



Leicester environment city: learning how to make Local Agenda 21, partnerships and participation deliver

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SUMMARY: This paper describes the pioneering experience of the city of Leicester (in the UK) over the last 10 years in developing its Local Agenda 21, and other aspects of its work towards environmental improvement and sustainable development. It includes details of measures to improve public transport and to reduce congestion, traffic accidents, car use and air pollution. It also describes measures to improve housing quality for low-income households, to reduce fossil fuel use and increase renewable energy use and to make the city council's own operations a model for reducing resource use and waste. It also describes how this was done – the specialist working groups that sought to make partnerships work (and their strengths and limitations), the information programmes to win hearts and minds, the many measures to encourage widespread participation (and the difficulties in involving under-represented groups) and the measures to make local governments, businesses and other groups develop the ability and habit of responding to the local needs identified in participatory consultations.

I. INTRODUCTION

LEICESTER, A CITY of 280,000 people located in the East Midlands of the UK, has developed a reputation for making practical progress towards sustainable development. In the summer of 1990, Leicester was designated Britain's first Environment City in recognition of its early efforts to enhance the natural environment of the city and of its political commitment to pioneering improvements in the urban environment. In 1996, the city was selected as a European Sustainable City. This paper reviews Leicester's efforts over 10 years as Environment City and seeks to identify some of the essential lessons learnt. The author acted as director of Leicester Environment City Trust, which later became Environ Trust (Environ), the organization established to act as coordinator of the Environment City initiative. Consequently, the paper emphasizes the process of change in Leicester and presents the perspective of a local NGO.

This paper is presented in four parts. It begins with a short overview of the original, and evolving, purpose of the Environment City project. The rest of the paper considers the three phases of the Environment City initiative that can be recognized with the benefit of hindsight. These three phases might be labelled *partnership*, *participation* and *governance*. Thus Section III discusses an evolving view on partnerships in the city and discusses whether partnerships are a panacea or a pitfall in realizing

sustainable development. Section IV focuses on Leicester's efforts to increase community participation in its Local Agenda 21 and the wider efforts to achieve sustainable development within the city. Section V presents the current framework for change in Leicester. This framework is based on the experiences of successful and failed partnerships and the joys and challenges of participatory approaches, and represents a model of local governance designed to shift Leicester towards a more sustainable future.

Throughout the paper, examples of projects that have been implemented in Leicester are summarized in boxes. These are not always directly related to the narrative text but do give a sense of the scale and nature of Leicester's response to its Environment City designation.

II. THE PURPOSE OF THE ENVIRONMENT CITY PROJECT

ENVIRONMENT CITY WAS one of the first UK initiatives to champion the role of partnerships in delivering sustainable development. The campaign was launched by NGOs – the Civic Trust, Friends of the Earth and the Wildlife Trusts – with the central objective of designating four UK cities as Environment Cities that would then go on to become models of good practice from which others could draw inspiration. In 1990, Leicester was designated as Britain's first Environment City largely because of its pioneering work in the creation and enhancement of open space in the city and its efforts to foster urban wildlife. Leicester had also demonstrated a commitment to improving the urban environment from the highest levels of local government and the academic community. The commitment of the political leadership of Leicester City Council proved to be an essential precondition for success in promoting sustainable development in the city. Since 1990, three other UK cities, Middlesbrough, Peterborough and Leeds, have been designated Environment Cities.

Leicester Environment City began with a strategy designed to emphasize partnership and "holistic" urban solutions which would place all sectors on an equal footing and encourage them to work together towards common goals (see Figure 1).

As the project developed throughout the 1990s the emphasis shifted from "protection of the natural environment" towards "achieving sustainable development". This shift has resulted in certain fundamental challenges for the Environment City project and demanded a shift in the skills and capacities required by those coordinating the project (see Section V). The promotion of sustainable development by an organization perceived in the city to be "green" has also supported the misconception that there is no distinction between sustainable development and the "green agenda". These perceptions have, at times, resulted in some resistance to the promotion of sustainable development particularly from those individuals and organizations that equate environmentalism with constrained economic development.

It is fair to say that we experienced some difficulty in defining precisely what is meant by the phrase "sustainable development". In Leicester, in the past decade, considerable time has been spent reflecting on definitions of sustainable development, deriving policies and principles linked to it and formulating action plans. The outcomes of these deliberations are best seen on the "Action Towards Local Authority Sustainable Development"⁽¹⁾ website (www.sustainability.org.uk).

1. The Action Towards Local Authority Sustainable Development (ATLAS) project has included Leicester, Derby, Nottingham, Dublin and Espoo city councils. It has researched the impact of high-quality motivational training and information on decision-making amongst senior officers and politicians in local government. The project is managed and evaluated by de Montfort University and Environ Trust and is funded by Directorate-General XI of the European Commission.

| Figure 1: Features of the Environment City Model | |
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| Traditional Environmentalism* | Environment City |
| Non-urban focus | Urban focus |
| Single issue | Holism |
| Confrontation | Partnership |
| Problems emphasis | Solutions emphasis |
| *as we perceived it in 1990 | |

For additional detail see Darlow, Alison and Les Newby (1997), "Partnerships: panacea or pitfall?", *Local Environment* Vol 2, No 1.

2. See Roberts, Ian et al (1996), *Local Sustainable Development, Turning Sustainable Development into Practical Action in Our Communities*, Environ Trust.

In 1996, partners in the Environment City project introduced the phrase "local sustainable development" as the desired outcome of their collective work.⁽²⁾ The definition of local sustainable development placed emphasis on the following:

- Aiming to improve the quality of life in Leicester based on a broad definition of welfare and happiness, including non-monetary factors to do with the natural environment and the social needs of the community.
- Seeing economic, social and environmental issues as interlinked and recognizing the need to tackle them in an integrated way.
- Taking account of the impact of development on the natural environment and its capacity to support human activities in all decisions.
- Balancing the importance of individual rights with that of collective responsibilities.
- Seeking cooperation between "experts", the influential and members of the public to ensure that development meets people's needs.

This approach was an attempt to create a vision capable of uniting a diverse range of interests and organizations, and the opportunity for dialogue, partnerships, enhanced mutual understanding and progressive action. In our experience, there are dangers inherent in presenting the concept of sustainable development to people who are unfamiliar with it. Too strong an emphasis on environmental protection, or any aspect of sustainable development, can result in polarization, undermining cooperation and dialogue, and standing in the way of commitments and actions that will realize sustainable development.

In promoting awareness and understanding of sustainable development, however, we have found it useful to think of the process of achieving sustainable development in the way we think of processes for achieving *quality*. Sustainable development then permeates all our actions and is the result of both the values of individuals and the culture of organizations and communities, and of the practical projects and programmes in our communities. In this way, sustainable development becomes a catalyst for change in an organization or a community rather than a description of an end state. Details of Leicester's approach to defining sustainable development can be found in the document *Sustainable Development – What on Earth Does It Mean?*⁽³⁾

III. A MATURING VIEW OF PARTNERSHIP

FOLLOWING ITS ENVIRONMENT City designation, Leicester set up three structures designed to act as catalysts for change in the city. Initially

3. *Sustainable Development – What On Earth Does It Mean?* is a popular presentation of the subject. Preparation of the document involved Stoke, Coventry, Birmingham, Leicester, Derby and Nottingham city councils. The project was funded by the Environment Agency and managed by Environ Trust, from where copies of the document may be obtained.

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| Box 1: | Examples of Projects - Leicester Environment City Programme |
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Leicester continues to promote the Environment City initiative. Examples include:

- 24 Environment City fact sheets;
- a regular Environment City page in the city council's Leicester Link magazine;
- an information technology-based initiative which has led to the setting up of "Greenscreens", which received 2,396 visits in the last quarter;
- a weekly "Greenlife" page in the local newspaper, the Leicester Mercury;
- a business line service, run for businesses by Environ and funded by the council, and the Environment City internet site, which is linked to the council's own site;
- the EcoHouse visitor centre, part-funded by the council, which averages 15,000 visitors per year;
- the Ark, a city-centre shop and information centre which averages 1,150 visitors per week.

a multi-sector Environment City Board was brought together under the chairmanship of the vice-chancellor of de Montfort University. This board was constituted to ensure that Leicester City Council, Leicester County Council, the business community and local community groups had numerically equal representation. The board established a charity, Environment City Trust Limited, to provide executive support to the board and to manage the Environment City initiative. Leicester City Council and Leicestershire County Council committed £25,000 each per year for three years. Additional funding was secured from the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) to support a research officer during the initial three year period. Overall funding of approximately £65,000 per annum allowed the recruitment of three officers responsible for coordinating the process of change, undertaking research, promoting the project and raising funds.

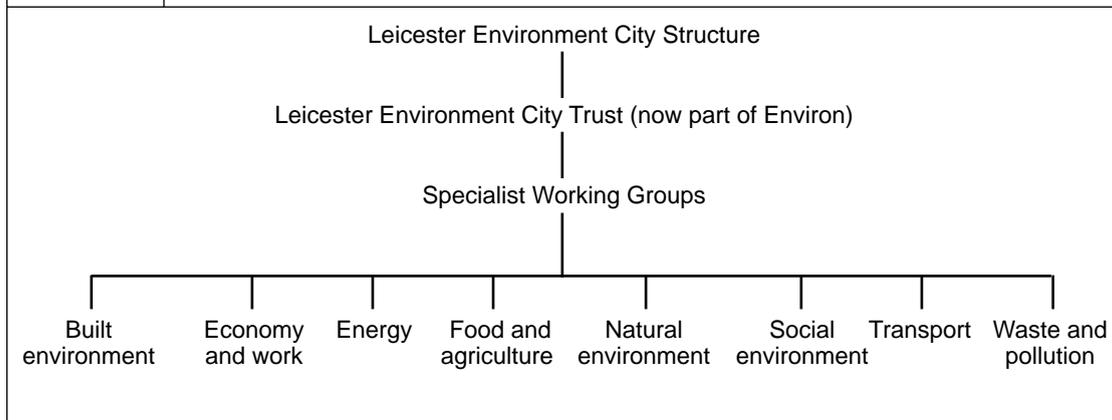
Having the leadership of the Environment City campaign resting with a local charity has resulted in a range of benefits. The charity has maintained a steady commitment to sustainable development in the city during times of political change. It has raised funds for innovative projects and has fostered relationships between local people, local government and the business community. In essence, the charity has become increasingly entrepreneurial, as it has been forced to create a private sector culture. Environment City Trust is now a part of Environ, which employs approximately 40 staff and continues to drive the programme of change towards sustainable development.

An early initiative of Environment City Trust was to create and manage eight specialist working groups (SWGs) that brought together decision makers, academics, business and interest groups around eight specific themes (see Figure 2). These working groups were seen as the main route for delivering change and were given the task of creating a strategic vision for their topic area, widening community participation, auditing the city's environment and developing practical demonstration projects.

This approach to partnership development has had mixed results. Those involved in the working groups developed a range of practical projects. For example, the transport SWG created a Leicestershire cycling strategy with the target of doubling levels of cycling, which has resulted in a significant increase in the numbers of cyclists. However, a full time member of staff, employed by Environment City Trust, was required to manage and support the SWG structure. In the first three years of the Environment City project this post required approximately £30,000 per annum to maintain.

As the Environment City project developed, many important lessons were learnt about partnerships. Reflecting on this early phase of the

Figure 2: The Initial Leicester Environment City Structure



4. Darlow, Alison and Les Newby (1997), "Partnerships: panacea or pitfall?", *Local Environment* Vol 2, No 1.

project, Les Newby and Alison Darlow write:

"It has become clear that partnerships do not achieve results as a matter of course. Commitment, resources and the right set of people and circumstances are all needed if they are to work. Equally, there is a realization that partnerships have limitations as well as benefits. Without doubt partnerships can oil the wheels of change and it would be a grave mistake to abandon them. But at the same time, partnership is not the yellow brick road to a sustainable city that it is sometimes made out to be."⁽⁴⁾

In the later stages of the Environment City project, it has become clear that partnership arrangements such as the specialist working groups can be extremely valuable in creating relationships between individuals and organizations that encourage joint working. But using a formal partnership structure, such as these working groups, will not necessarily result in significant in-house action within participating organizations or in major projects within the community. In summary, the Environment City project has demonstrated partnership arrangements to be of great value if they are embraced with a commitment to dialogue and to mutual understanding and with an emphasis on action. If this spirit is achieved, the partnerships effectively increase the city's capacity to respond to the challenges it faces in pursuit of improved quality of life and sustainable development.

Finally, very early on in the process of establishing the Environment City project, it became clear that a lack of additional funding was a significant barrier to innovation. For example, the working groups formulated projects but often were unable to execute them as no funding was available. As a consequence of this, a grant scheme was established to act as "seed capital". We believe the success of this scheme illustrates an important principle; within a city-wide strategy for sustainable development, it is important to provide funds to allow innovative projects to be encouraged and implemented.

Leicester's experience of multi-sector partnerships, and that from elsewhere, suggests many of the same conclusions. Research on networks and partnership, for instance Stoker and Young,⁽⁵⁾ highlight the importance of factors such as trust, information exchange and mutual dependency in successful partnership arrangements. Given the scale and wide-ranging nature of the challenge of sustainable development, there is no doubt that

5. Stoker, G and S Young (1993), *Cities in the 1990s*, Longman, Harlow.

work by all sectors of society is needed. Partnerships can lead to better coordination and can help ensure that organizations work in harmony. They can also mean wider support for sustainable development initiatives and hence increase the chances of success. However there are limitations to what partnership can achieve and, if managed badly, partnership arrangements can, in our experience, result in conflict, frustration and wasted time. Some key lessons include the following:

- *The role of multi-sector partnerships must be absolutely clear.* Partnership-based groups will tend to waste time discussing what their function is if it is not obvious from the outset.
- *The notion of numerically equal partnership between sectors on all occasions can be naïve.* The board of Leicester Environment City and the early specialist working groups attempted to create numerically equal representation of the public, private and voluntary sectors. However, it is more important that partnerships bring together a broad spread of those with most ability to act, are seen to be reasonably balanced and are well-informed about the hopes, concerns and ideas of the wider community.
- *The unique role of local government.* Given the unique role of local government as a local service provider and regulator and as a democratically accountable voice of the people, it should have a strong role in partnerships. It should not, however, exert too much dominance, otherwise the participation of and action by other sectors will be reduced.
- *Successful partnerships are usually based around mutual gain.* Ideally, organizations should get at least as much out of partnerships as they put in and this may mean concentrating on specific opportunities.
- *Partnerships must bring together not just the right organizations but the right individuals to represent them.* Ideal representatives combine a rare blend of seniority, commitment, time and ability. It is especially important that the chair of any group be selected with these attributes in mind.
- *The practicalities of partnerships are important.* They need to be realistically resourced and meetings need to be of a suitable size and frequency. In our experience, meetings of groups such as specialist working groups should involve fewer than 20 people and be held on the basis of need. Sub-groups can provide a useful means of getting on with specific jobs between main meetings.
- *Back-up support helps partnerships to achieve success.* Access to staff resources, budgets and information are all-important. The ability to carry out research on behalf of a partnership and to network with other organizations also increases the chances of success.
- *In practice, one organization or another will need to start the ball rolling* and make the first move in bringing a partnership of organizations together. So long as they have no objectionable vested interests and are given suitable resources, independent voluntary or “arms-length” organizations can be well-placed to do this.
- *Partnership meetings and relationships need to be carefully facilitated and should be action-oriented.* Experience in Leicester suggests that multi-sector partnership meetings can be very difficult to facilitate. Often, influential and energetic individuals with widely differing paradigms and agendas will sit around the same table. Such meetings can be chaotic, are often dominated by the most vocal and can be inconclusive in terms of specific commitments and actions arising. Suggestions on how to deal with this type of scenario are outlined in Section V.

IV. AN EMPHASIS ON PARTICIPATION

IF THE FIRST wave of activity in the Environment City project focused on *partnership*, the second emphasized *participation* and *planning*. In 1994, Leicester launched its Local Agenda 21 project entitled *Blueprint for Leicester*, consisting two main parts. First, an extensive public participation exercise was used to identify the views and aspirations of local people and organizations. Second, the results of this exercise, along with input from various practitioners, were used to create a shared vision, guiding principles and action plans for the future of Leicester.

The first phase of public participation in *Blueprint for Leicester* took place between October 1994 and October 1995. Several different methods were used in order to reach individuals and the many diverse communities within the city. A media campaign raised the profile of the blueprint

Box 2: Examples of Projects - Transport, Air quality and Energy

Transport: A series of measures to respond to immediate public concerns and to reduce congestion has been developed including:

- Leicester Environmental Road Tolling Study (LERTS) – a comprehensive, quality bus priority corridor with associated park-and-ride site to enable an experiment in road-user charging, to be run by the UK Government's Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions. Use of park-and-ride exceeded expectations and increased use of other buses on the corridor was also recorded.
- "Feet First" – a major traffic-calming, 20mph zone, and a "Safer Routes to School" project in the inner-city. This involves three primary schools.
- "Evington Safer Routes to School" – a major "Safer Routes to School" project involving three secondary and five primary schools. Funded by local government with contributions from the national NGO, Sustrans.
- "Real Time Information" – the first top quality bus "real time" information system in the country. Jointly funded by the city and county councils and by bus companies, Arriva Fox and First Leicester.

Air quality and pollution control: Leicester City Council has developed an air quality monitoring network in the city.

- Over the last five years the council has invested more than £300,000 in the monitoring network. This now comprises six fixed monitoring stations and a mobile monitoring station, using a total of 16 pollutant analysers. The system tracks the atmospheric concentrations of oxides of nitrogen (NOX), sulphur dioxide, ozone, carbon monoxide and PM10 particles (suspended particulate matter below a certain size which has greater impacts on health).
- Development of air quality modelling tools within the city. These are essential to local air quality management work, providing the only means of predicting future levels of pollution on a city-wide basis.
- The provision of a 24-hour call-out monitoring service, enabling a rapid response (target: one hour, average response: 25 minutes) to pollution complaints and incidents, operating during the daytime, in the evenings and at weekends.

Energy: Leicester is the main energy advice centre for the East Midlands with 28 satellite centres throughout the region. Website: <http://www.energy-advice.co.uk>.

- The Local Energy Efficiency Advice Drop-in Centre (EEAC) has a shopfront location in the city centre from which it gives free advice to householders and businesses. It specializes in advice to ethnic minority businesses and disadvantaged groups and uses an energy bus to take information directly to schools and other groups.
- In 1998/99, the shop received 12,472 visitors and 2,626 telephone or postal enquiries. £46,000 worth of energy-saving equipment was sold during the year including 7,000 locally produced low-energy light bulbs.
- Leicester's home energy strategy aims to reduce the consumption of non-renewable sources of energy from homes and enable all households to have access to affordable warmth and a healthy living environment.

and a short questionnaire was printed both in the local newspaper, the *Leicester Mercury*, and in the city council *Link* magazine which is delivered to all homes. It invited people to say what they would improve in the city and provided a simple opportunity for anybody to take part. Approximately 800 people responded. The survey was followed up by a series of face-to-face interviews. A number of interest groups which tended to be under-represented in consultation were then targeted for involvement and these included young people, the disabled, older people, women, ethnic groups, businesses, unions and voluntary groups. Consultation included facilitated meetings, completed vision packs, a Schools Design Challenge project, a video and poems. In all, 88 groups took part. Experts from all eight Environment City specialist working groups and from special city council task forces were invited to recommend policies and actions to make Leicester more sustainable. Although some initiatives worked better than others, the combination of methods succeeded in gaining relatively broad and representative participation. The results have been collated both in summary form and in a comprehensive blueprint finding report.⁽⁶⁾ Table 1 summarizes the different participation methods used and what they have achieved.

Leicester City Council has furthered this consultation process with a commitment to a more strategic approach to consultation and participation, and has published a statement committing it to effective participation with the people of Leicester to improve the quality of the decisions it makes on their behalf.

Consultation is also developing as an integral part of departmental business and service plans within the city council and in the formation of major policies. Guidelines for managers have been issued recently that include reference to the role of consultation in planning services. An audit

6. Full details of the "Blueprint for Leicester" project can be found on the Environ Trust website at www.environ.org.uk.

| Table 1: The Different Participation Methods Used | |
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| Participation method | Outcomes |
| "Visioning" workshops - certain types of groups, representing sections of the community whose voice may not be heard as loudly as others, were targeted to take part in facilitated discussions where they could express their own vision for Leicester. These included groups of young people, ethnic minorities, women, older people, people with disabilities, workplace groups, people on low incomes and small businesses. | Eighty-eight groups were involved. Some of these under-represented groups were easier to reach than others (see "Lessons Learned", below). |
| "Snapshot" questionnaire - a short questionnaire was delivered to every household and distributed through the <i>Leicester Mercury</i> (the local newspaper), asking people about their likes, dislikes and aspirations for Leicester. This ensured that everyone would have the chance to put forward their ideas. | 803 questionnaires were returned. |
| "Neighbourhood" questionnaire - a second questionnaire survey was carried out on a random sample basis in several contrasting neighbourhoods, to gain a more detailed picture of the views of a cross-section of people. | 748 households were interviewed. |
| Specialist working groups input - each of the working groups was asked to prepare a set of expert recommendations relating to their own topic area, including: guiding principles, key actions and potential sustainable development indicators. | All eight specialist working groups (with representatives from 29 organizations) made recommendations. |
| Task forces - the council set up eight internal task forces to examine the scope for its own action. | Each task force made a series of recommendations. |

of consultation in 1999 described around 240 initiatives that took place during the previous year, including:

- regular residents' surveys, including booster samples of African Caribbean residents;
- public consultation on the council budget through a "citizens' jury";
- involvement of young people in the democratic process through the Young People's Council (YPC);
- a survey of 10,000 people on crime and disorder (including focus groups of hard-to-reach people, such as young people aged 8-14, West Indian senior citizens, homeless hostel residents and young African Caribbean people).

Recent consultation on the new political structures was backed up with publicity material in the main local Asian languages. Focus groups were used to get the views of young people still in education and those in work. The city council funds a number of hard-to reach groups, including the Irish community, the Pakistan Youth and Community Association, and the Gujarat Hindu Association, to learn more about their needs and concerns.

In 1996, the second stage of the blueprint process began. It involved developing a shared vision for the future of Leicester along with guiding principles and action plans to tackle the main issues highlighted in the consultation. Representatives from key organizations took part in two full-day shared vision workshops. These used a facilitator and an interactive style to help participants draw up draft vision statements and guiding principles, based on the community and expert views compiled in the findings report. Bringing the key organizations together in this way has allowed a good cross-fertilization of ideas between different organizations and disciplines. Equally, it has helped to build partnerships (or strengthen existing ones) that can take a lead role in devising and implementing action plans.

In parallel, a high-level partnership was created, giving senior representatives from the major organizations and communities in Leicester the chance to help take things forward. The Millennium Partners – a group of chief executives from business, local public authorities, the voluntary sector and the media, has been highlighted as the most appropriate group to take on this role. Action plans were then drafted for each priority issue and these are currently in their implementation stage.

Changes introduced by the UK national government are influencing the course of Leicester's Local Agenda 21. Local authorities have been charged with producing community plans and with reviewing the delivery of their services to ensure that they are providing "best value". Major consultation was carried out prior to producing Leicester's community plan, which drew on the wealth of existing research and data held in the council. The community plan has evolved from the efforts to create Leicester's Local Agenda 21 and represents a significant shift towards "mainstreaming" sustainable development in the city. Questionnaires were sent to every home in the city and 2,500 were returned. Questionnaires were also sent to all secondary schools, and three focus groups were organized, one specifically for young people. The final draft of the plan is out for consultation, giving people in the city a further opportunity to comment on its contents. The results of consultation on the plan will set the city's agenda for the coming years.

Many lessons have been learned since the launch of the blueprint project.

- *The whole process has taken far longer than expected.* Flexibility over the timescale has been needed at every stage. In some cases, such as during initial community participation, lengthening the process was helpful but in other cases, hindsight suggests that a more rigid timetable might have been better.
- *A broad range of participatory techniques is necessary.* Broadly, the initial participation phase of the project worked well – especially the combination of different techniques used to involve people. And there was a surprising (and encouraging) degree of consensus about many of the issues facing the city.
- *It is extremely difficult to reach under-represented groups.* The results of the outreach work to involve under-represented groups were, however, patchy. Some groups, such as older people and people with disabilities, were relatively easy to reach because they were already organized into groups and therefore geared up to becoming involved. Where this was not the case, such as with people on low incomes, the process met with less success.

Perhaps the biggest mistake in Leicester's Local Agenda 21 Programme has been the failure to establish an independent partnership-based steering group right from the start. Such a group would have given the process added credibility, as well as a means of keeping within stricter timetables. The failure to put such a group in place subsequently hindered progress and probably caused confusion amongst the public and the organizations involved. The fallout from this mistake continues to the present day.

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| Box 3: | Examples of Projects - Local Agenda 21 and Sustainable Development Indicators |
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Local Agenda 21 action plans: Ten complete Local Agenda 21 action plans were published in May 1998 with a further five in draft form. These plans outline a vision, the guiding principles and the main aims and targets for 15 theme areas. They contain 78 main aims and targets with a further 165 detailed points of action. Twenty-nine different organizations took part in putting together the action plans. They cover:

- transport, economic development, housing and health, land use;
- the quality of the city centre, energy, wildlife, parks and open spaces, arts, culture and leisure;
- waste management and resource use, crime and community safety, opportunities for young people;
- pollution control, social care.

The plans were published in the Leicester Mercury, Leicester's daily paper, and formed part of a touring exhibition. They are monitored by Environ, Leicester's environmental charity, and are now one of the key foundations of the community plan (discussed below) due to be published in September 2000.

Sustainable development indicators: Since 1995, the city has used indicators developed with local people through discussions and surveys. People were asked to list up to eight things that would indicate whether their quality of life was getting better or worse. Although these indicators include issues out of the council's control, they help identify local people's priorities. The council is working in partnership with other agencies to address these issues, and these indicators will feature in the community plan. Website: <http://www.leicester.gov.uk>.

V. ENHANCING LOCAL GOVERNANCE

THIS SECTION SEEKS to draw together the experiences of Leicester Environment City into a framework for positive change in the urban environment. It is presented in three sub-sections. The first describes the evolving need for facilitation skills to ensure that the process of shifting the city towards sustainable development is, itself, sustained. The second sub-section presents views on how the process of change can best be

encouraged, in individuals, in organizations and in wider communities. The third sub-section then draws together a framework for local sustainable development from the experiences of the Leicester Environment City initiative. It is an attempt to summarize an approach to local governance that includes not only the political and administrative institutions of local government but also the relationships between government and the people of Leicester. Our experience suggests that this approach, properly understood and applied, will result in significant progress towards improved and environmentally sustainable quality of life in the city.

a. The Role of the Facilitator

It has become clear that sustainable development in Leicester is about much more than environmental policy defined in terms of departments, politicians, projects and programmes. It requires a rich mix of institutions, policies and values. This mix is not static. Rather, it is a dynamic system in its own right and might be considered a political eco-system.⁽⁷⁾ Such processes require careful facilitation and, in Leicester, this process of facilitation has emerged as an essential element of the later stages of the Environment City programme.

In essence, the quality of our communities and their capacity to become more sustainable rests in relationships. These essential relationships cannot be brought about solely by government; rather, they are the result of the interactions of all citizens: friends, parents, employees, citizens and so on.

A potential pitfall in the work to create dialogue and build relationships has emerged recently. To create dialogue between individuals, be they residents of a local housing estate or members of the business community or officers in local government, a *facilitator* is required. This role involves impartiality, ensuring that everyone's voice is heard and that the principles of dialogue are adhered to; the facilitator cannot be simultaneously the champion of sustainable development. The moment the facilitator disagrees with a view or attempts to push an issue, he or she loses the role. This situation has been witnessed on many occasions. For example, whilst working with a group of local residents, the issue of parking is raised. The group decides it wants more car parking spaces whilst the facilitator is bursting to interject with ideas on public transport, walking, cycling, working from home and so on. The moment these ideas are expressed, the facilitator becomes the "expert" and his or her ability to create dialogue is lost: one cannot be both facilitator and expert. One solution has been simply to create a distinction between the role of facilitator and the role of "expert" or "representative of sustainable development". Often, this results in a need for two people to attend a meeting, one to facilitate, one to be the "voice of sustainable development". The facilitator remains impartial and trusts that the process of dialogue will result in conversations and consequent actions that support and deliver more sustainable development.

When working in our wider communities, a similar dilemma is often present. Much of Leicester's work on sustainable development and Local Agenda 21 might be described as "community development". It recognizes that in different parts of the city, and in different organizations, sustainable development will take different forms but one consistent feature is a deep level of participation. *Concepts of good governance or democracy are implicit in our various definitions of sustainable development. But what happens when communities express aspirations for ring roads or out-of-town*

7. This view is argued by Chris Patten (a former UK Minister of the Environment) in the 2000 Reith Lectures, which can be read at www.bbc.co.uk.

shopping complexes? What should be our response to publicly supported leisure schemes that encourage huge increases in car usage? Whilst participatory local democracy is the most sustainable form of government, there are questions as to whether it can, in these days of mass media and short-term political horizons, make difficult decisions for the sake of those in distant places and for future generations.

Box 4: Examples of Projects - Leicester's Partnership for the Future

This partnership, chaired by the leader of the council, consists of representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors and the Young People's Council. The partnership is responsible for managing the city's community plan. Launched four years ago, the partnership published the first "Vision for Leicester" in May 1998, and oversaw the publication of the Local Agenda 21 action plans. The vision is for Leicester to be a "...premier city in Europe... a city with a strong economy, a healthy, caring and educated society, a safe and attractive environment and improving quality of life – a sustainable city."

A key priority for the coming year is to work with the Partnership for the Future to ensure that the community plan carries the vision and actions of the Local Agenda 21 action plans forward. A toolkit is also being developed to assist the use of the Local Agenda 21 action plans throughout the "best value" process. Through the European Community Indicators Project, funded by Directorate General XI of the European Commission, we also intend to improve the resonance of the city's sustainable indicators by developing more community-based indicators. We continue to seek opportunities for further funding and will be developing a number of bids for European Objective 2 funding this year. For example, Leicester City Council and Environ plan to work with small businesses in Leicester to develop "green commuter plans".

b. The Process of Change

What follows are thoughts on how we might approach the work of promoting more sustainable communities. Clearly, there is a wide range of skills required to realize sustainable development in the urban context. This includes skills in what might be called sectoral practices, for example, transport management, waste management, energy efficiency, ecological building design, nature conservation, economic development and so on. It also includes essential management skills such as the ability to design and implement management systems, to plan effectively, to evaluate progress and so on. The ideas expressed in this section are designed to complement these skills. They represent lessons on how change takes place in people, in organizations and in communities, and emphasize the values that have been most appropriate in the efforts to make Leicester a sustainable city.

The ideas expressed below have emerged from many hours of discussion, training and facilitation in local government and in the business community. In addition, many of them have been inspired by the work of "systems thinkers" such as Peter Senge⁽⁸⁾ who have challenged the view that we can consider our world as a set of separate and unrelated forces. Experience suggests that we cannot tackle sustainable development if we try and break apart the problems or fragment the world. Also, if we fail to understand the systemic nature of our communities then our hard work can backfire in subtle ways. Well-intentioned actions can result in responses that often offset the benefits of the intervention. Peter Senge has described systems thinking as "a discipline for seeing wholes"⁽⁹⁾ and has suggested that the unhealthiness of our world today is in direct proportion to our inability to see it as a whole. The ideas that follow have been

8. See, for example, Senge, Peter M (1990), *The Fifth Discipline*, Century Business.

9. See reference 8, Chapter 5.

derived from Leicester’s attempts to understand sustainable development in the light of systems thinking.

How do communities and organizations transform? If we accept that sustainable development is a catalyst for change, as suggested in Section II, then the obvious question arises, “How does change take place in communities and organizations?” Figure 3 illustrates a conceptual framework that has proven useful when formulating plans for change in local authorities, businesses and communities in Leicester.

| | | Tools for Transformation | |
|------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| | | How we are (Internal) | What we do (External) |
| Individual | I values/ perceptions | II behaviour | |
| Collective | III culture | IV practice | |

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The matrix suggests that individuals and groups have an “internal dimension” (represented by the left-hand column). For individuals, this refers to *perceptions* and *values*, those things that people hold to be of great importance. For groups of people, perhaps in families, neighbourhoods or in the workplace, this internal dimension may be described as *culture*. Equally, both individually and collectively, there is an “external dimension” (represented by the right-hand column). For individuals this refers to *behaviour*. For groups it might be called *practice*. The model is designed to show that if we want to transform, for example, an organization there is a need to be working in all four boxes, all of which are interconnected. Ken Wilbur describes this process in more detail.¹⁰ Importantly, real and lasting change is unlikely to occur if we fail to “work” in the left-hand column.

This framework can be of great practical value. Imagine, for example, working with senior officers in a local authority to consider how their urban environment might be improved. In our experience, there is a tendency to move into box IV, to think about the practices the authority might adopt, for example, improved waste management, funds for energy efficiency and the use of renewables, more local or ethical purchasing, road traffic tolling and so on. However, considering Figure 1, there is the need also to appraise the culture of the team and their ways of working (box III). It might be necessary to review the local authority’s historic progress towards sustainable development and to explore what has

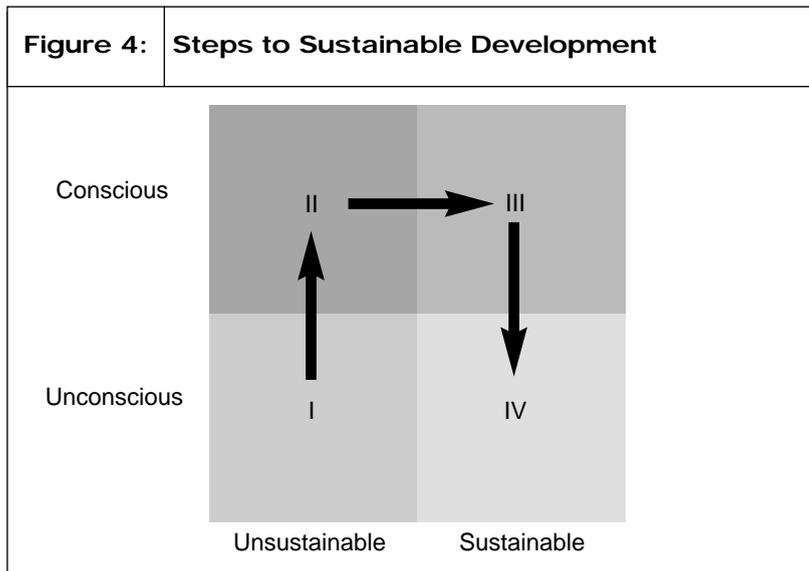
10. Wilbur, K (1996), *A Brief History of Everything*, Gill and MacMillan.

worked well and what could have been done better. This conversation, if well-facilitated, would force the group to confront cultural issues that are getting in the way of change towards sustainable development. Equally, it will be important to help the officers reflect on their own feelings about the idea and practice of sustainable development. How does it resonate with their values (box I)? Do they feel committed to making changes? What practical steps can they make in their own lives both at work and at home (box II)? In our experience, transformation occurs when organizations enquire, visualize improvements and act in each of the four areas of the matrix.

This understanding can be of considerable practical value when working to effect change. In the period 1995-1998, Leicester developed a training programme designed to enhance the understanding and application of sustainable development amongst senior officers and politicians in local government. The ATLAS programme, funded by Directorate General XI of the European Community and evaluated by de Montfort University, is based on the framework presented in Figure 3. Details of the ATLAS training programme can be found in the document *ATLAS – Designing and Delivering Training for Sustainable Development*,⁽¹¹⁾ which is available from Environ.

How does change occur for individuals? The efforts to promote change in Leicester have demanded repeatedly an answer to the questions “How can we influence the behaviour of individuals?” and “How can we encourage individual practices that are more sensitive to sustainable development?” In the early days of Environment City, considerable effort was spent on bringing local and global environmental issues to the attention of people across the city, utilizing carefully researched statistics and polished presentations. We believe this approach had some value; it acted as a “wake up call” for some and it caught the interest of many. But many people expressed concerns that the approach was “too negative” and led to shame and guilt.

11. *ATLAS - Designing and Delivering Training for Sustainable Development* is an output of the ATLAS project, see reference 1.



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Consequently, a considerable effort was made to consider how individuals might be encouraged to support a commitment to sustainable development and to improvements in the urban environment. Figure 4 presents a framework which suggests the stages in individuals' understanding and application of sustainable development.

Many individuals behave in ways that could be described as unsustainable and they are unconscious of that fact (box I). A conversation, some experience or access to information then acts as a "wake up call", raising awareness of the unsustainable and undesirable nature of the activities (box II). Feeling a commitment to sustainable development, the individual may make conscious efforts to change behaviour (box III). Finally, the sustainable behaviour becomes habitual (box IV).

Again, this model has proven to be a powerful diagnostic tool when promoting sustainable development. The need to broaden the appeal of sustainable development led directly to the creation of the Turning the Tide project. In December 1995, the city council, Environ, and Leicester Promotions, the city's promotions agency, began a programme of raising environmental awareness in the city. Since then, seven campaigns have been run under the Turning the Tide initiative. These include:

- three month-long campaigns, with a local focus, offering clear, concise information;
- giving people the opportunity to take simple positive action to make a difference to the quality of their environment;
- using a variety of media and adopting professional marketing techniques; and
- monitoring responses through follow-up campaigns.

Following each campaign, questionnaire and telephone interviews were undertaken involving a sample of Leicester residents. Between eight and 14 per cent of respondents were able to recall the campaigns and claimed to have changed their behaviour as a consequence. Around 30 per cent of people were able to recall at least one aspect of any campaign. In May 1998, 20,000 water butts were sold as a result of the water campaign, allowing local individuals to capture rainwater for gardening use; and in October 1998, 40,000 energy saving radiator panels were sold. During the energy campaign in 1988, the number of visits to the Energy Advice Centre increased three-fold. BBC Radio Leicester, the *Leicester Mercury*, Severn Trent Water and Pedigree pet foods, amongst others, supported the initiative directly through the provision of expertise and

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| Box 5: | Examples of Projects - Land Use Planning |
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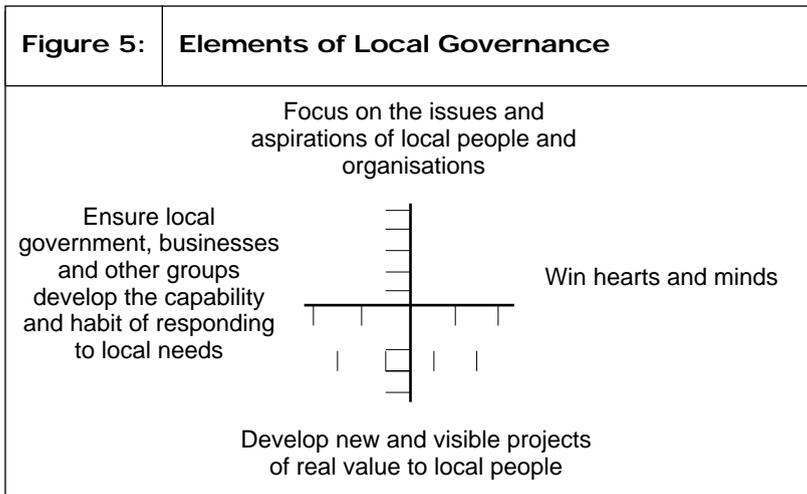
Sustainable development appraisals have been carried out for the drafts of the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Structure Plan and the City of Leicester Local Plan that are under preparation. The sustainability appraisals have resulted in greater emphasis on such issues as mixed development, greater use of public transport and emphasis on walking and cycling as significant transport options. Sustainable development targets and indicators are also being developed. Visit <http://www.leicester.gov.uk/planning> for examples of Leicester's sustainable development indicators.

Action toward maintaining a quality environment does not stop at the city boundary. As part of the LGA, Leicester has been involved at regional level in the preparation of "Viewpoints on the East Midlands Environment", which will lead to the Regional Environment Strategy. We have also produced sustainable development indicators for the East Midlands. Working with other regional partners, sustainable development appraisals have been carried out, including the Spatial Development Strategy (Draft Regional Planning Guidance) and the Regional Economic Strategy. Website: <http://www.emrlga.gov.uk>.

resources. In 1999, Turning the Tide won the National Westminster Bank's Public Information Award at the British Environmental Media Awards.

c. A Framework for Change

Planning for sustainable development in Leicester has been complex and the city's approach has evolved as the Environment City project has progressed. Figure 5 brings together the experience of 10 years and attempts to summarize it in a simple structure that shows the activities one might expect to observe in a city dedicated to, and actively pursuing, sustainable development. Our experience suggests that the process is best overseen by an NGO that is responsible for driving the process, enrolling individuals and organizations and regularly monitoring progress. Such an organization would need to combine the art of facilitation and dialogue with the science of management systems and best practice technologies in order to embed sustainable development in the values, culture and practices of a city.



Focus on the issues and aspirations of local people and organizations. The various techniques of consultation and participation are applied with great care to contact as many groups as possible within the community. Issues and aspirations are clarified, the democratic process is enhanced and understanding and trust is built in the community.

Ensure local government, businesses and other groups develop the capability and habit of responding to local needs. This capacity to respond to local issues is often the "missing ingredient" in city-wide strategies for sustainable development. In our experience, four types of activities are essential:

- Building multi-sector partnerships within the community and partnerships that deal with single issues raised by the community. In addition, enhanced relationships between local government and national government can result in funds being more readily available for local projects.
- Developing a process of action planning for local government, public sector organizations and businesses which capture targets that collectively comprise a strategy for sustainable development in the city. These plans should be supported by management systems, such as EMAS, within organizations. In particular, local government must develop the capacity and habit of being responsive to local needs.

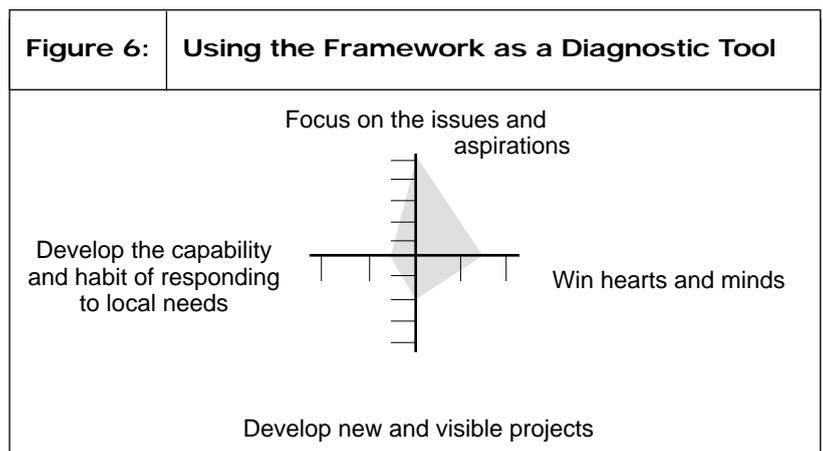
- Supporting NGOs, pressure groups and individuals within the community to become active in the pursuit of sustainable development. This may involve providing financial and organizational development support. It may involve helping individuals to understand the systems of local governance.
- Securing additional funding from external agencies such as national government, the European Commission, the private sectors and so on for campaigns and projects. In addition, make “venture” funding available throughout the community to support innovation and commitment of local people.

Win hearts and minds. A range of activities will build knowledge of, and commitment to, the drive for sustainable development in the city. Many activities are possible and might include:

- Creating a shared vision for the future of the city involving as many individuals as possible and widely communicated in the local media.
- Proactively winning-over influential individuals in the public and private sectors through training and briefing events. “Influencing the influential” is a key part of the strategy for sustainable development.
- Running awareness-raising campaigns throughout the city.
- Maximizing every opportunity to celebrate successes as projects are implemented.
- Developing techniques, such as community sustainable development indicators, that involve local people in the measurement of progress.

Develop new and visible projects of real value to local people. Efforts to build partnerships, consult the community, win hearts and minds and so on are only as valuable as the hard projects they deliver into the community. Practical projects will meet local needs and simultaneously demonstrate the practices of sustainable development. Knowledge of best practice in a range of areas such as transport, energy, waste management, economic development and so on will be required.

The framework may be a useful diagnostic tool. For example, many Local Agenda 21 Programmes in the UK have involved considerable effort in seeking to understand the needs and aspirations of the people of this city. However, building the capacity to respond to these issues has proven more difficult. LA 21 projects have often involved the generation of many ideas and have raised both awareness and expectations in local communities. They have not always resulted in new and visible projects. This situation might be expressed in an illustration as shown in Figure 6.



It is becoming evident that the next area of focus in our attempts to make Leicester more sustainable lies in clarifying and testing techniques of action planning that increase the capacity of local government and other agencies to respond to the issues raised by our communities. But simply building capacity to respond is also not enough. The projects

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Box 6: | Examples of Projects - Management Systems and Leadership from Local Government |
|---------------|---|

EMAS: Leicester City Council has recognized the need to demonstrate that it is organizing its own environmental affairs and the need to report progress to the community. The tool adopted for this environmental management is the Eco-management and Audit Scheme (EMAS). The whole organization (excluding schools) was registered successfully for EMAS in July 1997, one of only five local authorities and the largest organization on the register in the UK. After one year, good progress has been made on a number of targets: the council has reduced water consumption by 10 per cent, paper consumption by nearly 30 per cent and increased the use of bicycles to work by 50 per cent. The renewable energy programme now delivers 12 per cent of the council's energy requirements. The targets that are proving most challenging relate to staff transport. However, through EMAS, the council is now able to monitor these problem areas and is trying to develop corrective action. EMAS is the independently verified system that sets out how this is achieved.

Leadership from local government: Leicester city councillors agreed the following priorities as part of the developing community plan. These stem from a review of the council's "Strategic Direction", which has guided the organization since 1997. Leicester's community plan is due to be launched in September 2000, at which time the council's strategic priorities will be reviewed.

The council's key objectives are to promote the integrity and sustainable development of Leicester as a major European city committed to social justice, economic prosperity, environmental quality and cultural diversity by giving priority to:

- Education
 - raising educational standards
- Social inclusion
 - regenerating Leicester
 - supporting families
 - securing better housing
 - combating poverty
 - improving equalities
 - reducing health inequalities
- Protecting the environment
 - integrating transport
 - addressing crime and the fear of crime
- Modernizing local and regional government
 - engaging in local and regional democracy
 - achieving "best value"

developed in response to local needs must be based on the practices of sustainable development. Community-led development and sustainable development are not necessarily the same things.

Experience in Leicester over the past ten years suggests that shifting the city towards sustainable development is possible but exceptionally difficult. However, our experience suggests that a vision of the city based on the politics of involvement and the practices of sustainable development is wholly relevant to today's challenges. The practical progress to date has demonstrated that change is possible and has created confidence in the process. Ten years hence, I believe we will be reporting on developments in Leicester that demonstrate that the city is becoming an ever more equal, humane and environmentally sustainable city, a place of reasoned prosperity and great hope.