

1. Sustainable Development & the South West Region

1.1 Introduction

In the UK Strategy for Sustainable Development, "A Better Quality of Life", the Government has asked each region to produce a high level sustainable framework document. Achieving sustainability requires us all to change in the ways we think and live. This Framework adopted by the Regional Assembly on behalf of the people of the South West aims to provide an over-arching document that can guide and influence the decision makers in business, government and the voluntary and community sectors.

1.2 What is Sustainable Development?

In May 1999 the Government set out 4 objectives for pursuing sustainable development "social progress which recognises the needs of everyone; effective protection of the environment; prudent use of natural resources; the maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment."

In July 2000 a joint Government/Local Government report developed this definition:

"Sustainable Development is about creating a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come. It means recognising that our economy, environment and social well-being are inter-dependent. It means protecting and, where possible, enhancing the environment; ensuring we satisfy people's basic needs, such as providing warm homes and safe streets and giving the opportunity to achieve their potential through education, good health and employment"

*From "Local Quality of Life Counts - in a Nutshell"
(DETR/LGA/IDeA)*

Whilst the South West's economy has grown in recent years this increasing prosperity has not been shared by all and has not necessarily improved everyone's quality of life. Some people continue to live in poverty, in low quality housing in poor health and with restricted access to opportunities, services and facilities. The Region's environment is a key asset to the South West but one that continues to decline.

1.3 What Does Sustainable Development Mean for the South West?

Achieving sustainability in our region must have top priority. In environmental terms we have much that must be preserved and enhanced. The region boasts 60% of the nation's protected coastline and over one third of our area is nationally designated for its landscape quality. We also have the largest concentration of built heritage in the country.

But we all recognise that the South West must be a working region. We need a robust economy to ensure that wealth is created for investment in sustainable strategies. Inevitably the needs of people and the needs of the environment give rise to tension. One of the main purposes of this framework is to assist the resolution of these tensions.

The Crunch Issue

There can be no doubt that the crunch issue is how we face up to the reality of achieving sustainability. Decision makers in the region, in particular, must face up to hard choices that will both please and disappoint in equal measure. We have to be clear that the principles of sustainability must influence all our decision making. In many cases compromise will be inappropriate. Equally it is unlikely that every principle can be satisfied every time. We must learn to weigh carefully all the relevant factors and have a true appreciation of long term goals as against short term expediency. Progress on many of the issues such as climate change and the development of renewable energy will depend on action at a national or, indeed, global level. The South West Region must make a contribution to these priorities. The recently published Government White Papers- "Our Towns and Cities" and " Our Countryside - The Future" spell out the urban and rural agendas. Achieving an urban renaissance, rejuvenating our market towns and responding to rural needs will provide major challenges for the region's decision makers. Conflicts will inevitably arise in developing strategies and actions. Nowhere will this be more apparent for the South West than in addressing issues including:

- Protecting our natural environment whilst meeting the development needs of a thriving economy, and achieving an inclusive society
- Dealing with the changing demographics of the region, such as the ageing population and the regional disparities



- Rural inequalities such as access to services
- The impact of seasonal tourism on parts of the region, including traffic congestion in the summer and unemployment in the winter
- Improving transportation options within the region
- Responding to the opportunities of e-commerce, e-learning and e-government
- Managing the countryside against a background of change to the rural economy
- Responding to the needs of urban communities

1.5 How has the Framework been prepared?

Government Office for the South West commissioned Sustainability South West (SSW) - the region's Round Table for sustainable development - to prepare the Framework on behalf of the region. The Framework does not belong to any single organisation, but to the region as a whole.

A major part of the preparation process was to consult widely on draft versions, and to seek ownership of the Framework by the region's agencies. The Regional Assembly has a unique role in the region. Accordingly, Assembly representatives have been closely involved in helping to draft the document. As required by Government this Framework has now received an endorsement from the Assembly.

"The promotion of sustainable development where appropriate" is also one of the five objectives of South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) and it too, has been fully involved in the consultation.

The preparation of the Framework has been very much a partnership initiative. SSW is indebted to all the people and organisations who took the time and trouble to comment on earlier drafts and acknowledges the input and support it has received from key regional organisations and other representatives in the public, voluntary and private sectors.

Consultation responses on the draft Framework have been received from every sector and every part of the South West. The Framework team has worked to reflect the feedback and develop a consensus amongst all the stakeholders in the region. Consensus does not mean that everyone will agree with every part of the Framework - but that we will all consent to trying to work within its principles, recognising the benefits for the long-term future of the region.

These were the significant concerns brought to light in the consultation exercise. There are many other issues where the principles of sustainability need to be taken into account in decision making.

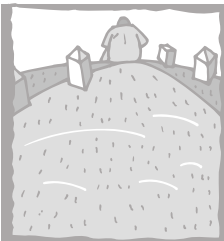
1.4 Aims of the Framework

Everyone is convinced of the need for development in the South West to be planned in a sustainable way. The question is how do we achieve this?

The Framework is a way of making connections. Better co-ordination of regional and local strategies and partnerships creates a bigger picture of how to improve the quality of life in the region.

We aim:

- to set out a high level strategic Framework for moving towards sustainable development in the South West;
- to establish an overall vision for the South West;
- to identify the themes which illustrate how environmental, social and economic objectives can be integrated and what the opportunities are to achieving this integration;
- to identify headline indicators to measure the extent to which we are realising the vision;
- to achieve 'buy-in' from regional organisations, local government, business and the voluntary sector.
- to provide a document which can be used to shape all regional strategies, including the Regional Planning Guidance and economic development strategies



1. Sustainable Development

About Sustainability South West

The South West Round Table for Sustainable Development was set up in 1998 through the Government Office for the South West. It is establishing itself as a key player in a number of critical regional processes, including conducting sustainability appraisals of the Regional Planning Guidance and the South West Regional Development Agency's economic strategy. The Round Table has now adopted the title of Sustainability South West (SSW).

SSW's mission is to be the independent champion of sustainable development for the region. Its members bring together experience from all sectors with a stake in the sustainability agenda, and the objective is to promote a consensus on the best way forward to progress regional sustainability. The current Chair of SSW is Jonathon Porritt, a leading campaigner in the field who has been appointed Chair of the national Sustainable Development Commission.

A full list of members of SSW, together with a list of organisations who support SSW's work financially can be found in the Appendix.

About the Regional Assembly

The Regional Assembly, formed in 2000 is a grouping of councillors representing local authorities in the region, together with representatives of various organisations with an interest in the region's economic, social and environmental well-being. There are currently 117 members. Meetings are held in Exeter and are open to the public. The Assembly has various purposes as well as the endorsement of this Framework:

- As the designated Regional Planning Body (RPB), it is responsible for preparing draft Regional Planning Guidance (including the Regional Transport Strategy), monitoring the final RPG, and preparing revisions to it.
- It provides a 'voice' for the region in national, european and international debates.
- It has the formal role of monitoring and scrutinising the work of the Regional Development Agency (SWRDA).

The Assembly's regular work is carried out through an Advisory Board and various officer Groups provide technical advice on issues like planning and transport.

