# MOTIVATING INDIVIDUAL CARBON REDUCTION THROUGH LOCAL GOVERNMENT-LED COMMUNITY INITIATIVES IN THE UK: THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AS AN AGENT OF SOCIAL CHANGE

by

**Michael Peters**
and
**Shane Fudge**

The Research Group on Lifestyles, Values and Environment (RESOLVE) is a novel and exciting collaboration located entirely within the University of Surrey, involving four internationally acclaimed departments: the Centre for Environmental Strategy, the Surrey Energy Economics Centre, the Environmental Psychology Research Group and the Department of Sociology.

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**RESOLVE Working Paper 04-08**

**Research Group on Lifestyles, Values and the Environment**
**Centre for Environmental Strategy (D3)**
**University of Surrey**
**Guildford, GU2 7XH, UK**
**http://www.surrey.ac.uk/resolve/**

**Contact details:**
**Michael Peters: email – m.peters@surrey.ac.uk**
**Tel: 00 44 (0)1483 682184, Fax: 00 44 (0)1483 686671**

**Shane Fudge: email – s.fudge@surrey.ac.uk**
**Tel: 00 44 (0)1483 682187, Fax: 00 44 (0)1483 686671**

**Abstract**

In UK policy circles there is a growing recognition that the interface between policy making and the public mediated through local government can provide a vital and practicable means through which to deliver carbon reduction at an individual, household and community level. Following on from progress in creating a more bottom-up policy infrastructure through the Local Agenda 21 programme, the 2007 UK Energy White Paper is one of the latest political statements to highlight the way in which reaching UK targets on CO2 emissions will continue to involve a greater local response to climate change.

Although for many years local authorities in the UK have played an important role in developing community engagement towards a sustainable development theme, the "modernization" of local governance has not been straightforward and facilitating "civic engagement" in this way has often proved problematic.

This paper traces the increasing responsibilities of local government in building imaginative community engagement to tackle climate change. It considers some of the opportunities, barriers and challenges for the types of practical responses currently being generated, drawing on three case study local authorities in England where community engagement provides a primary focus for their climate change agendas.

## 1. Introduction

There is an increasing consensus amongst policy-makers that projects which can be "embedded" within bottom-up social, cultural, and economic particularities hold the potential to be more effective than top-down solutions in enabling individuals to recognize their own role in contributing to more sustainable levels of energy consumption and also in encouraging citizens to engage more fully in the wider political debate on sustainable living (Long, 1998; Jordan, 2001). The 2007 White Paper *Meeting the Energy Challenge* (DTI, 2007) is one of the most recent UK policy statements to place an emphasis on the important role to be played by local government in developing local responses to climate change. During the last ten years, this role has been expounded in a range of key policy documents, legislation and guidance (outlined in section 6). These documents built upon principles that were first introduced through the Local Agenda 21 programme which constituted the first substantive political attempt to link together local, global, and intermediary political structures into a more effective framework for the governance of global risk (Agyeman and Evans, 1994).

While the 1990s "dash for gas" saw the UK's greenhouse gas emissions begin to tail off – enabling the New Labour Government to set an ambitious 2010 target of a 20% reduction according to 1990 baseline levels – emissions began to rise again during the mid-90s, mostly due to growth in road transport and air travel. There was also a growing awareness that the energy demand in housing accounted for as much as 30% of the UK's $CO_2$ emissions total (Jones *et al*, 2000). Critics pointed out that this was evidence that effective policies would now have to be constructed in order to address more direct patterns of consumption if they were not simply to counterpose conflicting sets of objectives.

The paper begins by exploring the influence of Local Agenda 21 in switching the emphasis towards energy consumption change at a micro-level of policy making. It is argued that this became a more coherent approach from 1997 where the "political modernization" agenda under New Labour began to place greater emphasis on the responsibility of local authorities to implement local-level policy initiatives for sustainable development. The final section of the paper considers some of the opportunities, barriers and challenges for this type of approach through an exploration of three case study local authorities in England which have focused on *community engagement* as a primary focus of their climate change agendas.

## 2. The Rio Earth Summit and Local Agenda 21

Following on from the 1989 Toronto Conference on Sustainable Development and the 1990 meeting of the International Panel on Climate Change, the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development resulted in several key policy developments (including 27 principles on the goal of establishing a new and equitable global partnership) and Agenda 21 which "represents a framework within

which governments must operate in order to achieve an environmentally and socially sustainable environment" (Irwin, 2001:42)  The Rio Declaration was instrumental in beginning to bridge global environmental awareness and the trans-national consequences of energy use and consumption patterns, into a policy framework with the potential for developing increasingly *local* responses to climate change.

Local Agenda 21 (set out in chapter 28 of Agenda 21) was seen as one of the most innovative policies to have emerged from the Rio negotiations (Agyeman and Evans, 1994); not least in its potential for widening participation in policies aimed at promoting sustainable development.  As Agyeman and Evans (1994:153) point out "Local Agenda 21 does exhibit aspects of what many regard as key issues central to the achievement of sustainability as a policy goal.  These issues include community environmental education, democratization, balanced partnerships between public and private sectors, and integrated policy making".  Indeed, one of the key principles of Local Agenda 21 was its argument that sustainable development should be part of a more "bottom-up" endeavour whereby local government departments should consult with the key stakeholders in their area in order to reach consensus on drawing up long-term, locally initiated environmental action plans.

Collier and Lofstedt (1997) have pointed out that Local Agenda 21 has been significant in informing a shift away from the often restrictive implementation of centrally decided measures. It has been argued that budgetary constraints placed upon local authorities by Central Government during the 17 years leading up to 1997 – particularly an inability to be able to set their own level of revenue expenditure and restrictions on the amount of borrowing allowed for capital spending - had the effect of limiting the potential for local government to develop effective, locally led climate change policies (Voisey et al, 1996; Collier and Lofstedt, 1997).  Collier and Lofsted (1997) make the point that many local authorities considered that involvement in Local Agenda 21 held the potential to regain a measure of independent power and local autonomy.

Barry (1999) has argued that one of the most important functions of the development of Local Agenda 21 to environmental policy goals, is that it became a political catalyst in introducing a process of 'democratic ecological governance'. Driven by the increased emphasis on stakeholder involvement, he argues that Local Agenda 21 was invaluable in informing policy with a modern 'commons' type regime that can potentially help to facilitate collective ecological management through:

> …making people aware of the interconnectedness of human wellbeing (including economic considerations) can give them a greater say in formulating local government policy, [and] does highlight the connection between long-term human self interest and environmental responsibility  (Barry, 1999:154).

Consumption drivers such as travel, eating habits, leisure practices, living patterns, holiday plans are all now acknowledged as critical areas of behaviour which need to be addressed if we are to reduce the damaging impact of modern living on the environment. In this sense it has been argued that a more "bottom-up" approach

holds the potential to find out how individuals might be best engaged and persuaded to live and work in more environmentally and socially responsible ways. The 2007 Energy White Paper has highlighted the importance of trying to engage this "local knowledge" into more mainstream policy approaches on reaching $CO_2$ emissions targets. Local authorities can provide a measure of mediation, it argues, in developing effective initiatives for encouraging individuals to recognize their own role in contributing to more sustainable levels of energy consumption, particularly in households and in areas such as transport behaviour (DTI, 2007:275).

The extent to which local government agencies are likely to be successful in performing this role is inextricably linked with the development of effective civic and community engagement which has traditionally proved difficult for many local authorities to tap into (Craig, 1989; Taylor, 2003). The following section considers this issue in more detail, focusing on the way in which "political modernization" has served to highlight the changing roles and responsibilities of local government in recent years.

## 3. Political modernization: the changing role of local authorities under New Labour

As argued above, there is a growing awareness in policy circles that top-down administrative approaches can only go some way towards bridging the complex relationships between citizens, institutions, and policy delivery mechanisms. Local governance has, however, often failed to develop a significant or "deep" level of civic engagement with communities and their inhabitants in past policy initiatives. Taylor (2003:125) for instance points to the continued influence of public sector cultures "which are often so deeply ingrained that power holders are often unaware of the ways in which they perpetuate existing power relations through the use of language and procedures that outsiders find impenetrable". She argues that this often serves to militate against a healthy level of citizen participation for instance on statutory-community partnership boards. Rowe (2001) further suggests that policies that have been developed through this joined-up approach often bear the hallmarks of a centralized agenda based upon "performance", rather than being defined by an overall policy vision.

Tracing the evolution of key policies through which Central Government in the UK have attempted to transform the politics and performance of local government in England, Downe and Martin (2006) have identified four key phases associated with the "radical transformation" of local councils between 1997 and 2005.

- 1997-1999 *Consultation:* the 1999 Local Government Act placed a statutory duty on local authorities to achieve 'Best Value'. Thus five year reviews of local authority functions were drawn up with a range of stakeholders;

- 2000 *Legislation:* this was a period marked by extending the legislation beyond the 1999 Act's emphasis on service improvement to address the democratic

accountability of local government and its capacity to engage with other local service providers and the public;

- 2001-2002 *the Best Value regime "in a state of crisis":* problems surrounding the inspection of the 5 year Best Value reviews owing to many more being produced than anticipated) meant that the Audit Commission were unable to deliver on their ten week turn-around inspection commitment;

- 2002-2005: the principal characteristic of this period was a much stronger emphasis on *the local authority role in community leadership* in order to address issues that cut across different policy areas such as health, well-being, crime and disorder and regeneration. Government guidance strongly encouraged local authorities to form Local Strategic Partnerships within their boundaries, bringing together different parts of the public, private, voluntary and community sectors to enable different services and initiatives to support one another more effectively (Downe and Martin, 2006:466-470).

The influence of Local Agenda 21 during this period could be discerned by the fact that local authorities would now be in a greater position to promote or improve the social, environmental or economic well-being within their statutory boundaries and also within the greater emphasis on "partnership working" which began to emerge during the 2002-2005 period. Encouraged by policies such as the *New Deal* and *Communities First* in Wales, it was hoped that engagement at the grassroots level would see communities and citizens forming part of a more collaborative approach to governance in the UK.

## 4. The prioritisation of climate change as a key local authority issue

Local authorities in England and Wales have several responsibilities with regard to incorporating energy policy and climate change considerations into their more recent functions. There has been a greater focus for instance on trying to engage individuals and households in a process of adopting less energy-intensive lifestyles. Many local authorities have become proactive in these regards and some have even framed policies within locally agreed targets for carbon emissions reductions.

The following sub-sections focus on six key documents (spanning policy, legislation and guidance) reflecting the emergence of the increasing set of responsibilities placed on UK local authorities in addressing climate change. The content of the documents suggest that successful policies will come about as a result of wider community and citizen engagement.

### 4.1 The Local Government Act 2000 – the introduction of community strategies

Emphasis on the importance of developing community strategies in local government policy was introduced under the Local Government Act 2000. Local authorities are required by the Act to work with other key players in the area

through Local Strategic Partnerships (in England) and Community Strategy Partnerships (in Wales) to develop a community strategy and deliver on its key aims and objectives (IDeA, 2007). It has been suggested that the introduction of this new strategic responsibility provides a clear mechanism for local authorities to set out coherent plans for tackling climate change in regard to the principles outlined in Local Agenda 21.  In its advice to local authorities on how to integrate climate change into the community strategy, the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA, 2007) set out three core reasons why climate change is so aptly suited to a more community oriented approach:

- Due to its complex, cross-cutting nature, climate change is an issue that necessitates a coordinated, integrated response;
- Substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions require the engagement of all sections of the community. Local authorities have a pivotal responsibility in galvanizing this concerted, community action;
- Climate change provides new opportunities for linking the agendas of different organizations. Community strategies can provide a shared agenda and opportunity for effective partnership working in this regard.

Community strategies can and do vary substantially in content and there is no recognized "blueprint" for incorporating climate change (IDeA, 2006). The prioritization of core areas to be included in the strategy is therefore a key step in this regard – a process involving discussion and deliberation among the organizations represented on the strategic partnership together with the views of other stakeholders and the wider community. For climate change to be included as an area for action it has to be identified as a priority issue.  IDeA (2006) suggest that this requires that there is at least one sustainable development "champion" on the board of the local strategic partnership with an awareness of climate change issues and 'zeal' to highlight their importance and cross-cutting nature to other members.

### 4.2 The Local Government White Paper 2006 – a new role for local authorities

This White Paper, entitled *Strong and Prosperous Communities* (CLG, 2006) emphasizes the scientific evidence for the urgency of climate change as a policy priority.  This document provided local government agencies with new opportunities to drive local action by placing greater emphasis on their position as community leaders by emphasizing the following four principles:
- Strong and visible leadership;
- Leading by example through services delivered and in-house practices;
- Responding to calls for action and the priority placed on addressing these issues by local people;
- Coordinating innovative partnerships capable of delivering real changes and progress.

(CLG, 2006)

The Government's intention to include climate change within the new local authority performance framework was also set out in this document as well as a proposed obligation on all local authorities to achieve future carbon reduction targets. The Government's stated ambition for LAAs in *Strong and Prosperous Communities* was that they should "provide local authorities and partners with the flexibility and capacity to deliver the best solutions for their areas through a reformed relationship between central and local government" (CLG, 2007a). In this sense the new LAAs would provide a more robust mechanism for ensuring that local priorities (such as climate change and an interest in the environment) translated through to effective action, "bolstered, where appropriate, with local targets and indicators" (CLG, 2007a).

The possibilities for local authorities reducing carbon emissions through a *range* of approaches was also highlighted, including key areas such as procurement, energy efficiency of council-owned buildings, green travel plans, development of local renewable energy sources for use in residential and community buildings, and the creation of new markets for low carbon technologies.

## 4.3 The UK Government's Climate Change Programme, 2006

This document set out the Government's policies and priorities for action in tackling climate change in the UK and internationally. It built on the original Climate Change Programme, published in 2000 in assessing both the impact of existing policies and the potential contribution of new policy options to achieving the UK's national goal of reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent below 1990 levels by 2010 and 60 per cent by 2050. It argued that 'action by Local Authorities is likely to be critical to the achievement of Government's climate change objectives…the Government wants to see a significant increase in the level of engagement by local government in climate change issues' (HM Government, 2006: 105-106). Several best practice case studies were highlighted including the seven local authorities who were selected as 'Beacons' under the Government's 2005 Sustainable Energy Beacon Councils scheme. In order to incentivise more local authorities 'to reach the levels of the best' the programme details a new local government performance framework to be introduced post 2008 that would include 'an appropriate focus' on climate change.

It was argued that a key role for local authorities would be in raising awareness and enabling the realisation of behaviour change within local community jurisdiction. As well as leading by example the programme pinpointed several areas where, through their increased power and responsibilities, local authorities could enable a substantial influence over local level carbon reduction including housing, planning, local transport, powers to promote well-being and activities such as their own local procurement and operations.

### 4.4 The 2007 Energy White Paper

The role of local authorities in promoting behaviour change was further highlighted in the 2007 Energy White Paper (DTI, 2007) – particularly in encouraging households to understand the link between climate change, their own actions and how they could become more energy efficient. The White Paper highlights recent research (CSE, 2007) arguing that a coherent national approach to tackling climate change requires effective community initiatives as an integral component.

### 4.5 The Energy Measures Report, 2007

The most recent, comprehensive endorsement of the UK Government's recognition of the critical role to be played by local authorities in addressing climate change is provided in the *Energy Measures Report: Addressing Climate Change and Fuel Poverty – energy measures information for Local Government* (BERR, 2007), where it is stated:

> *"Local authorities are uniquely placed to act on climate change mitigation and to alleviate fuel poverty. They can take action on their own estates and housing stock but can also play a key role in motivating the wider community to take action, based on their understanding of local priorities, risks and opportunities." (BERR 2007: 34)*

The report also carries statutory weight as local authorities are required to "have regard to it" when carrying out their functions (BERR, 2007a). The report draws together for the first time existing sources of help and advice to local authorities on climate change and fuel poverty into one document, setting out the actions local authorities can take to improve energy efficiency measures; to increase the levels and uses of micro-generation and low carbon technologies; to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and to reduce the number of households living in fuel poverty (BERR, 2007a).

One section of the report is devoted to "community leadership", emphasizing the need for contributions from all sections of the community in tackling climate change and fuel poverty. To a large extent this points to the core rationale as to why it is thought that community-embedded action should now play a central role in reducing domestic carbon emissions. Although individually any one household is theoretically capable of fairly small-scale change and reduction, collectively the actions of many individuals and households hold the potential to make a substantial contribution. It is suggested in the report that effective dissemination of this central message to community members is a task that local authorities are in an excellent position to carry out.

### 4.6 The Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change

In addition to the message coming from the policy documents highlighted in this section, concerning the need to devolve a measure of responsibility on climate change initiatives to a more local administrative level, there is also a major voluntary scheme - the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change - that enables local

authorities to demonstrate and accredit their commitment to addressing climate change at the local level. The scheme was originally launched in October 2000 at a conference in Nottingham, and is a voluntary pledge that local authorities are encouraged to sign in order to confirm their dedication to tackling climate change actively in their local area and in working with others to reduce emissions across the country (EST, 2007a).

The declaration is a one page statement acknowledging the urgency of climate change, committing the council to action and welcoming the potential benefits that this action will ena
ble.  Signed by the chief executive as well as the elected leader of the council, it constitutes a high-level, broad statement of commitment to address the causes and impacts of climate change in ways that are attuned to local priorities. The scheme is managed under the auspices of the Energy Saving Trust (established by the UK Government in 1993) and so far over 200 of the 410 local authorities in England and Wales have signed the declaration (EST, 2007a).

## 5   Progress in three English local authorities

This section then considers a selection of climate change initiatives that have been developed by three English local authorities – Shropshire County Council, the London Borough of Richmond-upon-Thames Council and the London Borough of Islington Council. These councils are case studies in a broader, on-going research programme designed to explore community engagement in carbon reduction programmes that have been initiated by local government. The research aims consider the types of initiatives that have been established; explore some of the similarities and differences in the approaches being adopted; and provide insights into the opportunities and constraints apparent under the different circumstances and demographic configurations faced by different local authorities.

### 5.1 Methods and approach

The local authorities considered here were selected primarily because of their commitment to addressing climate change (they have all signed the Nottingham Declaration for instance) and because they are all currently developing a number of projects that aim to engage their communities on a path to more sustainable environmental and energy-related futures under their emerging Local Strategic Partnerships and climate change strategies. Additionally they reflect a range of geographical place 'types' with Shropshire being predominantly 'rural', Richmond 'sub-urban' and Islington 'inner city, urban'.

For the purposes of this paper we précis the nature and scope of particular initiatives drawing on evidence gathered through the administration of preliminary research interviews with representatives of the project management teams from each authority, together with supporting documentation.  It is hoped that this will provide an insight into the type of community focused responses to climate change currently

being progressed by committed local authorities. Each interview lasted approximately one hour following a protocol of open-ended questions designed to capture the 'decision-maker'/'project management' perspective with regard to the initiatives, particularly in relation to, *inter alia*, the following key areas:

- overview and background details of initiatives being undertaken or developed
- how the initiative(s) fit into the local authorities' broader policy objectives on climate change and community involvement;
- opportunities, barriers and challenges for the implementation of such projects;

## 5.2 Overview of case study local authorities and initiatives

### 5.2.1 Shropshire County Council

Shropshire County Council launched a 'Low Carbon Community' project (LCC) in April 2006, with the primary aim of reducing carbon dioxide emissions within three communities in Shropshire by 6% (3920 tonnes) by April 2009. LCC has been developed by Shropshire County Council in partnership with Marches Energy Agency (MEA - a not-for-profit organization with charitable status) who are responsible for managing the project's various initiatives within the three localities of Ellesmere (a small town), Cleobury Mortimer (a hillside village) and the 'Floodplain Community'. A core objective from the project management perspective is to create a climate for change to assist communities in understanding climate change and to 'hold their hands' through a process of doing something about it (McGowan, 2007).

There are several ways in which residents, businesses and community buildings in the target localities are being encouraged to engage with the project and contribute to carbon reduction, including:

- **Home energy checks**: a simple 2 page form that householders are encouraged to complete, giving basic details about the nature of their property (including size, age, heating system, levels of insulation etc.) and return to MEA who then determine the current efficiency status of the home, and pinpoint measures that can be taken to improve efficiency.
- **Business and building audits:** similar to the home energy check, but carried out by MEA (rather than self completion) with interested businesses and community buildings (including schools, public halls, churches and tourist facilities), to assess current energy efficiency status and make suggestions for improvements.
- **Grants:** the project has also established a range of grant schemes to encourage and enable progress to be made in the implementation of measures to improve efficiency. These include a £100 reduction for the cost of cavity wall filling or loft insulation for the first 200 households expressing a desire to go ahead with these measures; free cavity wall filling and loft insulation for North Shropshire residents over the age of 65 and in receipt of benefit; a three

year interest-free loan facility for the fitting of insulation measures; greatly discounted energy saving light bulbs for businesses and business 'make-overs'; £20,000 each for the five schools of the target communities to pay for the implementation of energy efficiency measures.

- **Climate Change Months:** in order to raise awareness of the project and climate change more broadly, a range of activities designed to engage residents are carried out for one month in each target community. These include climate change pub quizzes, showing climate change-related films, a cartoon competition on the theme of climate change for 11-18 year olds and, at the end of the month, an interactive workshop where key issues relevant to the community are discussed and action plans formulated on a group and individual basis.

So far up-take of the grants has been 'surprisingly' low, as this project management interviewee explained: "I think they say, with buses that, you have to tell people eight times before it actually sinks in that there is a bus that goes past their house that will get them to where they want to go. I am working on the theory that it's probably the same with insulation and cavity wall fillings…" (McGowan, 2007).

### 5.2.2    *London Borough of Richmond-upon-Thames Council*

In their 2007-2017 Community Plan ('the Plan') Richmond Council set out seven priorities which together constitute a vision for the Borough that is "inclusive; puts protection of the environment at the core of its services and community life; delivers quality public services that truly reflect the needs of all its local people; and addresses its challenges by harnessing the capacity of all its partners in the public, private, voluntary and community sector" (LBRuT, 2007). The particular aspiration of becoming the most sustainable ("greenest") Borough in London is Priority 2 of the Plan. A thematic subgroup of Richmond's Local Strategic Partnership is currently being formed under the name of the Greener Richmond Partnership (GRP) to deliver the priorities and targets set under Priority 2 of the Plan, related areas of their Local Area Agreement and to contribute to cross-cutting priorities and targets under the Plan. The stated principle purpose of the GRP is to:

*"Tackle climate change and other environmental issues, in an integrated approach with partners in the local business, housing, transport, public, voluntary and community sectors by reducing the borough's contribution to climate change, ensuring it is able to adapt to changes in the climate and improving the local environment"* (LBRuT, 2007a).

One climate change-oriented community initiative where substantial progress has already been made is the emission based charging for parking permits scheme. It is an example of how local authorities can modify their existing services and regulatory framework in order to promote attitudinal and behavioural change among community residents. The scheme was introduced in April 2007 as a modification to existing permit charges operating in the borough's controlled parking zones (areas where parking is not allowed during specified times other than in specially provided bays, some of which are reserved for resident permit holders only). The main purpose of this scheme is to reduce vehicle-related carbon dioxide emissions in the

area, encourage people to use cars with smaller engines and increase overall awareness among the community's residents of the need to reduce transport-related emissions (Pugh, 2007). The price of permits for each controlled parking zone is based on the previously existing charges together with the cylinder capacity of the vehicle/its carbon dioxide emissions. Second and subsequent permits for a household are charged at 25% more than the first until 1st April 2008. After this they will be charged at 50% more.

Prior to the scheme being established Richmond Council consulted with the public via a questionnaire survey with a representative sample of 3,500 households and 1,300 businesses across the borough and all residents in controlled parking zones, to gauge the reaction to the proposed permit charging changes among the community. This revealed approximately a 50/50 split of those in favour and those against. However, almost 60% of respondents indicated that the implementation of the scheme would influence them when they came to renew their car, (in terms of what they replace it with), and in this sense "was quite a useful indication of the potential impact of this policy" (Pugh, 2007).

Although some other local authorities also currently impose additional charges for second and subsequent permits for a household (including around half of the 32 London Boroughs), Richmond were the first to apply an emissions based charge for parking permits and they continue to hope that it will provide a model that can be adopted elsewhere (Pugh, 2007). It is also hoped that this scheme will demonstrate local leadership and provide a basis for integration with additional legislative measures in other areas should they be applied.

### 5.2.3   *London Borough of Islington Council*

Islington Council have, during the last five years, established a range of initiatives in order to 'lead the way' in tackling climate change in an inner city environment. All of these initiatives are embodied in the work of their Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) - the first in England to have adopted a borough-wide carbon reduction target as part of its Local Area Agreement with the Government.  Key initiatives include:

- **Climate Change Partnership:** a partnership of organizations (currently numbering 50) from the private, voluntary and public sectors as well as the council itself, pledging to reduce their own emissions by 15% by 2010, with an overall target of reducing Islington's CO2 emissions by 55,000 tonnes by 2010. Under the Partnership a Climate Change Challenge for residents has been set up, encouraging community members to pledge to carrying out a series of simple steps to save energy (including switching standby appliances off fully, reducing the temperature of washing machine cycles and so on). In return for signing up to the Challenge participating residents receive a free energy saving toolkit with ideas and information on how to save energy and money, a free energy saving light bulb and there are opportunities to win a free energy meter or free gym passes

- **Climate Change Fund:** a £3 million fund established by the Council to support renewable energy and sustainable transport schemes in homes, council and community buildings. The Council has invited residents to donate the £20 discount that they receive as a result of paying their council tax by direct debit, directly into the scheme; so far taken up by over 1000 residents.
- **The Sustainable Living Centre:** situated in a prime high street location, provides free, impartial face-to-face and telephone advice to residents, aiming to inspire and advise people to take action to tackle climate change.
- **Green Behaviours Project:** an ongoing initiative that aims to motivate local people to make "practical, realistic but valuable" changes to their lifestyle and to think about how their individual actions affect the wider environment (Hales, 2007). The project targets the most deprived neighbourhoods in the borough and has trained 8 people to become "Green Champions" who engage with residents face-to-face to discuss the impact that their behaviour and lifestyle have on the local and global environment

Other climate change related initiatives include an 'Action at School' project and a set of Sustainable Transport policies that include the largest car club in the UK, which is part of Islington Council's green travel to work programme, involving resident competitions and campaigns to promote walking and cycling. Part of the drive for this action (manifested in the suite of initiatives and projects highlighted here) owes to the fact that one of the Council's 3 corporate priorities is "Cleaner, Greener, Safer" which is overseen by a member/officer board – the Greener, Cleaner Board. It requires all major strategies and detailed policies to consider climate change issues (Hales, 2007). Additionally, Islington have a Sustainability Action Plan which brings together and develops climate change commitments in a range of plans including the Carbon Management Plan, Sustainable Transport Strategy, Waste Minimization and Recycling Action Plan, Air Quality Management Strategy, Local Development Framework, Biodiversity Action Plan and Green Procurement Code.

## 6. Community engagement: opportunities, barriers and challenges

As well as providing an overview and some background details of initiatives being undertaken, the qualitative data collected during the project management interviews highlights several issues pertinent to the development of community-based approaches to addressing climate change. These are summarised below in terms of opportunities, barriers and challenges, either experienced or envisioned by the interviewees.

### 6.1 Opportunities
The opportunity for local authorities to raise awareness of the worthwhile contribution that a combined effort can make in realizing reduced energy and carbon consumption was highlighted by all interviewees; for example:
*"Getting our community members to understand that their individual actions can have a significant impact when taken together with the actions of their neighbours and the broader community is certainly a key priority embedded in the philosophy behind our climate change projects" (Shropshire interviewee).*

*"There is massive potential for awareness raising, education and engaging people through that"* (Richmond interviewee)

On the issue of awareness raising there was a palpable understanding among the interviewees of the importance of putting the message across in a sufficiently enticing way in order to resonate effectively with the differing needs and priorities of their community members; for example:

*"You can engage people on climate change – you just have to do it in a particular way and over something that is relevant to individuals' day-to-day lives…the style and type of communication is key" (Islington interviewee).*

Linked to this, the modification of existing services provided by the local authority in promotion of attitudinal and behaviour change was an opportunity expressed particularly by the Richmond interviewee. Reflecting on the progress of their emissions based charging for parking permits scheme, the interviewee stated that "I think one of the biggest achievements of the policy so far has been in raising awareness of the contribution that the individual can have through their choice of vehicle", indicating in his view that a predominantly economic-based scheme may also have the capacity to influence attitudes in a pro-environmental way.

The chance to capitalise upon latent concerns about climate change that already exist among community members was an opportunity again highlighted by all interviewees. In each case the interviewees spoke both of environmental attitudes surveys that they had recently conducted and also *ad hoc* levels of awareness that they had gauged through informal conversations with residents; for example:

*"Our preliminary research indicates knowledge of climate change among residents but a lack of knowledge on how to act. Our climate change projects constitute an opportunity to enable a practical translation of this knowledge through to action" (Islington interviewee).*

An ability to make the most of the cohesion and drive of existing social networks and community groups was an opportunity emphasised by two of the interviewees. One of them for example stated that "there is massive scope for propagating the message through word of mouth…and tapping into existing social networks and groups – like the Women's Institute, Parish Council and the Young People's Forum" (Shropshire interviewee).

**6.2 Barriers**
The ability of a local authority to achieve the effective infiltration of their messages to encourage attitudinal and behavioural change can be thwarted by apathy towards climate change among community members – one of the central conceptual barriers alluded to by all interviewees to a greater or lesser extent; for example:

*"There may be a viewpoint, I sense, that there's little point in one person - or even a community over here - making changes to combat climate change when for example they see little evidence for commitment from other large polluting nations" (Richmond interviewee).*

On one level this appears contradictory to the opportunity referred to by interviewees regarding latent awareness of climate change issues revealed in their

surveys and *ad hoc* information gathering exercises. On the other hand it probably reflects a reality that latent awareness and/or good intentions do not automatically lead on to action, however well the opportunities for that action are facilitated.

The experiences of participatory climate change projects in both Shropshire and Islington exemplify this point, where participation has so far failed to amount to any more than 1% of their target communities. In the opinions of the interviewees this might be attributed in part to the hectic nature of modern lifestyles, residents giving higher priority to issues other than climate change and inertia with regard to residents *wanting* to make behavioural changes; for example:

*"We came up against a massive block: basically we weren't able to get bums on seats. And the feedback we got was 'oh no, not another climate change event', kind of thing. People just seemed to be thoroughly uninterested in the area for whatever reason." (Shropshire interviewee)*

*"People's perceptions of time and how busy they are and how much they are pre-occupied with different issues is a massive barrier" (Islington interviewee)*

A central point referred to by many interviewees centred on the development of trust with community members as key influencing factor to establishing and maintaining engagement of individuals. For example one of the interviewees stated that a project's success is largely depends upon participation and this in turn depends on how well the initiative is promoted, and the extent to which the target community believes and trusts in the organisation developing the project and its proposed benefits.

A potential barrier to developing that trust, highlighted during interviews, relates to the perception and "image" of local authorities generally in the community. One interviewee for example stated that "It can be quite difficult for local authorities. The local authority has an image. Most people wouldn't dream of communicating with the local authority unless they had to" (Richmond interviewee) and another said "our residents bless them, can be quite critical of the council" (Islington interviewee). This echoes the argument that historically the relationship between residents and their local authorities has often been characterised with limited trust and minimal confidence (Byrne, 2000). Whether provision of incentives for participation (like Shropshire's contribution to insulation costs and Islington's complimentary gym passes, for example) constitute a positive aspect of building a trust relationship with community members is not entirely clear; they do nevertheless provide a reason to participate additional to the anticipated - and inherent - environmental and cost-saving benefits that form an intrinsic part of such projects' *raison d'être*.

**6.3 Challenges**
The main challenges articulated by interviewees concerned the provision of compelling sets of motivations and incentives for taking action coupled with the development of sufficiently flexible strategies capable of resonating effectively with the multiplicity of needs and priorities inherent in the diversity of a community's lifestyles; for example:

*"The right type of publicity and programme of events to get people interested and want to participate is very important. The old line about 'you can lead a horse to water …' is certainly relevant" (Shropshire interviewee).*

*"Local authorities have got to be more creative and innovative when it comes to climate change; think of things their communities would find interesting and talk to them about those things" (Richmond interviewee).*

Understanding the nature of likely opportunities, constraints and challenges is clearly an important, iterative process in the context of developing new projects and strategies designed to engage community members.

## 7. Concluding remarks

Through a shifting governance platform local authorities have, over time, come more to the fore as political catalysts in the delivery of local level responses to the challenge of climate change.  Part of this 'modernization' process has developed from the sustainability imperatives and commitments enshrined in the Local Agenda 21 programme – the first substantive political attempt to link local, global, and intermediary political structures into a more effective framework for the governance of global risk.

This potential agency and role for local government has been recognized and re-iterated in a range of UK policy developments and communications from Central Government. The UK Climate Change Programme for example, together with the most recent Energy White Paper, 2007 and guidance documents such as the Energy Measures Report 2007, promote this role as an interface between citizens and local policy-making and delivery.  Local authorities, it is argued, hold the potential to reach, influence and galvanize community activity.

Data drawn from this research suggests that this is not always a straightforward process however. For example a series of barriers as well as opportunities to engagement were highlighted by the project management interviewees pointing to potential difficulties for reliance on local authorities as change agents in addressing the more intractable problems of sustainable development.

The three case study local authorities described in this paper continue to develop a range of projects designed to engage their respective communities, encouraging individual and collective action to bring about reductions in carbon dioxide emissions and improved energy profiles and management. Shifting behavioural patterns in the direction of more sustainable, lower carbon living needs to tap into concerns about climate change that already exist amongst members of the community, along with a compelling set of motivations, incentives for taking action and raised awareness of the worthwhile contribution that a combined effort can make in realizing reduced energy and carbon consumption.

Local government's role and responsibilities in catalyzing such progress and change in their communities is clear; only time will tell how effectively the growing range of

initiatives being developed and deployed by local authorities in addressing the challenges of climate change will prove to be. Further research may be needed to consider, for instance, whether lessons from other local delivery mechanisms (independent grass-roots initiatives for example) could be more effective in engaging local knowledge and addressing the complexities of climate change at a local level.

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