

SUBR:IM's evidence to the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution: The Urban Environment

Introduction

SUBR:IM (Sustainable Urban Brownfield Regeneration: Integrated Management) is a research consortium, mainly funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council under its programme Sustainable Urban Environments. Our consortium consists of 23 academics and 23 researchers in nine universities and research organisations.

We aim to produce integrated and sustainable solutions for the development of brownfield land in urban areas in order to promote better quality of life and economic growth for all UK citizens. The objectives which will lead to this goal are:

- 01)** To enhance the robustness of technical solutions and tools for the restoration of brownfield land and its infrastructure in urban areas.
- 02)** To increase the knowledge base of investors, developers, planning agencies, local authorities, the public, scientists and other stakeholders involved in brownfield development, to integrate their needs within a sustainable framework and seek to encourage investment.
- 03)** To establish best environmental practice in the development of brownfield land in urban areas, which will extend existing knowledge and set international benchmarks and sustainability indicators.

More information is available on our website, <http://www.subrim.org.uk>

Question 7: What major policy developments are on the horizon over the next 5 to 10 years that might affect the urban environment?

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Background and Context

Understanding the nature of urban policy change and evolution requires an understanding of the key drivers which are affecting the UK, and how government will deal with continuing urban decline. There has been a clear urban to rural shift in population and jobs, as the 2001 Census analysis reveals, together with a massive decline in manufacturing employment. Despite this, some 80% of the population live in urban areas with some 11% of the UK's land taken up by urban areas. Decentralisation and deindustrialisation have both played their part in the emerging pattern of economic activity we see today in the UK. This has meant we need to think not only in terms of successful 'city regions' with extensive zones of influence, but also about the many urban areas suffering polarisation, dereliction and unemployment in areas of economic decline, which often with a historic manufacturing legacy. We are also seeing a growing regional disparity in growth as population continues to concentrate in the South East at the expense of the Midlands and the North.

In short, policy has been characterised by measures which seek to create opportunities for regrowth and rejuvenation of cities based on knowledge capital, whilst helping to solve key problems which include (Ravetz, 2000):

- The expansion of suburbs into countryside;
- Decline of inner city areas and exclusion of their communities;

- Congestion in centres and on the periphery; and,
- Shift from the public realm to privatised territory.

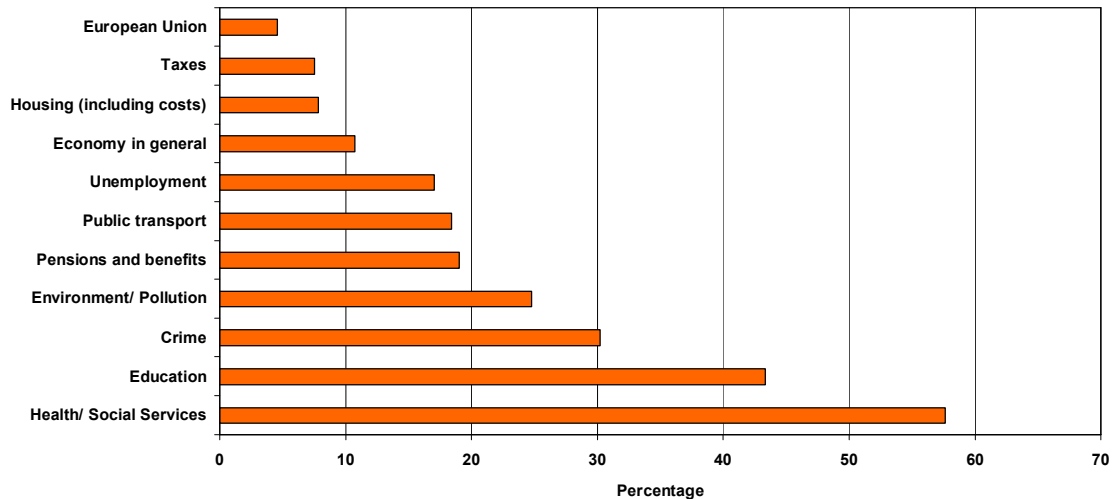
Forecasting policy changes is fraught with difficulty because frequently political expediency prevents step change, and therefore it is all too easy to suggest 'business as usual' by identifying current trends and casing forward trajectories based on continuation of these trends. But the UK is on the cusp of a trajectory where environmental uncertainties may well start to provide powerful arguments for limiting economic growth, whatever the political shade of government. The general public already places environmental concerns alongside health, education and crime (DEFRA, 2002) as areas of concern (Figure 1). Perhaps even in the medium to long term there could be a shift in political paradigm away from 'corporate environmentalism', based on a triple bottom line approach, towards one founded on more environmentally sensitive perspectives of 'resource productivity' and 'deep ecology'¹. However, a timeframe of 5-10 years posed by the Royal Commission is relatively short, and falls before the longer-term strategic scenarios developed by UK Foresight and others.

Clearly policy does not operate in a vacuum: it is driven by social, economic and environmental trends (see Q8 of RCEP Invitation to Submit), and it is important to identify these. For example, a recent international review of global scenarios identified key driving forces as continuing in the short to medium term (European Environment Agency, 2000). These 'givens' comprise:

- **Social factors:** ageing population as life expectancy increases, birth rate declines, healthcare improves and environmental protection improves. The United Kingdom has an ageing population. Between 1971 and 2003 the number of people aged 65 and over rose by 28 per cent while the number of under-16s fell by 18 per cent.
- **Economic factors:** globalisation and liberalisation of business organisations, supply chains, factor markets, financial flows, production and consumption.
- **Technology factors:** continuing rapid innovation in ICT and bio-technology and the implications for economies, organisations, technologies and cultures.
- **Environmental factors:** the onset of severe man-made climate change, causing ecological stress and disruption to economies and societies. Currently ecological footprinting suggests that if the entire world lived at the same standards as those in South East England, the equivalent of 3.5 planets would be required.

Figure 1 Issues the UK government should tackle (DEFRA, 2002)

¹ This is based on a strong emphasis on environment , ahead of economic growth.



These factors are also subject to uncertainty, with possible 'side-swipes', or unexpected events (for example, new forms of disease, global capitalism falters due to currency speculation or terrorism), or melting icecaps/impacted sea currents reverses the effect of global warming in some parts of the globe. As we face increasing uncertainties in our urban systems and infrastructure, government will also need to understand and recognise the increasing complexity (Foresight, 2004), interconnectedness and non-linearity in urban and infrastructure systems, and systems concepts or holistic perspectives may therefore offer greater insight. A 'connected' rather than a 'reductionist' view is therefore needed to understand these changes and to formulate appropriate policy responses.

Current urban policy trends

The history of urban policy over the last 10-15 years in the UK has been characterised by attempts to reverse and mitigate the decline of urban areas suffering population and jobs losses. Planning policies and guidance have therefore been pursued to counteract decentralisation and deindustrialisation in these urban areas with a strong emphasis on area-based regeneration initiatives. Moreover, sustainability has also developed as a key theme in urban, and related policy agendas, driven by increasing concerns over resource depletion, environmental degradation and climate change. The UK's sustainable development strategy already highlights the importance of sustainable consumption and production: achieving more with less; climate change and energy; natural resource protection and environment enhancement; and sustainable communities. Even without full support for Kyoto there is an increasing global political emphasis on climate change. It is likely that the following themes will continue to be important in the UK:

- **Planning:** community participation and local democratisation are important themes in planning policy, and are likely to continue to be in the future. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 is intended to make the planning system fairer, swifter and more predictable by simplifying the decision-making process and it likely this trend towards improving speed and efficiency will continue in the future. Planning gain and the way in which this is dealt with will also become more important, as government seeks to legislate on this issue.
- **Liveability and health:** there is an increasing emphasis on living space, health and quality of life, or what is frequently referred to as 'liveability'. Government will probably continue to focus on this theme, which is designed to highlight the importance of quality on local environment (for example, Environmental Protection Act, 1990 and Crime and Disorder Act, 1998).

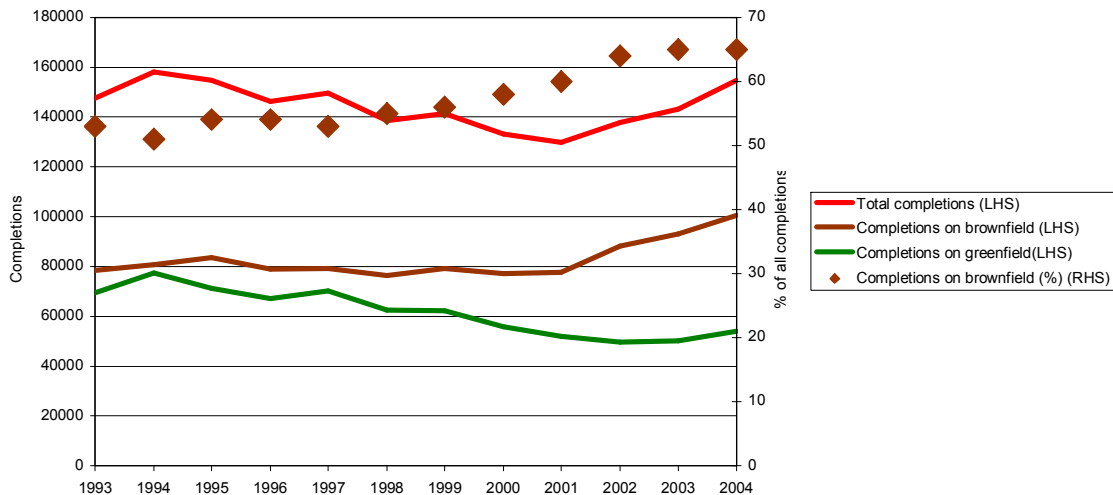
- **Natural resource protection and environment enhancement:** we live in an increasingly litigious society and there is a raft of European legislation which will influence policy at a national level. UK business still only spends less than 0.5% of turnover on environmental protection. The EU landfill Directive is already having an impact on the type of clean-up technique used for contaminated sites, by encouraging greater use of in situ methods². The Polluter Pays Principle is likely to be re-enforced through no fault liability (Environmental Liability Directive) and given the increasing emphasis on policies, which underpin quality of life and human health, this is likely to be a policy theme of continued importance. Disappointingly, Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 seems to have been relatively slow in its uptake in the UK (as of May 2005, 305 sites in England have been determined as Contaminated Land under Part IIA (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/land/contaminated/faq.htm>). Part of the issue may lie with local authorities, which lack resources for implementation. However PPS23 states that Part IIA³ is to be used to support the planning system in this respect, and SUBR:IM research (Dixon et al, 2005) shows that s106 agreements or planning conditions are more likely to be used in cleaning up sites. There have also been calls to integrate the planning and remediation permit systems more closely to enable more effective and speedier cleanup. Finally, the impact of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) is the most substantial piece of EC water legislation to date. It requires all inland and coastal waters to reach "good status" by 2015. It will do this by establishing a river basin district structure within which demanding environmental objectives will be set, including ecological targets for surface waters, and will have important implications for standards on contaminated land where the impacts on water bodies will be felt.
- **Transport:** transport contributes about 25% of CO₂ emissions in the UK, with road transport accounting for 85%, and cars about half of all transport emissions. Between 1970 and 2002 road traffic increased by 142%, outstripping growth in the economy. Current government policies are targeted towards reducing congestion and improving public transport and infrastructure. However, in areas such as the Thames Gateway, a lack of transport infrastructure is seen by many as hampering development (see below), although the recent success of the London Olympic bid may provide added impetus to resolve this problem.
- **Infrastructure provision:** The trend away from state to private provision is likely to continue. The Private Finance Initiative (PFI) is part of the public sector procurement landscape today and is used for a variety of public private partnership schemes in health and education, for example. Given the long-term nature of schemes, a key issue is how sustainability is incorporated in design and construction, and whether such schemes really do offer value for money. Water use and waste issues will also be important issues to resolve as climate change bites and resources are further depleted. The funding gap issues to enable infrastructure to be provided in the South

² This is also being driven by increased landfill costs, which is also influencing the development of novel products from waste (e.g. composted green waste) which may also influence the way recycled materials are used in brownfield regeneration.

³ The impact of Part IIA may be to focus the mind and effort of site owners to the redevelopment / voluntary route to avoid perceived blight associated with sites being determined as 'contaminated land'. (In the period to 04/05 the Environment Agency reports that they had been consulted and contributed to the remediation of 1300 ha of land which posed a risk of pollution to controlled waters as a result of either voluntary action or through the planning process).

East will almost certainly require government support, and policies are likely to reflect this.

Figure 2 Dwellings built on previously developed land, greenfield completions and all completions (England) (source: ODPM data)



There has also been a strong emphasis on **brownfield reuse**, emerging from government whitepapers during the mid to late 1990s and underpinned by planning and related guidance (for example, PPG3 and more recently, PPS1 and PPS23). Although SUBR:IM research (Shephard and Dixon, 2004) shows that the development industry has increasingly come to terms with brownfields and contaminated sites, a number of tensions are emerging in the brownfield policy arena, which will require action. For example, the emphasis on a relatively low brownfield target of 60% of new dwellings built on previously developed land de-incentivises stakeholders. There have been calls for raising the target and also for developing a broader measure which includes commercial use (headline UK Quality of Life indicator, H24) as more recently the brownfield ratio has bottomed out at about 65% (Figure 2). The Sustainable Communities Plan is an ambitious venture, but already deficiencies in the operational detail and implementation of the plan have been highlighted by a number of critics (Entec, 2005; EAC, 2005). It is likely therefore that these will also need to be addressed as follows:

- More sustainable construction: through tighter design codes and standards which are a requirement.
- More homes with better affordability: perhaps through differential tax incentives and through improved planning guidance, which defines 'affordable' housing more precisely.
- An increasing focus on 'hardcore' sites which require cleanup and may require enhanced incentives to enable them to be reclaimed.
- Higher densities for housing: again through the planning system and through perhaps changes to the VAT regime.
- Reducing flood risk on brownfields: tighter development control systems, planning policy guidance and market forces.
- An improved linkage between jobs, houses and transport. Residential density requirements are likely to be stricter but this can only be possible if transport, jobs and infrastructure are in place. Will Crossrail become a reality for example?
- Biodiversity and greenfield land: the accelerated loss of biodiversity continues to be a problem. With a finite amount of brownfield land and the increasing demand for

homes in high growth areas there will be additional pressures to use greenfield land, and any policy response will need to resolve these conflicts.

Future urban policy trends

Increased pressure on resources, increasingly complex systems, environmental impact and increased concerns from the public will all be important in the future. In particular governments will need to resolve the increasing tension between decentralisation and the drive for more compact cities. It is also likely that political power will be dispersed through a number of levels of government (Cabinet Office, 2004), and against the backdrop of increased EU co-ordination and enlargement there may also be increasing legal challenges to ministerial decisions and legislation (e.g. through the European Convention on Human Rights). We may also see increasing tensions at a national level between government and its interpretation of EU Directives. We are also likely to see an increased emphasis on environmental justice, through policies that place a strong emphasis on environmental protection and quality of life issues.

The following future policy trends are also likely to be important:

- Reductions in energy consumption (e.g. urban nightscapes for example) and tighter energy standards.
- Greater emphasis on renewable energy in property developments (this is already a requirement in the London Plan, for example, and within PPS22)
- Greater concerns over hazardous waste leading to stricter controls.
- Reducing carbon emissions from road use through moves towards cleaner, greener transport. Congestion charging; car-pool lanes and/or 'true-cost' (road pricing) charging will become more important.
- Micropower and distributed power encouraged for new property development.
- Greater emphasis on more efficient water use and quality through metering and higher environmental quality standards.
- Increased demands for safety and security from the public in transport and the environment.
- Encouragement/incentivisation of more sustainable techniques for cleaning up contaminated brownfield sites.
- Policies to encourage sustainable materials management. The growth in waste arisings at 1-3% pa means waste could double in 25 years and tougher measures to meet recycling targets will be needed.

However, greater clarity on 'sustainability' will be required and how it is incorporated into new and existing development schemes over a building's lifecycle. Stricter guidance is vital given that only 1-2% of UK commercial building stock is new build. Government is likely to legislate therefore through the deployment of fiscal incentives and tax breaks/penalties (and/or trading schemes and agreements) to influence the behaviour of producers and consumers. There is also likely to be tighter direct regulation through permits and registrations (Environment Agency, 2004). However, a 2001 survey from DEFRA (DEFRA, 2002) (not surprisingly) found that there was much less support for government action on the environment which involved higher taxes or prices. Some of the technical responses from the supply side are likely to be built around:

- Smart materials for the built environment;
- Miniaturisation and greater use of ICT;
- Deployment of fuel cell technology and moves towards cleaner vehicles; and
- Greater emphasis on intelligent infrastructures.

But the future also raises uncertainties: will society in 5-10 years be more cohesive or more individualistic?; will sustainable development become mainstream or will corporate greed and free market forces pervade at the expense of environment? Government responses to these questions are important to debate, but equally important to understand is the social and economic context and how individuals, institutions, and organisations respond, react and adapt to these changes. Moreover, continuing splits between departmental responsibilities on planning/housing/regeneration (ODPM), transport (DfT), finance (Treasury) and environment (DEFRA) will require improved integration, and also improved information and data sets on environmental impacts. It is also likely that the regional dimension will need stronger political ownership if regeneration and related policies are to succeed.

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Q14 How can construction be made more efficient in terms of natural resource use and waste minimisation.

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The UK construction industry's waste management and minimisation techniques aim to reduce waste arising during on site activities, reflecting a reactive approach to waste minimisation. In contrast to this approach the Netherlands have adopted a proactive approach that mitigates the arising of waste during the design stage. The Dutch Industrial, Flexible and Demountable Building System (IFD) programme encompasses a multi-disciplinary approach to building design that unifies process related aspects of building design, flexible building design and the end of life decommissioning process⁴. The underlying theory is orientated to establish methods of construction that promote deconstruction and waste minimisation by utilising building techniques that reflect on industrial techniques. The IFD programme encourages the use of modern industrial techniques such as improved product manufacture, automated construction, prefabrication, and construction robotics⁵. The integration of novel construction techniques diminishes the environmental burden of buildings as the decommissioning process is aided by the off-site production of building components and the subsequent connection of these components on-site, thus eliminating chemical adhesives and cementitious materials on site.

Research into the IFD programme and the adaptation of such an approach to suit the needs of the UK construction industry is under development. Design for Deconstruction (DfD) has emerged as a credible alternative that mitigates construction and demolition waste (CDW) arisings, whilst reducing the rate of natural resource depletion and reintroducing demolition waste back into the material supply stream, in effect, closing the loop in terms of resource usage. SUBR:IM is currently investigating the feasibility of DfD and aims to quantify the benefits that can be achieved by adopting such an approach. Research is due to be completed by September 2007.

The drivers and dynamics of The Netherlands building sector that led to the development of the IFD programme are not easily adapted to suit the needs of the UK. The economic, fiscal, and policy restraints which led to the development of the IFD programme are specific to the Netherlands. Further incentives are manifest in the lack of an established steel supply chain and high demand for aggregates which is fulfilled by reclaimed or downcycled materials. Furthermore, prohibition of the landfilling of recyclable materials, which is enforced through legislative instruments, also acted as an imperative for the development of a demountable construction programme. Conversely, the UK industry is subject to few policy or fiscal restraints with regard to reuse. Hence, the UK has not excelled in the development of reusable material supply stream. In order to increase reclaimed material usage, there must be policy driven change that provides incentives for reuse. The aggregate levy and landfill taxation provide a financial 'burden' that deters 'dig and dump' activities and mass disposal of CDW. However, they fail to dictate limits or implement minimum reuse rates for new developments. It is suggested that, like the Netherlands, regulatory control of material reuse is introduced.

⁴ Gassel, F., Experiences with the Design and Production of an Industrial, Flexible and Demountable (IFD) Building System. Eindhoven, The Netherlands, 2002.

⁵ Gassel, F., Experiences with the Design and Production of an Industrial, Flexible and Demountable (IFD) Building System. Eindhoven, The Netherlands, 2002.

The Building Regulations and approved documents provide excellent opportunities to promote material reuse, reduce resource depletion and mitigate CDW arisings.

Prominent research into DfD was conducted by task group 39 (TG39), who were commissioned by the International Council for Research and Innovation in Building and Construction (CIB). TG39 collated existing research on the topic of deconstruction to establish the feasibility of the design approach. Overarching themes for the collation of information under the remit of TG39 included the extent of deconstruction in selected countries⁶; technology, economic and policy relating to deconstruction⁷; DfD and material reuse⁸; deconstruction and materials reuse⁹.

Other initiatives that promote the reuse of CDW include the Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP) which was established in 2001 in response to the Governments Waste Strategy 2000. The primary aim of the WRAP programme is to establish stable markets for recycled materials and products. Its work concentrates on six waste streams: Aggregates¹⁰, Glass¹¹, Organics¹², Paper¹³, Plastics¹⁴ and Wood¹⁵. Each waste stream has a dedicate website that provides practical information on material reuse and recycling strategies. Funding for small medium enterprises (SME's), who wish to use recycled materials, is available through the Recycling Fund¹⁶ (a WRAP initiative set up to create a stable and competitive market for reusable materials, in order to meet government targets relating to reuse). WRAP's affiliated websites also direct users to sources of recycled materials, a list of the affiliated websites is provided for information purposes.

BRE's SMARTWaste¹⁷ programme provides the construction and demolition industries with a suite of tools that provide:

- Waste Benchmarking (SMARTStart)
- Waste Reduction (SMARTStart+)
- Pre-demolition Audits (SMARTAudit)
- Reuse and recycling site locators (BREMAP)
- Training consultancy and guidance

⁶ Kilbert, C. J. & Chini, A. R., Proceedings of the CIB international Conference, Task Group 39: Overview of Deconstruction in selected countries, Publication 252, August 2000, Florida, USA.

⁷ Chini, A. R., Proceedings of the CIB International Conference, Task Group 39: Technology, Economics and Policy, Publication 266, February 2001, Wellington, New Zealand.

⁸ Chini, A. R. & Schultmann, F., Proceedings of the CIB Task Group 39 Deconstruction Meeting: Design for Deconstruction and Reuse: Publication 272, 9 April 2002, Karlsruhe, Germany

⁹ Chini, A. R., Proceedings of the 11th Rinker International Conference: CIB Task Group 39: Deconstruction and Reuse: Publication 287, May 7-10, 2003, Gainesville, Florida, USA

¹⁰ <http://www.aggregain.org.uk/>

¹¹ <http://www.wrap.org.uk/conglasscrete/>
<http://www.wrap.org.uk/dundee%5Fglass/>

¹² <http://www.recyclenow.com/index.html>

¹³ <http://www.recyclenow.com/index.html>

¹⁴ <http://www.recyclenow.com/index.html>

¹⁵ <http://www.recyclewood.org.uk/>

¹⁶ <http://www.recyclingfund.com/>
http://www.wrap.org.uk/business_and_finance/equip/index.html

<http://www.recyclenowpartners.org.uk/>

¹⁷ <http://www.smartwaste.co.uk/>

A relatively small scale initiative from SALVO¹⁸ promotes the reuse of reclaimed materials. The web based initiative allows users to submit information regarding reclaimed materials so that others can source previously used items that have a high residual value. Although SALVO is UK based it has links with international reclamation markets, therefore it can provide an environmentally conscious alternative to new materials that may otherwise be source from abroad.

The use of so-called ‘Brownfield’ sites for development is being encouraged by government. Around 60% of new housing development occurs on such sites which have previously been developed. Often the structures that exist on these sites are demolished to make way for the new development. Sometimes some buildings are retained in part and then rebuilt.

Whilst increasingly, thought is given to the re-use of old materials for the above-ground parts of the building, little thought is usually given to the possible *re-use of the foundations* to the old building which might have successfully carried significant loads over a long period of time, and which could potentially continue to do so. Often the nature of the old foundations may not be known, as the plans may have been lost over time. Or even when such details are known, it is seen to be ‘simpler’ to break down the old foundations, and to construct new ones, and designers and their clients cannot be bothered to investigate the old foundations.

This state of affairs can lead to the waste of a valuable resource – the old foundation – and a construction which is not as sustainable as it should be.

Some initiatives are now underway to study the situation, and to put together case studies where foundations have been successfully (and possibly not successfully) re-used; encouragement and support should be given to these.

¹⁸ <http://www.salvo.co.uk/>

Q19 To what extent can new technologies be harnessed to use waste for energy generation, compost, recycling, etc?

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The Commission should appreciate a distinction between wastes composed predominantly of mineral material and those of organic matter. The former are often formed as ‘by products’ of industrial processes, but in the brownfield context, contaminated materials that have undergone remediation using so-called new technologies may still be classified as wastes under European and national legislation. Similarly, organic wastes which have undergone significant transformation to produce high quality products (e.g. fertilisers, composts) are still classified as waste products. This can severely hamper their re-use. There appears to be merit in re-examining the issue of de-classifying some materials as wastes if they reach a certain standard of decontamination and/or have defined recycle ability.

Brownfield land is often raised as a suitable ‘sink’ for processed waste materials, and it is true that both remediated mineral and processed organic wastes are likely to be used increasingly in both hard and soft end redevelopment. Developing ‘new’ technologies will inevitably improve the quality of remediated material and research by the SUBR:IM consortium is indicating that some mineral waste materials have a greater potential than hard core – they can also be used in greenspace creation, especially if used in conjunction with organic wastes. SUBR:IM research is also demonstrating that specific combinations of mineral and organic wastes into so-called ‘novel composts’ show considerable promise for both reduction of pollution risk, and vegetation establishment. Furthermore, other SUBR:IM research is showing that turning a range of organic wastes into charcoal has real potential for adsorption of metal contaminants and degradation of organic contaminants, and thus brownfield land remediation. More research and development will be needed to see if these ideas can move into an operational scale and commercial viability.

However, there are limits to the use that some materials can be put, and the comparatively small extent of greenspace currently created on brownfield land, together with budgetary constraints for its sustainable creation and subsequent management conspire to limit the amount of compost and other organic wastes that can realistically be expected to be recycled. It is also important that the fashion for recycling these materials is placed in a proper scientific framework, a) to avoid the urban environment being used for waste disposal under the guise of sustainable development (e.g. organic, new age), and b) to carefully consider the energy and carbon budgets that material processing and recycling to land involve. Life cycle analytical principles must be factored into an examination of the desirability of trusting to ‘new technologies’ and urban sinks as a saviour for historical waste issues. And as atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations continue to rise, there may be increasing pressure and interest in using organic wastes for carbon sequestration purposes more critically, notably in substituting for fossil fuel in energy generation.

Question 23: What is the role of the various bodies involved in urban policy?

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Executive Summary

- A key part of New Labour's approach to regeneration was the creation of a variety of area-based initiatives. It was only after a massive proliferation of initiatives and structures that any attempt to integrate the variety of schemes came about.
- In terms of the role of the various bodies involved in urban policy, this paper demonstrates that as the government has rapidly increased the number of policies and bodies involved in urban governance, coordination has become more difficult to achieve. In response, the government has sought to rationalise urban policies and create strategic structures to promote this joined-up governance.
- In order to integrate these schemes, the government set about creating more and more 'strategic' bodies such as LSPs and RDAs. The government has sought to strengthen both the *horizontal* and the *vertical* linkages between actors and institutions on each level.
- An important tension exists within the government's approach to sub-national governance between its decentralising ambitions and its centralising practices. The government has stated repeatedly that decentralising power to local government, local communities and voluntary and community actors is at the heart of its agenda. There is cause to believe that the government has been partially successful in this. Initiatives such as the New Deal for the Communities programme have been initiated with the aim of providing more community-led forms of regeneration. However, the government has often demonstrated centralist tendencies in how it has sought to restructure urban governance in line with the government's objectives.
- The UK system of urban governance has become for fragmented and locally-orientated and although there has been substantial central steering, there is still a lot of local initiative. Local government has to an extent re-invented itself in the face of ever greater amounts of central intervention in local affairs. However, a strong centre is still required in efforts to iron out some of the worst differences between localities in the UK. Central government has an important role to play in monitoring local performance and in spear-heading initiatives to drive up standards.
- One key barrier to encouraging business, voluntary and other sectors getting more involved in urban policy that this paper identifies is that of capacity. The government's expansion of the number of urban partnerships operating at the local level has stretched the capacity of actors at local and regional levels to get involved in urban partnerships. The government has provided a number of funding streams to address these capacity problems. However, this funding is small and spread thinly across urban areas.

Introduction

This submission of evidence is concerned with Question 23 of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution's study into the urban environment, namely:

What is the role of the various bodies involved in urban policy? Has too much emphasis been placed on the role of central government at the expense of regional and local action? How can the business, voluntary and other sectors be encouraged to contribute to the environmental sustainability of the urban areas?

While this paper answers these questions posed by the Royal Commission, it does so indirectly. Instead, this paper is principally concerned with examining generic issues of governance and associated problems of policy coordination between urban policy actors and institutions in and between levels of the British state. A substantial body of academic literature recognises that the structure of (urban) governance has changed substantially in the last 20 years and, in response, structural reforms that can provide greater coherence and coordination are required (Rhodes, 1997; Stoker, 2000; Bache and Flinders, 2004). This paper examines the degree to which the agenda for 'joined-up government' has been achieved within urban policy in England¹⁹ since Labour's election in 1997. In particular, we analyse the extent to which Labour has succeeded in creating *vertical* integration between the various actors and institutions operating at various spatial scales, as well as appreciating the *horizontal* imperative of joined-up government.

The first section of this paper presents a brief summary of the substantial academic literature on joined-up government. The second section presents an overview of developments in achieving joined-up government since 1997, suggesting that within the Labour government's approach to urban policy there has been a tension between its predilection of creating urban policies and bodies and its agenda for joined-up governance. Indeed, this section suggests that the government's approach to urban policy during the greater part of its first term in office was one of incentivitis where a plethora of urban policies and bodies were created largely because the government wanted to be seen to be delivering upon its manifesto commitments in an unrealistically short timescale. At the same time, the government sought to develop a series of reform initiatives that would create more strategic direction to these burgeoning initiatives. This section is divided between initiatives that sought to join-up governance horizontally and those that sought to do so vertically. The conclusion reflects on the Commission's questions in light of the analysis presented in this paper.

Joined-up Governance

Since the early days of urban policy in Britain there has been a recurring debate about how best to tackle the multi-faceted social and economic problems of deprived urban areas. Greater urban policy coordination and coherence has frequently been cited as an important part of initiatives to ameliorate urban decay. A key barrier, it is said, to achieving greater joined-up policy delivery has been the traditional organisation of the British system of government (at national, local and increasingly regional levels). Its vertical and functional separation has contributed to a failure to address the 'wicked issue' of social problems that cut

¹⁹ The analysis presented here concerns developments concerning urban policy arrangements in England and not Scotland and Wales where the respective devolved units have separate policies and institutions operating.

across organisational and departmental responsibilities (see Clarke & Stewart, 1997; Stewart, 2000). During the 1990s, the concern with policy coordination that had been so prominent during the 1970s was revived under the label of ‘holistic governance’, or ‘joined-up government’ (see Perri 6 1997; Perri 6 *et al*). A principal concern of the current Labour administration has been to operationalise the concept of joined-up government by developing a range of policies and reforms to the institutional structures of urban governance so as to make it better address the ‘wicked issues’ discussed above (Ling, 2002). Whilst concerns over policy co-ordination are not a new concern (see Kavanagh & Richards, 2001; Klein & Plowden, 2005), Labour has approached this problem with a new vigour.

There has, however, in the debate around joined-up government a reticence – especially in central government documents – to provide the term with a more concrete definition. One political scientist that has sought to do so is Pollitt (2003: 35), who offered the following definition:

‘Joined-up government’ is a phrase which denotes the aspiration to achieve horizontally and vertically co-ordinated thinking and action. Through this co-ordination it is hoped that a number of benefits can be achieved. First, situations in which different policies undermine each other can be eliminated. Second, better use can be made of scarce resources. Third, synergies may be created through the bringing together of different key stakeholders in a particular policy field or network. Fourth, it becomes possible to offer citizens seamless rather than fragmented access to a set of related services.

So, joined-up government represents a wider interpretation of what coordination should entail than has previously been the case. It involves not only coordination of programmes but also an appreciation of how the policies fitted together and how the totality of policies and programmes operating in an area impacted on individuals and communities as a whole. New Labour’s response to the perceived weakness of traditional forms of bureaucracy and political structures was set out in the white paper *Modernising Government* (HM Government, 1999), which argued that there needed to be more focus upon outcomes than upon structure and outputs. It also argued that policy deliberation should be broader in scope, consulting with all affected groups. This message was subsequently reaffirmed in the Performance and Innovation Unit reports, *Reaching Out* and *Wiring It Up* (Cabinet Office, 2000a; 2000b).

For some, joined-up government is part of a project of centralisation where central government seeks to devise and impose policies and integration between other bodies to achieve its objectives (Lee, 2000; Davies, 2002). Under this interpretation, joined-up government is an agenda that seeks to steer and co-opt regional and local actors into working with the grain of central government policies and objectives and potentially against those defined locally. This interpretation would seem to fit with the early years of Labour’s time in office when policies and institutions were devised centrally and imposed locally. Labour’s approach to urban policy, however, displayed an important tension. While it sought to give greater coherence to government policies, on the one hand, it created a large array of client-based policies (ones that target individual groups rather than broader social categories) and partnership programmes, on the other. These were developed to plug the gaps between the government’s welfare and regeneration policies. This, however, had the effect of increasing the fragmentation of urban policy at the local level. An ever greater array of bodies rubbed up against one another in what Sullivan and Skelcher (2002) termed the ‘congested state’. The Audit Commission report of 1989 criticised the ‘patchwork quilt of complexity and idiosyncrasy’ which existed because of the array of urban policy initiatives that were operating in an uncoordinated fashion. Burgess *et al* (2001: 21-22) found that whilst in 1989 30 initiatives were operating, by 2000 this number had burgeoned to 43 under New Labour.

This demonstrates the incentivitis that affected extant government policy. Burgess et al (2001: 20) remarked:

It is ironic, given its ostensible commitment to ‘joined-up’ government, that the Labour government has presided over such an unprecedented and bewildering proliferation of regeneration initiatives which, with the benefit of hindsight, make the original ‘patchwork quilt’ seem like a model of clarity and simplicity.

The principal factor behind this proliferation of initiatives was political, namely the need for a new government to be seen to be doing something. As Stoker (2005: 159) observed of Labour’s first three years in office:

Ministers looked for ‘quick wins’ and launched initiative after initiative from the centre. This activity stimulated [...] ‘incentivitis’, a syndrome in which managers feel swamped by the volume and variety of initiatives that they have to deal with. There is a lot of wasted effort in simply getting schemes off the ground and then trying to develop connections between all the different schemes.

However, Stoker suggests that joined-up government need not be seen only as a project of centralisation. It may also be a means to reassert the importance of local government in urban policy. Local government’s multi-functional structure allows it to avoid the functional specialism that characterises many of the special purpose regeneration bodies that have been created by government over the past four decades.

Urban Policy and Joined-up Governance in Practice

As Pollitt (2003: 37) makes clear, there are various elements of the joined-up government agenda that distinguishes it from previous efforts to coordinate policy. One of the key distinctions is between *horizontal* linkages (between for example, departments of state coming together to develop a single policy on an issue) and *vertical* linkages (between institutions at different spatial levels, for example the European Union right down to local authorities). Indeed, as Newman (2001: 106) stated, the government’s joined-up government agenda recognised this, emphasising ‘the need both for better horizontal integration (partnership working between public sector organisation, voluntary sector bodies and private sector companies) and for stronger vertical integration (between central, local and community tiers of government).’ This concept has provided a powerful organising perspective for the government’s approach to urban and social policies. The discussion below is subdivided between the innovations aimed at horizontal integration and those at vertical integration (whilst acknowledging that this is not a clear-cut dichotomy).

Horizontal Integration

The government’s agenda for horizontally joining-up government has been *multi-level* in focus, but as Stoker (2005) acknowledges, it was centrally driven at first. The Social Exclusion Unit, established by Labour in 1997, was set-up inside the Cabinet Office with the remit of developing holistic approaches across government to the problems associated with poverty. The SEU’s particular concern was with urban poverty and urban partnership arrangements. The unit has been a continuing advocate of ‘bottom-up’ regeneration strategies in which Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCOs) were charged with responsibility for policy formulation and implementation. The role of the SEU was to develop strategies for producing ‘social inclusion’. The Labour government placed considerable emphasis on the need for local communities to identify local problems and to work with other local stakeholders to resolve these problems in a joined-up manner.

In its first report, *Bringing Britain Together: a National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal* (Cabinet Office, 1998), the importance of improving the coordination of government regeneration policies was highlighted. The report set out a national strategy for addressing the problems of deprived neighbourhoods. This comprised three strands:

- national, client-focused programmes like the New Deals;
- area-based coordination initiatives like the New Deal for Communities (NDC);
- improvements in the policy coordination to be achieved by 18 cross-departmental, thematic Policy Action Teams (PATs) including one on ‘Joining it up Locally’²⁰.

However, as discussed above, Labour’s approach displayed an important tension between its aim of creating greater coherence to government policies through its joined-up government agenda and its creation of a large array of urban policies and bodies. While these policies and bodies, such as urban regeneration partnerships, were developed to plug the gaps between the government’s welfare and regeneration policies, it created greater complexity in the structures of urban governance at regional and local levels.

The government recognised that the proliferation of policies and bodies in urban governance had created barriers to achieving greater joined-up government. It thus accepted that some initiatives needed to be culled. This was brought out in the Regional Coordination Unit report, *Review of Area Based Initiatives*, of 2002. In early 2003, the Urban Affairs Sub-committee of ODPM claimed that the plethora of different programmes was a source of confusion, which led to greater levels of bureaucracy and waste in regeneration programmes. It argued that the government should place a moratorium on the development of new central government-led schemes. Instead, the committee recommended that local authorities should develop regeneration plans sensitive to local needs. The committee reserved some criticism for the Regional Coordination Unit, labelling it as ‘weak’ and suggested that it was in need of reform or possibly abolition (Weaver, 2003).

Whilst the government sought to ensure that it targeted the neediest through a comprehensive array of initiatives, it in fact increased the difficulty of creating satisfactory horizontal integration. A study by Carley *et al* (2000) into 27 partnerships across the UK found that there was insufficient joined-up activity between the various actors involved in the process of partnership. Hulls (1999: 186) noted that

It is much more difficult to achieve an integrated approach to local area regeneration through large numbers of area-based initiatives. This is particularly the case if different groups have slightly different objectives and approaches. There are also limits to the number of initiatives in which residents and local business people can actively participate. Duplication may spread key local capacity too thinly.

The Urban Affairs Sub-committee report, echoing some of the arguments of the centralising view of the joined-up government agenda, suggested that the proliferation of single issue initiatives had the effect of skewing regeneration activities to suit the aims of government rather than trying to identify local needs (Weaver, 2003).

In order to help tackle this lack of horizontal integration, the government created Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). The idea of LSPs came about through the *New Commitment to Regeneration* initiative that was developed by the Local Government Association with

²⁰ This began work in 1997 to examine a range of issues that related to social exclusion as a new approach to tackling regeneration through partnership at a strategic, generally city-wide, level.

government support from the Social Exclusion Unit and its 'Policy Action Teams'. Policy Action Team 17²¹, in its report *Joining it up Locally* (2000), argued that many urban areas lacked a sufficiently strategic approach to regeneration. It proposed the establishment of a single, overarching partnership that would bring together the public, private, voluntary and community sectors in every area. This partnership would have the role of giving a greater strategic dimension to the different initiatives and ensuring that services supported each other and worked together, so that complex problems such as neighbourhood renewal and social exclusion could be tackled more effectively.

This fitted with the DETR's aim of developing a greater rationalisation to the number of area based initiatives. The concept of LSPs was incorporated into the Local Government Act 2000 with the first ones being accredited by the then DETR in 2001²². As well as providing greater coordination of partnerships within urban areas, LSPs were also to take charge of the government's idea of Community Strategies²³. The Local Government Act 2000 also saw the introduction of measures such as Best Value²⁴ and New Constitutions for Local Authorities. These policies were devised with the aim of improving the links between Local Authorities and their communities (in the case of Best Value) and improving the internal workings of Local Authorities (in the case of New Constitutions). Also as part of this Act, each Local Authority was required to produce a Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy if the local council wanted to apply for Neighbourhood Renewal Funding²⁵ (NRF).

However, even with LSPs, there was still a view that poor coordination between various regeneration initiatives remained. In October 2002, the RCU completed a review of area based initiatives and found that local areas were struggling to cope with the proliferation of initiatives (RCU: 2002). The RCU recommended that 28 initiatives, such as Health Action

²¹ Policy Action Team 17 was established and led by the then DETR to examine best practice in local strategic planning in order to tackle social exclusion and promote more joined-up working in urban policy.

²² Some local authorities like Sheffield had anticipated the development of LSPs and had developed strategic partnerships before the government had legislated for them.

²³ As part of the Local Government Act 2000, local authorities were given a duty to prepare a Community Strategy to promote 'the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of their areas'. These strategies are designed to enhance the quality of life of communities by ensuring that public services are better co-coordinated, more responsive to the needs of the community, delivered in ways that suit the recipients of services and take account of the needs of future generations.

²⁴ The Best Value regime was established by the Local Government Act 1999 and places a legal obligation on local authorities to ensure that they deliver secure continuous improvements in service performance. Best Value requires local authorities to demonstrate that they have taken into account the 'four C's' - Challenge, Compare, Consult & Compete. Best Value requires local authorities to publish a 'Performance Plan' which is subject to external and independent audit, and are available for the community to inspect. It stresses public and user consultation as the main focus for improving performance and quality. Importantly, it also does not presume in favour of in-house delivery of services.

²⁵ NRF provides resources for the 88 most deprived Local Authorities in England to ensure that people are not denied services and opportunities because of the neighbourhoods in which they live. The funds were designed to be used as a top-up to the resources that were already going through these areas to help neighbourhoods that suffered from poor housing, crime, poor health, unemployment and educational issues to tackle deprivation and close the gap in core service provision between areas. NRF was not ring-fenced so LSPs could set their own priorities for spending.

Zones should be terminated and that the funds be absorbed into other regeneration programmes. It also recommended that NDC funding should be absorbed into NRF. The report recommended that some funding streams, such as the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) should be rationalised as part of the Regional Development Agencies 'Single Pot' scheme (see below) (RCU, 2002: 4).

Vertical Integration - The Regional Development Agencies

Much of Labour's approach to vertical integration emphasised the regional level as a fulcrum around which its agenda for urban policy would be developed, in particular through the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs).

Some, such as Robson *et al* (1999), have seen the development of RDAs as a precursor to the development of elected regional government in England. However, the eight RDAs outside London had limited autonomy and their economic strategies were strikingly similar to each other (Robson *et al*, 1999). This suggests that the level of their autonomy was limited. Lead responsibility for sponsorship of the RDAs initially rested with the DETR but was transferred in June 2001 to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). However, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister retained responsibility for the regeneration initiatives delivered by RDAs.

The five core areas of activity for the RDAs were: economic development and regeneration; competitiveness, business support and investment; skills; employment; and sustainable development (Hall, 2000: 11). RDAs aimed to co-ordinate regional economic development and regeneration, enable the English regions to improve their relative competitiveness and reduce the imbalances that existed within and between regions. The accountability of RDAs has been a source of concern, as they are constituted as Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPB). Thus, they are only accountable to ministers and their chairs and boards are appointed by the Secretary of State for the DTI (except in London). Moreover, the RDAs' twelve member boards must be business-led and include a minimum of four local government representatives. Thus, the scope for incorporating wider regional interests is extremely limited (Hall, 2000: 12–13).

In March 2001, the Deputy Prime Minister announced that RDAs would be given a new package of measures that would include greater flexibility in the way that they could use uncommitted funding. As part of these measures, it was announced that many regeneration initiatives such as the Single Regeneration Budget would be brought together in one 'single pot'. The Single Pot was designed to help RDAs to coordinate their regeneration and economic development efforts so that they could achieve their RES. These flexibilities were not given without strings attached. Central government retained a significant degree of control over the activities of RDAs through a system of targets, although RDAs decided on how best to deliver on these targets. The core indicators of these targets were:

- Number of jobs created and safeguarded
- Net hectares of derelict [brownfield] land brought into use
- Number of business start-ups and business survival rates
- Percentage of medium/large organisations recognised as Investors in People
- Value of private finance attracted

The focus was on physical and competitive targets and did not make any explicit commitments to social inclusion and regeneration. The move towards single pot funding left questions over the fate of regeneration policies such as SRB and its commitment to capacity building and community involvement. Instead of committing themselves to social regeneration initiatives, logic suggested that the RDAs would use regeneration funds to

support projects that would help them achieve the targets set for them by central government. Davies (2002) argued that RDAs were part of a centralising trend within the SRB process as RDAs redirected SRB funds to ensure that their activities supported the objectives of the RES. Thus, Davies saw RDAs as another in a long line of techniques for central government to attempt to control implementation from the centre.

According to the National Audit Office's (NAO) report *Success in the Regions* (2003), the efforts of RDAs was hampered by the target regime of the DTI. The report recommended that the DTI adopt a lighter approach to regulating RDAs and streamline their targets, many of which did not match RESs, Public Service Agreements or the targets of RDA partners. Indeed, many of the targets were not properly measured because of a lack of data, making it hard to assess the long-term impact of RDAs' work.

Towards the end of Labour's first term in office, Leach and Percy-Smith (2001: 198 –199) suggested the overall quality of vertical integration through regional structures was, at best, partial:

The difficulties of integration at the regional level could be exacerbated with the setting up of regional development agencies which have taken over some programmes previously overseen by government offices but not however, the European structural funds. Thus, in two of the key cross-cutting areas of policy – regeneration and social exclusion – responsibility is still shared across agency, Whitehall departments and, at the regional level, between regional development agencies and the government offices despite the need for integration in the guidance to the regional development agencies.

Hence, functional separation for the guidance of regeneration and development activities at the regional level created more complexity.

Conclusion

A key part of New Labour's approach to regeneration was the creation of a variety of area-based initiatives. It was only after a massive proliferation of initiatives and structures that any attempt to integrate the variety of schemes came about. In order to integrate these schemes, the government set about creating more and more 'strategic' bodies such as LSPs and RDAs. What the discussion above has shown is that the government has sought to strengthen both the *horizontal* and the *vertical* linkages between actors and institutions on each level. Now we turn to consider the main questions posed by the Royal Commission.

What is the role of the various bodies involved in urban policy?

This paper has focused on the generic structures of governance that exist at local and regional levels to coordinate urban initiatives. It is the argument of this paper that as the government has rapidly increased the number of policies and bodies involved in urban governance, coordination has become more difficult to achieve. In response, the government has sought to rationalise urban policies and create strategic structures to promote this joined-up governance.

Has too much emphasis been placed on the role of central government at the expense of regional and local action?

An important tension within the government's approach to sub-national governance is that between its decentralising agenda and its often centralising practices. The government has stated repeatedly that decentralising power to local government, local communities and voluntary and community actors is at the heart of its agenda. There is cause to believe that the government has been partially successful in this. Initiatives such as the New Deal for the Communities programme have been initiated with the aim of providing more community-led forms of regeneration. However, the government has often demonstrated centralist tendencies in how it has sought to restructure urban governance in line with the government's objectives (Davies, 2002; Lee, 2000). Within academic literature this is mirrored by a debate between those who extol the virtues of a 'New Localism' (Corry et al, 2004; Corry and Stoker, 2002) and those who argue in favour of more centralism (Walker, 2002). The New Localists argue that centralist and authoritarian forms of steering urban governance are inherently undemocratic and ultimately self-defeating as they believe that only by creating a culture of local democracy can real change in public services be achieved and a more pluralist form of politics that can re-engage disaffected communities. On the other hand, centralisers suggest that the New Localism agenda exacerbates differences between localities. These differences enhance the inequalities and under-provisions of services. Indeed, some like Walker (2002) argue that pursuing greater localism will lead to greater mal-distribution of the UK's wealth and income, along with life chances. In order to remedy this situation, centralisers argue that equalisation is crucial for creating the effective public services that the general public demand. As with most debates, the truth lies somewhere in between these two poles. The UK system of urban governance has become for fragmented and locally-orientated and although there has been substantial central steering, there is still a lot of local initiative. Local government has to an extent re-invented itself in the face of ever greater amounts of central intervention in local affairs. However, a strong centre is still required in efforts to iron out some of the worst differences between localities in the UK. Central government has an important role to play in monitoring local performance and in spear-heading initiatives to drive up standards.

How can the business, voluntary and other sectors be encouraged to contribute to the environmental sustainability of the urban areas?

One key barrier to encouraging business, voluntary and other sectors that has been identified above is that of capacity. The government's expansion of the number of urban partnerships operating at the local level has stretched the capacity of actors at local and regional levels to get involved in urban partnerships. As one voluntary sector representative in Sheffield put it (interview, 2002): 'There are so many partnerships that I could get involved with, but I simply don't have the time. It seems that every week a new initiative or partnership is starting up – I'm finding it hard to keep up with what is happening in the city!' The government has provided a number of funding streams to address these capacity problems. However, this funding is small and spread thinly across urban areas.

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