

## **SHROPSHIRE ENVIRONMENTAL ALLIANCE\***

### **RESPONSE TO SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY 2009-2020**

#### **Preface**

“Climate change is not another priority amongst the many that compete for local government leaders’ attention. It is now clear from the scientific evidence that it is the single priority which overrides all others, now and for the foreseeable future”

Local Government Association’s Climate Change Commission

“Climate Change is the most important long-term priority for local government. It is a test of the sector’s credibility and reputation. It is as important now as public health and sanitation were to our Victorian predecessors.”

Sir Simon Milton (Chair of LGA)

“Agriculture is at the heart of the two great global challenges we face – food security and climate change.”

Hilary Benn, July 2009

#### **Defining Sustainability**

The UN Sponsored Brundtland Commission (1987) defined ‘sustainable development’ as:

‘Development which meets the needs of the present without sacrificing the ability of future generations to meet their needs’

The Taylor Report contains a brief version of Government’s definition-

‘Sustainable communities embody the principles of sustainable development. They do this by-

- Balancing and integrating the social, economic and environmental components of their community
- Meeting the needs of existing and future generations
- Respecting the needs of other communities in the wider region or internationally to make their communities sustainable

#### **The 2020 Vision for Shropshire**

*This must relate to the priority challenges facing local communities and be unequivocal in meaning. This is our proposed vision for Shropshire in 2020.*

**All Shropshire communities will be resilient, informed and able to meet future challenges - particularly climate change, finite resources, food and energy security, loss of biodiversity and other environmental degradation.**

\*Shropshire Environmental Alliance is supported by: Bridgnorth and District Furniture Scheme, Cleobury Country Environmental Forum, Ecumenical Green Group, Ellesmere Goes Green, Ludlow 21, Rea Valley Environmental Group, Shrewsbury Friends of the Earth, Stretton Climate Care, Transition Town Wem and with contributions from Marches Energy Agency.

In facing the challenges spelt out in the Vision 'everyone doing their bit' will not be enough.

We need radical step changes on many fronts and should be seeking multi scale improvements (factor 4 to factor 7<sup>1</sup>) in carbon emission reductions and resource productivity. These are vital and urgent, and they are possible, but new ways of thinking and working together are needed. There are exciting opportunities for employment, development and improvement.

In the face of major uncertainties we need to encourage diversity in human experimentation (as well as Biodiversity). People and communities will need to be set free of some constraints to achieve this. We need a new politics of the common good in which people and communities are restored to wholeness (not fragmented by bureaucratic process) and can become both self reliant and mutually supportive. We must strive to secure application of the principle of subsidiarity<sup>2</sup>. This applies both to urban and rural communities.

In seeking factor 4 to factor 7 improvements in resource productivity we will be guided by the following principles-

- Systems Thinking<sup>3</sup> (be more holistic, avoid fragmentation and policy that leads to or perpetuates this).
- The pursuit of interconnections.
- Biological insights (learning from the natural world).
- End use/least cost first approach.<sup>4</sup>
- Search for best practice world wide.<sup>5</sup>
- Seek creative new combinations of already proven technologies.
- Economics that values the natural world and human wellbeing.
- Think 'Resilience' – how can we build this in?
- Planning for the longer term.
- Positive Action - Proactivity

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<sup>1</sup> A factor 4 improvement would for example cut the electricity consumption of domestic electrical appliances by 75%

<sup>2</sup> Subsidiarity is the idea that a central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at a more immediate or local level.

<sup>3</sup> Thinking about the whole system in relation to its environment and about the parts in relation to the whole- seeking to understand fully the interdependencies- maintaining an overview whilst looking at the detail. This means going back regularly to first principles. E.g. 'Systems thinking' has been applied to car design by General Motors using lightweight materials and aerodynamic shapes resulting in 2½ times greater energy efficiency. The principle can be applied in all sorts of fields- natural, social as well as technical.

<sup>4</sup> This involves being very clear about the need that has to be satisfied at the end of a process or supply chain e.g. A Passive House design recognizes the need for comfort and focuses first on orientation, then on insulation, air tightness and ventilation which enable savings on the heating system (which is eliminated) and four to tenfold reduction in ongoing energy costs.

<sup>5</sup> Hanover – passive houses, Japan – heat pumps, Copenhagen – transport systems, Holland – sustainable communities etc.

## **Key Success Factors**

These are the key overarching strategies that the Environmental Alliance believe are essential for the Council to adopt in order to lead us into a sustainable future. They are the things that we believe the Council needs to do particularly well and which only the Council can do. Examples of specific initiatives to address each of the key success factors are referenced and listed further on.

- Mobilize the large untapped pool of people to address the above challenges through both community and employment initiatives and in doing this recognize the vital importance of an engaging and continually refreshed strategic management and consultative process. *See strategy examples 1,2,7,9*
- Reorient and refocus the Education and Library systems to play a full and vital part in relation to the above - in raising awareness, education, skillbuilding and knowledge management for all age groups and occupations. *See strategy examples 3,4,10*
- Bring the best of new thinking and ideas to bear on the whole area of Low Carbon Transport – ensuring a good fit with the needs of our rural communities. *See strategy examples 5,11*
- Re-examine major policies which do not primarily address the challenges and apply creative thinking to see how they might be reshaped to address a broader cluster of issues including the challenges. *See strategy examples 6,12*
- Recognize the rural nature of Shropshire, and support the many who wish to reconnect in fundamental ways with the land and the soil and to defend against the risks of industrialized agriculture with its inherent tendency to mono-culture, loss of biodiversity and soil degradation. *See strategy examples 13,14,15*
- Take up the new opportunities presented by Central Government consultation paper on 'Strengthening Local Democracy' (July 2009) and The Carnegie Commission's report "A Charter for Rural Communities" and actively apply them in support of and in collaboration with diverse community initiatives. *See strategy example 8*

## **Examples of specific initiatives to support Key Success Factors**

1. As a matter of urgency re-work the strategy document in full collaboration with those community groups who have the insight, knowledge, expertise and judgment to ensure that implementation will be much more fully supported and effective.
2. Organise Carbon Reduction Roadshows to visit every parish in the county informing about the threats, challenges and opportunities, identifying local carbon reduction champions and supporting the setting up of proactive local groups.
3. All school leavers to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to contribute to community planning and action on climate change etc.

4. Arrange permanent displays and information services about climate change and carbon reduction in libraries and other education / community buildings.
5. Through the creation of Car Clubs and Community Buses which are highly energy efficient and the reduction of private car miles reduce carbon emissions from local transport to 50% in 5 years.
6. Change the balance of Planning Policy towards a similar level of self-build housing as achieved in Germany and France (from 10% to 25% v 45/55% in Europe) to secure higher sustainability standards.
7. Target existing housing stock in low-income areas to achieve energy savings of 50% for 90% of these homes by 2015 and create 500 new jobs in the refurbishment / home insulation sector.
8. Sourcing innovative funding to set up a community renewable energy enterprise and legal advice on setting up a community trust.
9. Encourage the development of community-centred environment groups with a focus on Climate Change, recycling, local food production and biodiversity.
10. All primary and secondary schools should be enrolled in the eco schools programme with climate change embedded in all subject areas, not taught as a separate subject.
11. Local bus fares should be subsidised so that the fare is at least 10% less than the equivalent average petrol cost for the journey.
12. Housing planning policy should embrace eco criteria which would include renewables (energy and materials), low energy requirements, sustainable drainage (flood risk reduction, water harvesting, soft landscaping etc) and, if site remote from an STW, at least secondary sewage treatment to reed bed discharge.
13. Institute soil enhancement and conservation in parallel with river bank management schemes to counteract erosion and improve aquatic ecology.
14. Engage local specialists in 'work groups' (see the Oxfordshire Partnership model) to enable urban communities to grow their own fruit and vegetables (also see Incredible Edible Todmorden).
15. Promote 'grow, cook and share' schemes for pupils and parents in all Primary Schools so that families can source and prepare locally grown food.

Please note these examples are largely unedited contributions from member groups and are in no way exhaustive.

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