

Sustainable development: opportunities for change consultation paper on a revised UK strategy

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Please address enquiries about '*Opportunities for Change*' to:

Sustainable Development Unit

DETR Ashdown House

123 Victoria Street

London

SW1E 6DE

Email: sdudiv@detr.gov.uk

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This document deals with strategic sustainable development issues which affect the whole country, using examples mainly drawn from England and Wales. We shall take account of comments from across the UK. In addition, there will be a further consultation shortly in Scotland on Scottish action to achieve sustainable development.

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Foreword by the Deputy Prime Minister

The Government has begun a historic programme to build a modern and fair Britain, a strong economy and a healthy environment to pass on to our children.

This means creating an economy that is innovative and efficient, with a highly skilled and well-rewarded workforce, with firms that can compete against the best in the world. It means sustainable economic growth that does not come at the expense of our environment, whether that is the places where we live and work, or where our children play or go to school, or the natural environment which we all value and enjoy.

And we believe in social justice a society where everyone has the chance to play their full part. Where a decent quality of life - health and housing, work and leisure - is there for us all, in every part of the country. And if we are to create a society that meets our needs, it should not be at the expense of generations to come. Scarce and valuable natural resources must be conserved. As a society, we should pay our own way, not expect our children to foot the bill. Today's greenhouse gases could be tomorrow's climatic disaster.

So this is what *sustainable development* is all about, a new and integrated way of thinking about choices right across Government, and throughout society, so that we can all share in the highest quality of life now, without passing on a poorer world to our children.

Delivering this is not going to be easy. Of course, Government can play an important part. Already we have started work on a radical programme to produce an integrated transport system. We have recognised the link between environment and health. For example, an estimated 24 thousand people a year die prematurely as a result of excessive traffic fumes.

But we all have something to contribute to this - business and trade unions, voluntary bodies and local authorities, families and individuals. It could be anything from using public transport, walking or cycling more and using the car less. Or helping to clear up urban eyesores. Or choosing environmentally-friendly products. It all counts.

That is why we have produced this consultation document. Over the next few months we shall be looking for views and ideas which we can build into our new Sustainable Development Strategy which we intend to publish before the end of this year.

Because sustainable development involves everyone, we need you to tell us what should be done and how you can become more involved. The opportunities to build a modern and fair society for now and for the future are there. We must all make the most of them.

John Prescott

Introduction

1. 'Sustainable development' is a phrase that has become widely used in recent years, particularly during and since the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Following Rio, the United Kingdom was one of the first countries in the world to prepare a national Sustainable Development Strategy, published in 1994. We intend to review and revise that Strategy, to reflect changes that have taken place since 1994 and our distinctive approach to sustainable development.

2. The Government's Election Manifesto stressed the importance of policies which combine environmental, economic and social objectives. Achieving all these objectives at the same time is what sustainable development is about. It brings together policies such as those to support businesses and job opportunities, to improve education and training, to improve the health of our people, and to safeguard the environment. It is an approach which seeks to find solutions, rather than emphasise conflicts; to build a decent society for all our people, in which each citizen has a stake; to move forward, rather than look to the past.

3. Since taking office last May we have put our commitment into practice through many initiatives in these areas. Initiatives particularly relevant to this consultation document include

- development of an integrated transport policy to meet the needs of our people and businesses while respecting our environment. We shall publish a White Paper in the spring;
- our support for international action to combat climate change, in particular at Kyoto in December. We will now be developing a national programme to tackle climate change;
- setting up a new Social Exclusion Unit, whose work will help all our people to share in the development of more sustainable communities;
- the launch of our Welfare to Work programme, including the Environmental Task Force which offers the opportunity both to get young people into work and to improve our environment;
- our programme for greening Government and our emphasis on the environment in our Presidency of the European Union;

- proposals that both the Welsh Assembly and the new Regional Development Agencies should have responsibilities for sustainable development;
- a ten-point plan for better management of our country's water resources;
- a target that all local authorities should put in place Local Agenda 21 strategies by the year 2000, to make sustainable development a reality in their communities;
- new, far reaching policies on sustainable international development, in particular the eradication of world poverty, as set out in our White Paper on international development.

4. This document

- sets out the Government's vision of sustainable development, and what we are doing to put it into practice;
- explores what further action might be taken, by each of us, to achieve sustainable development; and
- poses some questions, on which comments and suggestions are invited.

5. We intend to publish a new Sustainable Development Strategy by the end of 1998. But achieving sustainable development involves action by all sectors of society, in every part of the country. So we need to be able to take account of a wide range of views and ideas in deciding what this country's strategy should be. Without that, we shall lack the breadth of commitment which is needed for development to be truly sustainable. Over the next few months, we will stimulate a wide debate, the results of which will feed into preparation of the strategy. This document is a contribution to that debate.

What is sustainable development?

6. Sustainable development is a very simple idea. **It is about ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come.**

7. To achieve this, sustainable development is concerned with achieving economic growth, in the form of higher living standards, while protecting and where possible enhancing the environment · not just for its own sake but because a damaged environment will sooner or later hold back economic growth and lower the quality of life · and making sure that these economic and environmental benefits are available to everyone, not just to a privileged few.

8. There have been many attempts to produce formal definitions of sustainable development. The most widely used, particularly internationally, is the 'Brundtland' definition which refers to 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

9. Perhaps more important than formal definitions, however, are the key objectives which underlie sustainable development. Our vision of sustainable development is based on four broad objectives.

- **Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone.** It is not enough to focus on economic and environmental policies if whole groups in society, or parts of the country, are excluded. We have to reduce the harm to health caused by poverty, poor housing, unemployment and pollution. And our objective must be for everyone to live in a clean and safe environment, although that should not mean adopting policies which would prevent people from being able to afford the basic services they need. Nor should our needs be met by treating others elsewhere in the world unfairly.
- **Effective protection of the environment.** This means acting to limit global environmental threats, such as climate change; to protect human health and safety from hazards such as poor air quality and toxic chemicals; and to protect things which people need or value, such as wildlife, landscapes, and historic buildings.
- **Prudent use of natural resources.** This does not mean denying ourselves the use of non-renewable resources like oil and gas, but we

do need to make sure that we use them efficiently and that alternatives are developed to replace them in due course. Renewable resources, such as water, should be used in ways that do not endanger the resource or cause serious damage or pollution.

- **Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment**, so that everyone in Britain can share in high living standards and greater job opportunities. Britain is a trading nation in a rapidly-changing world. For our country to prosper, our businesses must produce the high quality goods and services that consumers throughout the world want, at prices they are prepared to pay. To achieve that, we need a workforce that is equipped with the education and skills for the 21st century. And we need businesses ready to invest, and an infrastructure to support them.

Setting a framework

10. This consultation paper identifies major themes of sustainable development, and shows how the various strands fit together. It does not seek to cover every policy related to sustainable development and quality of life · for example, wider policies on the economy, education, health or employment · but concentrates on areas where the main sustainable development objectives interact. Over the next few months, the Government will be issuing further detailed papers on specific issues, each of which will contribute to the debate.

11. The paper is based on themes which bring together some of the most important economic, environmental and social objectives.

- It looks at ways to encourage the development of **goods and services** which meet people's needs but involve the use of fewer natural resources;
- It considers how to promote **sustainable communities** for people to live and work in;
- It considers policies to **manage and protect our environment and resources**;
- It examines ways to **send the right signals**, through prices, regulations, and information for the public;
- It briefly reviews where **international action** needs to be taken, because one country's choices will affect not only that country, but also its neighbours and the wider world.

Achieving sustainable development

12. Sustainable development involves

- thinking broadly about objectives and about the effects of what we do · thinking about costs and benefits in the widest sense, and not separating things out into economic, environmental, and social compartments. It seeks to combine objectives to improve the overall quality of life rather than pursuing individual objectives · such as maximising short-term economic growth or improving some element of the environment · without regard to other consequences;
- considering long-term effects as well as short-term ones. Some of the most costly problems we face today · such as dealing with contaminated land · are caused by past decisions which were based on the standards of the day and so paid too little attention to this. In the Strategy, we shall want to set out policies not just for the next year or two, but which look 20 years ahead or more;
- assessing indirect as well as direct effects. To take a simple example, the environmental impact of a washing machine or a refrigerator is the combination of the whole process of making it, and disposing of it at the end of its life, as well as how it is used in the home;
- taking particular care when changes brought about by development would be irreversible · such as major changes in the earth's climate or the disappearance of rare plants or animals.

13. Sometimes it is relatively easy to see how to bring about sustainable development. For example, through the use of energy efficiency measures · some of which can pay for themselves in just 2-3 years · and by changing the way we use energy in the home, we can enable people to have warmer and more comfortable homes while still

- reducing the amount of money that people need to spend on heating; and
- cutting the amount of pollution and resource use, because we need to generate less electricity and burn less gas.

14. In other cases, it is more difficult to achieve economic, environmental and social objectives at the same time, and to marry the short and long term needs. Choices may be needed about relative priorities. But sustainable development is not just about making choices between objectives. Instead, it involves being prepared to think in different ways and to find new ways to do things. For example, a central focus of a waste strategy guided by the need for sustainable development is not just how to dispose of the waste that is produced · or even how to recycle it · but also how best to reduce the amount that is created in the first place.

15. This consultation document is about identifying opportunities for change · change that will promote economic growth, safeguard the environment and contribute to social progress. **We invite your views on what the objectives and targets should be, and the policies to achieve them. We ask you to suggest ways in which everyone can play their part in sustainable development, and what the Government can do to help them.**

Keeping track of progress

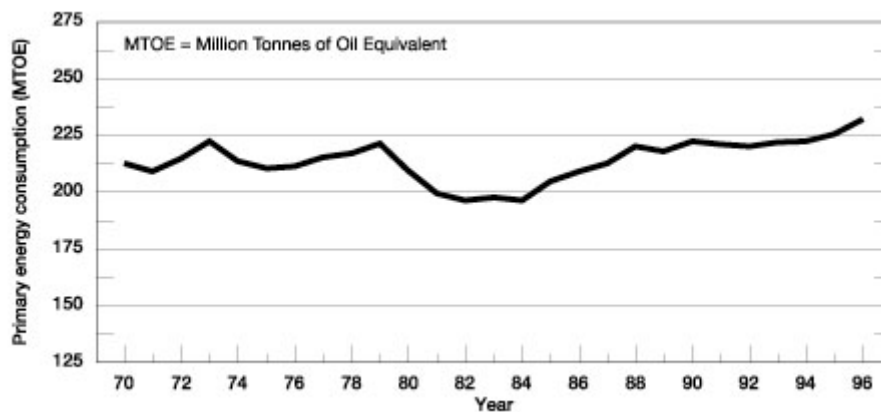
16. A vital part of sustainable development is setting targets and devising indicators to keep track of progress, and reporting in a way that is clear, comprehensive and useful to a wide audience. The UK published a first set of sustainable development indicators in 1996. We are reviewing those as part of producing our new strategy. Our aim will be both to produce a more comprehensive core set, and also to identify a handful of indicators which will provide an overview of progress. These will need to encapsulate the range of environmental, social and economic issues which make up sustainable development. Candidates we are considering include issues such as climate change, air quality, water quality, biodiversity, beauty and tranquillity of the countryside, economic growth, poverty and deprivation, the health of the population, or quality and affordability of housing. **We would welcome your views on a set of key indicators of sustainable development.**

Sustainable goods and services

17. Our prosperity and quality of life depends on competitive businesses producing the high quality goods and services which people require. Macroeconomic policies which create a successful business climate are fundamental to sustainable development. So are other policies which help to maintain and enhance competitiveness and social progress, such as those aimed at a better, more integrated transport system and education and training to equip our workforce for the future.

18. At the same time, we must aim for goods and services to be produced and used in ways which make efficient use of resources, and reduce pressures on the environment. Indeed, many products and services - such as cameras, radios and televisions, fridges and other domestic appliances, and forms of transport such as trains - now require only a fraction of the materials, energy and water used in the past. At the same time, they cost less and are of higher quality. This brings benefits to the consumer and the economy as well as to the environment.

Primary Energy Consumption: United Kingdom



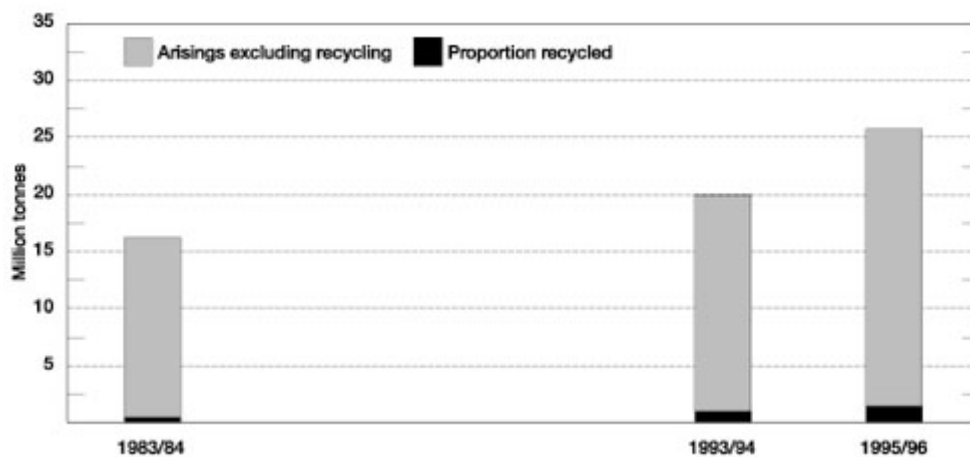
19. But increases in consumption mean that pressures on resources and the environment remain. For example, overall UK energy consumption has not fallen, despite some improvements in efficiency. Household waste has increased dramatically - we now landfill enough waste every 9 months to fill a hole the size of Lake Windermere.

20. Reversing these trends is a radical challenge. We cannot just focus on resource use or environmental pollution - reductions could be due to a failing

economy, or pricing essential goods out of the reach of those who need them. We must not ignore people's aspirations for goods and services which make for a better life.

21. Instead, we have to find ways to get more from less: so-called 'eco-efficiency'. Production and distribution processes will have to change to reduce emissions, resource use and waste. New types of products will be important. Persuading consumers to think of needs and services rather than products, and about the demands they make of producers, will also have a part to play.

Household waste arisings and recycling: England and Wales - *Provisional estimates*



22. There have been suggestions that over several decades we can halve resource use and double wealth, if we use technological innovation to use energy and materials four times as efficiently - the 'Factor 4' idea. Some people would argue for even greater efficiency improvements.

23. Greater eco-efficiency may be more important in some areas than others. On present indications the most pressing of these are likely to include energy use by households, transport and businesses, water use, and waste production. Other areas, such as information technology or biotechnology, are likely to offer substantial potential for eco-efficiency through new technology.

Producers

24. The markets within which producers operate are affected by a wide range of factors. To promote eco-efficiency and achieve more sustainable production and consumption we need to stimulate and support those influences which encourage producers to provide better goods and services while using resources more efficiently. And we need to discourage those which waste resources. Different markets and products will require different approaches and the range of options will vary from sector to sector.

25. For some, the model of *market transformation* provides a valuable framework within which to set long term goals. Market transformation provides a means to encourage better goods and services through a mix of mechanisms such as financial and marketing incentives to improve product quality, negotiation of long term agreements on goals and targets, progressive improvements in best practice, minimum standards and responsible care or producer responsibility for the product. Whatever the approach, it is important to begin with a sectoral dialogue which considers the following possible elements:

- setting a framework of long-term (20-30 years) objectives in negotiations between Government and business;
- negotiated agreements with business sectors covering more detailed programmes of measures to encourage sustainability;
- identifying and disseminating best practice, including encouraging adoption of good quality environmental management systems;
- improving consumer information on product characteristics e.g. through labelling;
- encouraging responsible care and producer responsibility initiatives which ensure that sustainable development considerations are designed in from the outset (including more durability), and that once a product has finished its useful life it is reused, recycled or otherwise turned to productive use;
- encouraging improved communication and dialogue with stakeholders;
- encouragement of sectoral benchmarking;
- 'sticks and carrots' to encourage cleaner technologies.

26. Company reporting on the environment is also a key element. A company's environmental performance can have a substantial impact on its profitability. Poor performance means that the company is liable for clean up costs, can increase its production costs and can build up liabilities for the future. In addition, an increasing number of stakeholders want to know about a business's environmental performance in key areas. Many leading businesses already publish stand alone environmental reports. There is a need to widen the take up and extent of environmental reporting so that the public, investors and the City can judge how effective companies are at managing their impact on the environment.

27. We would welcome views on:

- how might Government best work in partnership with business sectors on establishing business strategies for sustainable development encompassing some or all of these elements?
- which elements are likely to be the most effective?
- how useful is the market transformation concept and in which sectors?
- would it be helpful or feasible to regulate to set minimum standards for energy and material use in production processes?
- what is the most effective way of encouraging business to meet the range of different requirements for communication and dialogue with employees, consumers, the financial community, business suppliers and customers, and local communities? What role can published reports play?

Consumers

28. Consumers can have a huge impact on sustainable development through their influence as purchasers. But they need help to make choices. Existing consumer information could be improved: voluntary 'green claims' are not always trusted, while official schemes, such as the European ecolabel, have sometimes been slow to have an impact. In the short term, efforts may need to focus on simpler, standardised information on key products and key issues, such as energy consumption. Labelling and information schemes also need to

be supported by improved general awareness levels and consumer education. In the long term, information technology will enable comprehensive product information to be presented at the point of sale.

[Market Transformation: Household Appliances](#)

29. The way consumers use and dispose of products matters too. For example, more efficient use of domestic appliances, lighting and heating, and cars can help efforts to tackle climate change. Consumers can also help tackle the growth in household waste by minimising the amount they produce: for example, by avoiding products with large amounts of packaging and by taking part in reuse and recycle schemes in partnership with local authorities.

30. Meeting consumer aspirations in a more sustainable way also means going beyond products and services as they are currently provided. A higher quality of life may be achieved with fewer but higher quality, more long lasting or satisfying products (household goods, services, holidays etc.).

31. How do you think that consumer behaviour might best be influenced in relation to buying more sustainable products and using products in a more sustainable manner?

Should there be a new approach to foster dialogue between consumers and producers to find practical solutions to consumer concerns? If so, should this work at the national level or for individual business sectors?

What kind of information, and delivered through what medium, would most influence consumers to buy more sustainable products and use them in a sustainable manner?

Building sustainable communities

32. Building sustainable communities involves considering how to encourage employment, decent housing, good health, and access to services and recreation, in ways which make good use of natural resources, protect the environment, promote social cohesion, and contribute to local, regional and national prosperity. It brings together matters such as land use planning, an integrated transport policy, housing and construction, and regeneration of cities, towns and rural areas.

33. We should never forget that decisions on matters like planning, or transport, or housing are ultimately about the quality of life of communities and individuals. Past mistakes happened when decision-makers lost sight of that. We have to take decisions at the right level, and find ways to enable people to play a part in finding ways forward for their own communities.

34. A priority is tackling social exclusion · providing opportunities for a better life to people who may face multiple problems of poverty, joblessness, low educational achievement, poor quality housing, inadequate public services, and a degraded environment. We have recently set up the Social Exclusion Unit, under the personal steer of the Prime Minister. The Unit will help co-ordinate action across Government to shift the focus towards preventing social exclusion. It will look to find new, more integrated ways to tackle these severe problems to allow for long term solutions and the development of sustainable communities.

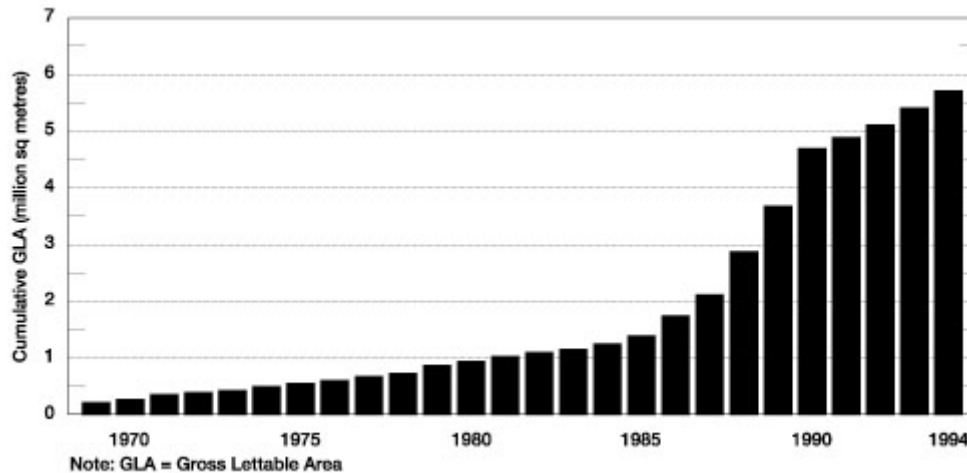
Where we live and work

35. Planning has a key role to play in achieving a more sustainable pattern of development. It seeks to integrate economic, environmental and social factors in decisions about where to put homes, jobs, shops and leisure facilities. By doing so it can limit demands on land and the environment, and reduce the need to travel, especially by car.

36. Government planning policy now incorporates sustainable development principles. For example, it now encourages developers to focus investment within urban areas, especially existing centres, rather than perpetuating the move to out-of town sites. But more still needs to be done at all levels of the

planning system as people's thinking about sustainable development moves on, especially to reflect the increased emphasis on combating social exclusion.

Out-of-town retail floor space: United Kingdom

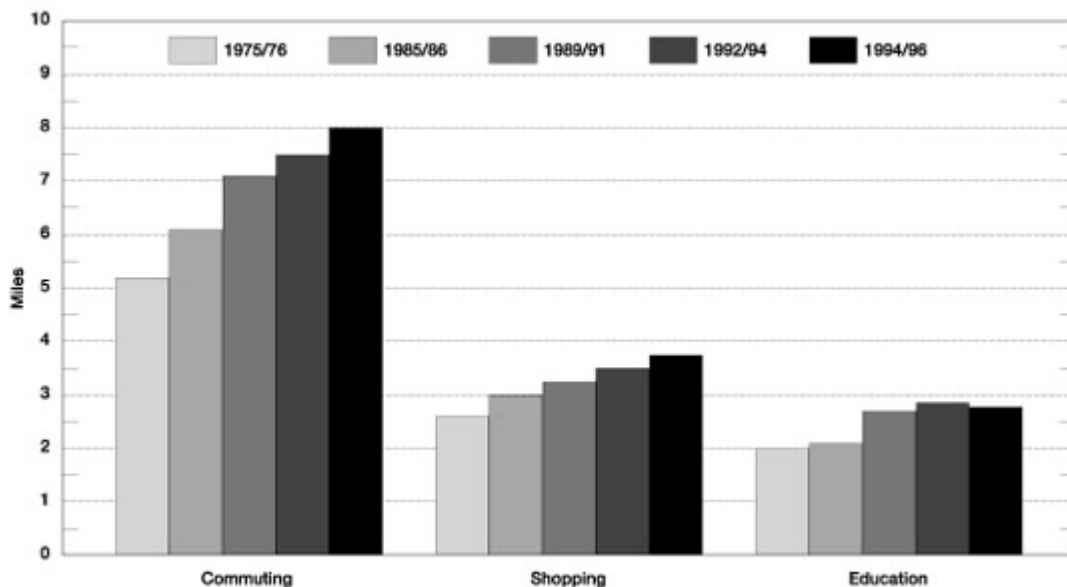


37. In addition, the planning system faces new challenges and opportunities from the projected increase in households · an extra 4.4 million (some 175,000 a year) are projected for England and an extra 223,000 (some 9,000 a year) for Wales between 1991 and 2016. This will mean maximising the reuse of previously-developed urban land, whilst ensuring that we maintain or improve the quality of our towns and cities. It will still, however, be necessary to develop green field sites. The challenge is to create patterns of development that are more sustainable than our present settlements. We need to decide which patterns and locations will prove most sustainable.

38. We must also look for ways to better integrate planning and transport through the planning system. Mobility needs to be achieved in an economically and environmentally sustainable framework. But there are questions about the sustainability of our travel patterns · for example, our day-to-day travel has increased in many ways over the past few years. Our consultation paper on an integrated transport policy has opened up debate on such issues and the conclusions in our forthcoming White Paper on transport policy will be reflected in our sustainable development strategy.

39. We are pursuing a number of initiatives which will incorporate the principles of sustainable development more firmly into the planning system. We intend to announce our views shortly, and to consult as necessary, on our preferred way forward on household growth, we have just announced our proposals for modernising the planning system to tackle the challenges of housing and transport, and we are consulting on enhancing the role of regional planning guidance (RPG), including making a sustainability appraisal integral to the RPG process. We also intend to publish later this year two good practice guides: one will help local authorities to reflect the principles of sustainable development more thoroughly in their development plans; the other will be on urban design, helping to make our towns and cities more sustainable places.

Average journey length: Great Britain



40. We are also keeping planning policy guidance under review. In particular, we have launched research on whether planning guidance which affects leisure, tourism and recreation needs to be updated, not least to take account of sustainable development more fully.

41. We would be interested in views on:

- **how best to incorporate the broader objectives of sustainable development within the planning system, in particular how best to integrate the social dimension;**
- **practical examples from local authorities and local communities for implementing sustainable development principles at the local level;**
- **what indicators are likely to be most suitable for assessing the performance of planning policies in meeting sustainable development objectives; and**
- **what patterns of development are likely to prove most sustainable.**

Buildings and infrastructure

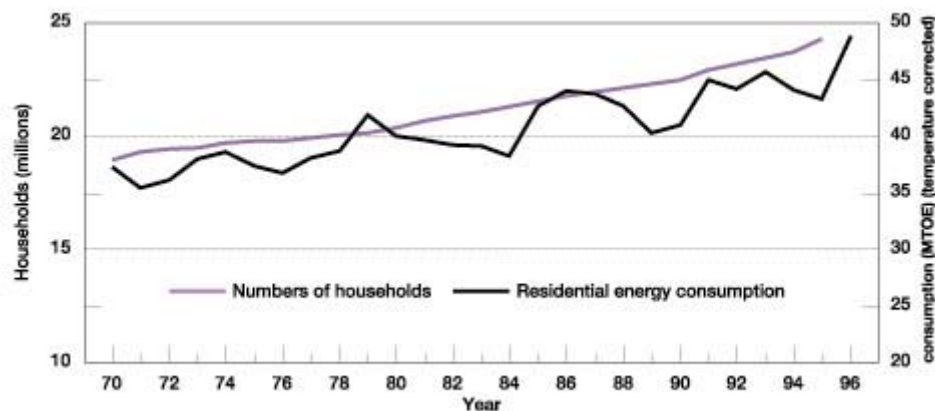
42. The way we construct and use buildings and infrastructure is important too. We need to think broadly about our needs and how we meet them, in order to find opportunities to reduce resource and energy use, minimise pollution and waste, and enhance economic efficiency and social objectives for example by promoting affordable warmth, better health or domestic and working environments which are better and more productive for those who use them.

43. This is a challenge for Government, the construction industry, architects, engineers and surveyors, and developers, occupiers and financiers. It involves thinking about the whole life and use of a building including the consequences of final disposal rather than just construction costs; efficient manufacture of construction materials, including through use of waste materials; promoting environmental management practices in the construction sector; price signals for example, whether charges or fee structures promote sustainable development; and the role of education, training, research and demonstration projects.

44. Sustainability is not just an issue for new construction. We also need to take a more sustainable approach to management of the existing building stock. We must examine the potential for economic and environmental benefits from more resource efficient refurbishment and increased recycling of

demolition wastes. Increasing energy efficiency of existing buildings is fundamental. Yet energy consumption by households has continued to grow, and carbon dioxide emissions from housing account for over a quarter of UK emissions. Non-domestic buildings need to be tackled too, but the property market does not necessarily provide incentives to do so.

Residential energy consumption and households: United Kingdom



45. Other objectives may also be achieved through the refurbishment of the building stock: for example, better public health; employment, or a more sustainable community if a commercial building can be used for a new purpose. We also need to consider the balance between refurbishing buildings and encouraging demolition to make way for buildings of higher environmental standard.

46. We have already introduced a requirement for the procurement of all new Government buildings to incorporate an environmental assessment procedure (BREEAM). A review is currently under way of the energy efficiency requirements in the Building Regulations and how they might be extended.

We would welcome views on what more can be done to promote sustainability in the construction industry, and in particular on what environmental, social and economic objectives we might have for the existing domestic and non-domestic stock.

Communities for people

Regeneration

47. Regeneration projects can make a considerable contribution to sustainable communities by supporting local people and businesses in the drive to tackle social exclusion and realise opportunities. Initiatives such as the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) are providing resources for hundreds of projects with a range of economic, environmental and social goals. Capacity building · equipping local people and groups to play a key role in devising and running regeneration projects · is now a key objective of the SRB. Access to finance, including loans, is an important factor. Community-based approaches which offer alternatives to traditional forms of finance may have considerable potential in this context. We are therefore working closely with organisations such as the Community Development Foundation and the Development Trusts Association to identify ways in which these alternative forms of support can be encouraged. **We would welcome contributions to the debate on the future of regeneration initiated by the Deputy Prime Minister in June 1997, views on how local communities can be encouraged to contribute to local regeneration, and views on what innovative forms of finance and support might be developed.**

48. Regenerating communities cannot be achieved by one agency working alone or by a single project. An holistic approach is essential to identify the needs and priorities of local areas and people and to implement practical measures to address those needs and priorities. We therefore welcome the steps taken by the Local Government Association (LGA) to develop 'Regeneration: the new Commitment' which involves agreeing a long-term, shared vision for localities and determining the steps needed to achieve that vision. We look forward to receiving the LGA's worked up proposals.

49. A healthy rural community can not only combat social exclusion and poverty but also help to protect and enhance the countryside and its wildlife. But rural areas can face problems of remoteness, a sparse or imbalanced population structure, lack of accessibility, or a narrow economic base. In some cases development pressures may cause difficulties for the provision of housing and services, particularly for the less well-off. **We would welcome views on measures to tackle rural deprivation, and on ways to combine development and conservation in smaller rural communities.**

Tourism

50. Tourism is a vital part of the national and local economy, bringing in much extra money for the country and creating many jobs. It can also benefit local communities by helping to maintain local facilities and services, such as public transport and shops, and can help to regenerate areas through improvements such as the use of derelict land, restoration of buildings, and conservation and repair of the countryside. But there are also concerns that growth in tourism may cause congestion, inconvenience to local people and environmental damage. **We would welcome views on how to manage tourism to ensure its benefits while minimising potential problems.**

Health

51. We are also publishing a green paper · *Our Healthier Nation* · which considers, among other issues, the relationship between health and the quality of the environment. Effective protection of the environment is a pre-requisite for a healthy nation. The way in which environmental quality affects health is sometimes easy to define, but usually involves complex interactions and effects on health cannot always be measured. Nevertheless, there can be no doubting the importance of environmental factors associated with good air quality; safe, secure and good quality housing; safe drinking water; access to open spaces; and proper use of chemicals and potentially hazardous substances. We must therefore act to reduce problems associated with these environmental factors so as to benefit human health.

Employment

52. High levels of unemployment make poor use of our human resources and mean that people's social needs are not met. That cannot be consistent with sustainable development. The Welfare to Work programme reflects our commitment to help people increase their own employability, get a firm footing in the labour market and determine their own future. An important part of the New Deal for 18-24 year olds is the new Environmental Task Force, which

provides an opportunity to improve our environment and get young people into work. For older unemployed people, we will offer help in new Employment Zones, supporting local community-based solutions to problems faced in areas of particularly high long-term unemployment.

Participation and decision making

53. Communities can range from hamlets to towns, cities, regions or the nation itself. Decisions need to be taken at the right level, whether national, regional or local, in ways which make the best use of the energy, ideas and commitment of the British people.

54. We aim to devolve decision making to country, regional and local levels where possible, so that those people best placed to take decisions are able to do so and that decision makers are more accountable to local people. Our work to improve local democracy and accountability is an important part of this process.

55. The Government's far-reaching plans for devolution have received support in Wales and action is now proceeding to implement these proposals. In our White Paper 'A Voice for Wales', we undertook to ensure that the new Welsh Assembly promotes sustainable development. To achieve this objective, we intend to place a duty on the Assembly to have regard to the principle of sustainable development. The Assembly will enable the aspirations and priorities of the Welsh people to be more directly taken into account in decisions. The White Paper also included a proposal to merge the functions of the Welsh Development Agency, Development Board for Rural Wales and the Land Authority for Wales: the new Agency will be answerable to the Welsh Assembly.

56. The regional dimension of decision making in England has been neglected in the past. Our proposals for Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and arrangements for taking account of regional views and opinions will help tackle this deficit. We intend that RDAs will have a specific objective of furthering sustainable development in their areas, and the RDAs Bill introduced to Parliament on 10th December makes provision for this.

57. At the local level, we want local authorities to develop their roles as leaders and champions of their local communities. Many have made great strides in putting sustainable development into practice through the Local Agenda 21 initiative. We want all authorities to adopt Local Agenda 21 plans by the year 2000, and will do what we can to help that. We will complement this through our commitment to give councils a new duty to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area. These are essentially sustainable development objectives.

58. We will also consider how to encourage public participation in decision making. This is not just about getting agreement to decisions by local authorities and other public bodies, but involving local communities in identifying problems and opportunities, in the management of environmental assets such as public forests, and in taking action for change.

59. We would welcome your views on:

- how we can encourage regional and local decision makers to adopt innovative solutions for sustainable development;
- what more could be done to give sustainable development, including local Agenda 21, a higher profile in local communities, and how to promote more well-informed and effective participation by citizens in decision making.

Managing the environment and resources

60. We continue to damage our environment. In some areas there have been improvements, but there is much to be done to reverse trends such as destruction of landscapes and wildlife, increases in the output of gases which cause climate change, or poor air quality. We have to tackle pressures on the environment such as those from development, agriculture and transport. At the same time there will be limits to what we should do · there will be times when the economic or social costs of environmental measures would not be justified by the benefits gained.

61. Twenty years ago we heard a great deal about a world running out of resources. Since then the immediate threat has appeared to recede as new resources have been identified and prices · notably of fossil fuels · have fallen. But sustainable development requires us to have an eye to the future · not only with regard to supply, but environmental and other impacts of resource use as well.

62. Often the issues are linked. Emissions of carbon dioxide, the gas which contributes most to climate change, are largely determined by how we produce and use energy. The quality of water in a river is affected by the flow, which in turn is affected by how much water is abstracted for society's use. We need to reconcile our need for mineral resources with protection of the countryside and wildlife.

63. This consultation paper highlights a few specific areas and raises some key questions about them. In addition, detailed consultation exercises have already been, or will be, undertaken in several areas: for example our forthcoming consultation on a UK climate change programme; chemicals, where we will be taking a strategic look at the sustainable use of chemicals; land and soil, where there have been extensive consultations on the new contaminated land regime and will be consultations this year on a new soil strategy; and a review of our National Air Quality Strategy.

Energy and climate change

64. Businesses must be able to meet their needs for energy and remain competitive; households need adequate and affordable warmth. These

objectives have to be achieved in a way which also meets environmental goals. In particular, we have to play our part in restraining emissions of greenhouse gases which threaten to cause dangerous climate change.

65. The timescale for energy developments is long, and their environmental, social and economic impacts can be substantial. Left to itself, the market may not take such issues into account. The previous Government's approach had some benefits, with the shift to gas-fired electricity generation accounting for half of savings in UK carbon dioxide emissions. But it had significant impacts for coalfield communities and for the long-term use of coal resources. Energy prices have fallen in real terms, which has been good for consumers, but has tended to encourage more fuel to be used and provided less incentive for investment in new technology and simple energy saving measures.

66. We have to look further ahead. Without new measures, carbon dioxide emissions from energy production and use will rise again as the scope for switching to gas-fired power stations diminishes and nuclear power stations come towards the end of their lives. We need to change the balance between sources of supply and move to greater use of renewable energy. And we need to reduce our total energy use · which has remained relatively stable over the past 25 years · without putting a brake on the economy or causing hardship for households.

67. In Kyoto last December, developed countries agreed to cut their emissions of greenhouse gases by an average of 5.2% over the next 15 years. This historic deal will lead to real reductions in global emission levels. The next step is to deliver these cuts, which will require major changes in the way we generate and use energy. We do not wish to pre-empt consultation on our national climate change programme later this year, which will largely focus on measures to deliver our international commitments, as well as launching a national debate about how we might move towards our domestic aim of a 20% cut in emissions. But in the context of energy policy as a whole we would welcome views on:

- **What action should be taken in the short term to ensure that the environmental and social goals of energy policy can be achieved at the same time as economic objectives are met?**

- **What should the Government, industry or others be doing to make sure that the environmental impacts of the energy supply industry do not increase again in the 21st century?**

Air and atmosphere

68. Many commitments on air and atmosphere arise from European or wider international agreement on matters such as climate change, the ozone layer, or acid rain. We will seek to persuade our partners to reach agreements which reflect the seriousness of the environmental threats we face, while taking full account of economic and social implications of those decisions.

69. Domestically, we have announced a review of the National Air Quality Strategy and implemented a new system of local air quality management, requiring local authorities to draw up action plans where there are particular problems. These plans might include action on traffic management, vehicle emissions testing, industrial pollution control and planning. There will be a role for everyone to play in moving to a less polluting way of life. Developing an integrated transport policy will be central to this. **We would welcome views on the priorities for Government in considering further policies to tackle air pollution.**

Freshwater and coastal waters

70. We need to manage water resources in a way which meets society's need for water in a fair and affordable way. We also have to ensure the well-being of the water environment.

71. The country needs a clear strategy for the management of water resources, covering water efficiency and water conservation as well as controls on abstractions. We will build on the ten-point plan set out at the Water Summit in May 1997, which included tough leakage targets for water companies, and reviews of the abstraction licensing system and of water charges. And while the quality of freshwater and coastal waters is generally improving, we are considering how economic instruments, including possible charges for water pollution, and regulation can together provide a flexible and

secure means of improving standards. **We would welcome views on what further actions can be taken to ensure that our water resources are managed in a sustainable way in future, including future priorities for freshwater quality.**

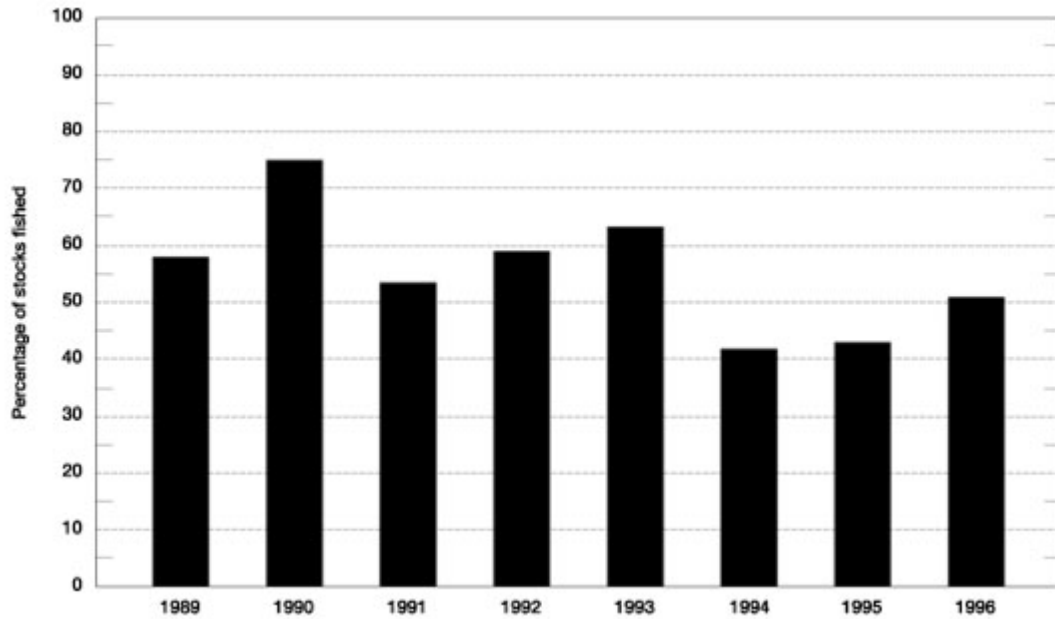
Seas and oceans

72. Healthy and productive seas and oceans are a litmus test of international commitment to sustainable development, not least because fish resources are important for food security. We aim to set an example by protecting our own seas from pollution and their resources from over-exploitation.

73. The main sources of marine pollution include dumping, activities on land, shipping and offshore activities. We have now ruled out the resumption of dumping of UK radioactive waste in the sea. Our long-term general objective is to cease discharges of hazardous substances to the seas around our shores. We will make every endeavour to move towards this objective, based on a careful assessment of risks, costs, and benefits. On shipping, we shall continue to promote more effective regulation and enforcement through the International Maritime Organisation and better collective implementation in Europe. On the offshore industry, we are considering, with the industry, how environmental regulation can be made more consistent and transparent. **We would welcome views on how these objectives can be addressed.**

74. Many fish stocks are at worryingly low levels because of over-exploitation. Assessments by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea of the level of stocks necessary to avoid an increasing risk that they will fail to reproduce themselves (the Minimum Biological Acceptable Level or MBAL) show that in 1996 only 51% of the stocks fished by UK and fleets from other European Community Member States were considered to be above MBAL. We are working with our partners within the Community to reform the Common Fisheries Policy to achieve more effective fisheries conservation, thereby safeguarding the livelihood of those who depend on the fishing industry and benefiting the wider marine environment. **We would welcome your views on the best ways to take this policy forward.**

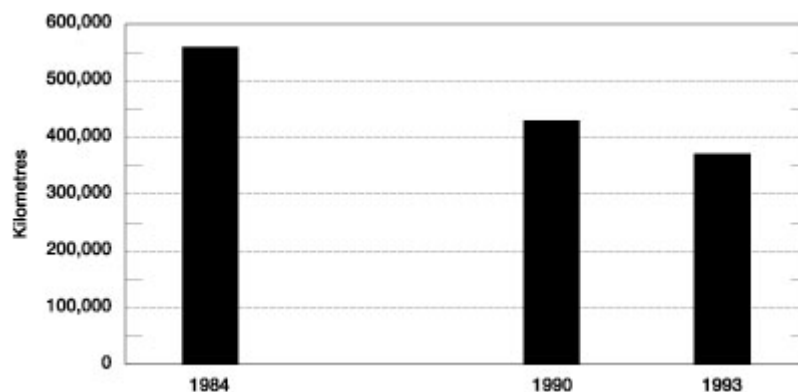
Fish stocks above Minimum Biological Acceptable Level



Countryside, land and wildlife

75. Pressures on wildlife and landscape · including from agriculture, roads and developments, and pollution · have led to declines in populations of animals and plants, the disappearance of hedgerows, and a loss of tranquillity in our countryside. We must reduce those pressures.

Length of hedgerows: England and Wales



76. The UK now has a well-developed strategy to protect our biodiversity · the immense variety of wildlife which makes up our natural heritage. It includes action plans for some 400 species · from rare insects and plants to species like the song thrush and otter · and 38 habitats. We are reinforcing our commitment to the most valuable wildlife sites (Sites of Special Scientific

Interest), and securing their proper management, consistent with the principles of sustainable development, is a priority.

77. Yet action plans for species or sites are not enough by themselves. **We invite your views on how protection of wildlife and habitats can be integrated more fully into policy making across society.** In particular, how can we build public understanding of biodiversity policies, and involve people in carrying them forward? And assuming that action plans are fulfilled, where should we go from here, other than doing more action plans?

78. There are already special statutory designations which apply to our finest landscape areas - the National Parks, the Broads, and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Green Belts have also been established to check urban sprawl and to safeguard the surrounding countryside. Special planning policies apply to all of these designated areas. Recent work by English Nature and the Countryside Commission to develop a Character Map of England will help shape the development process so that it reflects local character. Similar work is being undertaken by local authorities in Wales with financial support from the Countryside Council for Wales. We need to consider what more can be done to maintain and enhance the character of the countryside; the National Parks may be able to act as models for the sustainable management of the wider countryside. **We would welcome views on what more can be done to promote sustainable management and improvement of the countryside.**

79. We need food produced efficiently, at prices which we can all afford, in ways which are consistent with a thriving rural economy and conservation of the countryside and wildlife. The European Union's Common Agricultural Policy is a major influence on farming practices, but too small a proportion of its resources are channelled towards achieving environmental objectives through appropriate land management. The forthcoming reforms of the CAP should lead to a more market oriented policy and greater emphasis on measures designed to secure specific environmental goals. A more market oriented CAP together with the increasing trend towards liberalisation of trade should offer opportunities for developing countries on world markets. **We would welcome views on the environmental goals to be pursued and the type**

of targeted measures that could usefully be incorporated into the reformed CAP.

80. We import almost 80% of the timber and wood products we consume. We could reduce the burden on overseas forests, as well as contributing to a range of domestic sustainable development initiatives such as regeneration and extension of woodland habitats and renewal of damaged landscapes, by appropriate planting of new woodlands and by managing existing ones more productively. **We will be seeking views on how forestry can most effectively make its contribution to sustainable development.**

Minerals

81. Mineral resources available in the UK make an essential contribution to our life and prosperity. Their use benefits the economy, but there can be conflicts between exploitation of resources and environmental aims. We will be looking at what can be done to minimise environmental impacts of extraction, how to promote high quality restoration of sites, and the potential for more efficient use of aggregates and increased use of recycled materials. We will also be looking at how to conserve minerals, as far as possible, while securing necessary supplies, and to safeguard mineral resources from sterilisation by other forms of development. **We would be interested in your views on:**

- **the potential for more efficient use of aggregates and increased use of recycled material;**
- **what more could be done to minimise adverse environmental impacts of minerals extraction, and to promote high-quality restoration.**

Sending the right signals

82. Sustainable development cannot be imposed on people. We can use laws and taxes to influence people's actions. But the Government also has a duty to help people understand what sustainable development means, why it is necessary, and how they can help to achieve it. And the Government, and all public bodies, should set an example.

Economic Instruments

83. The amount we pay for things does not always take full account of the resources they consume or the pollution they cause. It costs nothing, for example, to pollute our rivers or the air. Attempting to charge consumers and firms for all the damage they cause to the environment would be difficult: such costs can be hard to pin down, and charges can hit certain groups harder than others. That is why the Government has reduced VAT on domestic fuel. But taxes and charges can be a good way to reflect some of the costs and to encourage different behaviour. Occasionally, if we cannot impose a tax on a polluting activity, it may be right to subsidise a less-polluting alternative although we should avoid subsidies that cause further distortions.

84. There are several economic instruments of this sort in the UK; examples are the landfill tax and taxes on fuels for vehicles. The Pre-Budget Report issued by HM Treasury in November 1997 said that the Government is committed to exploring the scope for using the tax system, where it is effective to do so, to deliver environmental objectives and sustainable development. There are a number of consultations in hand, including reviews of economic instruments to deal with water pollution and mineral extraction, a review of the landfill tax and proposals for a reduction in vehicle excise duty for clean buses and lorries. The Pre-Budget Report invited comments on the use of taxes to deliver environmental objectives; these should be sent to the Treasury. **We invite views on how economic instruments in general can be used to promote sustainable development.**

Regulation

85. Regulation will continue to be essential, particularly in setting standards which protect the health of humans or the natural environment. Our aim is better regulation which delivers objectives without imposing unnecessary burdens. Where regulations already exist, we need to consider whether they are too narrowly focused on a single objective and ignore wider economic, environmental or social goals. Or there may be regulations which stifle innovation or the introduction of new technology. We shall be looking at whether changes in regulation may be needed in some areas, and whether regulatory bodies, such as the Environment Agency, are able to take proper account of the use of resources and social impacts in reaching their decisions. **We invite your views on whether there are any significant areas where regulation could better reflect sustainable development objectives.**

Better information and education

86. Information on sustainable development has to be widely available and widely used. The Government already provides a great deal of material, both directly and through the help it gives to bodies such as Going for Green. Local authorities, voluntary bodies, business organisations and consumer groups also provide information to a variety of audiences. And of course television, radio and the press cover stories ranging from major international conferences to how best gardeners can cope with dry weather.

87. Consumers need particular kinds of information to help them when they are choosing between products. [Paragraphs 28-31](#) above consider this in more detail.

88. Some of the information will be delivered in more formal settings · at school, in further and higher education or at work. The previous Government produced an environmental education strategy. We intend to build on that. We have already announced the setting up of a Sustainable Development Education Panel, to be chaired by Sir Geoffrey Holland, which will report to the Government with proposals for action.

89. We would welcome views on current initiatives for sustainable development information and education and what improvements might be made.

90. Improving understanding and long term assessment of the social, economic, environmental, scientific and technological dimensions of policies are fundamental objectives of many UK education and research and development programmes. The latter are funded in a wide range of organisations by Government Departments, Research Councils, agencies and industry, between whom there is close coordination. The national Foresight programme contributes significantly to setting priorities and has stimulated new initiatives such as the LINK Programme on Technologies for Sustainable Development.

Setting an example: decision making by Government and public bodies

91. Government Departments and other public bodies are increasingly taking account of sustainable development, but more can be done. Several Government Departments and Non-Departmental Public Bodies already have a specific remit to have regard to sustainable development. We will consider whether others should do so. We will back this up with improved reporting and scrutiny, in particular through the new Parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee.

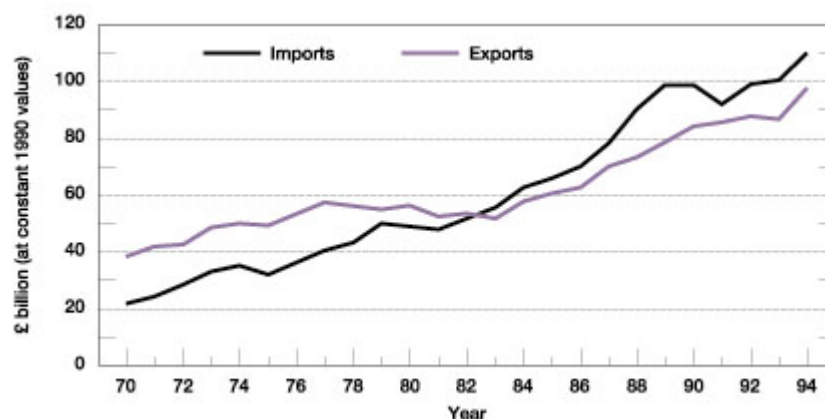
92. Proper appraisal of decisions, before they are taken, is vital. We have made improved guidance on environmental appraisal in Government Departments a priority. We are working with local government to produce guidance on putting sustainable development into practice through Local Agenda 21 strategies. One of the themes of the UK's Presidency of the European Union in the first half of 1998 will be the need to achieve sustainable development at the European level. **We invite views on how to promote decision-making at all levels of Government which takes full account of sustainable development.**

International cooperation and development

93. We are increasingly part of a global community as well as national and local ones. Our role as a trading nation means that our economic prosperity cannot be considered separately from prosperity abroad. Business partnerships, investment and supply chains stretch across national boundaries; national economies are more interdependent. More frequent international travel, and advances in technology such as the Internet, make for increasing opportunities for international communication, commerce and working. We now face environmental problems which are world wide in their effects, such as climate change and loss of forests, and these require global solutions.

94. Our aim is to provide strong leadership within a new environmental internationalism. We will work with other countries so that the international community can take up, fulfil and enforce environmental, ethical and free trade commitments. We will help those in less developed countries through improving their trade opportunities, through development assistance, business partnerships and the sharing of expertise. The UK has a unique opportunity for such leadership through its membership of the European Union, United Nations, and the Commonwealth.

UK imports and exports of manufactured goods



95. We have already set out our approach to international development in a recent International Development White Paper. As we develop our sustainable development strategy, we will be considering:

- how to support international sustainable development targets and policies to create sustainable livelihoods for poor people, promote human development, and conserve the environment;
- how to build partnerships with donors and recipients, private and public sector bodies, to this end;
- how to ensure that all our international policies, including aid, trade, investment, agriculture and environmental policies, are consistent in their support of sustainable development;
- how to build support at home and abroad for our policies, including through education.

96. The UK is already committed to implementing many international and European agreements relevant to sustainable development, on the environment and on other matters such as health, poverty reduction and trade. We will be considering priority areas for future cooperation, as well as working to meet our existing commitments, pressing other developed countries to do the same, and where possible helping developing countries to meet theirs. Tackling illegal activities which undermine progress · such as unlawful trade in substances that damage the ozone layer, endangered species and hazardous waste · is also a concern. **We would welcome views on how to ensure that sustainable development objectives are introduced into the broad scope of international agreements, and which areas are the priorities for international action.**

97. Just as UK business and consumers can encourage more sustainable goods and services within the UK, so they can also have a global influence by choosing goods produced more sustainably from other countries. Such goods might be those that did not damage the local environment, which made efficient use of resources, or which were produced in ways promoting participation, training and employment for those involved. The UK Government is supporting a collaborative initiative between business and non-governmental organisations, known as the Ethical Trading Initiative, which is developing a common approach to Codes of Conduct, and to their monitoring and verification. **How could UK Government and business further encourage**

the adoption of sustainable production measures both at home and abroad,
and how could consumers and importers be encouraged to choose more
sustainably produced goods?

Seeking your views: the consultation process

98. The Government will be arranging seminars and discussions with different groups of people - including businesses and trade unions, consumer groups, local authorities and non-governmental organisations. We shall be arranging events across the country, because we recognise that sustainable development issues are not the same everywhere. There will be a short leaflet, based on this document, and we shall be publishing more detailed documents on specific aspects of sustainable development.

99. The Deputy Prime Minister has written to the Government's sustainable development advisory bodies (the Government Panel on Sustainable Development, the Round Table on Sustainable Development, Going for Green, the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution and the Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment), and the relevant statutory bodies (including the Environment Agency, English Nature, the Countryside Commission and the Rural Development Commission) to seek their views. The Secretary of State for Wales has also written to a number of leading organisations in Wales. Ministers in Northern Ireland and Scotland are writing similarly to Northern Irish and Scottish interests.

100. We shall take into account all the ideas and proposals that come forward, both directly on this document and as a result of the broader consultation process, in preparing our new Sustainable Development Strategy. The Strategy will also reflect and draw together the outcomes from other reviews of specific policy areas which are relevant to sustainable development, such as the Integrated Transport White Paper which will be published early in 1998.

101. In addition, we hope the consultation process will stimulate discussion in schools and colleges; in residents' associations and community groups; at work and in the media. Many people in the UK belong to voluntary bodies, including environment groups; such groups may provide a ready-made forum for discussion at the local level.

102. The consultation document is available on the DETR web-site at: <http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/sustainable/consult1/index.htm>. Audio and large print versions are available.

103. The consultation exercise closed in June 1998 and the resultant sustainable development Strategy for the UK, '*A better quality of life*', was published on 17th May 1999. The Strategy, and an analysis of responses to '*Opportunities for Change*', can be found at http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/uk_strategy/content.htm.

Summary Document

Sustainable development: opportunities for change consultation paper on a revised UK strategy

Getting More

We all want more out of life

For most of us that means a better standard of living, but also a decent society to live in, for us and our children.

So we can't look at the economy, or health, housing and education, or our environment, in isolation. Each can help the other - or hinder it.

When we look around us, it can sometimes seem as if economic growth has to be at the expense of more pollution in our towns and cities. Or that protecting rural areas must mean that local people lose out on jobs or housing.

It need not be like this. We can all do more to combine our economic, social and environmental goals fairly. To make wise choices for the longer term.

That's called sustainable development and it's about creating a better quality of life for everyone.

Unless we make sure that economic growth is sustainable, then our quality of life will be held back by a poor environment and by social ills. In turn, the economy itself will suffer.

Sustainable development is also about making sure that these environmental, social and economic benefits are available to everyone, not just to the privileged few. And it is about paying our way, so that our quality of life is not at the expense of generations to come.

We can have it all

The Government has already made a start in building the modern, fair society we all want. We're developing an integrated transport policy. We've launched the Welfare to Work Programme, including the Environmental Task Force. We are tackling social exclusion, so that everyone can benefit from new

opportunities. We're encouraging councils to put together local action plans through a project called Local Agenda 21. And we have a ten point plan for better management of water resources.

But there are other urgent challenges facing us:

- finding ways of producing reliable, affordable energy, without damaging air quality or causing climate change;
- finding ways of reducing our household waste, not just by recycling but by producing less in the first place;
- finding further ways of producing food efficiently and at prices we can all afford, at the same time as supporting thriving rural economies and conserving our countryside; and
- making sure that everyone has opportunities to achieve their potential and contribute to their community.

We have to decide what needs to change and how. That's why we're talking to people in all parts of society about a new, sustainable development strategy. The first step is to find out what further action should be taken, not only by Government but also by communities, businesses, trades unions, local and regional authorities, voluntary organisations, families and individuals.

From less

It's only natural

One of the most pressing challenges we are facing now is that we are causing too much damage to the environment and using up the earth's natural resources too quickly.

Of course, our prosperity depends on businesses being competitive and producing the goods and services that people want. But our quality of life also depends on these being produced in a way that makes the most efficient use of resources and without sacrificing our environment.

We have to get more from less - we must change how we make and use things so that we reduce pollution, use fewer resources and generate less waste. Industry can also take advantage of the market opportunities such new technologies offer.

We also need to find ways of providing homes, jobs, shops and leisure facilities that use up less land and reduce the need to travel, especially by car.

It comes as a package

We can all play a part in setting priorities and getting the right package of economic, social and environmental goals.

Using up natural resources, which can't be replaced, is an urgent issue but we often can't simply stop using them. What about the people - whole communities - who depend on those industries for their livelihood? And if we can find alternatives, how do we make sure that they're affordable for everyone?

What's needed is a different way of thinking altogether and action from all sectors of society. That means everyone using energy more efficiently; looking for new types of products that we can all afford; providing education and new skills, and creating new industries and jobs. And it means protecting our environment.

For longer

Your choice

Think about the area you live in.

What are the big issues we need to tackle to improve life for you and your family, for your friends and neighbours? Less pollution? More or less housing development? Better public transport? Better managed tourism? Better leisure facilities? Less crime? More jobs?

We need you to tell us what the urgent issues are where you live.

Once we've all had our say about what is important to us - as individuals, as consumers, as families and communities, as environmentalists, as business and industry and as public authorities - we'll be able to stand back and look at the whole picture.

And we'll have to think carefully about the effects our choices will have, not just on our own lives, jobs and health but on those of other people around the country and in the rest of the world - our global community.

We're in this together. We will all have different needs and views. This consultation process is about finding the common ground, taking action together and following a common approach in our progress towards sustainable development.

We must also be sure that the choices we make today don't leave our children and future generations without any. They must have their chance to make their own choices.

The questions asked in the Public Questionnaire were:

Your voice

- Do you feel you need more information about sustainable development and what it means before you can make choices and decisions? Yes No
 - Whereabouts do you live Please Choose One...England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland
 - What kind of things concern you most about the future of your area? [eg, unemployment, poor housing, safety, lack of public transport...]
 - Looking 10 to 20 years into the future, what things in your area do you hope will still be there? [eg, the parks, the views...]
 - And what things would you hope to see changed or improved? [eg, traffic congestion, leisure facilities...]
 - What do you feel you and your family can do? [eg, recycling rubbish, using energy and water saving devices, car pooling...]
 - Is there anything stopping you doing these things now?
 - How can we encourage more people to be interested and involved in sustainable development? [eg, through TV advertising and interviews, through local campaigns and events...]
-