The Egan Review

SKILLS FOR
SUSTAINABLE
COMMUNITIES

Contents

THE COMMON GOAL: DEFINING AND MEASURING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Credit: English Regional Development Agencies

Contents

DEFINING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

1.1 Sustainable communities do not come about by chance – they are something we must work to create. To identify the skills we need to create them, we must first understand what we mean by the term 'sustainable communities'.

1.2 Considerable work has already been done to draw up a definition of this term – most recently in the *Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future* Report[3] which set out twelve 'key requirements', and the *Sustainable Communities: Dimensions and Challenges* Report[4] which identified key components of sustainable communities. We have reviewed this work, consulted with a range of professional and specialist organisations and other government departments, and developed the following common definition:

1.3 We have not attempted to define prescriptively the physical area or size of population that constitutes a sustainable community. This is a judgement that local authorities and stakeholders need to make. In one area, a city may constitute a sustainable community and in another, a town, or collection of towns, or individual neighbourhoods. We also recognise that functioning sustainable communities will frequently cross-administrative boundaries.
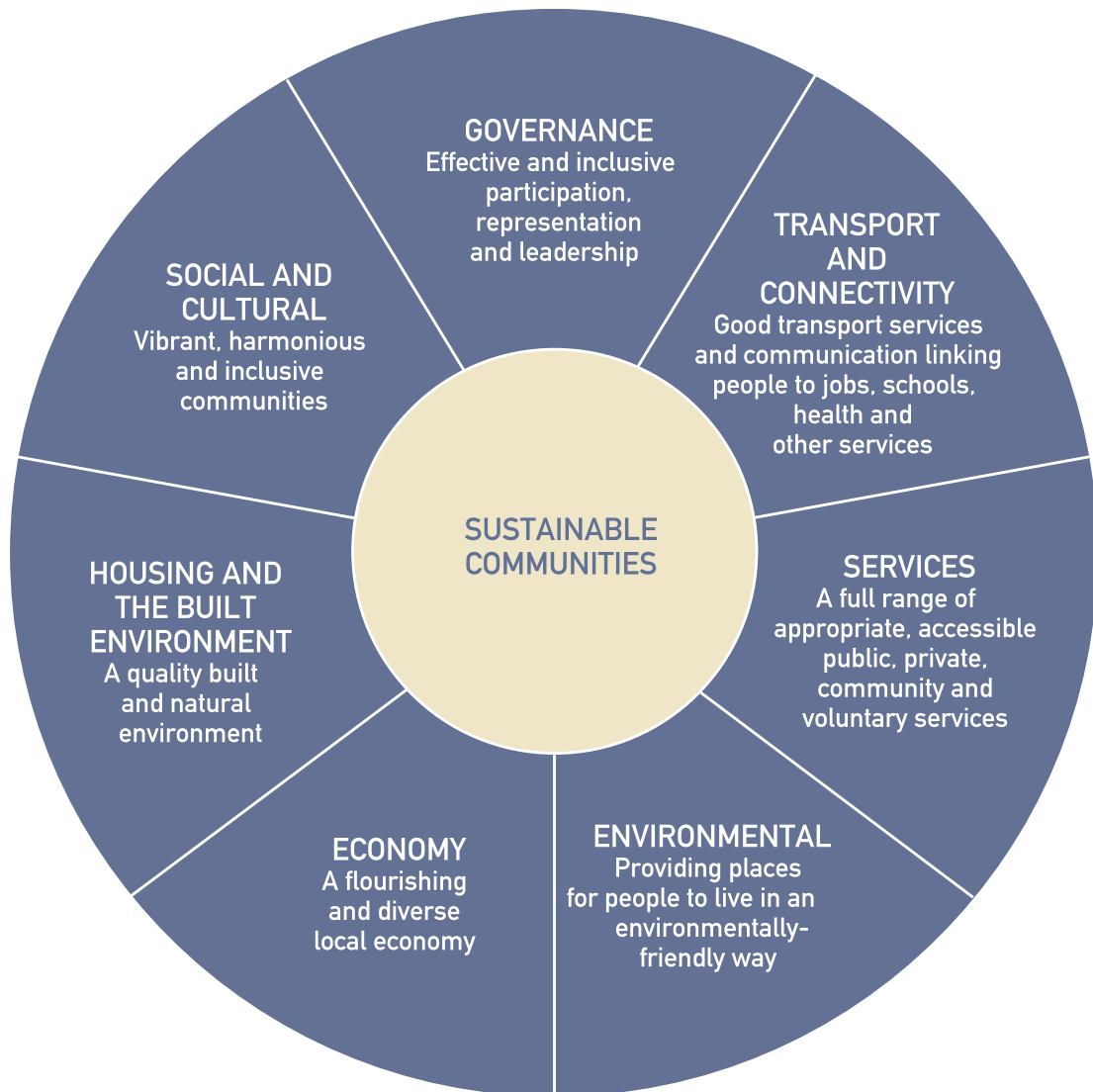
Definition of Sustainable Communities:

Sustainable communities meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, their children and other users, contribute to a high quality of life and provide opportunity and choice. They achieve this in ways that make effective use of natural resources, enhance the environment, promote social cohesion and inclusion and strengthen economic prosperity.

COMPONENTS OF SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

1.4 We used our definition to identify seven key components of a sustainable community and to derive a framework for delivery. Diagram One summarises our components. This constitutes our 'common goal'.

1.5 Each component is described in more detail in Box One. We believe it is essential that *all* components are addressed if we are to plan, deliver and maintain sustainable communities – there is no hierarchy. Depending on local circumstances, there might be a trade-off in the short-term in the priority given to different components, but in the longer term, all are essential to make a place sustainable.

3   Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, (2003), *Sustainable Communities: building for the future*.
4   Kearns, A. and Turok, I. (2003), *Sustainable Communities: Dimensions and Challenges*.

Contents

DIAGRAM ONE: COMPONENTS OF SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

GOVERNANCE
Effective and inclusive participation, representation and leadership

TRANSPORT AND CONNECTIVITY
Good transport services and communication linking people to jobs, schools, health and other services

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL
Vibrant, harmonious and inclusive communities

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

SERVICES
A full range of appropriate, accessible public, private, community and voluntary services

HOUSING AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT
A quality built and natural environment

ECONOMY
A flourishing and diverse local economy

ENVIRONMENTAL
Providing places for people to live in an environmentally-friendly way

Contents

BOX ONE: COMPONENTS AND SUB-COMPONENTS OF SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

A COMMON SUB-COMPONENT across all components is:

- All provision and/or activity to be high quality, well-designed and maintained, safe, accessible, adaptable, environmentally and cost-effectively provided

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL – Vibrant, harmonious and inclusive communities

- A sense of community identity and belonging
- Tolerance, respect and engagement with people from different cultures, background and beliefs
- Friendly, co-operative and helpful behaviour in neighbourhoods
- Opportunities for cultural, leisure, community, sport and other activities
- Low levels of crime and anti-social behaviour with visible, effective and community-friendly policing
- All people are socially included and have similar life opportunities

GOVERNANCE – Effective and inclusive participation, representation and leadership

- Strategic, visionary, representative, accountable governance systems that enable inclusive, active and effective participation by individuals and organisations
- Strong, informed and effective leadership and partnerships that lead by example (eg government, business, community)
- Strong, inclusive, community and voluntary sector (eg resident's associations, neighbourhood watch)
- A sense of civic values, responsibility and pride
- Continuous improvement through effective delivery, monitoring and feedback at all levels

ENVIRONMENTAL – Providing places for people to live in an environmentally-friendly way

- Efficient use of resources now and in the future in the built environment and service provision (eg energy efficiency, land, water resources, flood defence, waste minimisation etc)
- Living in a way that minimises the negative environmental impact and enhances the positive impact (eg recycling, walking, cycling)
- Protecting and improving natural resources and biodiversity (eg air quality, noise, water quality)
- Having due regard for the needs of future generations in current decisions and actions

Contents

HOUSING AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT – A quality built and natural environment

- Creating a sense of place (eg a place with a positive 'feeling' for people, and local distinctiveness)
- Well-maintained, local, user-friendly public and green spaces with facilities for everyone including children and older people
- Sufficient range, diversity and affordability of housing within a balanced housing market
- A high quality, well-designed built environment of appropriate size, scale, density, design and layout that complements the distinctive local character of the community
- High quality, mixed-use, durable, flexible and adaptable buildings

TRANSPORT AND CONNECTIVITY – Good transport services and communication linking people to jobs, schools, health and other services

- Transport facilities, including public transport, that help people travel within and between communities
- Facilities to encourage safe local walking and cycling
- Accessible and appropriate local parking facilities
- Widely available and effective telecommunications and Internet access

ECONOMY – A flourishing and diverse local economy

- A wide range of jobs and training opportunities
- Sufficient land and buildings to support economic prosperity and change
- Dynamic job and business creation
- A strong business community with links into the wider economy

SERVICES – A full range of appropriate, accessible public, private, community and voluntary services

- Well-educated people from well-performing local schools, further and higher education and training for lifelong learning
- High quality, local health care and social services
- Provision of range of accessible, affordable public, community, voluntary and private services (eg retail, food, commercial, utilities)
- Service providers who think and act long term and beyond their own immediate geographical and interest boundaries

Contents

21

Credit: www.JohnBirdsall.co.uk

Focus Groups

1.6   We tested how our definition and components matched up with people's perceptions of what makes a sustainable community. MORI ran a series of six focus groups for us with the public. A summary of the results is in Box Two.

1.7   We believe that our definition and components should be used to help create a 'common language' about the meaning of sustainable communities; a language that can be used and understood by everyone involved – politicians and the officers that serve them, professionals, regeneration

BOX TWO: FOCUS GROUPS

The groups were drawn from different areas and housing conditions namely Greenwich, Telford, Poundbury, Dewsbury, Northampton, and East Manchester. Participants came from a range of ages and social classes. They considered the Task Group's definition, the components and sub-components of the term 'Sustainable Communities', and identified any gaps or unclear terminology.

When participants were asked what they associated most closely with the word 'community', their emphasis was very much on the people element – families, children, friends.

They found the term 'Sustainable Community' generally acceptable, although many participants felt adding 'sustainable' was jargonistic and made little difference to their initial idea of community. The overriding view was that people make up a community and that children are important for the future.

The groups broadly agreed with our seven components. They thought social and cultural cohesion (encompassing safety, stability and social order) to be fundamental, along with trustworthy local government and good local services.

Contents

practitioners, developers, voluntary and community groups and the community itself, so that everyone can contribute to delivery of the common goal.

1.8 **We recommend that Government, local authorities and other stakeholders (built-environment professionals, public service providers, developers and community organisations) adopt the common goal and promote a common understanding of what the term 'sustainable community' means. Our definition and seven components constitute a model that others may wish to use. It may need to be supplemented to reflect local priorities and the views of local people.**

OPERATIONALISING THE COMMON GOAL

1.9 Our description of the common goal will need further research to refine it in the light of experience about what works for existing and future communities. But we believe it can act as a useful framework to:

- secure more effective joining up of policy agendas at national, regional and local, government, so that these deliver the needs of the people for safe, clean, prosperous and attractive communities;
- delegate much more performance-related responsibility from national to local government, where this has been

demonstrated to be earned (Chapter Two);
- identify essential components in very significant new developments (Chapter Two); and
- provide a basis from which skill sets can be developed (Chapters Three and Four).

MEASURING PROGRESS TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

1.10 In addition to creating a 'common language', we consider that our definition and indicators will help provide a benchmark against which progress towards greater sustainability can be measured. The rate of progress reveals how successful we are in assembling the right teams with the right skills to deliver the communities we deserve.

Indicators

1.11 We have identified a small number of performance indicators, representing our seven components, that could be used to help

Contents

23

set clear, measurable and public targets against which progress could be regularly tracked. We examined the extensive range of over four hundred existing indicators developed to meet particular needs by, for example the Audit Commission, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), the Sustainable Development Commission, and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

1.12 For each of the seven components, we selected between four and nine indicators that we felt most effectively represented key aspects. The resulting fifty indicators include a mixture of subjective and objective data inputs. We consider the use of subjective indictors to be essential – from the MORI focus groups and other surveys, we know that people want to live in places that are clean, safe and friendly, places that have quality open spaces and that offer jobs and good education. We concluded that indicators reflecting people's *perceptions* of where they live must be part of the process of assessing progress towards delivery, and the results must inform decisions on action needed to improve sustainability. Many local authorities already do this but we believe that it should be common practice for all.

1.13 Forty-six of the indicators are those that are already recommended for use by local authorities (but are not necessarily compulsory). These are drawn in the main from the Audit Commission's Library of Local

5   Audit Commission, IDeA (2003) Library of Local Performance Indicators

Performance indicators[5] and from other existing datasets. In addition, we recommend for the first time three other piloted and tested indicators, plus a further indicator which is brand new. The full list is set out in **Annex B**.

Using the indicators

1.14 We recognise that the seven components may be most relevant at different spatial levels, and that measurement of the components should recognise this. For example, economic data may be most relevant at regional or sub-regional level, whereas indicators of cleanliness, safety, and open spaces are likely to be most relevant at neighbourhood level (say 3,000 – 5,000 homes). For other indicators, such as provision of local services, data at district level may be most relevant. Local authorities, working with the Audit Commission, need to make their own judgements about the level at which particular data sets should be collected and interpreted.

1.15 We believe that the indicators we have identified offer a well balanced menu from which local authorities and their partners can choose to help them demonstrate progress in delivering sustainable communities. The choice of indicators will depend on local circumstances and the needs and priorities of local people. As such we do not believe that the entire set should be mandatory. In particular we do not want

Contents

Credit: Beacons for a Brighter NDC Partnership, East Manchester

the indicators to be seen as yet another box ticking exercise, or a set of hurdles to jump. We envisage the indicators being used as a means of demonstrating to the community what the problems are, what action will be taken to address them and how progress will be monitored. They should be used to motivate, to measure the impact of processes and actions, and could in future form the basis of useful comparisons – particularly international comparisons – on the effectiveness of action taken to address specific problems.

1.16 **We recommend that by the end of 2005, local authorities should:**

- **incorporate in their Sustainable Community Strategies (Chapter Two) a process through which they and their**

partners will select the indicators from Annex B that are most relevant to the needs of their communities;

- **identify mechanisms for establishing baselines and regularly tracking progress towards achieving sustainability with the longer term aim of tracking all of the indicators; and**

- **make provision for taking action to address poor performance where it occurs.**

Feedback to local people should be an essential part of this process.

1.17 Central government departments need to recognise the importance of these indicators and their use at local level alongside their existing single service indicators and targets.

MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

1.18 Diagram Two, Moving in the right direction, illustrates how progress towards delivering a sustainable community may be pursued over time. Ideally the overall direction of travel is in a straight line towards a clear goal, but in reality the route may vary because of specific blockages and barriers. Progress in one component (for example redesigning a town centre to attract new retail and business opportunities) may temporarily have a negative impact on another – such as creating a strong sense of place – and this may be reflected in the results of

Contents

DIAGRAM TWO: MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Contents
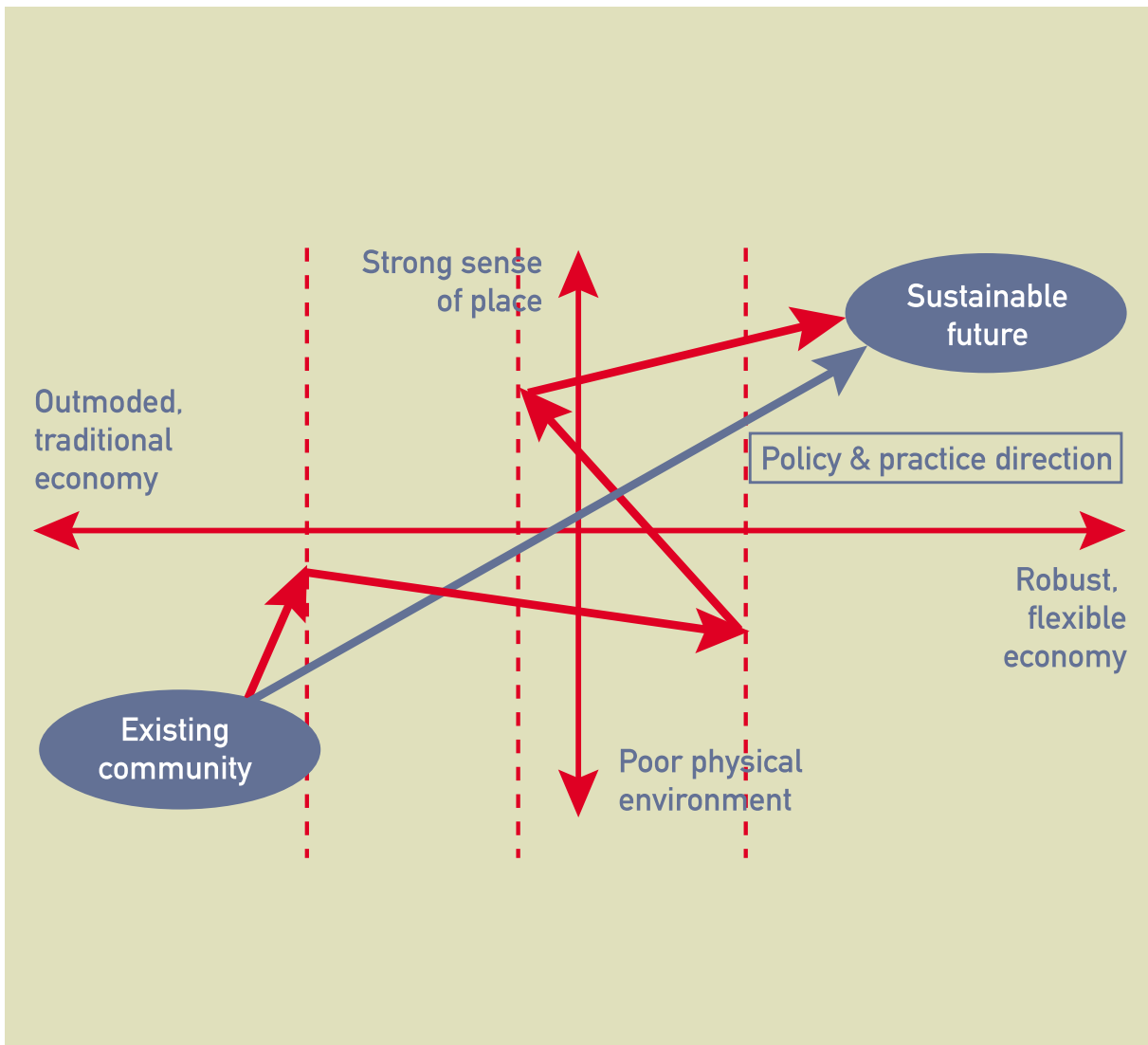
monitoring. Temporary trade-offs, where some components have to take a back seat while other priorities are addressed, are perfectly acceptable as long as the long-term trend for each component is in the right direction – towards the sustainable future. Decisions about such trade-offs will require sound judgement, as well as leadership and communication skills.

1.19 Moving towards the sustainable community ideal must be the long-term aim for all communities, urban and rural, North and South. Having said this, there is action we can take straight away to halt movement away from our ideal.

1.20 **We must stop generating new development that conflicts with the goal.** In particular:

- We want to see a sustainable community development code or benchmarks established to give clear information to developers, local authorities and communities about the environmental and quality standards that sustainable communities should achieve, and how these translate into practical building standards. Such a code or benchmarks should be informed by existing examples of best practice, and make use of tools such as those developed by the Building Research

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Establishment and SEEDA (South East England Development Agency) Sustainability Checklist for Development that place our country at the forefront of international standards.

- We believe such a code or benchmarks should be in place inside twelve months. We recommend that Government works with the Sustainable Buildings Task Group[6] to develop further this proposal, and should look at ways of incentivising progress, with the longer term aim of developments meeting carbon emissions and waste minimisation standards consistent with a sustainable one planet level within, say eight years.

6   The Sustainable Buildings Task Group is charged with identifying specific, cost-effective, improvements in the quality and environmental performance of buildings which industry can deliver in both the short and long term, together with further actions that Government could take to facilitate faster progress.

Contents

● We consider it essential to improve quality of place, and recommend that all new proposals for major building developments should meet recognised design quality guidelines or standards where they exist – for example, the Construction Industry Council's Design Quality Indicators,[7] and BREEAM EcoHomes.[8] Again, we recommend that Government works with the Sustainable Buildings Task Group to identify preferred guidelines/standards and any gaps or improvements required, and how these could be addressed as a matter of priority.

● We reject the use of land for single industrial, commercial, housing, retail or leisure development without full consideration of mixed-use alternatives; and we reject very significant developments not supported by

comprehensive masterplans and design (or urban) codes. The latter should pay full regard to the physical, environmental, economic and social context of the development, encapsulated in our seven sustainable community components.

1.21 **We recommend that Government works with the Sustainable Buildings Task Group to develop further our proposal for a sustainable communities code/benchmarking, that will give clear information about the environmental and quality standards that sustainable communities should achieve, and how these translate into practical building standards. Government should also look at ways of incentivising progress, with the longer term aim of meeting developments that achieve carbon emissions and waste minimisation standards consistent with a sustainable one planet level within, say eight years. Design standards and guidelines for very significant developments should also be addressed. We want to halt single use of land for industrial, commercial, housing, retail and leisure development without full consideration of mixed-use alternatives.**

Credit: www.JohnBirdsall.co.uk

7   Design Quality Indicators developed by the Construction Industry Council and Imperial College, London.
8   Building Research Establishment (2000) BREEAM EcoHomes

Contents