Consultation

For Local Air Quality Management:

the

how to

guide

National Society for Clean Air and Environmental Protection

Acknowledgements

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*It should be noted that this paper does not constitute Government guidance and is
independent of Secretary of State's Guidance produced under Section 88 of the Environment
Act 1995.*

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INTRODUCTION

Why Guidance on Consultation?

The Environment Act 1995, and subsequent detailed guidance on air quality management, make clear the need for a strong, coherent approach to consultation. This reflects a widespread change within central and local government towards more effective local democracy and fuller and more regular community participation.

More specifically, air quality management should now be linked with strategy making and action on transport and land use planning, and current guidance in both areas places great emphasis on thorough consultation.

The principle of strong and effective consultation has been welcomed by those professionals responsible for air quality management. On their own admission, however, there is at the moment a lack of skill and experience in consultative approaches.

While no single document can fill the skill and experience gap, this guide aims to move practice forward for air quality management by:

- making clear the context to consultation,
- outlining practical principles, procedures and approaches, and
- 'sign-posting' the reader to further help and support.

The guide focuses, very deliberately, on broader issues such as principles and overall approaches. It is at this level that much current participation work falls down and, without a proper foundation, effective approaches are not possible. The reader is therefore strongly advised to move through the whole document with care, in order to ensure a good understanding of why certain aspects are essential. The final section then provides help by explaining for where to find details of methods and day-to-day management.

How Was This Guide Produced?

This guide, produced for the National Society for Clean Air and Environmental Protection (NSCA), is built on proven practice in effective consultation and was written by Jeff Bishop on behalf of The Environment Council. It draws on many years experience in practical participative projects, in training courses, and in drafting guidance for professionals, elected members, the private sector and community organisations.

The process of drafting this guide has itself been consultative. Participants at NSCA events have debated the issues, raised concerns and suggested ideas. A group of professionals from the greater Manchester area also came together for a day to sharpen the brief and contribute key points, and have also had an opportunity to comment during drafting stages.

PRESSURES FOR CONSULTATION

Three main pressures influence approaches to consultation for Local Air Quality Management:

•   Requirements flowing from the **legislation and guidance**.
•   The **general context** pushing towards coherent consultation in many other areas.
•   **State-of-the-art practice** in information-giving, consultation, participation and partnership working.

Legislation And Guidance

The Environment Act 1995[1] provides the minimum legal requirements for consultation and Schedule 11 states that:

"A local authority in carrying out its functions in relation to .. (air quality issues) .. shall consult such other persons as fall within sub-paragraph (2) below.

(2) Those persons are –
    (a) the Secretary of State;
    (b) the appropriate new Agency;
    (c) ... the highway authority;
    (d) every local authority whose area is contiguous to the authority's area;
    (e) any county council ....;
    (f) any National Park (etc.) ....;
    (g) such public authorities exercising functions in, or in the vicinity of, the authority's area as the authority may consider appropriate;
    (h) such bodies appearing to be representative of persons with business interests in the area ... as the authority may consider appropriate;
    (j) such other bodies or persons as the authority considers appropriate."

It also requires (in Schedule 11 part 4) that all specified documents about air quality are available for inspection or (at a charge) to take away.

The Greater London Authority Bill, will also require local authorities in the Greater London area and those authorities adjacent to London, to consult the Mayor of London, when he or she is in place.

Guidance Note LAQM.G1(97) suggests that relevant community groups and any local councils should be added to the list of consultees.

Future revisions to the Secretary of State's Guidance may elaborate this, as with Local Transport Plans. In the interim, authorities will probably remain unclear about (a) what constitutes appropriate consultation, and (b) any repercussions of failing to reach a standard.

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[1] This and other basic background documents are listed in Appendix 2

An informal legal view[2] may give some further clarification, listing the following criteria (our italics):

- Consistency with LAQM.G1(97) - *as above.*
- A genuine two-way process - *not simply the giving out of information to consultees but some demonstration of both an opportunity to contribute and openness to other information.*
- Sufficient information - *this will inevitably be a debatable point until practice settles down.*
- Sufficient time - *in one court case, 6 weeks was given as a reasonable time period for conventional consultation.*
- Genuine willingness to change view - *a reinforcement of the 'two-way' point above.*

All this has been well summarised by Webster J in the 1986 case of R v. Secretary of State for Social Services ex p Association of Metropolitan Authorities:

"...in any context the essence of consultation is the communication of a genuine invitation to give advice and a genuine consideration of that advice. In my view it must go without saying that to achieve consultation sufficient information must be supplied by the consulting party to the consulted party to enable it to tender helpful advice. Sufficient time must be given by the consulting to the consulted party to enable it to do that, and sufficient time must be available for such advice to be considered by the consulting party. Sufficient, in that context, does not mean ample, but at least enough to enable the relevant purpose to be fulfilled. By helpful advice, in this context, I mean sufficiently informed and considered information or advice about aspects of the form or substance of the proposals, or their implications for the consulted party, being aspects material to the implementation of the proposal as to which the [Secretary of State] might not be fully informed or advised and as to which the party consulted might have relevant information or advice to offer."

The Context Of Participation

The Overall Context

Air quality management practice will need to respond to general pressures for more coherent participation at local authority level because of three main trends. The first is the broadest and most important.

- **Local Democracy**

From the first consultation papers on 'Modernising Local Government'[3] to the more recent 'Guidance on Enhancing Public Participation'[4], the Government has been promoting the need to change the relationship between government and governed:

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[2] Drawn from a paper to the 1999 NSCA Spring Workshop by Michael Morris of the UK Environmental Law Association and Solicitors Nabarro Nathanson.

[3] ''Modernising Local Government: Local Democracy and Community Leadership'; Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, London, 1998.

[4] ''Guidance on Enhancing Public Participation'; Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, London, 1999.

"The government wishes to see consultation and participation embedded into the culture of all councils .... and undertaken across a wide range of each council's responsibilities".

A few basic points underpin this developing approach:

- It requires not just a change in day-to-day practices but a shift in authority 'culture', affecting every officer and member.
- Approaches to participation will need to be not just ad hoc or occasional but coherent, regular, consistent and sustained.
- The term 'community' includes all possible groups and organisations; not just local residents but also business and industry, voluntary and community bodies, government agencies and others such as the health service.
- It suggests a shift from limited consultation to genuine participation, partnership, even delegation.
- It also suggests a shift from participation only in small scale initiatives to participation in issues as broad as strategies.

This is encouraging for air quality managers because it indicates serious commitment by central government to participative ways of working. It also suggests an opportunity to learn from, and exchange ideas with, others in an authority facing similar questions - as elaborated in the 'Signposts' section.

- **Local Agenda 21**

Local Agenda 21 (LA21) is growing in importance as the means to advance sustainable development. Strong participation is a central requirement in all LA21 guidance[5]. Not only are many authorities taking this seriously but many outside groups and agencies committed to LA21 are now asking challenging questions about their local authority's commitment to participation. There will without doubt be local pressure to link air quality management to LA21 and to manage this through properly planned consultation.

- **Best Value**

The Best Value regime[6] is beginning to come into clearer focus, and local authorities are realising that a full commitment to it requires innovative approaches to 'customer care' - in a form more related to good participation than to public relations. Effective procedures that satisfy Best Value requirements will also help to provide a baseline of good practice in participation in air quality management, (and vice-versa).

Specific Links

Air quality management does not operate in isolation. More and more it is seen as integrally linked to **land use planning**[7] issues and to **transport and traffic** - indeed recent government guidance actually requires such links to be made.

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[5] 'Sustainable Local Communities: Some Model Approaches to Strategy Development'; Local Government Association, London, 1998.

[6] 'Modernising Local Government: Improving Local Services through Best Value'; Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, London 1998.

[7] See in particular the 'Good Practice Guide: Air Quality and Land Use Planning', Royal Town Planning Institute, London, 1999.

A requirement for public consultation has long been established within the statutory land use planning system, although no clear principles for this, or procedural guidance, yet exists. Nevertheless, planning is an area where consultative approaches are expected, and case law practice provides considerable de facto guidance.

By contrast, transport planning was until recently regarded as so complex and technical that consultation was the exception. This is changing fast, not least in relation to Local Transport Plans (LTPs). The guidance on LTP preparation[8] places considerable emphasis on 'participation' and makes clear that a failure to follow the guidance could affect the financial support to an authority.

It is valuable to quote directly from the LTP guidance, in order to ensure that this guide for air quality management is entirely complementary. Key points (all extracts) are:

- "The government attaches a high priority to effective public involvement.
- A genuinely inclusive approach will be vital if authorities are going to achieve the widespread support necessary.
- It is important to make clear at the outset the aims and limits of public involvement.
- Plans should include a section which explains how the public were involved.
- We will be looking for authorities to adhere to the following principles for effective participation: early involvement, interactive (effective participation requires a two-way dialogue), inclusive (involving all local interest groups), continuous, open, and with effective feedback to participants."

State-of-the-Art Practice

Four particular points have been addressed by much of the more recent participation practice and guidance.

1. 'Consultation' has historically been largely one-way, and structured in a manner that seriously limits the impact of people's involvement. From many different directions, (including government guidance as above), there is pressure for approaches that move up the so-called 'ladder of participation', from consultation through involvement towards **open, two-way processes of genuine participation**.

2. 'Consultation' has often meant little more than arranging an ad hoc medley of activities such as a public meeting, an exhibition and a questionnaire. Such an approach is guided, as one government research report stated, "more by choice of specific methods than awareness of overall approach"[9]. Picking and mixing a few techniques is the opposite of (as the report goes on to say) "properly grounded, overall processes which enable participants to develop practice from project to project". As a result, ad hoc practice is rapidly being replaced with approaches built on **coherence, consistency and overall planning**.

3. In terms of actual methods, questionnaires and exhibitions address people as individuals, and this is even true within the much-derided public meeting. By so doing, they offer no

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[8] 'Guidance on Local Transport Plans'; Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, London 1999.

[9] 'Community Involvement in Planning and Development'; BDOR Limited for the Department of the Environment, HMSO, London, 1994.

element or stage in which people can engage with each other and with the issues in the depth necessary to ensure full understanding and creative solutions. **Bringing people together** is now therefore a key theme of current good practice.

4. 'Consultation' has also been based in the past on the principle that someone (nearly always the professional team) produces a draft of a strategy, plan or even design and people are invited to comment on it. This 'decide-announce-defend' model has shown itself to be wasteful and damaging in terms of time, resources, relationships and quality of outcome. By drawing in people at the earliest possible stage, it is possible to shift to a model of '**deciding together**'.

Addressing all four points suggests a dramatically different model from traditional consultation. Instead of planning a programme of strategy preparation and then consultation (i.e. two stages, two streams), a consultative approach is taken to the strategy preparation itself. Consultation ceases to be an 'add-on' and becomes the way in which a strategy or plan is prepared. This is fundamental for air quality management; current good practice is not about how to do consultation better but about better ways to prepare strategies and plans.

Various terms are used to describe such approaches, including **consensus-building** (which is used in most of this guide), stakeholder dialogue and collaborative planning. Consensus building is about enabling a wide range of people, in carefully managed settings, to share, understand, develop and - ideally - agree ways forward on complex issues. The approaches work because they are built on real care, thought, planning, skill, management and a willingness to see things through; in essence a 'designed process'.

Consensus building has been used with considerable success in examples such as:

•   Production of a parking strategy for Stratford-upon-Avon.
•   Managing a Transport Strategy for Warwickshire.
•   Developing a Management Scheme for a Marine Conservation Area.
         (The above are used as case studies in Appendix 1.)
•   Production of a Management Plan for the Blackdown Hills AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty).
•   Agreeing plans for a major, ex MoD site in a village in Hampshire.
•   Managing the first stages of Local Plan Reviews in various authorities.

Such approaches do however raise two important questions.

First, they require adequate resources attributed at the right stages. All of the examples above were appropriately resourced and, in the view of their clients, extremely cost-effective over time. Even if such arguments are true, it will still be difficult for air quality managers to argue for appropriate resources up-front to pay for proper participation. This issue is picked up again later.

Secondly, because consensus approaches involve people working together in depth, they inevitably involve only a small number of people, usually invited. There can be difficult arguments about who is and is not invited, the 'representativeness' of those involved and the status of any results in relation to others not invited. The resolution to this conundrum is surprisingly simple. Collaborative approaches should not be exclusive of wider methods but be complementary to them in the context of a properly managed, overall process. This too is picked up later.

APPROACHES TO PARTICIPATION IN AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT

In preparing this guide, practitioners made clear the importance of clarifying the most appropriate approaches to be used at the different stages of the Local Air Quality Management process, including work on statutory Air Quality Management Areas and non-statutory Local Air Quality Strategies.

Though all such work needs to be planned as a complete process, there will be differences in approach at the different stages. This is particularly true in relation to participation activity, on which a division can be made for methodological purposes between early stages (i.e. Stages 1 and 2 of the Review and Assessment process) and action leading to and including area plans and strategies. An overall approach with two distinct styles is suggested, as follows:

- **Stages 1 and 2**. It was felt by practitioners that intense investment in fully participative approaches would be of little value in these stages, especially where no action plans or strategies were anticipated. The focus should therefore be on a planned approach to **information and education**.

- **Management Areas and non-statutory Strategies**. If an Air Quality Management Area or non-statutory strategy is judged to be appropriate (perhaps jumping Stage 2 and proceeding straight to 3), a thorough, intense and genuine approach to participation was felt to be essential. Given the complexity of the issues and the conflicts likely to arise, the focus of work at this stage should be on a **consensus-building approach**. This assumes that, in undertaking Stage 3 Review and Assessment, there is a strong likelihood either of the declaration of an Air Quality Management Area or of developing a local air quality strategy.

This section now divides, covering each of the above separately. In terms of coverage, greater weight is given to Management Areas and non-statutory Local Air Quality Strategies, since these are the more challenging and less familiar areas of work.

Since the whole principle of consensus building approaches is to integrate 'consultation' with core plan or strategy preparation activity, it would be valuable to relate all that follows to other, general air quality management guidance[10].

Stages 1 and 2: Information And Education

The first steps in the Review and Assessment process - roughly analogous to formal Stages 1 and 2 - can be summarised as:

1. Reviewing the current and future air quality within the local authority's area.
2. Assessing whether air quality objectives prescribed in Regulations are likely to be achieved by the relevant date. (It should be noted that, at the time of writing, the

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[10] See in particular 'Local Air Quality Management: A Best Practice Guide'; Claire Beattie and Prof. James Longhurst, Air Quality Research Group, University of the West of England, Bristol. Net access via: http://www.uwe.ac.uk/aqm/project/index.html

relevant date is 31st December, 2005. This may change with subsequent amendments to the Regulations.)

Information collection and dissemination are critical during these stages in their own right. Investment of effort at these stages will however also reap considerable dividends if there is to be a move into Stage 3 and beyond. There is great value in doing anything in the early stages which will help to ensure a wider community understanding of air quality issues and the likely effects of any subsequent actions, and agree a common, shared information base. Much later conflict can be avoided by such 'planning ahead', so those anticipating a move to plans or strategies should prioritise an early information programme to provide a solid base for later and fuller participation.

The issue of 'information' in air quality has several dimensions demanding a careful approach:

- The baseline of what technical information to collect, what standards to set, what tests and objectives to use and even what geographic area to cover can be a subject for debate. What is more, they can be a subject for debate both within professional and authority circles and amongst outside groups and agencies.
- Such debates also raise questions about the limits of 'technical' information. Any contact with others in a local authority (e.g. planners with a concern for land use decisions) or those outside (e.g. parents with worries about child health), demands a different approach to information. Such an approach should be able to properly integrate and balance technical issues as defined by air quality managers with what others see as technical issues, and also with issues of perception, value and attitude.
- Information itself often 'hangs in the air' because nobody has given time to explaining its implications or meaning - for health, transport, the natural environment and so forth. Until there is a wider understanding of the actual meaning of some aspects of air quality, it is difficult to say that an authority's strategy has genuinely been "agreed".

Making this a reality implies the following:

- Some form of strategy or plan for ensuring that information collection and dissemination are handled explicitly and link directly into all other work.
- Formal recognition that 'information' involves an open, two-way process, grounded in mutual education and needing explicit management.
- Bringing in other groups and organisations to share in setting the scope for appropriate information, to contribute their own, and to share in ensuring that information is made widely available in a suitable form.
- The use of a wide variety of creative methods and techniques not just to spread information <u>to</u> the community but also to ensure the input of information, values, concerns and ideas <u>from</u> the community.

This may sound demanding but most air quality teams already have experience of 'outreach', possibly on an informal basis, to schools, community groups, trade associations and others to explain air quality issues, and experience of at least some techniques for doing this. Some of the points above may therefore require little more than linking in to and learning from work already underway. Actually producing a plan of action for information is not in itself demanding; the key is in recognising the need to do so and acting upon the recognition.

(If there is any concern about this, or about locating methods, please refer to the later 'Signposts' section.)

With a coherent information and education strategy in place, successful implementation depends quite heavily on making air quality meaningful and interesting to people (and without adding to fears and anxieties). While it can be easy to attract local people's attention when a nearby site is up for development, or a change is suggested for local traffic management, it can be difficult to get interest in air quality issues; they simply do not have the immediacy or visibility. It would be naive to suggest that anybody has yet tackled this successfully - indeed those involved with more strategic aspects of planning and transport have identical problems.

Five principles appear to underpin what success there has been:

• Use a wide range of methods.
• Get to people 'where they are', (i.e. in clubs, work, shopping etc.).
• Related to the above - work with schools but also through them to others.
• Ensure that people can also contribute their own ideas, values and concerns.
• Sustain action over time, to ensure that community input is maintained at as high a level as possible.

What this means is that many of the techniques and access points already in use are likely to be appropriate. Above and beyond this straightforward and proven list, public relations and advertising experience suggests two other critical dimensions that could lift an approach beyond basics.

The first point is about attitude. Far too often, discussions about 'communicating to the public' focus on what professionals decide the public should hear about. Successful communication requires a 180 degree shift or re-orientation - towards latching on to what people want to hear. It is about understanding ordinary, everyday concerns and aspirations and relating directly to these. In other words, where and how do air quality issues 'hook into' (or could they be hooked into) people's general way of thinking, talking and relating?

The second point is about style and detail, particularly about a need for creative thinking that generates enjoyable, intriguing, engaging (even rewarding) activities. In other territories, methods have included:

• Sponsoring a pub quiz league (with one round on air quality).
• A problem-solving, orienteering trail for children.
• A 'Spot the Pollution' indicator competition in a local paper.
• Information on beer mats.
• Neighbourhood action days (link to 'Safe Routes to School').
• Car-free days (with associated monitoring).

Given that such work may well be underway at the moment, the resourcing implications need not be dramatic. Air quality staff time will be needed from a senior manager to ensure a coherent approach. Overall staff time might be the equivalent of a full time person for six months but should be spread around a team. Directly attributable costs will arise if specialist copywriters and graphic designers are involved, and there will then be costs for printing and circulating material. If an information base is to be developed collaboratively by bringing in others, there may be costs for venues, catering, materials and reports. In this setting a few cash prizes for competitions are surprisingly cheap and yet remarkable value!

MANAGEMENT AREAS AND STRATEGIES: A CONSENSUS BUILDING APPROACH

Carrying on from Steps 1 and 2 above, the guidance suggests the following subsequent stages (as appropriate):

3.   Identify those parts of the authority's area where exceedances are likely to occur.
4.   Declare Air Quality Management Areas for those parts.
5.   Carry out a further assessment of the air quality within the Air Quality Management Areas.
6.   Report these assessment results.
7.   Prepare an action plan for the Air Quality Management Areas which sets out how the local authority can use its powers to try to achieve the air quality objectives within the timescales.

It is likely that the development of non-statutory Strategies will follow a similar process.

These are the critical and most difficult stages, i.e. Stage 3 Review and Assessment and the actions which could follow if air quality objectives are likely to be breached. They can be difficult because:

•   Action plans could involve quite draconian initiatives and controls, and may be vigorously resisted if simply launched on an unsuspecting public.
•   Plans will probably be complex and depend on some support from others, perhaps their direct involvement.
•   Plans must be integrated with Local Transport Plans, statutory land use plans and Local with Agenda 21 plans, and ought also to link in with other plans by the local authority and by other bodies (e.g. community health plans).
•   Agreeing a baseline, measuring, monitoring and changing plans as progress is made will all involve difficult decisions of interest to, and affecting, many groups.

Consensus building was developed as a response to settings exactly like those described above. Its methods have considerable value in the key stages of developing a plan built on wide awareness and agreed resolution for key problems. By avoiding separate streams or stages for plan-making and consultation, a better action plan can emerge. However, working in a focused way with small numbers of invited people does not remove the need to take the resulting plan or strategy out to as many people as possible once it is formulated.

This section starts with some key points about consensus-building approaches in general - their potential **benefits** and their **principles**. It refers to three **case studies** (in full in Appendix 1) that show the approaches in use, and then it suggests some important features to address in **designing a process** for any particular area. Finally, it returns to the issue of **wider dissemination**.

Benefits

The challenge and complexity of producing action plans is considerable. However, managing participation in a consensus-based way can yield a number of benefits which can, either

directly or indirectly, assist in managing this complexity. The following list has been drawn up over several years by practitioners themselves, suggesting that consensus-based working can:

- introduce local skills, knowledge, experience, resources, values and attitudes,
- engage this with similar input from other experts, professionals and groups, (other than just the local authority),
- help to build (even rebuild) trust and confidence between different groups,
- highlight, address and hopefully resolve conflicts between parties,
- speed the overall timetable,
- save resources overall,
- introduce the sort of creativity that will make for a better action plan,
- ensure that all key parties feel a sense of ownership and commitment,
- provide mutual education and exchange, and
- engage people during potentially difficult implementation stages.

Principles

Experience also shows that such benefits will only be secured successfully if participation - in this case in air quality action plans - is explicitly managed and operates within proven principles. In terms of an authority's overall practice, development on participative ways of working, for relationships with central government, and for specific action plans, such principles should also be consistent across a number of different topic areas, particularly with those used in transport and land use planning.

What follows below is a list of principles developed and proved by consensus-building practitioners in many different settings. Because the principles outlined in the recent guidance for Local Transport Plans (LTPs) provide a valuable bottom line, reference is also made (as appropriate) to these points.

- **Overall, agreed process**
  Success comes from the careful, thoughtful and explicit 'design' of a coherent, overall process, (not just ad hoc events and activities). This should address all stages of air quality management, linking back to any earlier information-based work. It is valuable for process 'designs' to be developed with the involvement of key stakeholders, but they should certainly be discussed and agreed with them before commencing.
  (LTP links: 'continuous' and 'early involvement'.)

- **Flexibility**
  By definition, not everything is known at the outset. Local circumstances, definitions of areas, air quality conditions and external standards can all change. This is all centrally important for the fluid topic of air quality and its management, so any process design needs to be able to respond to change. Experience shows that it is only by having a clear and mutually agreed plan of action that proper flexibility - i.e. a shift <u>agreed by all</u> - is possible.
  (LTP links: 'open' and 'providing effective feedback to participants'.)

- **Clear scope**
  As stated already, there are no absolute boundaries of what issues to include within air quality management, how it relates to other aspects, or what geographical areas (and hence communities) to cover. This uncertainty can be a serious threat if it is not

debated and shared during a participation process. It is an essential pre-requisite for trust between people that the 'scope' of any work is discussed as early as possible, not ignored, or imposed by one group only.
(LTP links: 'open' and 'providing effective feedback'.)

- **Openness, honesty, trust, transparency**
  Clear commitment to any process can only reasonably be secured if all parties are open and honest, and if the process builds trust through communication based on two-way listening and questioning and an exploration of needs rather than positions. 'Openness, honesty and trust' are outcomes which have to be worked at; they do not just happen. Several of these principles contribute to the building of trust, as does a process that is 'transparent', i.e. its structure, management and procedures are clear, open and accountable to all.
  (LTP links: 'open', 'interactive', 'effective feedback'.)

- **Inclusiveness**
  Consensus-based methods operate with selected people who, between them, represent the clear 'stakes' or interests in an issue. There are no perfect rules for establishing this and no group chosen can ever be 'right'. The key lies in the care and sensitivity with which those managing the process build up a list of invitees. Government guidance hints at basic 'sectors' to include, then leaves a wide and open list in terms of "such bodies .. as the authority may consider appropriate". Most authorities (especially via transportation and planning departments) could build up an excellent basic list for air quality issues. Rather than taking this as 'given', it can be important to share this with all invitees, seek their advice on others to involve and be flexible about incorporating them.
  (LTP links: 'inclusive' and 'open'.)

- **Common information base**
  Conflicts often roll on simply because different groups argue from different bases of important issues and key information. This will certainly be true in air quality management when, for example, a retailers' body and an environmental group may try to introduce information that addresses totally different aspects, or the same aspects but in totally different ways. As outlined earlier, a consensus process pays attention to sharing all information, seeking common agreements, and seeking further information which can take things forward.
  (LTP links: 'interactive' and 'open'.)

- **Diverse methods to help build common ground**
  No complex environmental issue such as air quality management has one neat, simple solution. Though there are disadvantages when people approach things from different directions, this can help to access diverse and innovative options, as well as more creative, agreed solutions built on genuine choice. To achieve this, given people's differing ways of working, a variety of fully participative and interactive methods should be used across time, and the emphasis should be on methods that help to locate and build on common ground. This also requires that several options are always available, and decisions between them left until as late as possible.
  (LTP links: 'interactive' and 'continuous'.)

- **Shared responsibility for outcomes and implementation**
  Once an air quality action plan begins to emerge, its eventual success will depend not just on the local authority but also on the support and even direct, practical actions of many others. An approach is needed that builds commitment throughout, including to

the all-important period of implementation when some potentially difficult decisions could lead to complaints, unwelcome press coverage and local tension. Showing a 'united front' across many stakeholders at this point can have quite remarkable effects in terms of dealing positively with negative reaction.
(LTP links: 'inclusive' and 'continuous'.)

- **Attention to detail**
  Even the best general principles can be completely subverted by poor choices of venue (though none is ever 'right'), poor invitations and briefing, badly chosen dates (though none is ever 'right'), not having enough materials, not providing refreshments, failed technology, poor time-keeping, lack of clarity, not reporting back and so forth. Whoever manages the process needs to be sure that they (or someone) is paying attention to every single one of the practical details.

Principles Into Practice?

The list of principles deliberately makes no mention of any particular 'method' or 'technique' for consensus-building. This is because there is no such thing as a good method or technique; methods and techniques are only as good as the process into which they fit. Some are intrinsically more or less likely to help achieve the principles above, but a properly designed process could, for example, find a positive place for exhibitions and questionnaires, even perhaps a 'public meeting'.

Most methods that provide the bedrock of consensus working are, however, rooted carefully back into the principles above; i.e. they specifically address issues of openness, interaction or the creation of common ground. They are also, by definition, based on the effective management of groups of people. This makes them difficult to describe quickly and in abstract.

To bridge the gulf from principles to detailed practice, three case studies are included in Appendix 1. In the current absence of air quality examples, they were chosen from areas that provide useful parallels and illustrate particularly relevant points. As such they should offer insights into what might be an appropriate approach in general for air quality action plans and also how to adapt a general approach to specific situations.

All three examples have passed successfully through the 'plan agreement' stage; in one case implementation has started. The examples, and key lessons offered - are as follows:

- A **transport strategy** for Warwickshire. This was chosen mainly because it provides an example of a coherent, flexible, long term approach to a large scale set of issues at a strategic level, so little detail is offered on methods used. Though a whole county is no doubt too 'large' for an air quality management area, the example also illustrates how to balance stakeholder work alongside general public consultation.

- A **Management Scheme** for the Thanet coast. Twenty two miles of the Thanet coast in Kent have been declared a 'candidate Special Area of Conservation', which includes a legal requirement to produce an area Management Scheme. The rigorous, scientific, legal and objective base of such a scheme has clear parallels with air quality management. In addition, much of the coast was also the subject of an Objective 2 programme of economic renewal directed in part at coastal tourism. Conflicts were seen as inevitable - much as air quality controls may appear to conflict with inner city

regeneration. The structure of this work was quite simple, so the example emphasises how the legal and scientific issues were handled in their broader context:

- A **parking strategy** for Stratford-upon-Avon. This was chosen mainly for the examples it offers of a variety of different methods, so this particular case study goes right down to practical details. It is also probably the closest geographic parallel with an air quality management area, so helps to illustrate issues of scale and length of consultative programme.

Adaptation To Air Quality Action Plans

As has been stated, no standard model can possibly be suggested for all Air Quality Management Areas, for all Local Air Quality Strategies or for all action plans. Nevertheless, the benefits and principles listed earlier, and especially the three case studies, offer a clear set of possible elements of an approach for any specific authority situation.

To help this forward one further stage, the list below includes a range of questions and issues that an experienced 'process designer' would wish to ask and from which an appropriate local approach could be developed.

The major factors that could make a difference to participative processes for air quality action plans are:

Geographic scale of an 'area'

- The size, density and complexity of an area clearly affect the nature and number of the possible stakeholders. As the case studies show, it is wrong to suggest that smaller areas are somehow 'easier' (they can be far more 'parochial'), but they do allow speedier and, for many people, a more understandable access to particular groups and bodies.
- Geography also affects practical aspects of physical access to any process; e.g. what venues are chosen, how are they accessed, what days and times can be selected for events. (This was a weakness in the Warwickshire transport strategy project described in Appendix 1.)
- Geography can increase the complexity if chosen areas cut across ward boundaries, or even more if they cut across authority boundaries.
- Finally, since air quality is no respecter of physical boundaries, questions are certain to arise about any line on a map. Any list of invited stakeholders should always (as in the Stratford example in Appendix 1) include people from adjacent, or 'knock-on' areas.

Seriousness of issues

- If initial data collection shows a serious problem, it is essential to involve people as early as possible because of the likelihood of introducing dramatic management measures. As all three case studies show, the earlier people are involved, the easier it becomes to bring them on board to face up to challenging initiatives and potentially damaging conflicts. This is especially true when technical information suggests a serious problem that is simply not perceived by people in an area.

- Different arguments apply where declaration of an air quality area is marginal. In such a situation it may be that one section of the community (typically the environmental action groups) places pressure on an authority to 'declare', while others (typically traders and businesses) may do the opposite. This is why early involvement and properly planned information campaigns are so critical in helping to raise and address tough issues.

Policy Boundaries

- Though focusing on participation in air quality management, this guide has also highlighted the need to make concrete links with transport and land use planning, perhaps also with other areas of local authority activity and activities by those such as health authorities. At the very least, an air quality plan should not be launched without at least asking whether others exist for the area being addressed, are in development or are planned. Nothing destroys public confidence more than when a local authority is seen to be working against itself.
- Though practical integration on the ground can be difficult and time-consuming, it can also, potentially, be time- and resource-saving. At the same time, there is little value in the lowest common denominator approach of always deferring an air quality strategies until every other plan is integrated with it! In addition, action plans prepared for Air Quality Management Areas will have statutory and guidance deadlines imposed on them.
- A lack of full integration should never be used as an excuse for not starting a process, but great care needs to be used in presenting this to participants. The three case studies all addressed this issue up-front and openly.

Timescales

- Timescales will vary from area to area and issue to issue, as the case studies show. It is also important, if wishing to engage people to help with implementation, that a view is taken not just of the short term process of securing an agreed plan but of the medium term dimensions of action on the ground - i.e. of the overall timetable. Only then can appropriate weight be given to proper participation, and its full benefits reaped.
- Consensus work always generates a dilemma, shown clearly in the case studies. A short, sharp timescale builds momentum and commitment, even a sense of urgency, but allows little time for reflection (e.g. back to one's group), further detailed technical work (if new questions arise) or the flexibility needed to link with other initiatives. With a more lengthy timetable, such benefits and disbenefits are reversed!
- When a process is being 'designed', care is needed not just in planning for the (as it were) straight line between start and finish. It is also important to consider possible interruptions to the process, implications of lost time, and (as above) the effects of trying to integrate the process with timetables for other initiatives such as Local Transport Plans and Local Agenda 21 Strategies.
- It is also important to plan with care in order to avoid not just confusion (even a sense of 'rail-roading') amongst consulted groups but also the opposite - a feeling of 'consultation fatigue'.

Resources

• Securing appropriate resources for participation, and to do so early in a process, may seem almost too much to even attempt. At the same time, it is worth trying to place a 'cost' on not managing participation properly: later conflict, endless complaints, slow (or blocked) implementation, wasted officer time, poor morale and staff turnover and so forth. This is rarely done because we are told that 'that's how life is', but it can be powerful evidence, especially with elected members.

• Pre-planning is therefore essential to ensure that resources are attributed in the preparatory stages, fully approved by any relevant committee or senior officer.

• Whether fully accounted or not, the most significant 'cost' will be for staff time. According to authority protocols, access to time from staff in other departments may or may not need to be 'paid for'. (The possible involvement of consultants is addressed in the 'Signposts' section.)

• In general, a commitment to a genuinely participative approach would require at least the equivalent of a full time person for 6-8 months. This would need to be spread between a senior manager and a support team. Administrative time would also be the equivalent of one person for any period, however this should focus on one person rather than a team.

• As well as staff costs, resources will be needed for (*inter alia*) printing, circulating and promoting widely, for venues, catering and materials, and for the administration of events. If best quality materials are produced - e.g. for a large exhibition - costs can rise considerably. Others within the authority will have experience of all such activities and hence costs.

• Finally, an unavoidable 'bottom line' point. If there are not sufficient resources available to do a reasonable job, then either change the whole approach or don't start! A patently inadequate programme is certain to damage an authority's credibility.

Skill and experience

• It should be clear by now that consensus-based approaches are not only relatively new but, because they are not just a matter of a few tricks here and there, they also demand considerable new skills. Few authorities will have such skills available in the authority as a whole, even fewer within their air quality teams.

• The ways of accessing such skills in this context are elaborated in the following Sign-posting section. Most importantly, experience has already shown that launching off into a collaborative approach without access to appropriate skills can be extremely damaging for all. If there really is no scope for accessing appropriate skills then, as with resources, it may be better to change tack and revert back to traditional methods.

• Building organisational capacity through training should be a core element of any approach. This will provide longer term benefits for individuals and for the organisation - not least in saving time and resources in the future.

From Consensus to Consultation

Once the bulk of any consensus-based work is complete, there should be a near-final Action Plan that incorporates all views, resolves conflict, and lists agreed actions. As all three case studies have shown, this can result in a wide body of people ready to be valuable advocates for the plan to their respective communities, valuable simply because they are not 'from the council'. This has been shown to dramatically reduce the amount and intensity of any

'defending' that needs to be done, but 'announcing' is still not just recommended but actually mandatory.

Even though a plan has been produced collaboratively, there is still a legal requirement to publicise it to all statutory and implied consultees (who may not all have joined the consensus work), and show a constructive response to comments. If a thorough information and education process has been put in place and agreement reached on the plan, this stage can be short. Though requiring no special methods or techniques beyond those used traditionally, some creativity in promotion and publicity will maximise the chances that all affected by a plan will have had an opportunity to access, understand and react to it.

SIGNPOSTS TO THE NEXT STAGES

Introduction

Most of this section focuses on where air quality teams can obtain help in developing their participative work, based on the assumption that few teams have the necessary skills and experience. There are, however, two key reasons why air quality teams should look <u>first</u> to consolidating their own skills in participation work:

•   Participative working is now supposed to be part of the overall culture of local government working, so <u>all</u> staff will, at some point, be required to help plan or run consultative exercises. Such skill and experience will therefore soon become a formal part of professional structures and essential in career development. It is of wider, longer term and personal relevance.
•   Others outside may have leading-edge skills and experience. There will, however, always be a need for people within air quality management who (a) ensure that approaches are entirely appropriate to their context, and (b) become directly involved in and learn from the work itself.

Authorities should put a high priority on ensuring some form of training, as early as possible in the process, for air quality managers (as in two of the case studies). This should include something for (a) senior officers responsible for overall strategic management, and (b) officers involved directly in event management and facilitation. Information follows later on how to secure training.

Help With What?

There are several aspects on which help might be of value:

•   Integrating participative processes into the management of air quality work as a whole.
•   'Designing' an appropriate strategic approach to participation within an overall air quality management programme; especially in the 'information' and 'consensus' stages.
•   Developing a creative and achievable medley of methods for assembling and disseminating information and for promoting wider understanding.
•   Planning specific events or activities in the context of an overall strategy, both in terms of their overall structure and specific methods or techniques.
•   Direct management and leadership of events and facilitation within.

'You Are Not Alone'

First, 'help' should not mean handing over the management of participation to others. Introducing someone else (consultants or colleagues from another department) to undertake all the participation work on an authority's behalf has no medium term benefits at all and few short term ones.

'Someone else' may fill an immediate skill and resource gap, but it leaves the team with no gain for next time; i.e. no organisational 'capacity' has been built. As a matter of principle, any outside help should be structured to enable skill transfer and team development. Outsiders should always work <u>with</u> an in-house team, not for them.

There are several basic sources of help, all of which will be explained more fully in the following section:

- within the authority,
- the authority area, its groups and communities,
- consultants and trainers, and
- from within an air quality or participation network.

Within the Authority

'You are not alone' is an apt phrase at the moment because there are many others within any authority asking similar questions about participatory approaches, querying their skills and considering who might help.

Some authorities now have teams to carry forward the government's aims on modernising local government, or working on consultation strategies, procedures and methods. If available, they are a natural first point of contact, although their remit can be very broad and their medley of skills and experience may be limited, especially in relation to consensus building. They should, however, be able to assist in planning out some coherent support and possibly training.

Where an overall 'community participation strategy' (or similar) is in place, or handbooks produced with guides to procedures and methods, these must of course be respected. Most importantly, conscious effort needs to put into ensuring that any process for air quality is consistent with what others are doing, especially in planning and transport.

What follows are some obvious sources of help for each of the elements listed earlier:

Participation in air quality as a whole: 'Participation' ought now to be a strategic priority for all authorities, and may be led by central departments although it is a fully corporate issue. In the absence of a central focus within an authority, there are significant limits to what any single group - such as air quality managers - can achieve.

Designing a strategic approach: People in departments or teams directly tasked with developing and managing community level initiatives can be of value here. Nowadays, they can be found anywhere within an authority, not just in the obvious 'social' or 'community' areas. They are likely to have good skills at the community level and also be valuable on broader community development. They may not, however, have experience of the type of consensus building approaches that involve the private sector, national voluntary bodies or elected members.

Developing information methods: With a little 'detective work' it can be remarkable to find out how many people in local authorities, often in quite unsuspected teams, have had to try to devise methods for putting across complex issues to the general public. People with valuable experience may be anywhere within an authority, often at a relatively junior level. They could be within service departments <u>and</u> central departments.

Planning, delivering and facilitating events: Help can be found on all aspects - advice on venues, publicity and event preparation, experience of using all sorts of methods and techniques, even people with some level of facilitation experience. The key aim here is to avoid 'reinventing the wheel'. Internal networking can locate such people and most should be willing to share feedback and offer help since they themselves are still learning. In particular, there can be real value (for all) in using people from other departments to lead or facilitate. This can help to create some feeling of independence from air quality and frees the air quality team to participate fully as technical professionals.

The Authority Area

Just as 'you are not alone' within an authority, the same applies in the wider context. Since there must be contacts between Districts and County for air quality work, this can be used to build shared skills in participatory work. The same also applies to some government agencies which are looking to locate participatory processes at the heart of their own structure and operations. (Exploring such links can again help to create some independence and free air quality officers to participate.)

There will also be other groups and organisations in any authority area experienced in participatory work or wishing to develop a skill base. Some may already be on a list as consultees for air quality work. Others may have no direct link to air quality issues but have good experience of community involvement. They are worth seeking out because they too may value a mutual exchange of ideas. Some examples might be:

- Some environmental groups at local level have staff with relevant experience and skill, especially in information collection, education, dissemination, promotion and awareness raising. They may also be experienced at event management.
- Some larger private companies are coming to terms with the consultative demands of sustainable development. They may have skilled staff for all of the aspects listed earlier: management development advice, strategic planning, consumer relations (often highly creative about communications 'tricks'), event management and possible facilitation.
- Socially oriented community groups are likely to have core practices and skilled staff relevant to aspects of participation. Though operating in a qualitatively different way, they can be invaluable sources of advice and skill on principles and methods, and often have staff trained in facilitation and mediation.

Consultants And Trainers

As stated above, any outsiders, especially consultants, should always work <u>with</u> not for an authority. The core objective of any consultancy work should be a transfer of skills, experience and confidence, i.e. capacity building. However, if an authority team are unfamiliar with participatory working, it can be difficult to draft a brief, and then locate and select appropriate consultants. Help and support from others in an authority is therefore indispensable, and a relatively open contracting process is valuable (if achievable within standing orders).

Appropriate consultants should have <u>all</u> of: (a) good, practical experience of participatory work at all levels (from strategic down to methods and facilitation); (b) a good track record as trainers; and (c) solid experience in operating in a capacity building way with their clients. Since few consultants are likely to have all of this demanding experience and skill, some suggestions for ways forward are:

Participation in air quality as a whole: Not surprisingly, the management consultancy world has started to respond to government pressures on modernising local government by developing training 'packages'. They can be effective, and some include elements of transfer and capacity building. However, very few management consultants yet offer packages specifically on participation and they are not, as yet, based on proven, practical experience.

Designing a strategic approach: There is undoubtedly a gap at this level. As suggested above, management consultants have less experience at the detailed planning level. Specific participation consultants are less in number and most have an experience base built on neighbourhood level community involvement, rather than strategic consensus building. It can therefore be quite difficult to locate valuable support for activity at the level of overall process design.

Developing information methods: There are probably no consultants at all specialising in the type of information management meant in this guide. There are consultants in the public relations, communications, graphic design and media territories with extremely valuable skills and experience, but they tend to (a) be expensive and (b) prefer to work for a client, not with them; (i.e. they are reluctant to transfer their hard-won skills).

Planning, delivering and facilitating events: There are a number of small companies and individuals offering skills in event management and facilitation, and some are now realising the need to adopt skill-sharing approaches. However, with a base in internal, private sector work, they may not be strong in the skills needed to manage and facilitate the larger, multi-party, multi-sector settings necessary for air quality management.

Networks

It should now be clear that the way forward does not lie in one group or sector even pretending to have the necessary skills and knowledge for its own area. This is resource-ineffective and, as a matter of principle, inappropriate to a 'participatory culture'.

A better approach would be to begin (as hinted at above) to build up networks of people and groups who, on a mutual basis, share and develop their own skills and experience. For air quality issues, there are two ways to look at this:

•	Develop a network of air quality managers. This could include people from adjacent authorities (with whom contacts are essential anyway), with related professionals (transport and planning are the obvious ones), even outside groups and agencies (as above). The network can be a base for sharing and developing experience, and also be of practical value in delivering training (see below).
•	Encourage - or join - a network of those interested in participatory working (i.e. far wider than just air quality managers). Membership would be much as above and there is scope for using the network to build up direct, practical support through providing external facilitators.

On the latter point, it would be extremely useful to read a short paper entitled 'Local Networks for Building Consensus'[11], available from the Improvement and Development Agency, (formerly the Local Government Management Board - LGMB). This proposes a county-based

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[11] 'Local Networks for Building Consensus', Local Government Management Board, London, 1998.

approach that is now developing in practice across the country. It helps to provide a resource of local people, trained in depth in process design and facilitation and available specifically to help on issues such as air quality management.

Finally, the amount of valuable information and guidance available on the Internet is increasing almost daily. This enables prompt access to experience from other local authorities, other sectors, even other countries. At a more local level, an authority's own intranet system can be effective in accessing people and groups with relevant skills and experience.

Training, Materials And Further Contacts

Training

It can be as difficult to draw out clear training needs as consultancy needs when nobody knows enough to yet express (for example) a 'need' for training in consensus building or facilitation!

In recent years most training has focused on methods and techniques, even very specific 'packages'. It has also focused on work with local communities rather than wider stakeholders, or on group facilitation. There has been, until recently, very little on strategic approaches or process design. The priority for most air quality teams should be on training for the strategic and process design levels since techniques should only follow strategy (and are endlessly available at a different level).

Good trainers for this area of work should be, or should have been, practitioners. They will avoid lecture-based learning and replace this with structures that are themselves participative, using interactive methods which engage trainees fully and which encourage them to use and apply their pre-existing knowledge and skills. As in two of the case studies, training will also be considerably more effective if it is integral to, and happens early in, practical project work, so that trainees can build and share experience quickly in a managed setting.

There are three basic models for the provision of training:

* *In-house, delivered by an authority's own staff*: This is very cost-effective, ensures consistency within a planned programme but raises an issue about who, within an authority, has the relevant knowledge and training skills.
* *In-house, delivered by an outside trainer*: This is the opposite to the above in that the trainer may have the necessary skills and knowledge but care is needed to ensure that training is not a marginal, one-off activity, unrelated to general personal or organisational development programmes.
* *'Off the Shelf' courses*: Some exist and are offered either by national or regional groups, such as private sector companies, training companies, voluntary groups and academic institutions. They can be well-prepared, tried and tested but also quite expensive (after adding in travel and other costs), rather general and may not be based in proven experience by the trainers. They do however offer one benefit over in-house courses: the opportunity to meet and work with people from other places.

There is, however, another model with significant benefits in this particular area: 'network courses'. In this approach, one authority (whether in a formal network or not) plans and manages training on behalf of several authorities, rotating the task to ensure equity. Such

training can therefore be tightly briefed to address local circumstances and issues, as cheap as in-house events, and managed to ensure valuable contact and exchange between authority teams.

Materials

Having access to practical guides that detail particular techniques is in its own right a form of training. Though it is not possible to develop skills in process design from such 'handbooks', good manuals nevertheless provide valuable checklists against which to test specific plans and proposals. Some authorities are now beginning to build up their own versions of such handbooks for participation.

Though any list is certain to be partial and incomplete (new items emerge almost monthly), the following have been found to be useful:

Action Planning: by N. Wates. From The Prince of Wales's Institute of Architecture, (14 Gloucester Gate, London NW1 4HG), 1996. An excellent guide to planning and running essentially one-off, large events. Its focus is urban development but the general coverage - right down to real detail - is very valuable.

Creating Involvement: by L. Hart. Local Government Management Board, London, 1994. A very straightforward, practical guide to a number of well-tried methods.

Guidance on Enhancing Public Participation: in the Modern Local Government series, from DETR, 1999. Though based on conventional community participation principles, this is essential because it represents the most recent government thinking. It includes good coverage from principles to practice.

Involving Citizens, A Guide to Conducting Citizen Participation: by W. Wiedman, for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, (from Wiedman c/o 4110 S. Detroit Avenue, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74105, USA), 1992. Though a struggle to acquire, this is a really excellent, short, practical guide to participative methods.

Involving Citizens in Community Decision Making: by J. Creighton, Program for Community Problem Solving, (Program for Community Problem Solving, (1301 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 600, Washington DC 20004, USA). Another USA publication, but worth getting because it is perhaps the best practical guide available, not least because it covers theory, methods and details, consensus building and participation.

Involving Communities in Urban and Rural Regeneration: from Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions, London, HMSO, September 1997. A good if rather traditional compendium of methods and approaches, by no means restricted to regeneration work.

The Guide to Effective Participation: D. Wilcox, Partnership, (13 Pelham Square, Brighton BN1 4ET), 1994. A basic textbook which covers some broad principles and references on to a wide range of possible approaches, methods and techniques.

The Good Practice Manual on Tenant Participation: by M. Kelly and C. Clarke of the Women's Design Service, (52-54 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8RT). Although based in specific areas of housing work, this is full of very useful, direct, proven practice of far wider relevance.

Working in Neighbourhoods: C. Jones, Community Education Development Centre, for WWF UK, (from WWF Community Education, Panda House, Weyside Park, Godalming, Surrey GU7 1XR), 1995. An outcome of the WWF programme of inner city neighbourhood work on Local Agenda 21, this includes a lot of clear guidance about programmes as well as details on specific activities.

Further Contacts

Rather than offer long lists of organisations and consultants, three specific ways forward can be suggested:

• The 'Guidance on Enhancing Public Participation' referenced above includes an Appendix which lists key local authority organisations and some further references which complement those above. Available, at a cost of £10, from:
DETR Publications Sales Centre, Unit 21, Goldthorpe Industrial Estate, Goldthorpe, Rotherham, S63 9BL

• NSCA can be contacted for further information at:
136 North Street, Brighton, BN1 1RG. email: info@nsca.org.uk

• The Environment Council provide training through a regular marketed programme, run in-house events on request and provide, alone and through their network (such as Jeff Bishop), practical consultancy work. They can be contacted at:
212 High Holborn, London, WC1V 7VW. Telephone 0171 836 2626 or direct to Alison Crowther on 0171 632 0120. Fax. 0171 242 1180.

APPENDIX 1: CASE STUDIES

1. A Transport Strategy For Warwickshire

Background

- Warwickshire had, in their own judgement, been less successful than hoped in securing transport funding from central government.
- This was attributed in part to not being able to demonstrate community support.
- Government guidance was shifting towards participative approaches.
- The authority was seeking examples to use to assist its work on Best Value.
- There had been positive feedback from the parking work in Stratford.

Overall Process

- A process manager was appointed; (for around 35 person days in total).
- As well as offering independence, the manager's role was to train an in-house team in basic facilitation skills, leaving behind an improved general skill base.
- The overall process took 10 months, completing in time to make a submission for funding; (though this was overtaken by the LTP announcement).
- The approach involved mixing in-depth, focused activities through groups with a number of other, broader activities.
- As will be seen, some proposed activities changed. They have been left on the diagram to show how and why the need for flexibility was handled.

'Round 1'

- The very first stage was the design of the process and training for staff.
- A widely constituted 'Co-ordination Group' of around 25 people was established at the start. They met to debate the scope of the issues, discuss and agree the process and suggest invitees to events.
- The first large group workshops took three different 'cuts' across the transport territory:
  - The 'Problem' event brought together a mixed group with a strategic perspective, to look in depth at the nature of the issues for a transport strategy.
  - The 'People' event brought together varied groups to highlight different views, ideas and attitudes about transport issues in the county.
  - Seven differently located 'Place' events focused on the distinctive circumstances, needs and therefore solutions for parts of the county.
- Following these events, a clear agenda began to emerge. This was used to develop an 'Action Pack - a sort of DIY format for managing a group event (i.e. without a facilitator).
- The idea was that the Action Pack could be used by groups from whom the larger events had drawn just a single representative, or by any groups which had not had the opportunity to join in other Round 1 activities.
- The activities described in the Action Pack focused on encouraging people to work together, debate and reach agreed suggestions. Over 40 groups used the Pack and sent in results.

'Round 2'

- The second Co-ordinating Group discussed work and outcomes, and reconsidered parts of the programme.
- They decided that a repetition of the Problem/People/Place events would offer little benefit. They chose instead to encourage officers to prepare a very early draft strategy and to take this out to a large group of people drawn from the first events and other interested groups.
- They also decided that certain important groups - e.g. non car owners, young people and Asian women - had not been involved in work so far. Resources were therefore shifted to allow county officers (alone, not with the facilitator) to go out to such groups and seek views and ideas.
- The draft strategy was presented deliberately to be 'shot down'; it contained some incomplete elements, clear options and choices and issues for discussion.
- Two large meetings were arranged, one afternoon and one evening to maximise access. Over 150 people attended and worked hard on both details of the draft strategy and how it related to earlier views on principles and priorities.
- The County Council has a regular arrangement with a polling company to access a 'Citizens' Panel' of 1000 households. On this occasion questions in the regular questionnaire covered key issues and outcomes from the consensus work.

Closure

- With all results now coming in, the interactive 'Assembly' was held in Shire Hall on a Friday and Saturday. This was a further opportunity for regulars to check out details, and also for newcomers to go back to first principles and offer personal ideas and judgements.
- The final main stage was the third Co-ordinating Group, at which the overall outcomes were introduced, the next version of the strategy presented, future stages described and an evaluation undertaken of the process.
- The strategy then proceeded through the necessary formal channels and its results were linked in to the Local Transport Plan. The approach used was entirely consistent with LTP guidance as quoted in the guide.

Key points

- Training an in-house group was regarded as highly effective - especially as a base for future work, mainly but not just on the Local Transport Plan.
- The ability to agree an overall process <u>and</u> to adjust it based on early feedback was greatly valued.
- The timescale could probably not have been shortened because considerable officer work was needed between events. This did however lead to some loss of momentum.
- The Action Pack proved a highly effective mechanism, providing something between an impersonal questionnaire and a facilitated meeting.
- It proved extremely difficult (despite focused efforts) to engage young people and car-based commuters.
- The large Assembly was disappointing, probably because of using one single, very formal venue rather than 'taking it to the streets' and hence nearer to people.

2. Thanet Coast Management Scheme and Action Plan

Background

- Almost 22 miles of coast on the Isle of Thanet had been declared a 'cSAC' - Candidate Special Area of Conservation (marine site) - under the Europa Nature programme.
- English Nature, through their Kent office, were required to follow newly emerging procedures to lead the process of writing and agreeing a 'Management Scheme' that would protect and enhance the coast's distinctive qualities.
- Any such Management Scheme has its basis in thorough, objective, clearly defined, scientific information and criteria.
- At the same time, the larger part of the designated coast - that lying in Thanet District Council's area - had been part of a European Objective 2 programme of economic and social regeneration.
- A key focus for regeneration was coast-based tourism, probably including actions that would conflict with the developing Management Scheme.
- This caused considerable concern for Thanet District Council and they were initially reluctant to join in fully.
- One resolution was to include in the process work on a Coastal Action Plan - to suggest regeneration activities that would also respect conservation criteria.
- English Nature had been keen to find an opportunity to test consensus building approaches for area management.

Overall Process

- Process managers were appointed to both supervise and lead the involvement process and to provide some direct facilitation support. The management involved 24 days of consultant time.
- As well as overall management, the process manager's role was to train a team in basic facilitation skills. The team included not just English Nature staff but also staff from Thanet District Council, the Environment Agency and Kent County Council.
- The basic process involved four full day workshops spread over 12 months - because considerable work had to be undertaken between events.
- Although this basic structure stayed the same, changing circumstances led to quite different phases, tasks and outcomes from those anticipated.

Workshop 1

- Around 45 people attended this event - a slight disappointment in terms of numbers and with some key people/groups missing.
- The opening exercise as people assembled was to look towards a positive vision for Thanet in 2010.
- The results from this were then contrasted with results from an exercise on current issues and problems.
- A presentation about the Management Scheme was followed by a group session on key questions.
- After lunch the focus shifted to evaluating and adding to some of the scientific and use activity already assembled.
- This led to a session on information needed by all parties to make sensible progress.

- The final session focused on the whole consensus process, looking ahead to workshop 2 and beyond.
- A full report was prepared. This was followed up by a thorough paper on answers to key questions and key information.
- Effort (by participants as well as the team) was put into getting more people to Workshop 2.

Workshop 2

- Thanks to the effort put in, the group attending was now up to nearly 60 people.
- After a brief update and comments on some possible 'principles' emerging from the Workshop 1 report, groups started to generate ideas for the Coastal Action Plan. Some interim priorities were put on the emerging long list.
- The next session started to introduce people to the rigours of a highly constrained, legally-based Management Scheme. Groups were presented with policies and recommendations from similar plans and asked to evaluate them for their relevance to Thanet.
- By this stage there were (a) some overall principles in place, (b) some conservation objectives, (c) many ideas for future action, (d) some pre-existing regeneration objectives and (e) an understanding both of the scope of a Management Scheme and of its detailed contents. Groups were then asked to relate all these (each group only looking at a few) in order to sharpen the Management Scheme and evaluate projects.
- Once again, the final discussion focused on next stages and any other 'voices missing'.
- The full report was prepared quickly but a gap of several months was left prior to workshop 3 because it was thought appropriate to produce a draft Management Scheme and draft Coastal Action Plan - termed 'cartoon versions'. It was thought that (a) enough progress had been done to make this useful and (b) it was essential for people to gain a real sense of what a Management Scheme might 'look like'.

Workshop 3

- The group of around 60 met again on this occasion. There were only two main elements to the day.
- The morning was spent in groups looking in more detail at the long list of possible ingredients for the Coastal Action Plan. They checked them against all possible criteria (especially conservation and regeneration together) and gave them some sort of priority.
- In the afternoon, people dug deep into the 'cartoon plans' checking them, changing wording, noting omissions, querying emphasis and so forth.
- In this session groups also looked at one of the basic management tools available - codes of practice.
- A full report was prepared and circulated. On this occasion a lengthy gap was left until Workshop 4 because (a) the Management Scheme had progressed further than anticipated and (b) a way had to be found to bring the District Council more firmly 'on board' with the process and outcomes.
- The latter point was resolved by adapting from a Coastal Action Plan to a more specific, high profile project - a possible 'Marine Park'.

Workshop 4

- The structure and style of the final event was slightly different. In the morning, people worked to close off their involvement with the Management Scheme and, in the afternoon, to start work on the Marine Park idea.
- A revised Management Scheme had been produced in advance of the meeting and was again tested thoroughly. Further work was also done on some specific codes of practice.
- Before lunch there was an overall - and extremely positive - evaluation of the state of play on the Management Scheme. The next stages to formal adoption were then outlined.
- At the start of the afternoon a short presentation illustrated the format and potential nature of a Marine Park.
- Groups then worked, using many of their previously shortlisted ideas, to suggest an overall strategy for a Marine Park.
- In the subsequent session groups produced action plans for one of their high priority, short term projects.
- Following a short 'where next' discussion (which raised the idea of future commitment by participants), the workshop ended with a short evaluation of the overall process - again extremely positive.

Key points

- Careful exposure to, and introduction of, technical and procedural issues (of the Management Scheme) enabled non-scientific people to make very positive and practical contributions to it.
- Despite this, the structures and tasks used for this were quite onerous and made for a rather repetitive style during workshops 2 and 3 in particular.
- The original project was so large and complex that it was difficult to get people in the room at the outset.
- It was risky moving forward in the early days without the full support of one key partner - the District Council. At the same time, it was the results of the process itself that finally convinced them to play a full part!
- Original expectations were exceeded quite dramatically. The Management Scheme is likely to be adopted well ahead of any others in the UK. The rather abstract Coastal Action Plan became a genuine, practical initiative. Many aspects of the supposed conflict between environmental and socio-economic issues were resolved positively.
- There is a commitment locally to similar ways of working in the future.

3. Parking In Stratford-upon-Avon

Background

- A parking strategy for the centre of Stratford-upon-Avon was needed for the review of the Local Plan, and for a funding application by the County Council to central government.
- There was severe pressure on all aspects of parking, many complaints and demands for action.
- Recent initiatives had been poorly received, mainly because they were perceived to have been imposed by 'them' (the authorities).
- Communication between some key groups was poor or had broken down.
- The District Council was developing approaches to increased public participation, in particular consensus building.

Overall Process

- It was decided to appoint a process manager (for around 15 person days) to ensure that strategy development was seen to be as independently managed as possible.
- The overall process - in its initial stage - involved three large, facilitated meetings, each about 5/6 weeks apart.
- Following these meetings the strategy went into the formal, political processes.
- A year or so after, the group reconvened to consider the specific, detailed proposals (adding another 2 days of consultant time).

Meeting 1

- A list of participants was identified at the outset. People were invited to join a 'Forum' and to comment on and add further names to the initial list.
- Around 30 people attended all three meetings; a good and wide mix, including elected members.
- Participants received a briefing note and were asked to undertake a short task in advance of the first meeting.
- The task asked them to suggest positive qualities for Stratford town centre, and to suggest examples of good ideas for parking from elsewhere.
- People were placed in mixed groups at the outset.
- After an introduction and summary of the advance tasks, participants worked as individuals and groups to generate issues and problems in relation to parking.
- Issues were summarised in plenary and compared to the positive aspirations around the question "what would happen if we did nothing?".
- This led to agreement on the need for intervention and some principles for it.
- In the final short session, groups suggested what they felt to be important information that would help them move forward to solutions.
- They were also asked to consider who else ought to be involved and how to ensure they came to meeting 2.
- A full report was produced and circulated, and key information collected. Attempts were made to bring in key others for meeting 2.

Meeting 2

- After a short recap from meeting 1 and on action between, the overall group reconfirmed, with some minor changes, the agreed principles.
- The main part of the event involved group work to generate and agree a long list of possible solutions to parking problems.
- As each group developed their lists, they were asked to ensure that suggestions matched the principles and consider solutions to any omitted principles.
- After a call-out session listing all solutions agreed by groups (almost 80), there was a coffee break. During the break each participant looked at each solution and evaluated it in terms of agreement or rejection (or uncertainty).
- When the group reconvened, the emerging shortlist was discussed and nearly 30 were agreed (i.e. received no negative evaluations).
- During a short final session, groups focused on the uncertain items and what might clarify them to enable a clearer decision for or against.
- A full report was prepared and circulated.

Meeting 3

- This meeting again started with a short recap and update.
- The core of the evening involved group work on strategy setting. Each group used a prepared grid across which they were asked to spread out some cards as a plan - a strategy - across time and against five main themes. Each card named one of their agreed actions.
- They were also asked to produce an argued rationale for their strategy.
- One group was tasked to come up with a minimal action strategy, three a middle range or moderate intervention strategy, and one a more radical format.
- Once complete, there was a whole group discussion to share outcomes.
- Very quickly, the minimal action approach was firmly rejected.
- The final conclusion favoured dramatic, high profile action in the short term to highlight the seriousness of the problem to the wider community.
- The short final discussion addressed the way in which the final paper would be produced and the overall group's views on further involvement.
- A final report was then produced, with agreement by all participants.

Reconvened Forum

- A year or so later, the group reconvened because (a) specific proposals had been developed, (b) the strategy needed to be checked before submission to central government, and (c) the authorities wished to seek advice and support before 'going public' with proposals.
- This additional meeting confirmed the revised text and many specific suggestions were made for details of proposed schemes - all positive.
- The meeting also secured positive and practical support from the Forum about how and when to raise the contentious issues with the wider community and the local media.

Outcomes (derived in part from a formal evaluation)

- The overall response was extremely positive.

- Some old fears have disappeared, people were talking again and there was new and shared understanding.
- Some quite dramatic actions were planned, and those involved made an informal commitment to be involved in and support the actions as they developed.
- There was agreement that such an outcome could not have been achieved any other way; indeed that some extra benefits such as partnerships had emerged.
- There is now a continuing working relationship on translating ideas into actions.
- Too little time was allowed between the first and second meetings to assemble, condense and circulate in advance a reasonable information base.
- As above, it proved impossible to involve young people directly (except through teachers and youth workers).
- An attempt to involve the media positively in the process had limited success.

APPENDIX 2: BASIC BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

All of the following documents are published by The Stationery Office, and are available from (mail, telephone and fax orders only):
The Publications Centre
PO Box 276
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General enquiries: 0171 873 0011
Telephone orders: 0345 023 474
Fax orders: 0171 873 8200

The Environment Act 1995, ISBN 0-10-542595-8

The Air Quality Regulations 1997, SI 3043

The United Kingdom National Air Quality Strategy, March 1997, ISBN 0-10-135872-5

The United Kingdom National Air Quality Strategy and Local Air Quality Management: Guidance for Local Authorities, DETR Environment Circular 15/97, (Welsh Office Circular WO/63/97)

Framework for Review and Assessment, LAQM.G1(97), December 1997

Developing Local Air Quality Action Plans and Strategies: the Principal Considerations, LAQM.G2(97), December 1997

Air Quality and Traffic Management, LAQM.G3(97), December 1997

Air Quality and Land Use Planning, LAQM.G4(97), December 1997

Guidance on Local Transport Plans, DETR, 1999

PPG23 – Planning and Pollution Control, July 1994

PPG13 – Transport, March 1994

PPG6 – Town Centres and Retail Developments

PPG4 – Industrial and Commercial Development and Small Firms