

**SUSTAINABLE HOMES:**

**HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS AND  
LOCAL AGENDA 21**



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**Sustainable Homes**

# CONTENTS

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Introduction	1
Global and European Context	2
International level agreements	
Europe	
Co-ordination of Local Agenda 21	4
Local Authorities and Local Agenda 21	6
A range of different approaches	
Links to other sectors	
Ideas into action – EMAS and HECA Action	
Summary	
Housing Associations and Local Agenda 21	10
The Way Ahead	15
Annex 1    Extracts from the Aalborg Charter	
Annex 2    Examples of Local Agenda 21 Policies	

## INTRODUCTION

This report has been commissioned by Sustainable Homes as part of its work of promoting environmental policies in housing.

Just as housing associations are getting to grips with what environmental policies they should adopt, so local authorities have been working out what their role should be in promoting “sustainable development” and what their relationship should be with local business and voluntary groups. There are large gaps at present between the rhetoric of sustainable development, at national, European and global levels and the perception of individuals and organisations who still have to work and live in the world as it is.

Local Agenda 21 is potentially the bridge which brings all sectors of the community together to consider what is meant by a good “quality of life” and how it can be achieved given the constraints of limited natural resources. It provides a context for any organisation concerned with human welfare, which must include housing associations, to consider how to achieve their aims in ways that are not self-defeating because of a failure to take full account of the wider - local, national and global - context in which they are working.

This report sets out to explain the wider context of Local Agenda 21; to describe how local authorities are coming to terms with its implications for policies and practices; to suggest where the work of housing associations fits; and finally to suggest how policy and practice might develop in future.



## GLOBAL AND EUROPEAN CONTEXT

### *International level agreements*

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) at Rio in 1992 secured a measure of agreement between governments in four areas:

- *Climate change, with the establishment of an international panel (leading to the conference in Kyoto in late 1997 which agreed to set world-wide targets for reductions of just over 5% in six greenhouse gases including carbon dioxide);*
- *A convention on sustainable forestry;*
- *A convention on biodiversity;*
- *Agenda 21*

Under the last of these, it was recognised that two-thirds of the required action depended on a large number of changes in policy or behaviour by individuals and organisations at local level: Government could not bring them about by itself. Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 declared:

*"Because so many of the problems and solutions being addressed by Agenda 21 have their roots in local activities, the participation and cooperation of local authorities will be a determining factor in fulfilling its objectives. As the level of governance closest to the people, they play a vital role in educating, mobilizing and responding to the public to promote sustainable development.*

Local Agenda 21 policies were to be agreed by local authorities by 1996.

*"Sustainable Development"*, as defined in the Brundtland Report, was identified as the key requirement for success:

*"Meeting the needs of existing generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"*

The Government response to the agreements reached at Rio was set out in a series of three reports in 1994. The largest of these, *Sustainable Development: the UK Strategy*, contained suggestions for measures which should move the UK closer to the point where development does not reduce the future potential of the environment but maintains or increases it. The report advocated building more homes on brown-field rather than green-field sites (a target of 50% was set); making more use of recycled or waste materials; eliminating non-conforming sewage discharges into rivers and seas - etc. Generally however it did not set out timescales or the means by which the targets were to be achieved. The last Government also published in 1996 *"Indicators of Sustainable Development"* which provides indicators to show whether, on the whole, the UK is moving towards or away from greater sustainability.

The Government set local authorities a target of March 1997 for preparing their LA21 strategies. This was to mean involving local people and local organisations in examining how their local environment might be protected and sustainable development principles put into effect to reflect local needs and opportunities.

Further impetus to Local Agenda 21 was given by the Habitat II conference held in Istanbul in the summer of 1996. Best practices, produced by both local authorities and the Government, focused on partnerships to tackle housing problems in a way that involves people in finding the solutions and generates benefits that go beyond the homes themselves.

At the European level, over 300 local authorities which support Local Agenda 21 have signed up to the Aalborg Charter (annex 1). Of the 323 signatories reported by the end of 1997, a high proportion (85) are from the UK. The Charter proclaims a powerful future role for cities: the signatories state their belief that cities rather than nations have the key role to play in achieving sustainable development and seek greater local self-governance. The signatories declare support for action to achieve social equity and integrated land use patterns as well as dealing with the full range of environmental issues.

The EU's Fifth Action Programme on the Environment published in May 1993 declared similar aims. EU member States believe that "the achievement of sustainable development calls for significant changes in current patterns of development, production, consumption and behaviour". The programme gives an important role to local and regional for spatial planning, economic development and infrastructure development. The programme also draws attention to the "vital" role that public and private enterprises and individuals have to play at local and regional level.

The EU takes account of sustainable development in a range of other policies, especially those on economic development and job creation. Community businesses undertaking work in housing and environmental fields in particular and the expansion of "Third Sector" organisations are seen as significant contributors to future employment in Europe. The Sixth Action Programme on the Environment to be published in 1998 is expected to go still further in promoting sustainable development.



## CO-ORDINATION OF LA21

The process of developing Local Agenda 21 strategies is co-ordinated by the Local Government Management Board (LGMB). LGMB is governed by a Board of elected members from local authorities throughout the country. It focuses on management and human resources issues and aims to help local authorities to deliver services effectively and provide democratic leadership for their communities. LGMB has produced a number of LA21 publications. These include Guidance the Local Agenda 21 Cookbook, Round Table notes, twenty seven Case Studies of local initiatives taken under the Local Agenda 21 umbrella, guidance for members and officers and the results of research into sustainability indicators.

LGMB see LA21 not just as a way of protecting the natural environment but also, under the banner of sustainable development, as a way of transforming thinking about nearly every human economic and social activity to take account of its impact. The policy areas covered by the Round Table Guidance illustrate the broad range of issues that are seen as relevant to LA21: they include community participation, greening the local economy, education, transport, planning, dealing with solid waste, CCT and the role of women.

Sustainable Settlements published jointly by LGMB and the University of the West of England in 1995 is of particular interest for housing providers. It provides a check-list for planners and developers on the whole range of sustainable development issues which could or should be taken into account in constructing new homes (or other buildings). It also draws together advice which has already been issued by Government through Planning Policy Guidance notes and Regional Policy Guidance.

LGMB is also responsible for providing advice on setting up Environmental Audit and Management Systems (EMAS) which are described in section 4 of this report.

LGMB has co-ordinated research into sustainability indicators so that there is a means to monitor progress. Like other management tools, indicators need to be relevant, measurable and easily understood, and to connect with local concerns. Public consultation tends to suggest indicators related to high profile problems such as traffic levels, crime or litter: public authorities also want measures of less obvious problems such as the number of unfit houses or the percentage of waste recycled. Some, not entirely successful, attempts have been made to find indicators which are surrogates for several others. One example is the rate of child asthma which depends on child health, traffic congestion, air pollution and poor housing. LGMB's research generated a long menu of 101 indicators to draw from. Indicators with both the relevance and resonance to remain elusive.

- *LGMB recommend a six step approach to Local Agenda 21:*
- *Managing and improving the Local Authority's own performance;*
- *Integrating sustainable development aims into the Local Authority's policies and activities;*
- *Education and raising awareness;*
- *Consulting and involving the general public;*
- *Establishing multi-sector partnerships;*
- *Measuring, monitoring and reporting.*

Thirteen key goals are defined as underlying this approach and are shown in the table in section 5.

The Local Government Association (LGA) which represents all local authorities in the UK has also been concerned in the evolution of policies and how they might impact on existing policy structures such as planning or housing. LGA draws up guidance for local authorities and engages in a policy dialogue with Government on issues of concern. Planning policy which takes account of sustainable development principles was in preparation at the end of 1997.

In the global context, the International Council for Local Environmental Information (ICLEI) represents 1,800 local authorities in 64 countries who are committed to achieving Local Agenda 21 objectives in their areas. ICLEI organises conferences and promotes and disseminates good practice. The UK is seen as a significant participant.



## LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND LOCAL AGENDA 21

### **A Range of Different Approaches**

A wide range of different approaches has been adopted to the formulation of Local Agenda 21 policies. While a majority of local authorities now have policies in place, the way these interact with the authority's existing policies and policy-making structures is very variable.

The level of responsibility accorded to the development of LA21 policies also varies substantially. At one extreme, the Local Agenda 21 policy process may be seen as a task to be undertaken without much expectation that it will impact very much on the way the authority behaves or operates. At the other end of the spectrum there are local authorities who have signed the Aalborg Charter (annex 1) and see the Local Agenda 21 process as giving further momentum to pre-existing policies to improve the environment and tackle social ills in their area.

Perhaps the main difficulty authorities have faced in drawing up policies is that the compass of Local Agenda 21 is so wide. As LGMB advice on sustainable development suggests, Local Agenda 21 policies may need to go beyond tackling the symptoms of environmental damage, to encompass the issues which are related to present patterns of development. A target of improving "the quality of life" would have to include the availability of good and sufficient local employment, strong communities, policies to tackle racism, more effective democracy, local financial institutions and so on. A comprehensive Local Agenda 21 policy may end up providing a wish-list of all the things that need to be different in all aspects of a local community and in all areas of a local authority's work and responsibility. This makes the policy very hard to get a grip on but is essential if it is to have any impact. An example of the gap that can otherwise arise between policy and practice is the environmental policy adopted by the builders of the Second Severn Crossing. It included checking that the biodiversity of the drainage reens which run into Severn were not being damaged: it made no mention of the energy and materials used in constructing the bridge and the bridge's future impact on the environment.

Examples of Local Agenda 21 policies are in Annex 2. Although a survey of all authorities' policies has not been undertaken for this report, from those that have been examined there seem to be three characteristic approaches.

**Ginger Group:** setting up a small unit, possibly supported by a Steering Group drawn from both within and outside the authority, which proposes policies on LA21 issues to other local authority Departments; and maybe also to business and voluntary sectors. It may be appropriate in small authorities where resources are very limited or very large ones where a single comprehensive consultation exercise may be impossible. It provides an evolutionary approach but also risks being ignored if the policies do not have the backing of any major Department.

**LA21 Forum:** creating a partnership Forum external to the Council with representation from the Council, business, the voluntary sector, residents' associations and individuals, which is serviced by the Council but free to advocate and promote policies or actions it decides are needed. It may be seen as important that the Forum is the policy of the community at large and not of the Council, making the assumption that the Council can not represent all local interests, e.g. minorities or campaigning groups or businesses. Generally those adopting this approach have so far aimed at agreeing broad brush targets and focusing on one or two particular initiatives where progress is possible. Its detachment however means it is still for individual local authority departments (or for businesses or individuals) to decide to what extent to take notice of their proposals and change their behaviour or policy.

**Policy Unit:** incorporating sustainable development into the Council's philosophy and policy-making structures and working to integrate sustainable approaches into the Council's policies, practices and external contracting arrangements. This is the main approach of authorities who have decided that LA21 requires change throughout the Council and a central policy unit, usually within

the Chief Executive's department, is needed to make it happen. It may have to be consulted about any new policy which is considered by the Council and will seek to inject elements of sustainable development/Local Agenda 21 into it. It may also initiate its own policy proposals through the corporate management structure.

**Intermediate Models:** There are obviously many other models which fall somewhere between these three. For example, some authorities have a Policy Unit but its role is to co-ordinate and support rather than to direct. The unit's role may not be to decide policies on its own but to service joint committees from different Departments at officer and member level which are set up to take the decisions.

As described above, some authorities have decided that Local Agenda 21 is best run and driven by organisations and individuals outside the authority. This can be seen either as better, because it enables the voluntary sector to reach conclusions without council influence, or worse, because it excludes Local Agenda 21 processes from direct access to local authority power structures. It can be argued that Local Agenda 21 is not about what the council does but what the community as a whole does - businesses, voluntary organisations, and the Council - and so is necessarily driven by a partnership organisation which must include every sector on equal terms. On the other hand the Council is intended to be representative of the community it serves without the need for extra structures and if the LA21 policy is not adopted as the basis of a wide range of Council policies, it may not have much value.

Whichever model is chosen, success depends on developing an inclusive discussion and taking forward actions that can be agreed upon. In Lancaster, where a partnership has been established external to the Council which publishes annual reports on progress, those involved are convinced that this is the best way of changing opinions in all sectors of the community, by building a consensus.

By July 1997, LGMB reported that 70% of local authorities had agreed to develop or adopt LA21 policies of which 50% had policies in place. Most effort so far seems to have gone into generating wide participation and supporting small and easy to implement policies such as in creating wildlife areas. This is illustrated by the twenty-seven good practice examples, published by LGMB in February and July 1997, set out in the table below.

*Links to other sectors*

*Ideas into action*

Issue	No. of examples
Wildlife/Nature Conservation	11
Education	9
Community cohesion	7
Improving the local environment	6
Community empowerment	5
Young people	4
Transport	4
Organic food and farming	4
Setting up an Advisory Forum	4
Greening business	2
Recycling	1
Security	1

Over half of local authorities have however now reached the point where they have to decide how to translate much wider policy documents into action. As advocated by LGMB, the policies that local authorities have drawn up tend to look at all aspects of the quality of life in their area. They point to the need for sustainable development objectives to be incorporated across the board at the fundamental policy level rather than as a variation to current practice. The Environmental Management and Audit System (EMAS) which has been piloted in a number of authorities, and is supported by LGMB, is one way in which local authorities are going about undertaking this.

EMAS is a management system similar to those produced by the British Standards Institute or International Standards Organisation (BS7750 or ISO14001). It sets up a process for incorporating LA21 objectives into the local authority's overall framework of policy and practice; making sure all staff are aware of the policy and have appropriate procedures in place; setting objectives and targets; and including arrangements to monitor their achievement, and review the targets.

Hereford City Council for example have adopted a LA21 policy which includes the aim of "minimising pollution and waste". This has been translated into an objective for an energy and water strategy. Related general and individual targets for energy and water use reduction in each Council building have been set. Individual objectives include: investing in any items with a 3-year pay-back, installing water saving measures in public toilets and extending the use of gas.

London Borough of Sutton's scoping review for EMAS has looked at how it could affect procurement and the drafting of external contracts, including those under CCT. External contractors could be required to have EMAS systems in place so that they can select economically viable practices that minimise effects on the environment. Many good practices in building do not involve extra cost but may need management or staff time in considering and, selecting the most environmentally friendly option. To date Sutton say they do not plan to apply this policy to housing associations but it could be the route through which the local authority exercises its influence as an enabler as well as in contractual situations.

There is inevitably some tension between new LA21 Units and local authority Departments who may have been working for many years to incorporate environmental policies and practices into their work. Departments may wish to keep control of policy-making and may feel they are losing a degree of control if their policy becomes part of a wider LA21 policy which relates to the whole Council. The "ownership" of individual policies will need thinking through in the next phase of LA21 implementation.

An example of this where local authorities have begun to think about the implementation of LA21 objectives is in relation to the Home Energy Conservation Act. The Act requires local authorities, as the Energy Conservation Authority for their area, to draw up plans to achieve a 30% reduction in carbon dioxide emissions from (public and private) domestic premises by 2011. Energy Saving Trust (EST) offers grant support under "HECA Action" to local authorities to assist them in meeting this target.

These schemes represent one of the ways in which local authorities may be beginning to look at how they might seek to achieve LA21 objectives which rely on a range of actions by external individuals and organisations. In the first year, Councils focused on mobile advice services or joint promotional campaigns. In the second year, there is a much greater focus on practical measures to promote implementation such as bulk-buying schemes, additional discounts, loans for fuel efficiency measures through credit unions and job creation. Housing associations have been involved in a limited number of cases, in particular in Hertsmere.

Many of these schemes would be model LA21 policies but they may not be so identified.

The process by which LA21 policies are adopted, what existing activity it includes and whether it is an umbrella for all LA21 related activity or a particular set of activities, has yet to be resolved.

It would seem that the likely way forward for Local Agenda 21 where it is supported by the Council will be broadly in line with LGMB's six stages but in a rather different order:

## Summary

- putting together a policy through a process of wide consultation
- the incorporation of sustainable development into local authority Departmental policies and plans, encouraged either by an internal or external LA21 unit or by central policy direction;
- setting of objectives and targets related to these plans which can be achieved without significant cost or which produce cost savings, with EMAS and other management systems increasingly used;
- consideration of requirements on external contractors or those on approved lists to adopt policies which achieve LA21 aims and to adopt EMAS (or a similar system) themselves;
- some increased support for actions by business and the voluntary sector, especially business advice on energy and water savings; support for local community initiatives; and a greater commitment to the principles of community-led regeneration.

Notwithstanding LGMB support and advice, the speed and extent to which these happen however is likely to be very variable depending on the commitment and enthusiasm of members and officers in each authority and the policies which it is decided fall under LA21. Whichever route is adopted, in the end it is the extent of the change in Departmental policies that will matter.



## HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS AND LOCAL AGENDA 21

There are as yet no policies that relate LA21 to housing or to housing associations. This is not surprising. Local Authorities to date have been getting to grips what the Local Agenda 21 process should be; how it can be taken forward in a way that involves businesses, the voluntary sector and local residents; and how it interacts with all other policy-making processes.

Because of the way Local Agenda 21 has been set up, it is not likely that housing associations will be pressed to change the way they operate by the Local Agenda 21 Forums or Policy Units. Instead, it is likely to be the housing, building control, planning, economic development and social services departments (and possibly others, depending how a local authority is organised) who will be seeking new approaches from the agencies with whom the Council works as each Department decides how to adopt sustainable development principles.

This is a very new area of policy and it has not been possible in the course of preparing this report to identify any housing associations which have specifically engaged in the Local Agenda 21 process and adopted new policies as a result. On the other hand, it is possible to identify initiatives in nearly every association in the country which are relevant and would be likely to be recorded by a local authority in listing the activities in its area which are contributing towards a move to greater sustainability.

The ways many associations have traditionally worked therefore are already in tune with Local Agenda 21. The table on pages 12-13 lists the LGMB's thirteen themes of sustainable development and the work many housing associations have undertaken which relates to each theme.

As these examples show, many housing associations have already been following policies which accord with Local Agenda 21 objectives, i.e.:

- *making homes more energy-efficient and water-efficient than building regulations require. Social rented homes - where a direct choice can be made between higher utility bills or a higher rent to pay for investment in fuel and water efficiency - are potentially in a good position to lead the way in these fields;*
- *building homes on previously developed or infill sites or by conversion of existing buildings, sometimes helping to retain historic structures;*
- *providing homes in the heart of cities thereby integrating housing with work and leisure opportunities, creating more coherent communities and limiting transport costs;*
- *taking a holistic approach to their role and working to support sustainable communities through Housing Plus or the People for Action network.*
- *involving tenants and others from the communities where they work in the management and control of the association's business.*

To date, none of this activity has been seen as part of Local Agenda 21, either by local authorities or by the housing associations themselves. Indeed, the contribution which housing, both existing and new, can make to Local Agenda 21 has not been seriously considered. The LA21 themes emerge from concerns about resource use and equity. The way these themes intersect with each of the major social programmes - none of which are entirely under the local authority's direct control - has not yet been thought through.

With support at the highest levels in both the previous and the present Government, and in the European Commission, sustainable development principles are intended to generate practical policies which will change the way we live and work – leading finally to an improved quality of life. However direct effects from the application of these principles are not yet very apparent. There is plenty of encouragement but little financial help. Traditional economic pressures and the needs of traditional business seem likely to remain the main driving forces behind the economy for some time.

Local Agenda 21 policies have however only just been formulated by local authorities. It is not clear yet whether LA21 is going quickly to have an impact at the highest policy level or whether it will be only about the physical environment and the scope for action by groups of concerned citizens supported by small grants. Local Agenda 21 and sustainable development have begun to enter public consciousness but an understanding of what they mean for the way we live and work is some way off.

Housing associations' response to LA21 is of course a matter of individual policy and each will have its own view about these issues. Housing associations have the same choices open to them as to how they will respond to Local Agenda 21 as local authorities do:

- *they can take LA21 to the heart of all their policies, alongside equal opportunities;*
- *they can take a case-by-case approach which integrates sustainable development objectives into policies as and when a policy comes up for review; or*
- *they can undertake some small-scale initiatives on particular projects on a pilot basis with a view to developing wider policy later.*

There are also three areas in which associations might wish to consider a response:

- **as a provider of affordable housing**
- **as an organisation committed to helping to meet the wider social needs of low income communities**
- **as a business**

Associations are likely to be required in local authority areas which are implementing LA21 policies to make a contribution towards them. For example the authority might set a target for reductions in carbon dioxide emissions in the district, with priority given to insulating homes and a reduction in the use of the private car. Policies could include action within their own housing stock and (say) requiring housing associations, if they wish to remain on the district's approved list, to achieve an energy efficiency standard, in their existing homes, in the new homes they are building and in their offices.

As an aside, unless LA21 principles are adopted throughout the authority, there are likely to be inconsistent responses from different Departments. One can imagine that the Planning Department might not immediately change their current policy on car space provision despite a Council policy to discourage car use.

Housing associations will be better prepared nevertheless if they open up a debate, including tenants, on the nature and location of the housing they own and develop which deals with all the issues referred to in section 5 or identified by LGMB. Like all new and potentially radical policies, an association could begin on a pilot level by selecting a defined area where the association has, or intends to produce, social housing. They could then work with local residents and organisations on how the environmental footprint of that housing might be minimised, prioritising measures which fit best with local needs.

<i>Local Government Management Board Objective</i>	<i>HA as housing provider</i>
Resources are used efficiently, waste is minimised and materials are recycled Waste management in construction	Energy and water efficiency Run-off infiltrated Use of recycled materials Use of previously developed land Use of BRE Environmental Standard
Pollution is limited to levels which do not cause damage to natural ecosystems	Reduced use of chemicals in construction and maintenance Reduction in CO <sub>2</sub> emissions Interceptors in drainage
The diversity of nature is valued and protected	Inclusion of natural areas in housing schemes
Where possible, local needs are met locally	Housing meets local needs Greater autonomy through energy and water efficiency Use of local labour and contractors
Everyone has access to adequate food, water, shelter and fuel at reasonable cost	Provision of affordable homes Affordability targets for energy and water use in new and existing homes Inclusion of allotments
Everyone has the opportunity to undertake satisfying work in a diverse economy. The value of unpaid work is recognised and payment for work is both fair and fairly distributed	Local labour schemes Training opportunities on sites Self-build schemes
Health is protected by the creation of safe, clean and pleasant environments and of services which emphasise prevention of illness as well as care for the sick	Good housing promotes good health Eliminating toxic materials from construction process Good quality maintenance
Access to facilities, services, goods and other people is not achieved at the expense of the environment or limited to those with cars	Locating developments near amenities
People live without fear of crime or persecution on account of their race, gender, sexuality or beliefs	Supporting ethnic minority HAs Achieving 'Secure by Design' Anti-racism and harassment policies
Everyone has the skills, knowledge and information they need to play a full role in society	Self build schemes Foyers
All sections of the community are empowered to participate in decision-making	Promote tenant participation
Opportunities to participate in culture, leisure and recreation are readily available to all	Location in town centres
Buildings, open spaces and artifacts combine meaning with beauty and utility; settlements are human in scale and form; and diversity and distinctive local features are valued and protected	Quality in design Inclusion of open space Limited size of developments Bringing listed buildings into use

<i>HA as business</i>	<i>HA as partner and stakeholder in the local community</i>
Energy efficiency in offices Water efficiency in offices	Help develop community businesses promoting energy and water efficiency in other premises
Reduced use of chemicals Reduction in CO <sub>2</sub> emissions	
	Support for schemes
Local procurement Combined heat and power provider	Support for local initiatives (eg local shops or food co-ops)
	Home improvement Agency work Support for energy efficiency work
Recruitment in ways which encourages local people Fair wages policies	Supporting local initiatives ( training and employment, workshop schemes, domiciliary care etc.)
	Home improvement Agency work
Car sharing schemes	Support for community transport
Anti-racism and harrassment policies	Support for Neighbourhood Watch
Providing information about policies and practices	
	Supporting community led regeneration
	Support local initiatives

Associations might then be in a better position to develop a green housing policy with the environmental issues of concern summarised within the Association’s standard specification and contract preliminaries. Where an association has adopted a green housing policy (perhaps as part of the Sustainable Homes initiative) it is in a position to communicate its plans to the local authorities where it works to see how its policies can contribute to meeting Local Agenda 21 targets. A policy on standards would however need to be supplemented by policies on wider strategic issues - targeting rehabilitation, infill or perviously developed sites rather than green filed sites and relating housing to other needs such as work and leisure.

**Community  
Regeneration  
Agency**

Associations which are already playing a wider role than housing in particular local communities could also develop their own Local Agenda 21 in relation to a wide range of objectives. This could include local consultation about standards and an intention to engage with the local community in discussing how and where the housing would be built, ways in which it might interact with existing local housing such as through joint CHP schemes or open spaces or green corridors; and general aims to do with the quality of life in the community where the housing is or will be constructed. It is likely that People for Action would be interested in supporting an exercise of this kind.

This could be a basis for debate not just about the homes that are the concern of the association but could be used, in consultation with the local authority to develop parallel initiatives in private housing in the same area. Examples of this kind of approach are being tried in Birmingham where a group of associations is supporting “Birmingham Ecological Enterprises” in promoting fuel efficiency (and in due course, water efficiency) to local owner occupiers, using the housing associations’ improvement of their own stock as both a platform and an example.

**Business**

As a local business, associations could become involved in their local LA21 forum or in green business organisations that are often established. As with their housing, associations could initiate an examination of their policies and practicies, using EMAS or some other system, either on a rolling basis throughout the association or a pilot basis in one Department. LGMB recommend this approach of improving internal performance as a prelude to providing and promoting LA21 ideas to external bodies. Associations are in a good position to demonstrate leadership.

These options can be summarised in the table below.

As with local authorities, there are many different routes to the adoption of LA21, sustainable development principles.

	<i>Housing Provider</i>	<i>Community champion</i>	<i>Community business</i>
<b>Policy</b>	Green specification Targets for existing homes	Own LA 21 policy	EMAS Constitution Employment policies
<b>Pilot</b>	Green housing scheme	e.g. self-build	e.g office management
<b>Rolling Programme</b>	Energy efficiency targets; then others	Build on support for range of local initiatives	Department by Department

## THE WAY AHEAD

This report has shown how the work that housing associations are already undertaking often has a strong resonance in Local Agenda 21 (LA21).

So far, LA21 has, if anything, been too broad and policies have had to look at every single aspect of the Council's work, both with what it does directly and what it contracts from others; from recycling of office paper to planning policies to protect the countryside. It would be useful to examine the intersection between LA21 and a major policy area such as housing which impacts on most, but not all, of these LA21 issues. It would also be a good opportunity to bring together a range of different organisations, including housing associations, which are taking on a role in community regeneration, to examine what partnerships might be established.

In discussions with LGMB and LGA, both have expressed considerable interest in examining this intersection. It could be either through a joint study or via a conference or seminar.

The forecast need for a further 4 to 5 million homes in the next 20 years (to provide for a growth in population of 1.5 million, a rise in the number of older people and a fall in average household size) could also provide a focus for debate on housing and LA21. At present, discussion is confined to the planning decisions on where the sites are to be found. From an LA21 perspective, it should be much wider to include the standard to which the homes should be built, how the homes are to be supplied with fuel, where the water is to come from, especially in the South and east, how the homes might be integrated into local communities, how they should relate to local amenities and job opportunities, what the links should be with food production, what role self-build could play, what employment might be generated and for whom - and so on. LA 21 provides the agenda. Lessons have surely finally been learned from past disastrous, and ultimately very costly, attempts to meet housing needs without reference to the wider context.

In summary, it is suggested that the way forward with LA21 so far as housing associations are concerned lies in:

- *Putting in place pilot projects which enable these policies and practices to be explored further;*
- *Communicating their policies to local authority partners to indicate where the association might make a contribution;*
- *Undertaking LA21 consultation exercises in partnership with the local authority and others;*
- *Supporting a joint study or a conference between Sustainable Homes, LGMB and LGA on "Housing and Local Agenda 21" which would explore how the two policy areas interact;*
- *Engaging in the debate about the future provision of homes in the context of LA 21.*

There is the potential here for a number of forces to come together to find a better way forward for local communities. Housing associations could play a significant role.

## **Annex 1 Extracts from the Aalborg Charter adopted by some 350 European towns and cities.**

### *Part I Consensus Declaration: European Cities and Towns Towards Sustainability*

#### The Role of European Towns and Cities

We, European cities & towns, signatories of this Charter, state that in the course of history, our towns have existed within and outlasted empires, nation states, and regimes and have survived as centres of social life, carriers of our economies, and guardians of culture, heritage and tradition. Along with families and neighbourhoods, towns have been the basic elements of our societies and states. Towns have been the centres of industry, craft, trade, education and government.

We understand that our present urban lifestyle, in particular our patterns of division of labour and functions, land-use, transport, industrial production, agriculture, consumption, and leisure activities, and hence our standard of living, make us essentially responsible for many environmental problems humankind is facing. This is particularly relevant as 80 percent of Europe's population live in urban areas.

We have learnt that present levels of resource consumption in the industrialised countries cannot be achieved by all people currently living, much less by future generations, without destroying the natural capital.

We are convinced that sustainable human life on this globe cannot be achieved without sustainable local communities. Local government is close to where environmental problems are perceived and closest to the citizens and shares responsibility with governments at all levels for the well-being of humankind and nature. Therefore, cities and towns are key players in the process of changing lifestyles, production, consumption and spatial patterns.

#### The Notion and Principles of Sustainability

We, cities & towns, understand that the idea of sustainable development helps us to base our standard of living on the carrying capacity of nature. We seek to achieve social justice, sustainable economies, and environmental sustainability. Social justice will necessarily have to be based on economic sustainability and equity, which require environmental sustainability.

Environmental sustainability means maintaining the natural capital. It demands from us that the rate at which we consume renewable material, water and energy resources does not exceed the rate at which the natural systems can replenish them, and that the rate at which we consume non-renewable resources does not exceed the rate at which sustainable renewable resources are replaced. Environmental sustainability also means that the rate of emitted pollutants does not exceed the capacity of the air, water, and soil to absorb and process them.

Furthermore, environmental sustainability entails the maintenance of biodiversity; human health; as well as air, water, and soil qualities at standards sufficient to sustain human life and well-being, as well as animal and plant life, for all time.

#### Local Strategies Towards Sustainability

We are convinced that the city or town is both the largest unit capable of initially addressing the many urban architectural, social, economic, political, natural resource and environmental imbalances damaging our modern world and the smallest scale at which problems can be meaningfully resolved in an integrated, holistic and sustainable fashion. As each city is different, we have to find our individual ways towards sustainability. We shall integrate the principles of sustainability in all our policies and make the respective strengths of our cities and towns the basis of locally appropriate strategies.

## *Part 2. The European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign*

We, European cities & towns, signatories of this charter, shall move forward together towards sustainability in a process of learning from experience and successful local examples. We shall encourage each other to establish long-term local action plans (Local Agendas 21), thereby strengthening inter-authority co-operation, and relating this process to the European Union's actions in the field of the urban environment.

We hereby initiate The European Sustainable Cities & Towns Campaign to encourage and support cities and towns in working towards sustainability.

## *Part 3. Engaging in The Local Agenda 21 processes: Local Action Plans Towards Sustainability*

We, European cities & towns, signatories of this Charter, pledge by signing this Charter and joining the European Sustainable Cities & Towns Campaign we will seek to achieve a consensus within our communities on a Local Agenda 21 by the end of 1996. This will meet the mandate established by Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 as agreed at the Earth Summit in Rio in June 1992. By means of our individual local action plans we shall contribute to the implementation of the European Union's Fifth Environmental Action Programme "Towards Sustainability". The Local Agenda 21 processes shall be developed on the basis of Part One of this Charter.

## **Examples of Local Agenda 21 Policies**

## **Annex 2**

The following examples are included to illustrate the type of issues which are addressed in LA21 policies and nature of the policies. Those discussed here are intended to be representative: there is probably no such thing as a model policy because of the wide variation in circumstances.

### **Birmingham**

Birmingham has a population of 1 million and 27,000 businesses. It decided that participation in drawing up its LA21 policies had to be through existing local networks rather than through a wide consultation exercise. A number of representative groups from business, the voluntary sector and campaign groups were brought together to collate and edit a policy document. The document is accepted as being unreconciled either with Council policies or local business practices but the hope is that through a series of work-groups, the proposals will provide material for both local authority Departments and local businesses to consider and work with.

Work group topics are poverty; education; equality and discrimination; leisure and recreation; food; nature conservation; health; waste; global dimension; water; pollution; land use; employment; energy; transport; and historic environment. For each area, the policy document lists current action by the Council; a list of useful contacts; and a table showing issues identified by local people and actions and organisations that could help. For each topic there are some suggestions of actions that individuals could take to advance the suggested actions.

As examples, under poverty the suggested actions cover better access to transport, more affordable childcare, access to finance via credit unions, better health and diet, opportunities for work experience and reducing the imposition of expensive pre-payment meters. Under land use, more communal gardens are advocated, using derelict buildings and redeveloping brown field sites.

## Manchester

Manchester set up the Manchester Local Agenda 21 Forum with fifty representatives from further education, business and the private sector, health organisations, campaigning and community groups, conservation groups, trades unions, women's groups, youth and schools and the local authority itself. Some 300 organisations were involved in producing the Forum's draft statement "Manchester: A Sustainable Future". Only two of the organisations were housing associations (Manchester & District and Homes for Change) although Hulme Regeneration, the City Challenge company involved in the rebuilding of Hulme through a housing association consortium, was also involved.

The Forum's goals are to produce a sustainable development strategy, promote it, stimulate practical action and produce indicators and baseline studies. It also has a small grants (£500 - £1,000) budget. The draft suggested setting up seven action groups: health, community and social issues; greening, land-use and open space; energy; transport; waste and pollution; economy and work; and education and consultation. Examples of its recommendations which relate to housing are:

### *Health Social and Community*

*Improve buildings and transport for disabled access*

*Increase housing provision for single people*

*Provide a variety of affordable housing*

*Tackle substandard accommodation*

*Greening, land-use and open space*

*Provide semi-wild areas for habitat diversity*

*Provide green space within 500m of all houses*

*Balance housing, economic and environmental needs*

*Increase the profile of sustainable development in the UDP*

*Build on derelict land rather than green land*

*Higher density housing in mixed use areas*

*Ecological protection and enhancement among planning conditions*

### *Energy*

*Plan for 30% to 40% reduction in domestic CO<sub>2</sub> emissions*

*Greater use of low energy lighting and electrical appliances*

*High energy standards in new and rehabilitated housing*

*Upgrade public rented housing*

*Action against fuel poverty – advice and support for affordable warmth*

*Use of active and passive solar heating*

*Develop renewable energy sources including photovoltaics*

*Establish energy service companies*

*Expand CHP and district heating especially in new housing*

### *Transport*

*Bike lanes separated from traffic*

*Traffic calming and Home Zones in residential areas*  
*Waste and pollution*  
*Separate collection for recyclables*  
*Home composting wherever possible*  
*Economy and work*  
*Job creation in energy conservation etc*  
*Environmental management and accreditation (e.g. EMAS, ISO14001)*  
*Develop and support community enterprise in energy conservation*  
*Support co-operatives and other not-for-profit structures*  
*Green consumption by corporate purchasers*  
*Holistic link to regeneration areas and others issues in sustainable development*

As this list illustrates, the strategy is seen as affecting all areas of policy. On the economy for example, the strategy suggest that 10,000 jobs could be created in house-building, renovation, energy saving, transport, greening and recycling which could pay for themselves both directly, through savings, and indirectly through benefits to confidence, health and reductions in crime. The social economy is seen as having an increasingly important part to play with housing associations and coops listed among other not-for-profit businesses which both meet local needs and employ local people and in which the whole community can have a stake.

However the policy is still no more than a list of suggested policy changes without proposals as to how they should be implemented and by whom.

### **Sutton**

Sutton has set up a Local Agenda 21 Forum with representatives of all sections of the community. In turn the Forum has set up topic working groups dealing with transport; community well-being; sustainable land-use and nature conservation; energy; sensible consumerism; and local economics. Each topic group aims to identify steps that can be taken locally to advance action which can be taken by all sections of the community in their topic area. Guides have been produced for each topic which outline some of these. For example, the Energy guide contains advice on reducing energy consumption at home and at work; providing information about the Home Energy Conservation Partnership which aims to encourage a 30% reduction in energy use; and lists contacts with a few local businesses providing solar heating systems and low energy glazing. The Local Economy guide suggests buying locally, joining a LETS scheme, and re-using and repairing rather than replacing. The Centre for Environmental Initiatives set up by the Council advises and supports the Forum in its work.

Following consultations and ideas from the Forum and topic groups, action groups have been set up to identify and promote a limited number of achievable projects. These include action under the Home Energy Conservation Act through energy efficiency advice and assistance; a walk-to-school initiative; a register of holistic health care; an adult education course; improving the capacity of the Council's community and other vehicle use; and introducing EMAS into the local authority. A project of interest to housing associations is an action project to develop guidelines for sustainable housing development through a seminar with housing associations and others, with the aim of setting up pilot projects.

The Council is also seeking to develop sustainability indicators under each topic heading which are easily understood and show progress towards the long term "vision". Examples which illustrate how authorities are wrestling with the problem to producing useful indicators are complaints about noisy neighbours, incidence of coronary heart disease, racially motivated incidents and "the number of neighbours known to speak to", as indicators of community well-being. In housing-related fields indicators include average NHER for all domestic dwellings in the borough; combined heat and power production; homes with solar panels or wind turbines; number of businesses adopting environmental policies; and volume of recycled waste including compost and garden waste.

### Newark and Sherwood

Newark and Sherwood have produced a 1997 policy draft entitled Making SENSE (Sustainable Enterprise for Newark and Sherwood's Environment). The document has been adopted by the Council but was nevertheless created in partnership with business and voluntary sectors. The policy is based on the Council's comprehensive view that

*"..it will be necessary to try new approaches if we are to continue to develop the quality of life in the District while preserving the environment for future generations".*

The policy is intended to be applied to all the Council's activities.

A Forum is to be established and specialist working groups dealing with the issues of natural environment and food; community and family; waste and pollution; transport; where we live and work; and energy. The groups may in turn set up affiliated groups for example an energy agency is to be set up by the Energy Group. Parish level groups and residents groups provide local action teams which aim to be involved in all these topics at the local level.

The strategy is based around a vision of life in 2050. In each category, the action being taken is described, the vision of the future, priority actions that are required and an action plan for the Council. Examples of the actions proposed are: producing a strategy for urban renewal under the Housing Act 1996 that includes the principles of sustainable development; and a series of initiatives to achieve the 30% reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2011 as required by the Home Energy Conservation Act.

### Bristol

Bristol has seen Local Agenda 21 as "an essential new framework" for drawing together existing policies. It published an interim strategy in 1996 and proposed a final one in 1997 although it has been delayed beyond the deadline. (Bristol suffered the disruption of becoming a unitary authority in 1996 following the abolition of Avon.)

The Council has adopted a three step strategy covering (1) the Council's Performance and Policies; (2) Measuring and Monitoring Sustainability; and (3) Involving People and Raising Awareness.

Under Performance and Policies, the Council list their Local Plan, Avon Transport Plan 1993 to 2013, Greater Bristol Nature Conservation Strategy, Energy Policy, Waste and Recycling Plan, Home Energy Conservation Strategy, and other strategies on Housing, Anti-Poverty, Health, Leisure and Parks Development. Review of these policies is in progress in many cases which will include taking account of the wider sustainability agenda. A Green Initiatives Joint Sub-Committee of the main Policy Committee oversees the role of the Council in the Local Agenda 21 Strategy and has a budget for corporate initiatives. A Sustainable City Team of eight staff has been established to develop the process. A Green Charter adopted in 1990 covers policies on energy, purchasing power, environmental quality control, the built environment, the natural environment and

movement/access. A Green Initiatives Working Party of officers coordinates and debates action to be taken in relation to the Charter and annual action plans by each Directorate are intended to plan actions.

Bristol is also pursuing EMAS.

Under Measuring and Monitoring, a 1995 State of the Environment Report was produced with an update in 1996 to show any progress or slippage.

To involve people more widely, the Council supports the Western Challenge Partnership (formerly BEET) which brings together the public, private and voluntary sectors to co-ordinate the Local Agenda 21 Steering Group and Action Groups on particular topics (waste, energy, biodiversity, food and transport). It also coordinates environmental business clubs and business advice services and runs events such as an annual festival. In parallel, Choices for Bristol has undertaken a visioning exercise which is to lead on to a sustainable community plan for a chosen area. The council is reviewing its democratic processes and looking at ways of involving all sectors of the population more effectively. Bristol 21 magazine promotes green initiatives and a £30,000 budget is available for environmental grants of up to £3,000.

The CREATE centre provides offices where many of the City Council, business and voluntary groups concerned with environmental issues are based which assists networking between different sectors.

*Steve Bendle  
32 Seymour Road  
Bath  
Somerset  
BA1 6DY  
Tel/Fax: 01225 461308  
Email: [Steve.Bendle@dial.pipex.com](mailto:Steve.Bendle@dial.pipex.com)*





## Sustainable Homes

Hastoe Housing Association  
Harlequin House · 7 High Street · Teddington · Middlesex TW11 8EE  
Telephone 0181-943 4433 Fax 0181-943 2163  
Email: [sustainable\\_homes@msn.com](mailto:sustainable_homes@msn.com)

PROMOTING ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES IN HOUSING