

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES PROGRAMME

An evaluation study for ENCAMS

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1. INTRODUCTION

The first Sustainable Communities project was established by Going for Green and Forward Scotland in 1995 (Forward Scotland was responsible for Going for Green in Scotland). 21 pilot projects were established: eight in England, two in Wales, nine in Scotland and two in universities. These pilots were completed in March 1999.

In November 1998, funding was sought from the National Lottery Charities Board for three years funding to build on these initial pilots and to launch a Sustainable Communities Programme (SCP). This evaluation report focuses on this second initiative, which ran from 1999 to 2002. A questionnaire-based interim review of the programme was undertaken during 2001, and the results are summarised in Annex D.

The brief for the evaluation required that the research and report be designed to examine the learning processes experienced by community groups to 'enable those working to enhance local sustainability to better understand the process of bringing about change and to develop their practice accordingly' (tender brief, July 2001). Rather than attempt an in depth study and analysis of these learning processes, the brief stated that 'the study should be concise and directly related to the work' of the SCP.

This study has been carried out as part of a larger project which includes undertaking a similar evaluation of ENCAMS Urban Britain in Bloom programme (UBiB), in order to make proposals for the development of joint UBiB/SCP learning networks in order to maximise the sharing and dissemination of learning from the two programmes.

It should be noted that various organisational changes have taken place since the SCP was established:

- Going for Green merged with the Tidy Britain Group in 2002 to form Environmental Campaigns (ENCAMS); all references to either body in this document use the ENCAMS name even though the specific reference may pre-date the change of name.
- The National Lottery Charities Board (NLCB) has been renamed the Community Fund. The same principle refers as to ENCAMS; the funder is referred to as the Community Fund throughout this document.
- The original two partners in the SCP were joined in 2000 by the Sustainable Northern Ireland Programme (SNIP). SNIP has since run the SCP in Northern Ireland.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology proposed in the evaluation brief was a review of documentation and meetings with regional and national staff.

In practice, a rather more detailed examination was undertaken involving:

- Meetings with national staff (Claire Abbott, SCP National Co-ordinator; Peter Hirst, ENCAMS Director of Policy and Practice; and Brian Johnson, Director of Local Environmental Research).
- Attendance at the national SCP management committee meeting in March 2002.
- Meeting with all regional Sustainable Communities Programme Officers (SCPOs) in March 2001 to discuss the scope of the evaluation and gather initial data on achievements and lessons.
- Telephone interviews with all seven regional SCPOs, and the Directors of SNIP (Sustainable Northern Ireland Programme) and Forward Scotland.
- Telephone interviews with 18 of the 56 local groups working with SCP at the time (April to July 2002). The choice of groups was made by the evaluator, in discussion with the UK SCP Co-ordinator, to ensure a good geographical mix and a broad range of types of groups.

Although a relatively small proportion of SCP groups was identified for interview, the consistency of their responses suggests that the views received may be taken as indicative of a wider consensus.

For more details, see Annex A for the list of groups identified for interview, and Annex B for the questionnaire used in the telephone interviews with staff and with local groups.

The notes from all interviews and meetings were used to undertake the analysis contained in this report. The key questions for the analysis were set out in the brief for the evaluation:

- The learning processes experienced by community groups in enhancing the sustainability of their neighbourhood, directly related to the work of the SCPOs
- The operating context, particularly the role of local government and other agencies that have an impact on groups in achieving local sustainability, and the wider national context
- Issues of project design and the appropriateness of different management arrangements in enabling the building of sustainable communities, particularly identifying the lessons learned so they can be taken into account when designing future projects involving sustainable communities
- New forms of evaluation and project appraisal suitable for sustainable communities.

However, as the work progressed there were also demands for a description of actual activities and achievements to be provided alongside the more analytical approach, so that the lessons could be understood in relation to what was actually being done on the ground.

The approach to analysis and drafting was to examine the interview reports and summarise the data in relation to:

- the extent to which they met the aims and objectives for the programme overall
- specific information available to address the four key questions identified in the brief.

3. SCP AIMS AND APPROACH

The aims of the Sustainable Communities Programme (SCP) were described in various different ways in different documentation produced at different times during the operation of the programme. A summary of the various aims and objectives are outlined below.

- The funding bid to the Community Fund stated that the SCP was established 'to develop and promote Going for Green's community approach to sustainable development' (in partnership with Forward Scotland). The bid explained that the SCP was responding to a 'demand to roll out the project [following the pilots] and to provide the tools to enable more local authorities ... to involve people in community-based action leading to more environmentally responsible, health promoting and economically beneficial lifestyles'.

The bid explained that Going for Green was founded in 1995 as part of the UK Government's response to the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. It was described in the bid as 'the UK's biggest sustainable development public awareness campaign', and was funded by the Government (through the DETR) and the private sector. Going for Green encouraged individuals to make small lifestyle changes which could reduce damage to the environment, under a five point plan:

- cutting down on waste
- saving energy and natural resources
- travelling sensibly
- preventing pollution
- looking after the local environment and encouraging biodiversity.

Initiatives under the SCP were intended to contribute to these overall objectives, and were expected to include schemes such as walk to school, waste minimisation and recycling, local environmental improvement schemes and anti-litter campaigns. It was intended that the programme should extend out from the initial 21 pilot areas and work with neighbouring communities / authorities.

- The funding bid also stated that the SCP mechanism aimed to 'inform, educate, support, enable and empower individuals, bringing communities together to make a real difference by demystifying sustainable development'.
- The supplementary sheet accompanying the bid stated that the aim was to 'initiate and support at least 60 local projects, all of which will deliver community identified initiatives which improve quality of life, help to build a greater sense of local community and support sustainable lifestyles'.
- The business plan, which accompanied the bid, stated a two-fold aim in slightly different terms:
 - To extend the work [from the pilots] to a further 60 communities via 30 local authorities over two years. These additional communities were to be especially those facing the greatest disadvantage.
 - To 'support Going for Green to learn from the experience of communities in order to publish comprehensive guidance materials in year two, enabling a nationwide sustainable communities programme to be developed within three years'. From March 1999 it was proposed 'to develop "learning networks" of communities and local authorities, centred on the existing pilot projects, enabling the pilots to share their experiences'.

The nationwide programme of sustainable communities 'would give the opportunity to everyone in the UK to become involved in action within their local community designed to improve quality of life, build a greater sense of community and support sustainable lifestyles'.

The business plan then went on to articulate two further aims (followed by detailed objectives) for the programme, as follows:

- Encourage people to take part in activities within their community which will improve quality of life, build a greater sense of local community and support sustainable lifestyles.
- Provide skills, confidence and opportunities enabling people to participate more effectively in local decision making, contributing to the longer term sustainability of communities.

It can be seen from the above that SCP was essentially seen as a capacity building and community development approach to sustainable development. The business plan explained that the method, piloted in the original 21 areas, was to work 'with a community, to understand its history, mapping the existing organisations and initiatives', and then involve residents in planning and managing local initiatives which address their concerns and priorities. To support the work, 'the project assembles a steering group of local agencies and organisations and encourages the formation of local multi-agency partnerships'.

The outcomes foreseen for the project were, in summary:

- A 'sense of empowerment' for the people involved in the project (forecast: 90,000).
- People benefiting from increased community 'cohesion' and from 'the improved quality of the local environment', to be measured by attitude and awareness surveys.
- Local authorities were expected to be able to work towards 'building their own sustainable communities' - identifying communities in their areas most likely to benefit from the project, undertake work with those communities to scope a potential project and see how their existing programmes and initiatives might be delivered to 'most effectively meet local needs'.
- People involved were expected to 'have a better understanding of sustainable development', to 'participate in local action' with their communities to adopt 'more environmentally responsible, health promoting and economically beneficial lifestyles'.

- Specific benefits, overall and for every year (assuming 60 communities involved), included reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 65,000 tonnes; saving 56,700,000 litres of water; financial savings on fuel bills of £1,450,000; 3,000 people taking action for a healthier lifestyle; the composting of 16,750 tonnes of waste and recycling 450 tonnes of material. These benefits were expected by the end of the second year.

As well as implementing the SCP approach, the co-operating local authorities were expected to help identify:

- how best to integrate such community involvement within their existing initiatives (such as Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and Local Agenda 21 (LA21) programmes)
- how best to use the SCP approach to aid new ways of working such as community planning
- to identify good practice amongst a range of community types, and the guidance needed to facilitate the involvement of all authorities eventually.

The variation in the wording of the aims in different documents makes a straightforward evaluation against aims and objectives impossible. Although the wording has not made the aims and objectives internally contradictory, each statement places the various elements in a different order, making it difficult to pin down exactly what the priorities of the programme were at any given point.

The most important aspect of this confusion is the lack of clarity about the relative priority given to the community development approach (eg capacity building, empowerment, participation etc), and the environmental and quality of life outcomes (eg health, or reducing carbon emissions, water use or waste generation).

Moreover, the relative importance of working with communities, or with / through local authorities, is equally unclear. This could be seen as an advantage to programme staff, allowing them to develop relationships, use approaches and create new initiatives which were relevant to specific local circumstances. Indeed, the programme may have been designed to enable that sort of flexible local approach and some staff clearly found that to be a benefit. However, it is possible to be clear AND flexible, and lack of clarity over objectives and priorities does reduce the ability of the programme overall to show clear UK-wide achievements against objectives.

For the purposes of this evaluation, therefore, we propose the following summary of objectives against which to evaluate the programme, so that the evaluation can follow a relatively clear framework:

- community development and capacity building (including empowerment and participation)
- environmental activities (including improving environmental quality)
- understanding of sustainable development
- development of sustainable communities.

As mentioned above, the brief for the evaluation also required examination of four other key elements of the programme:

- project design and management arrangements
- operating context
- learning processes experienced by community groups
- new forms of evaluation and project appraisal processes suitable for sustainable communities.

In order to evaluate the programme against the four summary objectives, and to examine the performance of the programme in relation to the four elements outlined in the brief for the evaluation, the activities undertaken through the programme are described and examined in the next section of this report.

4. THE SCP IN PRACTICE

4.1 Staffing and management arrangements

The Sustainable Communities Programme (SCP) was set up and operated very differently in England and Wales from operations in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

- In England and Wales, the five Sustainable Community Programme Officers (SCPOs) were recruited on a common job description and salary scale, and reported to ENCAMS Regional Directors. The SCPOs' responsibilities were to 'guide the participating communities and authorities, enabling information exchange and mutual support'.

These staff were seen to be 'responsible for continuing to provide local support to the communities within the existing pilot project in their area' and to 'act as mentor for other communities adopting the model'. They were also to be responsible for supporting the use of the *On the Street Where You Live* packs, and the use of Community EcoCal; for data gathering for monitoring and evaluation; for providing a local point of contact for the project; and for maintaining detailed knowledge of project progress through regular contact with communities.

The original funding bid did not place responsibility for learning networks within these posts, although later versions did include this task and it was included in later versions of SCPOs' job descriptions.

- In Scotland, Forward Scotland were keen to take a more proactive role than simply 'hosting' a member of staff and it was agreed that the SCPO in Scotland would be recruited and line-managed by Forward Scotland. The Forward Scotland board agreed that this SCPO should be on a higher salary scale and different job description to other SCPOs (the salary here was around £22,000, with the additional £5,000 subsidised by Forward Scotland).
- In Northern Ireland, the SCPO was originally recruited and line-managed through Tidy Northern Ireland (the ENCAMS sister organisation). When the original member of staff left, the new officer was appointed through the Sustainable Northern Ireland Programme (SNIP) and nominally line-managed half and half by Tidy Northern Ireland and SNIP. That officer left after a year and the next officer was recruited into a post which was seen as a SNIP post, funded by the SCP and working to a work programme agreed by ENCAMS. When that officer left, the remaining work for the SCP has been completed on a consultancy basis, managed by SNIP.

These differences fundamentally affected the priorities of work undertaken by SCPOs, and the nature of the approaches taken.

In addition to the line management linkages, each SCPO was expected to liaise directly with the SCP UK Co-ordinator (see below) and the UK SCP Development Manager (a nominated member of ENCAMS senior national staff). Initially, the UK SCP Co-ordinator was appointed to oversee the project with key tasks relating to ensuring good communications among the local schemes, including by establishing a project newsletter, interactive website, and through project meetings and visits. This employee was also expected to be responsible for encouraging and supporting contact with learning networks.

When the original Co-ordinator left, the role was changed to focus on ensuring that the SCP as a whole was working towards the task plan for each particular year of the grant. They were also to lead on the development of materials and to support the SCPOs through visits and organising team meetings of the SCPOs to strengthen communications. These were the Co-ordinators' priorities until the end of the programme.

Other management arrangements included:

- A UK SCP management group was established, made up of the UK Co-ordinator and representatives from ENCAMS, SNIP and Forward Scotland. This group met at regular intervals.

- The funding bid proposed that a variety of local management, steering and learning groups should be set up including Local Management Groups (to be made up entirely of 'those benefiting from the project' eg householders, representatives of tenants and residents groups, parish councillors, reps of local voluntary and community groups, schools and businesses); community-wide steering groups and learning networks. These groups were established in a variety of forms in different localities.
- Regular meetings of the regional SCPOs. The nature of these meetings changed over time with the nature of the programme and the personalities of the staff working on it. The meetings were a chance to share information and experiences and to talk through both local and national priorities. Meetings were serviced by the UK Co-ordinator.

Links were also made to other national organisations which had shared interests in the concept and practice of sustainable communities, particularly:

- Community Environment Resource Unit (CERU), which was formerly part of Community Development Foundation but had become independent. It was originally intended that SCP and CERU would jointly develop a support package for local authorities, but this proposal did not receive funding.
- Community Development Foundation (CDF), which could 'help disseminate the project to the community sector'.
- The Sustainable Communities Agencies Network (SCAN), which was developing frameworks for sustainable communities.
- Going for Green's Board and Co-ordinating Committee, through which the SCP could maintain close links with the Local Government Agency (LGA) and the UK Local Agenda 21 Steering Group, in order to 'help promote the work and findings of the project and to identify potential new participants'.

4.2 UK-wide plans and activities

The initial plans for UK-wide activities included:

- Appointment of staff: the UK Co-ordinator and seven SCPOs. All the staff were appointed as planned. As the UK Co-ordinator was an internal appointment, he started as soon as the grant was confirmed. The remainder of the staff were appointed between October and November 1999.
- A major national conference was planned to aid dissemination of the findings of the research on the pilot projects, and to promote the forthcoming rolling-out of the programme.

A two-day conference was held on 29-30 November 1999, jointly with Community Development Foundation. Over 140 delegates attended. On the first day, the new phase of the SCP was launched and practical lessons and experiences from the pilot phase were discussed; on the second day national policy issues and implications for developing sustainable communities were discussed. A conference report was produced.

- A series of seven regional seminars were planned (one in each region covered by an SCPO), also to contribute to dissemination of the findings from the research on the pilots and to launch the new programme. However, the regional seminars were also expected to enable the UK Co-ordinator and SCPOs to work with communities at grass roots level to help exchange expertise and to make links to the previous pilots, as the basis for future learning networks. The networks were originally programmed for establishment by the end of October 1999.

The regional seminars were not held in the form originally intended. Each of the seven regions organised networking events for their communities, but these events were not held until the end of the first and during the second and third years of the programme. These events were designed to network the community groups with the organisations and bodies who could help them achieve their aims eg local authorities, funding bodies, CVSs and community development workers (rather than linking to the pilot areas). Examples included two Building Sustainable Communities conferences in Northern Ireland (in 2000 and 2002);

Salsburgh and Newmains action plan launches; and a Celebrating Ponders End event in London.

- The development of supporting materials was intended to ensure participating authorities and communities were provided with appropriate skills and knowledge. Materials proposed included:
 - Step-by-step guidance for local communities: the *On the Street Where you Live* packs, which were published and launched in 2001. The toolkit was translated into Welsh during 2001-2002.
 - Community EcoCal: a computer and paper based 'environmental health check' designed to enable communities to measure their initial environmental impact and subsequent improvement. This was made available late in 2000.
 - A 'ten day support package' of training materials tailored to the needs of each local authority (two new local authorities were expected to be contacted in each of the areas neighbouring the pilot programmes).

The full local authority support package was never developed, as funding was refused. However, a handbook called *How to Make your Neighbourhood a Better Place to live*, aimed primarily at those working within local authorities and others working with community groups (as well as community groups themselves) was produced and launched at a Sustainable Communities Conference in January 2003. The publication, and the conference, were supported by Community Development Foundation and the IDEa.

- Establishment of a national information service, to support the work of the SCPOs. The idea of a computerised information service was abandoned as prohibitively expensive, so effort was focused on the printed materials.
- An awards scheme to highlight good progress towards building sustainable communities. Due to the unexpected delays in the recruitment of SCPOs and the slow start to the project, the awards scheme was not established.
- A UK SCP newsletter. One edition of a UK-wide SCP newsletter was published in April 2002 and distributed across the UK; UK-wide information was also available on the ENCAMS website from 2001. In addition, regional SCP newsletters were published in the North East of England, Northern Ireland, London and Wales.
- Other less formal opportunities for learning, training and support including 'skills development and training', in many cases through 'mutual skills sharing', were planned for SCPOs. The training provided for SCPOs included:
 - An initial one week induction training on working with communities and groups.
 - Mutual support and learning through the regular UK-wide SCPO meetings (mentioned above).
 - Training in facilitation through ICA:UK.
 - Funding for other training including attending courses organised by the Environmental Trainers Network eg on getting the wider community involved, fundraising, project management and media relations.
 - Opportunities to attend internal ENCAMS training courses.
- During the operation of the programme, and in order to provide further encouragement to potentially interested communities, closer links were made with Urban Britain in Bloom (UBiB), so that UBiB grants could be made available to SCP groups. By the end of August 2001, UBiB grants had already been made to groups in two of the seven areas; by January 2002 a further 25 grants had been given to SCP groups in all seven SCP areas (four groups got more than one UBiB grant). This was recognised as extremely useful by all SCPOs.

- UK-wide evaluation and monitoring were a priority in the work programme in the funding bid. Plans included ensuring that participating local communities would be 'fully involved in agreeing project evaluation and measurement'. Typical evaluation measures were expected to be:
 - the participation of minority community members in community activities eg ethnic minorities or people with disabilities
 - numbers of community businesses and other economic initiatives
 - the proportion of housing which is properly insulated
 - the provision of recycling facilities.

This information was expected to be collected through:

- Six-monthly network meetings of all participating authorities to document their actions, documenting training and advice provided (and recommended next steps), and agreeing milestones with each authority.
- The UK SCP management committee meetings.
- Six monthly reports to the UK office on numbers of people involved and Community EcoCal scores. This information was intended to track local progress 'towards becoming a sustainable community'.
- Annual household questionnaire surveys, started at the beginning of the project, to 'identify any change in the awareness, attitudes and actions of the community in relation to local quality of life, including quality of the local environment'.
- Self-evaluation (presumably by SCPOs) was also proposed, and for the SCPOs to pass skills on to communities.

In practice, none of these evaluation and monitoring mechanisms was used. The approach to the programme changed from a focus on environmental and quality of life outcomes to a much greater focus on community development, and the original approach to monitoring and evaluation was considered inappropriate. There was also an overall shift from working with and through local authorities, to working directly with community groups, so the meetings of participating local authorities were not considered a priority.

In addition, it had been agreed, in discussion with SCPOs, that formal baseline reporting through the use of questionnaires was not appropriate. Household surveys to monitor changes in awareness, attitudes and actions were abandoned as prohibitively expensive.

Each SCPO was expected to write a monthly report, for Regional Directors, detailing the activity in their area, what had been achieved and what the priority would be for the coming month. No national collation of this data was done. However, a report on the early stages, First Steps with Communities, was produced, summarising the initial work of the programme.

Overall, there were some difficult problems at national level, particularly around management and staffing, and the production of materials, as outlined in more detail below.

- **Management and staffing.** There have been some major staffing problems. The original UK Co-ordinator (Stuart Pritchard) was an internal appointment and was thus able to take up the post immediately upon notification of the grant (August 1999). At this point, the original SCP development manager left on maternity leave, and others in ENCAMS encouraged the programme towards a more community development approach. Stuart Pritchard left in July 2001 and there was a gap of several months before Claire Abbott was appointed in October 2001.

Only one SCPO remained in post for the whole of the programme (in Wales). In the North East, the SCPO left soon after taking up the post and the replacement did not start until February 2000. In Scotland, the first SCPO started in November 1999 and left in June 2000, and replacement interviews did not take place until October 2000. In Northern Ireland, the worker resigned in August 2000 and the work in Northern Ireland was then taken over through a partnership between SCP and SNIP (Sustainable Northern Ireland Programme). In the second year of the programme, four more staff resigned and those positions were eventually filled again.

Data from the interviews suggests that this very high staff turnover was due to the SCP being seriously under-resourced at staff level. The pressures on staff to cover wide geographical areas, build relationships with different communities, create positive relationships with local authorities, and co-ordinate learning and dissemination, were

enormous while the rewards were small: posts were short term and salaries and security were low, with starting salaries for SCPOs at around £15,500 (in 1999) compared to standard community work starting salaries of around £20,000. As mentioned earlier, the situation was different in Scotland, where a different job description and higher salary level (£5,000 more) was implemented.

The high staff turnover, with gaps between staff leaving and being replaced, not only meant much reduced continuity in the programme at local level, but also fewer resources and a less powerful dynamic in the SCP national team.

Management support for staff was also problematic. The SCP community-based approach is based on very different methods and priorities from mainstream ENCAMS work. ENCAMS tends to focus on formal and technical approaches, within an agenda increasingly focused on Local Environmental Quality, implemented through hierarchical institutional links (primarily with local authorities), while the SCP approach is to focus on developing relationships of trust and support with local community groups through non-hierarchical networking and community development methods. Some of ENCAMS mainstream staff did not necessarily fully understand the different community-based methods being employed through SCP, nor did they always recognise the value of these methods.

As a result, the SCP team often felt isolated from their ENCAMS colleagues at regional level, which made the national support even more important. When there was a hiatus in national support, as a result of the first UK Co-ordinator leaving and the post remaining unfilled for some months, there was naturally a drop in morale and overall dynamic.

- **Resources and products.** The feedback from the interviews suggested that staff found that the various products which were provided by the SCP nationally (eg packs) did not come at the right time and were not necessarily appropriate to their needs: one commented that the packs were 'too flash, too English and too expensive-looking'.

There were particular criticisms of Community EcoCal eg 'nothing locals did not know already'; not liked and not used; 'never let anyone look at it - not yet got one which works'; 'groups not at a stage where can look at environmental indicators'; 'not fully developed'; too technical and no good unless computer literate, which many are not; no training given to staff on how to use it; a 'distraction'.

The *On the Street Where You Live* toolkit was considered to have arrived too late for SCPOs to use it to establish relationships with groups, although it may be useful for groups to use on their own after the programme has closed.

The handbook for working with larger groups and local authorities, *How to Make your Neighbourhood a Better Place to Live*, was not published and launched until January 2003.

As a result of these delays and criticisms, the UK resources and products have not been used extensively within the SCP. The programme managers felt that one reason for this was that assumptions had been made in the bid before the emerging findings of the pilot study could steer the type of products required. As a result, the products initially planned became inappropriate as the programme was fully implemented.

On a more general point, the role of printed materials in community development-based processes does need to be carefully considered in the design of any future programmes. Any materials produced by programmes such as SCP will be used alongside other existing materials (known to local workers and to local groups), and will form only one part of an approach which is essentially based on working closely with groups and individuals. However, it is worth noting that:

- When materials are promised and not delivered, it can undermine the effectiveness of local working, however valid the reasons for delays.
- Materials can be very important and valuable in setting a shared identity for a programme, especially in reinforcing the links between local workers and a UK-wide programme.
- Materials can help establish a common national framework within which local work can take place.

Thus, although materials will only ever be one part of a community development approach to sustainable communities, they can be a valuable part.

4.3 Regional and local plans and activities

The focus of the work at local level was always intended to be based on local data gathering and planning. The original funding bid to the Community Fund worded it as follows: 'At the heart of the project is the drawing up of community plans', to be done by the local management group in consultation with all local residents.

Initially the intention was to build on the work carried out in the 21 pilot projects, and to extend the relationships which had been created between the programme and individual local authorities by continuing those links and building new areas of work with (two) neighbouring authorities.

However, as the first SCP annual report to the Community Fund pointed out that 'Due to the time lag between the conclusion of the pilots and the start of the new programme, it was not possible to sustain relationships with the old pilot local authorities'. New areas had to be identified and new relationships built from scratch.

The target was to work with 60 communities via 30 local authorities, with a focus on those communities facing the greatest disadvantage (as outlined in the business plan accompanying the initial funding bid). By the end of August 2001, 21 community groups were linked to the programme and it was decided to extend the boundaries of the scheme to include communities of interest as well as geographical communities. By December 2001, 56 communities had become involved (in the seven areas), and the total had reached 60 communities by the end of the programme.

The ways in which the localities were identified differed between England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

- In England and Wales, the national announcement of the launch of the SCP was followed by an invitation sent to all local authorities, encouraging them to tender to host SCP projects. The initial selection of areas was based on this process. Considerable development time was needed from SCPOs to establish these new relationships, and to reach out into new areas in order to meet the overall target.
- A similar publicity and launch programme was used in Northern Ireland, leading to the establishment of some local initiatives with local authorities but also some direct relationships with community groups which had responded to the publicity. When SNIP took over the programme, the relationship between ENCAMS, the SCPO and the local authorities changed as SNIP already had relationships with all 26 of the local authorities in Northern Ireland - and in any case local authorities in Northern Ireland have very different statutory responsibilities than in the rest of the UK (including no responsibility for land use or strategic planning).

Also, SNIP already had good relationships with a wide range of community groups and understood the very different context of working at community level in Northern Ireland. Not only were almost all community groups formed within one or other of the religious communities (Catholic or Protestant), but an enormous investment in community development had been made over recent years (primarily by the European Commission), and many groups were very sophisticated, had their own substantial assets, and had already established their own local priorities.

- A different approach again was taken in Scotland. Following the initial launch publicity at UK level, Forward Scotland prioritised work with areas of deprivation, lack of Community Fund funding, potential for access to funding from landfill tax, the opportunities for good partnerships on sustainable development (ie those who were still interested but had not yet made the issue mainstream), and realistic geographical spread for the SCPO to cover.

An initial list of eight to ten local authorities was identified, on the basis of deprivation criteria and the absence of Community Fund funding, and these were then reduced to the final three authorities by considering the other criteria. The SCPO eventually developed long term relationships with three authorities: North Lanarkshire, Aberdeen and Fife.

The whole process was lengthy and demanding, but finding the right partners, negotiating access formally with the local authority and working alongside the existing community development services were seen as a priority for Forward Scotland.

The differences in approach to working with local authorities have continued beyond the initial identification of localities process. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, relationships with local authorities have continued to be a priority. For example:

- In Northern Ireland, the SCPO has been involved in running conferences, networking meetings, pilot projects (eg on EMS and sustainability indicators) with local authorities, especially working with Local Agenda 21 (LA21) and environmental co-ordinators (until the LA21 posts began to disappear after the December 2001 deadline for writing LA21 strategies).
- In Scotland, the actual choice of neighbourhoods in which to work with community groups was made in partnership with the local authorities. No specific local authority departments were targeted, but the priority was to focus on those departments working on community services (eg community development, community education, leisure and recreation), rather than LA21. Effort was also put into developing cross-departmental links, and to working closely with councillors. At local level, the SCPO focused on community development and capacity building, and liaised with the local authority, the community development workers and local communities to develop joint projects and activities.

Forward Scotland has invested considerable time and effort in building these relationships at local and country-wide levels, and had developed a 'co-operation agreement' which was designed to formalise the relationships with local authorities by reducing the potential for misunderstandings.

- In England and Wales, there has been a great variety of approaches to working with local authorities, according to local circumstances. For example, in the North East of England, links to local authorities have been mainly as a result of the SCPO working with existing partnership bodies on which the local authority is also represented (eg bodies on neighbourhood renewal). In London, the approach was closer to that used in Scotland in that localities in which support to individual groups and projects was offered were identified in partnership with the four local authorities the SCPO was working with (the London boroughs of Barnet, Enfield, Hammersmith and Fulham, and Southwark). Other regions also used these approaches, and others.
- A special relationship has been developed by the SCP with Doncaster City Council. The Sustainable Communities Policy Development Officer in Doncaster is employed by the council on their own independent sustainable communities project, which was designed with advice from Peter Hirst of ENCAMS. The officer appointed here has become a member of the national group of SCPOs in order to participate in the national sharing of experience.

Here, the work started primarily with the local development trust in Conisbrough, with a focus on developing an action plan, but there has also been work in partnership with other local stakeholders including support for the formation of a tenants and residents association, and work to help groups with funding (including access to a major fund within the council).

The role of the officer in Doncaster is specifically to bring sustainable development and LA21 issues into the council's work with local groups. The ward in which the project initially worked was identified by Doncaster council, and four groups already existed in the area, working on related issues. This approach has had some benefits in that it is part of local authority activity and this provided close links to vital local services such as fire and police. However, until the officer became part of the SCPOs UK group, he lacked the connections to national thinking and sharing of experience.

It is clear from interviews with SCPOs and national SCP staff, that the relationships with local authorities had thrown up some clear benefits but also some problems (some of which are common to many national programmes operating at local level). The benefits included:

- There was considerable flexibility for SCPOs in establishing relationships with local authorities, which allowed a variety of approaches to be developed, with benefits for the overall programme in providing lessons from the diversity, and to ensure the most appropriate approaches for the local circumstances.
- Working with local authorities provided some good links which offered opportunities to incorporate sustainable development into wider programmes, including links to LSPs and community strategies (especially in London). Some links had also been made to local authority social inclusion policies and economic issues (Doncaster has done work on community enterprises).
- Some close working relationships had developed with local authority community workers, but the picture across the UK was very variable. There were strong links in Scotland, and in Wales a network of community workers had been set up in Pembrokeshire.

The problems included:

- It was sometimes difficult to get local authorities to commit to continuity, which made the local authority position quite difficult in relation to a short term programme such as the SCP.
- It was often difficult for SCP to fit into what already going on at local level when the national SCP also had its own priorities and goals. This is not a unique problem to the SCP and applies to many national programmes being implemented at local level. Some SCPOs were able to handle this sensitively and were very successful; others less so (as would be expected).
- Although in some places there was a positive view from the local authorities in identifying communities or neighbourhoods for SCP to work with / in, there were also cases when the local authority did not want the SCP to work in particular areas (eg social inclusion priority areas in one Scottish authority), which limited the coverage of the programme overall.
- Relationships depended a lot on the interest of individual officers, and on that individual officer remaining in the same post.
- In some areas it was found to be much easier to make relationships with council officers than with elected members (councillors), although this was a priority in some areas (particularly Scotland). Some councillors were very supportive, but elsewhere there were sometimes some conflicts with councillors over what they saw as their right and responsibility to represent local communities, and community groups' wishes to speak for themselves.
- Access for community groups to local authority (and other local) decision-making processes was generally found rather difficult. Six community forums were established in Doncaster, but this was not seen as a priority for the programme elsewhere. Groups were encouraged to relate to their local Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), and SCPOs circulated to all their groups the CDF / Forum for the Future booklet on how groups can feed into LSPs.
- There was no national framework for working with local authorities, so each relationship tended to be negotiated in isolation. In Scotland the formal 'co-operation agreement' was found to be very useful in some cases, but there was less enthusiasm for this type of formal arrangement elsewhere in the UK: SNIP already had links to all 26 local authorities in Northern Ireland, and had found little enthusiasm among its political partners for this type of formal agreement, and other SCPOs did not feel it was appropriate for their areas.

As mentioned above, the central focus for this work in most localities has been the development of Community Action Plans (CAPs), directly with local community groups. CAPs were prioritised in the original funding bids, but it took some time for progress to be made. As Stuart Pritchard, UK Co-ordinator, stated in the first annual report of the SCP (August 1999 to August 2000), 'given the community-based nature of the work, it has taken longer to establish work on the ground than had been anticipated when the bid was compiled'.

In practice, it seems that the CAPs varied in size and formality. Although action planning was undertaken in most communities to some degree, in many cases a formal CAP was not felt to be appropriate. Early national data suggested that most of the 31 communities involved in the programme had CAPs in place or 'awaiting ratification' at the end of August 2001, but only three

formal CAPs were made available for review in this study. However, there have been action planning weekends in Northern Ireland and major action planning events in London and West Midlands, as well as the informal planning undertaken by the groups at their own meetings.

Overall, the SCPOs found the CAP mechanism very useful as a framework for engaging with local groups and identifying local priorities for action. Some background detail is given below on where the local work took place, and progress in finalising CAPs. More details on the types of projects done by local groups are given in Annex C.

- **London.** The London SCPO worked in four different London boroughs:
 - Ponders End, Enfield
 - West Hendon, Barnet
 - Aylesbury and Alvey estates, Southwark
 - Clem Atlee estate, Hammersmith and Fulham.

CAPs have been completed in all four areas, with a formal launch in one (Ponders End).

- **West Midlands.** The West Midlands SCPO has worked in six areas, several in Birmingham:
 - Birmingham, Ladywood
 - Birmingham, Sparkbrook
 - Birmingham, Balsall Heath
 - Sydenham, Leamington Spa
 - Sandwell
 - Wellington.

Four CAPs have been produced and launched: the Sydenham Neighbourhood Initiative Business Plan, Balsall Heath Neighbourhood Development Plan, Ladywood Healthy Living Centre bid, and Wellington LA21 Group 'Sustainable Wellington'.

- **North East.** The SCPO here worked in seven areas:
 - Sulgrave, Sunderland
 - Thorney Close, Sunderland
 - Heaton, Newcastle
 - Moor Park, North Tyneside
 - Gresham Neighbourhood, Middlesbrough
 - Headland, Hartlepool
 - New Hartley, Blyth Valley.

Four CAPs have been completed for New Hartley, Gresham Neighbourhood, Heaton and Sulgrave. Action planning processes were also used in the other areas, and the information gathered used in other ways.

- **Wales.** The SCPO worked in three localities:
 - Harlech
 - Ogmere Valley, Bridgend
 - Monkton, Pembrokeshire.

One CAP has been completed and launched: Harlech The Way Forward. Action planning also took place in Monkton, but no formal plan was produced. The SCPO also worked with a 'community of interest': the Pembrokeshire Community Workers Network.

- **North West.** The SCPO worked in four areas:
 - Lache estate, Chester
 - Anfield and Breckfield, Liverpool
 - Shaw Heath, Stockport
 - Poulton, Morecambe.

Two CAPs were produced: Woodbine Crescent improvements action plan, Shaw Heath; and Shaw Heath park action plan. Action planning work in Poulton focused around a (successful) neighbourhood renewal funding application.

- **Scotland.** The SCPO worked in eight areas, with three local authorities:
 - Salsburgh, North Lanarkshire
 - Newmains, North Lanarkshire

- Middlefield, Aberdeen
- Seaton, Aberdeen
- Powis, Aberdeen
- Hill of Beith, Fife
- Townhill, Fife.

Two CAPs were completed and formally launched in January 2002: Smarter Salsburgh and Newmains Action Plan. The Scottish Executive gave a grant to publish these two CAPs, as examples of good practice.

In addition, action plans were produced for the Seaton Taking Action for Regeneration (STAR) group and for the community council in Seaton, to feed into the Aberdeen City Council's community plan (so no separate CAP was published). Also, a business plan and funding strategy was produced for Healthy Roots, an allotments group in Middlefield, and research and testing of local priorities developed in Crossgates, Fife (plus the same questionnaire was used in the other two Fife neighbourhoods).

- **Northern Ireland.** The SCPO worked with ten groups:
 - Ligoniel Recycling Group
 - Loughhall and District Improvement Association
 - Poleglass Youth and Community Group
 - Kilcooley Adventure Playground Group
 - Ballymoney Plugging the Leaks group
 - Belfast Community Recycling Network
 - Cloughmills Community Action Team
 - Eco Seeds (a co-operative)
 - Rasharkin Women's Group.

The focus in Northern Ireland was on a broad community development approach, with a particular interest in the recent past on waste minimisation. Formal CAPs were not undertaken as many of the community groups have been supported by community development workers for many years, have already undertaken numerous planning exercises and often already hold extensive assets. For this reason, the work focused on specific groups rather than neighbourhoods, and on providing support on specific new initiatives rather than on overall planning, as they had already identified local priorities. Here, SCP was one of a range of resources they could call on. However, there was formal action planning in Cloughmills and with the Rasharkin Women's Group (a residential action planning weekend).

5. ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF ACTIVITIES

The data above shows the wide geographical areas covered by the SCPOs, and the more detailed listings of projects, activities, training and learning opportunities outlined in Annex C illustrate the range of issues and problems tackled by the local work.

Overall, the findings from the interviews for this study were also very positive. The sorts of remarks made included that 'Communities have experienced tangible changes ... which will last a long time', and that the SCP had 'crossed barriers [and involved] a huge cross section of people'. Certainly, the building of relationships between the SCPOs and the local communities is seen by some as a crucial achievement, and one of the main benefits of the programme for many local groups has been precisely that support.

However, in order to assess the validity and value of these activities in relation to the overall objectives of the SCP, the following analysis is offered, drawing on the documentation provided and data from the interviews. This analysis is structured around the eight key areas identified in section 3 above, ie:

- community development and capacity building
- environmental activities
- understanding of sustainable development
- development of sustainable communities
- programme design and management arrangements
- operating context

- learning processes experienced by community groups
- new forms of evaluation and project appraisal suitable for sustainable communities.

5.1 Community development and capacity building

The whole SCP programme has seen a shift of emphasis since the original funding application was made, away from environmental outputs and outcomes, and towards a much stronger focus on community development.

It is important to clarify the meaning of community development and capacity building as we are using them in this report. We have used the definition of community development used in the *Achieving Better Community Development Handbook* (Barr and Hashagen 2000). This proposes that community development is 'an activity which confronts disadvantage, poverty and social exclusion, and promotes values of active citizenship, learning and community participation. It is about change based on empowerment, leading to a better quality of community life. While community development is usually local, it needs to be located within broader policy frameworks that recognise its role and understand its contribution.' (ibid 18).

Capacity building is often considered part of community development processes, which include learning as a value, alongside the acquisition of knowledge and skills for action. Capacity building can be directed at community groups, but it is also increasingly considered essential for those public, private and voluntary organisations which want to work more effectively with local communities.

This evaluation explicitly examined the support, learning and skills development opportunities provided through the SCP, and our findings were as follows:

- Support for local groups was provided through:
 - Formal support through SCPOs including work with local management groups, specific support on running meetings and setting up projects (eg help with budgets, fundraising, agreeing plans and priorities etc).
 - Informal mutual support developed through various group meetings at local level.
 - Visits to other communities as part of a planned 'community exchange programme' (although these were limited as no funding was available specifically for this).
- A range of more formal training and learning opportunities was provided for local groups by SCPOs including:
 - Training needs analysis and training provision, in numerous communities. For example, in Northern Ireland, every SCP group has been through a training needs analysis, plans have been made to provide training (which has started) and to fundraise to cover costs.
 - In the West Midlands there has been an SCP learning event for all groups.
 - A lifelong learning factsheet was produced for groups in London.
 - Various training days and seminars have been held for community group members and others (eg youth workers) on a range of issues including volunteers working with special needs children, environmental awareness campaigns, organic gardening (with BTCV), a farmers market seminar, action planning workshops, participatory appraisal training, hanging basket and general gardening training, energy efficiency, IT taster sessions, funding and managing projects.
 - Links with schools including after-school environment clubs, raising money for improvements to school grounds, environment days, Eco Schools work.
 - Links between community groups (eg a single mothers group) and training courses at local colleges.
 - Informal links to other local organisations and existing networks providing training and learning (eg CVSs).
- During 2001, the SCPOs developed a training menu for local groups. The menu was published as a leaflet and distributed to all groups the SCPOs were in contact with. It outlined the types of training that might be of interest to groups, and which the SCP could help provide or give access to. The topics for which training was offered included the following: fundraising, getting people involved, working in a group, managing conflict, finding information, making friends and influencing people, communication, Community Action Plans, organising events and campaigns, and sustainability. Groups were also invited to suggest additional topics.

- The original plans to hold seminars to transfer learning from the SCP pilot programme were mostly abandoned because of the time lag between the pilots finishing and the new programme getting underway. As a result, events of this type were only held in London, West Midlands and the North East.
- The initial design of the SCP included capacity building / learning and skills development for local authorities as well as local community groups. As funding was not available, these were not pursued although some SCPOs (eg in Scotland and London) worked very closely with local authority staff and elected members and have contributed to better relationships between them and local groups - including the establishment of more formal and long-lasting partnerships.
- There has been no overall strategic development of learning networks in the programme to date. The issues around learning networks are dealt with in more detail later in this report (see section 7).

Learning and skills development (often referred to as capacity building) is one important element of community development. However, the *ABCD Handbook* (Barr and Hashagen 2000) suggests there are actually two overarching dimensions to community development: one dimension concerned with community empowerment, and one concerned with quality of community life. Together, Barr and Hashagen argue, these help to create a healthy and strengthened community which is liveable, sustainable and equitable (ibid 23).

We will return to definitions of sustainable communities later in this report but, first, more detail is needed on these two key dimensions of community development. Barr and Hashagen summarise the constituent parts of these dimensions as follows:

- Community empowerment
 - personal empowerment (a learning community)
 - positive action (a fair and just community)
 - community organising (an active community)
 - participation and involvement (an influential community)
- Quality of community life
 - a shared wealth (community economic development)
 - a caring community (social and service development)
 - a safe and healthy community (community environmental action)
 - a creative community (arts and cultural development)
 - a citizens' community (governance and development)

For the purpose of this evaluation, the quality of community life dimensions are covered under other headings in this section (environmental outputs and outcomes, and development of sustainable communities). We will therefore focus here on the community empowerment dimensions. Using the ABCD framework, our findings are as follows.

- **Personal empowerment.** These are the processes through which individuals and groups of people gain the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to be able to take action on the matters that concern them. The SCP activities on learning, leading to a learning community, are covered above in the analysis of capacity building activities.

In addition, Barr and Hashagen suggest that 'experience is used as a route to learning' (ibid 27) and, using this approach, it can be seen that the SCP has provided many opportunities for local people (where the SCP has been active) to act positively on the matters that concern them: this was the basis for all the projects identified and run by local groups, the priorities in the action plans, all of which was supported by the SCPOs (see Annex C for more details on activities).

Many respondents felt there had been progress in empowering local communities, particularly through the action planning processes which were seen as inspirational in some cases. All these activities had contributed to building confidence, developing skills, creating greater understanding of community issues and needs, encouraging people to get involved in new activities, linked in some cases to formal education and training opportunities and qualifications.

There is less evidence of change in attitudes and behaviours of local agencies including local government, not least because the SCPOs tended to work with those in those organisations which already recognised the rights of communities to participate, and understood the benefits of this approach. However, there is certainly some evidence that the work of the SCPOs helped to strengthen those views in some localities, thus contributing to the development of long term support for empowerment.

- **Positive action.** Social justice and equity are core concepts within sustainable development, but they are often overlooked. The SCP did have a particular focus on working with disadvantaged and excluded communities. All SCP programmes were designed to be inclusive or, where appropriate, to focus on the specific needs of particular cultural groups (including black and minority ethnic groups). Projects included some designed explicitly to recognise and affirm different cultural heritages and identities. ENCAMS overall has equal opportunities policies and these were expected to be adhered to at local level, although this was not an explicit priority in the SCP.

The focus tended to be on specific projects with specific communities, and this can often be a useful first step to building confidence within communities, and familiarity between communities, leading on to fuller community cohesion over a longer timescale. There is less evidence that minority groups interests and needs have been recognised and taken into account in mainstream projects and programmes.

- **Community organising.** This was the central core of SCP activities at local level, and we can therefore confidently assert that the programme succeeded (in most areas) in encouraging people to be active in community organisations, developed useful new projects and services which were used by local residents, and understood more about community needs and assets (through the action planning). Some groups had begun to link to others in local networks, but this was the exception rather than the norm and, again, is likely to develop more over time (and see section 7 on learning networks).
- **Participation and involvement.** Within this category we will also consider the element from Barr and Hashagen's quality of community life dimension on a 'citizens' community', which covers governance and development issues (ie the means and mechanisms to facilitate ongoing improvements in the area).

Examples of work which contributed to this element of community development include:

- The work of the SCPOs to facilitate the involvement of local communities in major local developments (eg the Ladywood Healthy Living Centre, and the SYDI Centre, both in Birmingham); some of these initiatives were developed and managed by the community themselves.
- Six community forums were established in Doncaster to increase dialogue between communities and the local authority
- Local action planning exercises facilitated by the SCPO which fed into wider plans (eg in Aberdeen)
- A Time Bank was set up with two tenant and residents associations in Sandwell, West Midlands (case study for the national Time Bank scheme)
- There was considerable work around the country to help groups formalise their constitutions, and manage their budgets and finances more effectively, all of which helps strengthen long term community institutions. Examples include help with fund raising for various community schemes including a playground (in Northern Ireland), supporting the development of a multi-cultural community centre and worker (just under £1 million raised in West Midlands), and continuation of the SCP work by the local group (the Loughwinnick pilot SCP has been awarded £90,000 for an extension to the project, with an additional worker who started in March 2002).

Overall, however, the balance of activity within the SCP has been on setting up and supporting individual groups and projects, rather than establishing longer term mechanisms for involvement and influence.

Overall, the contribution of the SCP to community development and capacity building, in the localities in which the SCPOs operated, has been significant in terms of the empowerment dimensions identified in Barr and Hashagen.

5.2 Environmental activities

The actual projects undertaken by local groups were, in practice, largely environmental. Fuller details of local projects are given in Annex C, but examples include:

- Energy efficiency
 - Energy efficiency advice to tenants and residents, including provision of free low energy light bulbs.
 - Work with the North East Regional Development Agency (RDA), One North East, to help make the RDA office a sustainable workplace.
 - Community consortium for energy supply.
- Reducing waste and increasing recycling
 - Recycling unwanted goods into charity shops.
 - Recycling abandoned bicycles (scheme called Recyclist).
 - Repairing and recycling unwanted furniture.
 - Community composting schemes for garden and other organic waste.
 - Youth activities, and school links, around the Going for Green Waste theme month.
 - Feasibility study for major recycling project.
 - Cash for cans day.
 - Clean up events / Just Bin It / litter picks.
- Local environmental improvements
 - Planning for better management of green and open spaces.
 - Allotments with refugee group.
 - Establishment of community gardens, including on waste land.
 - Action on dog fouling including surveys and plans for action.
 - Support for various gardening groups, with training and tool sharing provided and special gardening days and other events. Includes work on gardening with groups which are often excluded eg the Refugee gardening group (and support network) in the West Midlands.
 - Healthy Roots project.
 - Health walks.
 - Hanging baskets, including training on establishment and maintenance.
 - Bulb planting.

These examples illustrate the range of environmental projects undertaken, but there is much less evidence of the environmental outputs and outcomes which have resulted because the techniques which were intended to measure these environmental outputs and outcomes (eg surveys and the collation of data from the Community Eco-Cal) were never used widely enough to provide sufficient data for this analysis. However, we can expect that at least some environmental benefits resulted simply as a result of the activities undertaken.

5.3 Understanding of sustainable development

Sustainable development is a complex and often poorly understood concept. The definition of sustainable development preferred by the Government is the one developed by the World Commission on Environment and Development. The WCED (Brundtland) report created the definition of sustainable development which is now used as the basis for almost all other national and international work in the field:

"Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable - to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (WCED 1987, 8).

Most interpretations of this deceptively simple definition stress the importance of principles of futurity (future generations), equity, environmental limits, tackling poverty and meeting human needs. The UK Government also now stresses that sustainable development requires that social, environmental and economic issues must be tackled at the same time if an approach is to be defined as contributing to sustainable development.

The extent to which the SCP increased understanding of sustainable development was tested in the interviews for this evaluation, and our findings suggest that there has been some increase in awareness and understanding of sustainable development, although more in some localities than others. Some SCPOs felt the term was not helpful and did not use it, while others specifically promoted the concept of sustainable development.

Research by Lancaster University (Macnaghten et al 1995) suggests that communities easily understand the concept of sustainable development when it is explained, and they can see the benefits of developing sustainable solutions. Indeed it is often argued that local community groups find it easy to see the big picture of sustainable development because they see the connections between social, economic and environmental issues everyday in local life.

While it is understandable that some SCPOs did not feel they should explicitly promote understanding of sustainable development in the areas in which they were working, it is clear from the experience of other SCPOs, and wider research, that this can be done effectively. Indeed, without explicitly promoting understanding of sustainable development, it is difficult to see how communities can work towards sustainability in the spirit of growing understanding, and the development of learning communities.

5.4 Development of sustainable communities

Definitions of what constitutes a sustainable community are even more contested than definitions of sustainable development, but there are some widely recognised sources that we can use. The DETR's guidelines which described the characteristics of a sustainable community (DETR 1998) was one of the first attempts, and remains a useful framework. Barr and Hashagen (2000) see sustainability as one of three elements of the 'strengthened community' which will result from community development, alongside equity and liveability, although we would suggest that the Brundtland approach to sustainable development (see 5.3) incorporates equity and liveability within sustainability.

One of the more comprehensive definitions of a sustainable community for the UK is that proposed by the Sustainable Communities Agencies Network (SCAN) in their Blueprint for a Sustainable Community (1999). SCAN's Blueprint identifies 11 key themes which are required for a sustainable community:

1. Good housing, shops and other facilities, accessible to all with the help of high quality reliable public transport
2. A flourishing local economy, both 'mainstream' and social economy, that stimulates local enterprise, meets local needs and helps to overcome poverty
3. Good education and training opportunities (see separate section for more on training)
4. Biodiversity appropriate to circumstances, and good air, water and soil quality
5. Low energy use and waste, coupled with warm homes and resource efficient businesses
6. Sustainable lifestyles encouraged and facilitated by education, information and opportunities supporting behaviour change
7. A safe and healthy environment, contributing to people's physical, mental and social well-being
8. A vibrant and creative local culture, characterised by thriving community groups and pride in the local community
9. High levels of public participation and decision-making, including by particularly excluded groups
10. Governance and development: the mechanisms and means to facilitate on-going improvements in the area

11. High quality information enabling the monitoring of social, economic and environmental progress.

As can be seen from the examples of SCP activities given above (sections 5.1 and 5.2), almost all these themes are well-covered within the programme overall. Those which are less well-represented among the SCP activities are themes 1, 2 and 11. However, the SCP can offer some examples of activities here too, including:

- Activities on encouraging walking and public transport including developing public transport maps and a website, and improving paths (theme 1).
- Activities to encourage community businesses and support the local economy including work in Cloughmills, Northern Ireland using the New Economics Foundation Plugging the Leaks approach, and the (more specific) establishment of a community pharmacy (theme 2).
- Activities to obtain information to enable the monitoring of social, economic and environmental progress including local questionnaires and surveys as preliminaries to community action planning (theme 11). However, overall there has been little detailed monitoring of these issues, and data has rarely been kept up to date or its implications analysed following its initial collection and use.
- In addition, some of the capacity building and training initiatives outlined above were designed to help people to change their behaviour and adopt more sustainable lifestyles (theme 6).
- The only other theme not yet covered in detail is theme 8, around the development or support of a vibrant and creative local culture, and the SCP has supported various activities which can be seen to contribute to this including:
 - Community galas, events and festivals, including using an environmental theme for major local festival
 - Establishment of sustainable multicultural community centre and community worker
 - Local history activities
 - Arts activities including 'Art from waste' events, and a mural with a youth group
 - Asian women's textile activities, creating banners for a community centre
 - Support for (existing) Bengali food co-operative
 - Involvement of community archaeologist in local green space improvements
 - Photography project to focus on 'posh spots' and 'grot spots' locally
 - Sports-related activities including development of a football pitch and events such as community football penalty shoot out day (in Sandwell), football coaching training to support the local youth team, and links to the local football club (in Liverpool)
 - Village trails, community newsletters and notice boards.

Overall, the SCP can be seen to have undertaken activities which have fitted within all the themes identified as making up a sustainable community. However, there are no SCP regions which have covered all 11 themes, and it is the integration of all these elements which are essential for a sustainable local community. This is not surprising as the sustainable community outlined in SCAN's Blueprint is also an 'ideal' community, and there are very few examples anywhere in the world which meet all these criteria.

It is also not possible to say whether the activities outlined above would have happened anyway (either at all or in a different way) without the involvement of the SCP. However, it is notoriously difficult to show direct cause and effect when a community development approach is used. Indeed, it is only by all parties having a sense of ownership of an initiative that it is likely to be viable in the long term. For the SCP itself, it can at least be asserted that even if these activities would still be carried out if the SCP was not there, the SCP helped ensure they happened when they did, has brought them to wider attention, and has provided evidence of the interest of local communities in these types of activities.

As the programme progressed, the local work focused increasingly on the production of Community Action Plans. This strategy has benefits, in that it supports local communities work through their own priorities and decide what they want to do, and creates a clear product from the SCP involvement. In a short term programme like the SCP, however, such a strategy also has disadvantages, particularly that the programme will have finished before the actions in the CAPs can be implemented. Although the community development approach is designed to enable groups

to become self-sufficient, and much of the support offered through the SCP was designed to achieve this, in practice three years provides very little time to achieve this. Such a strategy used for such a short timescale is likely to benefit already established (and/or highly skilled and confident) community groups much more than newly formed groups which lack experience. The different levels of experience and confidence among the groups the SCPOs worked with needs to be taken into account in considering the development of future learning networks.

5.5 Programme design and management arrangements

The SCP has clearly achieved some good local work, which has met many of the original objectives of the programme. Data from the interviews suggests that, in these cases, this work has been of a high standard and welcomed and valued by local people. Overall, however, a strong picture emerges of great variety in the quality of the support delivered through the programme, in the quality (and quantity) of the projects on the ground, and in the quality of any mechanisms to continue the work in the long term. This variation in quality can be linked to different management arrangements.

The data from the interviews and other discussions suggests that the particularly good quality work in Scotland and Northern Ireland was the result of stronger relationship between the SCPOs (who were also more experienced in some cases) and the organisations supporting them (ie Forward Scotland and SNIP). As outlined above, Forward Scotland took the view early on that the salary and job description for the SCPOs was not appropriate for their vision of the programme so they increased the salary, changed the job description and had different management arrangements. In Northern Ireland, the shift to management of the SCPO role by SNIP took longer, but has ensured that (as in Scotland) closer management support could be given and that the work of the individual SCPO fitted clearly into wider local programmes of work. These were clearly strengths of these different management arrangements which were recognised by the SCPOs, and by local groups, and need to be taken into account in designing future programmes. Section 6 gives more detail on lessons which can be drawn from the SCP's management arrangements.

In terms of programme design, the testing of the SCP against a set of criteria for an 'ideal' sustainable community (see 5.4) does provide one clear lesson for the design of future programmes, which is the need to focus clearly on clear and achievable aims and objectives, and to define specific outputs and outcomes within a larger vision. The vision, in this case sustainable communities, provides the direction of the programme, the outputs identify more specific products which will be needed (eg publications, events, projects etc), and the outcomes identify results (eg better understanding of sustainable development and willingness to change behaviour).

The vision, desired outputs and outcomes all need to be clearly stated, communicated to and understood by all staff and other participants in the programmes, and means identified through which the results can be assessed. This means there need to be some indicators of success for use during the programme and when it is concluded. These indicators should provide a framework within which staff can operate flexibly, according to local circumstances, but they should also provide a sense of security for staff that they are all working towards common (and agreed) aims / directions, and they can recognise where progress is being made.

Overall, we can conclude that the SCP's programme design was ambitious and the aims important. However, the aims and objectives were insufficiently clarified and communicated to the SCP's own staff and therefore to the groups they were working with. The fact that the whole emphasis of the programme changed from the original bid document (towards a community development approach), with few clear statements that staff could refer to, weakened the overall identity and robustness of the programme as it allowed misunderstandings to go unchallenged.

Clarity does not mean lack of freedom. Flexibility and appropriateness, and room for innovation and creativity, can all be supported by effective reporting systems which give people the confidence to take risks and experiment within clear frameworks. Lack of clarity can actually reduce flexibility by creating an atmosphere of uncertainty, which can undermine confidence in achievements.

In spite of these difficulties, and to the credit of all the SCPOs and the UK Co-ordinator, work was delivered on the ground which was valued by those involved.

5.6 Operating context

The SCP was designed in 1998, and the programme began in 1999. It has been operating through a period of immense change which has fundamentally altered the local, regional and national contexts in which the work has taken place. For example:

- Devolution has created a new parliament in Scotland and assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland, with a variety of devolved powers. These have involved subsequent changes to government departments and how they operate in each of these countries. The priority given to sustainable development has varied in each of the four countries in the UK, with the National Assembly of Wales taking sustainable development as its overarching ethic and goal, while it remains a lower priority (despite some rhetoric to the contrary) in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- In England and Wales, the government departments responsible for sustainable development have changed at least twice during the life of the SCP. The huge Department of Transport, Local Government and Regions (DTLR), which incorporated sustainable development and environmental issues, created soon after the 1997 General Election, was then divided again into the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM).

The Sustainable Development Unit (SDU) was located in DEFRA, away from local government, transport and regional policy and alongside food, farming and rural affairs. Other environmental issues have remained elsewhere, such as energy policy within the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

More recently (2003), the ODPM has launched a major national programme under the title of Sustainable Communities. Although the focus of this programme is primarily around housebuilding and planning, the use of this name signals interest in the concept, and the potential for finding some valuable opportunities for ENCAMS and others to feed in the lessons from the SCP to government.

- At regional level, in England, the role of regional government offices, the Regional Development Agencies and the regional assemblies grew quickly in importance. Although all these regional bodies nominally had responsibilities to sustainable development, the extent to which they incorporated these ideas into their strategies and programmes varied enormously. In spite of these regional differences, overall there has been a major growth in the involvement of voluntary and community groups with these regional institutions, including on issues of sustainability.
- At local level, during the SCP, the national deadline for local authorities to complete their Local Agenda 21 (LA21) sustainable development strategies came and went (December 2001). After that deadline, interest in sustainable development in local government changed, with some local authorities continuing to invest resources at senior levels and at the heart of authorities (eg in the Chief Executive's departments), while others reduced their investment in these activities and focused on other priorities.

At the same time, the national Modernising Government agenda was encouraging local authorities to restructure their decision-making, with moves towards elected mayors and cabinets rather than the traditional committee structure. For some communities, this has been viewed as a reduction in access to the decision-making processes of local government, especially in those areas where the voluntary and community sectors actually took part in some committee deliberations and decision-making.

The Modernising Government agenda did, however, also increase pressure on local government to consult with local communities (and other local organisations), and to work much more in partnership with local stakeholders. The development of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) was intended to help rationalise the profusion of partnerships which had been set up over recent years. The focus of the LSPs on creating community strategies, which were to be the vehicle for local plans to fulfil the power of all local authorities to promote local social, economic and environmental wellbeing, provide an excellent opportunity to build on the work done for the LA21 strategies and, in some areas, there were indeed close links between these.

In parallel to these structural and overarching policy changes, there has also been a huge raft of other initiatives launched by national government but intended to be implemented at local level. These include initiatives to improve schools and local education and training opportunities including Sure Start and Education Action Zones. Other schemes aim to regenerate deprived neighbourhoods, including New Deal for Communities and Neighbourhood Renewal funding. Health services have also been through major change, including the development of Health Action Zones and the restructuring of the NHS with a focus on primary care, especially through the creation of Primary Care Trusts. And there are numerous others.

These massive structural changes to local, regional and national government, and the constant flow of new initiatives, has made it very difficult for programmes like the SCP to identify a particular niche at the various levels.

In practice, each SCPO has attempted to stay informed about their own circumstances, and to develop activities and programmes which were robust enough to survive the next wave of change. In this, SCPOs were largely successful. A few were also very successful in proactively using these changes in the policy context, particularly by spotting where these related directly to their own local objectives and seeking resources from these new programmes. This is an important skill in making local programmes for sustainable communities successful, as flexibility and adaptability to change will always make local communities and local groups, more robust in the long term.

5.7 Learning processes experienced by community groups

The capacity building, community development and more formal training opportunities delivered through the SCP (or signposted through the SCP) have already been described. It is always a difficult balance for community-led processes between an approach which focuses on learning through experience, and formal training.

Community groups did feel they had learned from the experience of participating in the SCP, as did the SCPOs themselves. The data from the interviews with local groups showed little interest in formal training courses, which were seen by some groups as abstract and not sufficiently focused on their immediate needs. Given the time pressures these groups face (few people with little free time), this makes such training a low priority for them. There was also resistance from some respondents to anything which could be associated with formal education and 'school', and this aversion may need to be taken into account in developing future learning opportunities.

Learning through supported action, on issues of direct concern to community groups, was clearly the preferred approach for groups. There was also interest in mutual learning, from others in the same boat, but this was alongside quite strong parochialism in some localities, where there was no interest in working with other groups in wider networks. There is more detail about the lessons for the development of wider learning networks below (section 7).

Overall, as outlined above, the programme made learning by community groups a priority and SCPOs experimented with various approaches including signposting to other training, developing the training menu, undertaking formal training needs analyses, running specific training events and encouraging groups to reflect on and learn from their experience.

This evaluation is intended to help these learning processes within ENCAMS by articulating lessons from the programme (see section 6), which can help ENCAMS and other organisations in designing future programme of support for sustainable communities.

5.8 New forms of evaluation and project appraisal for sustainable communities

The achievement of sustainable communities, even working towards sustainable communities, requires a focus on both process and product, approach and results. The SCP used a community development process / approach, and there are evaluation models specifically designed to focus on community development (eg the ABCD approach outlined above and used as a framework for this evaluation). The products / results were intended to be around creating sustainable communities, and there are criteria for assessing sustainable communities (eg the SCAN Blueprint, which was used for this evaluation, and others outlined above).

There are also various models for project appraisal, which have not been used in SCP locally or nationally but which may be of value in considering larger local projects and programmes. Examples include:

- The Quality of Life Capital model, which was developed by the Countryside Agency, Environment Agency and English Nature, which provides a framework for balancing potentially conflicting needs and demands over land use issues and is particularly useful for specific site decisions.
- The Integrated Appraisal models being developed by DEFRA and the Environment Agency can be used to appraise the social, economic and environmental implications (and risks) in planning new policies, projects and programmes.

These, and other project appraisal mechanisms, may be used as part of the development of sustainable communities.

It is important to stress here that the ways in which these mechanisms are implemented will be as important as which one is used. The ABCD evaluation model for community development stresses that evaluation is part of the community development process, and needs to be applied according to the same principles of community involvement, and with the same objectives - of increasing community confidence, knowledge and skills. The same principles apply to evaluation and project appraisal for sustainable communities: ideally they need to involve those they are seeking to investigate, those involved in the process or programme being evaluated or appraised, and those they hope to influence (see Annex E for more details of the benefits and limitations of evaluating participation, and participatory evaluation).

Lessons from practice of evaluating participation in sustainable development are now beginning to emerge, which have revealed some complex tensions as well as some models. A central tension is this choice between participatory and non-participatory approaches to evaluating participation.

Research for the IDeA, on evaluating poverty and social inclusion programmes, supports the ABCD approach (see above) that the approach to evaluation should reflect the objectives / values / criteria of the programme being assessed, eg participatory methods of evaluation for participatory programmes (Alcock et al 2000). However, this could be seen as reducing the potential for developing participatory evaluations of non-participatory programmes, which can be a positive introduction to participatory working for those who have not worked in that way before. It also limits the potential for some evaluations of participatory programmes to include only limited participation in order to meet instrumental objectives, where consultation rather than a more fully participatory evaluation is appropriate (Johnson undated). In addition, two evaluations of participatory programmes (evaluations which were not fully participatory according to Rebien's (1996) criteria) have produced some of the little 'hard' evidence on the effectiveness of participatory working that exist.

The first of these, by the World Bank, is a simple classic cost benefit analysis which compared the costs and benefits, over time, of participatory and non-participatory programmes funded by the Bank. Their findings showed that, overall, participation by beneficiaries was 'the single most important factor in determining overall quality of implementation', and made a significant contribution to project effectiveness including resulting in lower operational costs eg maintenance (World Bank 1994).

The second is an analysis, by the UK Department of Health, into the health benefits of participation. This research used traditional social science methodologies and concluded that there was an increased likelihood of people reporting poorer health generally, higher stress levels, higher prevalence of smoking, and poorer diet quality among those who felt they had a lack of control over decisions affecting life and a lack of influence over neighbourhood decisions, those with no involvement in community activities, those living in more deprived areas with a low 'neighbourhood social capital' score and, especially for men, those with no personal support group. Direct cause and effect are difficult to prove in research on health, but this research shows that those who feel empowered to make their own decisions, are engaged in community activities and live in places with strong neighbourhood social capital, are less likely to report poor health and less likely to have unhealthy lifestyles (eg related to diet and smoking) than those who do not.

The willingness of audiences sceptical of the value of participation to accept the findings of these two research projects clearly suggests another issue which needs to be taken into account in evaluating participation, which is to do with the status and reputation of the body commissioning the research, and the appearance of 'objectivity' of those undertaking the research and analysis. The relevance of

these additional dimensions need to be taken into account in identifying appropriate methods for any specific evaluation study: the balance between credibility among users and beneficiaries (as a result of greater control over process, outputs and outcomes) and credibility among funders and other target audiences.

The choices between using a participatory or non-participatory approach to evaluate participatory or non-participatory programmes will depend on the objectives of the evaluation. The objectives (what the evaluation is expected to achieve) are, in turn, likely to be based on the four elements usually quoted in rationales for participation: ethics (eg about rights), effectiveness, strengthening governance and democracy (issues of legitimacy and accountability), and opportunities for learning and change. Evaluation objectives, like those for participation programmes, may be instrumental or transformative (O'Riordan et al 1999):

- **Instrumental** evaluation is a means to an end (sometimes referred to as Habermasian). Instrumental approaches focus on practicality (eg achieving goals more effectively) and the legitimacy of decisions. Outcomes such as strengthened civil society and democracy could also be seen as instrumental. Relevant processes would focus on public reason, persuasion by the best arguments, production of consensus, and implementable and legitimate decisions. Evaluation criteria would be around the extent to which outcomes are do-able, and their legitimacy.
- **Transformative** evaluation is an end in itself, as well as a means to a better product (sometimes referred to as Arendtian). Transformative approaches would focus on a learning, responding, capacity building, citizenship process, and aim for empowerment, creative agency and self esteem. Relevant processes would be about a sense of recognition and agency, and of being part of a shared society through shared stories. Evaluation criteria would include the extent to which a process generated opportunities for learning, a sense of empowerment and agency, social intelligence and self fulfilment, as well as a sense of belonging to a shared society.

Sarah White expands these categories to four (White 1996): nominal (evaluation for 'display' eg PR purposes); instrumental (as above); representative (opportunities for groups to have a voice and express their own interests); and transformative (as above). Objectives such as strengthening civil society, enhancing democracy and enlargement of citizenship (or facilitation of other (eg state) agenda) could fit into either the instrumental or transformative models, depending on the motivations of whoever is promoting (and defining the objectives of) the participatory process and/or its evaluation.

Hunt and Szerszynski (1999) suggest associated tensions which can result between instrumental and transformative objectives for evaluations, including between problem-solving and relationship building approaches, cultural empowerment and structural change, digestibility and authenticity (ie between preserving the authenticity of participants own words and creating outputs which can be digested by institutions in the form of reports and recommendations, requiring 'translation'), ambivalence and consistency (recognising shifting policy and political contexts while also coming to some general conclusions which can be meaningful to decision makers).

Even when a participatory approach to evaluation is considered appropriate, further tensions arise. Firstly, it has been suggested that all evaluations are participatory, because they need to at least take into account the views of users, beneficiaries, stakeholders etc (Rebien 1996), but the degree to which they are participatory varies. Arnstein's ladder of levels of participation (or later variations of the ladder) can be used to analyse the levels of participation in participatory evaluation, as well as in participatory exercises themselves, as Arnstein's analysis addresses the key issues of power and control. In evaluation of participation, the key questions are around value and judgements (Alcock et al 2000), and the issues of power and control arise in addressing whose assessment of the work is valued and why and how that value is measured: what Robert Chambers summarised in the question 'whose reality counts?' (Chambers 1997).

Secondly, there are various different approaches to participatory evaluation. Some of the main current models are:

- **Fourth generation evaluation.** First generation evaluation is seen to be about measurement by a 'technical' evaluator; second generation about describing patterns of strengths and weaknesses by an evaluator operating as a 'describer' (and covering technical aspects); the third generation about judgement, with the evaluator operating as a 'judge' (as well as a describer and technical). Fourth generation evaluation is 'responsive constructivist

evaluation', which is essentially 'participatory evaluation' in which the evaluation's parameters and boundaries are set through an interactive negotiated process with stakeholders (Guba and Lincoln 1989).

- **The 'theory of change' approach** (which has been used in community development) is essentially a participatory planning process in which the goal is to generate a theory of change which is plausible, doable and testable and which makes explicit the pathways of change the project is expected to follow. Here, theorising happens in advance and is then tested as the process unfolds, through 'theory surfacing' rather than imposing theory on a body of data (Connell and Kubish 1996).
- **Realistic evaluation** (Pawson and Tilley 1997) is designed to deal with real problems in social policy and programmes, based on the scientific realist philosophy (ie goals of objectivity and detachment without taking over-simplistic positivist approaches), in order to inform realistic developments in policy-making that benefit programme participants and the public. The basic realist formula is: context + mechanism = outcome.
- **The InterAct model** (InterAct 2001) is designed to be participatory, but could be adapted for an evaluation which was only consultative: InterAct is an alliance of experienced practitioners, researchers, writers and policy makers in the field of public participation and stakeholder engagement. The aim was to produce a simple practical framework for evaluating participatory, deliberative and co-operative ways of working, to provide some immediate support to practice, and to increase the sharing of information about methods. This framework was trialled in an EU LIFE funded project on participatory river basin management, and was launched (with the Institute for Public Policy Research) in June 2001 in order to start a debate on the issues, leading to an updated framework later.

The InterAct framework provides a basic checklist covering both what needs to be examined when evaluating participatory processes, and how it should be done. In terms of what to look for, InterAct proposed the following issues need to be covered: objectives (how they were set, what they were, extent to which they were met etc); context (external and internal factors affecting the initiative); levels of involvement (based on Arnstein's ladder of participation); methods and techniques used; stage reached (not all evaluations are done at the end of projects); inclusiveness (extent to which efforts are made to reach traditionally excluded groups); commitment to using the results of the evaluation; baseline, inputs, outputs and outcomes (inputs in terms of time and money; outputs such as newsletters, reports; outcomes such as personal and organisational change - as well as practical changes such as reduced maintenance costs or increased leverage of support).

Tim O'Riordan suggests that 'The best evaluation is instructive, collective, continuous and appropriately correcting' (O'Riordan 1999). And the ideal situation may be to establish a balance between instrumental and transformative objectives, clear ethics and principles, participatory and non-participatory methods, qualitative and non-qualitative indicators that are appropriate (according to various audiences) and verifiable (ie numerical but also explanations of why and how), and agreement on timescales. Even where the ideal is not possible, some kind of balance needs to be struck to ensure that achievable objectives, ethical principles, appropriate methods and learning from results can at least be aimed for in a new 'virtuous circle' of learning from experience in ways which also help to develop better methods of assessment. These evaluation activities also need to be undertaken in an appropriate way, and 'need to support the process whilst at the same time understanding and evaluating it - evaluation should ideally be linked to building capacities' (LASALA 2001).

For the evaluation of the SCP, the aim has been for good levels of participation but not for control by participants. Participatory methods used have included:

- A sample of local groups was interviewed using open questions, to gain their detailed feedback on the study.
- The SCPOs were involved in initial discussions to scope the study and identify initial achievements which could be tested (discussion at the SCPO meeting in March 2002). This discussion was used to draft the interview schedule and questions, and sample the community groups.
- All the SCPOs were interviewed individually, to gain their detailed feedback on the SCP with complete confidentiality.
- The UK SCP Co-ordinator was involved in all decisions about sampling of groups, questions for interviews and draft reports (as were other ENCAMS staff).

- Discussions were held with various of ENCAMS management staff individually.
- The SCP national management committee was involved in early discussions to scope the study (at their meeting in March 2002), and have commented on draft reports.

The approach has been essentially qualitative, using some quantitative data obtained in the interim review in 2001 (see Annex D). Initially, the evaluation design was intended to achieve a mix of transformative and instrumental objectives, and there were some transformative elements in the early stages (eg in the meeting with SCPOs) but, as the need to feed into decisions about the future of the programme became more pressing, instrumental objectives became the priority. Throughout, the principles and values which lay behind the evaluation were focused on support and learning, rather than attempting an abstract assessment of the programme against technical criteria.

In an evaluation of this sort, there are various communities of interest - the local groups, the staff at different levels, those responsible for management. There are also other interests eg the local authorities in the localities where the SCPOs worked, funders, other contacts in government (eg DEFRA) and other organisations (eg CDF and SCAN). Ideally there would have been opportunities for these other stakeholders to input their experience of the SCP, but this was not a priority for the study at this stage. However, it may be possible to initiate some dialogue with these external stakeholders in the future, around the findings from this evaluation, to focus on lessons learned and the potential for future developments.

6. LESSONS FROM EXPERIENCE

The research for this study has identified some overarching lessons on managing a programme to support the development of sustainable communities. These are, in summary:

- Clear and achievable aims and objectives
- Good timing
- Adequate resources
- National profile
- Integrating local and national working
- Embedding new approaches
- Community development and sustainable development
- Defining a sustainable community.

6.1 Clear and achievable objectives

The original aims and objectives of the SCP were exciting, innovative and hugely ambitious. They were also carefully designed to avoid excessive expectations. Nevertheless, the extent and range of the aims and objectives were not matched by the resources sought or available.

The SCP was an attempt to develop a comprehensive national programme of activity around sustainable communities but only to seek short term, low cost and minimal staff resources. Not only were the seven regional staff expected to work in 60 new communities in 30 local authority areas across the UK in two years, they were expected to draw lessons from this experience, contribute to the publication of comprehensive guidance, establish learning networks and enable 'a nation-wide sustainable communities programme to be developed within three years' (SCP Business Plan). Not only this, but the communities they worked with were to be 'especially those facing the greatest disadvantage' and, therefore, requiring the greatest levels of support and resources.

The staff were given a focus which simultaneously focused at community, local authority and national levels: they were expected to encourage people to take part in activities within their communities (and plan for long term support); to encourage local authorities to integrate community involvement into programmes such as LA21, SRB and community planning, and identify good practice; to run regional training seminars, newsletters, and monitoring systems; and to participate in national level activities including conferences and the production of case study and guidance materials. Any one of these activities could have provided an overall focus for the programme but, taken together, the result seems to have been a sense among staff of confusion between competing priorities, as well as frustration at a simple lack of adequate resources to tackle the tasks they were expected (and wanted) to do. Such was the ambition of the multiplicity of aims and objectives in the various documents, it may be that they would have been unachievable whatever resources were available.

In particular, there was a lack of clarity in the programme about the extent to which the regional staff would work with and through local authorities, and the extent to which they would work directly with communities to develop local projects. In the event, the staff made direct work with local communities their primary focus in the first instance (although some did develop good relationships with the relevant local authorities as well). This may have been partly due to pressure at national level to develop community activities within two years. It may have been due to the personal interests and priorities of the staff employed. It may have been due to the difficulties of working with local authorities on issues of sustainable development, which requires linked action across various departments and professional silos. Most likely, it was a mix of all three of these factors. Whatever the actual drivers for the resulting focus on local community development, the lack of clarity in the original multiplicity of aims and objectives did not provide adequate alternative pressures. A clearer overarching purpose to the programme, and nationally agreed priorities for objectives, would have helped staff to prioritise activities more easily.

6.2 Good timing

There are two separate aspects of good timing. One is about the time it takes to establish community-based projects and programmes (both in calendar time and staff time). The other is about ensuring that other resources are available at the time they are needed to support mainstream activities. These are addressed in turn.

First, the programme was not long enough to achieve its objectives. There are two elements to this - the problems of short term funding programmes, and the particular demands of community-based programmes.

Three year funding programmes usually go through three phases, especially when staff are brought in specifically for the programme. There is a one year setting up phase, during which staff are appointed, systems established and relationships begin to be developed. There is then one year when the programme can operate at full stretch, and there is a final year in which the programme starts to run down. This running down is inevitable if staff are offered no further employment, as they start to look for other jobs before their current employment finishes. This is not unique to the SCP. It is well known throughout voluntary sector programmes which are funded through short term funding arrangements.

There are variations within the SCP, as the programmes in Scotland and Northern Ireland are being managed through other organisations which have a long term commitment to this work (Forward Scotland and SNIP). This does not apply to the SCPOs in England and Wales.

These cycles need to be borne in mind in planning programmes like the SCP, and the timing of expected products and other achievements needs to take it into account, both in terms of quantity of products which can be created, and the times at which they are most useful or likely to be achieved.

Beyond this simple cycle, there are other specific issues affecting community-based programmes. It is well understood in community development programmes that an essential ingredient for success in working with local people is the establishment of relationships of trust. It takes time to build trust, and trust can only be created through experience of working together over time, at the pace the client group can manage. Not only can this take months, it is also highly labour intensive. The organisation or individual offering support must have enough staff time to ensure support is available when needed.

Communities (especially those living with disadvantage) need support they can rely on. Some of the demands on staff time would have been reduced, and it would have been more likely that the staff could have achieved more within the timescale of the programme, if the SCPOs had been able to build from the work done in the SCP pilot phase, as originally planned. But, in the event, this was impossible because of the time lag between the close of the pilots and the establishment of the current phase. Thus another element of the issue of 'good timing' is the need to follow through with appropriate next steps as soon as possible, without the gaps during which time communities lose heart and initiatives lose momentum.

As it was, the SCP lacked sufficient time in both these ways: the programme has been too short to enable staff to build strong relationships which will survive in the long term (given the imminent closure of the programme), and the staff have been so overstretched they have found great difficulty

in responding well to the needs and demands of the communities they have worked with. However, in spite of the difficulties, many of the SCPOs have established relationships of trust with many of the groups they have worked with, and have done their best to meet the needs of those groups. Some SCPOs have also helped develop long term networks and partnerships to help provide long term support linkages. The groups have clearly appreciated their input, as they cite the presence of the officer as the most important attribute of the programme for them.

There is a cycle of relationships in community development methods, which moves from developing mutual understanding and trust (what one respondent referred to as a six month period of 'running in' for the scheme), through a level of dependence during which time new structures are being established (eg new groups formalised, networks established, plans laid), and on to independence as groups become self-managing.

The SCP is closing down at a point at which most of the regions are only just reaching the end of the second phase (at most). Groups get used to support and the closure of the programme will leave a big gap for some community groups. Withdrawal requires careful planning, and a long lead time, to avoid such difficulties. An exit strategy was formulated by SCPOs in consultation with the UK ENCAMS management, and each SCPO worked through their exit strategy with groups to ensure that the group would be able to continue their work and would know where to get support. In spite of this important and useful planning, however, the fact remains that the SCP is ceasing local support. A further two years funding at the same level would have allowed continued support for the developments on the ground which are now reaching a critical phase, would have enabled achievements to be consolidated and more groups to move to self sufficiency.

Second, the SCP has suffered from the lack of relevant resources available to the SCPOs at the right time. When the SCPOs were appointed, there were no national resources available, and the first national product (the Community EcoCal) was felt by almost all staff to be too complicated and not appropriate to the work they were doing. The SCPO group created their own menu of training opportunities, but not until the end of the second year.

Although the staff were expected to 'support the use' of the *On The Street Where You Live* toolkit, these were not available until the middle of the third year, by which time the groups in the local communities had passed the stage at which the packs were useful to the SCPOs, although the toolkits may be useful to local groups in future. The handbook, for local authorities and community groups, was only published and launched in January 2003. The proposed information service, and the training package for local authorities, were never produced at all because funds were not awarded for this work. Although the various bid documents suggest that these products were always intended as part of the 'rolling out' process beyond the initial 60 communities, they were also clearly intended to be used within those communities as well.

The staff did feel it would have been extremely useful if these resources had been available for them to use earlier in the process, preferably at the beginning of this second phase. This may have been because some SCPOs in England and Wales were relatively inexperienced and felt isolated, and thus they may have placed undue emphasis on materials. Whatever the reason, the failure of the national programme to produce the resources promised did cause SCPOs difficulties and anxieties (see earlier comments on materials). It would also have made sense, in terms of the overall development and rolling out process, for the resource products to have been trialled in the 60 communities, refined as a result of feedback on these trials and then for the products to be made more widely available. This process is now beginning to take place with an evaluation event for the toolkit in Scotland, to provide feedback for a revised version.

6.3 Adequate resources

There are several aspects to the lack of adequate resources in the SCP: staff resources, appropriate staffing levels and rewards, adequate management support and other backup.

- **Staff resources.** We have already noted that the aims and objectives were very ambitious, and that the staff were overstretched. Not only was there too much to do within three years, but the geographical areas some staff were expected to cover were enormous.

Communities need regularity and reliability of support, and many SCP staff saw themselves as 'spread too thinly' in terms of the time they could make available to groups. This was exacerbated by the added complications of having to travel long distances in some cases

(which took up additional time). Feedback from groups and staff suggests that either double the number of staff were required, to cover the same amount of communities; or the target number of communities needed to be halved.

- **Appropriate staffing levels and rewards.** The salary levels offered for the regional SCPOs were around £15,000 at the start of the programme (these were increased by 3% each year). These salaries compared to around £20,000 for an experienced community worker at the time. The implications of these low salary rates are three-fold:
 - The SCPO posts attracted mainly young and relatively inexperienced individuals. These people were enthusiastic and committed but they needed extensive support and training. Although a week of induction training was provided for each SCPO, facilitation training was provided and they were offered access to various other training opportunities, this did not necessarily meet all the needs of the staff themselves.
 - The relatively low status of the SCPO posts reduced the ability of the SCPOs to relate to senior local authority officers, and to challenge the existing local authority structures which undermine the joined-up working necessary for sustainable communities.
 - More generally, it should be recognised that work paid at these levels is often interpreted as low value, which undermines the status of community-based work and provides inadequate rewards for those who are struggling with the very challenging implications of working with disadvantaged local communities. This is difficult and demanding work, which requires considerable personal strength and experience, which is not adequately rewarded through these levels of salary.
- **Adequate management support.** Given the needs of the SCPOs, the strength of the management structure supporting them was vital. Unfortunately, the initial management structure for the programme was not well planned and was poorly resourced.

The original plan was to provide line management support through the ENCAMS regional directors, but in practice this did not work well (with some exceptions). In large part the ENCAMS regional directors did not see this work as a priority and, as importantly, they were not aware of the very different demands of community-based work of the type being promoted through the SCP. As a result, although most SCP staff were formally based in ENCAMS regional offices, they felt isolated from each other and from other ENCAMS programmes (which had very different approaches and objectives), and they lacked support from managers who were not aware of their particular needs, nor of the particular issues arising from sustainable development or community development, both of which tended to be outside their experience.

The SCPOs were also expected to relate to the national priorities of the SCP, through the UK SCP co-ordinator in Wigan. This created some difficulties for SCPOs who saw a split structure of accountability - at regional and national level. Various problems were identified during our research which arose as a result of this split, including initial uncertainty about budgets and exactly what the SCP could offer groups at the local level. This uncertainty, in turn, was not conducive to strengthening trust between the SCPOs and the communities they were working with, as SCPOs could not be clear about the funding support groups could expect.

The poor communications between the national and regional management structures also created uncertainty about shifts in overall programme priorities. Some staff saw the priorities of the SCP change during its life, from a predominantly environmental focus at the beginning to a much more community development focus later on. This shift was welcomed by most SCPOs once it was fully articulated, and most found this the most effective way of working, especially those in Scotland and Northern Ireland who were working within organisations used to this approach. However, better communications - or, even better, greater involvement of regional staff in debating and making such a shift - would have been more effective. Poor communications also reduced opportunities for lessons from the SCP community engagement work to be fed across into other ENCAMS programmes, and for shared learning to develop.

The SCPOs themselves attempted to deal with these problems by meeting together with the UK Co-ordinator regularly and developing their own support through these meetings. This approach to mutual support has been strengthened since Claire Abbott was appointed, as she has focused on supporting and resourcing these meetings.

- **Adequate leadership and direction.** Initially the programme was expected to be run by a full-time Sustainable Communities UK Co-ordinator, and a Sustainable Communities Manager. The tasks for the Co-ordinator, as outlined in the original bid documents, were around communications and the support of learning networks. The Sustainable Communities Manager role was undertaken by the Co-ordinator's line manager within ENCAMS.

The resignation of the Co-ordinator in the middle of the second year did create real problems for the management of the programme, especially as there was a delay of several months before the replacement Co-ordinator was appointed. As a result, leadership and direction were absent at a critical time for the SCPOs work regionally, and the national development of the programme overall. For some respondents to this study, the lack of a national programme manager, who could take overall responsibility both for line management and for project development, was the key weakness of the programme overall.

The SCP programme is a complex and challenging initiative, and the role of UK Co-ordinator has been vital. Ideally, this is much more than a co-ordination role: it needs to offer strong leadership and direction, especially as the programme is within an organisation which is generally working with different methods and different objectives. This is not to suggest any failure by the individuals who have occupied these various posts, but rather that the level and design of these management roles has been underestimated, and adequate resources have not been made available for these crucial tasks.

- **Adequate resources for community activities.** The SCP was designed to offer support to local communities, through the provision of a regional officer's time, but the programme was not able to provide direct financial support for community projects. Financial support was given to many groups for a variety of training and learning activities (eg formal and informal training including NVQ qualifications), meeting and transport costs, facilitated planning sessions, networking events and meetings, and public liability insurance. A specific element of the budget ('training for beneficiaries') was designated for distribution to community groups for these activities, but there was no direct funding for practical projects.

During the last year of the SCP, stronger links were made to ENCAMS other community-based programme - Urban Britain in Bloom. This link made it possible for SCP groups to apply more easily for UBiB grants for practical community projects, and several did receive funding.

In addition, many SCPOs worked to raise other funds for the community groups with which they were working, including through grant applications and obtaining benefits in kind. For example, the Ladywood Healthy Living Centre received over £900,000, the neighbourhood management bid in Poulton levered in a similar amount, and various large grants were given to groups working on the SCP in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Access to resources for community projects has several benefits. Community groups, especially in disadvantaged areas, need small amounts of money to be made available to allow them to do any projects. In addition, the ability to offer access to such funds provides the support workers with another incentive which can be used to encourage the groups to listen to and take on the messages (eg sustainability) which may be being offered.

In summary, the lessons from the SCP on resource needs for any future programmes to support sustainable communities include:

- A named individual should be clearly identified as the manager of the overall programme, with line management as well as programme development responsibilities. This post needs to be adequately graded and resourced to enable the recruitment of someone with appropriate experience and knowledge. This individual will also need to call on other resources to enable them to develop a management structure which is appropriate to supporting the other staff on the programme as well as resourcing specific activities and products.

Strong leadership and direction is essential on programmes as complex and ambitious as the SCP. In addition, mechanisms are needed to involve frontline staff in decisions about shifting priorities, both so that they can feed in their experience and so that they are aware of how thinking is changing at national level.

- The particular demands of community-based working should be recognised as being very labour intensive and long term, and this work needs to be adequately resourced in terms of staff knowledge and experience (and thus appropriate salary levels) and length of programme funding.
- Institutional interventions, such as working with or through local authorities, need to take into account the levels at which staff will be required to work, and that the staff doing this work will need the appropriate status (eg job grades) to be effective and influential in working with other institutions.
- Easily accessible resources are needed to support community activities, both to enable projects to be done and to provide an incentive for community groups to work with the programme. The design of resource products needs to be fully integrated in planning new programmes with similar aims and objectives to the SCP.

6.4 UK profile

It has been one of the major strengths of the SCP that it is a UK wide programme. This has increased the status of the work on the ground, increased the sense of achievement of local communities (and thus helped strengthen their growth in confidence), and gained the interest and support of local authorities.

The UK wide programme of activities (conferences, materials etc) has been highly valued by staff (subject to the caveats expressed above). Three areas for improvement have been suggested:

- Developing a much higher UK wide profile through a strong national publicity programme as well as activities which take the programme objectives forward (eg conferences and publications). Within ENCAMS, the work of the SCP was seen by its own staff as marginal to the organisation's mainstream activities, especially as the SCP was not often mentioned in UK wide ENCAMS materials.
- Help and advice is needed on how local communities can better celebrate and publicise their own achievements and successes, and the use of local examples of success in UK wide publicity. Very often local communities do not recognise the extent of their successes, and wider recognition can support a sense of achievement, and confirm positive lessons as well as building confidence and willingness to continue with community activities. The contribution of 26 case stories by SCP communities, posted on the ENCAMS website and to be disseminated through the Shell Better Britain Campaign information service and other online links, will contribute to this.
- Stronger messages need to be developed about the nature of sustainable communities, and how the programme was contributing to this vital work. There was a lack of clear understanding by many of those involved in the programme about exactly what was meant by a sustainable community. This issue is covered in more detail below (see 6.8).

6.5 Integrating local and UK wide working

Work towards sustainable development has always recognised the importance of linking the local and the global. Community development theory also recognises that all local work takes place in a wider context, which has to inform local decisions. The SCP faced these issues in very practical ways.

- **Importance of local context.** The benefits of a UK wide programme should not overshadow the importance of understanding the local contexts in which community-based programmes necessarily work. Each local context is different, and there is always a history to deal with: all communities have existing networks, groups and organisations - and longstanding relationships with their local authorities, experience of working with other

organisations, their own priorities, concerns, problems and feuds. In community-based working, existing networks and difficult personalities are very important and it takes time to get to know what is going on and ensure such detailed local knowledge is built into wider plans.

- **Reconciling local and UK wide priorities.**

- **Issues.** There can be difficulties in reconciling issues which are central to quality of life at local level (eg litter and dog mess) with UK and international priorities for sustainable development (eg climate change and water management). Some of the initial targets for the SCP focused very much on broad environmental issues, including targets for reducing carbon dioxide emissions through reductions in energy and fuel use, water saving, waste management and recycling.

While UK guidance on broad environmental priorities can be very useful, the focus in the SCP communities on producing their own actions plans has identified specific local priorities. Mechanisms are needed which ensure that these local priorities are translated into UK wide priorities, to sit alongside those national priorities which are set through broader (especially international) pressures. Feeding the results of action planning work into the development of LSPs and community strategies may be a first step, at local level, to this wider influence.

- **Methods.** Any future programme may also wish to experiment further with the concept of powerful UK wide frameworks with extensive local autonomy and flexibility. This is the ideal balance, and very difficult to achieve, but it is clear that local staff very much value strong overarching, clear and simple, frameworks which provide general guidance on principles and priorities, within which they can respond to local circumstances and demands.
- **Range of opportunities.** Different geographical areas not only have different problems but also different opportunities (eg access to funding, regeneration programmes etc). Working across the UK, there are now important differences in governance structures (regions in England, national assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland and a parliament in Scotland), as well as different legal systems and other regulations among these different places.

A UK wide programme needs to allow for local and regional development work to have the flexibility to adapt to this variety of contexts and it is a major strength of the SCP that it has worked in partnership with other organisations which can ensure these differences are recognised in the local working (ie working with Forward Scotland and SNIP).

The links to the English regional institutions in SCP to date have been much less strong. As outlined above (5.6), the importance of these regional institutions has grown enormously during the life of the SCP and any future programme planning to support sustainable communities needs to build these regional relationships into initial planning and design.

Relationships with local government will remain a key focus for the development of sustainable communities, especially within the context of their new powers to promote social, economic and environmental wellbeing (introduced during the course of the SCP). Links between the local groups and local government will continue to be vital, as an early step in spreading the lessons from community-led work, and the priorities of local communities, more widely.

6.6 Embedding new approaches

The SCP was designed originally to be fully integrated with local authority programmes, and the initial bidding process was intended to ensure local authority involvement. In practice, however, it seems that some local authorities saw the process as just another bidding process to bring new resources into their areas, without any real commitment to further involvement in the development of sustainable communities. Embedding innovative activities into mainstream programmes involves various steps which have not been taken through the SCP and which need to be fully considered in any future programme, as outlined below.

- **Moving from community support to strategic activities.** The SCPOs main focus to date has been on providing support to individual local community groups. This support

becomes less necessary as groups develop their skills and confidence, and resources can be directed instead at strategic work to embed the lessons from this way of working into local institutions, especially local authorities but also other public, private and voluntary bodies.

Any future programme for sustainable community development could retain an objective of promoting community-based approaches, but this could be done in partnership with the local groups, drawing on their achievements and providing opportunities for some community activists to become involved in wider arenas. The proposed learning networks could provide one mechanism for achieving this, if they are set up with that purpose.

- **Moving from pilots to mainstream.** There are some real tensions between ways of working in pilot projects and developing mainstream activities, and these tensions are rarely fully recognised. For example, several SCP communities experienced problems with local councillors who did not value community action, seeing themselves as the appropriate representatives of community concerns rather than local groups being established. These types of problem can be sidestepped in pilot schemes, but they can become major barriers in trying to move such approaches to the mainstream, where the sustainable community development approach has to be accepted in principle rather than just being a short term irritant.

Any future programmes could make it a priority to develop a careful articulation of the benefits of the community-based approach to sustainable development, which can be used at local level in specific debates in individual local authorities (and other bodies), to support the continued resourcing of activities towards sustainable communities. These arguments will need to be won if the lessons from the first phases of the SCP are to be embedded into other institutions.

- **Moving from ENCAMS out to other institutions.** The first target in ensuring the lessons from the SCP are embedded in existing structures will be to debate the approach within ENCAMS. ENCAMS as an organisation shares many of the cultural qualities of local government (eg technocratic and professional approaches dominate, rather than people skills), and there are historically close links between ENCAMS and local authorities. This shared history can be used to test the appropriateness and validity of lessons from SCP within the organisation before they are promoted to wider audiences. There should then be opportunities for ENCAMS to disseminate the lessons from the SCP more widely.
- **Working with and through others.** The benefits of the partnerships with SNIP and Forward Scotland have been noted throughout this report, and these links can be drawn on further to promote the other emerging lessons from the SCP in future phases. There are also existing links between ENCAMS and other networks and organisations (eg through SCAN and IDeA) which can be built on to take the ideas of sustainable communities into the future.

Making these links will, however, require a strong central strategy which ensures clear roles for the different partners, and that the national SCP partners (eg Forward Scotland and SNIP) are as engaged in national policy discussions as other national organisations (eg CDF and SCAN). Where close links have already been made at local and regional levels, these bodies too will need to be involved in national debates. The strength (and unique position) of the programme will depend on these continuing links to grassroots activity.

- **Remembering the politics.** The embedding of the issues and methods which have been developed through the SCP into mainstream local and national government policies and programmes will not just depend on the quality of the arguments which can be advanced. These lessons will have to be framed in ways which encourage politicians at all levels to understand that this approach can help meet the problems they are already tackling, from deprivation to community engagement in planning. There are two elements to this:
 - The art of shaping messages to meet existing (and, if possible, emerging) political priorities is one which needs to be further developed and resourced, if moves are to be made towards sustainable communities. It requires not only skilled and knowledgeable personnel, but also sufficient resources to enable them to stay up to date with wider policy developments so that they can identify and pick up on specific opportunities. As importantly, this work needs to be recognised as a central task for ENCAMS staff, and valued as such in setting wider organisational priorities and budgets.

- Local groups, and SCPOs have experienced major difficulties in accessing and influencing local decision-making. In large part, therefore, the SCP activities have been developing outside the mainstream local authority (and other) decision-making processes. This is partly a pragmatic choice, in that even if influence could have been brought to bear on mainstream programmes and issues it is likely to have taken too long to have borne fruit within the lifespan of the SCP. It is also partly a tactical choice, based on community development principles, in that supporting communities to achieve something themselves strengthens their confidence and ability to influence key decisions in the future.

For both these types of reasons, influencing decision-making has not been a priority. However, once groups have been operating successfully for a while, they are likely to want wider involvement, at which stage their attention will turn to mainstream decision-making processes. It may be that the learning networks could focus attention on effective influencing of decision-making processes as a priority issue, both to meet demands from community groups and to ensure that their experience is fed into decisions in the wider arena to improve the quality of those decisions.

6.7 Community development and sustainable development

The SCP as it currently operates is based on an assumption that a community development approach is an appropriate methodology for working towards sustainable communities. If this is taken as a proposition rather than an assertion, the findings of this research and the lessons from this programme could be extremely valuable to a wide audience.

There is an inherent tension in using community development approaches to achieve sustainability. Community development is based on a belief that priorities, values and principles governing any projects, programmes or campaigns should be led by the community, and not imposed from 'outside'.

Although, to some extent, local communities may have a 'common sense' understanding of sustainable development issues, there is little explicit and conscious understanding of the implications of sustainable development. This lack of knowledge is not confined to local communities - there is a general lack of understanding at all levels of society about the nature of sustainable development. Developing knowledge about sustainable development relies in part on input of detailed technical knowledge, alongside local knowledge and personal experience.

Sustainable development is not just about liveability, or integrating environmental with social and economic development, nor is it about 'business as usual' with a few green bits added. The theory and principles of sustainable development provide a fundamentally challenging critique of current social and economic systems. If the UK is to work towards sustainability, there needs to be explicit understanding of these issues. The original objectives of the SCP recognised this, referring to the importance of 'demystifying sustainable development'.

The non-directive approach which has been central to the theory of community development for many years may therefore not be entirely appropriate in programmes seeking to support sustainable communities, as sustainable development does not rely entirely on local knowledge and priorities. However, it may be possible to use a range of community development methods to work towards sustainability rather than a pure community development approach, and this has been attempted in the SCP. The main vehicle in SCP for linking community development with sustainable development at local level has been the creation of Community Action Plans.

It is important to note that the tension between a community-based (bottom-up) approach, and technical expertise, leadership and input, has emerged as a central issue within sustainable development thinking over recent years. In many cases this has been focused around the tension between participatory and democratic issues and physical sustainability. It is essentially the tension about whether the overarching ethic or principle is sustainability or democracy. For some, sustainable development is just one issue which requires democratic methods and can contribute to wider democracy; for others, democracy and participation (or community development) are a means to an end - the end being sustainable development. Others see the two as inseparable but, although it is true that sustainable development requires a participatory approach (and stronger democratic processes), simply putting the two things together does not solve the practical and theoretical central dilemma.

The same tension can be described differently: as the balance between process and product. As discussed above, for the SCP the process focuses on community development, and the product is sustainable communities. However, this also glosses over the inherent contradictions, as the actual product of community development approaches is supposed to be a strengthened community (according to sources such as the ABCD handbook). For some, this can be put more simply as community development focusing on a community-led agenda and sustainable development focusing on an agenda imposed from outside the community. However, this presupposes that communities are not likely to choose sustainable activities without outside direction and/or support, and that community development approaches are value-free - neither of which are particularly robust arguments.

These tensions are very clear within the actual practice of the SCP, as SCPOs have struggled to balance the priorities of local communities with their own (and ENCAMS) understanding of sustainability. This adds to the difficulties of the role the SCPOs have had to perform, as they have been asked to take an established approach (community development) and apply it to a radical new set of outcomes (sustainability). Moreover, these are outcomes which are not widely understood (ie sustainable communities).

The key problem which arises from these tensions is that there has been a lack of clarity about what the SCP is actually trying to achieve (especially at local level), and how progress, achievement and success are assessed. The different targets identified in the various SCP bid documents underline the lack of clarity, as they range from reductions in carbon dioxide emissions to the participation of minority community members in community activities. While these targets are not mutually exclusive (in theory and with unlimited resources), they are presenting conflicting priorities.

The programme has made some attempts to share and develop understanding on sustainable communities (through the national conferences), and the SCPOs have valued input from ENCAMS nationally on these issues, particularly from Peter Hirst. The difficulties which have been experienced are not unique to the programme and point to lessons for the future which are around the need to share what learning there is, and to continue to develop the thinking so that the analysis is richer and deeper, and so that the results of that analysis are comprehensible to local communities, local authorities and other groups and institutions.

The lessons from the SCP suggest that the community development approach has been successful in getting communities engaged, but less successful in getting sustainability (and environmental) messages across to communities, or reflected in priority activities. Indeed, many SCPOs have avoided talking to groups about sustainable development as such, on the basis that there is too little general understanding of what a sustainable community is, or taking the view that 'people understand it' from their own perspective. The SCPOs have tried to ensure that their understanding of sustainable development informs the types of activities which communities consider in their Action Plans, but in many cases there has been little overt promotion of sustainability. This is not the case in every region, especially where the organisation managing the SCPO has an overt mission to promote sustainability.

Overall, it may be that traditional community development may be necessary but not sufficient to create sustainable communities. Sustainability is not a concept which is inherent to local communities (even if many of their choices could be sustainable), it is not an existing priority (especially for disadvantaged communities), and it requires certain technical expertise. Equally, the traditional community consultation methods which have often formed part of sustainable development programmes are not sufficient to really engage community interests.

An approach is needed which fully values the local community contribution, but which also introduces external thinking about the environmental, economic and social implications of the actions the communities choose to undertake. This may need to be managed by local government, but such thinking could be powerfully supported by the establishment of learning networks. If this approach were adopted, there would need to be very clear frameworks for the networks, and some basic shared initial information to promote understanding. For example, each learning network would need to have a clear aim, and clear set of objectives through which it is working towards its aim. It may also need a basic pack of information so that all the initial members of the network start from some sort of common knowledge base (eg based on SCAN's *Blueprint for a Sustainable Community*).

A balance between traditional learning, and articulating lessons and learning from experience, is emerging as a critical element in programmes aiming for sustainability, and the SCP has some unique experience to offer in this debate. If the learning networks were established as an action research project, to test this approach to developing sustainable communities, it would provide opportunities to ensure that resources were not only fed into practical programmes on the ground, but also that learning could emerge throughout the programme which could feed into national and international thinking on sustainability.

6.8 Defining a sustainable community

The original objectives of the SCP made clear that the programme was designed on the assumption that sustainable communities were about opportunities for everyone in the community to be involved in activities within their local community - and for the development of community-identified initiatives - which improve quality of life, build a greater sense of community and support sustainable lifestyles.

These are useful elements of a framework for understanding sustainable communities, with the mix of community engagement and control, improved quality of life, and lifestyle changes. Exactly what this means in practice is different in different localities, as the SCP recognised. There are those who reject any attempts to define a sustainable community, arguing that it can only be defined at local level according to local priorities. However, one of the essential aspects of sustainable development is the essential connection between local and global issues, so any sustainable community will have an understanding of both the local and global impacts of its decisions and priorities, and how their local priorities are connected to decisions at other levels. For this reason, national (and international) agreed criteria for sustainable communities can provide useful guidance for local use and adaptation.

The nature of the communities which can become sustainable deserves some attention. Initially, the SCP was intended to focus on geographical communities, and that is also the focus for the SCAN Blueprint. However, there was some interest in the latter stages of the SCP in also tackling communities of interest, including one example of intervention in a workplace community (in the North East). This issue of the nature of the communities which can be examined in terms of sustainability will certainly remain on the agenda.

Beyond the distinction between geographical and other communities, the SCP was intended to work especially with disadvantaged communities, and excluded groups. However, given the timescale of the programme, several regions decided to focus on communities which did have problems but in which something was achievable within the limited time available, rather than on the most disadvantaged and excluded communities. This decision has proved sensible, given the range of activities undertaken, and it does seem that the initial aim may have been over ambitious. As already noted, the most disadvantaged communities can require enormous inputs of resources over very long periods (as the UK Government programmes on neighbourhood renewal recognise). However, there is clearly enormous potential for sustainability issues to be addressed alongside mainstream regeneration programmes, and this could be another audience for the lessons from the SCP.

One final issue remains, which is about the way the terms sustainability and quality of life are used interchangeably. The UK Government has used the term Quality of Life in various of its statements on sustainable development, but also well-being (in community strategies and LSPs), and sustainable development in other planning contexts. There remains a major issue as to whether communities can understand the concept of sustainable development, or whether other terms should be used which are more readily understandable. However, the problem with this approach is that if people think they understand what is being said, they will not question it, which can lead to assumptions about meaning which miss the really important elements. As already mentioned, research by the University of Lancaster also shows that, given a reasonable description of what sustainable development is, people in local communities quickly understand both the meaning and many of the implications, and support the concept in principle.

We would suggest, therefore, that it is generally preferable to use the term sustainable development and take the time to discuss the meaning, rather than use euphemisms. Sustainable development is a challenging and complex concept, which requires explicit discussion in planning for sustainability. It cannot be replaced with other words simply because they are familiar.

7. LEARNING NETWORKS

The potential for the establishment of learning networks was intended from the outset to be a key question for this study. From interviews with SCP staff, local groups and others, the following findings emerge:

- There is real interest in learning networks from all parts of the SCP. However, it is recognised by local groups that they lack the time and financial resources to engage in activities beyond their locality. Some also do not see it as a priority at all, feeling that 'we are parochial and proud of it'. The greatest interest is from paid workers (SCP, local authority and others), and from some individuals in the local groups. Proposals for establishing networks may need to consider attracting people from all these sectors, possibly by establishing different networks to meet the different needs.
- If learning networks are to be established, there must be a clear purpose. People do not have the time to engage in activities which are woolly. This does not mean that there has to be a rigid formula, but simply that the reasons for establishing the networks is clear, widely understood and supported by those who will participate.
- Any new learning networks need to be established with a clear knowledge of which other networks already exist and either build on (through supporting) those, or fill any identified gaps. Many staff (and some community groups) are already engaged in networks at local, regional and national level - on LA21, sustainable development, education, environment, development trusts, community development. Any proposals for new networks need to build on these existing links. It has also been suggested that such networks also need to establish strong links to existing higher and further education provision, both to allow participants to follow up particular learning opportunities personally, and also to bring in expertise from the formal education sector where appropriate.
- It must be recognised that people need a certain level of confidence before they will participate in wider networks, and they should not therefore be seen as a way of working with new and inexperienced staff or local activists (although people in the network may be able to offer support), but rather for those with experience to articulate and disseminate the lessons they have found, and provide mutual support for each other. Certainly confidence can be built through engagement with wider networks, but such activities will not be appropriate for everyone.
- Where local networks are established, the geographical boundaries will be critical. The 'localities' people identify with vary hugely, and networks may need to relate to people's perceptions of their neighbourhood, area, city or region, rather than conventional geographical boundaries.
- Any new learning networks should draw on experience from other initiatives which are already trying to articulate and disseminate learning. For example, although visits to other projects are seen as a valuable learning tool, the experience of the Shell Better Britain Campaign is that the budget they have nationally to support these types of visits is always underspent, suggesting that these may not be a priority for local groups.
- Learning networks need to use a variety of learning methods, including gaining access to conventional training but also finding ways of sharing information and experience. This will require the creation of a safe environment, in which people can share information with no fear of others in the network using it to compete with or undermine activities by others. Such relationships of trust will take time to build, and the balance between conventional training and sharing of experience may need to change over time.
- Learning networks should ideally be built on existing structures in which relationships of trust have already been established. The findings from this study, and from the UBiB study, suggest that people will not engage with learning opportunities unless they know and trust the organisation which is promoting them, and such trust takes time to develop. For SCP, therefore, if there is interest in establishing local learning networks, development work needs to start as soon as possible. Local activists may get involved through the encouragement of a local SCPO, but are much less likely to be interested without such a personal link.

- There is a strong sense among those interviewed that there should be a face-to-face element to any learning networks. Although the use of electronic methods for sharing information is growing rapidly, people still need to work together in person in some cases. Electronic methods can support meetings, and provide access to a wide range of knowledge, but at this stage they cannot provide a wholly satisfactory mechanism without other more conventional approaches (eg workshops etc).
- Networks need resources, at least for the secretariat role. This does not have to be particularly onerous, and can often be an addition to an existing role (as was the role of the Rural Action network co-ordinators). However, given the funding difficulties of most voluntary and community organisations, at all levels, without additional resources to cover basic costs and the time of a co-ordinator, it is very unlikely the network will succeed.
- Careful consideration is needed of what exactly is being sought through the establishment of learning networks. For some respondents to this study, 'doing successful projects is a learning opportunity', and looking at training needs is a learning opportunity. Any new networks will have to be very clear about what is being offered, what is likely to result, and what resources are available, in order to attract people.

Overall, therefore, it seems likely that a rigid framework of networks will not be appropriate, but rather a series of models which can be used where groups and professional staff feel there is benefit for them. These could then be supported by some form of national support team. However, there is a sense from respondents that new SCP networks are not needed in most places, as there is already a great wealth of networking opportunities (and demands).

The greatest demand for shared learning is at UK wide level, and particularly to share local experience with policy makers. However, even at national level caution is advised by respondents. Learning does not necessarily lead to change and development. Such changes need to be explicitly promoted and pursued. The power of ideas is only transforming when it is the transformation which is pursued rather than just the ideas. Learning networks will thus only be part of wider programmes of change, but there is clearly support for them to be developed as an important, and currently missing, part of that wider programme.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There has been a lot of very positive activity undertaken through the SCP, at local and national levels. Much of this activity has focused on building relationships with local communities, and supporting them in identifying local priorities in moving towards sustainable development. There has also been production, at national level, of a range of resources (eg the training menu, *On the Street Where you Live* packs, and the *How to Make your Neighbourhood a Better Place to Live* handbook) which are now available for use by a wider range of community groups and local authorities.

As already noted, three years is a very short time in which to establish a programme of community-based activity. This would have been less of a problem if there had been continuity with the pilot areas, but this proved impossible in practice for a variety of reasons. Moreover, the three years cannot be seen as a period of continuous full scale delivery of the programme, given staff turnover and gaps in filling certain critical positions during that time. In spite of these difficulties, the SCP staff (at national and local level) have achieved an impressive level of activity in a new and highly complex area (ie the development of sustainable communities).

The work at local level has increasingly focused on support and training, with the production of the training menu, training needs analysis and the establishment of training programmes, often in partnership with individual external consultants and local institutions. There has been no strategic development of learning networks to date, and no clear demand for such mechanisms at local level. There is, however, a sense that there are important lessons to be drawn from the SCP over the two phases so far, and that a great deal of experience, knowledge, contacts and information would be lost if the programme were not to build on that in some way.

The ideal next step would have been to extend the programme, at the level of funding provided for the first three years (at least) and with the existing staff for a further two to three years, to consolidate and strengthen the work that has been achieved to date based on the lessons which have

emerged from this evaluation. The aims and objectives for the next stage would have needed to be streamlined for maximum clarity and to ensure they are achievable with the proposed resources, the national profile increased, national leadership and direction strengthened, and all staff adequately trained and rewarded for the extremely difficult and demanding work they would be undertaking in attempting to support communities in becoming more sustainable. All the SCP staff, at national and local levels, have shown strong commitment to the ideals which lay behind the programme.

A further two to three years would have allowed the staff working on the ground to support the local groups they are currently working with to become fully established as strong independent organisations which could have continued this work in the long term, with diminishing needs for support from the SCP national programme but with continuing links. At the same time, the SCPOs could have started to devote more resources to strengthening the links between the local groups and the local authorities, particularly by building formal structures in which the groups and the local authorities work together to develop practical programmes to increase local sustainability. At UK wide level, a parallel programme of activity could have developed a series of learning activities, including the development of formal learning networks.

However, ENCAMS has now redefined its overall corporate objectives and has a much stronger focus on local environmental quality and other priorities. It has taken a corporate decision not to continue with work with local community organisations, nor to use community development approaches. Nevertheless, ENCAMS can still contribute to the future development of sustainable communities by making the lessons emerging from the experience of running the SCP more widely available.

In particular, the local authorities which have been participants in the SCP to date have had very few (if any) opportunities to reflect on and draw out lessons from their experience of the programme. A carefully designed and managed programme of learning events which enabled these authorities to articulate and build on the lessons from past experience, alongside aspirations for the future, could provide the basis for a wider programme of learning about sustainable communities which could, in time, be opened to other interested parties (see below).

There has been consideration of separate learning networks for community groups and organisations, but the research for this study, with SCPOs and community groups themselves, suggests that community level learning networks are very rarely successful. Not only do community groups lack the time and resources to get involved in activities beyond their day to day priorities (although some individuals are interested), where they do have an interest in wider learning activities they often have very specific needs which are not necessarily met through regular contacts with other similar groups.

Therefore, to enable local authorities to strengthen their activities in this area in partnership with community organisations, it may be that the best option is to establish learning networks which involve both local authorities and community groups. This approach was used in the WWF Local Sustainability Unit's training courses on Local Agenda 21, bringing together teams of three people from each local authority attending: a local authority officer, an elected councillor, and someone from a local community organisation. For those attending, the presence of this mix of people was the most important and successful element of the training.

In the learning networks now being considered, there would not need to be any restriction on only one from each of these categories (officer, member, community), which would also meet some of the criticisms of the WWF formula. Such a mix of membership would allow these individuals from local communities who wished to engage in developing ideas and activities beyond their immediate locality to do so (or simply to take different ideas back to their locality), and would ensure that genuine grassroots voices were involved in future debates about the development of sustainable communities.

These community and local government networks could also involve other public, private and voluntary sector bodies as appropriate, but that development could be planned by each network according to its own priorities. The networks could operate at local authority, county, sub-regional, regional, supra-regional, national or UK levels, or at all these levels.

As a starting point, however, it would make sense for the existing SCP local authority areas to be the initial focus, drawing together those involved in the programme to date. With appropriate support from ENCAMS nationally, these networks could then develop as seemed most appropriate, depending on the other networks which already exist in each area, region or whichever level is chosen, and to meet the interests of those involved.

There is also a wider debate already progressing, at national and international levels, about the development of sustainable communities. The SCAN, the IDeA Local Sustainability Team and others (including the Countryside Agency and Environment Agency) are already active in this field, and many other organisations also have an interest.

ENCAMS already has a central role in this debate (primarily through Peter Hirst's past and current involvement), but this role could expand. For example, ENCAMS could support the local government / community learning networks - stimulating interest, providing resources and frameworks for starting up networks, and bringing ideas from local (and regional and national) practice together on a national basis.

It is likely that such a role would best be managed by a series of partnerships between ENCAMS and other organisations which may also wish to support the work at different levels such as SNIP and Forward Scotland (and possibly an organisation in Wales), the LGA and IDeA, Groundwork UK and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit.

There is now a unique opportunity for ENCAMS to build on more than five years of substantial investment in local and national support for the development of sustainable communities. This evaluation report is intended to support the internal debate about the form that support should take in future.

Diane Warburton
31 March 2003

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ANNEX A. GROUPS IDENTIFIED FOR INTERVIEW

London

West Hendon or Perryfield Community Group
Youth Community Group, Ponders End
Enfield Women's Centre
Clem Atlee Residents Association

West Midlands

Wellington LA 21
Ladywood Community and Health Centre
Sydenham neighbourhoods initiative

North East

New Hartley Community Association
Moor Park

North West

Poulton Residents Association
Shaw Heath Residents Association

Northern Ireland

Poleglass youth and community group
Belfast Community Recycling Network
Cloughmills
Eco-Seeds

Scotland

Newmains
Salsburgh
North Lanarkshire Council
Aberdeen Healthy Roots

Wales

Harlech the way forward
Monkton Voice

ANNEX B. QUESTIONNAIRES USED IN INTERVIEWS

Questionnaires used with local groups

Preamble

- We understand that you have participated in the Sustainable Communities Programme (SCP) through xx officer @ ENCAMS / Forward Scotland / SNIP
- We are carrying out a short review of the SCP. and have identified a random sample of groups which have been involved
- We would like to do a short interview with you
- Everything will be completely confidential; none of those interviewed will be identified
- We just want to examine whether the programme has achieved what it was intended to, and how much it met the needs of the groups involved.

Questions

Your group and project

- Was your group formed specially to work with the SCP, or was it already going?
- If the group was already going:
 - what were its main activities before
 - roughly how long has it been running (eg a year, 5 years)?
- What have been your main activities with SCP (very briefly)?
- Did you do any of the following:
 - community action plan
 - skills audit for your group
 - networking with other groups or organisations
 - other things
- Is your group involved in community activities apart from SCP? If so, what sorts of things?
- Who has been involved in your project?
 - number of people in your group
 - regular core group
 - get involved in specific activities or events
 - what sorts of people (eg age range, local residents or paid workers, people from black and minority ethnic communities, people with disabilities)?

Support

- Would you have been involved in the same activities if you had not received support from SCP?
- What type of support have you received through SCP (eg funding, training, information, advice)?
- Which were the most useful elements of support, and which were the least useful, and why?
- Are you satisfied with the level of support you have received from your SCP Officer?
- Would you have liked more or different support from SCP? If so, what?
- Did you get support for this work from elsewhere as well? If so, what and where from?
Who gave the most useful advice and support?
- Did you make any links to other community groups?
 - in SCP
 - in other networksIf so, what was the most useful thing you gained from these links?
Have you stayed in touch? If so, why?

Achievements

- What do you think were the most important achievements of your involvement with SCP?
 - environmentally
 - in terms of community action, empowerment and cohesion
 - in terms of developing the skills and confidence of your group

- anything else?
- Did your involvement in SCP contribute to improving the environment in your area? If so, how?
- Did your involvement with SCP help your group understand sustainable development better? If so, how did that make a difference to what you are doing locally?
- Has your involvement with SCP helped your group run more effectively (eg meetings, activities)? If so, how?
- Do you feel more confident dealing with other institutions and people in authority (eg local council) as a result of your involvement with SCP? If so, how?
- Overall, what were you hoping to achieve through working with the SCP?
- Did you achieve what you were hoping to? If not, why not?
[If not achieved because work in progress, ask whether they think they will achieve what they hoped for and, if not, why not?]

Next steps

- What do you plan to do next?
- Do you have alternative sources of support you can use when SCP is no longer available? If so, what?
- What would you say are the main lessons from your involvement with SCP?
- Have you used those lessons at all (eg in new areas of work for your group - or telling others about them)?
- Has your involvement with SCP made any difference to the way you and other members of your group think and act (eg about environmental issues, or about community action, or about changes to personal lifestyle to be more sustainable)?
- Would you be interested in joining some sort of 'learning network' following on from your involvement in SCP?
If so, what would you hope to get out of such a network?

Overall

- What would you say were the best aspects of the SCP programme?
- Was there anything specific you would have liked from the programme that was not available? If so, what?
- Is there anything else you would like to say about the Sustainable Communities Programme?

Questionnaires used with SCP officers

Preamble

- We are carrying out a review of the Sustainable Communities Programme (SCP), and have identified the key staff with Claire Abbott
- We would like to do a short telephone interview with you
- Everything will be completely confidential; no-one interviewed will be identified
- We just want to examine whether the programme has achieved what it was intended to, and how much it met the needs of those involved.

Questions

Structures and functions

- What was your role in the SCP? What did that involve on a day to day basis?
- What services have you provided to local groups (eg training, access to information etc)?
- How did you identify the communities you worked with (if you know)? And how did you prioritise which groups to give support to?
- How did you work with the group to prioritise the issues on which the group wanted to work?
- In terms of your links to local groups, what do you feel have been the most effective and successful aspects of the SCP, and what have been the least effective?
- In terms of your links to local authorities, what do you feel have been the most effective and successful aspects of the SCP, and what have been the least effective?

- In terms of your links to the national SCP, and ENCAMS, which aspects of the management support and help available to you has worked best on a day to day basis? And which aspects have worked least well? [*NOTE: England and Wales only*]
- And what about your links regionally to ENCAMS: which aspects of the management support and help available to you has worked best on a day to day basis? And which aspects have worked least well?
- Can you suggest any specific changes to the ENCAMS management structures at national and regional levels which would have helped your work at local level?
- Has the national identity / profile of the SCP or ENCAMS affected your work on the ground in any way? Has it helped or hindered your work with community groups?
- Which of the products from the national SCP (eg the pack, Community EcoCal, the training menu) were most useful? And why? And which were least useful, and why?
- Has the context for the SCP changed since it started? What are the implications?

Achievements and priorities

- Do you feel that SCP achieved its objectives in terms of
 - better awareness and understanding of sustainable development
 - empowering local communities, including increasing community involvement
 - increased community cohesion
 - participation in local action for health, environment and economic benefits
 - adoption of more sustainable lifestyles
 - more local partnerships
- What do you feel were the most important of these achievements in your area?
- What do you think would have helped achieve these programme objectives better?
- Have you done any formal monitoring and evaluation of the achievements of your work on SCP? If so, what? And have you used the results of this exercise for future planning in any way?
- Did your work link to local authority work on Local Agenda 21, Local Strategic Partnerships or Community Strategies? How (or why not)?
- Did your work link to local authority work on social inclusion? How (or why not)?
- Did your work link to local business? How (or why not)?
- What incentives were available for you to use to encourage local people's involvement (eg free low energy light bulbs)?
- Have the community groups developed their own management structures? If so, have these been successful, and in what ways? Why do you think these have succeeded (or not)?

Learning

- Can you describe the learning opportunities within the SCP, formal and informal (eg workshops, access to information about training, meeting to reflect and plan)?
- Can you suggest any other types of learning opportunities that should be provided in this sort of programme?
- Do you think SCP groups would benefit from joining learning networks? What do you think groups would gain?
- Have you been involved in wider networks on sustainable communities? If so, which ones and how? If not, why not - and would you like to be?
- Overall, what do you think has been the greatest achievements of the SCP, so far?
- What do you think makes the SCP unique: originally, in practice, and potentially?
- Which elements of the SCP have worked best in your view? And which have worked least well?
- Can you suggest any changes to the programme which would make it work better?
- What are the main lessons you think need to be learned from your experience
 - by ENCAMS in running a programme of this sort?
 - about sustainable communities more generally?
- Are there any other points you want to make about the SCP?

ANNEX C. SCP PROJECTS, TRAINING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

This Annex was written based on material supplied by SCPOs specifically for this purpose, and using information from other sources used throughout the evaluation. It is not a comprehensive listing of projects, but is intended to give an idea of the range of activities undertaken around the UK through the SCP. In addition, more detail is given on the community action planning activities undertaken in each locality in section 4.3 of the main report.

London

Ponders End, LB Enfield

- Mixture of local community group members and resident volunteers working on community-led neighbourhood survey (questionnaire-based resident consultation)
- Local Bangladeshi Women's Group: textiles-based art project to express feelings about the Alma neighbourhood
- Local residents, community groups council workers and councillors doing Neighbourhood Walkabouts to identify local concerns
- Alma Primary School: Art collage project to express feelings about the Alma neighbourhood
- Mixture of local community groups, resident volunteers and council departments ran Celebrate Ponders End community festival
- Ponders End Development Forum (PEDF)
 - Production of a Community Action Plan
 - Community newsletter
- Bangladeshi and Somali Women's Groups: Art Project using locally recycled materials
- St Matthew's School and local community volunteers created local community garden from waste land
- Student placement
- Worked with LBE Housing and Sustainability to deliver energy-efficiency advice to residents in tower blocks.

West Hendon, London Borough of Barnet

- West Hendon Residents' Association and London Borough of Barnet Housing Department ran Money's Too Tight To Mention': advice and information event (energy efficiency, cheap and healthy meals, consumer issues, local recreation opportunities)
- West Hendon Residents Association ran neighbourhood consultation (questionnaires)
- Perryfields Estate Community Group
 - Established regular coffee mornings, internet club and healthcare drop-in
 - Project: Community clean-up (litter pick)
- LA21 Greening Group
 - Planning for Real for local green space
 - Gardening Day with local youth group
- With BTCV and the Youth Service, ran Summer Youth Environmental Activities Programme
- With LBB Housing and North London ITeC ran IT Taster Sessions at community centre.
- Factsheet on lifelong learning.

Aylesbury / Alvey Estates, London Borough of Southwark

- Alvey Gardening Group
 - Community garden with local composting scheme
 - Coffee morning club
 - St Peters Church Gardening Group: developing a community garden
- Mixture of local gardening groups
 - Tool-sharing scheme
 - Visits to a number of London gardens

- Walworth Upper School
 - After-school environment club
 - With local gardening groups ran an Environment Day with training, education and workshops to improve local scene.

Clem Attlee estate, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham

- Clem Attlee, Rocque & Maton Residents' Association (CARMRA)
 - North Fulham Community Carnival
 - Local training awareness events.

Seminars and learning events (in addition to above)

- Training day for youth workers in Southwark
- London Sustainability Exchange / CDF / SCP seminar (May 2002)
- Walworth Upper School Environment Days (June 2002).

West Midlands

Sydenham Neighbourhood Initiative, Leamington Spa

- Building a new multicultural community centre in a sustainable manner
- Community sports event (including celebrity footballers)
- Bonfire and Diwali night celebrations 2001 and 2002
- Youth activities based around Going for Green Waste Theme Month
- Asian Women's textiles evening courses. Banner completed for new community centre
- Landscaping and garden projects for the new centre
- Funding: raised over £1 million for projects including community development worker and building the centre
- Energy efficiency promotion ie distribution of free energy saving lightbulbs
- History project investigating the backgrounds of local people; video in time capsule beneath new community centre
- Community composting seminar with freebies by HyDRA
- Fun days
- Local clean ups using ENCAMS kits
- Real nappy awareness campaign.

Sydenham Fun Club, Leamington Spa

- Established committee
- Constitution
- Funding
- Support network
- Weekly social club for children with special needs
- Training volunteers to work with special needs children.

Sydenham Single Mothers Group, Leamington Spa

- Established committee
- Constitution
- Funding
- Weekly group for social evenings, outings, support work and a voice for single mothers in isolation and poverty
- Free training courses through the local college.

Sikh Community Centre, Leamington Spa

- Urban Britain in Bloom project: hanging baskets by carers group

South Asian Action Group, Leamington Spa

- Formulation of constitution
- Dholi and arts taster sessions with local musicians and young artists.

Thorns Tenants and Residents Association, Sandwell

- Community consultation and designs drawn up for community park venture
- Shrub removal to improve safety around estate
- Development of football pitch
- Youth cabaret show encouraging youth involvement in community

- Funding
- Search for a group computer
- Skills audit exercise
- Jubilee event
- Community football penalty shoot out day
- Football coaching training for local people to run the youth football team (nationally recognised certificate)
- Training in manual book-keeping for group and local people
- Time bank scheme with two neighbouring TRAs
- Local clean ups using ENCAMS kits
- Project to successfully become a national TRA case study.

Balaji Temple, Sandwell

- Community activities based around Going for Green's Waste Theme Month

Ladywood Community and Health Centre, Birmingham

- Twice weekly gardening activities for disabled people at local day care centre
- Development of *Looking at Ladywood* project focusing on perceptions of the area, crime and safety etc
- Urban Britain in Bloom community bulb planting
- Urban Britain in Bloom community 'Adopt-a-planter' gardening project
- Urban Britain in Bloom community fruit trees project
- Partnership with South Birmingham College outreach programme to deliver free gardening courses for the community, and landscaping and repair jobs undertaken by college student.

Ladywood Youth Group, Birmingham

- Photography project on 'Posh Spots and Grot Spots', and display at local art gallery

Ladywood Healthy Living Centre, Birmingham

- Successful bid to NOF for a Healthy Living Centre programme (£987,000), covering:
 - Access to leisure facilities project; employment of mini bus driver
 - Healthy food project linked to Ladywood fruit tree project and community kitchen project
 - Physical activity
 - Community safety: making the area safer for people to venture out of their homes.

Sparkbrook, Sparkhill and Tyseley Area Regeneration Initiative (SSTARI), Birmingham

- Development of neighbourhood consortium
- Organisation of SSTARI carnival with environment theme.

Balsall Heath Forum, Birmingham

- Urban Britain in Bloom 'confused spaces' gardening project
- Organic gardening training (with BTCV) for volunteers
- Funding

Refugee Gardening Club, Birmingham

- Establishment of group
- Funding
- Support network.

Wellington LA21 Group

- Established committee
- Constitution
- Group logo competition
- Bilingual wheellie bin stickers encouraging to recycle
- Garden tool library established
- Farmers market seminar on food and sustainability
- Monthly farmers market
- Green Fair
- Community Fun Day
- Volunteer recruitment
- Creation of display boards celebrating past projects

- Series of community surveys: one to one interviews and newspaper articles
- Action planning workshop
- Funding to rebuild local church in sustainable manner
- Dog fouling campaign
- Local clean ups using ENCAMS kits.

Seminars and learning events

- Farmers Market seminar on food and sustainability: Wellington LA21 Group
- Composting seminar: Sydenham estate, Leamington Spa
- Asian Women's textile course: Sydenham estate, Leamington Spa
- Horticultural training: Balsall Heath, Birmingham
- Book-keeping training: Thorns TRA, Sandwell
- Football coaching: Thorns TRA, Sandwell
- Mini bus driving licence: Ladywood, Birmingham
- Horticultural training: Ladywood, Birmingham
- Training courses through local college: Sydenham Single Mums, Leamington Spa
- Green Fair: Wellington LA21 Group
- Action Planning seminar: Wellington LA21 Group
- Training volunteers to work with special needs children: Sydenham Fun Club, Leamington Spa
- Real Nappies awareness campaign: Sydenham, Leamington Spa
- Dog fouling awareness campaign: Wellington LA21 Group
- West Midlands SCP Learning Event for all groups
- Visit to Gloucester Time Bank Projects: Thorns TRA and two neighbouring TRAs
- Visit to Leicester Eco-House: Sydenham Neighbourhood Initiative
- Visit to Wren's Nest estate in Dudley for project ideas: Wellington LA21 Group
- Visit to Dholi exhibition: Sydenham Neighbourhood Initiative
- 'Out of isolation' seminar for Asian women: Sydenham Neighbourhood Initiative

North East

Blyth Valley (New Hartley)

- Questionnaire
- Village trail
- Planning for Real: built model of village
- New Hartley banners project (past, present and future)
- Publication of leaflet about village.

Hartlepool (Headland)

- Questionnaire
- Just Bin It: three clean up events
- Community event: art from waste and bulb planting around St Hilda's Church
- Community archaeologist: work on the Regent Square green space.

Middlesbrough (Gresham Neighbourhood)

- Alley gates
- Eco-Cal for households
- Cash for cans day
- Hanging baskets
- Neighbourhood watch
- Two summer galas
- Parties in two parks to raise awareness and funds
- Anti-litter campaign.

Newcastle (Heaton)

- Good Clean Fun Day: residents and students on litter, graffiti, recycling and gardens
- Questionnaire
- Computer available for use
- Raising funds for a notice board.

North Tyneside (Killingworth site)

- Questionnaire

- Working with One North East (the Regional Development Agency) to make their building in Killingworth more sustainable.

North Tyneside (Moor Park)

- Just Bin It
- After school environmental club, New York primary school
- 'Recyclist': reusing abandoned bicycles
- Eco-Schools: Ayresome Junior School
- Transport map produced showing public transport routes and where people want to go.

Sunderland (Sulgrave)

- Schools and Charities in Sunderland (SACS): recycling unwanted goods in to charity shops.

Sunderland (Thorney Close)

- Community Clean Up (Just Bin It)
- Training needs identified and training planned.

Seminars and learning events

Blyth Valley (New Hartley)

- Transport open day
- Community safety open day
- Sustainable buildings talk by Walter Segal Self Build Trust
- Ceilidh Dancing Workshop
- Display model of village at local indoor shopping centre (Cramlington) and Post Office in Village
- Open days in community centre for people to come and add their comments to the model
- Invited to display model at a regional event in Killingworth
- New Hartley Banner Project (past, present and future)
- Visit to memorial of Hartley Pit Disaster (Earsdon).

Hartlepool (Headland)

- Visit to Saltburn by the Sea community
- Community consultation: what changes would they like to see on the Headland
- Group represented at the Volunteer Forum, Borough Hall
- Visit to Grange Villa Community Garden (Urban Britain in Bloom recipient)
- Community consultation: what changes would they like to see in the green space
- SACS in Hartlepool

Middlesbrough (Gresham Neighbourhood)

- Launch of SCP, Ayresome Junior School
- Transport open day
- Training in planting and maintaining hanging baskets
- Just Bin It
- Rose Garden Memorial in Ayresome Gardens (Urban Britain in Bloom)
- Conference in Middlesbrough Environment City: one of the workshops was on SCP in Middlesbrough
- Community Plan for Glebe Park
- Competition for Best Frontage and Best Back Yard
- Community newsletter
- LETS Scheme
- Anti-litter posters
- Neighbourhood Watch
- Increase recycling in houses with alley gates.

Newcastle (Heaton)

- Community artist to produce mural on shutters of community rooms

North Tyneside (Moor Park)

- Community appraisal event, Moor Park Community Centre
- Two transport seminars
- Members of community walking around the area to identify environmental problems.

Sunderland (Sulgrave)

- Participatory Appraisal Training
- Community conference, Sunderland
- Just Bin It Red Litter Day
- What's On in Sulgrave?
- Transport open day.

Sunderland (Thorney Close)

- Training in Funding, and Managing Projects.

North West

Anfield and Breckfield, Liverpool

Partnership between the council, the football club and community groups

- Christmas card and tree recycling scheme
- Big sweep (with Sweeper zone)
- Dog fouling survey
- Community Challenge: community garden.

Shaw Heath, Stockport

- Work with local residents to identify local priorities
- Woodbine crescent garden
- Grotspot survey.

Poulton, Morecambe

- Heritage archway improvements
- Community garden.

Lache, Chester

- Adventure playground

Seminars and learning events held

- Neighbourhood management information and Consultation day: Poulton
- Hanging basket course: Poulton

Northern Ireland

Ligoniel Recycling Group

- Training needs audit
- Training plan

Loughhall and District Improvement Association

- Training needs audit
- Training plan

Poleglass Youth and Community Group

- Training needs audit
- Training plan

Kilcooley Adventure Playground Group

- New group established
- Council funding obtained for playground
- Training needs audit
- Training plan

Ballymoney Plugging the Leaks group

- Being set up as a sustainable borough
- Training needs audit
- Training plan

Belfast Community Recycling Network

- Training needs audit
- Training plan

Cloughmills Community Action Team

- Training needs audit
- Training plan
- Plugging the Leaks local economic development project
- Development of a community pharmacy

Eco Seeds (a co-operative)

- Training needs audit
- Training

Rasharkin Women's Group

- Training needs audit
- Training plan

Seminars and learning events held

- Two major conferences covering all Northern Ireland on sustainable communities, held in 2000 and 2002.

Scotland

Newmains

- Newmains Action Group (NAG) fully constituted (about 15 people including the local councillor)
- Funding for NAG environmental sub-group for footpath improvements (£56,000)
- Children and Families sub-group of NAG ran a bus scheme to take children to swimming and sports activities
- Children and Families sub-group painted equipment in local playground
- Development and launch of Community Action Plan
- Planning for new community centre
- Urban Britain in Bloom funding for NAG to develop a sensory garden at the front of Newmains Primary School.

Salsburgh, North Lanarkshire

- Fully constituted local group (about 20 people plus the local Member of the Scottish Parliament - MSP)
- Development and launch of the Community Action Plan
- Christmas tree and party for village
- Fundraising Race Night
- Removal of 40 dumped cars
- Shrub and tree planting event (with Urban Britain in Bloom funding)
- Urban Britain in Bloom funding for school seed growing and bulb planting
- Funding from North Lanarkshire Forward (£43,000) for gateways marking entrances to village, benches, improvements to Main Street and a community garden by the community centre.

Middlefield, Aberdeen (Healthy Roots Project)

Healthy Roots is a project to revitalise a 10-acre derelict allotments site in Middlefield to make a community garden including growing healthy food, recycling, health and wellbeing training and work opportunities, educational resources, improving wildlife and biodiversity. Activities include:

- Development of Healthy Roots committee, and setting up a company limited by guarantee
- Group includes the local councillor
- Open event to build wider community involvement
- Group obtained funding, including £1,000 from Urban Britain in Bloom for trees, shrubs, bulbs and fruit trees
- Business plan and funding strategy produced.

Seaton

- Seaton Tenants and Residents (STAR) group established and formally constituted
- Summer fundraising gala
- Funding strategy
- Development of plan for community newsletter
- Draft Community Action Plan fed into Aberdeen City Council community plan as a neighbourhood plan
- Welcome to Seaton information booklet about the area.

Powis

- Draft Community Action Plan fed into Aberdeen City Council community plan as a neighbourhood plan

Crossgates, Fife

Crossgates is Fife's first energy efficient village. Projects and activities include:

- Questionnaire to research success of original energy efficiency project and identify issues of importance to community (very high response rate of 32%)
- Community meeting to discuss issues identified in the questionnaire responses, involving the Chair of the Community Council and the local councillor
- Results fed into Fife's draft Energy Strategy.

Hill of Beith

- Questionnaire to research success of original energy efficiency project and identify issues of importance to community (very high response rate of 32%)

Townhill

- Questionnaire to research success of original energy efficiency project and identify issues of importance to community (very high response rate of 32%)
- Community meeting to discuss issues identified in the questionnaire responses, involving the Chair of the Community Council and the local councillor

Seminars and learning events

Newmains

- Skills audit to identify training needs
- Access to CAVOC training events
- Citizenship training through WEA
- Visits to other community centres.

Salsburgh, North Lanarkshire

- Citizenship training through WEA
- Access to training through the local CVS.

Middlefield, Aberdeen (Healthy Roots Project)

- Training for committee through WEA on the role of Directors

Seaton

- WEA training on citizenship

Crossgates, Fife

- Information education for local primary school on energy efficiency and health issues.

Wales

Pembrokeshire Community Workers Network

- Committee of seven community workers from statutory and voluntary sectors
- Directory of community workers
- Training needs analysis day
- Network development day.

Harlech The Way Forward / Harlech In Bloom

- Two-day action planning and visioning event
- Training needs analysis

- Two launch events for the action plan
- Establishment of management committee for the action plan (including two community councillors)
- Website (www.harlech.box.com).

Monkton, Pembrokeshire

- Training needs analysis
- Action planning event
- Mapping progress event.

Communities that Care (CTC) and Cwm Ogwr Project for Youth (COPY), Ogmore Valley

- Report on risk factors facing young people
- Ogmore Valley Community Directory

Seminars and learning events

Pembrokeshire Community Workers Network

- Partnership working skills
- Encouraging community participation.

Doncaster

Conisbrough

- Action plan with local development trust

Bentley

- Recycled furniture scheme with local unemployed people

Wellgate estate

- Worked with seven families who stayed in the area after the estate was demolished to help rebuild community spirit.

CADRE

- Energy efficiency assessment by the university
- Community consortium for energy supply
- Crime safety and fire safety through partnership working

General

- Worked with the Earth Centre to look at getting energy efficiency into local homes
- Established six community forums.

ANNEX D. INTERIM REVIEW 2001

Introduction

As SCP entered its third and final year (September 2001 to 30 November 2002), a review was undertaken to collect some basic information about the operation of the scheme. The review examined the nature of the groups involved, how SCP had benefited them, and to gather some baseline data for the fuller evaluation study. This annex summarises the results of this interim review.

Methodology

Questionnaires were designed by ENCAMS and these were used by SCPOs to interview their local community groups. The review covered six of the seven areas (one SCPO post was vacant at the time of the exercise), and 22 of the possible 31 questionnaires was completed (71%).

Findings

• **Types of groups**

The interim review provided information on the groups involved at that stage. That found that:

- 64% of groups had been going for longer than a year, and 36% had been going for longer than two years (which suggests that they pre-date SCP).
- In terms of the formality of the groups, it was found that 41% had constitutions, and 55% had a bank account.
- 77% of groups met monthly or more often (68% met monthly, 9% weekly)
- 50% of groups were regularly attended by 10 or fewer people; a further 41% attended by between 10 and 20 people.

These figures suggest that 64% of groups (about 20 groups out of 31) had been established in order to work with the SCP, and that the majority of the groups were still fairly informal (ie no constitution). It is also clear from this research that the 31 'communities' are in fact 31 community groups, rather than broad communities with a range of groups.

• **Interests in groups**

The review also sought information on the key concerns and aspirations of the groups. The result was a very broad spread across the options given in the questionnaire, but the highest were:

- Litter (77%)
- Greenspaces (72%)
- Crime and safety (63%)
- Information (59%)

• **Projects and activities by SCP groups**

From the list of given options, the following findings emerged:

- Improving unattractive local environments (91%)
- Green spaces (73%)
- Litter (73%)
- Securing community facilities (64%)
- Conducting surveys (64%)
- Playspace (55%)
- Campaigning for street furniture (36%)
- Housing issues (36%)
- Recycling and composting (27%).

• **Benefits from involvement in SCP**

The interim review questionnaires sought information on what groups had gained from being involved in SCP, and offered a list of options. The findings were:

- 100% felt they had gained from being involved in project work or specific activities
- 82% felt they had gained increased awareness of the concerns of the community
- 68% had increased understanding of issues affecting the community
- 68% felt they had gained from involvement in the Community Action Plan process

- 64% felt there were gains in relation to increased participation by members of the community
 - 50% felt there were gains in relation to improvements in the appearance of the neighbourhood
 - 41% felt there had been gains in confidence in dealing with the council
 - 18% felt they had an increased understanding of the responsibilities of the council.
- **Feedback on the SCP**
 The feelings of the community groups about the SCP at the time of the interim review were as follows:
 - 100% agreed that becoming involved with SCP created enthusiasm within the group (50% agreed strongly and 50% agreed slightly)
 - 50% agreed that involvement with SCP had influenced the way they lived their lives (14% agreed strongly, 36% slightly; 36% disagreed and 14% didn't know)
 - 59% agreed that involvement with SCP had enabled the group to gain more influence with the council (9% strongly, 50% slightly); 32% said it hadn't.
 - 70% agreed that involvement with SCP had contributed to improving the appearance of the neighbourhood (14% strongly, 54% slightly); 18% said it hadn't.
 - 54% agreed that involvement with SCP had enabled them to exert greater control over their lives and the environment (14% agreed strongly and 40% slightly); 31% said it hadn't.
 - 90% disagreed with the idea that SCP had been a disappointment; only 5% felt it had.

ANNEX E. EVALUATING PARTICIPATION, AND PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION: BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS

The distinction between participatory evaluation and evaluation of participation needs to be recognised. A participatory programme can be evaluated using non-participatory methods, and a non-participatory programme can be evaluated using participatory methods. Each approach has its own benefits and limitations, as follows:

The benefits of evaluating participation may include:

- Improving the practice of participatory working by capturing, analysing and sharing experience of good practice, and what works in different circumstances.
- Building support for participatory ways of working, by providing evidence of effectiveness and achievement, and learning processes to support often isolated workers.
- Contributing to the development of the theory and analysis of participatory working, including creating new theoretical models, methodologies and criteria for success which cover process outcomes (eg trust, ownership, understanding) as well as product outcomes (eg physical improvements, better air quality or greater biodiversity).
- Helps develop the sophisticated social science methodologies which are needed for sustainable development. The social science perspective explicitly recognises the particularity of context (including constantly shifting policy and political contexts and resource constraints), the complex dynamics of the social world (including human motivations as well as social institutions) and the heterogeneity of settings for sustainable development decision making. Social science methodologies have helped transform the way sustainable development is understood by introducing issues which were barely recognised ten years ago (GEC 2000), including:
 - uncertainty and complexity
 - recognition of a diversity of 'publics' with diverse values, knowledges, cultural identities
 - creating different ways of framing environmental risks and potential strategies to resolve problems
 - recognition that different sectors have different abilities to tackle problems
 - recognition that trust is a vital element in public perceptions of science and institutions, and that the development of inclusionary processes can help revitalise trust in science and policy.
- Helps develop new measures of processes to improve governance, an essential element of sustainable development. Conventional measures of performance, value for money etc in public services tend to be restricted to terms of economy, efficiency and effectiveness, but governance issues can introduce three additional e's: excellence, equity and empowerment (Jackson 1991).
- Go beyond 'consumerist' measures of quality to identifying 'social' measures eg of environmental goods, which are not just to do with consumption but also to do with altruism (or at least enlightened self interest).
- Value other forms of knowledge beyond the purely technical and scientific.

The limitations of evaluating participation may include:

- Evaluating participation can be costly in terms of time and money, in the short term (although they should save resources in the long term by increasing effectiveness). Participatory programmes are often run by organisations with limited resources, such as NGOs and community bodies (and some local authorities), who can barely fund programmes let alone research. New sources of funding may need to be identified if effective evaluations are to be developed in any coherent way.
- They require new methods of working which may be unfamiliar even to experienced social researchers. New methods always take more time, and will need to be developed and honed before they are fully effective.

- There are particular problems in evaluating any 'human service' programmes, as these never exist in isolation and it is therefore extremely difficult to assess the specific contribution of a particular programme to any given outcome, especially in view of the constantly changing policy and political contexts. Alcock et al suggest that the best that can be hoped for is to articulate what else is going on which may affect (or have affected) outcomes by using various methods of data collection and ensuring a range of perspectives is trawled (Alcock et al 2000).
- Timescales are critical. Many of the full impacts of participatory programmes are not apparent until many years after the initial activity, and mechanisms may need to be identified for capturing results over a long period (ten years or more).

The benefits of participatory evaluation include:

- Providing an initial step to engaging stakeholders if the programme being evaluated is not participatory, or an additional step and continuing engagement if the programme is participatory.
- Better understanding of findings by funders, beneficiaries and other stakeholders as a result of them sharing discussions on the implications of the complexities of political and policy contexts, as well as more straightforward lessons.
- Greater ownership of findings by stakeholders as a result of helping to design and manage the evaluation process.
- Greater understanding among all stakeholders of individual and shared choices, values and assumptions, through jointly developing criteria for success.
- Access to a wider range of knowledges.
- Opportunities for reflection and joint learning, depending on the level of participation in the evaluation.
- Opportunities for 'reality testing' of findings if stakeholders can feed back on findings at early stages (or at least before conclusions are finalised).
- Capacity building and learning opportunities for researchers and other stakeholders as a result of joint working and sharing experience.
- Ensures a recognition that social scientists (like all scientists) are not value-free, by requiring that values, choices and assumptions are made explicit to stakeholders.

The limits to participatory evaluations may include:

- There may be additional costs (time and money) at various stages.
- Participatory evaluation is likely to require the use of new methods, unfamiliar even to experienced social researchers.
- The legitimacy of the research will depend to some extent on ensuring the representativeness of stakeholders, and appropriate mechanisms for accountability, which can be complex to identify and manage.
- Researchers are likely to have to manage conflicting pressures from different stakeholders, including potentially different value frameworks which will affect definitions of the success of the work.
- Results may be compromised if evaluators are not seen to be sufficiently objective, and appropriately distant from all parties: funders, commissioners and participants. Researchers are likely to have to develop relationships of trust with those whose work is being evaluated (to ensure there is access to all relevant data and to avoid secrecy and

misinformation), while maintaining sufficient distance to be trusted by those commissioning the research (if they are different).

- The status of findings may be compromised if audiences for findings feel the results have been unduly influenced by those with a vested interest in the project or programme's 'success'.