

Background to the Themes of a Sustainable Woking

Sustainability is about achieving a balance between the economy, society and the environment (or people, profit and the planet). It is about ensuring a good quality of life for everyone, whilst maintaining and conserving the natural systems of the earth. A fair and healthy society and economy is as important as a healthy environment.

This document explains each of the Themes of a Sustainable Woking. Each theme is taken in turn and an explanation is given of how each theme relates to sustainability. By understanding the meaning behind each theme, Officers and Members can understand the range of issues which the service they are providing, or the proposal they are recommending, could have, and the nature of the impact that this will have on sustainability in Woking.

This document is available electronically at:
woking.gov.uk/sustain

If you would like further information, guidance or advice, please contact Corporate Strategy (email CorporatStrategy@woking.gov.uk).

1. Use of energy, water, minerals and materials

The use of resources, whether water, minerals and materials, soil and trees, or energy and food, must be used in such a way that they are not reduced in number or misused so that they become unavailable in the future. This also includes using Brownfield sites and vacant buildings instead of Greenfield sites. This is sustainable consumption.

Some resources like coal and oil are finite and one day they will run out. Other resources like water are not finite but are under increasing pressure due to human demand, leading to detrimental effects on rivers and other aquatic ecosystems.

2. Waste generation / sustainable waste management

The use of resources usually results in the production of waste materials which cause environmental damage. It is important that waste production is kept to a minimum. Minimising waste is the first step, with re-using and recycling as additional sustainable methods of dealing with waste.

3. Pollution to air, land and water

Pollution can occur in air, land or water and can be in many forms (e.g. chemical, biological, noise, light). Pollution means the contamination or defilement of something and pollutants can be natural or man made. The introduction of a contaminating substance into any natural system or environment, causes elements of that environment to change. All aspects of a natural system are linked and dependent upon one another - this is known as an ecosystem. If one of those elements is removed or damaged due to pollution, eventually it could threaten the whole ecosystem.

The environment has a limited ability to assimilate pollutants, but once this level is exceeded, pollution can be harmful. Pollution can be detrimental to human health. Pollution should therefore be minimised to levels which do not damage natural systems and human health.

4. Factors that contribute to Climate Change.

If action is not taken to reduce greenhouse gases (CO₂ equivalent emissions) within 30 years there could be an irreversible effect on the Global Climate. This is why Woking Borough Council has taken a lead and developed its own Climate Change Strategy for the Borough - taking the view this is not something to be ignored - we all have to take action now.

This Climate Change Strategy for Woking aims to build on the Council's environmental success and to take a carbon neutral approach to the future of services and activities within the Borough. It is important that the Council's policies, processes and services mitigate factors that contribute to Climate Change and prepare for the impact the Climate Change will have in the future.

5. Protection of and access to the natural environment

It is essential that the natural environment and its biodiversity is maintained and that one species, man, doesn't destroy other habitats and species. Wildlife and natural habitats provide us with sources of food, clothes, housing, medicines and areas for recreation. The loss of wildlife and natural habitats will eventually begin to affect the way that we live our lives.

The loss of countryside, open space and natural habitats through roads, housing and other development affects increasing numbers of people, not just local residents and recreational visitors. People can access the natural environment in a number of ways, some of which can be detrimental. Access therefore needs to be managed. Many people gain an enormous sense of well-being from being in a green open space and having some contact with nature. It is important in an urban area such as Woking that there continues to be an adequate amount of green space available to meet the needs of the local community.

6. Travel choices that do not rely on the car

We all need to travel, whether it be for work, school, shopping or entertainment. However, Surrey has one of the highest levels of car ownership in the country. There is a conflict between the freedom the car offers and the congestion that it causes and also the decline in other forms of transport means that there are fewer alternatives to the car.

This has had a number of negative impacts. For example, pollution is a hazard to health, local communities are being eroded through the decline and subsequent closure of local shops and facilities and there are significant negative health impacts caused by a more sedentary lifestyle. There is also little choice regarding mode of travel for some groups in society, who are

forced to use the car at present. These groups include those where there is little or no public transport provision.

7. A strong, diverse and sustainable local economy

A sustainable local economy should make use of information technology and modern working practices in order to improve resource efficiency, reduce waste generation and encourage waste minimisation. There should be investment in technology which minimises environmental impacts. Social factors such as life-long learning and support for local community projects would also be encouraged.

A strong local economy should give access to satisfying and rewarding work without damaging the local, national or global environment. Valuing unpaid work is also important as is recognising the contribution the voluntary sector makes to the quality of life for many people.

8. Meet local needs locally

The concept of meeting local needs locally can sometimes be referred to as the “Proximity Principle”. This can include a sense of community and responsibility to the area in which you live, work and play; supporting the local economy, shops, post offices, leisure centre, pubs and markets. For example, by purchasing goods locally, we sustain local businesses and avoid the pollution associated with the transportation of goods from other places.

Planners, architects and developers recognise that people want to live in places which promote a sense of “community”. The focus is on concentrated development which offers a range of services and facilities. This includes shops, leisure, employment opportunities and open spaces. A mixture of house sizes, styles and materials add to the character and visual appeal. Such settlements encourage a sense of belonging and community, attracting a wide range of types and ages of property which are culturally beneficial. However, where not all needs can be met within a locality, appropriate access centres are needed.

9. Opportunities for education and information

A key objective of sustainability to develop a “learning society” in which everyone routinely expects to learn and upgrade skills throughout life. Improving access to training, education and staff development helps to foster good working environments and helps to create opportunity.

Ensuring that all members of society have equal access to free education gives them the opportunity to equip themselves with the skills to fulfil their potential. It also enables them to make decisions that affect their own future and that of generations to come, from a position of knowledge.

10. Provision of appropriate and sustainable housing

Appropriate housing means housing appropriate to need. It is also about tackling homelessness and providing safe and warm homes. House prices in

the south east are the highest in the country. Surrey's Councils have carried out housing needs surveys and they found that there was a need for affordable family housing and properties, particularly for first time buyers.

Appropriate housing also means making the best use of urban land and ensuring that developments are within easy reach of facilities. There is a need to consider environmental aspects for new and existing housing. Factors such as energy efficiency and use of sustainable construction techniques are of significant importance.

11. Personal safety and reduced fear of crime

Feeling safe and secure at home, at work, when socialising or in the street has a large impact on the quality of life. Therefore helping to reduce crime and the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour is also a key element of sustainable development.

Despite crime rates falling in Surrey, fear of crime has become one of the most salient features of our collective experience. It affects not only our basic feelings of personal security, but our relations with strangers and the sense of trust which is key to ordinary social life.

12. Equality in health and good health

Health is important to us all, in mind and in body. Our health can be affected by the macro or wider environment. Health can also be affected by the micro or local environment by the type and location of housing, food scares and localised air pollution. Every aspect of our environment can impact on our health, from air or water pollution to a healthy diet and a decent home. Unhealthy lifestyles, poverty and low educational attainment can also affect our health. Taking measures to reduce these factors will also contribute to better health.

Health means more than just being free from disease. It means access to fulfilling employment, having the resources to keep ourselves fit, secure and independent. It means an environment free from pollution, hazards and risk. Despite all the social and medical progress that has been made we are still faced with many avoidable hazards to health and are challenged by enduring health inequalities. Equity in health requires the removal of avoidable and unfair differences in access to good health.

A balanced diet is important in preventing poor health. Often, some of the poorest people have the greatest difficulty in accessing an adequate supply of affordable, quality food. Lack of money is part of the problem, but awareness on the nutrition benefits of the right types of foodstuffs also contributes to poor diets.

13. Access to cultural and leisure facilities

Easily accessible leisure facilities should be made available to all at a reasonable price and should remain available to future generations. On a

more local scale leisure facilities should be central and affordable and provide leisure and cultural pursuits to meet all tastes.

The arts and sport make a significant contribution to quality of life and should be accessible to everyone. They can also contribute significantly to regeneration and bring communities together.

14. Social inclusion / engage and consult communities

To speak of community is to recognise that there is such a thing as society, and that its health and cohesion affect the well-being of everyone. We are dependent in every almost every aspect of our lives on the neighbours and strangers who make up the rest of society - on their co-operation in a shared moral, legal and social order. Loss of a sense of community is widely felt and many of the causes of this lie in deep-rooted social trends, such as the breakdown of tradition and changing lifestyles.

Involving people in action, breaking the cycle of social exclusion and improving the sense of community can help people feel that at least they have an opportunity to be part of the community. Marginalised groups also need to be included and capacity building within communities is necessary. Government must be seen to be open to public influence and participation and to be accountable and responsive.

15. Equal opportunities for the whole community

A fair and just society is a major underlying theme in sustainable development. It calls for equal access to basic necessities, resources, health, education, goods and services regardless of age, colour, religion, gender, physical and mental ability, postcode, sexual orientation.

16. Contribute to Woking's pride of place

Local diversity and distinctiveness are not only important in the natural environment, but are equally as important in terms of our culture and history. When change and development take place it is important that regard is given to the quality, identity and character of an area. Protecting diversity and local distinctiveness helps to strengthen local community and cultural identity. This in turn can foster pride in an area, encouraging people to feel good about where they live and work.