

August 2004

Taking It On - the South West region response

This region is a wonderful place to live and work - BUT we have some unsustainable trends:

- ⇓ Pockets of real poverty and poor health
- ⇓ Increasing traffic congestion
- ⇓ Much poor quality, energy inefficient and unaffordable housing
- ⇓ Huge inequalities in access to services and cultural and leisure activities
- ⇓ Household waste increasing by 100,000 tonnes every year
- ⇓ Environmental assets, including landscapes and wildlife, increasingly under threat from unsustainable development
- ⇓ An increasing % of tourists visiting the region by car
- ⇓ A low wage economy and poor graduate retention
- ⇓ Farm incomes under pressure

Other Key Factors:

- ⇒ We are the fastest growing region in the UK
- ⇒ The South West has the most ageing population of any UK region
- ⇒ Climate Change impacts are increasingly affecting our way of life

In a recent public opinion poll* residents voted the environment as the thing they most valued about the South West. Our biggest sustainability challenge is:

learning how to combine growth and economic prosperity with social equity and environmental protection.

*see the South West Regional Assembly's Regional Public Opinion Survey, Phase 1, 18th June 2004 at www.southwest-ra.gov.uk/swra/ourwork/integratedregionalstrategy

A sustainable future for the South West?

The South West's hallmark is its rich diversity and environment. While five million people live in the region - over 15 million visitors are drawn here annually by our fabulous natural, built and cultural heritage. All these 'temporary residents' bring many benefits including jobs but also create more traffic and waste, use natural resources and increase our CO2 emissions.

The region's geography presents big challenges in terms of access, particularly as we have a growing and ageing population to serve. Providing more integrated, locally-based services, ICT based help and information and more local sourcing of goods and services is becoming a key sustainability priority. Our attractive environment raises house prices and we need to increase housing affordability and decrease running costs for those on lower incomes.

The region's economy is also distinguished by its diversity, with marked variations in the health of our local economies. For many, working in the South West offers more opportunities for a healthier lifestyle including a better work/life balance. If the region is to protect its special quality of life, our approach to business development and practice must be to adopt sustainability principles. The region needs new sustainability learning and skills to deliver sustainable development. Leadership that adopts a longer-term approach to governance in the region will be crucial to achieve progress.

Key Messages from the consultation

The National Sustainable Development Strategy identified 4 key priorities for action: climate change and energy; sustainable consumption, production & the use of natural resources; environment & social justice and helping communities to help themselves. Whilst many of our consultation responses relate to these headings, **these priorities did not emphasise the South West's particular priorities for action** which are summarised below. There was also a strong desire to see action to **deliver** the national strategy.

Action for Sustainability in the South West

Provide the leadership, learning, skills & innovation needed to:

- ✓ Manage a growing and ageing population in the most sustainable way.
- ✓ Provide more affordable, sustainably sited and constructed housing.
- ✓ Reduce the need to travel/distances travelled (and associated CO2 emissions) to access goods and services by residents and visitors.
- ✓ Sustainably manage our natural and cultural resources whilst adapting to climate change.

1. What are the main challenges for delivering sustainable development in the South West region? *n.b. responses not necessarily listed in priority order*

1.1 **Education** for all (including businesses) to explain that genuinely sustainable development means integrating social and economic progress with environmental protection and that it is very unlikely to be achieved by progressing these elements separately.

1.2 **Learning the skills - especially the leadership skills - to *deliver*** this integrated approach in ways that meet the particular needs of the South West including:

- Mitigating against, and adapting to, climate change impacts
- The sustainable management of natural resources and development of renewable energy resources
- Minimising waste and managing it more efficiently
- Protecting and enhancing our natural environment, nature conservation assets and built environment including urban green space
- Providing affordable, sustainably constructed and sited housing and businesses
- Promoting sustainable tourism
- Promoting sustainable management of agriculture and coastal waters
- Promoting local and regional sourcing of goods and materials
- Reducing deprivation and the low wage sector
- Reducing distances travelled to access integrated services including better use of ICT
- Supporting more sustainable market town regeneration
- Developing sustainable solutions to growth and our demographic changes including the ageing population
- Embracing the long term benefits of sustainable investment vs. short term increased costs

1.3 **Unresolved Issues**

- Responding to the challenge of **access**/transport - there are two different views on tackling this within the region (although both support increased use of ICT/Broadband):
 - a. Focussing on improving communications infrastructure (including road-building and airport expansion to increase links to outside the region) to mitigate against the perceived 'geographical peripherality' of large parts of the region.
 - b. Focussing on improving access (as opposed to transport per se) within the region, with an emphasis on developing/promoting the use of more locally-based goods and services.
- Developing sustainable solutions to the needs of **population growth and the ageing population** - differing submissions have ranged from positively assisting with 'overheating' in the South East to developing more locally-based economies and smaller, more local multi-use public services centres.

2. How can the Regional Agencies and bodies better deliver sustainable development? *n.b. responses not necessarily listed in priority order*

- 2.1 By investing in new systems to engage everyone to participate in public decision making for the future sharing in the responsibility of **leadership for the long term**.
- 2.2 By adopting the principles of sustainability as the key driver of policy and business practices.
- 2.3 By developing integrated regional policies and working.
- 2.4 By taking on more of a championing and leadership role with the wider public.
- 2.5 By providing the Regional Development Agency with more support to promote sustainable economic development that takes a more integrated approach.
- 2.6 By adopting a common sustainability appraisal tool based on the Regional Sustainable Development Framework.
- 2.7 By identifying and promoting examples of SD success.
- 2.8 By linking up with local delivery mechanisms eg LSP's.
- 2.9 Make **long term investment** grants/loans available recognising the longer payback periods of a more sustainable approach.
- 2.10 Through integrating sustainable development into the new Regional Spatial Strategy.
- 2.11 By regional agencies adopting and reporting on their own sustainable business practices.
- 2.12 By showing practical leadership (e.g. in procurement, sustainable construction, sustainable tourism, energy efficiency etc.).
- 2.13 Strengthening the role and capacity of Sustainability South West.

3. What contributions from the local level would help the region to improve delivery of sustainable development at the regional level?

n.b. responses not necessarily listed in priority order

- 3.1 Securing a statutory duty for local authorities to deliver sustainable development.
- 3.2 Local strategic partnerships/community strategies demonstrating how they have taken account of the Regional Sustainable Development Framework.
- 3.3 Sharing in the responsibility of leadership for the long term including encouraging more engagement in local decision-making, particularly with the more 'difficult-to-reach' groups.
- 3.4 Boosting capacity to deliver sustainable development - matching resources to aspirations.
- 3.5 Supporting community sustainability champions and better networking between local initiatives.

4. How can regional sustainable development frameworks (rsdfs) better contribute to the delivery of sustainable development?

n.b. responses not necessarily listed in priority order

- 4.1 By elevating their status to become mandatory guidance documents for other regional strategies together with greater resources to strengthen the impact they can have on the delivery of sustainable development outcomes. This would support their intended role as the overarching framework against which regional policies and projects are developed.
- 4.2 By identifying priorities for action and focus on delivery - what to do and how to do it with a direct link to the delivery of local community plans.
- 4.3 By concentrating on specific regional priorities.
- 4.4 By establishing a set of short, medium and long-term goals.
- 4.5 By being regularly updated and used as a formal tool by regional bodies who would report annually on their own contribution.

The South West RSDF has made a difference in encouraging organisations to work together, undertaking regional appraisals and through other spin-off partnership initiatives including:

- ⇒ Sustainable construction - the 'Future Foundations' initiative
- ⇒ Skills and Learning - the 'Way Ahead' initiative
- ⇒ Sustainable Tourism - the 'Future Footprints' initiative

The region will be updating the RSDF and will take on board feedback received during the Taking It On consultation.

5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current UK and regional sustainable development indicators and how they are used?

n.b. responses not necessarily listed in priority order

National:

- 5.1 The indicators are not well known, well used or joined-up with other indicators from Government.
- 5.2 There are some data problems, for example, the waste indicator.
- 5.3 The indicators persist with GDP as a headline indicator of sustainability - the UK set does not yet address growth or productivity that has social benefits without harming the environment.
- 5.4 Measurement of UK indicators should report against the effectiveness of sustainable development policy as well as informing wider policymaking.

Regional:

- 5.5 Additional data, informing more integrated intelligence, needs to be gathered at a regional level to help assess future progress against the RSDF.
- 5.6 Regional debate is also needed on whether the use of indicators alone is sufficient or whether alternative or additional methods are needed to measure progress.
- 5.7 The current indicators do not inspire the general public to engage and media coverage is poor.

6. How can central government help us as a region to deliver sustainable development? *n.b. responses not necessarily listed in priority order*

- 6.1 By providing leadership for sustainable development as a top priority across government departments - demonstrating consistency, clarity and commitment.
- 6.2 By adopting fiscal incentives/disincentives to promote sustainable consumption, waste minimisation and climate change mitigation - ensuring the availability of appropriately targeted support to alleviate any temporary economic deprivation incurred.
- 6.3 By providing national clarity and guidance on the meaning and integrated practice of SD.
- 6.4 By providing a legal framework for sustainable procurement that also supports global fair trade and ethical investment.
- 6.5 By replacing the GDP as a measure of sustainability.
- 6.6 By providing national funding for regional sustainable development roundtables to increase their capacity to promote sustainable regional outcomes.
- 6.7 By working with communications/media experts to deliver sustainable development messages more effectively.
- 6.8 By assisting in managing change in our natural and manmade landscapes caused by climate change, the requirement for renewable energy and population growth/demographic change through a more inclusive planning system that is led by the need for sustainable development.
- 6.9 By integrating SD performance indicators into existing statutory performance monitoring systems to apply at the national, regional and local levels.

Sustainability South West has coordinated the region's response to Taking It On. The response reflects the diversity of views expressed and does not represent a regional position statement. The region held a consultation event and the views of over 100 stake holders from organisations and businesses from around the region were taken into account. In addition the following agencies/organisations submitted comments during the consultation period:

Government Office for the South West
The South West Regional Assembly
The South West of England Regional Development Agency
The Environment Agency
English Nature
The Woodland Trust
South Gloucestershire Council
Local Sustainability Group South West
Cornwall County Council
South Somerset District Council
Envolve
Somerset Trust for Sustainable Development
Sustainability South West
Co2 balance ltd
WWF

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