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Regional
Observatory

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What Makes a Community Sustainable?



A State of the Region Thematic Report

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Executive Summary

Executive Summary

This report is an output from the State of the Region dialogue on Sustainable Communities. The State of the Region process involves an ongoing dialogue between those producing evidence and those using it to make policy, with the goal of delivering better evidence-based policy.

This report aims to identify the key themes that help make communities sustainable and proposes a pragmatic approach to using data to help identify sustainable communities.

There are several definitions of sustainable communities. Some of the common elements suggest that such communities would exhibit: a mix of housing types at prices people can afford; good transport links; a range of employment opportunities; policy driven from the community itself; an inclusive culture; healthy people; safe places; ability to integrate with other surrounding communities; and ability to meet the needs of current and future generations. It is clear from all the definitions that they need to be sustainable across a broad range of policy themes.

During this dialogue we have identified six themes that are the key elements of any sustainable community. These are:

- **Housing & the environment** - A sustainable community would have a mix of housing type and tenure in an area that has attractive, accessible public spaces, including some greenspace, and clean, safe streets.
- **Crime** - A sustainable community would have a low incidence, and low perceptions, of crime; residents would feel safe both in their houses and on the streets; and the quality of the environment and public spaces would not be diminished by graffiti, litter or fly-tipping.
- **Community cohesion** - A sustainable community would have a strong sense of community spirit; residents would feel like they belong to their local area and feel that it is a place where people can get on well together.
- **Economic opportunity & jobs** - A sustainable community would have a range of available employment opportunities; a suitable balance between lower paid opportunities and higher skilled jobs; a diverse business base; and would provide opportunities for business start ups.
- **Transport** - A sustainable community would provide options for its residents to travel both by private car and on reliable and user-friendly public transport; would allow easy access to the major economic centres in the vicinity; and encourage walking and cycling.
- **Health & population** - A sustainable community would have a population with a wide spread of ages; a mix of ethnic backgrounds; low mortality rates; and low hospital admissions.

This report also proposes a set of indicators that can provide some measurement of the sustainability of a community and track the progress achieved building sustainable communities. The indicators suggested are relevant, recognisable and influential in terms of policy.

The report has set out to consider sustainable communities in the broadest context. We have not considered the difference between rural and urban communities but recognised that the building blocks of sustainable communities are the same wherever they are located.

A key message is that balance is crucial across all the themes; acting on the themes individually will rarely bring long term success therefore interventions need to be coordinated across all of them.

We recognise that there is no perfect formula in the creation of a sustainable community. However, we want to use this report as a starting point for discussion around the themes identified and help improve the measurement approach suggested.

Introduction

Since 2004, the Observatory has been publishing annual State of the Region reports to inform strategic thinking and policy development in the region. Whilst we will continue to publish the annual reports, we have restructured the State of the Region process so that it will bring the reports closer to the needs of policy makers across the region.

Evidence-based policy can only become a reality if those producing the evidence and those making the policy work together. There needs to be an ongoing dialogue between the two groups not just occasional contact. The new State of the Region process provides exactly that. It consists of a series of thematic dialogues. Each starts with a workshop bringing together the key policy and decision makers with the researchers and analysts who supply evidence. The workshops receive “think-pieces” from experts in the field drawn from across the country to provide a fresh perspective and stimulate debate. Following the workshop, a work programme is produced to develop the regional evidence base and link it to policy developments, involving colleagues from across the region, and beyond it, throughout the process.

One of the outputs of each dialogue is a thematic report, in some cases more than one. These set out the key evidence and how it links to policy. This report is one of these State of the Region Thematic Reports.

Background

Background

This thematic report has been produced as a result of a State of the Region dialogue focusing on sustainable communities. The dialogue began with a seminar held in November 2008, drawing together representatives from the policy and research communities in the West Midlands.

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of what makes sustainable communities, how they can be identified (and possibly measured) and what this can tell policy makers about interventions to create more sustainable communities.

One of the difficulties faced in developing an evidence base supporting the growth of sustainable communities is that much of the evidence needs to reflect accurately very particular local circumstances. By their very nature, communities are localised and much of the standard evidence is not available in a form that is applicable to these very flexible geographies.

This means that much of the evidence gathering is based on qualitative evidence, but to be effective this needs to be able to be linked to the quantitative information available at local authority or regional level. These connections allow policy makers to demonstrate the impact of local interventions at higher geographical levels. This report primarily focuses on making those links to local and regional level policy.

One of the roles of the State of the Region process is to gather as much of the existing intelligence together and present the examples of best practice that exist. As we pulled together the evidence, it became clear that there are six policy areas that are crucial to the development of sustainable communities. This report examines them individually and then assesses the balance required between the themes.

What is apparent from the work is that truly sustainable communities can only really emerge when all the themes are well balanced. **The key message for policy makers is that interventions need to be coordinated across policy themes and that tackling elements individually won't produce the desired effect.**

The purpose of the report is also to try and provide a series of indicators that allow for the measurement of the sustainability of individual communities.

The report draws on previous work to try to define what constitutes a sustainable community before considering each of the six themes individually. Finally it pulls together the themes and uses case studies to demonstrate successful sustainable communities.

What is a Sustainable Community?

Communities and Local Government (CLG) define sustainable communities⁽¹⁾ as

"...places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. They are safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run, and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all."

All definitions recognise that sustainable communities are based on a broad range of policy themes. A combination of a mix of housing types at prices people can afford; good public transport; schools; shops and a clean, safe environment. Sustainable communities need a range of economic and employment opportunities, appropriate to the needs of their population. People also need open public space where they can relax and interact and the ability to have a say on the way their neighbourhood is run.

There is generally a common interest that links the community together. The relationship between the people or the community and the main institutions (e.g. the local authority) is vital. There need to be strong lines of communication in both directions and consultation is vital. Sustainable communities balance the social, economic and environmental components of their community. Without a balance of these three components there is generally a diminished likelihood of long term sustainability.

While a sustainable community should essentially be able to operate in self contained fashion there is also a recognition that really successful communities can also integrate with other surrounding communities. The region should be a patchwork of sustainable communities that combine to produce a sustainable region where the individual communities offer support and more importantly don't hinder the opportunity for other communities to become sustainable.

According to the Community Group⁽²⁾:

"The best neighbourhoods - and that doesn't mean the richest, but the ones with the finest community spirit - are ones that go out of their way to embrace and include the residents. Often they're very ethnically varied, but without the tensions that mark so many areas. People are accepting of each other - it's more than tolerance, it's a sense of pride in the area and its people."

Sustainable communities are diverse, reflecting their local circumstances. There is no standard template to fit them all. But the CLG definition requires that generally they should be:

- **Active, inclusive and safe** - fair, tolerant and cohesive with a strong local culture and other shared community activities.
- **Well run** - with effective and inclusive participation, representation and leadership.
- **Environmentally sensitive** - providing places for people to live that are considerate of the environment.
- **Well designed and built** - featuring quality built and natural environment.
- **Well connected** - with good transport services and communication linking people to jobs, schools, health and other services.
- **Thriving** - with a flourishing and diverse local economy.
- **Well served** - with public, private, community and voluntary services that are appropriate to people's needs and accessible to all.
- **Fair for everyone** - including those in other communities, now and in the future.

1 Sustainable Communities: Building for the future, CLG, 2003

2 The Community Group - <http://www.communitygroup.co.uk/>

What is a Sustainable Community?

Each Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) has its own Sustainable Community Strategy and we analysed these to help identify the key policy themes and some suitable indicators. The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) explains that:

“Sustainable Community Strategies (SCS) are key long-term planning documents for improving the quality of life and services in a local area. It is from these that local area agreements (LAA) are developed. Every local authority is expected to have an SCS - developed and agreed with its local strategic partnership.”

Definition of Sustainable Communities

Sustainable communities meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, their children and other users, contribute to a high quality of life and provide opportunity and choice. They achieve this in ways that make effective use of natural resources, enhance the environment, promote social cohesion and inclusion and strengthen economic prosperity.

The Egan Review: Skills for Sustainable Communities, 2004

The Six Key Themes

In order to develop a framework for measuring the sustainability of communities we have identified six themes that are the key elements of any sustainable community. These themes are:

- **Housing & the environment** - a varied mix of housing type and tenure, the quality of the built environment, the quality of the natural environment and the availability of, and access to, good quality greenspace;
- **Crime** - low levels of occurrence of, and perceptions of, crime;
- **Community cohesion** - people's sense of belonging to a place and their ability to influence their area;
- **Economic opportunity & jobs** - access to a range of employment opportunities and business start ups;
- **Transport** - good public transport links and good road access;
- **Health & population** - a healthy population of mixed age, gender and ethnic background.

Having identified what the key policy themes are, we now discuss why these themes are important, how they could be monitored and how seeing these themes in the context of sustainable communities can help achieve the individual policy goals.

Identifying the indicators

Our selection process for choosing the indicators used under each theme followed a simple process. Firstly they should be directly relevant to the policy theme. This may seem like an obvious statement but in a lot of instances proxy measures are used that become divorced from the main subject. Secondly they need to be recognisable. By this we mean that it would not be useful to come up with a completely new suite of indicators when there are already hundreds of indicators in use surrounding these themes. Thirdly, to be influential in terms of policy, they need to fit with the main drivers; in this case we see the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and Public Service Agreement (PSA) agendas as being the key ones and so the links to the National Indicator set either directly or by obvious relation become crucial.

Housing & the Environment

Why is it important?

We all need somewhere to live but we all have individual needs when seeking out a place to live. A limited housing stock means a limited potential population, and a limited potential population makes achieving sustainability much more difficult. Therefore a range of housing types is required to broaden the range of people who might find their ideal property in the community. As well as type, the tenure of the property is important. In the West Midlands at the time of the last Census (2001) 70% of people owned their own homes (or had a mortgage on the property), 6% rented privately and 21% were in social housing (either local authority or Registered Social Landlord owned). This shows that there needs to be rental property available, be it private; y or socially owned.

The quality of the local environment affects individuals in their day-to-day life. In this context we are considering both the natural environment and the built environment. The quality of the environment is not focused on one or the other, so it is important to get both right.

The quality of the environment is also seen as a vital factor in the attractiveness of a place and therefore its sustainability. The West Midlands Regional Lifestyle Survey⁽¹⁾ in 2005 found that amongst the most important things in people's choice of a place to live were:

1 West Midlands Regional Lifestyle Survey, WMRO, 2005

The Six Key Themes

"...environmental factors such as environmental quality ('a nice clean environment') and tranquillity."

The "Living places - caring for quality"⁽²⁾ report in 2004 highlighted that:

"85% of people believed that the quality of public space impacts on quality of life and that the quality of the built environment directly impacts on the way they feel."

It is important to note that a good quality environment doesn't have to be one that would be considered beautiful landscape, but it does need to be well looked after.

There has been extensive work carried out into the health and wellbeing benefits that accrue from greenspace and therefore providing a quality environment benefits residents in multiple ways. As we noted in State of the Region Update Report 2007, there are well recognised psychological benefits that come from access to, and proximity of, green space.

It is also recognised that investment in public space can have a beneficial economic effect by: stimulating the local economy, improving perceptions of the area and helping to attract and retain workers in the wider area.⁽³⁾

What does success look like?

The simple answer is that, from a housing and environment perspective, a successful sustainable community would have a mix of housing type and tenure in an area that has attractive, accessible public spaces, including some greenspace, and clean, safe streets.

What does failure look like?

There is a strong predominance of a particular housing type or tenure. There is a problem (real or perceived) with litter. The public spaces that are available are either of poor quality or are felt to be unsafe.

How are we measuring it?

Housing tenure (OA, source: Census 2001 - this splits private renters from homeowners, whereas the most recent CLG data (2008) on tenure doesn't. The social housing figure in 2001 is similar to the 2008 figure). *This shows housing provision split by privately owned, privately rented, and social rented - a good mix is needed for a sustainable community to accommodate all income levels.*

Proportion of households waiting for social housing (LAD, source: DCLG housing statistics 2008). *Ideally, the proportion of households waiting for social housing should be low, a high proportion or an increase in households waiting for social housing would indicate that more social housing was needed.*

Local Authority dwellings that fall below the decent homes standard (LAD, source: DCLG housing statistics 2008). *This helps to monitor the quality of social housing, if the number of dwellings increases, this would indicate that the condition of social housing was worsening.*

Living environment domain (LSOA, source: DCLG Indices of Multiple Deprivation). *This could help to benchmark the quality of the environment within communities, useful because it is available at LSOA level.*

2 Living Places: Caring for Quality, Communities & Local Government, Feb 2004

3 How to improve residential areas, Communities & Local Government, June 2007

Local area, community and home as a place to live - (Place Survey 2008). *Identifies the level of satisfaction of local residents with their local area, their community and their home as places to live.*

Satisfaction with parks and open spaces - (Place Survey 2008). *Identifies the level of satisfaction of local residents with parks and open spaces.*

NI 195 - Improved street and environmental cleanliness (levels of litter, detritus, graffiti and fly posting) (Defra DSO) - *relevant to the quality of both the built and natural environment.*

NI 196 - Improved street and environmental cleanliness - fly tipping (Defra DSO) - *relevant to the quality of both the built and natural environment.*

Crime

Why is it important?

Communities can never be safe when the local residents are concerned about crime.

'How to improve residential areas'⁽⁴⁾ states that:

"A good neighbourhood has low levels of crime, vandalism and anti-social behaviour..."

Residents need to feel safe to feel that their community is one in which they want to live. Areas that have high levels of violent crime or burglary are not areas that people wish to move into. These types of crime seriously affect community cohesion (see community cohesion section), creating mistrust amongst the community and less feeling of pride in the place, which is key to sustainability.

In terms of measuring how crime impacts on the sustainability of an area it is as important to tackle the perception of crime as it is to tackle the reality. How people feel about crime in their area may not accurately reflect recorded incidences but will have a far greater sway on their engagement with the community. It is often the case that the public perception of crime is different to the recorded levels of crime.

Vandalism and graffiti impact on the perception of an area as being a good environment, as covered in the housing & the environment section. Essentially residents want to feel that their public spaces are clean and safe.

Some aspects of anti-social behaviour can be tackled in communities that have a range of activities available for residents. This occupies those that are otherwise more likely to engage in anti-social behaviour and helps foster community cohesion.

What does success look like?

These are communities where both the incidence **and** the perception of crime are low. Residents feel safe both in their houses and on the streets. There is pride in the community as being a safe place to live. The quality of the environment and public spaces are not diminished by graffiti, litter or fly-tipping.

What does failure look like?

People feel unsafe either in their homes or in public places. Either rates of crime or perceptions of crime are high. The quality of the environment is impaired by graffiti, litter and fly-tipping. Local people feel that there is a problem with anti-social behaviour.

4 Ibid

The Six Key Themes

How are we measuring it?

Violence against the person offences per 1,000 population (LAD, source: Home Office recorded crime2007/08). *This helps to monitor the prevalence of violent crime.*

Burglary dwelling offences per 1,000 households (LAD, source: Home Office recorded crime2007/08). *This helps to monitor the prevalence of burglaries.*

Feeling safe - (Place Survey 2008). *Identifies how safe people feel in their local area during the day and after dark.*

Teenagers hanging around streets - (Place Survey 2008). *Identifies the scale of problem that teenagers hanging around streets represent for local residents.*

Vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage - (Place Survey 2008). *Identifies the scale of problem that vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage represent for local residents.*

Community Cohesion

Why is it important?

A sustainable community needs its local residents to get on together. A sense of community spirit sees people looking out for each other. This can help keep levels of crime low, can help with the health of residents and reduce the impact on public services with more unpaid help taking place.

Cohesion allows a community to become much more proactive in what actually takes place. Communities that act together can have a far greater impact on decisions that affect them.

The definition of a cohesive community promoted by the Faith and Cohesion Unit is one in which there is a common vision and sense of belonging for all, the diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and positively valued, those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities, and strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods. It can therefore be seen that there is a strong link between sustainable communities and community cohesion. CLG guidance states that sustainable communities should:

- be fair, tolerant and cohesive with a strong local culture and other shared community activities;
- have a strong sense of community identity and belonging;
- respect and engage with people from different cultures, backgrounds and beliefs;
- be socially inclusive with good life chances for all;
- have a sense of civic values, responsibility and pride;
- respect the rights and aspirations of others.

Levels of community cohesion vary greatly across the region. One means of measuring cohesion is the National Indicator NI1 which considers *the percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area*. This varies from 83.6% in Shropshire to 60.8% in Stoke-on-Trent.

What does success look like?

There is a strong sense of community spirit. People feel like they belong to their local area and feel that it is a place where people can get on well together. Levels of crime are lower. Often these communities will have active neighbourhood forums. They will have a range of social events for residents to participate in.

What does failure look like?

Residents don't connect with each other. There is a feeling of detachment from decision making in the area. Often these communities act as 'dormitories' where people do little more than sleep in the local area. In the more extreme cases there can be severe tensions in an area. These can be between the younger and older residents; between those of different ethnic backgrounds; 'incomers' and those that originate in the area. Levels of crime or anti-social behaviour are high.

How are we measuring it?

Belonging to community - (Place Survey 2008). *Identifies how strong the feeling of belonging to their immediate neighbourhood is among local residents.*

Different backgrounds get on well - (Place Survey 2008). *Measures the perception of how well people from different backgrounds are getting along together in the local area.*

Respect and consideration to others - (Place Survey 2008). *Identifies the perception of whether people in the local area treat each other with respect and consideration.*

Economic Opportunity & Jobs

Why is it important?

For any community to be sustainable there has to be work for the residents. There need to be opportunities for those residents that are entrepreneurial to be able to start and run businesses in the local area.

The concept that **all residents** would seek work in the area that they live in no longer rings true. People are prepared to travel for the right job opportunity. A fairer measure of sustainability in regard to employment would be a range of lower paid jobs (where the workers would not wish to travel so far) available locally and access, either in the local community or through viable transport links, to better paid jobs elsewhere.

It is reasonable to expect that a sustainable community would have a broad employment base. Areas that rely on one major employer or one particular industry are vulnerable to market forces. Major employers can grow with a community and feel part of the sustainability of that community but any change in the circumstances of that employer can have catastrophic effects.

Equally a reliance on a particular industry can be dangerous for an area. The last 30 years have seen numerous examples of this; from the closure of many coal mines to the problems faced in the automotive industry. Many communities that would previously have been felt to be sustainable were irrevocably damaged as the main source of employment was taken away with no obvious alternative source.

Also within the scope of this theme is the requirement for residents to have access to education and training, to allow them to gain the skills required to take advantage of the economic opportunities available.

What does success look like?

A sustainable community would have a range of available employment opportunities. There would be a suitable balance between lower paid opportunities and higher skilled jobs. The business base would be made up of businesses from multiple sectors. There would also be opportunities for business start ups to develop.

The Six Key Themes

What does failure look like?

The employment opportunities that are available are restricted. There is a high dependency on a single employer or a single sector. There are too few jobs available locally for those with low skill levels, who are less likely to be willing to travel elsewhere. There are too few higher-skilled jobs within easy access via suitable transport links.

How are we measuring it?

Number of businesses by industry (LSOA, source: Annual Business Inquiry and mid year population estimates, 2007). *This shows how many employers there are in an area by industry, a decrease in the number of businesses in one industry over time would show that.*

Working age employment rate by industry (LAD, source: Annual Population Survey - residents based, 2008). *This shows which industries employ the most people.*

Working age self employment rate (LAD, source: Annual Population Survey - residents based, 2008). *This gives an indication of entrepreneurial activity.*

Employment by occupation and industry (LAD, source: Annual Population Survey - workplace based, 2008). *This shows the types of occupations and industries that people working in the area are employed in. You could usefully compare this with the mix of skills levels amongst residents, e.g. ratio of managerial and professional roles to residents with NVQ level 4 or above.*

Working age Jobseekers Allowance claimant rate (2008, source: Department for Work and Pensions). *This shows whether the availability of work is improving or worsening in an area, e.g. a high claimant rate indicates that lots of people can't find work.*

Jobcentre Plus vacancies notified by occupation (source: Department for Work and Pensions, 2009). *This shows the types of job opportunities available in an area. A higher number of unskilled job vacancies and low number of high skilled job vacancies would indicate that an area needed to attract higher skilled jobs.*

VAT registrations by industry (LAD, source: Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR). *This gives an indication of entrepreneurial activity as it measures new business start ups.*

Transport

Why is it important?

Access to varied economic and employment opportunities within the community itself are important to the community's sustainability. However it is important to reflect that in the 21st century people are prepared to, and indeed expect to, travel for work. As such a community's connections to other economic centres become important.

For those that are willing to travel to seek employment or business opportunity a strong transport network is vital. In seeking sustainable communities these transport links should be spread across public and private transport. Those businesses that operate in an area need to be able to reach customers and attract employees, so a connected community is important for the sustainability of the local business base.

The option to travel by reliable, user-friendly public transport is crucial whether this be bus, train or other forms of public transport. It is also important that there are good links for the private car user. We do not have a society that is prepared to leave the car at home, so poor road links will harm the sustainability of an area.

The third option is to make more sustainable methods of transport appealing and practical, so walking and cycling routes are important. A sustainable community will also look to join up its different modes. Making walking and cycling easy to connect to the public transport network is important, as is the option to use park & ride schemes.

Transport also provides the link between communities, providing benefits beyond just the economic aspect. Providing links to leisure opportunities through public transport is important. There are strong social demands for public transport that don't necessarily fit the economic drivers. For example public transport networks often follow a hub and spoke model, with the main arterial routes into a town or city centre having regular bus services whilst links between other parts of the area are limited. Whilst these links may be less significant for business travel, they do fulfil an important social function.

What does success look like?

A community that provides options for its residents to travel both by private car and on reliable and user friendly public transport. Residents have easy access to the major economic centres in the vicinity to allow those that are willing to work elsewhere to do so. Walking and cycling are encouraged and there are good links between different transport modes.

What does failure look like?

Residents are disconnected from economic opportunities. Those businesses or employers in the area can't attract customers or employees due to the difficulty in accessing the area. Congestion makes road travel difficult to the point of being a deterrent. Public transport provision is either non-existent or unreliable. Those that wish to cycle or walk find it difficult to do so or find those modes of transport dangerous or unsafe.

How are we measuring it?

Mode of travel to work (Source: Labour Force Survey). *This shows whether people are travelling to work in a sustainable way.*

Average journey time per mile during the morning peak (UA, source: Department for Transport, National Indicator 167). *This shows how long people spend travelling and helps to monitor congestion - an increase in journey time could indicate an increase in congestion.*

Bus services running on time (UA, source: Department for Transport, Bus Punctuality Statistics GB: 2007, National Indicator 178). *This monitors the reliability of bus services.*

Access to services and facilities by public transport, walking and cycling (UA, source: Department for Transport, National Indicator 175). *This shows which services and facilities can be accessed sustainably.*

Proximity to employment centre by public transport (LSOA, source: DfT accessibility indicators, 2008). *This shows the proportion of working age population with 20 minutes, 40 minutes distance of an employment centre (by sustainable travel), and the proportion of JSA claimants with 20 minutes and 40 minutes distance.*

Local bus services - (Place Survey 2008). *Identifies the level of satisfaction and frequency of use of local bus services across local residents.*

The Six Key Themes

Health & Population

Why is it important?

A diverse population is important to the sustainability of communities. A mix of age and ethnicity gives a balance to an area. The health of the population is important to the growth of an area as a sustainable community.

The population mix is important. Areas where one particular age range predominates may feel like they are thriving, but they are vulnerable to change as that group ages and the mix changes.

For example communities that are situated near universities can be dominated by young people. This can offer business opportunities and give a boost to the economy but often these individuals only plan to live in an area for a short period of time and don't integrate into the local community, having more connection to their university community. Such areas can often see their housing stock converted from family homes to properties that cater to the rental market that students require.

At the opposite end of the spectrum communities with high proportions of older people can feel like there is a strong community bond but when few new people move into the area there is a risk of the community ageing together. As the community ages there are implications for service provision particular around health concerns.

The health of the population is important and is often linked to the other themes. Many of the health indicators that relate to individuals can be proxies for other aspects of the community. For example childhood obesity can be linked back to access to safe play areas and the opportunity to walk to school which can be affected by either community safety or by poor planning of the built environment.

The manner in which settlements are planned and designed contributes significantly to the health of the people who live in them. Bad planning and design results in poor health outcomes; conversely, good planning and design can be positively health-enhancing. Access to safe greenspace or play areas is important for physical and mental health.

At the lower levels of the socioeconomic ladder, the risk for premature death is highest. The greater the economic opportunity in the area the better the chance for individuals to raise their standard of living.

What does success look like?

A sustainable community will have a population with a wide spread of ages. Generally there will be a mix of ethnic backgrounds. The community will have a lower mortality rate and hospital admissions will be low.

What does failure look like?

The overall population is dominated by one particular age group. The population has little or no ethnic mix and different communities are not well integrated. Mortality rates in the area will be higher than the average for the wider region.

How are we measuring it?

Population by broad age group and gender (2008, source: mid year population estimates). *This helps to monitor the balance of age groups and gender.*

Population by ethnic group (2007, source: experimental mid year population estimates). *This helps to monitor whether there is a good mix of different ethnic groups.*

Life expectancy (2005-07, National Statistics Public Health Mortality Files, Mid year population estimates). *High life expectancy indicates better levels of health.*

Mortality rate (2005-07, National Statistics Public Health Mortality Files, Mid year population estimates). *High mortality rate indicates that the area has health issues which need to be addressed and maybe preventing the community from achieving in other areas e.g. bad health may mean residents can't work.*

Hospital admissions (2005-07, Hospital Episode Statistics, Mid year population estimates). *High hospital admissions indicate that an area has health issues that need to be addressed.*

Proportion of households living within 2km of a GP (2009, source: Commission for Rural Communities access to services). *Proximity to a GP surgery indicates good access to healthcare provision.*

Satisfaction with health services - (Place Survey 2008). *Identifies the level of satisfaction across local residents about their local GP, local hospital and dentist.*

How do the six themes connect?

These six themes are not isolated nor should they be. The individual reviews highlight some strong cross cutting themes. There are direct links between: crime and community cohesion; transport and economic opportunity & jobs; housing & the environment and crime; health & population and community cohesion.

As we've highlighted throughout the report tackling one of the six themes alone will not generate a sustainable community. Just developing the housing stock won't be a success if there are not the right transport links or economic opportunities. Tackling crime issues won't work without community cohesion to back up the intervention.

All of the six themes impact on a person's view of their community. One indicator stands out as being an area where strong performance is a pre-requisite for a community to be seen sustainable. That is the Place Survey indicator:

Proportion of residents satisfied with their local area as a place to live.

If residents aren't satisfied with their area as a place to live it can't truly be said to be sustainable. People who are unsatisfied will often seek to move elsewhere. Satisfied residents are more likely to feel a part of their community and contribute to it.

The measure recognises that the quality of place remains a priority to residents and drives how satisfied people are with their local area as a place to live. This indicator will provide authorities and service deliverers with a baseline of local satisfaction which will help them identify and address the sorts of issues affecting how residents feel about their local area.

The Place Survey results are currently available across the region at local authority level but some of the region's authorities have sufficiently large samples to be able to understand the performance at more local level, offering a valuable insight into how people view their area as a place to live.

This indicator offers a high level view against which to check other results. Satisfaction with the area should correlate with good performance across the six themes. The individual measures will allow policy makers to understand which of the areas need greater focus to improve overall satisfaction.

Evidence of Interventions

Evidence of Interventions

In order to demonstrate that policy interventions can support the development of sustainable communities we have highlighted four regional case studies. The case studies all show case approaches that cut across a number of themes and that aren't based specifically on one intervention e.g. housing alone.

In each case the interventions have happened over a period of time and have involved the public sector bodies working in partnership with local residents and businesses to build up the community involvement and therefore improve community cohesion. As we stated in the 'What is a Sustainable Community?' section, development of sustainable communities require strong relationships between the residents and the body that is seeking to intervene (e.g. local authority).

Each of the case studies have chosen to tackle multiple policy areas and this fits within the approach detailed in this report.

Case Study - Greets Green

The Greets Green Partnership is a 10 year community based regeneration programme with the aim to make a real and lasting impact on the lives of the people in its area. This programme was awarded £56 million in 2000 and is located on the western fringe of West Bromwich Town Centre. It is funded through the New Deal for Communities (NDC) initiative to set up and run projects dealing with housing, health, community services, crime prevention & community safety, training and jobs & skills.

In partnership with a number of public and private sector organisations and working closely with all members of the community, the Greets Green Partnership delivers initiatives across the following five strands:

- **Community services** - Build a stronger community by bringing residents together and providing them with skills and confidence. By doing this, they will be able to do more for their neighbourhoods and to take the lead on future development.
- **Crime and community safety** - Reduce crime and the fear of crime in Greets Green. Create a safe, secure environment by working in partnership with West Midlands Police and introducing physical improvements to discourage crime.
- **Health** - Improve the health, well-being and quality of life of Greets Green residents. Achieve this through the integration of health and social care services that are flexible and responsive to the diverse needs of the community.
- **Housing and urban form** - Create a high quality environment in Greets Green with housing to be proud of - fit and affordable for 21st century living.
- **Jobs and skills** - By 2010 we want Greets Green to be a place where people choose to live and work.

The partnership has worked hard to be able to evidence its performance in a way that links in to the broader public agenda. This evidence provides tangible evidence on the attempts to turn Greets Green into a more sustainable community.

Since the Greets Green Partnership was formed, it has funded over 340 projects through the area. Some key achievements of the programme that can be supported by hard evidence include:

- The number of crimes committed in Greets Green was reduced by more than 50% since 2001;
- The number of people who feel unsafe after dark decreased from 54% in 2002 to 41% in 2006;
- The level of anti-social behaviour in the area has declined from 136.51 per 1000 in 2001 to 19 per 1000 in 2006;

Evidence of Interventions

- In 1999 George Salter High School had a 22% GCSE pass rate. By 2008 the school had become a Collegiate Academy and is amongst the most improved in the country with an 89% GCSE pass rate;
- In 2004 just 23.6% of the area's public sector homes were up to Decent Homes standard. By 2008 the figure increased of up to 78.1%, with projects in place to reach the 2010 target of 100% compliance;
- A major £3.8M programme environmental improvement work is currently underway to upgrade the roads, pavements and boundary walls on several key arterial routes through Greets Green;
- In 1999 the worklessness gap between the Sandwell average and Greets Green was 4.9%. By 2008 the gap was reduced to 3.2%;
- Since 2006 employment has increased 4% within the area; The number of working age population holding NVQ Level 2 qualifications has increased 7% since 2002;
- In 2002 the level of residents taking no regular exercise for 20 minutes was 12%, the figure now stands at 8%;
- The proportion of residents that felt they were involved in their community increased through the programme from 33% to 47%;
- The percentage of residents that felt they could influence decisions in the area has risen from 26% in 2002 to 30% in 2008.

Greets Green offers an example of a policy intervention that has sought to evidence its success and development through quantitative evidence.

Case Study - Perry Common

Perry Common, in northern Birmingham, is a former 'outer-estate' of 1920s council houses that were constructed with defective materials. The area is undergoing a massive redevelopment, with nearly one thousand council houses having been demolished in the last ten years.

A once strongly cohesive community has been fractured as families have been displaced elsewhere across the city during the demolition and construction phase. Although there was much physical and material regeneration occurring in the Perry Common area it was felt by local residents that the human needs of the community had been disregarded.

The Perry Common Regeneration Partnership was established to improve the quality of life for residents through meeting their social, economic, health and emotional needs. The initiative is owned, run and managed by local residents in partnership with the local Anglican Church.

This regeneration scheme took a consultative approach to developing the evidence it required to put effective policies in place. Much of the work it has done has been based on more qualitative evidence developed with the local community.

The partnership used various community consultations and 'Planning for Real' events to build trust and connections with the community. They have also acted as a broker between local residents and service providers.

The partnership is now pursuing a strategy to address the needs of local residents integrated by the following three key initiatives:

- A one-stop community shop has been established as an open and welcoming sign-posting service between residents and professional services. The community shop serves the needs of an estimated 70 residents per month. A number of courses are run from the community shop including smoking cessation, literacy, numeracy, and sexual health clinics as well as youth groups.
- The partnership's second strategy involves employing an Employment and Training worker, to act as a broker between local adult education providers and the community at a grass-roots

Evidence of Interventions

level. In the first six months over 60 local residents have undertaken adult learning courses - over 50% of these had no formal qualifications.

- Employing a parish nurse who will be a registered qualified nurse but who integrates nursing with a holistic Christian whole person approach to health.

The partnership has made a significant contribution to the area. 43% of residents stated in 2003 that they like living in the area (an increase from 37% in the baseline survey of 2001). This change is felt to be the result of extensive community consultation and engagement, the development of employment and training opportunities, and the development of social and community initiatives including a Community Choir which has performed at national events.

By maximising the involvement of residents and ensuring that they are positioned to take on regeneration work for themselves, the Perry Common Regeneration Partnership is responding to local need and celebrating local resourcefulness. This project proves the benefits of a holistic approach to regeneration, aiming to address the social, economic, health and emotional needs of local residents.

Case Study - Stourport Canal Basins

Stourport Forward Market Town Initiative is a three-year restoration project with the aim to transform and reinvigorate Stourport-on-Severn as a major tourist destination⁽¹⁾. A central element in this initiative was the restoration of Stourport Canal Basins with the aim of return the Basins area to its original Georgian splendour.

The partners in the Stourport Canal Basins regeneration project include the Heritage Lottery Fund, British Waterways, Advantage West Midlands (through Stourport Forward), Wyre Forest District Council, Stourport Town Council, Worcestershire County Council and the Arts Council.

The Master Plan supporting this regeneration project was arts-led. It was integrated by nine arts commissions selected to illuminate, enhance and promote the site through events, projects and off site art pieces⁽²⁾.

In addition to the Master Plan the initiative also involved⁽³⁾:

- Housing development
- Reuse of local building materials
- Improvements to the accessibility of the site
- Community involvement through open public sessions, events and activity days.

The Flow Festival was a large scale weekend family event in July 2008 to celebrate the completion of the current restoration and re-launch the newly restored Canal Basins in Stourport⁽⁴⁾.

The project included a wide variety of environmental, social, economic, and community benefits, and it is estimated to create up to 70 jobs. The Canal Basins regeneration project shows a very good example of an initiative where the main activity is supported by a mix of well integrated smaller projects aiming to support the regeneration of the locality⁽⁵⁾.

1 http://www.regenwm.org/casestudies/casestudies_details.asp?cat=2007_Prize_Winners&cid=78

2 http://www.stourporttown.co.uk/stourport_basins_arts.html

3 http://www.regenwm.org/casestudies/casestudies_details.asp?cat=2007_Prize_Winners&cid=78

4 http://www.stourporttown.co.uk/flow_festival1.htm

5 Ibid

Case Study - Pride in Camp Hill

Pride in Camp Hill is a community regeneration initiative, aiming to transform the area in and around Camp Hill, in Nuneaton, Warwickshire, for the benefit of local people and businesses⁽⁶⁾. The initiative started in 1999 as a partnership project between Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council (NBBC), Warwickshire County Council (WCC), Advantage West Midlands (AWM), the Prince's Foundation and the residents and businesses of Camp Hill⁽⁷⁾.

The scheme was structured around three strands⁽⁸⁾:

1. Physical and environmental improvement - this strand includes a combination of construction of new buildings (25 percent of which will be for affordable housing); demolition of old homes; development of the village centre; and deliver a new community building.
2. Social and economic regeneration: Some of the activities and improvements put in place include: Opportunities centre (where residents can acquire IT skills and construction qualifications); Camp Hill Enterprise and Employment Resources; Home tuition; Early Year's Centre; Detached youth programme and the Camp Hill Festival.
3. Service delivery improvement - The aim is to reduce crime, boost educational standards, improve travel links and enhance the appearance of the area. Some projects in place include: Residents' forum; Police priority area; Camp Hill accessible transport; estate wardens; and open spaces.

This initiative has been recognised by RegenWM as a living model of major built environment change running hand-in-hand with social and economic renewal . The coordinated approach of the interventions has been highlighted as a key lesson that this initiative has provided: "physical development schemes have to be integrated with social and people-based projects to ensure their sustainability and adaptability" .

6 <http://www.prideincamphill.co.uk/index.html>

7 <http://www.prideincamphill.co.uk/pride/index.html>

8 www.regenwm.org/casestudies/casestudies_details.asp?cat=Community_Development&cid=33

Tracking Progress

Tracking Progress

Once evidence is identified that is usable it needs to be presented in ways that allow policy makers to maximise its value. We have identified a broad range of indicators that could potentially be used to identify sustainable communities. The following table is a summary of the indicators which could be used to give a view of performance that will allow an understanding of how sustainable a community appears to be.

It would be possible to use these to produce a dashboard of indicators that would allow a simple overview of performance.

Figure 1: Measuring sustainable communities

Housing & environment

Indicator	Source	Geography	Year
Housing tenure	Census 2001	Output area	2008
Proportion of households waiting for social housing	DCLG	Local Authority District	2008
Local Authority dwellings that fall below the decent homes standard	DCLG	Local Authority District	2008
Living environment domain	DCLG Indices of Multiple Deprivation	Local Authority District	2008
Local area, community and home as a place to live	Place Survey	LSOA	2008
Satisfaction with parks and open spaces	Place Survey	Local Authority District	2008

Transport

Indicator	Source	Geography	Year
Mode of travel to work	Labour Force Survey	Local Authority District	2008
Average journey time per mile during the morning peak (National Indicator 167)	Department for Transport	Unitary Authority	2009 (not available yet)
Bus services running on time (National Indicator 178)	Department for Transport	Unitary Authority	2009 (not available yet)
Access to services and facilities (including employment centres) by public transport, walking and cycling (National Indicator 175)	Department for Transport	Unitary Authority	2008
Local bus services	Place Survey	Local Authority District	2008

Crime

Indicator	Source	Geography	Year
Violence against the person offences per 1,000 population	Home Office recorded crime	Local Authority District	2007/08
Burglary dwelling offences per 1,000 households	Home Office recorded crime	Local Authority District	2007/08
Feeling safe	Place Survey	Local Authority District	2008
Teenagers hanging around streets	Place Survey	Local Authority District	2008
Vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage	Place Survey	Local Authority District	2008

Community Cohesion

Indicator	Source	Geography	Year
Belonging to community	Place Survey	Local Authority District	2008
Different backgrounds get on well	Place Survey	Local Authority District	2008
Respect and consideration to others	Place Survey	Local Authority District	2008

Economic Opportunities & Jobs

Indicator	Source	Geography	Year
Number of businesses by industry	Annual Business Inquiry	Lower Super Output Area	2007
Working age employment rate by industry	Annual Population Survey - residents based	Local Authority District	2008
Working age self employment rate by industry	Annual Population Survey - residents based	Local Authority District	2008
Employment by occupation and industry	Annual Population Survey - workplace based	Local Authority District	2008
Working age Jobseekers Allowance claimant rate	Department for Work and Pensions	Lower Super Output Area	2008
Jobcentre Plus vacancies notified by occupation	Department for Work and Pensions	Lower Super Output Area	2009
VAT registrations by industry	Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR)	Local Authority District	2007

Tracking Progress

Health & Population

Indicator	Source	Geography	Year
Population by broad age group and gender	Mid year population estimates	Lower Super Output Area	2008
Population by ethnic group	Experimental mid year population estimates by ethnic group	Local Authority District	2007
Life expectancy	National Statistics Public Health Mortality Files, Mid year population estimates	Ward	2005-07
Mortality rate	National Statistics Public Health Mortality Files, Mid year population estimates	Ward	2005-07
Hospital admissions	Hospital Episode Statistics, Mid year population estimates	Ward	2005-07
Proportion of households living within 2km of a GP	Commission for Rural Communities access to services	Lower Super Output Area	2009
Satisfaction with health services	Place Survey	Local Authority District	2008

Next Steps

This report is not intended to be a full definition of what makes a sustainable community. What we have done is gather together evidence from a variety of sources and identify the key themes that help make communities sustainable. Having done that, we've taken a pragmatic approach to using data to help identify sustainable communities.

None of this can supersede a local understanding of the area, but we've shown that taking a more holistic approach to intervention around sustainable communities will offer greater benefits to all concerned. Acting on an individual policy theme in isolation will rarely bring long term success but tackling the varied themes together offers a way to bring greater impact from the interventions.

Much of the aim of this report is to guide policy makers in targeting effective interventions. This does not mean that sustainable communities won't develop naturally. Many sustainable communities have developed over years through shared interest in the community without any policy intervention. However as the population becomes more transient and people seek employment or quality of life in new areas the process by which sustainable communities evolve naturally becomes more challenging as the average time people are resident in an area reduces.

We would wish to use this report as a starting point for discussion to help improve the dashboard approach and to fine tune the themes identified. We are confident that the policy areas we've identified are the most important but on a case by case basis other local issues with need to be considered.

The range of indicators we've chosen should be considered together. Picking out individual indicators won't give a full view of sustainability. A good regional example of this dashboard approach to measuring sustainability can be seen in work produced by SQW Consulting for Advantage West Midlands that looks at the sustainability of rural communities⁽¹⁾.

In many cases successful interventions overcome the barriers that are preventing communities developing sustainably.

There are a variety of issues that have not been covered in this report that may be need further consideration:

- In the modern world, where people move about far more frequently, do sustainable communities really matter?
- Do sustainable communities need to be bound by geography or are we likely to see sustainable communities develop based on shared interest that are spread over far larger areas through the impact of social media?
- Should policy makers be intervening to make communities more sustainable?

The West Midlands Regional Observatory would welcome input from those involved in developing and measuring sustainable communities to help us continue to move this debate forward.

1 West Midlands Rural Evidence 2008 Base, AWM, Dec 2008

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Full Document Information

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West Midlands
**Regional
Observatory**

www.wmro.org

West Midlands Regional Observatory

Level 3
Millennium Point
Curzon Street
Birmingham B4 7XG

Telephone: 0121 202 3250
Fax: 0121 202 3240
email: info@wmro.org

www.wmro.org