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Guidance for community sustainable development

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Foreword

Publishing information

This British Standard is published by BSI Standards Limited, under licence from The British Standards Institution, and came into effect on 31 December 2011. It was prepared by Subcommittee SDS/1/4, *Sustainable communities*, under the direction of SDS/1, *Sustainable development co-ordination committee*. A list of members of this committee can be obtained on request to its secretary.

Information about this document

The start and finish of text introduced or altered by Corrigendum No. 1 is indicated in the text by C1 C1.

Presentational conventions

The provisions in this standard are presented in roman (i.e. upright) type. Its recommendations are expressed in sentences in which the principal auxiliary verb is “should”.

This British Standard takes the form of guidance and recommendations. Therefore, it should not be quoted as if it were a specification to which compliance could be claimed.

Commentary, explanation and general informative material is presented in smaller italic type, and does not constitute a normative element.

Contractual and legal considerations

This publication does not purport to include all the necessary provisions of a contract. Users are responsible for its correct application.

Compliance with a British Standard cannot confer immunity from legal obligations.

0 Introduction

0.1 Information about this document

There has been growing interest in the concept of “sustainable communities”. Communities are the bedrock of sustainable development. This guidance will help interested parties to define what sustainable development is in their communities.

Understanding the link with the term “sustainable development”, or its short-hand reference “sustainability”, is vital because the concept is underpinned by an important set of principles, and processes. These integrate economic, social and environmental concerns. Sustainable development was framed and endorsed internationally by governments through the United Nations (UN) at the first Sustainable Development Summit (see Annex A). The next UN Summit will be the Rio+20 conference in June 2012. *Greening the local economy* is one of the core themes for this sustainable development summit.

Given the core role local communities play in helping to practically achieve sustainable development outcomes, the interest in sustainable communities and this British Standard is as an alternative framework for advancing sustainability more widely (alongside those aimed at organizations and businesses). This standard is also a result of the recognition of the economic and social importance of fostering and protecting robust and prosperous communities, particularly where pressures on community life and shared values appears to be increasing.

Reflecting the UN sustainability principles, Table 1 (3.1.3) demonstrates how these can be usefully interpreted and applied to be locally resonant and relevant.

This standard is in the BS 8900 series of sustainable development standards and follows the template and approaches set out in BS 8900:2006, *Guidance on managing sustainable development*. This is the first standard of its type and BSI's decision to develop BS 8904 is a step in offering leadership and enabling wider engagement both in the UK and internationally.

Standardizing an approach is challenging given the diversity of contexts and possible applications. This standard has been developed with communities in mind that are primarily based on a “place”, but the principles can be extended to those communities with different, more diverse forms. Different communities have differing needs and expectations. However, this standard attempts to give a sequence of steps to improve community sustainability and for the community to assess the support provided by relevant authorities and other parties.

This standard has been drafted on the following principles.

- a) The users of this standard start by identifying the community it aims to serve, the possible benefits and desirable outcomes of community based sustainable development.
- b) The aim is to embed sustainable development in everyday community life, which is necessarily challenging, provoking and continually evolving.
- c) The process can either be driven from the grassroots or by key community stakeholders (e.g. local authorities, schools).
- d) Building confidence in processes and sustainable outcomes is an important part of the process and some communities might wish to use some form of verification, although this standard does not point users toward any particular auditors or certification bodies.
- e) A development or maturity matrix is provided as a way of assessing progress, clarifying next steps and combining the principles underpinning sustainability with practical implementation.

There are many other helpful and relevant texts, conventions, codes and case studies available; this standard acts as a guide to make sense of these many and varied sources.

0.2 Framework

The concept of sustainable development provides a framework for building thriving, vibrant communities that ensure economic, social and environmental well-being for all, both now and in future. For the purpose of this standard we adopt the BS 8900 definition of sustainable development:

an enduring, balanced approach to economic activity, environmental responsibility and social progress.

A sustainable community is:

a place where people want to live and work now and in the future.

Such a community limits its impacts on the local and global environment, is fair, well governed and inclusive, and allows good opportunities for a flourishing local economy. The idea of a sustainable community enables us to conceive of sustainable development in a more tangible way, manifesting it in a specific place or community of interest. Through the actions of government, business and civil society, communities are ultimately where sustainable development will or will not be realised and as such we deliver sustainable development through delivering sustainable communities.

Communities in our definition can be of any size and dimension, although, this standard will be most usefully implemented in communities that already have a degree of cohesion and momentum to facilitate continuing participation. Indeed a successful approach to creating and fostering a sustainable community depends upon the empowerment, ownership and engagement of those who are and will be affected. Consequently, this standard recommends the active involvement and ongoing commitment of community members, as well as offering advice on how this can be achieved.

The long-term success of any community will also depend on its flexibility and readiness to adapt to change, its ability to absorb “shocks” or mitigate risks and its strength of vision and guiding principles. Key to its robustness is an understanding of and responsiveness to the dynamics of economic, environmental and social dimensions. Therefore balancing the need for structure whilst enabling innovation from within the community has an important part to play.

What matters to local communities, how they agree and prioritize what needs to be done, and how they can be empowered in ways to meet their basic needs (food, shelter, and health) and to safeguard a decent and fulfilling quality of life, is central to “sustainability”. This is about securing a long-term quality of life, but that accepts that local solutions must help lower our individual and collective “ecological footprint”, that is the amount of what we consume (water, land, food, etc.). It is about sharing, and issues of equity both within and between communities and across generations

0.3 The need for community guidance

The nature of society is that we as individuals and as communities are interdependent with others, and the actions we take in our place, have an impact on other places and people. Even if the case is unproven regarding “limited resources” and a global “entitlement” to a fair share of what each of us need to get by, sustainable development demands that we reduce wasteful and polluting ways of living. This can take place at an individual, community or corporate level. Initiatives such as Action for Market Towns [1], Big Lunch [2] and Transition Town [3] show that communities want assistance with how to carry out development in line with sustainable development principles. This guide is seen as a realistic response to redefining the term “progress”, so that it re-balances financial wealth creation and the owning of more material goods, with measures of fairness and distribution, so that gross domestic product (GDP) becomes a more meaningful measure as in Stiglitz et al [4].

Issues of risk and resilience, particularly related to food and fuel security, are rising in importance for communities in all parts of the world. Greater self reliance and self sufficiency is what many sustainable communities are gearing up to, so they are able to get through times of financial and economic stress, and are able to withstand natural and physical disasters. Whilst prosperity is usually defined by financial wealth and growth, increasingly sustainable communities will be concerned on overcoming vulnerability, and achieving and maintaining stability, in order for them to thrive and flourish.

What kind of quality of life communities living today pass onto future generations, with suitable ways and means to take care of themselves whilst respecting the “eco-systems services” on which we all depend, is shaped through decisions and actions being taken now. Technology can help but cannot provide the total solution. It is people that *“are the difference that make the difference”*.

There is a clear need for a framework to guide communities in balancing increasing and often competing challenges to living sustainably. There is also a desire among businesses and public authorities to share some common understanding of what is required to get there.

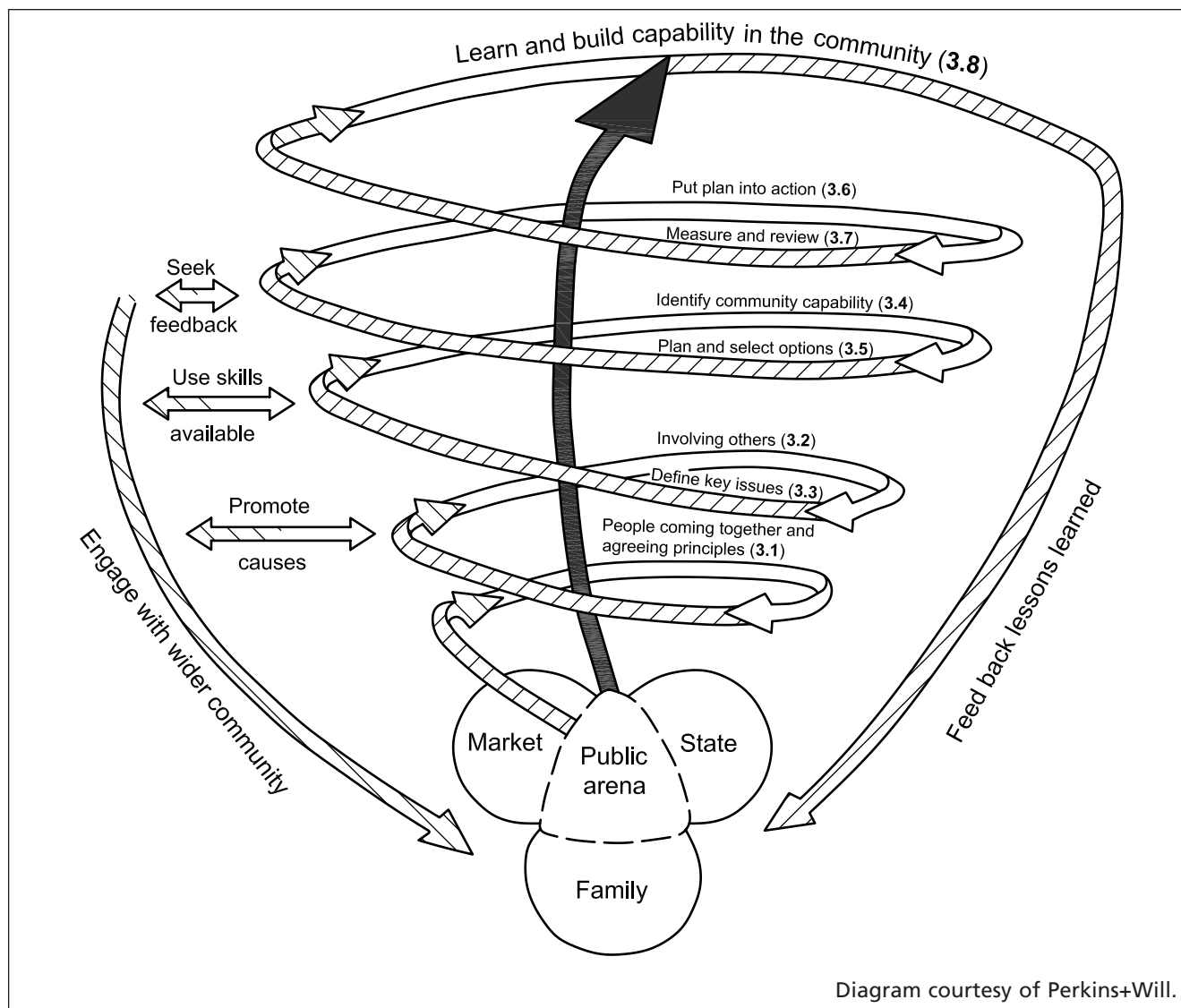
Government, businesses and non-governmental organizations share common interests in sustainable development and in realising sustainable communities. This is the case for Government and non-governmental organizations as they search for more efficient and effective ways to deliver services and address market failures, and for businesses as they increasingly understand how their own viability is intrinsically linked to that of suppliers and customers in a globally interdependent physical, social and economic environment.

Sustainable development is central to effective local planning, strategic decision making, risk assessment and public engagement. This also relates to spatial planning frameworks and this is an area that is under development in the UK.

This standard does not specify performance criteria or explain the specific elements of economic, environmental and social impacts, nor does it prescribe a sequence in which the guidance has to be followed. The recommended steps in implementing the guidance are illustrated in Figure 1: the standards user can start at whichever point seems most appropriate to their community, and may wish to return to certain steps at different times.

A sustainable community is one that takes charge and determines its own agenda. This includes the wider acknowledged public health benefits. By making the community more socially integrated and secure, community participants will feel an increased sense of well being, be encouraged to walk, enjoy group activities, feel benefits of exercise and fresh air that will ultimately improve health. An additional benefit could be that integrated health and social care becomes more preventive rather than curative with less financial drain on local authority resources with future proposed responsibilities for public health and social care.

Figure 1 Schematic diagram of recommended steps in implementing guidance for community sustainable development



The interrelationship of elements in the public arena is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Interface of market, state and family

