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Motivating Carbon Reduction in the UK: the role of local government as an agent of social change

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Title Page

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Abstract

In UK policy circles there is a growing recognition that mediating the interface between policy making and the public through local government led initiatives is one way through which to provide a practicable means through which to deliver carbon reduction at an individual, household and community level. Following on from the aims of Local Agenda 21 in creating the space for a more bottom-up policy infrastructure, 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. This emphasis was given further weight through the introduction of a new local performance framework in April 2008. This new set of 198 national performance indicators (PIs) for local government and other local bodies are now the only PIs which Central Government will use to assess local government performance. Importantly they include three PIs that specifically cover the issue of climate change and carbon reduction (CLG, 2008).

For many years local authorities in the UK have played a role in encouraging more community led sustainable development objectives. However, what Giddens (2000) describes as the 'modernization' of local governance, has often proved to be inherently problematic, not least in developing the 'civic engagement' aspect of this model of governance

The article traces these problems in relation to the increasing responsibilities of local government in developing local community led responses to climate change. While the UK Government continue to highlight the opportunities for this type of political framework in addressing the bottom-up complexities of climate change, we consider why some of the issues raised in three case study examples are indicative of wider problems in expanding this form of governance in the UK. The article concludes that difficulties encountered with regard to the implementation of LA 21's central objectives have extended through to the more recent focus for action in combating the specific challenge of climate change. More broadly, innovation in the sense of fostering an effective level of civic engagement in sustainable development objectives, continues to remain problematic

Key Words:

Local Agenda 21; climate change; governance; local authorities; community engagement

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 more 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. Over the last decade this role has been expounded in a range of key policy documents, legislation and guidance (outlined in Section 6). These documents have followed principles that were first introduced through the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and specifically Agenda 21. As Lucas *et al* (2003:2) point out Agenda 21 began to integrate the principles of sustainable development into a recognizable policy form, signified by:

A need to halt the environmental degradation and resource depletion that has characteristically accompanied economic growth in the industrialized world. It also aimed to address the inequitable distribution of wealth and benefit arising from this pattern of development both within and between nations and inter-generationally (Lucas *et al*, 2003:2)

Local Agenda 21 (LA21) was developed out of this programme and was designed as the practical framework through which to promote the idea of 'thinking locally, while acting globally', in order to meet sustainable development objectives through a more effective, bottom-up approach (Church and Young, 2001).

The limitations of top-down governance in addressing the environmental complexities of sustainable development – and particularly the growing urgency of climate change – were vividly illustrated in the UK in the wake of 1992 (Harding and Newby, 1999). 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-1990s, mostly due to growth in road transport and air travel (Royal Commission, 2000). There was also a growing awareness that the energy demand in housing accounted for as much as 40% of the UK's CO₂ emissions total (Jones *et al*, 2000). Critics pointed out that this was evidence that policy initiatives 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.

2. Structure of the paper

The article begins by exploring the way in which many of the principles of LA21 have to some extent shadowed the higher profile of local government and local level decision making on the political process itself in the UK. It is argued that 'political modernization' became a more coherent approach from 1997 where the Labour Government began to place greater emphasis on the responsibility of local authorities to implement local-level policy initiatives in relation to a wide variety of issues. It is argued that this process has not been without its difficulties, and the uneven integration and implementation of LA21 for instance, into the local governance framework in the UK prefigured some of the limitations of more recent local authority led action (and lack of action) on climate change. Regarding the amplified urgency of UK government targets on CO₂ emissions, and augmented responsibilities of local government agencies to deliver visible progress at their end, the final section of the paper considers some of the opportunities and challenges of 'civic participation' faced by three case study local authorities in England which have concentrated on *community engagement* as a primary focus for their climate change agendas.

3. 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 also 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 establishing increasingly *local* responses to the challenges of sustainable development and a changing climate (Grubb et al, 1993).

LA21 (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 providing greater flexibility in promoting sustainable development. As Agyeman and Evans (1994:153) point out "LA21 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 LA21 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. It was therefore argued that local government agencies could now perform a role as *catalysts* in linking top-down agendas and bottom-up delivery through their influence 'as major players in the local economy; their role as employers, purchasers of goods and services and local regulators', meant that they were ideally placed to provide a more strategic approach to the governance of global risk (Agyeman and Evans, 1994).

Barry (1999) has argued therefore that, potentially, one of the most important functions of LA21 to wider environmental policy goals is that it held the promise of influencing a process of 'democratic ecological governance'. Driven by the increased emphasis on stakeholder involvement, he claims that LA21 steered local authority initiatives could enable a modern 'commons' type policy regime which helps to foster:

...an awareness 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).

The 2007 Energy White Paper has highlighted the importance of trying to enable 'local knowledge' of this kind to become better integrated into more mainstream policy approaches on reaching CO₂ emissions targets. Local authority initiatives, it is argued, could provide better leverage in 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).

Consumption drivers such as travel, eating habits, leisure practices, living patterns and holiday plans are also 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 (Jackson, 2005). 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 next section considers two of the key issues which have militated against the successful mobilization of this kind of governance so far in the UK. Firstly, it is argued that while local authorities *have* gained more autonomy and decision-making powers – particularly since 1997 under the New Labour Government – LA21 has not been centrally involved in driving this process and its lack of statutory influence has meant that incorporation into local policy-making has been variable and dependent upon the kind of leadership and vision that underpins the activities of particular local authority areas.

Secondly, it is suggested that, even with these principles in place, the extent to which local government agencies are likely to be successful in working effectively with individuals and communities in developing workable strategies through which to address the issues outlined above, is inextricably linked with the development of successful civic and community engagement; an area which has traditionally proved difficult for many local authorities to tap into (Craig, 1989; Taylor, 2003).

4. Political Modernization and the Changing Role and Responsibilities of Local Authorities in the UK Since 1997

One of the principal criticisms of the policy framework of Agenda 21 itself was the fact that national government signatories were not bound by any legal obligations to abide by the recommendations that were made. By extension, local authority agencies themselves were left with the impetus “to decide whether or not and to what extent they wished to respond to Local Agenda 21 as a framework for local policy making” (Lucas *et al*, 2003:2). As Carley and Christie (2002:212) have pointed out, the election of a Labour Government in 1997 suggested that a greater commitment to LA21 in the UK would tie in well with new ideas which, in rhetoric at least, supported a more creative approach to policy making, and more effective linkages between “environmental, social and economic policies than its predecessor”. In contrast to the highly centralist approach deployed by the previous Conservative administration, the Labour Government itself seemed to support the growing awareness in policy circles that top-down administrative approaches would only go some way towards bridging the intricate relationships between citizens, institutions and policy delivery mechanisms.

What became known as the ‘modernization’ of local governance during this period, can be traced through the evolution of a number of key policies through which Central Government in the UK have attempted to transform the politics and performance of local government in England beyond the traditional emphasis on their role as service providers and top-down decision-makers. 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 potential for both the principles and the policy framework of LA21 to influence proceedings during this period revolved around 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': a development which observably began to emerge during the 2002-2005 period (Downe and Martin, 2006; Tuxworth, 1997). 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.

5. The Prioritisation of Climate Change as a Key Local Authority Issue

As argued in the earlier part of the paper, climate change has grown in urgency as a part of the global sustainability argument. In the UK, this came to a head in 2000 when the Royal Commission Report on Environmental Pollution (RCEP) pointed out that CO₂ emissions were increasing, despite political claims to the contrary. Two UK energy white papers – released in 2003 and 2007 – have both emphasised the need for a wider problem-solving approach in order to address the complexities of this issue – the latter, for instance, addresses both the supply *and* demand issues around reducing the UK's CO₂ emission levels.

Local authorities in England and Wales now have several responsibilities with regard to incorporating demand-focused energy policy and climate change considerations into their

more recent functions. For example greater emphasis has been attached to the importance of engaging individuals and households in a process of adopting less energy-intensive lifestyles as an integral facet of attempts to reach ambitious national and international targets on emissions reductions (CSE, 2005; CLG, 2007). Many local authorities have become proactive in these regards and some have even framed policies within locally agreed targets for carbon emissions reductions.

What follows is a brief outline of several key documents (spanning policy, legislation and guidance) reflecting the increased focus on the importance of UK local authorities and their responsibilities in addressing climate change. The content of these documents suggest that successful policies will come about as a result of wider community and citizen engagement – echoing some of the fundamental principles underpinning the framework of philosophies behind LA21.

5.1 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 building on the principles outlined in LA21.

5.2 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.

5.3 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).

5.4 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.

5.5 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*:

"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, 2007a: 34)

The report carries statutory weight as local authorities are required to 'have regard to it' when carrying out their functions (BERR, 2007b).

5.6 The New Local Performance Framework

Introduced in April 2008 this new framework has the intention of strengthening commitment to local as well as national priorities, thus providing a basis to "reconnect citizens with government" (CLG, 2007: 5). It places local authorities under a duty to consult widely in developing a Sustainable Community Strategy: "...the starting point for local delivery" (CLG, 2007: 5). The framework introduced a streamlined, single set of national performance indicators (PIs – 198 in total) which include three PIs specifically focused on addressing the challenges of climate change. These are 'CO₂ reduction from local authority operations'; 'Per capita reduction in CO₂ emissions in the local authority area' and 'Adapting to climate change' (CLG, 2007: 8). This new set of 198 PIs for local government and other local bodies are now the only PIs which Central Government will use to assess local government performance.

6. 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.

6.1 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 two or three representatives of the project management teams from each authority (8 interviewees in total), 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;

6.2 Overview of case study local authorities and initiatives

6.2.1 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 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 (including contribution towards the cost of cavity wall insulation, loft insulation and energy efficient lighting).
- **Climate Change Months:** 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, film shows, cartoon competitions 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).

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 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 carried out a wide-ranging public consultation which 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.

6.2.3 London Borough of Islington Council

Islington Council for example 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 (Hales 2007). 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 a Climate Change 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; a £3 million Climate Change Fund to support sustainable transport and renewable energy in homes, council and community buildings; a Green Behaviours Project that aims to motivate local people to make lifestyle changes and think about how their individual actions affect the wider environment; and a 'Green Living Centre'. The Centre opened to the public in November 2007, and one of its most important aims "is to help people in the borough reduce their carbon emissions – so looking to reduce individual domestic carbon emissions" (Kirwan, 2008). Advice is available for visitors around four main areas: recycling, energy efficiency, biodiversity and green travel. Occasional 'one-off' events (e.g. a 'plastic bag amnesty') are organised to complement the Centre's drive to connect with the public, boost its profile and – hopefully – engender greater interest and increased visitor numbers: "our events are designed to promote that the centre is open... they cover a broad range of interests to try and engage people in a broad range of sustainability issues" (Kirwan, 2008).

Administration of advice within the centre principally takes the form of face-to-face guidance with visitors. Islington Council also operate a parallel telephone advice line offering the same sort of advice, but managed by a different team of people.

6.3 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. It is important to bear in mind that for these local authorities, their aspiration and drive to address the complexities of climate change is not purely contingent upon the exhortations and related ('official') communications emanating from Central Government. This reality however comes with an important caveat; one which goes some way to explaining why local authorities like these represent the 'exception' rather than the 'norm'. It has to do with the lack of robust evidence to demonstrate the impact on carbon emissions of local or regional action, as described in CSE, 2005. In their UK-wide review of local authority action on climate change they provided strong evidence indicating that the few current examples of good practice (like the case studies detailed in this paper) "...are principally down to the work of enthused, informed and committed individuals...these 'wilful individuals' have taken it upon themselves to secure progress [and] have applied their willpower, doggedness and professional expertise to create conditions within their organisation in which they can operate effectively" (CSE, 2005: 20).

In many ways this points to some of the more entrenched difficulties that are likely to be encountered with regard to the realisation of wider-ranging local and regional engagement in practical carbon reduction. We pick up on this theme further on in the paper, in Section 7. Prior to this the following subsections draw attention to key opportunities, barriers and challenges conveyed by the decision maker interviewees questioned for this research.

6.3.1 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 and desire 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).

This important issue is central to the broader need to engage directly with individuals as pointed out by CSE, 2008 (p. 83); "...in order to stimulate understanding, improve motivation and secure action to reduce their carbon emissions."

Linked to this, there was a strong consensus among the interviewees about the opportunity available through modification of existing services in promotion of attitudinal and behaviour change. Reflecting on the progress of their emissions based charging for parking permits scheme, the Richmond interviewee, for example, 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. In Islington the interviewees made it clear that combining the modification of existing planning services with new carbon-reduction focused advice is an approach that the council has been particularly keen to pursue.

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).

This points to another key opportunity area that has been particularly capitalised upon by the establishment of the Green Living Centre in Islington. Interestingly a sizeable proportion of visitors are apparently quite interested in the design of the Centre itself – (i.e. 'who developed the centre') – because they admire the 'look' of it. This is an important point because part of the underlying ethos in the establishment of this initiative was to make the Centre as appealing as possible to a broad range of socio-demographic sectors (Hales, 2007). It was upon this reasoning that the prime high street location was chosen, as Ms Kirwan described: "there are several features that means the Centre integrates well with the Islington coffee shop culture; its on Upper Street in Islington which is full of posh shops and cafes; the designers were very keen to make sure that it fits with the kind of shops and

services in the vicinity. There are a lot of architects in the borough – so often people come in and want to know about the design and like it – again this includes people who are interested in eco-refurbishment. Some people are interested that we have a display cabinet with building materials and want to know where suppliers can be located.”

Additional features within the Centre that continue to attract particular interest from visitors include a table made from reclaimed wood and eye-catching wooden floor boards that were reclaimed from a school in Sussex. The well known mantra of ‘practise what you preach’ is borne out therefore by the fact that almost all the materials used in the design and fitting of the Centre are sustainably sourced

We asked Ms Kirwan about the socio-demographic mix of visitors and were told that on the whole it is ‘quite a mix’ of elderly people, parents and young professionals. One of the main strengths of the Centre from an ‘advisor perspective’ is its accessibility from a busy shopping street: “...this is a good thing and I think people like the accessibility – they know its open. People who know of it have been coming in more regularly: they know its there.” Other key assets from the advisor viewpoint include the face-to-face advice (“rather than having to go through the telephone”) as well as the demonstrations on show within the Centre (including energy efficient light bulbs and reclaimed items/objects of interest) “providing a more friendly and engaging dialogue on these issues. The fact that it looks good is also a strength – it is quite eye-catching and the window display does, I think, pull people in” (Kirwan, 2008).

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).

6.3.2 Barriers and challenges

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 dependent 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*.

Two key 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).

Clearly the act of connecting with people (and the household/community configurations that they find themselves in) requires recognition of the fact that all individuals are inherently different. But at the same time, evidence suggests that many people in 'affluent Western' societies are driven by goals that articulate - and sometimes typify - the most extreme forms of materialism. Therefore, if decision makers (at all levels - local and national/international) are to make pragmatic progress it is imperative that they acknowledge the full gamut of influences that shape, manipulate, encourage and deter consumer conduct and choice with regard to home energy and carbon management.

It is the contention of the authors (following on from the most recent nationwide Defra-funded survey on environmental attitudes) that a majority of UK residents are genuinely concerned about climate change, but not genuinely oriented in the direction of behaviour change. This is not necessarily the case in certain other European countries and elsewhere across the world where the involvement and participation of society at the community level has taken on different levels of focus and expediency.

7. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Through a shifting governance platform local authorities have, over time, come more to the fore as potential 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. However, evidence other reviewed for this paper strongly indicates that a majority of UK local authorities have yet to engage properly in these developmental processes of connecting and influencing their communities (e.g. CSE, 2005).

A recent stimulus for local authority action in this regard has emerged in the form of the New Performance Framework which includes specific indicators on climate change and carbon reduction. This 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” (Taylor, 2003:125). Furthermore Taylor 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.

Empirical data generated for this paper also confirms that this is not always a straightforward process – even for local authorities (such as the three cases explored) which might be considered ‘exemplars’ in terms of the effort and progress that they have achieved. 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.

We suggest here that part of this sluggish engagement in the development of practical strategies for galvanising collective community-focused action on climate change by many UK local authorities stems largely from:

- a) a legacy of poor image and perception of local authorities among the general public, and
- b) (at a more strategic, internal level) the tenets of the broader sustainable development-oriented objectives of LA21 that have, hitherto (in recent times), provided their primary steer for ‘environmental’ issues.

The Central Government's much more specific focus for local authority attention on combating climate change through individual and collective community-based carbon reduction has yet to emerge as a united, local government-wide 'call to arms' as was the case – by and large – with recycling and waste reduction in the late 1980s. This more physical and tangible problem was well suited to the physical and tangible solutions enabled through kerbside recycling schemes, community composting, waste minimisation clubs and so on (Peters and Turner, 2005). These approaches in general attracted favourable levels of public engagement that continue on to this day and importantly enabled local authorities to demonstrate their commitment to delivering on critical sustainability responsibilities embedded in LA21.

The practicalities of implementing LA21 have been dependent, largely, on the prevailing social, economic and political cultures of specific – and disparate - local and regional jurisdictions (Webster, 1999). In this sense, realising the vision of sustainable development encapsulated in LA21 (i.e. linking local causes and global effects) has often proved problematic – as the example of its application in the UK has clearly demonstrated.

With climate change and carbon reduction the problem – particularly from an 'energy consumer' perspective – is much less tangible. Electricity and gas, for example, are invisible. The utility that they provide (through central heating and enabling household appliances to function for example) in relation to the associated carbon dioxide emissions that this causes is, understandably, a less straightforward concept to grapple with than the physical issue of packaging discarded from bought products.

In this sense the challenge for local authorities is both educational and practical in nature. But firstly, recognition of the problem and a desire to do something about it needs to come from local government itself. This impetus has been attempted to be sparked off most recently through Central Government's introduction of local authority performance indicators on climate change.

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 has been clearly prioritised by Central Government and its agencies; 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. Continued research is required to assess the effectiveness of other local delivery mechanisms, applying to the local government situation relevant lessons on engaging local knowledge and addressing the complexities of climate change at a local level.

The information gathered for this research from the local authority 'decision maker perspective' indicates that many climate change initiatives have yet to infiltrate the message of sustainable energy use and carbon reduction to a broader spectrum of the community who appear not to possess a latent enthusiasm for behaviour change. This gives rise to two central, related questions:

1. to what extent are these types of action-oriented programmes that focus on climate change – designed and implemented at the local decision-making level – capable of exerting sufficient and compelling influence upon a broad community cross-section?
2. if people continually prove to be attracted by the allure of an ever-increasing range of 'energy guzzling gadgets' then how does a local-level policy maker take this fact into account and begin to develop imaginative, workable strategies that don't – by default – cater exclusively for already 'converted' pro-environmental members of the public?

How successfully these questions can be addressed locally and regionally may well determine the degree to which local government is able, demonstrably, to bring about the type of radical change (in the direction of more sustainable lifestyles) that is both desired and required to attain the challenging and pressing requirements imposed by local, national and international targets for climate change and carbon reduction.

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