



Briefing:

Policy Integration

The UK Sustainable Development Strategy, *A Better Quality of Life*, opens with the message that sustainable development is the simple idea of ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for future generations to come.¹ It goes on to sum up sustainable development as:

- Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone
- Effective protection of the environment
- Prudent use of natural resources
- Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment

The strategy is being updated this year. These four objectives are often quoted, but two essential qualifying sentences are usually forgotten. *A Better Quality of Life* also notes that:

“Although the idea is simple, the task is substantial. **It means meeting four objectives at the same time, and in the UK and the world as a whole.**”²

This last sentence is the key to sustainable development. The human race has pursued all four objectives for millennia. Success in one is totally reliant on the others. Good social conditions require strong economies, strong economies rely on environmental resources, and environmental conditions are inseparable from our quality of life. Despite this, each objective has often been pursued independently, and success in one area has worked against others.

Past debates often focused on the clash between economic and social objectives, on the struggle between labour conditions and economic growth. But the contribution of that essential environmental resource – land - to economic growth has long been another source of enormous conflict. At the beginning of the 21st century, with the largest ever world population and exceptional rates of human resource consumption, conflicts with other environmental objectives are becoming increasingly apparent.

The mission of sustainable development is therefore to find ways of pursuing each of the four objectives with the minimum of harm to others, *and* where choices between objectives are inevitable, to be explicit and democratic about the choices. This is the notion of **policy integration**.

¹ *A Better Quality of Life: A Strategy for Sustainable Development for the UK*, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, 1999. Paragraph 1.1.

² *Ibid.* Paragraph 1.2.

Planning for sustainable development requires overt and systematic approaches to integrating policies and plans. It entails explicitly recognising potential conflicts and searching for innovative ways to reduce these. In many cases it means finding new ways to achieve the same objectives. As the National Assembly for Wales' Sustainable Development Scheme³ says, it is about *learning to live differently*.

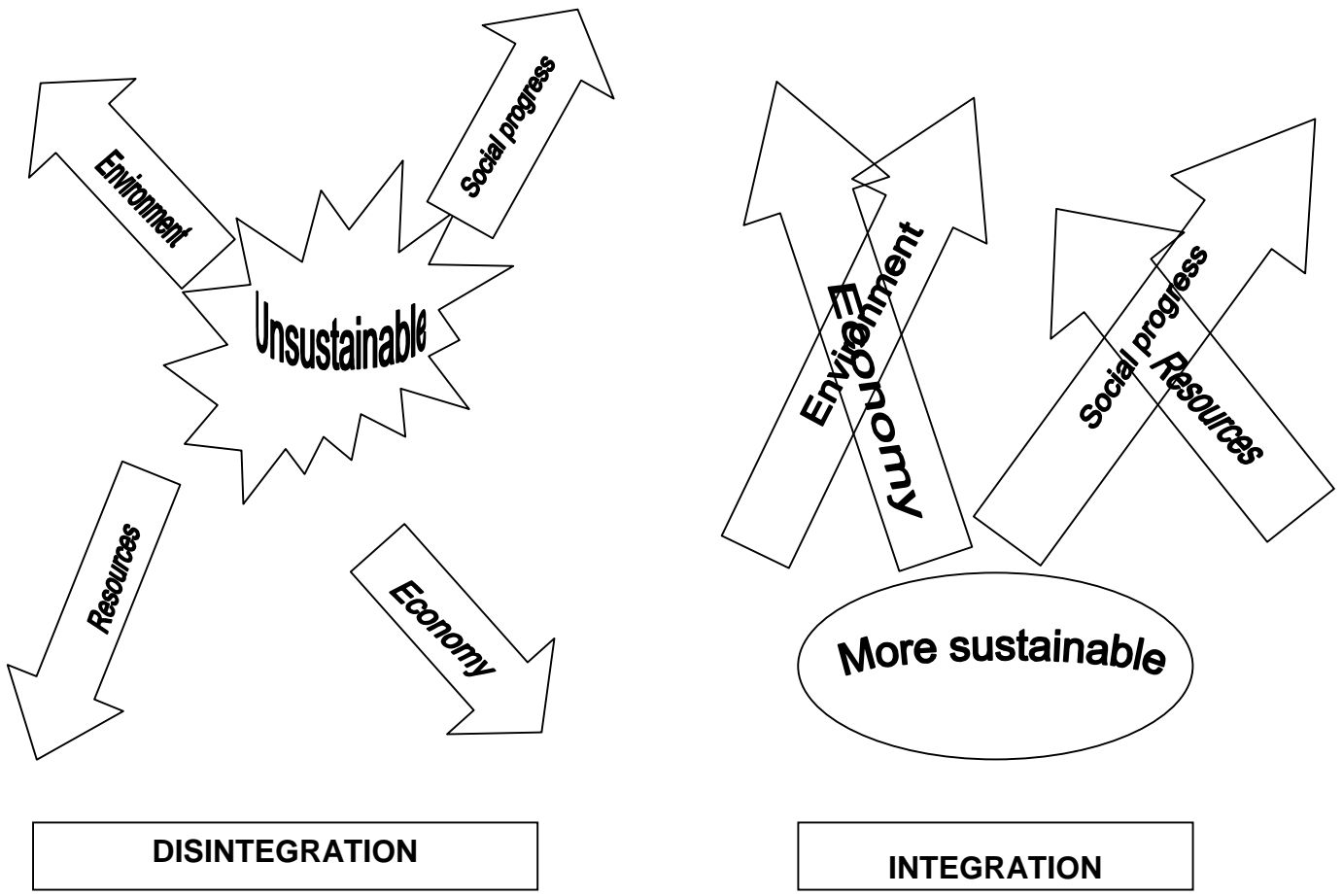
Below we describe a policy integration process that can be applied to any form of strategic planning, including community strategies, local transport plans, regeneration strategies, tourism strategies and best value improvement plans.

Win-win-win? The challenge set in *A Better Quality of Life*, is “to meet all four objectives at the same time”. It is the classic idea of win-win-win, but may be over-ambitious. It implies that with some ingenuity we can *always* find solutions that meet all four objectives at once. Certainly there will be cases where this is possible, but, as anyone who has struggled with policy development knows, frequently choices will have to be made.

Asking policy-makers to always identify win-win solutions may simply lead to cynicism and alienation. It is effectively asking the impossible. *But* there are undoubtedly many missed opportunities for improving integration. Asking policy makers to apply a systematic policy integration process is a more positive and realistic request.

³ A summary of the CAG study is available free from the Countryside Agency as Countryside Agency Research Note CRN26 *Policy Integration*, and was also described in two articles by Joan Bennett, “Turning Three into One” and “Policy Integration – From Theory to Practice” in *Town and Country Planning*, January and February 2001.

Integration – So what’s new? Many policy-makers would argue that they always consider social, economic and environmental factors during the policy development process – ‘so we’ve been integrating for years!’ It’s perfectly true that good practice has long advocated ‘joined-up’ policies. But, in research for the Countryside Agency, CAG Consultants found that policy-makers applied the term ‘integration’ to five quite different ideas (see next page), only two of which could be described as genuine policy integration.



FIVE INTERPRETATIONS OF 'INTEGRATION'	
POLICY INTEGRATION	
<i>Win-win-win</i>	<p>Solutions which meet social, economic and / or environmental objectives without harming any others.</p> <p><i>Illustration: Converting derelict mills in a town centre to provide affordable dwellings, using a high standard of resource efficient design. This policy brings social benefits (affordable housing, reduced fuel poverty, more attractive town centre, lived-in safer town centre); economic benefits (more available workforce, derelict building brought back to economic use); and environmental benefits (reduced energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, homes in close proximity to shops and services reducing the need to travel, and reduced need to build on greenfield land.)</i></p>
<i>Conflict minimisation</i>	<p>Solutions which reduce (but do not fully overcome) conflicts between different objectives.</p> <p><i>Illustration: As a result of household growth there is a local demand for new housing. But residents and visitors are opposed to any further loss of open countryside and there is concern about the traffic that would be generated by additional edge of town or rural housing. The planning authority can not identify sufficient urban brownfield sites to fully accommodate household growth. To minimise conflict the authority establishes a programme of housing renewal and vacancy rate reductions in poorer urban areas and imposes a policy of restraint on new housing in rural areas. This reduces conflicts between social objectives (housing need) and environmental objectives (loss of countryside and traffic generation), but does not overcome conflicts with the social objective of affordable rural housing for local people.</i></p>
OTHER 'JOINED-UP' POLICIES	
<i>Policy Compatibility</i>	<p>Policies within a plan which do not work against others.</p> <p><i>Illustration: A tourism strategy includes policies to increase visitors by establishing a website advertising local accommodation with facilities for direct email to accommodation providers. The strategy also includes a policy to bring the economic benefits of tourism to more members of the community. To make these policies more compatible, the strategy proposes financial support for IT equipment and email training for accommodation providers.</i></p>
<i>Strategic co-ordination</i>	<p>Strategic plans for the same area support each other.</p> <p><i>Illustration: A priority for a local strategic partnership is to promote diversification of the rural economy by encouraging tourism. The regional development agency is searching for key strategic employment sites close to motorways. Many potential strategic sites are in rural areas, but the regional economic strategy identifies strategic sites on the periphery of urban areas in order to avoid any adverse impacts on rural tourism.</i></p>
<i>Addressing all three themes</i>	<p>Addressing social, economic and environmental themes within one plan.</p> <p><i>Illustration: A local transport plan includes policies to promote freight transfer facilities (economic), subsidise bus fares for the elderly (social) and reduce town centre air pollution and congestion by park and ride facilities (environment).</i></p>

What is the difference between the first two versions and the remaining three? Essentially the first two have identified the key conflicts with social, economic and environmental objectives, what we call the *crunch issues* and searched for ways to reduce these. The remaining three versions of 'joined-up' policies have been very selective in what they have considered.

For example, in the policy compatibility illustration, the tourism strategy has not considered if an increase in visitors might have other adverse impacts, and if there are any opportunities to reduce these. Possible adverse impacts might include social – less safe communities and loss of much needed housing to visitor accommodation; and environment – increased travel and climate change emissions, and increased traffic congestion.

Similarly, in the strategic coordination illustration, the LSP and RDA have simply sought to ensure that a policy in the community strategy and another in the regional economic strategy do not conflict. They have not asked whether there are any other conflicts between these two policies and other economic, social and environmental objectives. In the final addressing all themes illustration, no attempt has been made to ensure that the plan objectives are mutually supportive. All that has been done is to include social, economic and environmental policies within one plan. In fact this approach probably does not deserve the description 'joined-up'.

A policy integration process The tools and techniques of policy integration are nothing new. All that is needed is that they are applied with a willingness to confront *crunch issues* and to find new ways to approach them. Nor does policy integration require great technical expertise. But what it does require is the application of: **imagination and innovation**.

In the box below we have described key steps in policy integration. The first three steps apply to broad strategy development, the remainder to more detailed policies and programmes.

A POLICY INTEGRATION PROCESS

1. Agree strategy objectives and check they cover the key sustainability goals. Revise if necessary.
 2. Identify significant conflicts between strategy objectives - crunch issues.
 3. Revise and refine strategy objectives to help reduce / avoid the conflicts.
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4. Identify options for taking strategy objectives forward that reduce conflict and maximise compatibility between objectives.
 5. Check whether options raise crunch issues.
 6. Gather information that will inform the choice between options.
 7. Compare how well options address crunch issues.
 8. Select preferred option.
 9. Adapt preferred option to further reduce conflicts.
 10. Revisit integration throughout implementation.

Detailed Policies and Broad Programmes

EXAMPLE 1 – INTEGRATING THE COMMUNITY STRATEGY- ROUND 1

Once the broad strategic goals of a community strategy (CS) have been agreed, steps 1 to 3 of the integration process may be applied.

1. As the CS is a comprehensive strategy we would expect it to embrace most sustainability goals – first check (scope) against a list of Sustainable Development objectives that enlarge on the 4 national themes. (See the ‘General sustainable development objectives’ in the briefing [“What is sustainable development”](#).) Have any important objectives been forgotten? Should / could they be addressed by the CS?
2. Identify likely significant conflicts between the CS strategic goals. So – if a strategic goal is to enhance and protect internationally important marine habitats – crunch issues might include conflicts with CS goals to: expand the freight port; expand marine based tourism; improve residents’ access to the sea. *(This step inevitably requires the LSP to already have some thoughts on how it might implement CS strategic goals. If this is unclear for some goals, then integration may have to wait until detailed policies and programmes are being developed. But recognising and reducing conflicts at this stage will save time later.*
3. Redefine the strategic goals, e.g.
 - Enhance and protect important marine habitats, while supporting tourist facilities and residents’ access.
 - Expand marine-related employment without damaging important marine habitats or residents’ access to the sea.

(Although at this stage the result is simply a new form of words, by redefining the strategic objectives – the more detailed policy and programme design will almost certainly be more integrated.)

Round 2: When detailed policies and programmes to achieve the strategic goals are developed (whether as part of the CS or other strategies), apply steps 4 to 9 of the integration process.

EXAMPLE 2 – INTEGRATING A RURAL STRATEGY

4. A strategic goal of a rural strategy is to – *increase rural jobs and diversify the rural economy*. One option is to meet this goal by developing a major visitor attraction close to a motorway junction.
5. Potential crunch issues are: economic (jobs may go to urban residents who commute or move for the season); social (disturbance and congestion for local residents); environment (damage to rural character and visitors making lengthy car based trips.) Given the numerous potential conflicts, new options are sought that might be more integrated. ***This is when ingenuity and innovation is needed!*** An alternative option is devised – to organise a season of themed festivals in local market towns and major villages, while encouraging visitors to stay in local accommodation.
If a new option clearly performs better on all fronts, it may be possible to move straight from here to step 9. If not...
6. Gather information on how these options might compare on the crunch issues. For example, is there information about jobs created, who gets the jobs, and trips generated, when these options have been tried elsewhere?
7. Set out how each option is likely to perform against the crunch issues - rural jobs, disturbance to residents, traffic congestion, rural character, and trip generation. *This inevitably requires prediction – which may prove inaccurate – an argument for both researching experience elsewhere, and continuing to revisit integration during implementation.*
8. Choose the option which best reduces conflicts. *But* there may be no obviously ‘better’ option because each performs well on some crunch issues and less well on others. If this happens, the first thing to do is search for other options that might better fit the bill, or ask if existing options could be adapted to reduce the conflicts. (See step 9.) If neither of these work, hard choices will have to be made.
9. Suppose the option of themed festivals is chosen. This still potentially conflicts with the objective of reducing car trips. It might therefore be adapted to include coach services from neighbouring urban areas, along with joint coach and entry tickets.

Isn't this appraisal by another name? Yes and no. A well designed appraisal process would go through these steps. In reality most appraisals do not. They fail to:

- Confront the big crunch issues – often giving them the same weight as much more minor impacts.
- Search for innovative alternative options to overcome crunch issues.
- Identify ways to adapt options.

Often appraisals are reduced to a series of ticks and crosses that are either ignored or force decision-makers into negative or second best decisions.

A negative example might be that, in the cause of protecting marine habitats, the community strategy abandons the hope of creating more marine based jobs, rather than looking for ways to create new jobs at the port without damaging habitats and elsewhere in marine-tourism.

A second best example might be that the Rural Strategy opts for a major visitor attraction, but demands that it has good landscaping to minimise damage to rural character.

The implications for stakeholder involvement in decisions Applying a policy integration process will help to reduce conflicts. But some will undoubtedly remain, and hard choices will have to be made.

This has implications for stakeholder involvement techniques. So often stakeholders are asked to come up with a `wish list' of what they would like. Wish lists may contribute to the initial choice of strategic goals, but will not help when it comes to the hard choices of programme design. The implication is that integrated decisions demand a more sophisticated method of decision making which use *informed participation* techniques. (Also known as deliberative participation.) *Informed participation* methods present stakeholders with the alternatives options and their pros and cons, and ask them to make *choices* rather than wish lists. (Or of course to come up with better options.)

Whatever strategy is being prepared, from a community strategy to a best value improvement plan, stakeholder involvement should be designed to confront the crunch issues and present stakeholders with real choices.