

Mainstreaming sustainable development

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The Government's vision and what this means in practice

**Department for Environment,
Food and Rural Affairs
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Mainstreaming Sustainable Development – the Government’s vision and what this means in practice

1. Our vision

The coalition Government is committed to sustainable development (SD). This means making the necessary decisions now to realise our vision of stimulating economic growth and tackling the deficit, maximising wellbeing and protecting our environment, without negatively impacting on the ability of future generations to do the same. These are difficult times and tough decisions need to be made. This Government believes in going beyond the short term with eyes fixed firmly on a long term horizon shift in relation to our economy, our society and the environment.

This refreshed vision and our commitments build on the principles that underpinned the UK’s 2005 SD strategy, by recognising the needs of the economy, society and the natural environment, alongside the use of good governance and sound science.

Sustainable development recognises that the three ‘pillars’ of the economy, society and the environment are interconnected. The Government has initiated a series of growth reviews to put the UK on a path to strong, sustainable and balanced growth. Our long term economic growth relies on protecting and enhancing the environmental resources that underpin it, and paying due regard to social needs. As part of our commitment to enhance wellbeing, we will start measuring our progress as a country, not just by how our economy is growing, but by how our lives are improving; not just by our standard of living, but by our quality of life.

2. What this means in practice

2.1 Sustainable Development in Government

Good progress has been made in the last 16 years since the first UK SD strategy was published. However, the time has come to move SD beyond being considered as a separate, ‘green’ issue which is a priority for only a few Government departments. Just as leading businesses recognise that sustainability is a core strategic issue and not just a ‘nice to have’, this Government wants to mainstream SD so that it is central to the way we make policy, run our buildings and purchase goods and services.

Ministers have agreed an approach for mainstreaming SD which in broad terms consists of providing Ministerial leadership and oversight, leading by example, embedding SD into policy and transparent and independent scrutiny.

New measures to support this include:

Ministerial leadership and oversight

- The Environment Secretary will sit on the key domestic policy Cabinet committees, including the Economic Affairs Committee, to enforce the Government's commitment to sustainability across policy making.
- A Ministerial Steering Group will oversee delivery of new Commitments for Greening Government's Operations and Procurement.

Leading by example

- Reducing Government's waste generation, water use and greenhouse gas emissions. Waste will be cut by 25 per cent (approximately 74,000 tonnes) by the end of this Parliament. Best practice water efficiency methods will be put in place across Government, as well as a new stretching commitment on greenhouse gas reduction which builds on the current 10 per cent announced by the Prime Minister in May 2010.
- Ensuring the Government buys more sustainable and efficient products and engages with its suppliers to understand and reduce the impacts of supply chains.

Embedding sustainable development in Government policy

- Defra will take the lead responsibility for reviewing departmental business plans in relation to SD principles. The Minister for Government Policy will then hold departments to account through the quarterly business plan review process.

Transparency and independent scrutiny

- Developing real and measurable indicators to monitor sustainability across Government and report results publicly.
- Independent monitoring of sustainability in Government operations, procurement and policies by the Environmental Audit Committee.
- More frequent and up-to-date publishing of information and statistics online will replace annual reports on sustainability to allow constant scrutiny of progress and performance.

Support for this new approach to SD is at the highest level in Government. Leading by example through the ambitious greener Government targets we will ensure SD is at the heart of each Government department. For example, our approach to the recently-published White Paper on Public Health and the forthcoming one on the Natural Environment demonstrates the synergies between enhancing and protecting our environment and improving the quality of life and health of our communities, while contributing to sustainable growth. Aspects of the Department of Health's (DH) Public Health Outcomes Framework put

emphasis on the role the natural environment can play in 'living well' and these proposals are currently subject to consultation. In turn, the Natural Environment White Paper presents a good opportunity to provide a clear framework for those newly responsible for public health delivery.

The need to account for the social aspects of policies when assessing SD has been recognised and this has led to wider cross-Government work to ensure we identify and measure social impacts as systematically and consistently as possible. This work is being jointly led by Defra and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and will have benefits across Government by further developing our ability to assess and value social, economic and environmental impacts when making policy and spending decisions.

2.2 Green Economy

The Government is committed to sustainable growth, economically and environmentally, and there are many opportunities for UK businesses in moving to a green economy. We will publish a Roadmap to a Green Economy in April 2011 that will outline how Government will seek to maximise economic growth, whilst decoupling it from impacts on the environment.

Natural capital is an essential part of a productive economy and we need to value appropriately the goods and services it provides. This will be a key theme of the Natural Environment White Paper, the first such for 20 years. Building on the National Ecosystem Assessment, the White Paper will set out the state of our natural asset base and will strengthen Government commitments to ensure we properly measure and recognise the value of natural capital in policy decisions.

This Government has made a number of announcements and policy decisions which will support delivery of the transition to a green economy – including the Green Deal, a carbon price floor, greater support for export of clean technologies and the review of waste policies. In the Spending Review the Government committed £1bn for the Green Investment Bank with a commitment for additional significant proceeds from asset sales to help unlock the finance necessary to help move to a green economy. We are also committed to introducing a presumption in favour of SD in the planning system, which will be at the core of the new simplified National Planning Policy Framework.

HM Treasury (HMT) will support green growth and build a fairer, more balanced, economy. Specifically, its business plan sets out commitments to increase the proportion of revenue accounted for by environmental taxes. For example, plans to introduce a carbon price floor by 2013 and to replace air passenger duty with a per flight duty. And through Accounting for Sustainability, HMT will introduce connected sustainability reporting in 2011/12 – bringing together reporting on expenditure and carbon reduction, waste management and use of finite resources.

2.3 Action to tackle climate change

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges our generation will face. The Department of Energy and Climate Change's (DECC's) business plan sets out a long term transition to secure, affordable, low carbon energy on the way to an 80% cut in greenhouse gas

emissions by 2050. However, to be sustainable, this must be underpinned by an approach that supports fairness and economic growth.

One of the actions that will deliver on this is the Green Deal. This initiative will save energy, create jobs and support vulnerable consumers. The Department for Transport (DfT) will support the early market for electric and other ultra-low emission vehicles, promote the more effective use of strategic roads by addressing the causes of congestion, and continue to improve road safety. The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) is committed to ensuring that the planning system, building regulations, the building control system and Energy Performance Certificate regimes support our ambitions for a low-carbon and eco-friendly economy.

Sustainable development requires a global effort. This is particularly the case in efforts to tackle climate change and prepare for its impacts; one of our most critical problems requiring a sustainable development approach. DECC is the lead department on international climate change mitigation and the Department for International Development (DFID) leads on international adaptation, but the UK programme on international climate change is necessarily cross-Whitehall. The UK pursues our goals through a twin track approach including critical engagement in the United Nations (UN) negotiations for a global deal to curb emissions and adapt to climate change, alongside work in partnership with other countries to shift economies towards a sustainable path with lower emissions. For example Defra, DECC, DFID, HMT and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) are all members of the Board for the UK's International Climate Fund that will disburse £2.9bn over 2011-2015 to developing countries. The fund will support adaptation, help to reduce deforestation and invest in low carbon development. The objectives of this fund include delivering co-benefits for environment and development, which Defra will play a key role in, so that the fund delivers for SD in the round.

2.4 Protecting and enhancing the natural environment

In addition to our action on climate change, the commitment in Defra's business plan to publish a Natural Environment White Paper represents the first step in a fundamental new direction for the country, in how we value nature – for our economy, our wellbeing and our long-term security. It will therefore integrate the importance of a healthy natural environment to our prosperity and quality of life. It will set out an ambitious vision for achieving this, some guiding principles, and a range of immediate actions, to help initiate this fundamental shift for the future.

2.5 Fairness and Improving wellbeing

A key part of Government's agenda is a focus on fairness and wellbeing. This means helping to improve quality of life as well as enabling and empowering others to improve their wellbeing, as part of the Big Society. The Department for Culture Media and Sport's (DCMS') vision has a strong link to social wellbeing through promotion of sport and leisure time and also makes a positive contribution to economic growth through tourism, creative media and leisure and cultural industries. DCMS' initiative to address philanthropy could play an important role in meeting concerns around funding for initiatives in the Big Society and aligns with the Cabinet Office and Office of Civil Society approach to building the Big Society through community empowerment. This includes the opening up of public services and

encouraging social action e.g. empowering communities by training a new generation of community organisers and supporting the creation of neighbourhood groups, especially in the most deprived areas.

The Department for Education's (DfE) Pupil Premium offers schools the opportunity to choose how to spend additional funding aimed specifically at helping develop children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The Department of Health's Public Health Responsibility Deal challenges business and other sectors to set out their contribution to a healthier nation in the areas of food, alcohol, physical activity, health in the workplace and behaviour change

The Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) commitment to develop a child poverty strategy, focused on eradicating child poverty by 2020, includes actions to encourage the unemployed to become self employed and to encourage and promote community focused work schemes, e.g. work clubs and work experience placements.

2.6 National and International Sustainable Development

We will continue to work closely with our neighbours in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, sharing approaches and best practice in SD, and we will look to our European partners, the Commission and Member States to exchange experiences and agree joint approaches on issues which go beyond the UK's borders.

Internationally, the recent negotiations in Cancun and Nagoya are prime examples of how the UK has led the way on this agenda working with key developing countries and through international organisations. We will continue to join up our objectives on mitigating climate change with protecting biodiversity and reducing global poverty. This approach will play a role in the run up to the next Earth Summit in Rio in 2012 – where the UN will focus on the role of the green economy and poverty eradication in the context of SD.

2.7 Building a Big Society

Government can set a framework for SD at a national level, but many changes need to happen through the Big Society at a local level, ensuring our communities work more closely together, using local insight, energy and knowledge to develop solutions tailored to local circumstances.

The Big Society puts individuals and groups in the driving seat and Government in an enabling role removing the barriers, where appropriate, which prevent others from taking responsibility. More empowered communities and a society where people are more involved in social action such as volunteering should lead to increased well-being, stronger communities and stronger social ties.

2.8 Business Planning

Departments published their business plans in November 2010 setting out their priorities and the actions that will help them deliver these. These plans demonstrate the importance given to long term SD by Government as whole and set out a range of actions and commitments which will help deliver it. HMT, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS),

DECC and Defra are all committed to sustainable, low carbon and green economic growth. DfT has a number of actions to deliver a sustainable transport sector and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) plans to deliver a long term sustainable development strategy. However, we want to go further and make sustainable policy-making business as usual, reflecting environmental and social impacts. As part of the new framework for embedding SD into policy making, we will regularly review departmental business plans to ensure that environmental, social and economic impacts are taken into account as far as possible. The Minister for Government Policy will then hold departments to account through the quarterly business plan review process.

2.9 Operations and Procurement commitments

We will lead by example with the greenest ever operations and procurement through a step change in leadership, efficiency, transparency and accountability that will underpin the reform of Government's operations and procurement. We have committed to reduce carbon emissions from central Government by 10%, and to being more transparent on our performance; 19 department headquarters buildings now have real time reporting of energy efficiency data, making data available for all to see on their websites. The new Greening Government commitments that will replace the Sustainable Operations on the Government Estate (SOGE) targets from 2011/12 will take the scope and ambition of Government's challenge further, including being transparent on the carbon impact of our supply chain, and making procurement of goods and services more sustainable whilst continuing to deliver value for money.

2.10 Transparency and public accountability

We will measure and report¹ our progress through a new set of indicators on SD, building on past experience on sustainable development and wellbeing measures and linking with developing national and international initiatives, including plans announced in November 2010 to measure the nation's wellbeing.

The Environmental Audit Committee will play a role in holding Government to account with a renewed commitment² to scrutinise the appraisal of Government's policies and our new overall approach.

We are also committed to being open and transparent with more of our sustainable operations and procurement performance data, so that the public and Parliament can hold us to account.

¹ Defra Statisticians will take the lead on this and will report annually on a high level set of indicators to provide an overview, linking with other initiatives, such as work on measures of wellbeing. The high level set will be supplemented by periodic (policy-specific) indicator reports, which will be developed by Defra Statisticians in consultation with statisticians in the relevant policy Departments.

² Made in their report into 'Embedding sustainable development across Government, after the Secretary of State's announcement on the future of the Sustainable Development Commission'