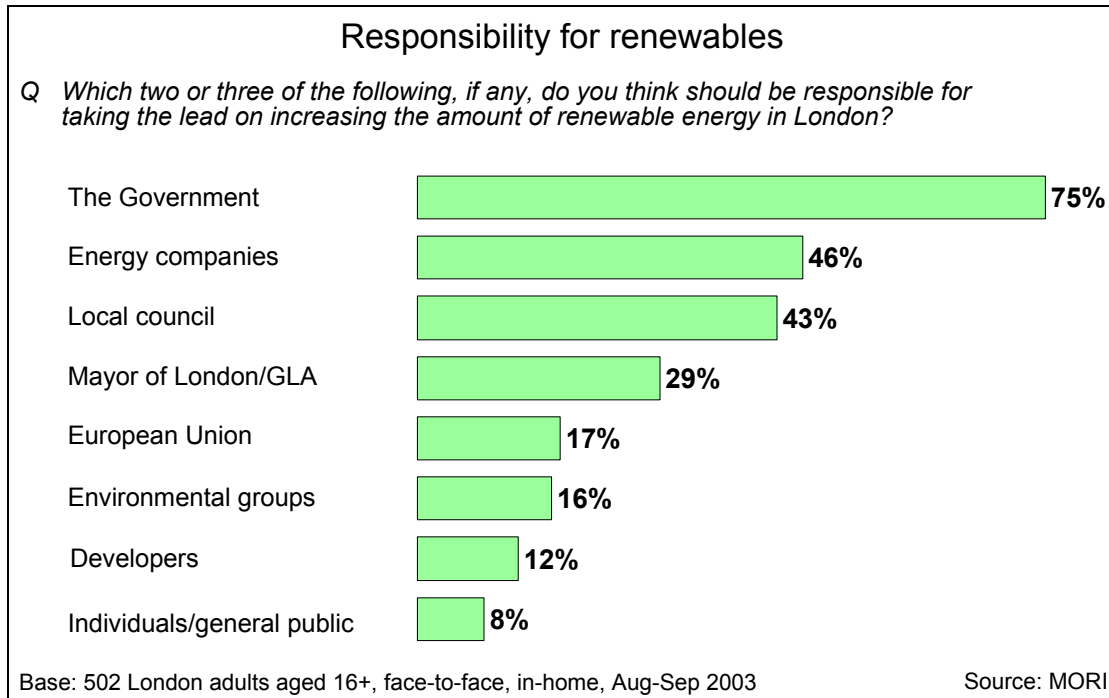
Regulation

- In its broadest sense, government sets an entire regulatory environment within which all social actors make decisions. In the current context, we touch briefly on just two areas: regulations affecting the built environment (other than planning, referred to above) and regulations affecting consumer products;
- Building regulations (e.g. on energy efficiency) and guidance on design standards have a role to play in shaping the development choices made on the ground. Our own experience on these issues suggests that regulation is a more potent tool for securing housing with low environmental impact given that these considerations feature low down on buyers’ (and therefore developers’) criteria of ‘liveable’ housing. In relation to commercial development, regulation may be more effective in bringing forward sustainable buildings because it provides ‘a level playing field’ for the market as a whole which removes the ‘first-mover’ risk for individual developers;
- In the case of consumer product regulations, one of the key findings of the NCC research³⁰ was that consumers believe that government and industry have an important role in taking unsustainable products off the market. People want to be able to choose between a range of sustainable products, rather than choosing between those that are sustainable and those that are not:

“Stop every product being made, like the unrecycled toilet roll or the unrecycled kitchen roll...and then you couldn’t get away with it” Male, 18-24, C2DE, Manchester

³⁰ *Green Choice: What Choice*, National Consumer Council, 2003

- The Strategy Unit³¹ notes that people are more accepting of state intervention to reduce negative externalities – behaviour that impacts on others – than when the impact is limited to that person. This therefore favours interventions for sustainable development and sustainable communities. Indeed, Brook Lyndhurst have noted across several environmental issues such as waste and energy that the public believe that responsibility for tackling these issues rests with Government to provide leadership.



Information

- There continues to be much discussion about the need for and role of information to bring about behavioural change. In keeping with a model of “rational agents” it is often argued that the public should be provided with better education and information which will then enable them to make sustainable choices;
- There are undoubtedly situations where information is required. However, we note several criticisms of the basic assumption that information and education and awareness *necessarily* lead to positive behaviour change. Hobson, for example³², contends that many human behaviours are not decided along rational lines and that environmental behaviours are often non-linear. Similarly, the AIDA model (Awareness – Information – Decision – Action) is criticised given that increases in people’s levels of knowledge and awareness of environmental problems does not correlate with increased levels of pro-environment behaviour, the so-called “value-action” gap;
- Certainly, from the work that Brook Lyndhurst has undertaken, the issues are: what kinds of information; and how it is targeted to specific audiences. Our research tends to draw a distinction between information that raises awareness about a certain issue, and that which aims to give details about how to practically implement sustainable behaviours;

³¹ *Personal Responsibility and Changing Behaviour: the state of knowledge and its implications for public policy*, Strategy Unit, 2004

³² *Sustainable Lifestyles: Rethinking Barriers and Behaviour Change*, Hobson (1999), UCL

- The evidence suggests that people need more information at the micro-level so that they can translate their general support and awareness into specific actions, such as details about the collection times for recycling times, or how to switch to a 'green' electricity tariff and so forth.

Fiscal Intervention

- Whilst not currently directly linked to the local liveability agenda, the scope for fiscal intervention either to lead or support local level action is potentially considerable (the tax breaks on private sector investment in regeneration areas are an example of this);
- There are already several 'green' market instruments in operation in the UK – for example the landfill tax, the climate change levy, the modest range in emission-dependent vehicle licensing duty, and the Renewables Obligation. However, the extent to which these impact upon public behaviour is not well understood and/or not highlighted;
- Furthermore, there are concerns that the UK is not going far enough. The SDC's progress report (2004), for example, comments:

"We deplore the fact that further progress on introducing more green taxation is regularly held back for fears about the potential impact on the UK's short term competitive position".

- There may be other issues that have *local impacts* that are more appropriately tackled at *national level*, or where an *integrated package* of top-down bottom-up incentives and deterrents can be identified;
- At this stage, we can do no more than note the potential significance of this kind of intervention, and suggest that they are necessary as part of mainstreaming sustainable development (and liveability) processes.

4 Making Liveability Work for Sustainable Communities

4.1 Analysis & Interpretation

Drawing on the evidence and argument presented in Sections 2 and 3, we draw the following conclusions:

- Liveability is, and can best be conceptualised as, a *necessary but not sufficient* component of sustainable development in the UK;
- Liveability as currently defined and practised contributes to the development of sustainable communities, particularly in environmental terms. A good quality local environment is one of the key building blocks of sustainable cities;
- A key power of liveability is that it identifies specific actions that should be tackled. This strength of focus needs to be maintained moving forward;
- Liveability can help people to take small steps towards making the environment matter (but will not necessarily lead to wholesale buy-in to pro-environmental behaviour);
- The term “liveability”, and its component parts, helps people, including politicians, to think about local environment issues and to have a common language. This is less true of sustainable development, or even sustainable communities.

At the same time, however, there are a number of cautionary notes:

- Liveability is very much a ‘here and now’ perspective; it addresses human *need*, but addresses human *impacts* on the environment only to a small degree, and issues of *carrying capacity* hardly at all;
- Liveability as currently practised in the UK does not tackle fundamental behavioural aspects of unsustainable lifestyles or the cultural norms on which these behaviours are founded. This may be satisfactory, as long as we are clear about it;
- Liveability can be a victim of unsustainable lifestyles, where a good life for some undermines liveability of others. Indeed, there are some domains in which ‘bad’ habits and behaviours undermine both liveability (in the sense of a good life) and sustainability (in the sense of living within safe environmental limits);
- This is also related to difference: what is good for some may not be good for others. Beyond graffiti, litter, dog mess and social intimidation - about which there are strong cultural unanimities - ‘liveability’ could run into difficulty where there is less consensus over what constitutes ‘good’ behaviour, and what is appropriate behaviour in different settings (e.g. town centres and suburbs at night; for older people or younger people). There appears to be a scarcity of research concerning the liveability needs of different groups and communities.

4.2 Recommendations

Our analysis up to this point compels us to recognise that in meeting aspirations for a 'good life' sustainable communities will have to achieve a balance between what individuals want and what is in the best interests of communities.

Within the relatively narrow confines of "Cleaner, Safer, Greener" there appear to be no major conflicts, but in relation to broader aspects of 'liveability' there clearly are. There is clear evidence that there are limits (in the short and medium term, at least) to how far individuals can, or will, change their behaviour in favour of sustainable development, and limits to how far it is appropriate to expect communities to "help themselves" in relation to sustainable development.

There would therefore appear to be clear grounds for government to take a lead on framing the ground for people to pursue sustainable development and liveability simultaneously.

In the light of our analysis and conclusions, we recommend that this ground be framed by taking the liveability agenda forward under three broad headings:

- **Strengthening** – using liveability as a focus for capturing *social* sustainability gains and building strong communities;
- **Deepening** – making existing action on liveability work harder for sustainable development;
- **Broadening** – extending the reach of the current definition of liveability, so as to embed liveability within the overall pattern of delivering sustainable development and to ensure that initiatives in adjacent policy areas take full account of liveability issues.

4.2.1 Strengthening Liveability

Using liveability as a focus for capturing social sustainability gains and building strong communities

The potential contribution of liveability to **social cohesion** is very important. Interviewees in this research identified a number of existing liveability projects in which building social cohesion is a central objective (e.g. new sports facilities for teenagers to prevent anti-social behaviour) but there is undoubtedly scope for further 'mainstreaming' of the social dimension within the liveability agenda.

This strand also fits with the "Helping Communities to Help Themselves" and "Changing Behaviour" components of Defra's consultation paper on a revised UK Sustainable Development Strategy.

Five potential synergies are outlined below:

- From the physical to the social;
- Creating stable neighbourhoods;
- Social enterprises;
- Environmental equity;
- Civil renewal – community involvement & engagement.

(i) From the physical environment to social relations

The research literature suggests that the community aspects of local environmental quality are fundamental elements of the liveability agenda, with scope for further progress.

Indeed, research by MORI³³ contends that "*a positive way to promote liveability may be to connect the physical with the idea of community*", and goes as far as to conclude that "*Community spirit is the background of liveable space*". This is supported by research by the New Economics Foundation³⁴ which contends that while priorities often appear physical, behind these lie human concerns such as trust, confidence and friendship.

Tackling litter, for example, means not only an immediate physical improvement in terms of cleanliness, but a sign that local agencies are effectively tackling the problem, that people care about the area, and that the space feels safe. Research suggests that one of the most frightening aspects of littering is that it signals an element of the community who are 'out of control'. Other examples such as this need to be identified, tested and replicated.

These links between community issues and local environmental quality offers the potential for liveability to move towards a more integrated understanding of the relationship between physical issues and their underlying social context. It also offers the opportunity to develop liveability in such a way as to bring it closer to the objectives of sustainable development. Indeed, as the SDC note³⁵:

"If we accept that liveability can also be a vehicle for building community confidence and encouraging civic pride, then the agenda could be said in some form to resemble sustainable development"

Furthermore, there may be practical benefits to be gained through a focus on changing behaviour and involving residents in addition to simply improving formal services. Indeed, the Strategy Unit's recent paper³⁶ asserts that "governments cannot do it alone". Rather, the achievement of better policy outcomes requires greater engagement and participation from citizens.

There is some evidence that the social and physical aspects of liveability are beginning to be joined up; Groundwork, in particular, recognise the potential "win-win" here in their approach to regeneration, and point towards the significance of public space in fostering better community cohesion in Oldham³⁷ and its relevance in mediating "contested space" in Northern Ireland.

(ii) Creating stable neighbourhoods

The UK Sustainable Development Commission notes that improved local environments may reduce housing pressures by countering peoples' aspirations to move to low density homes in suburban areas. Specifically, they assert that a focus upon key liveability issues could lesson those factors that 'push' people to move out of an area, as well as promoting successful examples of urban renaissance and high density living.

³³ *The Language of Liveability*, MORI/ODPM, 2004

³⁴ *Prove It: Measuring impacts of renewal*, New Economics Foundation/Barclays SiteSavers

³⁵ *Understanding Liveability: Opportunities for Sustainable Regeneration?* SDC, 2002

³⁶ *Personal Responsibility and Changing Behaviour: the state of knowledge and its implications for public policy*, Strategy Unit, 2004

³⁷ *Oldham pus faith in public space*, Regeneration & Renewal, April 2004

The impact of liveability upon the 'quality of life' appeal (or lack thereof) of the neighbourhood could have particular importance for both regeneration areas (specifically 'sink estates' suffering high population out-migration) and the Market Renewal Pathfinder areas in Northern England, which are seeking to stimulate demand for housing in low-demand areas.

Indeed, Kearns and Parks (2002)³⁸ highlight the significance of 'area' and 'environment' disorder in influencing the desire to move from an area, in addition to 'housing' factors. Further evidence is required on the extent to which liveability improvements have reduced this migration driver in practice in deprived areas.

(iii) Social enterprises

There has been much debate about the role of social enterprises in delivering services to local communities. In terms of the specific interest to this study, the liveability agenda could potentially offer several opportunities to social enterprises - around community transport, local food provision, recycling, 'local clean up' services, and so on.

Indeed, in our *Environmental Exclusion Review* for the NRU (2004) we noted that social enterprises often tend to have a focus upon the quality of the local environment, and might be well placed to deliver significant aspects of the liveability agenda.

Therefore, support for those social enterprises that specifically deliver environmental goods and services would simultaneously benefit both liveability and sustainable development.

(iv) Environmental equity

Equity and fairness are key principles of sustainable development. Similarly, there is also a potentially strong *equity* aspect to liveability, since there is increasing evidence that deprived areas disproportionately suffer both environmental and social 'bads'. Therefore, a policy focus on the 'liveability' of deprived areas would be entirely consistent with sustainable development.

There are indications that this is already beginning to happen. For example, there has been growing interest in and recognition of the relationship between deprivation and environmental quality:

"I believe the environment is overwhelmingly an issue of concern for the poorest citizens. It is the poorest who live in the worst housing, are the most affected by traffic pollution, live closest to landfill sites and have the worst graffiti and litter problems."

Tony Blair, Prime Minister, 2003

"There has been a lack of regard for the environmental concerns of disadvantaged communities, based to a degree on the presumption that the environment is a 'middle class' issue. However, litter, vandalism, etc. are central to the needs of these communities".

Sustainable Development Commission, 2003³⁹

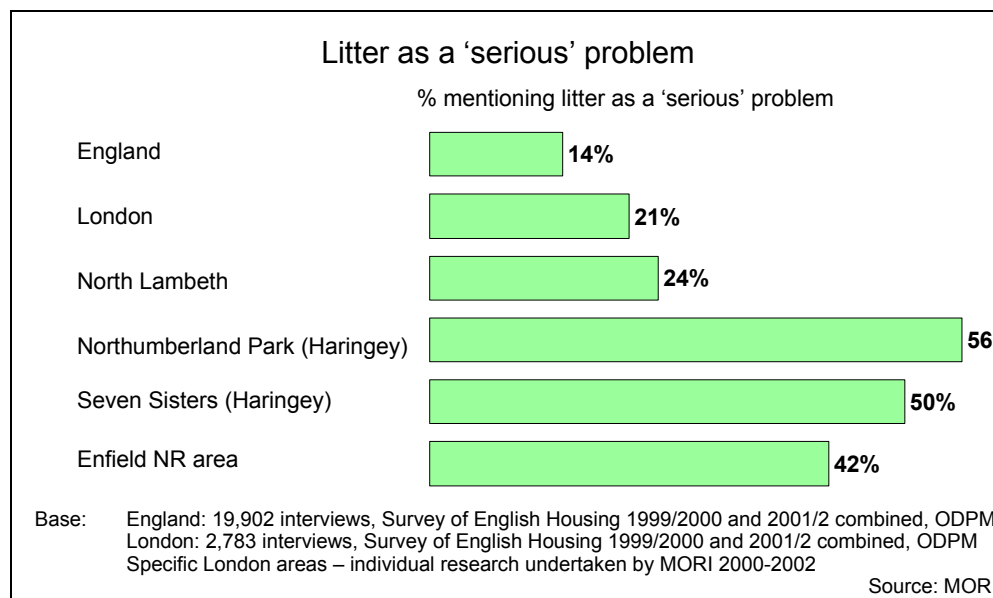
³⁸ *Living in and Leaving Poor Neighbourhood Conditions in England*, Kearns & Parkes, University of Glasgow, 2002

³⁹ *Vision for sustainable regeneration – environment and poverty: the missing link?* SDC, 2003

Two other significant developments on this issue are worth noting. First, the consultation paper on the UK Sustainable Development Strategy *Taking it on* (Defra, 2004) notes the importance of the links between the environment and social justice, and identifies this as one of the four key priorities for the revised strategy to address.

Second, our work for the NRU specifically sought to better understand the links between poor environmental quality and deprivation. The report notes that the emerging research base supports the general assertion that the most deprived areas also suffer the poorest local environments, particular so in terms of the quality of the local environment.

This is strongly reflected in terms of local perceptions. For example, the graph below demonstrates the significance of litter as a 'serious' local problem and how it varies from area to area. While around one in seven (14%) report litter as a serious issue nationally, as do one in five (21%) in London, the proportion increases significantly within certain parts of London: 24% in North Lambeth, 42% in Enfield's Neighbourhood Renewal area, and as many as 56% in Northumberland Park in the London borough of Haringey.



This pattern for litter in fact holds for a wider range of local environmental quality issues. The Survey of English Housing (2000/1), for example, provides compelling evidence that - while liveability is a national issue - it is consistently felt more severely in deprived wards. In particular, the gap is most evident in terms of *crime, litter & rubbish, and vandalism*, which close to three times as many residents in the 10% most deprived wards identify as serious problems than in other areas.

(v) Civil renewal - community involvement & engagement

The Policy Action Team 9 Report⁴⁰ (1999) notes there is a 'ladder' or 'spectrum' of community and voluntary action, from small scale initial steps (such as good neighbourliness and participation in ad hoc local clean ups) to regular, formal commitment.

⁴⁰ Report of the Policy Action Team 9 on Community Self Help, Home Office, 1999

It is often the case that the former is a prerequisite of the latter. For example, it is unlikely that residents in a deprived area with no previous experience of taking part in community work will spontaneously wish to join a local neighbourhood committee; this could be asking residents to “run before they can walk”.

Our research for the NRU suggests that local liveability issues could be a *key means* of delivering the community engagement and civil renewal agendas. In particular, the research noted that local environmental issues are often one of the best ways of establishing initial forms of community action; activities like street clean-ups, local food growing schemes and improvements to public space can often be the *catalyst* for civil renewal, particularly in areas of little or no history of taking collective or community action.

This is supported elsewhere in the research literature. Church & Elster (2002)⁴¹, for example, conclude that getting involved in a practical local project is often a key first step both to active citizenship and to environmental awareness. Similarly, Encams note that local environmental issues provide “*a practical introductory path that leads to communities being more involved in the local area and in local decision making*”.

The ‘quick wins’ that liveability can deliver are also considered important to counter apathy, cynicism and distrust of local authorities. For example, Encams’ project in Lozells Road in Birmingham⁴² – funded through the ODPM’s Special Grants Programme – demonstrates how small environmentally-based initiatives help to foster community spirit and shared aspirations, changing the mindset from one of ‘passive despair’ to one of actively promoting change. Market research prior to the clean up found comments to be typical of the former:

“You don’t complain because it’s a hassle and nothing is done”

“These days people don’t care, no one has any pride any more”

“People don’t realise there can be a change”

However, following the event – among the participants at least – there was a noticeable shift in attitudes:

“People stopped us in the streets and asked what was going on. Everyone was delighted that something at last was happening”

“The feeling of coming together was great and it adds to the community feel”

Likewise, community engagement schemes naturally favour the local environment, which tends to be high on local residents’ agenda because they are salient issues. Therefore, the relationship is mutually reinforcing: local environmental projects encourage community engagement; community engagement encourage (certain kinds of) environmental protection.

⁴¹ *Thinking locally, acting nationally: Lessons for national policy from work on local sustainability*, Church & Elster (2002) for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

⁴² Black Majority Churches Environmental Project, Encams, 2003

4.2.2 Deepening Liveability

*Making existing action on liveability work harder
for sustainable development*

Three aspects in particular have been identified as appropriate for action:

- Managing the means and process of liveability for sustainable development;
- Developing liveability as a catalyst for wider sustainable behaviour;
- Maximising economic benefits from “cleaner, safer, greener” environments.

(i) Means & process: managing liveability for sustainable development

It was pointed out that, at the micro-level, liveability could potentially contribute towards sustainable development through the way in which local environmental problems are dealt with. For example, is graffiti cleaned with chemical agents that are environmentally benign or harmful? Is litter recycled or sent to landfill?

This raises issues of process and means as opposed to outcomes, focusing on ‘doing things better’ rather than expanding the remit of the liveability agenda. In particular, the issue of ‘green’ procurement is significant. There is little evidence as to whether liveability initiatives and policies are taking into account sustainable development in their procurement practices.

There would therefore appear to be scope to research, develop and disseminate best practice on “managing liveability for sustainability”.

(ii) Providing a catalyst for wider sustainable behaviour

There was a suggestion among several of the interviewees that, by taking small steps to improve the local environment, residents may become *systemically* more environmentally aware. Just as in the example of community involvement where initial engagement then leads to further involvement, the suggestion is that involvement in improving the liveability of one’s neighbourhood leads to a systemic pattern of sustainable behaviour.

This is not a well researched area. However, among the limited evidence that does exist, there is both support and rejection for the assertion. For example, research by MORI for the Strategy Unit’s review of the UK Waste Strategy⁴³ noted that in areas with high recycling participation rates, residents appear to have become more aware of and sensitive towards their impact on the environment in other respects, such as energy consumption and water use.

However, this is contradicted by research by Barr (2003)⁴⁴ which found that residents who recycled regularly were *less likely* than average to take steps to reduce the amount of household waste they produce.

This issue was also the subject of some discussion at the seminar. There was a feeling that, while liveability could *potentially* be the catalyst for wider sustainable behaviour, it should not be assumed that this will *necessarily* be the case. Several of the interviewees concurred with the findings of Barr (2003) in that people can be interested in some issues but not others, and so patterns of behaviour are sporadic rather than systemic.

⁴³ *Reviewing Public Attitudes to Waste & Recycling*, MORI, 2002

⁴⁴ see Darnton (2004) *The Impact of Sustainable Development on Public Behaviour*, Report 2

More research is required here to evaluate whether these links are being made in practice, and the extent to which liveability is encouraging people to think more widely about *their own* rather than others' bad habits in relation to local sustainability. It would be useful to begin to gather this kind of evidence through evaluations of the existing pilot projects funded through the Liveability Fund.

(iii) Maximising economic benefits

The Groundwork Report *Places for People* (2004) argues that liveability is not only good for residents, but also for the economy. They point to the importance of 'green infrastructure'.

Fewer links appear to have been made in the UK than in the US to the economic ramifications of liveability policies:

*"Interestingly, the connection with economic efficiency has been far less prominent in the UK than in US. Indeed, much of the attention here has been giving to improving neighbourhoods in isolation"*⁴⁵

Nevertheless, There has been a growing interest in the value of 'green infrastructure' particularly in terms of the way the physical environment makes an area a 'good place' to live and work in, and hence attracts inward investment and a high calibre workforce:

"Inward investment requires the creation of places and spaces where people want to live and work. These issues are crucial for economic success, and those towns, cities and regions that provide safe and attractive places will be the winners". Tony Blair⁴⁶, 2001

Indeed, there have been some notable examples of areas utilising the value of their 'green' assets (such as wetlands, woodlands, parks, and so on). For example, North Staffordshire's "Greening for Growth" initiative⁴⁷ looks to develop environmental infrastructure on previously contaminated land, to 'green' transport corridors and create community woodlands in order to attract inward investment and a high calibre workforce. Similarly, Hull's quayside is to become the centrepiece of the city's regeneration scheme to attract premium residential and commercial property returns⁴⁸.

In spite of such potential, several interviewees in Brook Lyndhurst's other New Horizons research project looking at regional competitiveness and sustainable development still felt that barriers remain to promoting the concept of green infrastructure, including:

- 'Making the case' in terms of *quantifiable* impacts on inward investment and business relocation. (We note that the North West has made some progress in this regard through the development of a 'portfolio' of projects⁴⁹);
- The SDC research in the regions noted that consideration of the sector has in some areas continued to be hampered by environment-related matters being considered as *obstacles* to economic development, rather than providing *opportunities* for a broad base of economic activities;

⁴⁵ Fabian Commentary: *What's the big idea?* Harvey (2002) at www.fabian-society.org.uk

⁴⁶ Prime Minister's speech: Improving your local environment, 24 April 2001

⁴⁷ Green improvements plan launched, www.stoke.gov.uk, 2003

⁴⁸ *Quayside to become the keystone of Hull's waterfront*, New Start, 27 February 2004

⁴⁹ *The Economic and Regenerative Value of the Natural Environment in the North West*, NWDA, 2003

- The South East's research (2002) on the region's "environment economy" suggests that regional partners do not always think of it as a sector in its own right, and therefore do not provide the knowledge, support and promotion that it deserves. The report concludes that "*the message, therefore, is one of a group of activities all with a common factor based on the environment, whose untapped potential has yet to be fully realised*". This is supported by the London SDC, which notes that the contribution of environmental and social assets to economic development has yet to be fully recognised⁵⁰.

While CABE Space have recently produced a report on the value of green space looking particularly at international examples⁵¹, this area of enquiry should continue to be developed, for example in the evaluation of the impact of UK liveability projects. Beyond gains to local house prices and land values, aspects on which further hard evidence is required include: efficiency gains to public service spending (including perhaps 'whole life costs' of public place infrastructure); impacts on reducing residential out-migration; public health gains (e.g. prevention of mental and physical illness); and local multiplier effects in terms of attracting new households and businesses.

4.2.3 Broadening Liveability

Extending the reach of the current definition of liveability

Whilst we believe that both strengthening and deepening liveability could be achieved in a relatively uncontentious fashion, we recognise that the issues involved in broadening its scope are more challenging. Nevertheless, we think that there is a case for extending the range of issues tackled by the liveability agenda.

We have identified three "adjacent" issues, reflecting both the expressed concerns of the public (in terms of the issues they identify as relevant to their local quality of life) and current policy development in these areas. The areas are:

- Housing (notably the issues of energy efficiency and renewable energy);
- Health – notably the public health agenda that is seeking to tackle the determinants of health and well-being;
- Transport & access – notably the concept of "sustainable mobility", incorporating walking, cycling, public transport and reduced dependence on the car.

These issues are illustrative rather than definitive, but serve to illustrate opportunities for simultaneously managing negative environmental and/or social impacts for whole communities while providing liveability gains for individuals.

⁵⁰ LDA/London Sustainable Development Commission, 2003

⁵¹ For example, research in Dutch towns demonstrates that a garden bordering water can increase the price of a house by 11 per cent, while a view of water or having a lake nearby can boost the price by 10 per cent and 7 per cent respectively. A view of a park was shown to raise house prices by 8 per cent. Taken from *The Value of Public Space: How high quality parks and public spaces create economic, social and environmental value*, CABE Space (2004)

(i) Low-energy homes

There would appear to be considerable scope to integrate energy efficiency and renewable energy production within new communities. From a liveability point of view, this would connect with "Decent Homes" as set out in the Sustainable Communities Plan and the focus identified in the Egan report. It would also link with social initiatives such as "Warm Homes", fuel poverty; and environmental objectives such as local air quality and tackling global emissions.

The opportunity therefore seems to exist to "join up" on a broad front, and to do so in a way which has the potential to empower communities.

In Leicester, for example, over 8,000 council households linked to the Combined Heat and Power system will save an estimated £193 on the annual bill⁵². Similarly, several Housing Associations have integrated energy efficiency measures with the pursuit of their affordable warmth objectives. The SDC in its review of the Sustainable Communities Plan highlighted energy efficiency in relation to housing improvement and new development as a key liveability issue that should be strengthened, particularly since 50% of all UK energy use is in buildings.

(ii) Healthy communities

Health is not an ODPM responsibility but there is a growing cross-departmental focus on preventative public health interventions and healthy communities (e.g. work by the Health Improvement Agency; the King's Fund). Moreover, as we identified earlier, good health is one of the sometimes 'hidden' factors that contributes strongly to quality of life but is not always picked up in surveys asking about liveability. The links between local environmental condition, housing and health are well established in the literature. In addition, the idea of promoting healthy communities:

- Addresses equalities and social exclusion (children & obesity; older people; the less well-off; BME communities and the rising incidence of 'Western' diseases);
- Is a core objective of New Deal for Communities, yet has been one of the hardest aspects to deliver, given that residents often see health as less pressing than other priorities (according the first evaluation report);
- Has strong links to house condition and housing situations (especially for older people);
- Has clear links to "cleaner, safer, greener" via the promotion of parks, recreation space and walkability of local neighbourhoods; and to anti-social behaviour by tackling drug and alcohol abuse;
- Could promote environmental equity – for example, a focus on childhood asthma and air quality, or cutting road deaths for children and older people, which (for children) are also more significant issues in deprived areas.

Powers of well-being for local authorities allow for the kind of cross-cutting local working that would be required to deliver healthy communities.

⁵² *Ring of Power: Leicester's plans for community heating*, in Green Futures, March/April 2004

(iii) Sustainable mobility

Sustainable mobility links clearly to the 'safer' dimension of liveability, but also has broader sustainable development benefits. Furthermore, there are potentially very significant equalities components, particularly for children (especially in deprived areas) and older people.

Potential liveability gains include local air quality & health, walkability and personal safety. Potential sustainability gains are: emissions & global environment and putting people back into the public realm.

In the case of all three possible "broadening" themes, the potential exists for a programme of pilot projects in a next wave of Liveability Fund so that structures, mechanisms and best practice can be worked out. Pilots would need not only to focus on what local authorities can do but also demonstrate how to build wider liveability partnerships – for example, with energy supply companies, or Primary Care Trusts.

4.3 Closing Remarks

As the foregoing illustrates, there would appear to be a wide variety of ways in which the relationship between liveability and sustainable development can be strengthened, deepened and broadened.

The main concern is not the *potential* for synergy, but whether or not these links are systematically being made and fully utilised. Our review of the literature, our consultations and our analysis would tend to support this view.

Therefore, in spite of the potential for strong linkages, more work may be required to assess to what extent these are being translated into both policy and practice on the ground. There is, in our view, potential to pilot projects in a next wave of Liveability Fund so that structures, mechanisms and best practice can be worked out on these issues. Pilots would need not only to focus on what local authorities can do but also demonstrate how to build wider liveability partnerships – for example, with energy supply companies, or Primary Care Trusts; and the extent to which existing powers of well-being could be deployed in this respect.

5 Outstanding Issues and Questions

Whereas the previous section outlined specific actions for the development of the liveability agenda in the immediate term, the purpose of this section of the report is to identify wider issues of relevance to the way in which liveability will continue to develop in the future.

Although not the subject of detailed discussion within the confines of this study, we briefly discuss two themes in particular that warrant further consideration by ODPM:

- The links between liveability and wider policy discourses across government pertaining to local environmental quality and sustainable development (5.1);
- The corresponding cross-government relationships that ODPM should be facilitating in respect of liveability and sustainable development (5.2).

5.1 Policy Domains and Hard Choices

As we have noted in Sections 3 and 4, liveability exists within a broader policy context with a series of adjacent policy discourses with which liveability and sustainable development share a series of common interests. Here, we reflect upon the following:

- Behavioural change & sustainable lifestyles;
- Choice;
- New localism.

Behavioural change & sustainable lifestyles

As currently practiced, liveability does not appear to tackle fundamental behavioural aspects of unsustainable lifestyles or the cultural norms on which these behaviours are founded.

Nevertheless, the issue of personal behaviour and individual lifestyles is significant across a range of government agendas, and both liveability and sustainable development are no exceptions.

We have already touched upon fact that 'bad' behaviours (e.g. littering, anti-social behaviour) directly undermine liveability. Furthermore, in addition to such 'bad' behaviours, *legitimate* liveability benefits for some represent liveability disbenefits for others – this applies as equally to drivers and non-drivers as it does to the desires of old and young people living in urban centres, each with their own conception of what makes life liveable for them.

Indeed, there is a need to consider whether liveability has an 'objective reality' - who gets to say what is acceptable behaviour? Within the confines of cleaner, safer, greener there is perhaps little room for conflict (insofar as most people generally want these things). However, the move "from the physical to the social" involves a number of contested issues, from mixed tenure and ethnic housing segregation, to a concern about 'outsiders' and 'other groups' coming into the neighbourhood.

There is therefore a need for ODPM and Defra to address behaviour change as a central tenant of liveability; specifically in relation to the psychological, ecological and cultural models of decision making that the Strategy Unit have recently highlighted as alternative discourses to the "rational actor" interpretation.

Managing choice

There is a need to acknowledge and accept that the wants and needs of everyone cannot be met everywhere, all of the time.

The choice debate is in fact conditional upon two distinct types of choice: those we make as individuals and those we make as a society. The two do not – and cannot – exist in isolation. Society's decisions to tax, subsidise or even leave activities alone shape the framework in which individual choices are made. This is referred to by the OECD as the "infrastructure of consumption".

Therefore, policy intervention is inevitable, even in the case of no policy assumption; *laissez faire* policies result in one set of outcomes; interventionist policies in another set. Nor is there any such thing as 'free' choice; each choice set has a corresponding 'constraint' set.

The balance is one of constraining choice to promote sustainable development and collective liveability on the one hand, and ensuring adequate choice on the other so that people and communities are empowered to make their own decisions, under the guidance of community leadership provided by local agencies and the LSP.

This report has already flagged up a number of policy measures (in section 3.3) that could be used to 'frame' choice so as to enable people to make sustainable choices as opposed to those of the unsustainable variety. We make no case here about which devices are best employed in what context, other than making the point that people can make poor individual choices and that government intervention, in some form or another, is likely to be both necessary and important.

There is therefore a need for ODPM – in relation to liveability as well as sustainable communities and others – to have a wider discussion regarding these issues than is possible or desirable within the scope of this report.

New Localism

There is a fundamental question regarding the balance between local decision making on the one hand – characterised by the so-called "New Localism" agenda - and 'top down' control on the other.

Several interviewees felt that several aspects of sustainable development require a top down approach, driven by government rather than by communities. In contrast, there was a sense that liveability is able to adopt a bottom up approach from the local level, with priorities set by local residents;

Again, this raises a potential tension; between the liveability agenda on the one hand which responds to the legitimate priorities of local residents, and sustainable development on the other, which the evidence to date suggests may never achieve the same level of public saliency and support, given its strategic and long term nature;

Whether or not it is the liveability agenda that has to deal with such inherent conflicts between individual wants for a 'good life' and the 'public good' of sustainable development, they will need to be addressed somewhere if sustainable development is to move into the mainstream; and it is at the local or community level where many of these conflicts will have to be managed. The role of LSPs, Community Strategies and Community Leadership is crucial here to support the role of individuals and groups in "communities helping themselves".

Key questions are therefore raised, about the extent to which authority and responsibility can be devolved, the appropriate distribution of power across spatial levels, and the balance between leadership and community control. So for example, local street problems have a strong affinity to local control and intervention, whereas questions of transport policy may best be handled at a regional or national level;

A further question relevant to the liveability agenda at the local level is the extent to which liveability is mainstreamed within community strategies. To some extent this is happening through the CPA, BVPIs around street cleaning and recycling, and Best Value Reviews of Environmental Services and the like. However, the extent this is happening under a coherent liveability 'banner' – or indeed is making the links between liveability and wider sustainable lifestyles – is not clear.

5.2 Cross Departmental Working

Given the adjacent policy agendas that are relevant to the pursuit of both liveability and sustainable development, there is a need to establish and/or enhance links with other programmes. We note that specific opportunities appear to include:

- with DoH on the relationship between local environmental quality and public health;
- with the Home Office on the links between liveability and the community engagement/civil renewal agenda;
- within ODPM on sustainable communities – both the proposed development in the South East and Housing Renewal Pathfinder areas in the North;
- with Defra on sustainable lifestyles;
- with NRU on environmental exclusion;
- within ODPM on the role of the planning system in respect of liveability and sustainable development;
- with the Strategy Unit on their work on behavioural theories of decision making;
- with Treasury on possible fiscal regimes that would be consistent with liveability and sustainable development.