

areas for future action

integrating sustainability into policy

The most effective way of ensuring that sustainability is incorporated into Council policy and practice is by making sustainability appraisal a mandatory part of the policy process.

Sustainability appraisal also allows the Council to influence the community strategies being drawn up by Local Strategic Partnerships and ensure that they take a sustainable approach to improving the social, economic and environmental well-being of their communities and contribute to global sustainability.

The County Council has recently developed a sustainability appraisal toolkit which can be used in a variety of circumstances and by a wide range of people from different backgrounds. The toolkit also strengthens the policy process by testing the developing policies and asking how they can be improved

Guidance on Directive 2001/142/EC on Strategic Environmental Assessment has recently been provided by Government. This will affect the way that sustainability appraisals of development plans (local development frameworks) are carried out by requiring a detailed environmental assessment as part of the wider sustainability appraisal process. The aim of the Directive is to ensure that environmental considerations are taken into account in strategic decision-making.

Urgent work will have to be done to establish an up to date environmental baseline against which assessments can be made. The Environment Agency is likely to carry out this baseline assessment. The Directive makes specific provision for public participation and consultation. This may well have considerable staffing or cost implications.

FOCUS for future action

Facilitate sustainability appraisals of future policies and major programmes across all Directorates of the Council.

Facilitate sustainability appraisals of all emerging community strategies in Cumbria.

Ensure that the Council has the capability to meet the requirements of the SEA Directive before July 2004

Assess the scope and impact of Strategic Environmental Assessment on the Authority, including resource and data requirements and the possibility of a partnership approach to meeting the requirements of the Directive.

improving the council's environmental performance

The way that the Council manages its environmental performance sends a powerful message to the community. An environmentally responsible council can influence business, industry, health and education agencies to follow suit. This generates momentum and makes it easier to encourage the wider public to take action to reduce their impact on the environment

The diversity of work carried out by the Council on behalf of the community has the potential to generate adverse, neutral or beneficial environmental impacts. The Council owns and manages a wide range of buildings, purchases energy, buys and operates vehicle fleets, manages the local highway network, provides public transport information and services in conjunction with other transport providers, and purchases an enormous range of goods and services, from heating oil to paper to food.

The County Council is also a landowner. Excluding school sites it owns a number of tenanted farms and smallholdings, additional parcels of let grazing land and two County Wildlife Sites. Current policy is to achieve 'better value' and sell land as tenancies are surrendered. Most land vacated by tenants is retained in agriculture but some land is sold for future development. The potential exists for the Council to manage its land in a more sustainable manner.

The Council has already made a corporate commitment to reduce its environmental impact and has in the past produced a Green Workplace Guide, a Green Purchasing Guide, conducted campaigns to reduce office waste, recycled redundant computers into the community, facilitated employee transport sharing and is currently purchasing renewable energy to power street lights and some buildings.

Recently a new Energy Manager has been appointed and the energy conservation budget has been increased to £200,000. A new energy strategy and action plan has been drawn up.

The County Council played a lead role in setting up the partnership which produced the Cumbria Biodiversity Action Plan to protect vulnerable species and habitats. The Authority has signed up to the BAP process and is now considering how to programme and fund work to meet the commitments it has made on biodiversity.

Other ongoing work includes the survey and sensitive repair of bridges to protect resident bat populations and the maintenance of roadside verges to enhance their biodiversity.



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FOCUS for future action

Improve the current environmental performance of the Council as an organisation by focusing on resource use (energy & water), waste, staff travel and procurement.

Produce a Biodiversity Action Programme designed to deliver County Council commitments on biodiversity across Cumbria

managing waste

Last year in Cumbria, 284,000 tonnes of municipal waste was generated from households, street sweepings and small businesses - this is roughly a tonne of rubbish per household. 87% of this waste was buried in landfill sites and only 13% was recycled or turned into compost. The amount of waste being generated is increasing by 5% per annum.

Government policy is to reduce the volume of waste being produced and also to reduce the amount sent to landfill for disposal. Targets have been set to divert waste from landfill. In Cumbria our targets are to recycle and compost 18% of our municipal waste by 2003/04, 21% by 2005/06 and to recover value from 67% of municipal waste by 2015 - which includes recycling and composting.

The District Councils and the County Council are now working within the framework of a joint strategy to reduce the overall amount of waste produced and increase the amount of waste that is recycled and composted.

nuclear decommissioning

Cumbria's nuclear industry, which employs some 12,000 people and supports a further 2,600 jobs locally, is undergoing major transition. A new Nuclear Decommissioning Authority is to be set up in West Cumbria to operate the Sellafield and Drigg sites. The focus of future business activity will be on decommissioning rather than reprocessing.

In addition the Government is re-launching a process to develop effective long-term management or disposal of radioactive waste, with the creation of a Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM).

The County Council maintains a close watching brief, and has participated in a stakeholder dialogue process initiated by BNFL and coordinated through the Environment Council. Out of this process has come an economic forecast that the Magnox, THORP and MoX plants will close between 2011 and 2014, leading to a rapid loss of 8,000 direct jobs over that period.

In environmental terms, the industry is the source of discharges of radioactivity to the environment (and Irish Sea), and generates, stores, or disposes of substantial volumes of low, intermediate and high level waste at Sellafield and Drigg. There will in the medium term be significant reductions in discharges as the reprocessing activity on site closes in the next decade.

FOCUS for future action

Extend the number and capacity of waste treatment facilities to recycle and compost municipal waste

Initiate a county-wide waste awareness campaign to help people and businesses reduce and re-use waste in Cumbria

FOCUS for future action

Establish effective liaison with the new Nuclear Decommissioning Authority and seek to influence environmental and economic outcomes

Continue to participate in the BNFL Stakeholder Dialogue

Engage with the CoRWM consultation processes on the future approach to radioactive waste management

protecting the environment and biodiversity through partnerships

The County Council reviewed its involvement with a range of environmental partnerships in Cumbria in 2002. The Authority's aim is to create a high quality, well-managed and accessible countryside and coast, with enhanced biodiversity and effective practical conservation and interpretation in line with the Council's Corporate Strategy.

As a consequence of the review, the Council will focus its limited financial and staff support on 12 major partnerships relating to biodiversity, landscape, woodlands, countryside and coastal management. These partnerships support the Corporate Strategy objective of protecting and enhancing the environment through conservation management or practical environmental enhancement projects.

The £130,000 Environment Fund will be used to support these 12 partnerships with priority being given to the A'sONB and some funding being made available on a bid basis to support projects arising from the environmental sector.



Photo: Cumbria Wildlife Trust

FOCUS for future action

Contribute to the management of the North Pennines, Solway Coast and Arnside-Silverdale Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Support the Cumbria Biodiversity Partnership, the Cumbria Landscape Project, Cumbria Woodlands, and Cumbria Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group.

Support Groundwork West Cumbria, East Cumbria Countryside Project, British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, The Morecambe Bay Partnership, the Solway Firth Partnership.

education for sustainable development

'Education for sustainable development is the learning that people need to improve and maintain quality of life for all, now and for generations to come. It equips individuals, families, communities, groups, businesses and governments to live and act sustainably, by giving them an understanding of the implications of their decisions and behaviour for society, for the economy, for wildlife and for natural resources⁽¹²⁾.

IN 2003 the Government responded to the Sustainable Development Education Panel's recommendations on education for sustainable development⁽¹³⁾. This has led to a number of initiatives being launched including an action plan on travelling to school⁽¹⁴⁾ with £50m funding spread over 2 years and an action plan on sustainable development⁽¹⁵⁾ covering schools, colleges and universities.

Primary and secondary schools are to be allocated (typically) £5,000 and £10,000 respectively through the DfES's capital programme to put in place a school travel plan and supporting initiatives. The aim is to reduce peak congestion by promoting safe and healthy travel to school. Local authorities are expected to play an active role in developing local travel plans.

The action plan on sustainable development combines environmental management of school premises with education for sustainability.

Cumbria County Council currently supports the Education 21 Partnership with some staff resources and limited funding. The Partnership provides opportunities and resources for education for sustainability which is channelled to schools through the Big Green File - a resource directory on sustainable development placed in each school.

The Partnership is not directly involved in raising awareness of issues amongst the adult population and this is left to Local Agenda 21 processes. The County Council maintains an informative web site on sustainability issues and promotes community understanding and action on sustainability issues.



Photo: Cumbria Wildlife Trust

FOCUS for Future Action

Continue to support the Education 21 Partnership in Cumbria and ensure that its work is embedded within the Education Development Plan

Harmonise curriculum support for education for sustainability and the way school premises are managed and maintained

Ensure school travel plan budgets are utilised effectively

facilitating sustainable lifestyles

Moving towards sustainability in Cumbria requires complementary action by individual citizens, households, local councils, commerce and industry, other public sector organisations spanning education, health, the voluntary sector and the variety of partnerships pursuing social, economic and environmental well-being.

The County Council can lead by example. Having taken action to reduce its resource use (energy and water) and cut the level of waste and pollution it produces, it can legitimately call on others to follow suit.

A number of mechanisms exist to engage the public, raise awareness of the need for change, demonstrate what can be done and facilitate change at all levels, from the individual switching from car to bus to commute or the company seeking to reduce energy use.

responding to climate change

National Policy

UK policy is to cut greenhouse gas emissions, principally carbon dioxide emissions by 60% by 2050 and to increase the amount of electricity generated from renewables to 10% by 2010. Other supporting elements of Government policy include energy taxes to encourage companies to switch to low carbon energy sources; improved fuel efficiency in cars; encouraging companies to trade in emission quotas to help meet the CO₂ targets; changes in building regulations and grant regimes to improve energy efficiency in factories, offices, homes and schools.

Local authorities are expected to help meet national targets by adopting policies that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions; improve energy efficiency, reduce transport emissions, tackle fuel poverty and prevent methane emissions from landfill. This is currently being reflected in regional planning policy which calls on local authorities to make a firm corporate commitment backed by strong practical measures to reduce greenhouse gases, principally CO₂.

FOCUS for Future Action

Community action to promote sustainable lifestyles by funding suitable programmes and local demonstration projects

Work closely with LSP's, Local Agenda 21 processes and other stakeholder groups and environmental partnerships to promote sustainable action in the community

Initiate public information and engagement programmes to explain issues and develop sustainable solutions

Measuring quality of life in Cumbria with the aim of reversing adverse trends through public policy and community action

local impacts

A recent report⁽¹⁶⁾ suggests that:

- daily temperatures in Cumbria will rise between 1 and 2 degrees by 2050's;
- summer rainfall will reduce by as much as 15% in Cumbria by 2020's;
- winter rainfall in Cumbria will increase by some 15% throughout the first half of the century rising to somewhere between 15% and 30% increase by 2080's depending on emission levels;
- snowfall in Cumbria will decrease by 10% by 2020's falling by a further 35%, possibly 55% from current levels by 2050's; in many parts of Cumbria snow may disappear altogether as we enter the last quarter of the century;
- while predicted changes in sea level are not available for Cumbria increased frequency of flooding around rivers and the coastline is expected;
- milder winters will be characterised by the earlier appearance of leaves on trees, the earlier arrival of migrating species like swallows and insects, including agricultural pests and earlier breeding times for many species;
- higher temperatures will draw in new species to southern areas while those that are comfortable with colder temperatures may be driven northwards or in the case of Arctic relic fish species disappear altogether;
- warmer drier summers are predicted to reduce the rate of recharge of wetland areas and bogs with a decline (or total loss) in both habitat and associated species;
- dryer summers are likely to lead to an increase in outdoor human activity with a consequent increase in the number of outdoor fires;
- higher summer temperatures and drier soils will reduce the productivity of agricultural grassland and reduce yields from crops like potatoes which are irrigated by rain;
- soil quality is likely to be affected by seasonal changes in temperature and rainfall and depending on the combination of weather factors will either result in more vigorous plant growth or stunted, patchy growth, prone to disease and crop failure;
- water quality will deteriorate and the quantity may not be available to meet increased domestic, industrial and agricultural use particularly if there are a series of comparatively dry summers and winters.

FOCUS for Future Action

Develop an energy and water strategy to: reduce wastage of energy and water; reduce CO₂ emissions from council buildings; educate and involve staff in the strategy implementation; use renewable energy technology and sustainable design principles in refurbished and new property; purchase energy from renewable sources and establish a new policy statement which supports national and regional policy on climate change.

Extend this approach to climate change through purchasing contracts for energy efficient electrical appliances, council vehicles, IT equipment and other products and staff travel plans.

Raise awareness of the effects of climate change and promote action in the community to reduce carbon dioxide.

Seek to influence and support waste minimisation measures and energy from landfill gas schemes.

genetically modified foods

the GM debate

Controversy surrounds GM foods. There is considerable concern about the possible effects of GM technology on our food, our health and the environment. While some believe that GM technology can help reduce the damage done to the environment by modern agricultural practices, environmentalists believe that GM crops may have unintended consequences on human health, risk contaminating conventional crops, native wildlife plant species and threaten the viability of organic farming.

The UK Government held a public debate on GM crops and commissioned farm scale evaluations of GM crops and an assessment of their costs and benefits. Government policy is to regulate GM technology in a way that protects human health and the environment. The results of the debate, the trials and the economic study will further inform Government policy. Government will also take advice from ACRE, the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment when considering individual applications for planting GM crops.

Nationally people seem generally uneasy about GM crops and do not support early commercialisation of GM plant technology. A survey of Cumbrians carried out in June 2003⁽¹⁷⁾ showed that: 68% were not comfortable about eating GM foods; 88% thought it very or fairly important to be able to distinguish GM foods (including meat or eggs from GM fed animals) from conventional or organic foods; while 57% of those interviewed agreed strongly or tended to agree that GM technology is likely to damage native species and habitats.

EU legislation

Directive 2001/18/EC provides a procedure for approving or otherwise each application before genetically modified material can be released into the environment or placed on the market. Products derived from GM material are covered by Regulation (EC) 258/97 on novel foods. A second Directive 98/81/EC regulates the contained use of genetic material for research.

the County Council's position

The Council held a debate on GM foods on 24th July 2003 and concluded that there was cause for concern. It therefore decided to ensure, as far as possible, that Cumbria remains free of GM crops and GM food and feed. In support of this resolution the Council resolved to take action to try to prevent GM crops being grown on Council land, being purchased and served in meals on Council premises and also resolved to lobby Government for clarity in labelling of products.



Photo: Freefoto.com

Focus for Future Action

Initiate dialogue with Government on labelling of GM crops, food and feed.

Report to the Council's Scrutiny Panel on the outcome of the national debate and the farm scale evaluations. Monitor and advise Council on future developments.