



Sustainable Development Research Network

SDRN ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Friday 6 July, 2007

University of Westminster, London

Present: Roland Clift (CES, University of Surrey); Mark Davis (CLG); Stephanie Davis (CLG); Isabella Earle (Defra); Paul Ekins (PSI); Diana Kasparova (PSI); Katy Lock (Land Use Consultants); Kate McGeevor (SDRN); Eileen Mortby (Defra); Katharine Ross (Environment Agency); Alan Paterson (DfT); Tanja Pless-Mulloli (University of Newcastle); Hilary Salter (SDRN); Simone Sharpley (CLG); Ben Shaw (SDRN); Stuart Wainwright (Defra); Jonny Wentworth (Defra); Colleen Williams (Dept. of Health).

Apologies: Andrew Dobson (Keele University); Arik Dondi (Defra); Malcolm Eames (Brunel University); Louise Enticknap (CLG); Hazel Granger (CLG); Karen Lucas (University of Westminster); Evan Williams (SEPA).

1. Welcome and introductions

Roland Clift welcomed members of the Advisory Committee and guests.

2. Minutes from the last meeting and matters arising

The minutes from the last meeting, held on 17th April, 2007 were approved.

In connection with the discussion regarding Defra research and the role of the SDRN at the previous meeting, Stuart Wainwright announced that a new knowledge hub would be established at Defra within the next few months, drawn mainly from the SCP evidence base but also from SDRN work. It will focus on cross-cutting small group research which did not fit easily into the main Defra research areas and also rapid analysis. The latter would need a research function to support it. The hub would have access to both internal and external data sources and would be undertaken by both internal and external people. It will involve the Science, Economic and Strategy Directorates as well as universities and other agencies. Staff are being recruited and will hopefully be in place within three months. The link with SDRN was very important and it was suggested that the new staff should attend the next Advisory Council meeting in October. Roland Clift responded that this was a positive move.

3. Progress to date

- Communications

Kate McGeevor reported that the Communications Strategy was being developed with Amazon PR. The next activity was the SDRN Annual Conference on 20th September and Amazon was helping find sponsorship and also promoting the Young

Researcher Poster Competition. She asked whether, in view of the announcement of Defra's Chief Scientific Advisor that week, there might be scope to invite Robert Watson, to add to the discussion at the beginning of the conference and members of the Committee felt that this was a good idea. In the first of the parallel sessions, Andrew Dobson and Tim Jackson would be speaking on Leadership, Change Management and Citizenship in Sustainable Development. The alternative session would be on Place-making and Sustainable Development. Peter Roberts of the Academy for Sustainable Communities would be speaking on how the ASC uses research and how to develop skills for placemaking and Deryck Irving, of Greenspace Scotland, would be giving a presentation on Placemaking Scotland.

The second parallel session would be focusing on two new Research into Practice workstreams. The one confirmed so far was Spatial Planning. Initially, the second was going to focus on the ecosystems approach but Defra had not thought that the area would be particularly useful as a conference session at this time (although it remained a possibility for the following year) and Kate therefore asked for ideas for the fourth session. Roland Clift suggested industrial ecology or industrial symbiosis and the Committee approved this suggestion. Roland was to suggest speakers to Kate. Kate said that the final session was on Health and the Environment, with a panel discussion. After the close of the conference and in conjunction with the reception, there would be a Young Researcher Poster Session, sponsored by NERC and ESRC, neither of which had previously sponsored the conference.

Kate had recently been in discussions with RICS and announced that a new SDRN/RICS evening lecture series would commence on 4th October with a lecture on sustainability appraisal.

- Liaison with Policy-makers

Ben Shaw reported that he and Kate McGeevor had been in discussions with DCMS regarding a scoping study on the effect of climate change on cultural and sporting assets. In addition, he was meeting DfT to discuss the Sustainable Transport Research into Practice workstream.

- Rapid Research and Evidence Review

The revised SDRN Rapid Research and Evidence Review briefing paper had been circulated and members of the Advisory Committee were asked to comment on and choose one from the following three suggested topics for the first review:

- Health, environment and sustainable development linkages
- Sustainable procurement: translating private sector procurement practice to the public sector
- Leadership, change management, citizenship.

Roland Clift suggested to the Committee that the chosen topic should be the one which would benefit most from a literature review. The following discussion centred around public visibility and recent debates and one consideration was which of the three topics would have the most visibility for Defra and SDRN. The prevailing view was that sustainable procurement should be the topic of the first review. However, caution was advised at the implied suggestion that government lagged behind private companies as far as sustainable procurement strategies were concerned and it was flagged up that public sector procurement was more constrained than that of the private sector. It was agreed that procurement should be the first review but that the title should be rephrased so that it was not

pejorative. It should be decided at the October meeting which topic would follow on from this.

- **Research into Practice Workstreams**

Ben Shaw reported that three of these were ongoing. He had been talking to DfT regarding the Sustainable Transport theme and the Centre for Sustainability (C4S) at TRL was working up plans. In October there would be an event on climate change adaptation and transport. There may be possible case studies arising from this, such as on flooding. The final proposal for this workstream was now ready. Katy Lock would be updating the Committee on the Spatial Planning and Development theme in her later presentation. The third theme was Business Resource Efficiency, looking at resource efficiency and supply chain management and resource efficiency and competitiveness and reviewing how businesses obtain their resource efficiency advice. It was reported that Defra had a current research programme on business resource efficiency, in conjunction with Oakdene Hollins. An interim report was now available and the final report was due in 4-6 weeks.

4. Communities and Local Government (CLG) Discussion

- **CLG research activities (Mark Davis, CLG)**

Mark Davies explained that the CLG's Sustainable Development Action Plan was due to have been completed a few weeks before but it had been delayed since Communities and Local Government was still a new department and it had inherited new responsibilities such as community cohesion and equalities. What needed to be done was to agree a narrative with ministers as to what SD meant as a department. In terms of research, there were three themes - Citizenship and community development; Climate change and sustainable building and planning; and Disadvantage, equality and spatial economic performance.

The Citizenship - 'Together we can' - programme included a citizenship survey, work on race cohesion and local empowerment and local ballots, to give more control over spending. In terms of the climate theme, a 'Green Package' was launched in December. Consultations were being held on zero carbon emissions for new housing and there was a draft policy statement on planning and climate change. Work was continuing on reducing carbon emissions from the existing housing stock and non-residential buildings. There were also some studies being done at the locational level, such as trying to make the Thames Gateway a low carbon development zone or water neutral. In terms of the Disadvantage, equality and spatial economic performance theme, there were spatial disparities with respect to the economic potential of regions and there was a commitment to regenerate these through new land and property development. The Department was also concerned with gender inequalities.

A new ESRC Spatial Research Centre was being set up, concerning sub-national economic development. This would be reporting under the State of the Cities programme. Other linked work was an evaluation of regeneration programmes. The SDC report into the sustainable communities plan suggested that more needed to be done to evaluate CLG programmes. There was also research into the appropriate levels of intervention.

Roland Clift commented on the broad range and scope of the Department's work. Simone Sharpley told members about the Planning Research Network and relevant papers on the website - <http://www.planning-resnet.org.uk/>

- Spatial Planning workstream (Katy Lock, LUC)

Katy defined spatial planning as the term used to encompass planning - the management of the competing uses for space, and the making of places that are valued and have identity - which focuses on the location and quality of social, economic and environmental change. Spatial planning was seen as increasingly important in delivering sustainable development, and sustainability appraisal (SA) was considered a key link between sustainable development research and spatial planning practice. SA also incorporated the requirements of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). Recent SA research included a 5-year EC review of SA/SEA under the SEA Directive; ongoing assessment of the revised planning system introduced under the 2004 Act (including the recently published Planning White Paper); SA issues highlighted in the Spatial Plans in Practice Project and discussion in practitioner journals. Initial issues emerging were a skills gap with practitioners undertaking SA; the fact that it was a laborious process and often a 'tick-box' approach was used; the need for a solid evidence base; the fact that it was very subjective - how could research communication add value - and the need to define and apply environmental limits in SA. The objective of the Spatial Planning workstream was to explore the role of Sustainability Appraisal in improving the delivery of sustainable development outcomes through the spatial planning process. It was proposed that the means to achieve this would be via a literature review and communication with practitioners, followed by a workshop, which would be written up as a report.

In the discussion following the presentation it was suggested that it would be beneficial to communicate with a wide range of practitioners and avoid self selecting respondents. Kate McGeevor suggested that Amazon PR might be able to help with that.

- RCEP Urban Environment Report (Paul Ekins, PSI)

Paul Ekins introduced the recently-published RCEP report on the Urban Environment. The RCEP found that the natural urban environment was a key influence on health and well-being. Priorities for the built environment were and integrated approach to transport - encouraging people to walk, cycle and use public transport; energy; water and sewerage; waste management - that closes resource loops so that discarded materials become new resources rather than wastes; and urban design - that creates beautiful buildings and cityscapes where people want to live. There was a web of constraints created by interactions between existing infrastructure, incentives, instruments and institutions, people's inclinations and lack of information which needed to be addressed through policy packages or portfolios that combined economic instruments, voluntary agreements, regulation and information provision. The proposed idea was an environmental contract between central and local government, with the effective participation of the wider community at a local level. The contract would be delivered largely through existing plans and structures, would concentrate on the interactions and synergies between environmental issues and would consist of

- Local Government Environmental Innovation Fund to stimulate creative initiatives at a local level (e.g. Merton, Woking)
- Aspirations - encouragement to attain stretching standards (e.g. higher levels of Code for Sustainable Homes), which may later become
- Standards to be achieved by all local authorities (e.g. Building Regulations, Decent Homes, Local Transport Plans).

Paul said that he hoped that the RCEP work could feed into SDRN and CLG. In response to Paul's presentation Tanja Pless-Mulloli observed that links between urban environmental and health may be clear but that very hard to demonstrate and measure. Jonathan Wentworth highlighted the 'tyranny of small decisions' that result in bigger impacts in the urban environment, for example, paving over gardens, use of pesticides and asked what sort of mechanisms could be used to overcome these. One response to this is that the problem is one of knowledge and expertise, for example, it is cheaper to install permeable than impermeable paving.

- **Citizenship, Leadership and Participation** (Ben Shaw, for Andy Dobson)
To introduce the discussion Ben Shaw presented notes from Andy Dobson, who was unable to attend the meeting. The three main points from this were 1) that leadership and citizenship are important topics as far as putting SD into practice is concerned, 2) that these topics are under-reported as far as the policy community is concerned, 3) that there is a rich vein of research on which to report.

Jonathan Wentworth suggested that this was close to the work which Defra was undertaking with ESRC as part of their behaviour change research centre. Tanja Pless-Mulloli said that one could learn from other debates on behaviour change - e.g. smoking - and the length of time it took for policy to evolve from evidence. Alan Paterson mentioned that there was a lot of ongoing work in transport on attitudes and behaviour. In addition, there was a new OSI Foresight programme just starting on sustainable environmental management in the built environment. Mark also said that there was joint work between CLG and Defra on the role of communities on tackling climate change.

There was a general discussion on the desirability and need for more post-hoc evaluation and longitudinal studies, together with the need for work on models of financing infrastructure and monitoring systems. The importance of people in catalysing specific changes was also highlighted.

5. Discussion

- Agreement of decisions made
 - Invite Robert Watson to the SDRN Annual Conference.
 - Pursue sustainable procurement as the topic of the next rapid research and evidence review
 - Jonny Wentworth to forward details of a new report assessing the sustainability of RSSs, which has been carried out by Levett-Therivel Sustainability Consultants
- Agreement of topics for next meeting
 - What had been learnt and what should be taken forward, following the Annual Conference.
 - An update section for an hour and then longer discussions on citizenship and health

6. Time and date of next meeting

The next meeting would be held on Wednesday, 10th October 2007. The following meeting was provisionally scheduled for either 15th or 17th January, 2008 and Kate would email members of the Committee to ascertain their preferred date.