



# "IT AIN'T EASY BEING GREEN"



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## **“IT AIN’T EASY BEING GREEN”**

A REPORT OF A SOCIAL ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT  
TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE LIVING AMONG  
HOUSING ASSOCIATION RESIDENTS

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pdf: available at <http://www.brighton.ac.uk/sass/sustainablelivingproject/> along with background documentation relating to methodology, project design, and the analyses undertaken in this study.

In addition to this research report, a project report has been produced in partnership with HydeMartlet and is available at: <http://www.hyde-housing.co.uk> and also at: <http://www.brighton.ac.uk/sass/sustainablelivingproject/>

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## About the partners

The project that is the focus of this report was undertaken in partnership by HydeMartlet housing association and the School of Applied Social Science (SASS) at the University of Brighton and supported by the Tenant Participation Advisory Service.

The School of Applied Social Science (SASS) at the University of Brighton delivers a range of applied social science courses at undergraduate and post-graduate levels. It has a strong tradition of partnership working with local organisations and SASS academics carry out research on a wide variety of contemporary social issues.

[www.brighton.ac.uk/sass](http://www.brighton.ac.uk/sass)

HydeMartlet – part of The Hyde Group managing and maintaining over 10,000 properties in Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire.

[www.hyde-housing.co.uk](http://www.hyde-housing.co.uk)

A consultant from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) was employed to recruit the residents and facilitate the workshops. TPAS is a national tenant participation organisation working to promote tenant empowerment.

[www.tpas.org.uk](http://www.tpas.org.uk)

The project was funded by Brighton and Sussex Community Knowledge Exchange (BCSKE). BCSKE supports partnership projects between the University of Brighton, the University of Sussex and local communities. It aims to contribute to social inclusion in Brighton, Hove and Coastal Sussex by strengthen relationships between the Universities of Brighton and Sussex and their local communities,

[www.bton.ac.uk/cupp/projects/bsckeprojectlist.htm](http://www.bton.ac.uk/cupp/projects/bsckeprojectlist.htm)

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## Introduction

*“The burning forests, the dissolving coral reefs, the extinction of species - we have numbed ourselves with these familiar litanies. During the past 30 years we have dealt with the issue, if at all, only in our minds [...] We are still dreaming, still murmuring in our sleep as we grope for the levers that connect thoughts to actions.”*

*Ian McEwan<sup>1</sup>*

*“We need you, the people of Britain is responsible for 44% of the UK’s emissions through their decisions on electricity, heat, and transport, to change their behaviour.”*

*David Miliband<sup>2</sup>*

How do people perceive the environmental issues associated with their homes, and what can they do to make them more environmentally friendly? Does living in a low carbon home mean that people will choose to live a sustainable lifestyle or take action to make their communities more environmentally sustainable? And what is the role of housing associations in tackling climate change and other environmental problems?

This report explores these questions and the role of community engagement in tackling environmental problems. It reports the findings from a community environmental project that took place in Brighton and Hove over an 18 month period during 2007-8. The project involved local residents discussing green issues and taking action to make their lives, homes, and communities more environmentally sustainable.

The first section sets out the policy context and the rationale for the project. It develops the argument for a more robust role for housing organisations in engaging residents on environmental issues, and in supporting residents to live more sustainably. The second section describes the project at the heart of this report, setting out its aims, design, and structure. How residents were engaged and recruited into the project is given particular attention in this section. The third section gives a detailed account of the research methodology and strategy used to evaluate this project. Sections 4, 5 and 6 report on the findings from this qualitative evaluation, describing what took place in the project, what actions were taken by participants, and how participants experienced the project. Section 7 sets out the main learning points relating to engaging residents on environmental issues and discusses some of the theoretical and practical implications of the project. The final section summarises the key learning points, and describes some of the policy implications of this work, particularly for housing organisations.

Because of the limited space available in this report, we have had to be necessarily selective in the presentation of our findings. Follow-up articles from this project will focus on barriers to behaviour change, environmental concerns, and a more complete account of the literature we have carried out on community engagement with environmental issues.

# 1 Policy context and rationale for the project

This section sets out the research and policy context and rationale of the project. It is based on a review of the literature in a number of areas that link a growing concern with unsustainable human development and lifestyles with social and environmental problems. We start by articulating the principles and values that underpin this programme of work.

## 1.1 The principles of underpinning a sustainable society

In 1983, the United Nations established a commission chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland, the Norwegian Prime Minister, to produce a report. According to the UN Secretary General's introductory note, its task was to examine the "environment and the global *problematique* to the year 2000 and beyond, including proposed strategies for sustainable development" (1987:1). The World Commission on Environment and Development drew its membership from across the globe in order to identify the main global problems and to map out a common, 'sustainable path' for global development (1987:23). In August 1987, the Commission's report, *Our Common Future*, was transmitted to the UN General Assembly. Section 2 focused on the concept of sustainable development, and defined it as follows:

*"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:*

- *the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and*
- *the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs."*

*WCED, 1987: 54*

The concept of sustainable development brings together the environmental, economic, and social-justice conditions necessary for meeting the needs of present and future generations. Central to the WECD definition is a recognition of the limits imposed on human societies by the external environment.

In 1991, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the World Conservation Union (IUCN), and the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) joined forces to produce a strategy to guide national and international decision makers with an influence over social development and the condition of the natural environment. The first part of the strategy, *Caring for the Earth*, set out the principles for a sustainable way of life that simultaneously conserves nature's "vitality and diversity" whilst meeting human needs (IUCN/UNEP/WHO, 1991:3). The strategy made it clear that integrating social and economic development with conservation of the natural environment means living according to a set of sustainability principles and "adopting life-styles and development paths that respect and work within nature's limits" (IUCN/UNEP/WHO, 1991).



Nine principles underpin action to build a sustainable society, including:

- (1) Respect and care for the community of life
- (2) Improve human quality of life
- (3) Conserve the Earth's vitality and diversity
- (4) Minimize the depletion of the earth's non-renewable resources
- (5) Keep within the earth's carrying capacity
- (6) Change personal attitudes and practices
- (7) Enable communities to care for their own environment
- (8) Provide a national framework for integrating development and conservation
- (9) Create a global alliance

Source: IUCN/UNEP/WHO, 1991: pp.8-12

It is the 6th and 7th principles that are at the centre of the work reported in this report. The 6<sup>th</sup> principle is about fostering new ways of living and acting that take into account the Earth's limits. The authors of *Caring for the Earth* made it clear that this is a matter of values and called for a new environmental ethic to underpin the transition to a more sustainable way of life:

*"To adopt the ethic for living sustainably, people must re-examine their values and alter their behaviour. Society must promote values that support the new ethic and discourage those that are incompatible with a sustainable way of life. Information must be disseminated through formal and informal educational systems so that the policies and actions needed for the survival and well-being of the world's societies can be explained and understood."*

*IUCN/UNEP/WHO, 1991:11*

It is clear from this that IUCN/UNEP/WHO believed that education, both formal and informal, has a particularly important role to play in fostering sustainable living. But the 7<sup>th</sup> principle points to the importance of community action, partnerships, and empowerment as other means of building a sustainable way of life:

*"Most of the creative and productive activities of individuals or groups take place in communities. Communities and citizens' groups provide the most readily accessible means for people to take socially valuable action as well as to express their concerns. Properly mandated, empowered and informed, communities can contribute to decisions that affect them and play an indispensable part in creating a securely-based sustainable society."*

*IUCN/UNEP/WHO, 1991:11*

But active communities are more than just a key ingredient of a sustainable society – they are its makers. Without building robust networks of sustainable communities, there can be no sustainable society.

In our work, we have sought to apply the methods of informal education, community action, and action research to explore residents' environmental concerns, raise awareness of environmental issues, and to support residents in applying sustainability principles to their lifestyles, homes, and neighbourhoods.

In the next section we discuss three cross-cutting areas of UK policy that provide the policy context and rationale for this work. They include: sustainable development policy; sustainable communities; and the role of housing policy in tackling climate change.

## 1.2 Policies to build a sustainable society in the UK?

### 1.2.1 The UK Sustainable Development Strategy

The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is driving the environmental sustainability agenda forward in the UK, in partnership with the Department for Local Government and Communities, the Department for International Development and the Department of Energy and Climate Change.

After a period of consultation, a new UK Sustainable Development Strategy was presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in March 2005. *Securing the Future* replaced the earlier 1999 strategy - *A Better Quality of Life*. *Securing the Future* set out a strategic framework for sustainable development activity across the UK up to 2020 (Great Britain, 2005).

According to *Securing the Future*, and echoing the definitions discussed in the last section, the purpose of sustainable development “is to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life, without compromising the quality of life of future generations” (Great Britain, 2005:16). The strategy identified five practical principles which were intended to guide policy development in the UK and action towards this goal. These principles include:

- Living Within Environmental Limits
- Ensuring a Strong, Healthy and Just Society
- Achieving a Sustainable Economy
- Promoting Good Governance
- Using Sound Science Responsibly

Source: Great Britain, 2005:16

These principles are clearly interconnected, and provide a solid basis for policy development and joined-up action across government departments, as well as partnership working at the local level.

In addition to these principles, a set of priorities for action within the UK were identified within the Strategy. These priorities are aligned with international sustainable development goals and priorities and include:

- Sustainable Consumption and Production
- Climate Change and Energy
- Natural Resource Protection and Environmental Enhancement
- Sustainable Communities

Source: Great Britain, 2005:17.

Each priority area for action clearly falls within the ambit of one Government department more than others. Nonetheless, each priority also involves working across departmental boundaries. The cross-cutting range of *Securing the Future* was highlighted by the requirement that all central government departments produce Sustainable Development Action Plans to be reported on and updated on a regular basis (Great Britain, 2005).

### 1.2.2 Building Sustainable Communities

Local participation and community engagement are vital for building sustainable and cohesive local communities. So building sustainable communities means translating the principles of sustainable development to the local level. *Securing the Future* committed the UK Government to a national programme to establish such communities:

*“The Government will promote joined-up solutions to locally identified problems, working in partnership to tackle economic, social and environmental issues. At the local level, we are announcing a package of measures to realise the vision of sustainable communities across England, in both urban and rural areas, which will catalyse the delivery of sustainable development”.*

*Great Britain, 2005:9*

Chapter 6 of *Securing the Future* focused on building sustainable communities. The measures to “catalyse” local sustainable development included, for example:

- developing more robust partnerships at the local level to develop and deliver local sustainable community strategies;
- giving local authorities more powers to improve the quality of the local environment;
- involving people in local decision making and in efforts to improve the local environment;
- ensuring that local planning decisions and guidance are consistent with sustainability principles.

Source: Great Britain, 2005:10.

According to *Securing the Future*, local sustainability strategies and neighbourhood plans should build on the work of LA21 (Great Britain, 2005:128). Local Agenda 21 were local action plans designed to encourage local authorities to engage in sustainable development at the local level. They gave local expression to the sustainability aims of Agenda 21, an international blueprint for action that emerged from the UN after the 1992 Earth Summit and to which the UK was a signatory. Local Agenda 21 reinforced the importance of the active participation and involvement of local people in sustainable development (Church and Elster, 2002), a characteristic that has been widely examined and evaluated (Scott, 1999; Rowe, 2000; Roberts, 2000; Sharp, 2002).

In other policy initiatives related to *Securing the Future*, resident participation, community empowerment, and the development of effective mechanisms for community engagement have been seen as key to building sustainable communities and to achieving community cohesion (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2006; Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006). For example, the 2007 Sustainable Communities Act started out from the premise that, in order to improve the sustainability of local communities, local people needed to be consulted and engaged.

Before we go onto discuss the themes of behaviour change and community engagement, we discuss the third broad area of policy linked to the subject matter of this report – the role of the social housing sector in tackling climate change.

### 1.2.3 A role for UK housing policy in tackling climate change?

In the 2008 Climate Change Act, the UK Government set legally binding CO<sub>2</sub> emission reduction targets of at least 80% by 2050 relative to 1990 levels (Great Britain, 2008). In line with this Act, the April 2009 Budget set a UK carbon budget with a legally binding 34% reduction in emissions by 2020 (HM Treasury, 2009).

A significant challenge for Government is that residential housing and household consumption make up a significant contribution to these emissions, as much as 44% according to some sources (Eccleston, 2007). Housing policy and the social housing sector therefore have an important role to play in meeting the UK's CO<sub>2</sub> emission reduction targets. For example, the current government has set out a policy to ensure that every new home is zero carbon from 2016 (HM Government, 2009). Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), such as housing associations and local councils, have a vital role to play here, and will need to find innovative ways to engage their residents and local communities around environmental issues in order to reduce the negative environmental impact of their homes and neighbourhoods. Kemp (2009), for example, has put the case for this wider role in a recent article published in *Inside Housing*:

*“Being a good landlord is no longer good enough. Today, especially during a recession, councils and housing associations need to use their influence, capacity, creativity and finance to lever in resources to create strong sustainable neighbourhoods”*

*Kemp, 2009:19*

In recent debates about how the social housing sector can be put on a greener footing, technological and design solutions for achieving reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in UK housing have received a good deal of interest. For example, there has been much discussion over the past few years about eco-friendly or low-carbon homes (Ward, 2009). Indeed, housing associations are particularly well placed to contribute to the UK Government's plan of building ten eco-towns in the near future (Birch, 2008). One approach to fostering more pro-environmental behaviour has been to include environmentally sustainable design features in the home itself. These design features, for example, can make the adoption of sustainable behaviours 'by default' more likely, such as the reduced use of energy and water.

However, there is increasing recognition that technological or design improvements alone will be insufficient to tackle climate change (Tahir, 2009). For example, it is still possible for residents to lead an environmentally unsustainable lifestyle, even where they live in a home that has been designed in an environmentally sustainable way. In any case, the amount and quality of sustainable housing in the UK is small and difficult to determine given current sources of information, something unlikely to change as long as building regulations and planning policies continue as they are (Williams and Lindsay, 2007). Furthermore, the relative size and impact of sustainable behaviours that are not reliant on the built environment is still sizeable, something that makes this a key area of work for researchers and policy makers (Williams and Dair, 2007).

Technological and design solutions certainly have a vital role to play in bringing down CO<sub>2</sub> emissions linked to UK housing stock. Nonetheless, social solutions and innovations have a part to play too. Exclusive attention to technological and design solutions to climate change and other environmental challenges, whilst important, may shift attention away from the role of human agency and the social, cultural and economic conditions that need to be in place to make the transition to a more sustainable way of life more likely. For example, the ways that residents understand, inhabit and use their homes are bound to be relevant to how environmentally sustainable they are in the long run. That is, in order to reduce the share of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from housing-related sources, it will be necessary to focus policy and action on both the dwelling and its inhabitants.

RSLs such as housing associations are in a good position to support residents in their efforts to green their lifestyles and homes (Housing Corporation, 2006). Furthermore, housing associations have a key part to play in implementing sustainable development policies at the local level, because of their neighbourhood focus and their presence in local strategic partnerships (LSPs) (Hickman *et al*, 2006). However, to perform this role effectively, they will need to have a more robust presence on LSPs, and optimise their contribution to Local Area Agreements (LAAs) (Davis and Simpson, 2007).

The project described in the sections that follow was premised on the view that housing associations have a pivotal role to play in ensuring the sustainability of the homes they build and manage, and the communities they help to build. And it is clear that housing associations cannot effectively perform this role without working closely with residents - both tenants and leaseholders (Hickman, 2006).

For RSLs to play this wider role it is vital to gain a solid understanding of residents' environmental values and concerns; how they perceive the environmental issues associated with their homes and neighbourhoods; how they inhabit and use their homes; and what they can do to make their homes and communities more environmentally friendly.

### **1.3 “Behaviour change” or “community mobilisation”?**

Here we critically examine the two-pronged approach by which the UK government has sought to influence and foster behaviour change among the UK population.

#### **1.3.1 Behaviour-change approaches to reducing carbon emissions**

According to one source, “around 40% of national greenhouse gas emissions are the result of decisions taken directly by individuals” (Letcher, Redgrove, and Roberts, 2007:9). Yet there are many barriers to adopting more sustainable behaviours or engaging with environmental problems such as climate change (Macnaghten and Jacobs, 1997; Lorenzoni *et al*, 2007). Perceptions and beliefs about climate change are bound to influence the readiness to take action, making pro-environmental behaviour more or less likely. These psychosocial barriers include, for example: uncertainty about the scale of climate change and its impact (Dessai, O'Brien, and Hulme, 2007); a perception that climate change is a distant threat, with little direct relevance to everyday life (Burningham and Thrush, 2001); a tendency to project the consequences of climate change into a far-flung future, reducing its power to influence present action.

These observations point to the following question: how can individual agency be “mobilised” when the potential outcomes appear so distant and uncertain? One response might be to find ways to personalise the impact of climate change in our daily lives (Redgrove and Roberts, 2007). For example, initiatives to raise awareness about environmental issues may be more likely to succeed in changing behaviour where they emphasise the multiple links between global environmental issues and everyday experience - when they are grounded in an understanding of how lay people go about making links between their own lives, the local environment in which they live, and the wider natural environment.

Efforts to promote behaviour change through traditional policy instruments such as financial incentives, legislation, and regulation are unlikely to succeed on their own. Such instruments do not sufficiently take into account the main drivers of individual action – the economic circumstances, social relations, and cultural contexts that shape individual attitudes, values, and aspirations. This was clearly acknowledged in chapter 2 of *Securing the Future*, which set out the UK Government's approach to changing public behaviour.

A more detailed account of this approach to behaviour change can be found in a Government paper called *Changing Behaviour through Policy Making*.<sup>3</sup> The approach to behaviour change presented in *Securing the Future* and in this paper can be summarised as follows:

First, sustainable development depends on changes in the behaviour of individuals, communities, and private and public sector organisations. Past approaches to promote change have failed to lead to a “fundamental shift” towards sustainability. For example, campaigns to inform and raise awareness among the public around environmental issues have had a limited impact on behaviour; increasing public knowledge and awareness of climate change alone does not translate easily into pro-environmental behaviour. *Securing the Future* cited survey evidence from a range of sources to support the claim that “information alone does not lead to behaviour change or close the so-called ‘attitude-behaviour’ gap” (2005:25).

Second, traditional policy instruments such as “command and control regulation” are unlikely to be enough to foster a more environmentally sustainable way of life among the majority of the UK population (Great Britain, 2005). Whilst the Government remains committed to outcome-focused regulation and to providing reliable and consistent information, *Securing the Future* recognized that a more active approach to sustainable development was required, going beyond traditional measures to regulate behaviour.

Third, a series of studies on behaviour change and sustainable consumption underpinned the part of *Securing the Future* concerned with changing behaviour and promoting sustainable choices (Great Britain, 2005). For example, Darnton (2004a, 2004b) examined approaches to changing public behaviour. And Collins *et al* (2003) reviewed evidence and practice on ways of influencing public opinion and behaviour, focusing in particular on the provision of information, and on marketing and influencing strategies.

Fourth, the social, cultural, and economic contexts in which people live influence their behaviour – and there are significant “social and practical barriers” to “choice” (Great Britain, 2005:25). This suggests that, as well as tackling the material obstacles, the development of “new social norms and fostering facilitating conditions” are necessary for behaviour change to take place.

Finally, a behaviour-change framework was presented in *Securing the Future* which sought to establish a new set of norms, to “enable, encourage, and engage people and communities in the move toward sustainability” (2005:26). The purpose of this framework was to guide public influencing strategies designed to foster pro-environmental awareness, attitudes, and behaviour. The framework had four components:

**Enabling:** Government will go beyond the provision of information and raising awareness. It will remove the barriers to behaviour change and will provide the necessary resources and facilities, education and skills to support pro-environmental behaviour more likely.

**Engaging:** Government cannot drive the behavioural changes needed on its own. For these changes to happen individuals and communities need to be engaged and the necessary partnerships established with public, private, and third-sector organisations.

**Encouraging:** Government will continue to encourage individuals, communities, and organisations to behave in a more environmentally-sustainable way using traditional policy instruments, such as taxation; financial rewards; penalties, fines, enforcement; social pressure and league tables.

**Exemplifying:** Government will also “lead by example”, ensuring that its policies are consistent with its sustainable-development priorities.

This package of policy measures set out in *Securing the Future* was intended to “kick-start” change and “catalyse people to behave differently” (2005:26). It articulated a particular view of the state’s role in tackling the environmental problems caused by human activity. For example, one of the studies cited in *Securing the Future* is a Cabinet Office paper by Halpern *et al* (2004) which examined the ways that Government might influence individual behaviour across a range of policy domains – e.g. public health, environment, social security and crime – using behaviour-change measures. It advocated empowering citizens to take more

personal responsibility for their behaviour – in Halpern *et al*'s words, “helping people to help themselves” (2004:4). Implicit here is a re-configuration of the role of the state – a shift to an enabling state, a state that influences changes in behaviour through working in partnership with communities and individuals, rather than through direct mechanisms of command and control:

*“The efficacy of government policy may be significantly enhanced, and public behaviour positively influenced, by the application of more sophisticated approaches to support individuals and communities in changing behaviours. To be effective and acceptable, such approaches need to be built around co-production and a sense of partnership between state, individual and communities”.*

*Halpern et al, 2004:4*

Since 2005, DEFRA has further developed this policy framework for pro-environmental behaviour, augmented by a series of studies on public understanding, attitudes, and consumer behaviour (DEFRA, 2008a). The aim of this framework is to guide government policy development and delivery in relation to individual and community contributions to environmental sustainability (DEFRA, 2008a). A social marketing methodology was used to develop it, reflecting a focus on consumer behaviour and lifestyles, and a concern with fostering “sustainable choices” and the “taking up” of “sustainable products” (DEFRA, 2008:11).

The underlying assumption here is that the problem is one of economic behaviour - of unsustainable consumption and environmentally destructive market choices. It follows from the way that the problem has been constructed that the most appropriate policy response is to look at every way possible to foster sustainable choices and pro-environmental consumer behaviour. This logic is also clear in a DEFRA-commissioned study of the role of community engagement in fostering behaviour change:

*“Through their purchasing decisions individuals are responsible for a further fraction of emissions incurred elsewhere in the economy. A focus on the role of individuals and communities is central to the Government’s agenda on climate change.”*

*Letcher, Redgrove, and Roberts, 2007:9*

There are some useful parallels to be made here with approaches and strategies adopted in UK public-health settings to change health-related knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. These have included, for example: legislation; taxation; education; marketing and media campaigns; technological interventions; the provision of resources that support healthy behaviour (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, 2007).

However, interventions and programmes to change behaviour have had mixed results and limited success (Draper and Hawdon, 1998; NICE, 2007). For instance, a review of the evidence relating to behaviour-change measures carried out by National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) concluded that “the research literature evaluating the relevance and use of these models is inconsistent” (2007: 9) and that “the evidence on psychological models was found to be limited” (2007:10). Moreover, apart from lack of good quality evidence to warrant their use, the guidance pointed to a number of other limitations of such approaches to changing behaviour: they have not always led to the outcomes intended; they have often neglected to take into account cultural and social context; and, not least, the individuals being targeted may not always share the same priorities that underpin the interventions directed towards them (NICE, 2007).

### **1.3.2 From behaviour change to social and cultural change?**

There are powerful social, economic, and cultural determinants of pro-environmental behaviour, and of how individual citizens make sense of and respond to environmental problems such as climate change. It is therefore vital that policies to promote sustainable living are grounded in an understanding of how these contextual factors act to promote or obstruct pro-environmental action.

The influence of these wider social and cultural factors on behaviour was acknowledged in *Securing the Future* and in *Changing behaviour through policy making*. The Government's behaviour-change strategy (summarised in the last section) sought no less than to "change deep-seated habits" (Great Britain, 2005:26) and to establish a new set of cultural norms and values to underpin how British society works. However, the discussion about how cultural processes and contexts influence behaviour focuses strongly on consumption. For example,

*"Success will involve tackling complex factors which affect consumption and production patterns. Social and cultural values lie behind people's aspirations and choices" (Great Britain, 2005: 44)*

*and*

*"We need to understand more about the social and cultural influences which shape our consumption choices, habits and impacts" (Great Britain, 2005: 52).*

Yet the role of cultural processes is hardly mentioned in a more recent framework for pro-environmental behaviour produced by DEFRA (2008a).

Cultural and social processes influence far more than consumer choices. Cultural and social contexts constitute how individuals think, feel, and act, and how they perceive and respond to the problems they face. The role of "cultural capital" and cultural processes in influencing behaviour has received recent attention in a discussion paper produced by the Strategy Unit within the Cabinet Office (Knott, Muers, and Aldridge, 2008). This paper explores the role of social relations and cultural processes in achieving policy objectives, particularly in areas such as health and the environment. Whilst it does not express Government policy, it does perhaps signal the potential for taking into account cultural processes in developing effective policies to tackle environmental problems.

Certainly, in public-health settings, the social and cultural influences on health experience and health-related behaviour have been widely studied.<sup>4</sup> Public-health policies and programmes that seek to improve the health outcomes of the population need to take into account these powerful influences on health and wellbeing. For example, the 2004 *Choosing Health* White Paper and the national public-health programme that arose out of it, were based on an understanding of these diverse influences on wellbeing. *Choosing Health* acknowledged the influence of poverty, deprivation and poor parenting on the physical and mental health of many children and young people, negatively affecting health outcomes in adulthood as well (Department of Health, 2004:42). The relevance of culture in promoting health was also recognized in the consultation leading up to the publication of *Choosing Health*:

*"Consultation made it clear that we need to create a culture where being concerned about health, including emotional wellbeing, asking for help or information and discussing risk is seen as natural behaviour that is respected and valued".*

*Department of Health, 2004:44*

It is clear that there is scope for widening and deepening the discussion about how social and cultural processes shape behaviour and action in relation to the environment.

In the last two sections, we have discussed strategies for changing individual behaviour and for promoting pro-environmental living. We build on this discussion in the following section



where we examine the role of community mobilisation in building more resilient and environmentally sustainable communities.

### 1.3.3 Community engagement on environmental issues

Community engagement and participation have been strong themes under the post-1997 Labour government across many areas of public policy, including housing, health, regeneration, and sustainable development. For example, the 2006 Local Government White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, sought to make local government more accountable to local people and enable greater public participation in decision making:

*“The best councils and councillors already work closely with citizens and communities. We want this to be the case everywhere – for people to be given more control over their lives; consulted and involved in running services; informed about the quality of services in their area; and enabled to call local agencies to account if services fail to meet their needs.”*

*Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006:7*

The White Paper’s aim was to set out “a new framework within which local authorities and their partners can work” (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2006:13). It sought to transform the relationships between local government, central government, and local people, and made it clear that a central responsibility of local government is to provide overall strategic leadership in building cohesive, sustainable communities. This is to be achieved through the development of local partnerships (Local Strategic Partnerships) and by enabling greater participation of citizens and community organisations in local decision making (Department for Communities Local Government, 2006:13).

The rationale for increased community participation has been framed in a number of ways in UK public-policy discourse. Across policy domains, it has been seen as a means of improving the quality of service provision, increasing the democratic accountability of local services to those who use them, or improving the effectiveness of those services. For example, community engagement and participation have played a pivotal role in public health as a means of improving services and of improving health and wellbeing (Dixon, 1989; Draper and Hawdon, 1998; Rifkin, Lewando-Hundt and Draper, 2000).

The UK Government has recognized that community mobilisation and participation have a vital role to play in promoting pro-environmental behaviour (DEFRA, 2008a; DEFRA, 2008b; Letcher, Redgrove, and Roberts, 2007). The main rationale for engaging and empowering local communities has tended to be instrumental – it is seen by Government as a tool for achieving behaviour change. For example, a DEFRA-commissioned study on the role of community-level approaches to mobilising individuals around environmental issues found that a number of characteristics were critical to the success of such initiatives (Letcher, Redgrove and Roberts, 2007). These were: a sense of control and ownership; relevance of activities to local needs; the ability to achieve small successes; the existence of a trusted and sustained resource base (2007:5). Furthermore, Letcher, Redgrove and Roberts called for a national-policy framework that supports such initiatives, a call seconded by other researchers (Church and Elster, 2002).

As was made clear earlier, the UK Government recognizes that many complex policy problems cannot be solved by government on its own. The proximity of the third sector to local communities means that they are in a strong position to promote sustainable living and community action to tackle climate change. Indeed, if the Green Alliance is right, in the politics of climate change, third sector leadership is the key to success (Hale, 2008).

In recognition of this, UK Government support for the third sector has been substantial; for example, DEFRA financially supported the national third sector capacity-building programme, *Every Action Counts*<sup>5</sup>. This programme ran over a four-year period (ending in March 2009)

and supported the work of community organisations, community workers, and activists in England in taking action on environmental and sustainable-development issues.

DEFRA's *Third Sector Strategy* published in November 2008 made it clear that partnerships with third-sector organisations would play a central role in delivering on DEFRA's strategic objectives and building sustainable communities across the country (DEFRA, 2008b). The Strategy set out goals and objectives for achieving a more robust partnership with the third sector around sustainability issues. It described the support that the UK Government will provide third-sector organisations to enable third-sector organisations to play an active role in achieving environmental objectives. For instance, it made it clear that the UK Government will look to third-sector organisations to help it "mobilise individuals and communities to choose greener living and protect the environment" (DEFRA, 2008b:5). The Strategy also committed the Government to introducing a Green Living Fund, the creation of a Third Sector Taskforce and the establishment of a new advisory board.

The Third Sector Taskforce was subsequently launched in March 2009. This new high-level partnership will be jointly led by DEFRA, the Department of Energy and Climate Change, the Cabinet Office, and third sector representatives (DEFRA, 2009). It will be tasked to produce an action plan to raise awareness of climate change in the third sector and to foster more action among third sector organisations to address environmental issues.

It is clear that the Third Sector is viewed as an important vehicle for delivering sustainable development and environmental policies and objectives. Moreover, community-based initiatives and social action are likely to be a central contribution of the third sector to tackling climate change and sustainable development more broadly. The next section points to a few examples of community-based initiatives that have sought to engage the public on environmental issues and foster changes in behaviour.

## 1.4 Examples of community-based initiatives to mobilise the public to take action

Next, we point to a few examples of community-based projects and third-sector initiatives that provide the inspiration for the project described in this report.

Downie and Elrick (2000) explored the historic lack of links between environmentalism and community development in Scotland. They argued that only when these two are brought together will effective sustainable-development policies that involve local communities take place.

Facilitating this national policy context is the objective of Church and Elster's (2002) case-study approach to examining the range of community-based instances and initiatives of sustainable development taking place in the UK. They sought to establish the extent to which local practitioners had been effective in linking environmental issues with social exclusion. A key goal was to inform national policy by collating learning from a wider range of local community initiatives.

In a report on how national sustainable development policies have been delivered at the local level, Blair and Evans (2004) argued that there is a need for local councils to lead the way by example. They point to the lack of genuine partnership working between local councils and their communities to deliver sustainable development as well as wellbeing. And they propose a sustainability code of governance called 'principled localism' that establishes obligations on local government to ensure that sustainable development can take place through the effective engagement with the local population.

Other reviews and analyses of specific local or community-level examples of initiatives to promote or improve sustainability exist. For example, the Centre for Sustainable Energy (Redgrove and Roberts, 2007) conducted a survey of community initiatives and carbon trading as part of DEFRA's broader project of examining the role of community initiatives in mobilising behaviour change.

One example of a community-based initiative to engage residents on environmental issues is provided by a project developed by Global Action Plan, an environmental charity set up in 1993 that works towards achieving pro-environmental behaviour change. The Eco Teams programme influenced the work reported in this report and shares with our work a number of assumptions about the role of community mobilisation as a means of fostering pro-environmental behaviour and about the transformative potential of deliberative practices. It was based on a critique of the individualistic understanding of behaviour change that is central to many of the policy responses developed in the UK to tackle health and social problems. Instead, Global Action Plan's approach was based on an understanding of the cultural and social context in which individual behaviour takes place (Nye and Burgess, 2008).

"Eco Teams" were small groups of participating households from a community who were brought together a number of times to discuss, reflect upon, and consider the environmental implications of their lives. The idea was to explore how individuals and households can be encouraged to live in a more pro-environmental way.

The Eco Teams programme was evaluated for DEFRA by Nye and Burgess (2008). The evaluation of the project found that Eco Teams were an effective way of facilitating pro-environmental behaviours such as recycling, composting, shopping locally, avoiding excessive packaging when buying, and reducing overall energy consumption. Nye and Burgess (2008) sought to explain the success of Eco Teams in changing behaviours and pointed to the following factors: the groups provided support, but also acted to regulate participants' behaviour; and the household monitoring and measuring of energy, waste and water acted as a feedback mechanism for maintaining pro-environmental behaviours.

## 1.5 Summary and key learning points

Many of the policy developments proposed to promote sustainable living are grounded in a top-down and mechanical model of behaviour change directed at the individual. We have argued in this section that effective strategies for promoting pro-environmental behaviour need to recognise the role of human agency through community action in the wider context of cultural and social change. The fundamental question underpinning the rest of this report is: How can engagement with, and concern about, environmental issues translate into collective action in favour of environmental sustainability?

The next section gives a detailed account of the programme design, its aims and objectives, and identifies the stakeholders, partners, and participants.

## 2 Project aims, objectives and design

The project set out to explore the ways in which housing association residents living in Brighton and Hove could be engaged on environmental issues. This section describes the aims and objectives of the initiative, and how it sought to achieve those aims – through partnership, community engagement, and social research.

### 2.1 Project aims and objectives

The broad project aim was to promote sustainable living and to reduce the environmental impact of HydeMartlet residents (tenants and leaseholders) living in Brighton and Hove.

This project was orientated towards a set of learning, research and action goals. Its main objectives were as follows:

- To explore HydeMartlet residents' beliefs, perceptions and levels of awareness associated with environmental issues and climate change;
- To raise awareness of the impact of current living patterns and patterns of consumption on the natural environment;
- To identify the economic, social, and cultural barriers to sustainable living among HydeMartlet residents and identify effective strategies for overcoming these barriers;
- To identify what action HydeMartlet could take to make the homes they manage more sustainable and to support residents to live in a more sustainable way.

### 2.2 Research aims and objectives

As well as having a community action focus, the project also had three distinct research-related goals.

The first was to understand the concerns, perceptions, and barriers to environmental change at lifestyle, home and community levels.

The second was to identify effective strategies for overcoming these barriers and what action HydeMartlet could take to make the homes they manage more sustainable and support residents to live in a more sustainable way.

The third was to conduct a qualitative, process evaluation of the project (the evaluation aims and design are described in more detail in section 3).

### 2.3 The partners

Apart from clarifying the project aims and design, and obtaining funding, the initial stage of the project involved building a local partnership to underpin the project's development and to establish a steering group of relevant stakeholders.

The project was led by researchers from the School of Applied Social Sciences (SASS) at the University of Brighton, in partnership with HydeMartlet. The latter is a registered social landlord and is part of The Hyde Group. HydeMartlet manages and maintains over 10,000 properties in Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire.

The project was funded by Brighton and Sussex Community Knowledge Exchange (BCSKE). BCSKE supports partnership projects between the University of Brighton, the University of Sussex and local communities. It aims to tackle disadvantage and contribute to social inclusion in Brighton, Hove and coastal Sussex by strengthening relationships between the Universities of Brighton and Sussex and their local communities.

The project was supported by the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS). TPAS is a national tenant participation organisation working to promote tenant empowerment. A consultant from TPAS was commissioned to recruit the residents and facilitate the workshops.

### **The Steering Group**

The project was supported by a steering group made up the main partners and various local and regional organisations with community and environmental interests. The Steering Group included representatives from the following organisations:

- Brighton and Hove City Council
- TPAS
- Global Action Plan
- Hyde Plus
- HydeMartlet
- Science and Technology Policy Research, University of Sussex
- A HydeMartlet resident and project participant
- Climate South East
- School of Applied Social Science, University of Brighton
- Brighton and Sussex Community Knowledge Exchange, University of Brighton

### **2.4 The participants**

The selection of participants was constrained to residents who lived in HydeMartlet managed, owned, or developed properties situated within the Brighton and Hove city boundaries.

Recruitment took place using a variety of methods that included direct recruitment (e.g. door knocking) and indirect methods such as sending letters to residents, publishing a press release in the local paper and flyers. In order to provide incentives and to reward participation, participants were given a £20 shopping voucher for each session attended.

Three groups of 8-10 HydeMartlet residents with different housing tenures were recruited to take part in the project with the help of the TPAS consultant. This included two groups of tenants and one group of leaseholders/shared owners. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants across all three groups.

**Table 1 Demographic characteristics of participants**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>N*</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	8	34.8	White British	21	91.3
Female	15	65.2	White Irish	2	8.7
Total	23	100.0	Total	23	100.0
<b>Age group</b>			<b>Employment status</b>		
18-24	1	4.3	working full-time	9	39.1
25-34	4	17.4	working part-time	2	8.7
35-44	5	21.7	A home maker	2	8.7
45-54	8	34.8	Retired	2	8.7
55-64	3	13.0	Full-time student	1	4.3
65-74	2	8.7	Long-term sick or retired	6	26.1
Total	23	100.0	Other	1	4.3
			Total	23	100.0
<b>Disability</b>			<b>Tenure</b>		
No - does not have a disability	12	66.7	Tenant	14	60.9
Yes - has a disability	6	33.3	Shared owner/leaseholder	8	34.8
Total	18**	100.0	Other	1***	4.3
			Total	23	100.0

\*two participants did not complete the "baseline" questionnaire.

\*\*five participants did not say whether or not they had a disability, so there were 5 missing cases here.

\*\*\*a carer for one of the participants.

The table shows that almost two-thirds of the participants were tenants as opposed to leaseholders. In addition, there was a balance between those who worked and those who did not work because of a long-term sickness, retirement, or another reason. There was also a high preponderance of women. All participants were White British or Irish. One third of participants reported having a disability.

Table 1 obscures some important differences between the groups. The participants of group 1 (tenants) were on average older (most being aged 45-54), and were less likely to work. Group 2 (tenants) included a mixture of those who worked and those who did not. All members of group 3 (leaseholders) worked and were on average significantly younger than the other two groups.

Section 4.1 describes patterns of involvement and engagement in the project in more detail.

## 2.5 Anticipated outcomes of the project

It was anticipated that this initiative would have five sets of outcomes for participants:

**Knowledge:** Greater awareness of environmental issues and an understanding of what sustainable development means in relation to individual lifestyle, the home and the local neighbourhood;

**Behaviour:** The adoption of a more sustainable lifestyle among participants, leading to a reduction in carbon emissions;

**Social capital:** Positive social outcomes for participants, providing an opportunity to network with other residents and establish new friendships and connections locally;

**Confidence and empowerment:** It was anticipated that planning and undertaking action to tackle environmental issues would raise confidence and empower participants;

**Skills:** The development of new and existing skills; for example, learning about local environmental and social issues; teamwork and communication skills; creativity and leadership; sharing practical knowledge and information.

For HydeMartlet, it was anticipated that the project would provide:

- Practical learning about how to promote sustainable lifestyles and evidence on what works to engage residents on environmental issues;
- A greater understanding of the implications of environmental issues such as climate change and sustainable development for the work of housing organisations;
- Evidence to support decision making around sustainability issues;
- An enhanced level of sustainable living among HydeMartlet residents in Brighton and Hove;
- Stronger community links and higher levels of social cohesion (and the benefits that accrue from that) among HydeMartlet residents in Brighton and Hove;
- Research on how housing associations can work with their residents to develop sustainable communities.

The project also had a set of important partnership outcomes. For example, it sought to strengthen local partnerships between housing organisations, the University of Brighton, local voluntary organisations, and Brighton and Hove City Council. In addition, it was anticipated that the project would lead to closer collaboration between residents and HydeMartlet, particularly around the theme of environmental sustainability.



## 2.6 Project design: How did the project seek to achieve these goals?

The project sought to set up a space for residents to discuss and act on environmental issues relating to their lifestyles, homes, and neighbourhoods, both local and global. In order to do this, we designed and delivered a set of six structured workshops to enable residents to:

- (a) Reflect on and discuss local environmental issues;
- (b) Explore how participants could act able to 'green' their lives, homes and neighbourhoods;
- (c) Reflect on the barriers to such action.

The workshops commenced in February and ended in July 2008 and had the following themes:

- (1) Common environmental concerns at the global/national/local levels;
- (2) Sustainable living/greening your lifestyle;
- (3) Homes and housing/greening your home;
- (4) Community and neighbourhood/greening your community;
- (5) Planning your community action;
- (6) Reflection on what has been learned and recommendations/ideas.

Table 2 shows the themes of each workshop in more detail and sets out the actions that participants were encouraged to take between sessions (to report back on in subsequent sessions).

The process and content underpinning these sessions depended on the stage of the project. For instance, some of the sessions involved semi-structured dialogues and had a focus-group format. Other sessions were more reflexive and unstructured, encouraging more open dialogue.

All of the workshops included discussions on the role of HydeMartlet and, to a lesser extent, the local council, in supporting residents live more sustainably. Residents' recommendations and ideas were reported back to HydeMartlet managers through a consultation/community event after the workshops had finished and through a project report.<sup>6</sup>

The workshops therefore acted as a mechanism for residents to participate in decision making and to express their concerns and ideas relating to how their homes and neighbourhoods might be made more environmentally sustainable.

The workshops also sought to foster individual and neighbourhood action on environmental issues. Once the groups had been established, and the main issues and challenges had been identified and discussed, it was anticipated that participants would review options for individual and social change to promote more sustainable living. They would then go on to develop their ideas for individual and neighbourhood action.

**Table 2 Sequence of workshop session in the neighbourhood sustainability project**

<b>Session no.</b>	<b>Theme/activity</b>
<b>1</b>	<p><b>Introduction to the project</b>            How aware are you of environmental problems and green issues?            What are your concerns and priorities in relation to environmental problems?            What are the causes of these problems?            What impact are these environmental problems likely to have?            What is the role of housing associations like HydeMartlet in helping residents live more sustainably?</p>
<b>Activity</b>	Calculate “carbon footprint” – using UK Government carbon calculator
<b>2</b>	<p><b>Themes: individual behaviour and sustainable living</b>            How green is your lifestyle? What can you do?            What are the barriers to change? How to overcome them?            What might encourage you to reduce activities that increase your carbon footprint?            Do you think there is a role for housing associations?            What can HydeMartlet do to encourage its residents to live more environmentally friendly lifestyles?            What services could HydeMartlet provide to make this more likely to happen?</p>
<b>Activity</b>	<p><b>Greening your lifestyle</b>            Identify one area in your life that you think has a negative impact on the environment: for example, activities which leave a large carbon footprint. Then seek to make a change in your behaviour – either increasing an environmentally-friendly behaviour or reducing a behaviour that you think might be damaging to the environment.</p>
<b>3</b>	<p><b>Themes: homes and housing</b>            How green is your home? How energy efficient is your home?            How could you make your homes more sustainable?            What could HydeMartlet do to help residents reduce the carbon emissions produced by their homes? What additional services could HydeMartlet provide to help achieve this? How can HydeMartlet support residents to run their homes in a more environmentally-friendly way?</p>
<b>Activity</b>	<p><b>Greening your home</b>            This week’s actions will have two parts:            First, how much energy does your home use? And where can you improve the energy efficiency of your home? This will involve reviewing the energy use in your home and undertaking a rough energy audit or “stock take”.            Second, action - do one thing to make your home more energy efficient.</p>
<b>4</b>	<p><b>Themes: community and neighbourhood</b>            How green is your community or neighbourhood?            What action could your community or neighbourhood take to reduce carbon emissions?            What are the barriers to change in the community or neighbourhood you live in?            What could HydeMartlet do to make the neighbourhood you live in more environmentally friendly? What services could HydeMartlet provide to support local community or neighbourhood groups interested in taking action on climate change?            What could the local council do to help people in your area live in a more environmentally friendly way?</p>
<b>Activity</b>	<p><b>Greening your community</b>            Arrange to meet with members of your group somewhere convenient. Then identify an environmental problem that you’d like to focus on and come up with two or three ideas for things you could do as a group to tackle the problem.</p>
<b>5</b>	<p><b>Theme: plan your neighbourhood action</b>            What issue are you most concerned about and which you think you will be able to take action?</p>

	<p>What will you do? What do you hope to achieve?  How will you do it? Who will do what? What resources and support will you need?  How will you maintain momentum? Have you identified the possible risks to your project?</p>
<b>Community action</b>	<p><b>Neighbourhood action</b>  Groups take action with advice and support from the project team.  There will be 4 or 5 weeks between sessions 5 and 6.</p>
<b>6 (final group session)</b>	<p><b>Themes: reflection on what has been learned and future action</b>  How did your community action go?  What happened? What did you learn?  Has taking part in this project encouraged you to become more aware of the environmental impact of how you live/your home?  Have you identified any of the barriers to change? What are the challenges?  What ideas do you have for promoting more sustainable living and more sustainable homes in Brighton and Hove?  And how can HydeMartlet help you to achieve this vision? What services could HydeMartlet provide to reduce carbon emissions from the homes it manages?  Here each group will identify three specific recommendations for HydeMartlet to take forward.</p>
<b>Evaluation</b>	Evaluation interviews with participants
<b>Further action</b>	<p><b>What Next?</b>  What can you do next? What resources are available?  Support groups/individuals with funding and help sustain the projects</p>
<b>"Roundtable" and social event</b>	Presentation of the early findings from the project and social event to celebrate end of project and what you have achieved!

## **2.7 A final “round-table” consultation event**

The workshops involved discussions about the role that housing associations in general, and HydeMartlet in particular, could play in helping residents live more sustainably. Once this fieldwork phase of the project had ended, a round-table event took place at a city-centre venue in Brighton. This was attended by residents who had participated in the project, sustainability and community managers from HydeMartlet, researchers from the University of Brighton, and a sustainability officer from Brighton and Hove City Council. A representative from the company commissioned by the Council to provide a recycling service to city residents was also invited, but was unable to attend.

At this event residents had the opportunity to express their local environmental concerns, discuss their experiences of the project, and share their ideas about possible ways forward. A brief overview was given by the University researchers about some of the central themes to emerge from the project, learning points and some interim findings. Residents were then able to raise concerns and address their questions directly to senior managers from HydeMartlet and a representative from the local council. The event also had a social purpose to celebrate everyone's contribution to the project.

In the next section, we give an overview of how we sought to evaluate the project, including the methodological perspective and research strategy that we applied. We also explain how the evaluation research described here related to the broader research goals of this programme.

### 3 Evaluation aims, objectives and methodology

As well as being interested in learning more about residents' environmental concerns and barriers to living in a more sustainable way, we were also interested in learning about how to best engage residents on environmental issues and how change could be fostered. The evaluation sought to understand the social process underpinning the project and its qualitative outcomes (Patton, 1981). This type of evaluation of complex social interventions has been conducted in the fields of health, education and social care (e.g. Kemp, 2006; May *et al.* 2007).

This section sets out the evaluation aims, methodology and strategy. It is divided into five parts: first, we set out the evaluation aims, followed by an account of our methodological perspective. Then we go on to describe the methods used in data collection and consider the ethical issues related to this research. Finally, an account is given of how the data were analysed.

#### 3.1 Evaluation aims

The evaluation of the project sought to give an account of what took place in the project, the experiences of participants, and its qualitative outcomes. It had three aims:

- (1) To identify the qualitative outcomes of the project and the extent to which the project objectives had been achieved;
- (2) To provide an accurate account of the social process underpinning the project and to document how the project developed and unfolded in narrative form;
- (3) To give an explanatory account of how these outcomes were generated.

#### 3.2 Methodology

A qualitative approach was taken in the evaluation, with a focus on understanding the social process underpinning the project (focusing on the workshops), and identifying its qualitative outcomes.

Three features of the evaluation methodology are highlighted here:

##### **First, a naturalistic approach was applied.**

The evaluation applied a naturalistic approach as we felt that this was the most appropriate way of understanding how community or social-action projects work on the ground.

Social-action projects occur in natural settings where the boundaries between social processes and their outcomes are usually difficult to mark out clearly. Isolating process from outcome, and cause from effect, is rarely straightforward in social research; it is almost always impossible to isolate a causal relationship between intervention and outcome from the impact of other contextual factors.

Moreover, there are considerable methodological difficulties in developing meaningful indicators for social and psychological outcomes. In community-based programmes, effects are often emergent and goals change as the programme unfolds and changes. This means it is sometimes difficult to evaluate such activity in relation to an initial set of goals.

In qualitative evaluation, it is not the scale or extent of the phenomena that is of interest, but the nature, quality and meaning of experience or action in relation to the context in which it takes place. A central concern of what Patton has called the 'qualitative-naturalistic approach' to evaluation is 'describing and understanding these dynamic programme processes and their holistic effects on participants so as to provide information for programme improvement' (Patton, 1980:52).

The 'qualitative-naturalistic' approach is well suited to programmes that change and evolve in response to what is learned, to shifting priorities, or unforeseen difficulties. It is particularly appropriate for the evaluation of initiatives that are, as Patton puts it, 'dynamic and developing, with "treatments" changing in subtle but important ways as staff learn, as clients move in and out, and as conditions of delivery are altered' (1980: 52). Finally, this approach is well adapted to programmes that are innovative or new, where the evaluation can potentially have a formative role.

### **Second, we focused on the process.**

The main focus of this evaluation was on understanding the process underlying the project, what took place, and its impact on participants.

Process evaluations seek to arrive at a conclusion about the value and significance of a programme through researching how it is delivered. Whilst we ought to be concerned with its qualitative impact on participants, process evaluations are not principally concerned with the measurement of outcomes. As Greene has pointed out, the qualitative evaluation of a programme depends on understanding 'how the programme is experienced by individual participants [...] in particular contexts, for it is in these contextualised experiences that the meaning of programme quality and effectiveness are shaped and moulded' (2000:988). This knowledge is vital for improving and developing the programme, for identifying what worked and what did not work, and for future action. What is learned from such evaluations can usefully provide a blueprint for replicating the programme in other settings, at other times, and with different sets of participants (Robson, 2000).

### **Third, we applied a narrative-based approach to evaluation.**

Social programmes evolve and take shape through the combined actions of a variety of individual agents and organisations, often across a range of different social settings. Understanding and unpicking such complex processes means grasping the project's underlying plot, the chains of causally-related events and actions that *is* the project. Being able to account for a social programme means being able to tell its story.

Narrative is relevant to qualitative evaluation in a second way. In narrative-based approaches to evaluation, participants' stories form the basis of accounts of the project, organisation, or service being evaluated. These personal stories often serve multiple purposes for the speaker; they may set out to explain, describe, interpret, evaluate, justify, or celebrate actions or events that have occurred.

Participants' and stakeholders' stories about their experiences help the evaluator to understand the programme from a range of different perspectives and come to a view about its overall significance. These individual narratives interweave with and become incorporated within the greater narrative of the programme or organisation. According to Greene, the task of the evaluator is to 'integrate these multiple individual stories about programme engagement and experience into community narratives' (2000:989).

Sharing their experiences of taking part in an activity, project or programme also gives participants an opportunity to reflect upon and find meaning in what has taken place. This echoes Mishler, who has said that 'telling stories is a significant way for individuals to give meaning to and express their understandings of their experiences' (1986:75). In this way, narrative-based approaches to evaluation can enhance and deepen any learning from the programme, facilitating personal change.

### 3.3 Levels of analysis

Four interlinked levels of activity can be usefully distinguished in community-based programmes:

- (1) Policy development and formation;
- (2) Strategic (decision-making);
- (3) Operational (delivery);
- (4) Experiential.

In the evaluation described in this report, we focused on the last two of these - the operational and experiential levels.

The operational level relates to the narrative at the level of the project. That is, how is it designed and delivered? How does it evolve over time? What are the principles and processes underpinning its development? What are its outcomes? This means attending to the day-to-day running of the project and process issues such as group formation, community action and learning; e.g. how are groups created and maintained? What are the bonds that keep them together?

The experiential level relates to participants' narratives. These are of two kinds: first, the biographical narratives that participants bring to the project; second, participants' stories of taking part in the project and of environmental action. The evaluation reported here sought to identify the impact of the project on participants through listening to these stories. This involved asking questions such as: How did they come to be involved? What did the project mean to them? What individual commitments did they make to sustainability and to working for a sustainable future? What did they learn? Did they experience any changes in their beliefs, attitudes, or behaviour as a consequence of their involvement in the programme?

Whilst the main focus of this evaluation was on these two levels, the project itself also had a broader strategic significance. For example, one of its goals was to develop a more active dialogue around environmental issues between local residents, HydeMartlet and other local organisations such as Brighton and Hove City Council. This involved establishing a process through which residents' experiences and concerns about environmental issues could be voiced and documented in a form that could be taken on board by local decision-makers.

### 3.4 Data collection methods and data sources

Small-scale process evaluations of community-based initiatives or social-action programmes tend to rely on qualitative methods of data-collection involving observation, interviews, discussion, or documentary research. They make use of qualitative-analysis techniques and a diverse range of interpretive tools to make sense of the data generated.

In our project, we pragmatically applied a variety of data-collection methods that would allow us to address both our research questions (described in section 2) and to achieve our evaluation aims. These methods included the following:

### 3.4.1 “Baseline” survey of participants

A questionnaire was designed to collect baseline data about participants’ environmental concerns and characteristics.<sup>7</sup> It had five main purposes:

- (1) To gauge participants’ levels of awareness about environmental issues - the questionnaire included questions about participants’ environmental concerns, attitudes, and behaviours;
- (2) To learn about participants’ levels of social and environmental engagement;
- (3) To provide monitoring information required by HydeMartlet; we identified the demographic and social data that we needed to collect and then adapted a set of items from a standardized questionnaire used by HydeMartlet for equity monitoring purposes;
- (4) To elicit initial ideas about how HydeMartlet might be able to support residents live in a more sustainable way;
- (5) To raise participants’ awareness of environmental issues and to reflect on their environmental concerns, as a primer for discussion in the first workshop.

The concepts or themes we were interested in asking participants about related to each of the five objectives of the project. One set of questions used in the evaluation questionnaire were modified versions of questions from Section G of the Questionnaire used in DEFRA’s 2007 Survey of Public Attitudes and Behaviours toward the Environment (DEFRA, 2007).<sup>8</sup> These were used to gauge residents’ environmental attitudes and behaviour.

Two questions about social participation and frequency of social contact were adapted from the ONS’ Social Capital Question Bank (Rustin and Akinrodoye, 2002). Both questions were used in the British Household Panel Survey 2000.

It is important to note that we were not intending to carry out a systematic survey of HydeMartlet residents here. No generalisations can be made about HydeMartlet residents on the basis of the results reported in later sections of this report.

Of the 25 residents who took part in the project, 23 questionnaires were completed at the beginning of the first workshop session. Some of the data drawn from this survey are reported below.

### 3.4.2 Workshop discussions

Because the workshop discussions were designed to facilitate a process of reflection, group formation and planning of neighbourhood action, they constituted a key source of data. These workshops have been described in full in section 2.

### 3.4.3 Final consultation event at Community Base, Brighton

As described in section 2.7, all three groups had an opportunity to come together at the end of the project for one final consultation event. At this event they were able to meet members of the other groups and share experiences. This also gave residents an opportunity to share their concerns and ideas for change with senior managers from HydeMartlet.



### 3.4.4 Participant observation

One of the researchers attended over two-thirds of the workshop meetings to gain first hand knowledge of the development of the project and to try to understand the relationship between knowledge, meaning and action in relation to the environmental issues under discussion. Together with the recordings made of the discussions that took place at the workshops, the notes collected at these sessions were a key source of data that helped us understand the ways how group identity was created, the process by which knowledge was exchanged and shared within the group, and the link between these two elements with individual behaviour change and community action.

### 3.4.5 Semi-structured interviews (post-project)

A sample of 11 participants from across the groups interviewed for the purposes of the evaluation in order to gain an understanding of how the project had affected participants.

The interviews were semi-structured and were organised around a set of themes or categories relevant to the purpose of the evaluation. In particular, we asked participants questions around the following themes:

- Previous experience of environmental action and community involvement;
- Reasons for taking part in the project and initial expectations;
- Experience of taking part in the project and participants' stories of taking part;
- Impact of taking part in the project on:

Knowledge and awareness (objective 1)  
Behaviour (objective 2)  
Social capital (objective 3)  
Confidence and empowerment (objective 4);

- Appraisal of the project – what worked/didn't work?
- Ideas for the future projects/environmental action.

The evaluation interview schedule is available on the project website  
<http://www.brighton.ac.uk/sass/sustainablelivingproject/>

## 3.5 Research ethics

The main ethical issues of this social action research project were considered at the outset. Here, we identify what these were and how they were addressed:

### 3.5.1 Informed consent

Information sheets set out the project's aims and objectives and what participating in the project would entail. The project was explained in detail to all potential participants before they were invited to take part.

### 3.5.2 Confidentiality within the group

A set of ground rules were agreed upon in the first session for each group. This included a shared commitment to respecting one another's contribution and agreeing to keep any of the discussions to take place in the group confidential.

### **3.5.3 Data protection**

Data were held by SASS and were stored in accordance with the data-protection policy of the University of Brighton and with the requirements of current data protection legislation (e.g. data were securely stored and anonymised).

### **3.5.4 Anonymity**

Participants' confidentiality was maintained by anonymising all documentary and audio data collected, ensuring that participants were not identifiable in any published output.

### **3.5.5 Payment**

Each participant was rewarded for their time in the project, with £20 shopping vouchers offered for every session attended.

### **3.5.6 Participation**

The steering group included one resident representative. In addition, a central purpose of the project was to engage HydeMartlet residents on environmental issues, particularly climate change. Participants were invited to comment on the project report and the steering group representative gave comments on the full research report.

### **3.5.7 Equity**

All adult residents in the selected areas will had an opportunity to participate in the initiative and through the project, influence strategic decisions that affected them.

## **3.6 Data analysis**

### **3.6.1 How was the workshop data analysed?**

A framework approach to qualitative analysis was used in the thematic analysis of the data (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). There were five steps to the analysis:

#### **Step 1 Familiarisation**

The workshop audio data were not transcribed. The first step in the process of interpreting this data was to listen to all the audio recordings across the three groups and to identify emergent themes and categories. During this process detailed descriptive notes were taken of the themes, questions, and what took place in each of the workshops.

Ritchie and Spencer (1994) refer to this process as "familiarisation". It involves "immersion in the data: listening to tapes, reading transcripts, studying observational notes" (p.178). According to Ritchie and Spencer, a central goal of the familiarisation stage is to list "key ideas and recurrent themes", where "the analyst is not only gaining an overview of the richness, depth and diversity of the data, but also beginning the process of abstraction and conceptualisation" (p.179).

## Step 2 Building a thematic framework

In building a thematic framework for analysing the qualitative data collected in the workshops, our starting point was the set of general topics underpinning the workshops (described in Table 2) and our research aims. As described above, we then sought to identify themes and ideas as they emerged from the audio data. These were then assimilated into the topic framework that we had started out with and that underpinned the workshops. The aim here was to produce a thematic framework that would have a high degree of “fit” with the workshop data.

The final version of this framework therefore combined three types of categories<sup>9</sup>:

First, *a priori* categories (e.g. driven by research aims/pre-set workshop themes – and set out in Table 2)

For example:

- Local environmental concerns;
- Global environmental concerns;
- Explanatory models for environmental problems;
- Social responses to environmental problems;
- Practical barriers to living a sustainable life;
- Greening the home;
- Strategies for change.

Second, emergent themes or *a posteriori* categories drawn from participants’ accounts and experiences were selected. Identifying these categories within the broad themes underpinning the workshops (Table 2) was a central aim of the analysis. We were particularly interested in identifying analytical themes – themes “arising from the recurrence or patterning of particular views or experiences” (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994:180).

Third, process and outcome categories – these themes relate to the experience of taking part in the project, the project process, and evidence of outcomes.

The final version of the thematic framework used to classify the data is shown in Box 1.

## **Box 1 Indexing categories used to classify these workshop data<sup>10</sup>**

### **Environmental awareness and concerns**

- Levels of awareness/knowledge and understanding of environmental issues
- Perceptions about the impact of climate change and other environmental problems
- Personal, political and social response to climate change and other environmental challenges

### **Lifestyle**

- Current lifestyle – concerns/how green is your lifestyle? Environmental issues/concerns relating to the individual lifestyle
- Ideas/suggestions for greening your lifestyle
- What could residents do to make their own lifestyles greener?
- Barriers to pro-environmental action/sustainable living and how to overcome them
- What did residents do to change their behaviour?

### **Home**

- How environmentally friendly is your home?
- What could be done to make your own home greener?
- Action taken to green the home
- Barriers to greening the home

### **Community – where you live**

- Neighbourhood – environmental concerns/issues relating to the area you live in
- Local environmental concerns – neighbourhood/block
- Brighton-wide environmental concerns
- Community/group actions
- Barriers to community action/making the community/neighbourhood more environmentally friendly

### **About the project (evaluation)**

- Project process
- Role of facilitator
- Outcomes/impact on participants
- Ideas for improving/building on this project
- What worked/didn't work?

### **Policy and participation**

Recommendations/priorities:

- for HydeMartlet – what can HydeMartlet do to help you?
- for Council/Government
- for other organisations (e.g. business, community organisations)

### **Step 3 Indexing notes**

The codes from this index were then applied to the notes taken from the audio data.

### **Step 4 Charting notes/selective transcription of illustrative excerpts**

Charting is an analytical technique for rearranging qualitative data according to the key themes identified or in relation to *a priori* concepts (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994). In our analysis, the data (in this case, detailed handwritten notes and selective transcription) were lifted from their original context and then entered into charts organised around thematic codes. The purpose here was to transform the data into a form amenable to analysis and that would facilitate comparisons across the three groups. Headings and subheadings for these charts came from the thematic framework shown in Box 1. Illustrative quotes and excerpts were transcribed from the audio data and entered into the appropriate chart and under the relevant thematic heading.

### **Step 5 Mapping and comparing groups and interpretation**

Once the charting of the workshop data had been completed, the data were interpreted as a whole. The aim here was to describe the range and nature of the data, to develop typologies, and to draw out underpinning concepts.

#### **3.6.2 How was the interview data analysed?**

The evaluation interviews were fully transcribed and analysed using an adapted 'framework' approach (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994). The analysis of this data had four stages. First, a process of familiarisation took place in which the interview schedule (available on the project website) was used in order to create the initial thematic framework. Second, a detailed process of indexing was applied using the coding frame. Third, the data were re-organised according to emerging topics and themes. Lastly, a process of mapping and interpretation was applied in order to describe and compare the data across the different groups.

#### **3.6.3 How was the survey data analysed?**

A basic descriptive analysis of the baseline questionnaire data was carried out using SPSS (i.e. tabular analysis, frequency distributions). Participants' responses relating to their environmental concerns, awareness, levels of engagement, etc., were disaggregated by group, tenure, gender, and employment status. Demographic data are reported in section 2. The results of other analyses of this data are included in the sections that follow.

Sections 4, 5 and 6 present the main findings of this qualitative evaluation.

## 4 The social process underpinning the project

This section is the first of three that reports the findings from the qualitative evaluation and examines some of the social processes underpinning the project. All three sections are grounded in the data collected during the course of the project, in the data drawn from the post-project interviews and participants' narratives.

In this section, we focus on the processes of engagement and participation that threaded through this piece of work. We explore the following themes: engagement and participation; a safe social space: informality, and mutual support; reciprocity, sharing knowledge and experience; learning through reflexivity, dialogue and catechism. The final part of the section seeks to characterise this process as one of deep learning facilitated through social engagement and participation.

### 4.1 Engagement and participation

Four themes relating to participants' engagement and participation are highlighted here:

- (1) Engagement with social and environmental issues
- (2) Engagement into the project - initial motivation and engagement into the project
- (3) Involvement and participation in the workshops
- (4) Factors that promoted engagement and participation

#### 4.1.1 Existing levels of engagement with social or environmental issues

There was some evidence of existing community engagement among participants at the outset, but this was limited to work-based groups or tenant groups. For example, in the baseline survey, participants were asked about their local involvement in their communities.<sup>11</sup> The main forms of organisational affiliation and involvement were as follows:

- Seven participants were involved in a local tenants' group or residents' committee (mostly groups 1 and 3);
- Seven were members of a trade union (mostly groups 2 and 3);
- Four residents were involved in a community or civic group;
- Only 2 residents said that they were a member of an environmental group;
- None were members of a political party, religious or faith organisation.

Participants were also asked in the baseline questionnaire about what action they had taken on green issues. Table 3 shows the proportion of participants who had engaged in various forms of local pro-environmental action over the past year.

**Table 3 Showing reported pro-environmental actions of participants over the past year (February 2007 to February 2008)**

Type of environmental action	%	Base N
Made suggestions to friends, family, or neighbours about how they might live in a more environmentally friendly way	57	23
Taken action on environmental issues in the area that you live	45	22
Participated in any green or environmental groups	14	21
Made suggestions at work about how to make your workplace more environmentally friendly	42	19
Contacted HydeMartlet with suggestions about how your home could be made more environmentally friendly	17	23
Contacted your local council with suggestions about how your local community or neighbourhood could be made more environmentally friendly	30	23

Note: The question items shown here are modified versions of questions used in Section G of the questionnaire used in DEFRA's 2007 Survey of Public Attitudes and Behaviours toward the Environment (DEFRA, 2007).

Table 3 shows that there was limited experience of taking action on environmental issues among residents. For example, when they were asked whether or not they had been involved in any local action on social or green issues over the past year (e.g. campaigning, organising events, etc), half said never, but around one third had been involved monthly or several times that year. Three residents were involved in social or green local issues several times a month. Overall, then, there was some degree of social activism among half the group at the start of the project.

There were also some differences between groups in the level of pro-environmental action. For example, members of the leaseholder group 3 were more likely to have lobbied friends or family, to have taken local action on green issues. Participants from groups 1 and 2 (tenants) were more likely to have lobbied their landlord, HydeMartlet, or the council on green issues.

Finally, in the baseline survey of residents we asked about residents' local social ties.<sup>12</sup> The frequency of contact with neighbours was used as a broad indicator of the extent of local social ties among participants, beyond their own families/households. When asked "How often do you talk to your neighbour?". Two out of every five residents said "most days", but one third talked to a neighbour just once a month or less.

Levels of participation in the local community varied between the groups. Residents from group 1 were much more likely to talk with neighbours "on most days", perhaps reflecting the fact that most members of groups 2 and 3 were in full-time employment.

#### **4.1.2 Engagement into the project - initial expectations and motivation**

In the first workshop and in the post-project interviews, residents were asked about their initial expectations and motivations for taking part in the project. A variety of motives for participating were identified in the qualitative analysis of this data:

First, **environmental concerns**: It was clear that most of the participants had been motivated to take part by their environmental concerns.<sup>13</sup> Many of the concerns cited were very local such as rubbish, waste and recycling. For example, one member of group 2 (tenants) emphasised that her concerns had motivated her to take part, downplaying the material incentive - though acknowledging that this was a motivating factor as well: "That's the reason why we're all here this evening. It's not just about getting vouchers. It is because we are seriously concerned about this issue" (participant, group 2). Concerns for their local environment were also a key motivation for taking part; for example, some were frustrated at the state of recycling facilities in their area. Finally, there were some residents who had participated in HydeMartlet led resident involvement activities and saw the project as an opportunity to get involved in something that will benefit their local community.

Second, **taking action**: It was clear that some participants viewed the project as a way of taking local action. For example, in the evaluation interviews, some participants explained that they had decided to take part in the project because they saw it as having a realistic prospect of having a positive impact. One resident felt generally negative and powerless about climate change, but welcomed being offered a chance to work with local people to make a difference:

*“Yeah, so we wanted to know more about that, but, so yeah, yes I think and, for me as well, I was feeling a bit negative I suppose about, quite negative and powerless I guess about the whole concept of climate change, which is very real as well as being conceptual, and feeling quite concerned about it. But also I had a sense of inertia and lack of motivation and thinking, “Well, is it worth doing these tokenistic things?” So, yeah, that’s a motivation to get going into something like this”.*

Some residents expressed a civic motivation for taking part. For example, a participant from group 1 described how she wanted to see Brighton “at the front” in addressing green issues, and saw this project as a contribution to that end. Another participant from group 1 decided to take part because she felt strongly that the society she lives in is very wasteful and she wanted to take positive action to change this: “I felt by coming to this, I can understand how I can make a difference and pass that onto other members of my family and friends” (participant, group 1). She thought that the project would raise her awareness and help her to “understand what’s going on around the environment and also that I can get involved and do something positive to help” (participant, group 1).

Third, **learning and increasing awareness**: One participant (group 1) was motivated “to get involved in projects that will raise community awareness”. Others were motivated to take part because they were interested in learning more about green issues and how to live in a more environmentally-friendly way. For instance, another member of group 1 was keen to learn new ways to save money and to look at ways of making the home more energy efficient. Certainly, some members of group 3 (leaseholders) saw the project as an opportunity to learn from others and to deepen their understanding of environmental issues.

Fourth, **being heard**: Some participants were motivated to take part because they saw the project as a means of voicing their local environmental concerns. They wanted to influence their social landlord or the council into taking action. For example, a participant from group 2 said that “the reason why we are here is because we are all passionate about it and if we all shout a little bit louder, someone up there will listen”. One member of group 1 cited concerns about the inaccessibility of recycling facilities and saw the project as a way to influence her landlord in taking action on this. Indeed, this motivation to take part was confirmed in the evaluation interviews, where interviewees expressed a desire to raise with HydeMartlet their concerns regarding some of the less environmentally-friendly features of their homes.

However, not all participants were positive about the prospect of their voices being heard by their social landlord. A participant from group 1, for example, saw the project as a means of influencing HydeMartlet, but was pessimistic about the prospects of being listened to: “It’s very difficult to see how it will fit in and get them to listen” (participant, group 1). Similarly, some members of group 2 also had low expectations about the chances of being listened to (“What’s the point of going, no one is going to listen to us?”).

Fifth, **social engagement**: In the evaluation interviews, the desire of getting to know like-minded people who might share a concern about local environmental issues was a motivation for some. One resident from group 2 had acted as an advocate on sustainability issues in her workplace, but felt isolated as few of her work colleagues shared this passion and interest. For her, joining the group was a way of linking up with others who felt like her:



*“I was hoping that I’d meet people that had the same, were singing off the same song sheet if you understand, that we all had the same interest and passion - and I wouldn’t feel so isolated [...] And I think that’s my expectation of it. It was to speak to people that actually didn’t think, oh and laugh, not, yeah laugh at me, but who had the same interests”.*

Finally, **mixed motives**: It was clear from listening to the workshop data that some participants did not have clear expectations about the project at all and were unable to cite any clear reason for taking part. Whilst none of the participants overtly referred to this, it is possible that the availability of vouchers for attendance might have motivated some came to the workshops. Indeed, this was a point raised by two of the participants in the evaluation interviews. It is important to understand that many of the participants were older people living on a basic wage or pension which meant that the £20 voucher could have been more of an incentive to take part. Indeed, one of the residents admitted as much when she said “Absolutely it’s : when you’re on a basic pension, to get every three weeks to get this extra £20, it’s like, ‘Ooh, that’s good’ “!. However, she pointed out that it was ultimately the subject matter that motivated her to attend the sessions, and that she would not have participated in the project had she not been interested in the topic.

#### **4.1.3 Involvement and participation in the workshops**

The project took a participatory approach that encouraged participants to feel fully involved. Whilst engagement on the issues was a key motivation to take part for many, ongoing participation worked to galvanize further engagement.

Two forms of participation could be distinguished: first, participation in the activities that were part of the weekly set tasks and, second, participation in community action. Both were linked - actively participating in the workshops enhanced confidence in the entire enterprise. Many residents showed a strong moral commitment to tackling environmental problems and understood the role of individual and collective action in making a difference.

#### **4.1.4 Evidence of participation and engagement**

There were three groups in the project ranging in size from 7 to 10. One of the groups met during the daytime, whilst the other two groups met in the evenings. Table 4 below shows the number of participants who attended each of the sessions in each group.

**Table 4 Pattern of attendance in workshops, by group**

Workshop number	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3	
	N	%	Count	Row %	Count	Row %
1	8	100	5	71	6	60
2	7	88	5	71	7	70
3	5	63	7	100	7	70
4	3	38	6	86	7	70
5	5	63	6	86	9	90
6	6	75	5	71	4	40
All	8	100	7	100	10	100

As Table 4 shows, the level of participation was reasonably steady throughout. This was mainly due to the hard work of the TPAS consultant whose role it was to recruit participants in partnership with HydeMartlet officers. The lowest attendance rates were seen in groups 1 and 3, where less than half of the group attended sessions 4 and 6 respectively. By session 4, around a quarter had dropped out. This left a core group of committed participants (around 70-75 per cent of the original group members) who had formed around a set of shared issues and concerns. It was clear from the audio data for group 1 that, by session 5, participants were highly engaged and activated, and that the facilitator played a vital role in this. From the workshop data for group 2, there was evidence of a high level of engagement with the issues and, by session 4, the group had begun to bond well; for example, the facilitator reflected back to the group at the end of this session: "You do seem to be getting together quite nicely as a group".

Engagement and participation in the project fluctuated between workshops and within them. Box 2 gives a summary of what took place in the workshops for Group 3. It demonstrates this shifting process of engagement and participation. It also highlights the facilitator's vital work to create an informal, open and non-punitive atmosphere to keep residents on board.

## **Box 2 The process of engagement and participation – Sample of notes taken from audio recordings for Group 3 illustrating the engagement process**

**Session 1:** The session started by members of the group being introduced to one another. The facilitator explained the purpose of the project, introduced members of the research team to the group, and provided opportunities to ask questions. After this, discussion began on the environmental issues that concerned participants most of all.

**Session 2:** This session began with feedback on what members of the group had done since the last session to green their lifestyles. The TPAS facilitator encouraged the group to reflect on how green they considered their lifestyle to be, a kind of process of self-appraisal. There were no responses initially. The facilitator then started to talk about her own lifestyle, citing examples of where she had sought to live in a more environmentally friendly way. The participants then worked in small groups/pairs to explore ways of changing their own lives in the following areas: transport, water, food, consumption, recycling (participants were given one area each to focus on). The feedback from this exercise was very animated and the energy in the group lifted. This was clearly due to the relevance of the issues and perhaps because some had had to move out of their comfort zones to critically appraise their own lifestyles from an environmental perspective. The discussion that followed highlighted the moral nature of the issues and how they can rouse strong feelings.

Many creative ideas for greening one's lifestyle were shared and the facilitator finished off by explaining the themes of the next session and setting the next task. By this point, the group was less animated, less engaged, less enthusiastic. When setting the "homework" task, the facilitator made it clear that it was not compulsory for everyone to complete the task ("I'd rather you come and didn't do things"). Participants were asked to identify one area of their life and make a small change – either a positive change (to do something differently or new) or a negative change (to stop doing something or do less of something). The facilitator again engaged them by moderating expectations and promising to try and do something to change her own lifestyle, seeking to lead here by example.

**Session 3:** Participants discussed how environmentally friendly they felt their homes were and how they might make their homes more environmentally friendly in relation to the following categories: water, waste, garden, adaptation, energy.

**Session 4:** This session focused on participants' local neighbourhoods. When asked how green they felt their communities were, there was a subdued response from a few members of the group. The TPAS facilitator had to work hard to elicit a response from them. When the group was asked to come up with their ideas for things that could be done to green their neighbourhoods, the facilitator observed that they were unforthcoming and tired. They did, however, propose a few ideas for small neighbourhood projects. The facilitator shared some of her own ideas to get them started and ended up making some specific suggestions. Much of the talking in this session was done by the facilitator, rather than the participants.

**Session 5:** The group did not sound very energized or cohesive; perhaps this was because they came from different geographical areas and had entered the project at different points in time? For example, four of the group came from the same area of the city and were noticeably less engaged than other members of the group. Again, the facilitator had to work hard to engage and involve these four residents, offering them ideas, suggestions, local resources, contacts, offers to investigate funding sources, etc.

**Session 6:** By the final session, these four residents had dropped out, and only a small core group of participants remained and were able to feed back on their community actions.

This shows the complexities involved in group identity formation and engagement. Some members of group 3 knew each other before taking part, but, for most, this was the first time they had met. A few members of this group found it difficult to engage and share with the rest of the group, and disengaged altogether towards the end of the process.

#### **4.1.5 What factors promoted ongoing engagement and participation?**

A number of factors promoted participants' engagement and participation.

First, the project focused on issues that mattered to residents. For example, by the final workshop, after some of the participants had reported back on their local actions, the TPAS facilitator reflected back to one of the groups: "It's a lesson for all of us I think when you're thinking 'Oh we haven't got any sense of community'. It's just about getting the right thing". "Getting the right thing" is clearly a vital ingredient for engaging local people in social action.

Second, one participant from group 2 commented in one of the workshops: "Groups like this are brilliant as long as we are not ignored". Indeed, it was made clear to participants from the outset and throughout that residents' views would be taken on board by HydeMartlet and it was hoped that what was learned in the project would influence decisions relating to sustainability issues. It was vital that these initial expectations of authentic involvement were fulfilled in order not to risk residents' positive perceptions of either the project or of HydeMartlet.

Third, the vouchers paid to each resident clearly had a role in maintaining attendance for some participants. It is possible that the vouchers acted as "a sweetener" for those who would have participated anyway. Those who were mainly motivated by vouchers had probably dropped out by the final session.

Fourth, for most participants the workshops were accessible and took place at a convenient time and in a place the residents could get to. However, some experienced barriers, such as clashes with work commitments and a general lack of time to take part. In the final workshop session, participants of group 3 felt that the evening workshops needed to be somewhere where everyone could get to. The venue for one of the groups had to be changed because the room was on the first floor of a community centre, which meant it was difficult to access for residents with a disability.

Fifth, flexible expectations on the part of the participants were important in order to maintain engagement and attendance. The approach to setting and feeding back on the "homework" tasks was relaxed; the tasks were voluntary and had a learning rationale – they involved doing something small and practical, and then reflecting on and sharing the outcome. For example, the tasks set in session 3 were undemanding and the TPAS facilitator made it clear that it was not compulsory to complete them (e.g. "If you don't do it, it doesn't matter"). The facilitator would repeatedly remind participants that the activities set at the end of each meeting were not tied to participation in future sessions and that if they were unable to do anything between sessions, then they should still come to future meetings.

Sixth, the emotional and administrative work carried out by the facilitator was vital for the success of the project – a key part of her role was to engage and empower the residents, and to support and encourage their full participation. The analysis of the workshop data highlighted the following areas of emotional and group work carried out by the facilitator.

This work created the conditions for the participants' learning and action:

- Initial recruitment and engagement into the project;
- Maintaining attendance and interest among participants;
- Encouraging and motivating residents - for example, during the workshops, this was achieved through constant motivational talk and by staggering the payment of vouchers;
- Coaching, advising, guiding, and informing - for example, at the outset, the facilitator addressed participants' concerns and questions about taking part in the project. This was important for securing residents' initial engagement;
- Managing expectations and facilitating individual and group decision-making;
- Building the groups - fostering positive relationships characterised by trust and reciprocity among participants, and so establishing the conditions for local action;
- Facilitating dialogue, learning, and encouraging reflection.

Finally, the workshops were designed to engage participants in a dialogue about environmental issues and to motivate them to make some small steps to green their own lives, homes, and communities. This participatory approach and the principles underpinning the workshops helped to engage participants.

Here, we focus on four features of the workshops that characterise the approach taken:

- Informality and sociality;
- Learning through dialogue and reflection;
- Reciprocity and sharing.

These features of the workshops are examined in the remainder of this section using audio data from the workshops and interviews.

## 4.2 Cultivating a safe social space

Positive participation required that residents felt welcome and relaxed. Fostering an informal and friendly atmosphere was key to achieving that.

### 4.2.1 Forming the groups

The TPAS facilitator was successful in building three groups characterised by mutual support, informality, and friendliness. Sometimes this group-building goal of the facilitator was visible in the reflective comments she made to the groups. For example, during session 4, she reflected back to members of group 2: "You do seem to be getting together quite nicely as a group". Indeed, it was clear from the audio data for this group that she had succeeded in establishing a positive social space within which participants could explore a range of personal and public concerns – an informal, relaxed environment where participants could share their ideas freely, and a condition for collaboration on their shared projects.

The role of the TPAS facilitator was crucial in steering the process of group formation, a fact acknowledged by the residents themselves:

*"The group was nice because you, because we've had moans, haven't we? We've come along with moans and shared our frustrations and people have come up with suggestions for other people and also we've had this direction from [name of facilitator] which has worked really well because otherwise a lot of meetings they just wander off, don't they?"*

### 4.2.2 Mutual support

There were high levels of mutual support and collaboration displayed across the groups. This acted as an incentive to participate for some, leading to comments during the workshops like: “You have to get extra support from people [...] That’s why I like coming there” or “This group’s quite useful” (group 2, session 6). For example, a participant in group 1 offered to give other members of the group a lift to future sessions. Up to that point, they had travelled to the workshops by taxi. Another example comes from group 2 (session 5), where participants were very supportive, share ideas on how they might respond to local environmental problems. One participant was concerned about waste disposal from a local supermarket, and it was suggested among the group that he write to the supermarket to complain and contact an organisation called Fairshare to collect the waste.

Some participants reported receiving additional support with their community actions from other people living in their neighbourhoods. For example, a participant from group 1 had set up a gardening project with the help of HydeMartlet. She consulted local residents about regenerating a green area that had been untouched for 11 years. This led to more interaction with their neighbours and fostered new local connections:

*“People have been really helpful [...] one man went past and actually saw what I was doing and came back and gave me some tomato plants and I planted them all out”.*

When asked whether bringing this green space back to life had given her any satisfaction, she responded:

*“It made me really happy. It’s just bringing people together and its giving other people pleasure. I didn’t think about the people above [...] so it was quite nice [...] There was a gay couple. They moved here and lost their garden and were so upset and now they’re happy that they can be involved in it all. And they’re the ones that are gonna be planning the plants and everything”.*

### 4.2.3 Sociality

Sociality<sup>14</sup> and friendliness was a feature of the groups and an important ingredient for establishing the conditions for collaboration on shared local projects. This was another important part of the facilitator’s role - to constitute the group and foster positive relations and trust between participants. For example, getting to know your neighbours and other residents was identified as a key outcome or theme for members of group 1 (session 4). One resident from this group highlighted the value of building local relationships for responding to environmental problems collectively:

*“The biggest thing is to get to know your neighbours...once you get to know people, then you club together. But you’ve shut yourself behind the doors, then you think I’m not going to get into all that. You can’t do things on your own.”*

Another example comes from a participant in group 2 who explained how she had appreciated meeting people who also had an enthusiasm for environmental change. For example, she said that, before getting involved in this project, she had felt like a “lone wolf” advocating on environmental issues. Participating in the group helped her feel more connected with people with similar concerns and values (“You don’t feel like a geek”).

In another case, meeting new people was precisely the reason for joining the group in the first place:

*“It was a way of getting out to meet people because I live on my own. I don’t associate very much with the people on the estate,*

*so it was a way of getting out to meet different people from different walks of life. And just sort of actually going out of the house to physically do something, rather than just going out to do the shopping once a week. I think I've been very conscious of the fact that I really do need to get out more and it's hard to know where to go to meet people".*

Sociality then galvanises agency. For example, in the 5<sup>th</sup> workshop for group 1, participants were asked to discuss and plan their community actions in pairs. As participants presented their ideas, other members of the group were very positive and encouraging about one another's ideas; in this way, the positive social relations established in the group helped to motivate participants.

Indeed, right across the groups, it was remarkable how little conflict there was – a kind of moral consensus in relation to environmental issues was established, and those participants who were unclear about their moral position on the issues being discussed were perhaps most likely to disengage from the project. This moral consensus was the basis for the shared neighbourhood actions that followed. In the end, the long-term objectives of taking part in the project were clear to many of the participants, some of whom would say, "You know, I am just trying to do my bit so that my children can enjoy a decent world".

### **4.3 Sharing experience and knowledge**

Establishing a safe, informal social space was an essential part of the project process. But this was also a means to an end – to establish the right social conditions so that participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences, ideas, and knowledge. A participant from group 3 put it succinctly in a post-project interview:

*"It was quite informal which was good, so it was a relaxed atmosphere and it makes people feel that they can talk and they're not being scrutinised or criticised so it's a nice open forum isn't it?"*

The sharing of information, contacts, learning, and experience was a central part of the social process underlying this project. An important learning point was that residents themselves are a vital source of knowledge and expertise on practical ways of making home and locality more environmentally sustainable.

In a post-project interview, one participant emphasised that he had valued this aspect of the project and learning from others:

*"That's one of the best things about it, because it's like sharing our ideas and you always : you might have some people who think they have all the answers or they know something, but other people always have something to add, so that's like a think tank, isn't it? It's an exchange of ideas which is really good."*

Many of the workshops included high levels of information exchange between participants which could potentially inform future lifestyle decisions. A few participants were particularly knowledgeable and clearly enjoyed the opportunity to share their knowledge with others. As one participant said of another one in group 1: “[Name] is like an encyclopaedia isn’t she!”. Here are some examples,

- In session 3, when reporting back on what they had done in their homes, one participant from group 1 had investigated buying or obtaining a composter and shared this information with the rest of the group;
- A long discussion about water meters took place in group 2 (session 4), with one participant sharing his knowledge on the topic with other members of the group;
- Similarly, a member of group 3 had some technical knowledge on energy efficiency, which he shared with other members of the group;
- A participant from group 2 shared their knowledge about recycling, emphasising that only certain types of plastics can be recycled;
- In session 4, a participant from group 1 discussed all the ways of reducing energy use and how to live more sustainably, providing lots of practical tips shared (e.g. where to buy low energy bulbs – “I think IKEA does them. I think you can get them online”).

The sharing of ideas and practical advice about greening one’s life, home and taking action in the local neighbourhood were a central part of the learning process. For example,

- Sharing ideas around food and cooking. In group 1 (session 2), for example, a participant described how she had bought some old cook books and had started using old-fashioned recipes;
- Sharing ideas about how to save money (groups 1 and 2). A participant in group 2 explained that, with her particular energy provider, economizing on electricity over the year is rewarded with a bonus;
- Sharing practical tips about gardening. Members of group 1 shared ideas about gardening and growing food, with one participant explaining how to grow food in pots.

Another example comes from group 3, where two participants set up a website focusing on environmental issues as one of their actions. This was used as a way to discuss common concerns such as pollution, noise, and other environmental issues, such as how and where to grow vegetables.

The TPAS facilitator offered advice and guidance to each of the groups in relation to their individual and neighbourhood actions. Examples of this advice include:

- Suggesting that participants talk with other tenants’ groups/associations who have carried out community planting – and to share their experience of doing this (group 3);
- Sharing her own ideas from other community projects delivered from elsewhere to stimulate ideas for what action participants could take;
- Providing advice on how to access money – e.g. through existing community associations;
- Advising participants on how they could come together to become a formally constituted group so they could then apply for funding (group 2).



Finally, there was also a considerable amount of information sharing relating to local services and information sources, particularly relating to waste and recycling. For example,

- At the end of session 5, a member of group 1 recommended the money-saving website [www.moneysavingexpert.com](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com) to the rest of the group;
- Sharing information about who to contact about waste issues. For example, a participant from group 1 shared her experience of using the community service provided by Freecycle;
- The TPAS facilitator shared information about the local recycling service provided by a Brighton-based organisation called Magpie (group 1);
- Sharing of information about health food shops and where to buy green food, local grocers, etc.

The learning point from all this is that if people with an interest in environmental issues are brought together in a room and are given the opportunity and time to establish rapport and trust, then the likelihood is that much of the knowledge and experience required to live in an environmentally-sustainable way will already be there in that room. It is a matter of unlocking it.

The process of reflecting on and evaluating those aspects of our lives related to environmental sustainability is one way to foster changes in behaviour and encourage local environmental action, something we explore in the next section.

#### **4.4 Learning through reflection, dialogue and catechism**

Here we explore the contribution of dialogue and reflection to this process of individual change and learning.

The workshops had a clear structure, which was necessary to achieve the research goals of the project, and also to give the facilitator a framework to work with. Nonetheless, there was enough flexibility within this overall design to allow for exploration and improvisation.

The activities and discussions that made up the workshops were designed to encourage participants to reflect on the ordinary and everyday aspects of their lives, and on what changes they might be able to make in their own lives, homes, and neighbourhood.

It was clear from the post-project interviews that many of the discussions that took place in these workshops were highly reflective and there was some evidence that they resulted in deep learning<sup>15</sup> in some cases. Tasks were set at the end of each workshop that encouraged participants to reflect on and evaluate the environmental friendliness of their own lifestyles, homes, and neighbourhoods. Not all participants fully engaged with these tasks, but many did.

It was clear that, where they did so, the tasks were often effective in raising awareness of those aspects of their lives and the places where they live that perhaps could be more environmentally sustainable. An example comes from the second workshop, where participants fed back on the exercise to calculate their carbon footprint. This task proved to be an effective way of engaging participants in a discussion about the sustainability of their current lifestyles. There was clearly a moral dimension to this discussion, with green equated with virtuous or good. The question about the environmental friendliness of one's lifestyle is clearly a morally loaded one. This meant that participants were sometimes reticent to present themselves as living unsustainably or doing nothing to make their homes/neighbourhoods more environmentally sustainable. An important part of the process then in engaging participants on environmental issues is to cultivate an atmosphere of trust and safety, where people feel comfortable talking about these areas where they feel they may not be doing enough and that they could do more.

Participants were often aware of the moral inconsistencies in their own behaviour. For example, a participant in group 3 admitted to flying once a year, and that she was keen to continue this, aware that this might not be so good for her carbon footprint. But then, in a twist of logic, she believed that her flying was off-set by the environmental friendliness of the rest of her lifestyle, flying presented as “the evil among the goods”.

This moral positioning is indicative of how many participants thought about environmental issues in relation to their own lives; climate change and other environmental problems presented them with a set of moral dilemmas about how they should live and what action they ought to take to address their wider environmental concerns. For many participants, engagement and participation in this project was a way of exploring these moral questions about how to live a good, green life.

An experience-centred, dialogic model of learning was applied in the project, rather than one based on teaching, preaching and fact feeding. For example, at the outset, at least one resident had expected something less participatory, with more of an emphasis on formal teaching sessions, delivered by experts on climate change or sustainability issues. In a post-project interview, she summed up her initial expectations and how they had contrasted with her actual experience:

*“When I, yeah, at first I thought it was people going to be almost lecturing you on this and saying that you ought to do this, this and this. And then when we got there [...] we thought, ‘Oh no, it’s not’. It’s a case of finding out and asking about things.”*

Other participants showed an awareness of the advantages of informal discussion and practical experience over more traditional methods of learning. For example, one participant from group 1 commented in a post-project interview:

*“It’s surprising how the difference from being here and having just literature – to hear what other people have said [...] It’s almost as though you’re doing an exam without having learned anything [...] It’s not the same as coming here and doing it.”*

Summarising and reflecting back was an important part of the learning process. An important part of the coaching role of the facilitator, for example, was to reflect back to the participants, summaries of what they had said and what they had committed to.

Finally, as the groups moved into the action phase of the project, questions and catechism played a vital role in getting participants to think about the viability of their ideas. Practical questions were posed by the TPAS facilitator and other members of the group to encourage participants to narrow down their ideas and to think through the process of how they would achieve their goals.

#### 4.5 Summary: The social process as deep learning

Sharing and reciprocity in a climate of genuine interest and dialogue permitted a true exchange of ideas and practical tips for behaviour change or for campaigning and taking community action. So a key learning point from this project was that a positive, non-judgemental social environment supports deeper learning processes and increases the likelihood of individual behaviour change.

The informal sharing of ideas and tips for everyday life can potentially lead to practical changes. Working within a group can place social pressure on participants to make such changes and can motivate participants to change their behaviour that might otherwise be difficult to maintain.

Personal change happens within the context of the relationships in which our lives embedded. This is why social rather than individual-focused interventions are likely to be more effective in getting people to make a commitment to live in a more sustainable way.

Box 3 represents the process schematically as a series of steps.

#### Box 3 The process of fostering behaviour change

**Step 1:** Individuals with a seed of concern (diffused, unclear) become motivated enough to join an interest group;

**Step 2:** Group activities lead to the creation of a group identity, making individual members more likely to follow certain behavioural patterns 'prescribed' or sanctioned by the group;

**Step 3:** Group activities (e.g. sharing information and eco-practices), reinforce group identity but also lead to practical learning about ways of living more sustainably;

**Step 4:** Working in a cohesive group can provide a social incentive for taking action that conforms to the values shared by members the group. The process of 'reporting back' at the beginning of each session served this function, providing a gentle social incentive to carry out the tasks set in the previous session;

**Step 5:** Belonging to a group can help to motivate changes in behaviour, especially if those changes involve making an individual effort (e.g. cycling instead of driving).

In sum, this section has discussed some of the benefits of group-led discussion and group work for learning through experience and reflection, and for behaviour change. The next section reports back on some of the actions taken by the participants.

## 5 Promoting pro-environmental action

This section describes what participants did and gives an account of residents' pro-environmental actions across three levels: lifestyle, home, and community.

The workshops were complemented with “homework” activities that participants were asked to complete in their own time between each of the sessions. Over the course of the programme, the scope of these activities became increasingly broad, moving from the individual to the neighbourhood level; the process started with raising individual awareness of environmental issues and encouraging pro-environmental action at the individual level. Attention then shifted to the home, and finished with action at the neighbourhood level. These actions are described in Table 2 (Section 2) and included things like calculating carbon footprints, conducting a home-energy audit, or researching opportunities for local environmental action.

In the remainder of this section, we describe some of the things that participants did at each stage of the project.

### 5.1 Sustainable living

We start with lifestyle change.

#### 5.1.1 Lifestyle changes reported by residents

The introductory workshop centred on a discussion about participants' environmental concerns and sought to raise participants' awareness of environmental issues. At the end of this workshop, residents were asked to calculate their individual “carbon footprints”.<sup>16</sup> The results of this activity were then used as a starting point for discussion in the 2<sup>nd</sup> workshop which focused on sustainable living. During this workshop, participants were asked to identify how they could live in a more sustainable way, and to identify any of the barriers that prevented them doing so. Ideas for achieving overcoming these barriers to sustainable living were shared among the group. In the final part of the session, participants were asked to commit to making small, manageable changes to their lifestyle (e.g. to reduce carbon emissions by driving less, reducing daily water or energy use, etc.).

So what changes did participants make? Box 4 shows examples of the kinds of lifestyle changes that participants made. Most of these lifestyle changes were reported back in the 2<sup>nd</sup> workshop. Participants also reported green intentions and changes to their behaviour during later workshops, when the focus of the discussion was not on lifestyle change.

## Box 4 Lifestyle changes reported by residents

### Group 1

- Used public transport instead of driving;
- Walked more and drove less;
- Shared a lift with other participants to the workshops;
- Bought loose produce and less packaged food;
- Bought more locally produced food and checked the origins of food to reduce food miles;
- Calculated carbon footprint and identified aspects of lifestyle and home that most contribute to carbon emissions;
- Cooked more and froze leftovers;
- Made own meals instead of buying convenience food;
- Signed up to milk round and reused bottles, instead of buying milk in plastic containers from supermarket.

### Group 2

- Made an effort to more recycle more;
- Walked more (e.g. to the shops);
- Lobbied business responsible for local recycling;
- Recycled shoes and clothes;
- Refrained from buying takeaway coffee;
- Gathered information about local recycling facilities;
- Took cardboard and plastic to local school for modelling;
- Looked into recycling mobile phone – found out how to do this;
- Used public transport rather than bus;
- Bought locally-produced food.

### Group 3

- Used car less;
- Walked more;
- Used public transport instead of driving;
- Cycled more;
- Bought locally produced and in-season vegetables and fruit.

As is clear from Box 4, the most common changes that participants made to their lifestyles were related to transport – many reported a switch to other modes of transport other than the car. Instead, participants took to using public transport, cycling and even walking! A commitment to flying less, especially within Europe, was made by a few participants during the course of the project - although some were unapologetic about flying and saw it as a necessary part of their lives.

Another focus of participants' actions was around food; some participants indicated that they were more aware of the sources of their food, opting for local sources of food or consuming more organic produce. Some participants sought to avoid supermarket chains in favour of small, local providers of fresh food. A few went even further than this, and had made a commitment to grow their own vegetables in gardens or allotments.

### 5.1.2 Preaching to the converted?

However, in interpreting these results, it is important to note that it was often unclear what reported changes in behaviour had taken place as a result of participation in the project and which behaviours pre-dated the project. Differentiating between these required careful listening to the audio data from the workshops.

Many participants had already begun the process of adapting their lifestyles to a more sustainable model before the project had begun. For these participants, it was a matter of doing more of what they had been doing already. As one participant put it, this involved “tweaking” his behaviour “rather than making major changes”. For example, he had made an effort to buy more local produce and to pay more attention to the origins of the food he consumed:

*“I’m trying to source a lot of vegetables and fruits after the conversation we had last time [...] we started to get lazy and take wherever in the supermarket [...] but very difficult. We had to cut back on certain fruits”.*

The issue of food provoked plenty of discussion and debate among residents who often framed their choices about food in terms of sustainability. For example, is it better to buy imported organic fruit or non-organic, locally-produced fruit?

### 5.1.3 The boundary between “home” and “lifestyle”

Clearly, it is both. An important learning point from these early workshops was that the conceptual boundaries underpinning the project design were very porous and did not map very well onto participants’ everyday experiences. For example, the *a priori* categories “lifestyle” and “home” were found to be overlapping, such that action taken to make the home more environmentally friendly could also be interpreted as pro-environmental behaviour or a shift to a greener lifestyle. Is leaving the TV on standby to a lifestyle or home-related issue?

## 5.2 Changes in the home

At the end of session 2, participants were asked to identify three things that they could do to make their home more environmentally friendly. In preparation for the third meeting, residents were also asked to complete a do-it-yourself, home-energy audit through a service provided by the Energy Saving Trust.<sup>17</sup> Box 5 shows some of the things that participants reported doing to green their homes during the course of the project.

## Box 5 Changes in the home to make it more environmentally friendly

### Group 1

- Switched off lights and saving on light use;
- Changed from conventional incandescent bulbs to low-energy bulbs;
- Bought a composter and began to compost;
- One participant joined the Energy Saving Trust's "Save 20%" campaign;
- Some participants could not think of any changes beyond what they do already in the home.

### Group 2

- Recycled water – e.g. water used to cook pasta transferred to watering the plants;
- Used less water;
- Installed a water meter;
- Put a "hippo" in the toilet cistern to save water;
- Made a greater effort to turn everything off "standby";
- One participant reported buying more locally-produced food;
- Another participant made changes to how she pays her bills, moved to a green energy provider, and switched to paperless billing to reduce waste. She also ordered an energy monitor from her electricity company;
- One participant had looked into buying a cheap wormery.

### Group 3

- Switched off lights;
- Changed to low energy light bulbs;
- More aware of turning off computer;
- Helped with composting at another participant's composter – adding to their compost.

\*Note: the list here for Group 3 is shorter than that for the other groups because the participants were not asked to feed back on the actions they had taken to green their homes in session 4. Unlike the other two groups, this session started with a discussion about neighbourhoods/communities so that no time was allocated to feedback on what people had been doing in their homes.

It is important to add a note of caution when interpreting Box 5. As has already been mentioned, many of the pro-environmental actions listed in Box 5 were things that participants were doing already. It was not always clear whether these actions were a consequence of or pre-existed participation in the project. That is, the distinction between what participants were already doing and the changes linked to involvement in their project was often blurred in the accounts given during the workshops. For example, one participant in group 2 said that he had made an effort to turn everything off and not leave electronic goods on standby. But it became clear as the discussion went on that this was a habit that pre-dated involvement in the project.

By the end of the project, some participants had replaced conventional incandescent light bulbs for energy saving ones or had chosen the highest energy rating for electric goods when replacing old ones. Those with gardens were composting and harvesting rain water. Some of the tenants without showers lobbied their housing association to install water-saving showers in all homes.

### 5.3 Community/neighbourhood action

Sessions 4, 5, and 6, focused on planning, implementing and then reflecting on environmental action focused at the neighbourhood level.

In session 4, residents identified the environmental issues facing their neighbourhoods and the areas in which they live. At the end of this workshop, each group was invited to develop creative ideas for small-scale neighbourhood actions. Either individually or in small sub-groups, they then selected one of these ideas to take forward to develop between sessions 5 and 6.

The 5<sup>th</sup> session focused on planning and clarifying the focus of participants' neighbourhood actions. Members of each group shared their ideas for local action. The TPAS facilitator helped them refine and focus these ideas, and provided advice on how to put them into practice.

Each group was supported by both the TPAS facilitator and HydeMartlet in developing and implementing their neighbourhood projects. In the final workshop, the groups met to reflect on what they had done, what they had learned and to identify a set of priorities and recommendations to take to HydeMartlet and Brighton and Hove City Council.

Box 6 describes the actions that residents took to make their neighbourhoods more environmentally friendly.

#### Box 6 Action that residents took in their local neighbourhood/community setting

##### Group 1

In the final workshop, participants from group 1 reported back on at least three actions that had focused on the local community.

A group of participants had acted together to lobby for "clean-up days" across their local area. Two Brighton and Hove community organisations, Emmaus and YMCA, were contacted about picking up large unwanted goods that the local council usually charges to remove. However, after consulting with Emmaus, one resident felt that the idea was impracticable: "Anything that's worth anything people are gonna take before they come round [...] and we don't want to end up picking up rubbish because we have to pay to get rid of it". Emmaus had advised her that the Council should do the clearance. It was only after liaising with a HydeMartlet housing officer on the issue that a community clear-up was arranged. By the end of the project, there was some anecdotal feedback that HydeMartlet had responded to participants' concerns and had organised a clean-up operation on the estate.

One participant decided to do act independently and lead on the replanting of a green space near where she lives. Again, there was good support from HydeMartlet.

Another participant became involved in a tree planting project with her local community association and planted a palm tree.

##### Group 2

In the final workshop, participants from group 2 reported back on some of the things that they had done since the previous workshop to make their local neighbourhood more environmentally friendly.

The first example of local action involved three residents who sought to green, regenerate, and replant a small derelict area. This required liaising with the local council and with HydeMartlet and local people. One participant sought to engage others in a project to green this space which was owned by the council. She contacted local people involved in the Neighbourhood Watch scheme and had asked them what they would like to see done with



the derelict area. As a result, nine neighbours signed up to help maintain the derelict land, and to help landscape the area and plant trees.

Two participants lobbied a local business to reduce the amount of litter in their street. For example, they had contacted their local MP about the situation and had asked other members of their group to sign a petition. They had also approached HydeMartlet for help with this issue and had lobbied local councillors.

Finally, one resident acted as a green “champion”, campaigning for better recycling facilities in her local area and had sought to raise awareness among other residents about recycling through a local newsletter.

### **Group 3**

In the final workshop, members of group 3 (the leaseholders’ group) also reported having been involved in some local neighbourhood activities to green the area in which they live. Community-level action included the following:

Two residents set up an online discussion forum and notice board for their block. They used this to highlight and discuss green issues and to share information about green organisations and services. They also used this as a way to begin a campaign against excessive energy use in the communal areas of the block.

One resident had become involved in the planting of a roof terrace in their block.

Two other residents lobbied the council and HydeMartlet for better communal recycling facilities.

Participants in this group also explored the viability of installing solar panels on the roof of the building they live in.

As is clear from Box 6, a rich variety of action took place aimed at small-scale interventions in the local neighbourhood. The priorities for residents included better recycling facilities, cleaner streets and more energy-efficient homes. The actions taken to address these priorities included lobbying the housing association, the local authority, or local businesses. Some projects included converting abandoned spaces into green ones or growing food. There were also a number of projects aiming to create networks among residents to share ideas and concerns and, critically, building capacity for future action on sustainability issues.

On the other hand, in retrospect, we were probably not realistic enough about what it would take to develop a set of coherent, robust community environmental projects. The groups did not come together collectively to act around a single focused project as we had planned, and the organisation of the neighbourhood actions was fragmented. Some of the participants did not do anything at all in their neighbourhoods, whilst a few had disengaged by the final sessions.

Nonetheless, an important lesson explained by residents was the realisation that tackling many of the issues highlighted in the early workshops required collaborative responses and could not be addressed by individuals on their own. Small groups of individuals like themselves could create the critical mass necessary to effectively improve sustainability at the local level and, where necessary, seek help from the local council and other key institutions.

## **5.4 Next Steps**

Following the publication of a project report, participants were invited to discuss how the remaining funding from this project could be used to help reduce the environmental impact of HydeMartlet residents in Brighton and Hove. It was agreed that it would be split and used for two purposes: first, to support the community projects that arose out of the project; and, second, to support new environmental-action projects involving HydeMartlet residents. For

instance, around £1000 of money was awarded to residents who took part in the project to establish a green space in their neighbourhood.

HydeMartlet are in the process of adapting the workshops so that they can be used by in-house staff to promote behaviour change and engagement on sustainability issues across their operating area.

Residents' recommendations are being considered as part of HydeMartlet's internal environmental action planning process, emphasising the need to link solutions for both people and their homes.

The next section explores some of the personal outcomes that residents reported having achieved as a result of their taking part in this project.

## 6 Qualitative outcomes

In this section we describe some of the evidence of the qualitative outcomes of the project, focusing first of all on the four original objectives of the project.

Social-action projects involve the facilitation of events, actions and experiences directed towards positive personal and social change. If there are clear and realistic project aims, then it is possible for small-scale qualitative evaluations to determine whether or not such projects have achieved what they set out to achieve.

Identifying outcomes and effects are central to such evaluations, but this is rarely straightforward. For example, even if the immediate outcomes of the social programme are positive and identifiable, their long-term effects may be negligible, impossible to document, or both. Moreover, many of the outcomes may be unanticipated, emerging during the course of the programme. How does one take these emergent outcomes into account when evaluating community-based work?

As noted in the last section, a methodological challenge we faced in this project was differentiating activities and behaviours that pre-existed the project from the qualitative impact on participants. Most of the residents who took part in this project had already taken some action to make their lives and homes more sustainable. For instance, in group 3's final workshop, somebody said that "these groups seem like preaching to the converted because we were [...] we are more sustainable now".

### 6.1 Knowledge, learning and awareness

There was some evidence from the post-project interviews that the project had led to more awareness of environmental issues and ways of responding to them. For example, some participants reported in the workshops that they felt more aware of the environmental impact of their homes and lifestyles. For example, a participant in group 1 (2<sup>nd</sup> session) reported to the group that "I'm very much aware of things now. I turn everything off in the house that I can do [...] I try and buy as much fair trade as I go round". She added that, as a result of participating in the project, she had become more aware of sources of food and tried to shop more locally.

Some participants also reported changes to their thinking about green issues. The discussions that took place in the workshops raised participants' awareness of the ordinary and everyday aspects of their lives, now viewed through a green lens. For example, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> workshop session, participants reflected on the environmental friendliness of their everyday habits and routines. In response to this, one participant in group 3 commented: "It made me think about washing clothes so much". Another member of group 3 observed "we had to find ways around things, so it has been quite useful [...] I don't think if we hadn't been to this group, we would be consciously thinking about it".

Raising awareness about green issues among others was also a possible outcome of the project. For example, one participant (group 1, session 6) reported that participation in the project had encouraged a change in her thinking and this made it more likely that she would seek to encourage others to think differently: "It makes you think differently, and then you talk to your friends or your family and make them think differently". An outcome for another participant from group 1 (session 6) was that the project had influenced her family. Another example comes from group 3, where two participants set up a website and online discussion group for residents in their block to discuss and find solutions to their environmental concerns.

New knowledge was a clear outcome of the project for many participants. For example, one participant (group 1) reported during the 5<sup>th</sup> session, that "I've learned so much". More specifically, some participants had gained a better knowledge about green organisations or

services. Another participant (group 1, session 6) said that she had learned about the work of Emmaus Brighton and Hove and its Goodwill co-op project<sup>18</sup>, and she was keen to learn more. A participant from group 2 reported in session 6 having learned more about sources of support for community-based green initiatives. Others reported gaining new technical knowledge as a consequence of their social actions. For example, one participant from group 3 explored the viability of putting solar panels on the roof of his block. In doing so, he reported having learned more about the structural conditions that would need to be met for installing wind turbines.

In sum, there was some qualitative evidence of greater levels of knowledge, learning, and awareness in participants' own accounts. Often, this process of learning went together with a process of dispelling myths, as one resident reports. Originally, her concerns had been centred on recycling. Yet, in her own words, the project made her look at the issues of sustainability in a much broader way, as something that affects all aspects of how she lives:

*"I think it has increased my awareness of certain things : made me want to pursue certain things : made me want to look at things in a different way. And go on the internet and look things up, and thinking, "Well, I didn't know that". Some people say, "Well, what's sustainable development?" They think it's recycling isn't it? It's not just about recycling. And people forget. I think I've learned that, that there's far more to it than just doing. As much as the recycling is an important part of it, there's more to it".*

In the post-project interviews, there was a clear emphasis on the quality of the learning that had taken place (deep knowledge, as opposed to just awareness of sustainability issues). This distinction is important, because for residents, the mix of increased understanding and group participation led to some behavioural changes among members.

## **6.2 Behaviour and lifestyle changes**

### **6.2.1 Changes to behaviour**

There was also some qualitative evidence that participation in the project had led to the adoption of a more sustainable lifestyle among some participants. For instance, in session 4, the facilitator reflected back to participants in group 1: "Since you've been coming along, you've really made some changes". Echoing this, a participant from group 3 reflected in the final workshop: "This has been helpful to us and getting us to be greener". In session 5, a participant from group 1 was heard asking another participant: "Have you found you've got a lot from this?" The other participant responded: "Yes, I've actually changed the way that I think". She went on to explain that she had moved beyond just a change of perspective to a change in behaviour:

*"Actually, the ordinary things, the personal, household things [...] It's made me think a lot more...everyone says you all know about turning the water off when you clean your teeth and we all know about reusable bags, but I think it did get beyond that".*

In session 6, a participant from group 3 reported that she was "buying a lot more [clothes] in charity shops" and that she had started walking more ("I'm walking more [...] I'm definitely more aware of stuff"). A participant from group 1 explained in the final workshop that she had started going to the farm shop to buy free-range eggs, rather than to the supermarket. But she qualified this by saying that her motivation was to do with cost rather than the environment. Her participation in the project had given her ideas about saving money and reducing costs. Indeed, there had been a "big change" in her shopping habits!

Residents were often keen to present themselves and their lives in as green a way as possible. A desire to be recognized as good and green may have acted as an important

motivation for behaviour change among some, as a way of appearing virtuous in front of others. The facilitator reflected back to participants of group 3, describing them as “vying to bath less, and shower less, wash their clothes less [...] I’m more dirty than you”. It is possible then that presentation of self as green in the workshops might have translated into more environmentally friendly behaviour in everyday life.

In the post-project interviews, residents argued that increased knowledge and awareness were the precursors to behavioural change. As one resident put it, the project had given her the opportunity to make some changes in the way she lives:

*“I see this project as that launch from being aware but not actually doing anything [...] Or not feeling I’m doing anything, to actually having a sense that, “Yeah, things are changing, I am acting to make a difference”. So, and that’s quite, been quite timely and quite a good opportunity I think to do those things. So yeah, I would say it has had quite an impact”.*

### **6.2.2 Change to how residents use their homes**

In addition to making changes to their lifestyles, residents also changed how they used their homes (e.g. reusing water, switching to green electricity tariffs, etc.). For example, a participant from group 1 reported in the final workshop that she had started to hang out her washing to dry on a line, rather than use a washing machine. Another reported that she had got a water butt fitted to harvest rain water.

There was also evidence that residents from group 3 had sought to adopt more sustainable behaviours in relation to their homes. For example, one resident described how they had become more conscious of the environmental performance of a new fridge/freezer as a consequence of being involved in the project. Another member of group 3 described how he had begun to ration his consumption of water: “I’ve been timing myself in the shower [...] using less water”. But the motivation was not wholly environmental – cost played a part; the change in his behaviour had been motivated by the “shocking rise” in his water bill, as well as by his environmental concerns. To save energy, he had also begun to wash his hands using cold rather than hot water. Other residents from this group reflected that there were some limits to the changes that they could make in relation to their home; there were some things outside of their control – for example, the way that their homes had been designed or the fact that HydeMartlet manages the communal areas.

### **6.2.3 Action in relation to the local neighbourhood**

A few residents also took leading roles as sustainability “champions” or joined others in campaigning for green spaces, or for changes in how energy is used in their buildings, or had begun to grow vegetables in communal areas.

The local actions that participants undertook to green their neighbourhoods are described in the previous section.

### 6.3 Social capital

The project had some positive social outcomes for participants, providing them with opportunities to network with other residents, and establish new friendships and local connections.

A central outcome was that the project brought people together who did not know each other at the outset together. For instance, for group 1, the geographical distribution of residents across the city had been a barrier when it came to planning local action. On the other hand, it also provided an opportunity to meet with other residents from other parts of the city.

For some, the meetings during the day gave them a place to meet others; for example, a participant from group 1 reflected in the final session: “For me: because for me, because I’m so lonely – it was somewhere to meet people”. For another resident in this group, the project had been “a way of getting out to meet people because I live on my own, I don’t associate very much with the people on the estate, so it was a way of getting out to meet different people from different walks of life”.

### 6.4 Confidence and Skills

#### 6.4.1 Confidence and empowerment

There was also some evidence from the workshops and the post-project interviews that the project had raised the confidence and motivation of participants to take action. For example, in the first session, a participant from group 1 reflected back on the action she had taken to make her home life greener: “I was quite chuffed with myself”. Another participant in the same session observed that: “My whole thing is green now. What I can do – and I’m annoyed I can’t do more”, clearly showing a high degree of environmental engagement.

Here are some specific examples of action taken by participants illustrating these themes of confidence and empowerment relating to environmental issues:

- Joining other groups related to sustainability and climate change (e.g. Transition Towns);
- Lobbying other organisations (e.g. local recycling companies, Brighton and Hove City Council) for recycling facilities, improved rubbish collection, etc. For example, two participants lobbied Brighton and Hove City Council about waste left near their home by a supermarket;
- Leading a group project to turn a piece of abandoned land into a green space;
- Joining a food-production scheme that made use of household compost for a community garden, taught participants new skills, and gave them vegetables for their own consumption.

Confidence and a newly-gained sense of empowerment was a common theme among some of the older members of the groups. For one resident, the project had given her a sense of purpose and something for to focus on:

*“Yeah, it’s made me realise that I can go outside these four walls and actually contribute, because I haven’t worked : I had to take early retirement [a few] years ago, and you do get to the point where you think, I just don’t feel like I’ve got a purpose anymore”.*

### 6.4.2 Skills

The workshops and evaluation interviews with participants uncovered a number of skills implicit in their individual and collective actions described above. These skills included:

- Teamwork;
- Communication skills;
- Negotiation skills;
- Project development and community organising;
- Learned how to lobby and campaign;
- Identifying sources of information and support for green initiatives.

### 6.5 Emergent outcomes

There were a few other qualitative outcomes that emerged from the project and that we had not explicitly focused on at the outset. Perhaps most obviously, the project made a contribution to strengthening the relationship between local residents and HydeMartlet, encouraging a dialogue around local environmental issues. For example, a participant in group 1 commented in the final workshop on how approachable HydeMartlet had been when she had presented them with her ideas: “I was really surprised at how approachable they are about ideas [...] when they came it was ‘yeah, fine’. Not only that. They took it further than what I expected”.

Other examples of emergent outcomes included:

- Adopting pro-environmental behaviours meant living more economically for many participants, so participation in the project gave them plenty of ideas about how to save money - an important issue for those on low incomes or basic pensions.
- Some residents actively sought to engage other people in their neighbourhoods and raise local awareness about local environmental issues.
- In some cases, reflecting on the use of resources such as energy and water in everyday activities had a more personal impact. For example, one participant from group 3 reflected, “It [the “homework” activity] made me feel guilty about washing the sink!”.
- Another resident said that she had been encouraged by the project to get more involved in tenant representation.

The project succeeded in raising the profile of sustainability issues for HydeMartlet<sup>19</sup>, making them more likely to engage in future pursuits along these lines. In addition, HydeMartlet now has a significant body of residents who might act as environmental-sustainability “champions”, as well as an established means of communicating with residents on these issues. These emergent outcomes for the housing association are valuable and can potentially develop even further.

The next section summarises the learning from the project and identifies some practical principles for planning and organising this kind of community-based activity to address local environmental issues.

## 7 Summary of learning: What worked/didn't work?

The purpose of this section is to explore the practical implications of the project and to set out what we learned about how to engage residents on environmental issues.

The section is divided into four parts. First, we identify aspects of the project and the workshop programme that could be improved. Second, we present some of our learning with regard to collective action and environmental behaviour change that links up with the discussion presented in section 1. Third, some of the barriers to pro-environmental behaviour in relation to home, lifestyle, and neighbourhood are explored. Finally, this section outlines a number of principles for overcoming some of those obstacles to pro-environmental action.

### 7.1 What worked and what didn't work in the workshops?

In the post-project interviews, some ways of improving the workshop programme were identified. For example, some residents would have liked to have had access to more technical information or expert answers to some of the questions that emerged in the discussions. One resident felt that some of the arguments and ideas expressed in the later workshops were repetitive.

Members of the project team also identified areas for improvement as the project unfolded:

- Some of the sessions were too long;
- Too much time was spent on feeding back in some sessions;
- Some sessions were overloaded, with too much crammed in;
- The groups were too geographically dispersed and this was a barrier to neighbourhood action and identifying shared local concerns;
- There was too much overlap and repetition between some of the sessions; for example, homes and lifestyles overlapped since, in practice, they are substantially the same thing for many people.

Box 7 identifies some practical ideas for improving the workshop programme that underpinned this project. Whilst many of these suggestions are based on our own reflections, some of these ideas and suggestions originated with the residents themselves or from the TPAS consultant:



### Box 7 Ideas for improving the workshops

- Shorten the time taken with feedback;
- Be careful not to pack too much into each workshop;
- Workshop sessions should be closer together;
- Session 3 (focused on the home) could be organised around places in the home to give it more structure; for example, kitchen, lounge, bathroom, garden;
- A more explicit focus on appraising and evaluating the sustainability of lifestyle, home, neighbourhood;
- “Field trips” could be built into the project to provide for a variety of learning experiences; for example, viewing local eco home developments;
- An increased emphasis on practical learning and the development of skills/capacities; for example, one could include a budget for training days or workshops in areas such as project management, sustainable energy, waste and recycling, green DIY, and so on;
- Draw on external advice and expertise in the form of seminars, briefing sessions, or practical workshops. It is important that participants are able to tap into local and national sources of expert advice and guidance for their neighbourhood initiatives e.g. horticultural expertise; advice on making the home more energy-efficient; information about renewable energy sources and micro generation;
- An information pack with practical advice on greening the home and where to get information on each theme covered in the workshop discussions;
- Review categories underpinning the workshops, particularly lifestyle and home. Analytically speaking, these categories can be distinguished but not in practice. One way forward would be to organise the discussion and activities around a simple set of categories grounded in residents’ everyday lives, such as: gardening; travelling by public transport; cooking; food shopping; clothing; showering and bathing, etc.

### 7.2 Summary of learning points about engaging housing association residents on environmental issues

The success of community-based environmental initiatives depends on an effective recruitment and engagement strategy. The strategies and tactics used to engage housing association residents in this project led to mixed results. Whilst three groups were recruited, it was only the hard work and continual efforts of the TPAS resident engagement consultant that kept the residents engaged.

Some of the learning points and principles relating to the engagement and recruitment of residents are set out in Box 8. These are generalisable across a range of groups and settings and not just housing association residents

### Box 8 Principles for recruitment and engagement of participants in community-based environmental projects

- Over-recruit at the outset in anticipation of some attrition;
- Use a variety of recruitment methods; e.g. door knocking; “snowballing”, encouraging participants to bring their friends and neighbours; press release; local residents’ newsletters; posters;
- Leaflets and flyers are unlikely to be effective on their own. For example, in one of the workshops, group 1 participants discussed how best to consult with other residents on environmental issues. There was a consensus that leaflets and flyers generally do not work on their own and that more direct engagement methods such as “door knocking” are more effective: “Leaving things with people and telling them to leave it on the doorstep doesn’t work [...] you have to actually knock back and half the time they say ‘oh yes, I did see something, hold on’”, and, “You’ve got to actually knock on their door and talk to them”);
- Provide a mixed set of incentives – material, personal, social, political, moral;
- It is easier to engage residents and then build cohesive groups if everyone is from the same neighbourhood or geographical area. Recruiting from the same geographical area makes collaboration on community actions more likely;
- Make it cost-free for participants to take part;
- Make it easy to participate: meetings with participants should take place where everyone can get to easily, near where people live;
- The scheduling and timing of meetings and other events should be tailored to residents’ daily routines; for example, if most of the target group work, then the sessions will need to be programmed to take place in the early evening;
- The project worker needs to be skilled and experienced in community engagement and be an effective facilitator/group worker in order to engage and strike up a good relationship with residents;
- There needs to be a visible and authentic commitment to change from partner organisations and a willingness to listen. Effective engagement depends on a belief among participants that they will be heard, that what is said and done will influence decisions that affect their lives. That is, it needs to be clear to participants where the ideas, recommendations, and learning will go after the project has formally finished.

### 7.3 Obstacles to building neighbourhood action<sup>20</sup>

As section 5 has shown, there were mixed outcomes in the neighbourhood actions. Why didn’t the groups come together to take action in their communities in the way we had originally intended? A number of barriers and difficulties explain this:

First, **coordination**: There was a lack of organisation and coordination among the groups. People living in the same block/area did collaborate where they could, but the groups were geographically disparate and this worked against collaboration.

Second, **communication**: However, there was also limited communication between sessions between participants, even among those living in the same vicinity; for instance, a barrier for group 1 was that no one took responsibility for communicating with the others and so collaborative action could not be developed outside of the workshops. As the TPAS facilitator reflected back to members of group 3: “One thing I’ve noticed with the other groups is sometimes that communication between the sessions has been difficult [...] you are busy people [...] it drifts”.

Third, **motivation**: Motivation may have been an issue: the incentives may not have been enough to maintain engagement for some participants; vouchers were good at getting people to turn up, but are not necessarily that effective for motivating community activity which depends on a high level of social and emotional engagement.

Fourth, **time**: The time-scale was too tight for refining, developing, and putting into practice participants' ideas and plans. The groups needed much more time (i.e. several months) to develop their ideas and to build local action with support from HydeMartlet, the council, and a dedicated community development worker/facilitator.

Fifth, **focus**: There was a lack of focus in residents' ideas. The groups found it difficult to attain a clear focus and identify a set of realistic goals.

Sixth, **collaboration**: There were poor levels of communication between HydeMartlet and the groups in the early stages, though this improved mid-way through the project. Moreover, at the outset, the partnership underpinning the project was weak, leading to poor levels of communication between the project team and HydeMartlet. Again, this improved later on and, in the end, HydeMartlet was very supportive of participants' ideas and the project as a whole.

#### **7.4 Overcoming the obstacles to neighbourhood environmental action**

How could the project be improved to build local social action around environmental issues? Box 9 sets out the principles that help to build effective social action to address local environmental problems.

### Box 9 Principles for building social action around environmental issues

**More time spent on planning and teambuilding prior to taking action:** As already mentioned above, residents needed a longer, more realistic period of time (3-6 months) to clarify objectives, develop an action plan and implement their projects. It was felt among the project team that outcomes would have been more robust if participants had had a longer relationship with the project. It was also clear that the groups needed to meet more often among themselves before moving into the action phase.

**Proper resourcing:** As with all community-based initiatives, adequate resourcing is crucial. For example, a resident suggested that we should have put aside a “pot of money” for their community action, and specified from the outset that this was available for residents to draw on. We believe that a budget allocated to each environmental action group to support their work would have led to a more robust set of outcomes and more substantial local activity. Residents should also be properly rewarded for their time, and alternatives to vouchers need to be considered, including direct payments where possible.

**Make available relevant practical training:** For example, residents could have been offered workshops on planning and coordinating local environmental projects or be helped to gain the practical skills and knowledge necessary for achieving their environmental goals.

**Ongoing support:** Ongoing monitoring, support and advice from a dedicated project worker are also necessary whilst the groups are developing their ideas and then putting them into practice on the ground.

**A robust partnership underpinning the project:** From the point of view of the research team, a key lesson from this project is the vital importance of building a strong partnership early on between the professionals and decision-makers working in the organisations involved. Without a robust partnership in place at the outset, such projects are bound to run into barriers. There needs to be evidence of visible political and practical “buy-in” from the organisation/institution(s) concerned from the outset. To facilitate partnership working between residents and housing associations, it is vital to have a named employee from the organisation who acts as a bridge between the residents and those working on the project.

**Robust local sustainability partnerships:** The existence of active local environmental organisations and sustainability partnerships are likely to make it easier to establish community initiatives focusing on local environmental issues. Private and voluntary sector partners can offer vital sources of support to community groups in tackling environmental issues that they are concerned about. It is particularly important to involve the local council as a key partner at an early stage because they lead on sustainability issues in each locality.

**Effective communication:** Community-based initiatives to mobilise local people to take action on environmental issues depend on clear channels of communication between all partners – in this case, between community actors and housing officers. In addition, ongoing communication between participants is vitally important for developing and coordinating local action.

**A defined geographical focus:** Geographical proximity among participants fosters collaboration and networking. In order for the participants to work together in an ongoing fashion to build their projects, it is essential that they live in the same area (street, block, and neighbourhood).

The final section draws together the various threads of this report, identifies some key learning points, and makes some recommendations to housing organisations on how to engage their residents around environmental issues.

## 8 Summary and recommendations

This report has presented findings from an in-depth qualitative evaluation of a social-action project to engage residents living in Brighton and Hove on environmental issues. This evaluation shows that the project was successful in engaging three groups of tenants and leaseholders living in Brighton and Hove and living in homes/neighbourhoods managed by a local housing association, HydeMartlet. Each group of residents met on six occasions in which they discussed, debated, reflected on a number of changes to their behaviour that began with their lifestyles and successively moved to their homes and neighbourhoods. The project was successful in promoting pro-environmental behaviour among some residents and, to a more limited degree, in fostering local environmental action. It was also successful in building a dialogue between residents and a housing association around local environmental issues, particularly in relation to housing.

### 8.1 Policy and research implications<sup>21</sup>

Sustainable housing policies need to be informed by a more sophisticated understanding of how people inhabit their homes and how they negotiate the information they receive about climate change and other environmental problems.

Community-based initiatives have an important role to play in fostering pro-environmental behaviour. Authentic resident participation can make a significant contribution to the sustainability agenda, as this project has demonstrated.

This project has shown how housing associations can do more than provide residents with information in leaflets and newsletters about how to make their homes more environmentally friendly (although this is a useful starting point). This project has shown how they have a role in supporting processes of community mobilisation and neighbourhood action involving their residents.

Housing associations are important local actors that can positively contribute to the creation of sustainable communities through active engagement in LSPs. Working with local councils, other voluntary sector organisations and residents' groups, housing associations can play a useful role in fostering the safe social spaces needed for people to come together to improve the local environment and take action to address wider environmental problems such as climate change. Such spaces can be built by fostering social capital and positive community bonds. These are a condition for collective action on sustainability issues and also provide channels of social influence and change.

Based on a review of social-science research on sustainable development and climate change, suggestions for further research that stem from this study include the following:

- A central question to emerge from this project, and which warrants further investigation, is how residents understand the relationship between their homes, local environmental problems, and global environmental issues, such as climate change, overexploitation of natural resources, biodiversity loss, or pollution?
- Research to explore the role of the voluntary and community sector in galvanizing action on climate change and other environmental problems. For example, what is the role of faith organisations in tackling climate change and promoting pro-environmental lifestyles?
- Another central question to emerge from our work and which merits further investigation: What are the social and cultural barriers to sustainable living amongst people living in densely populated urban areas?
- The theme of adaptation was noted for its absence in the discussions that took place in this project. Further research could focus on how the public understand the impact of climate change on their lives? How can residents living in housing association managed schemes be supported in adapting their homes and communities to climate change?

## 8.2 Practical implications for engaging housing-association residents on environmental issues

Housing is one of the main contributors to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Housing associations are at the heart of Government efforts to increase the amount of affordable housing in the UK. They are therefore an important partner in helping to cut UK carbon emissions from this source. To play this role effectively, it is vital that housing associations work together closely with their residents – both tenants and leaseholders.

Local projects which link social and environmental priorities in practical ways can bring residents together and plant the seeds for local action. For example, our project has highlighted how the following activities might be particularly good at doing this:

- Community gardens and local food production: how can people be supported and encouraged to grow their own food in communal spaces? What can housing associations do to support community food projects?
- Reclaiming neglected land as community spaces provides a good way of engaging residents around environmental issues – e.g. community re-planting projects;
- Ensuring that existing and new housing developments include green spaces which are shared, 'owned' and cared for by residents. The traditional idea of the "village green" as a tangible symbol of community life comes to mind here. Such shared social spaces can act as a space for people to meet together and for children to play.

Three simple, practical ways of promoting pro-environmental behaviour emerged from this project and which housing associations could easily play a role in:

First, residents could be offered free training and support to develop the skills necessary to green their homes and communities; for example, this might take the form of low cost, accessible practical training or seminars in green DIY, composing, managing community projects, sustainable energy, waste and recycling, etc.

Second, housing and council officers may also benefit from training in community development (so they are better equipped to engage with residents) and environmental sustainability (so they have a better understanding of the environmental impact of their work).

Third, residents could be provided with ongoing support and advice on environmental issues in relation to home and neighbourhood; for example, horticultural advice; advice on ways of saving energy in the home; information about renewable energy; helping residents to adapt to the possible impact of climate change on their homes and communities. Housing associations can potentially help put residents in touch with local and national sources of expertise and guidance for greening their homes and neighbourhoods. Sustainable home "surgeries" delivered locally could be one way of giving residents guidance on these issues. The evidence from this project also suggests that some residents would engage with green support groups.

### **8.3 A final note**

It is clear from this project and other work in this area that community-based initiatives with an environmental focus can help to promote social wellbeing by reconnecting people with their local environment and with one another. But a central challenge for policy makers is how to forge stronger connections in public consciousness between personal concerns, the local social environment, and the environmental challenges shared by all at the global level.

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## Notes

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1. McEwen, I. (2008) The World's Last Chance. The *Guardian*, Wednesday November 19 2008. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/nov/19/global-climate-change-policy-obama>
2. Quoted from a transcript of a discussion on Radio 4's Analysis programme, *Go Green or Else!* Broadcast on 19.07.2007. Available at : <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b007s27w>
3. This more detailed version of the behaviour change model described in *Securing the Future* is available on DEFRA's website at:  
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/sustainable/government/documents/change-behaviour-model.pdf>  
[Accessed: 12 September 2008]
4. For example, see Blaxter (2004) or Marmot and Wilkinson (2006) for an introductory overview of the social determinants of health, and Helman (2007) for an introduction to cultural influences on health and wellbeing.
5. Every Action Counts was a DEFRA-funded programme that has provided support to community organisations and community workers in England and Wales to play a more active role in sustainable development and tackling climate change. Every Action Counts closed in March 2009. More information can be found at <http://www.everyactioncounts.org.uk/index.asp> [Accessed 16/07/09]
6. The project report was produced in partnership with HydeMartlet. Available at: <http://www.hyde-housing.co.uk> and at <http://www.brighton.ac.uk/sass/sustainablelivingproject/>
7. The final questionnaire that we used in the project is available on the project website at: <http://www.brighton.ac.uk/sass/sustainablelivingproject/>
8. The full questionnaire used in the 2007 Survey of Public Attitudes and Behaviours toward the Environment can be found at the ESRC's Survey Question Bank: <http://www.surveynet.ac.uk/sqb/qb/surveys/spaql/spabe07.htm>. The questions that we adapted from the British Household Panel Survey to indicate social engagement and participation were drawn from the ONS question bank at [www.ons.gov.uk](http://www.ons.gov.uk).
9. A code is a category or low-level concept. Coding involves linking instances of data (i.e. words, phrases, segments of discourse, notes) to pre-existing or a priori categories and emergent or a *posteriori* categories and so creating categories of data.
10. The full coding paradigm can be found on the project website at <http://www.brighton.ac.uk/sass/sustainablelivingproject/>
11. Source: ONS' Social Capital Question Bank (Rustin and Akinrodoye, 2002)
12. See note 11.
13. We anticipate that follow-up papers to this report will present an analysis of residents' environmental concerns and learning about the barriers to pro-environmental behaviour.
14. *Sociality* is used here to mean the capacity and disposition to form and maintain relationships and to positively engage with other people in social settings (e.g. particularly at work, family relationships, and friendships).

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15. *Deep learning* is a concept that has been widely discussed in the education literature and can prove more useful than passively received information from experts (Warburton, 2003; Hall, Ramsay and Raven, 2004).
  16. Residents were directed to the 'Act on CO2' government-sponsored website to calculate their CO2 footprint. Available at: <http://antonco2.direct.gov.uk/index.html>  
For those without access to a PC, we transposed all the questions from the internet version onto paper, and then residents completed the questions manually. We then entered the responses into the internet site and then returned them. The point was not to measure participants' carbon emissions, but to use this as a starting point for discussion about one's own lifestyle within the groups. All residents identified areas that impacted on their carbon footprint (e.g. electrical equipment, travel, insulation).
  17. An online version of the questionnaire can be found at <http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/Global-Data/Publications> was provided in paper form, and was completed and sent to the Energy Saving Trust (EST) by post. This was another useful exercise for raising awareness of the sources of energy inefficiency in the home. The feedback from EST provides advice on potential solutions and ways of improving energy inefficiency.
  18. More information about Emmaus Brighton and Hove and the Goodwill Co-op project can be found at <http://www.emmausbrighton.co.uk/>
  19. The project report is available on HydeMartlet's website at <http://www.hydemartlet.co.uk/> and at <http://www.brighton.ac.uk/sass/sustainablelivingproject/>
  20. We anticipate that a full account of barriers to sustainable living, greening the home, and barriers to green neighbourhoods will appear in subsequent publications.
  21. Residents made a list of recommendations and priorities that they believed that HydeMartlet should take on board. A list of these with the response from HydeMartlet can be found in the project report available at <http://www.brighton.ac.uk/sass/sustainablelivingproject/>