

Sutton Partnership and Sustainable Community Strategy

Abstract

Sutton has been successful in developing a strong profile on sustainability within the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS).

Despite a small team and a lack of funding for paid LSP staff, Sutton has managed to deliver a range of important projects. This has been down to:

- a strong council track record and leadership on sustainability
- strong advocacy for sustainability within the LSP
- working with partners to secure external funding

The issue

Sutton is an outer London borough with a mix of neighbourhoods. The southern parts of the borough are suburban in character. By contrast, some of the northern parts of the borough have:

- significant pockets of social deprivation
- environmental degradation
- poor social infrastructure
- limited access to employment, community facilities, housing and transport services

Sutton Council has a 20-year track record in addressing these kinds of sustainable development problems. It has used this experience and commitment to ensure that sustainability has a high profile within the SCS and the work of the LSP.

What Sutton did

The area has a strong history of partnership working. Previous partnership working has borne fruit, so there is a positive attitude towards it. The council is strongly identified with sustainable development, which is seen as a core element of the council's function. It has taken the main leadership role on sustainability, particularly at a strategic level.

The vision of the council's Corporate Plan is: 'to create a sustainable suburb in London'. The same vision is shared by the borough's SCS – the Sutton Strategy – and the core strategy for the Local Development Framework. This ensures a strategic alignment of plans for delivering the LSP's vision for a sustainable future.

One of the six themed groups within the LSP is called 'sustainable living'. Important members of the group include:

- the council's lead member for environmental sustainability
- local charities, Ecolocal and the BioRegional Development Group
- the Environment Agency
- Sutton Environmental Network

- Transport for London (TfL)
- primary care trust (PCT) public Health staff

This group also has two of the 25 places on the LSP Board. These are currently filled by:

- a member of the BioRegional Develop Group, a local charity promoting sustainable development
- the lead member for environmental sustainability

The council's small sustainability team has worked with its partners to promote various sustainability issues:

- setting the planning framework in the Local Development Framework (LDF) for sustainable development
- promoting the use and generation of renewable energy
- adopting the high standards of energy efficiency in council property and new builds, including new social housing schemes
- leading the adoption of an SCS that has sustainability at its heart and a vision to create a sustainable suburb in London

Some of the LSP's important projects designed to help deliver the SCS's sustainability objectives include:

Smarter Travel Sutton

This is the large traffic reduction project funded by TfL and supported and delivered by other council partners. It came out of the council's close working relationship with local voluntary environmental organisations and the PCT. The project aims to achieve a range of outcomes, including:

- reducing congestion
- promoting sustainable transport
- health improvements through more walking and cycling
- creating positive action on the environment through schools and businesses

The key target is traffic reduction in the borough. Personal journey planners have visited every home, and every school should have a travel plan by the end of the year. The project aims to ensure that it addresses the needs of excluded groups, by giving advice on accessibility issues and working with younger and elderly people.

The One Planet Hackbridge Project

The sustainable Hackbridge project is a holistic approach to regeneration and change in one district of the borough. It is a pilot that should become a model for action across the borough. It aims to show how working in partnership with the community, business, voluntary organisations and other public agencies can bring about lifestyle and physical changes to define sustainability in practical terms for all that live and work in the area.

The Biodiversity Action Plan

This is the borough's partnership between voluntary or community organisations, land owners and other public agencies to improve, protect and manage our habitats and wildlife for future generations. Many partners have been involved in this project to help reduce dependency on the car. This includes:

- schools setting up their own 'green travel plans'
- TfL and the council promoting sustainable transport through door-to-door visits
- business and voluntary organisations developing green travel plans and helping set up car clubs across the borough

Climate Challenge project

As part of this project, there was a survey of attitudes which found that the community are aware that sustainability is a priority for the council. It also showed that, despite people being interested and prepared to change behaviour, many felt bewildered and disempowered. The project aims to address these issues.

Key success factors

The following success factors have been mentioned above:

- strong council track record and leadership on sustainability
- positive experiences of previous partnership working in the borough
- alignment of a vision for sustainability across the council's Corporate Plan, the SCS and the LDF
- a committed 'sustainable living' group within the LSP and senior sustainability advocates on the LSP board

Other success factors include:

The Eco-Management and Auditing Scheme (EMAS)

Within the council, there is a general acceptance of sustainability as a cross-cutting issue. Every team has to have a sustainability action plan as part of EMAS. Support for this is provided by the sustainability team. Most expertise is focused on the council, voluntary sector and Transport for London.

External funding

The council has had to work hard with a range of external partners to secure funds to deliver projects. For example:

- Smarter Travel Sutton is a £5 million project is funded by TfL
- European Life funding helped set up and develop the EMAS scheme
- Section 106 helped deliver a wide variety of initiatives including cycling facilities, car clubs and habitat management
- single regeneration bid grants helped with energy efficiency and renewable energy projects
- working with the voluntary sector has helped access many smaller grants for projects not available to a local authority

Partnership working

Because of a lack of funded officers, the Partnership Officer has developed a 'virtual team', a network of officers from different organisations.

The impact

Sustainable development is well integrated into the SCS:

- It brings together the borough's housing strategy and the Local Development Framework to deliver sustainable affordable homes and new developments in the borough that will be focused on the main town and district centres – linking new housing with employment, leisure and transport hubs.
- It makes strong links between improving health through exercise and reducing use of the car with partnerships between the council, TfL and the Primary Care Trust (PCT).
- It brings together a partnership to reduce anti-social behaviour by promoting environmental and cultural activities to young people. This includes the development of a new Life Skills Centre involving the fire brigade, voluntary sector, the police and the council.
- It includes an objective to become a 'one planet borough' by 2025, as measured by its ecological footprint. This is being piloted in Hackbridge with the One Planet Hackbridge project, which is based on the 10 One Planet Living themes, each with its own separate targets. The borough is fortunate in that it contains the Beddington Zero Energy Development (BedZED), which is the UK's largest carbon-neutral eco-community, as an exemplar.

Lessons

One of the main barriers for the project is funding. Most projects rely on external and temporary funding:

- Few members of the sustainability team are core funded. Although the team contains 19 members, nine are employed by Smarter Travel Sutton and five by the Sutton Ecology Centre. The Climate Challenge Officer is also externally funded.
- The council lacks the resources to keep pursuing funding. Much environmental funding is not available to local authorities, hence the added importance of working with community sector organisations.

Another barrier identified by the council is that short-term priorities tend to take precedence. The council has experience of working to a longer term view. However, some other members of the Partnership, eg the police, find it difficult to see how their work links to sustainable development. There have been improvements where there is a clear overlap (for example with health and transport projects) or where savings can be made from resource efficiency.

Although sustainability is becoming more embedded in the work of the LSP, most of themed groups within the partnership have little understanding of it. They rely instead on the members of the Sustainable Living Theme Group.

Data and evidence

Data is currently being compiled on the effects of the first year of Smarter Travel Sutton.

Further information

<http://www.suttonpartnership.net/>

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