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Background/History and Development

In 1972, 70 governments met in Stockholm for a conference which created the United Nations Environment Programme, whose main priority was environmental protection. The United Nations' appointed the World Commission on Environment and Development, chaired by Mrs Gro Harlem Brundtland. In 1987 they published their report "Our Common Future" which sought to find a way forward that also tackled the need to address development as well as environmental protection. The Commission coined the term, 'sustainable development' defined as "Development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

The global document 'Agenda 21' was signed by 170 countries including the UK at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the 'Earth Summit') held in Rio de Janeiro. Agenda 21 commits signatory countries to produce national strategies for sustainable development and chapter 28 of Agenda 21 called on local authorities to establish "Local Agenda 21" processes by 1996. Much of the pioneering work on Local Agenda 21 by local authorities in this country has laid the ground for new areas of work such as community strategies and the work of local strategic partnerships discussed later. Commitments made at Rio were reconfirmed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 (Rio + 10) where the emphasis was placed on Local Action 21.

The UK produced its first national sustainable development strategy in 1994. The current Labour Government produced the latest national strategy, "A Better Quality of Life" in 1999. This is due to be revised in 2003/4.

The European Union's strategy for sustainable development, agreed at the 2001 Gothenburg summit, places a strong emphasis on six key sustainability themes:-

- climate change;
- threats to public health;
- depletion of natural resources;
- traffic congestion and pollution;
- an ageing population;
- poverty and social exclusion.

The summit recommended urgent action and a new approach to policy making to achieve policy coherence to ensure that all policies have sustainable development as their core objective.

Definitions of sustainable development

There are over 150 different definitions of sustainable development. Here are a few of the better known ones.

"Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission) 1987

"Improving the quality of life while living within the earth's carrying capacities."

Caring for the Earth (World Conservation Union, UN Environment Programme and the World Wide Fund for Nature) 1991

"Please leave this planet as you would wish to find it"

Anon

"Don't cheat on our children"

John Gummer (former UK Secretary of State for the Environment) 1993

The UK Sustainable Development Strategy defines sustainable development as being about “ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come.” To do this requires meeting four key objectives at the same time.

- Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone
- Effective protection of the environment
- Prudent use of natural resources
- Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment

This strategic definition of sustainable development applies in legislation and guidance concerning the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as well as the existing and emerging regional organisations such as the Regional Development Agencies and Regional Assemblies.

The challenge of sustainable development

Sustainable development is different from what we normally associate with ‘development’, because it integrates social and economic development with environmental protection and improvement. “We need sustainable development because the need to develop is as great as ever, but future development cannot simply follow the model of the past, where economic activity tended to mean more pollution and wasteful use of resources.” (Achieving a better quality of life: Review of progress towards sustainable development. Government annual report 2002). Sustainability from a conventional perspective usually means achieving a level of economic growth that is attractive to continuous investment. Economic considerations dominate this type of thinking at the expense of the social and environmental issues of sustainable development. This limited interpretation of sustainability assumes that society always benefits from economic growth and that there are unlimited environmental resources that can be continually consumed and wasted.

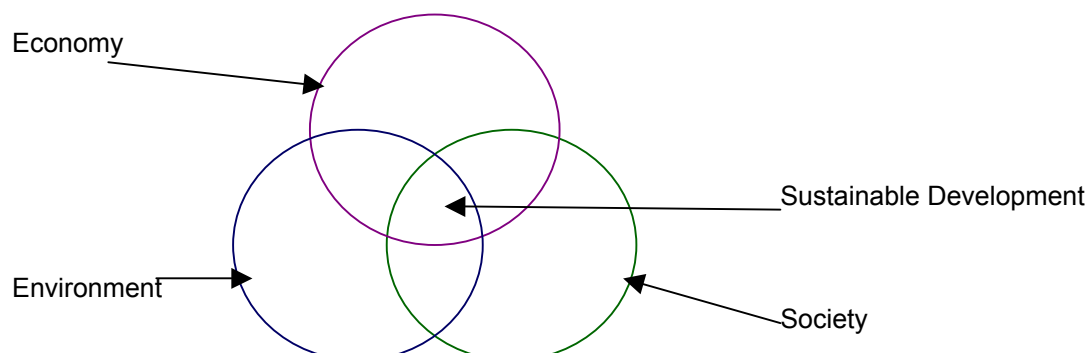
All of the various definitions of sustainable development tend to agree that it has the following key characteristics that distinguish it from conventional development.

- Sustainable development is concerned with the achievement of social, economic and environmental objectives at the same time and not a process of trading advantages in one sphere against losses in another. It is about integrating objectives rather than balancing them.
- Sustainable development recognises the impacts that decisions taken locally will have globally.
- Sustainable development recognises the impacts that decisions taken now will have on generations in the future.
- Sustainable development places a high emphasis on public participation in decisions that affect them.

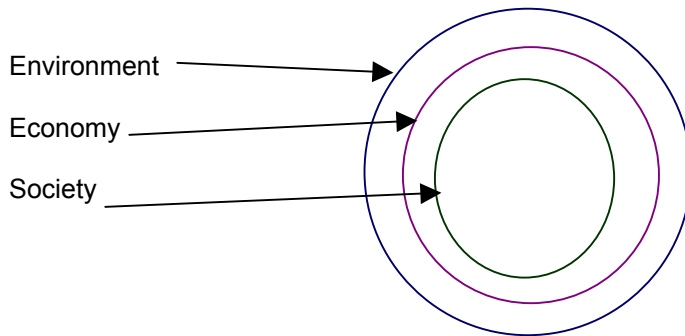
Sustainable development links local action with global environmental issues and also takes into account the needs of future generations. Sustainable development is about “*ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come*” (A better quality of life: A strategy for sustainable development for the United Kingdom 1999).

Sustainable development is a far more sophisticated concept that challenges the conventional school of thought and recognises the reality that quality of life depends on economic, social and environmental improvement at the same time not at the expense of each other. Finding solutions that achieve this “win-win-win” outcome are not straightforward and requires an approach that challenges existing methodologies and changes the way that things are done at present.

This integration of economic, social and environmental issues is often illustrated through the following diagram where sustainable development is achieved when the so-called ‘triple bottom line’ of economic, social and environmental improvement occur simultaneously.



Whilst this concept is useful, it can be argued that it is limited by giving equal weighting to each of the three bottom lines. It also implies that whilst sustainable development occurs in the small area of overlap in the centre of the diagram, the majority of development continues unsustainably. A more challenging concept, increases the area of overlap to the extent that it places environmental protection and improvement as the most important element upon which the economy relies to provide social benefits in a truly sustainable manner.



Characteristics of a sustainable society

Much work has been done on defining the key characteristics of sustainable society. Early work by the Local Government Management Board identified several attributes by which a sustainable society would be recognisable. This work has since evolved into a variety of checklists of sustainable development (see sources of further information) and also sustainability indicator projects that attempt to measure progress towards sustainability. Existing checklists and sets of indicators should not be regarded as definitive or sacrosanct. Local strategic priorities should prevail that reflect local issues and local resources. Nevertheless existing checklists can be useful prompts when starting to define local sustainable development and they can help to ensure that the issues reflect the need for a sustainable society to include environmental protection and enhancement, meeting social needs and promoting economic success simultaneously.

Sustainable Development in Leeds

Identifying sustainability issues and addressing them should be part of everyday planning and delivery of services. Guidance from the Government requires local authority Best Value reviews to “give effect to the principles of sustainable development”. Best Value reviews should also demonstrate that activities support the Council’s corporate objectives and Community Strategy. Community strategies are supposed to contribute to sustainable development and take account of national, regional and local sustainability strategies.

Sustainable development should not be treated as a separate objective. Rather the aim should be to ensure that all objectives together are working towards sustainable outcomes. In other words where a local authority has fully incorporated sustainable development objectives into its Community Strategy or Corporate Objectives (which the table in Annex 1 illustrates Leeds has effectively done), then the process of promoting sustainable development and promoting the Community Strategy and Corporate Objectives through Best Value will be one and the same.

Local priorities for sustainable development in Leeds are influenced by a range of international, national and local strategic frameworks. These include

- The European Union’s strategy for sustainable development
- The national sustainability framework and national sustainability priorities
- Regional Sustainability Priorities for Yorkshire and Humberside
- The Vision for Leeds
- Leeds City Council Corporate Priorities
- Leeds Local Agenda 21

European Priorities

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- depletion of natural resources;
- traffic congestion and pollution;
- an ageing population;
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The summit recommended urgent action and a new approach to policy making to achieve policy coherence to ensure that all policies have sustainable development as their core objective (Achieving a better quality of life. Review of progress towards sustainable development. Government annual report 2001. DEFRA 2002).

National Sustainability Framework (A Better Quality of Life: A strategy for sustainable development for the United Kingdom 1999).

Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone

- Strengthening regional and local economies;
- Meeting people's social needs: promoting better health, housing and access to services and recreation;
- Improving local surroundings: revitalising town centres, tackling degraded urban environments, and ensuring that development respects the character of our countryside;
- Reducing crime and the fear of crime;
- Addressing problems of poverty and social exclusion in the most deprived communities;
- Making it easier for people to get involved in their communities;

Effective protection of the environment

Prudent use of natural resources

- Achieving long-term cuts in greenhouse gas emissions and promoting sustainable energy;
- Improving air quality;
- Safeguarding freshwater resources and water quality;
- Safeguarding the health and productivity of the sea;
- Maintaining and improving the quality of our soil and contaminated land;
- Protecting and enhancing biodiversity;
- Reducing the spread of pollutants and improving management of waste;

Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to do more with less: making better use of resources; • a stable and competitive economy; • to develop skills and reward work; • goods and services which meet consumers' needs and are produced, and can be used, ever more efficiently; • Government, producers and consumers working together to achieve long term change.

National Sustainability Priorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more investment in people and equipment for a competitive economy; • reducing the level of social exclusion; • promoting a transport system which provides choice, and also minimises environmental harm and reduces congestion; • improving the larger towns and cities to make them better places to live and work; • directing development and promoting agricultural practices to protect and enhance the countryside and wildlife; • improving energy efficiency and tackling waste; • working with others to achieve sustainable development internationally.

Social aspects of sustainable development	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and training • Building local communities • Participation and local democracy • Regeneration • Health and safety (workplace) • Health • Safety (e.g. food, streets) • Access to decent housing • Local environmental quality and amenity • Fair and open dealing with customers and suppliers • Public services (hospitals, schools, employment services, benefits offices etc) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal opportunities (race, disability, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, age) • Human rights • Consumer rights and interests • Social inclusion • Eradication of poverty • Reducing crime and fear of crime • Access to services, infrastructure and landscape • Access to culture, heritage and sport • Supporting charities • Ethical investment • Distributional effects

Economic aspects of sustainable development	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fair and rewarding employment • Standard of living • GDP • Rate of inflation • Resource use / efficiency • Competitiveness • High quality goods and services • Value for money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce development – education and skills • Trade (inc ethical trade) • Integrated transport • Better regulation • Sustainable production • Sustainable consumption • Procurement policies

Environmental aspects of sustainable development	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noise • Litter • Biodiversity • Oceans • Fisheries • Wildlife • Landscape • Forests and woodlands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contaminated land • Climate change • Pollution • Air quality • Soil quality • Fresh and marine water quality • Drinking water quality

Natural resource aspects of sustainable development	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy resources and use e.g. renewable energy • Minerals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water demand, availability and affordability • Waste

(Achieving a better quality of life. Review of progress towards sustainable development. Government annual report 2000. DETR 2001)

Regional Sustainability Priorities for Yorkshire and Humberside are to ensure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good quality employment opportunities are available to everyone • Conditions which enable business success, economic growth and investment • Education and training opportunities which build the skills and capacity of the population • Safety and security for people and property • Conditions which engender good health • Culture, leisure and recreation opportunities available to all • Vibrant communities which participate in decision making • Local needs met locally • A transport network which maximises access whilst minimising detrimental impacts • A quality built environment and efficient land use patterns that make good use of derelict sites, minimise travel and promote balanced development • Quality housing available to everyone • A bio-diverse and attractive natural environment • Minimal pollution levels • Minimal greenhouse gas emissions and a managed response to the effects of climate change • Prudent and efficient use of energy and natural resources with minimal production of waste

(Advancing Together: Towards a Sustainable Region. The Regional Sustainable Development Framework for Yorkshire and Humberside, 2001)

Vision for Leeds
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making the most of people • Competing in a global economy • Integrated transport • Looking after the environment • Better neighbourhoods and confident communities • Information and communication technology

(Vision for Leeds: A strategy for sustainable development 1999 to 2009)

Leeds City Council Corporate Priorities	
<u>Organisational</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best Value • Community Planning • Democratic Renewal • Regeneration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing conditions • Transport
<u>Service</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Safety • Economic competitiveness • Educational achievement • Employment • Environmental management • Health and community care 	<u>Core Values</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting the needs of the public first • Equality of opportunity • Countering poverty and inequality • Open, responsive and accountable • Sustainable development • Best Value • Partnership • Good employment practice

(Leeds City Council Corporate Plan 1999/2002, Leeds City Council Best Value Performance Plan 2001/2002)

Sustainable Development Principles	Local Agenda 21 Themes
Protecting and enhancing the environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficient use of natural resources • Waste minimisation • Pollution • Biodiversity
Meeting social needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Places • Settlements • Local diversity • Protection of health • Health care and prevention • Meeting local needs • Access to skills and knowledge • Participation in decision making
Promote economic success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vibrant local economy • Access to facilities • Opportunities for culture

(Leeds Local Agenda 21 Draft Strategy Statement and Action Plan 2000)

Annex 1 - Integration of Sustainable Development in Community Strategy and Corporate Objectives

National Sustainability Framework	Regional Sustainability Priorities for Yorkshire and Humberside		Vision for Leeds	Leeds City Council Corporate Priorities		Local Agenda 21 Themes
<p>Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone</p> <p>Effective protection of the environment</p> <p>Prudent use of natural resources</p> <p>Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment</p>	<p>Good quality employment opportunities are available to everyone</p> <p>Conditions which enable business success, economic growth and investment</p> <p>Education and training opportunities which build the skills and capacity of the population</p> <p>Safety and security for people and property</p> <p>Conditions which engender good health</p> <p>Culture, leisure and recreation opportunities available to all</p> <p>Vibrant communities which participate in decision making</p> <p>Local needs met locally</p>	<p>A transport network which maximises access whilst minimising detrimental impacts</p> <p>A quality built environment and efficient land use patterns that make good use of derelict sites, minimise travel and promote balanced development</p> <p>Quality housing available to everyone</p> <p>A bio-diverse and attractive natural environment</p> <p>Minimal pollution levels</p> <p>Minimal greenhouse gas emissions and a managed response to the effects of climate change</p> <p>Prudent and efficient use of energy and natural resources with minimal production of waste</p>	<p>Strategic themes</p> <p>Learning city</p> <p>Enterprise and the economy</p> <p>Integrated transport</p> <p>Thriving neighbourhoods</p> <p>Harmonious communities</p> <p>Cultural life</p> <p>Health and well-being</p> <p>Environmental city</p> <p>Planning Principles</p> <p>Community engagement</p> <p>Urban design</p> <p>Information and communication technology</p> <p>Finance</p> <p>Spatial planning</p> <p>Leeds and the region</p>	<p><u>Organisational</u></p> <p>Best Value</p> <p>Community Planning</p> <p>Democratic Renewal</p> <p>Regeneration</p> <p><u>Service</u></p> <p>Creating better neighbourhoods and confident communities</p> <p>Making the most of people</p> <p>Competing in a global economy</p> <p>Integrated transport</p> <p>Looking after the environment</p>	<p><u>Core Values</u></p> <p>Best Value</p> <p>Countering poverty and inequality</p> <p>Equality of opportunity</p> <p>Good employment practice</p> <p>Open, responsive and accountable government</p> <p>Partnership</p> <p>Putting the needs of the public first</p> <p>Sustainable development</p>	<p>Efficient use of natural resources</p> <p>Waste minimisation</p> <p>Pollution</p> <p>Biodiversity</p> <p>Places</p> <p>Settlements</p> <p>Local diversity</p> <p>Protection of health</p> <p>Health care and prevention</p> <p>Meeting local needs</p> <p>Access to skills and knowledge</p> <p>Participation in decision making</p> <p>Vibrant local economy</p> <p>Access to facilities</p> <p>Opportunities for culture</p>