

**Environmental issues and human
behaviour in low-income areas in the UK**

A report to the Economic and Social Research Council

by

Anne Power and Jake Elster

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Telephone: UK+20 7955 6679
Fax: UK+20 7955 6951
Email: j.dickson@lse.ac.uk
Website: <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/case>

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Non-technical summary

Aims and objectives

The LSE Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) investigated the links between environmental issues and people's behaviour in low-income areas in the UK.

A focus group study involved 75 residents in six representative low-income areas which are part of a longitudinal ESRC funded CASE study into area change in the UK. A questionnaire was also completed by 72 of the 75 participants.

Evidence from key local managers in the 6 areas added detailed local observations. We set our work in the context of earlier studies of environmental attitudes and behaviour and environmental problems in low-income areas.

Main Research results

Existing evidence showed that:

- local environmental problems are widespread but worse in low-income areas
- there is little evidence that wider environmental concerns are less in low-income communities
- residents in low-income areas often face different barriers and incentives for action from those in higher income areas
- local environmental neglect can have much wider impacts, contributing to area decline and abandonment
- environmental behaviour change is limited by unclear solutions and low political profile, but models of human behaviour can help in understanding how to support change

Focus group findings

Local Problems

Most participants were strongly aware of local environmental problems, such as litter, dereliction and lack of green space; but also wider environmental problems such as global warming, species loss and pollution. The majority of participants put local issues above global problems because of their impact.

Global Problems

Participants readily identified familiar problems such as biodiversity loss and global warming, but also globalisation, global inequality, international migration and resource depletion. Only four were not worried about wider environmental issues.

Participants had a clear understanding of the mechanisms and complexities underlying wider environmental problems, rather than just having heard of them. Participants identified ways in which global sustainability problems impact on their everyday lives, such as changes to the weather, increased risk of skin cancer, and worries for the future.

Causes

Participants put a strong emphasis on personal responsibility, but also blamed the wider context of business, Government and social pressures for the problems. For example, businesses produce “throw away” goods, local authorities provide too few litter bins, too few recycling facilities, marketing pressures on consumers.

Actions

Participants took many actions with potential benefit to the local and wider environment. These included cleaning up their area, reducing car use, recycling and growing their own food. 60 mentioned turning off lights and 52 re-used bags or jars.

Energy reduction measures included walking and cycling more, choosing less packaging, cutting electricity use.

Barriers to action included lack of infrastructure and facilities, poor public transport, incentives to buy more. Participants talked about mixed messages about which actions were worthwhile.

Suggested changes

Participants advocated actions under four headings:

- **practical**, for example, more bins and recycling schemes, more environmentally friendly products
- **economic and legislative**, for example, fines and incentives, making the polluter pay
- **involving and empowering people**, for example, local decisions and resources, more information and education
- **international action**, for example, debt relief, international pollution control

Findings on local environmental issues based on interviews with local managers

Neighbourhood managers responded to community pressure to tackle local environmental problems by developing innovative “hands-on” mechanisms to combat litter, graffiti, vandalism, disrepair, disorder etc through neighbourhood management, neighbourhood wardens, and better services more generally. These concerns and actions by formal bodies coincided with residents’ environmental priorities. They offered the wider environmental benefit of stabilising turnover in some neighbourhoods and revaluing property that otherwise might have been demolished.

Local managers in housing and regeneration had scope to influence behaviour and decisions in favour of more environmentally friendly approaches. However, generally, they did not see it as high priority and were less concerned than residents about the environment.

Conclusions

The study shows an awareness of environmental problems and actions in low-income areas that belies many firmly held assumptions:

- people in low-income areas are aware of wider as well as local environmental problems and possible solutions
- people can relate global problems to their everyday lives
- environmental action, motivations, and barriers to action vary depending on the action in question, the context for action and often on the person who is acting
- individual environmental action can often be dependent on a supportive context, ease of execution (and a favourable “climate” or framework)

- barriers to action are often serious, for example, lack of options or facilities
- many residents in poor areas share a similar view of sustainable development with the rest of the country, agreeing that action on environmental problems is necessary, and are willing to act
- local managers highlighted the potential for a stronger environmental response in poor areas but showed weak motivation and generally unimaginative ideas of what could be done.

1. Background

The aims of our study were to:

- review and build on existing evidence to produce a practical overview of links between environmental issues and human behaviour in UK low-income areas
- identify lessons about how environmental behaviour change could be supported, and suggest promising areas for further work

In particular our study focussed on three issues:

- the relationship between the local neighbourhood environment and wider environmental problems and goals
- people's opinions, experiences and actions in relation both to their own immediate environment and the wider environment
- how behaviour change could be supported

Previous work on environmental problems in low-income areas informed the theoretical basis for this study.

- a) Poor local environments can contribute to people wanting to leave areas, fuelling problems of decline and collapse in poor neighbourhoods with far wider environmental, social and economic consequences (Mumford and Power, 2003).
- b) People are most engaged locally, and most aware of policy impacts on them at the local level. Environmental, social and economic problems and potential solutions are often stark at the local level. For example, poor quality housing contributes to exclusion, economic decline of areas and energy inefficiency (Rogers and Power, 2000; Mumford and Power, 2003).
- c) Low-income residents react to local conditions using public transport, walking and cycling for lack of access to a car, or may not recycle because facilities are not available.
- d) Despite strong constraints and pressing local concerns people living in low-income areas also act on environmental issues out of altruism, for example, buying dolphin-friendly tuna (Elster, 2004).

This led us to develop 5 hypotheses:

- Local environmental neglect has a significant negative impact on people's quality of life, which has wider implications for the environment.
- Environmental behaviours are more influenced by local area conditions than by wider problems.
- Environmental behaviour change will happen most easily if it builds on the starting point of everyday lives in the context of local areas.
- Low-income residents care about wider environmental issues.
- Behaviour change depends on the wider context, the removal of barriers to action, and the knowledge and constraints of individuals, as they experience them on a day-to-day basis.

2. Objectives

In the following chart we set out how we met the 2 aims and 6 objectives of our work.

Aim/Objective	How addressed and whether met
1. Practical overview of the relationship between environmental issues & human behaviour in low-income areas	Existing evidence and field research provided a detailed picture of environmental issues and behaviour in low-income areas and the links between them.
2. Lessons for supporting behaviour change	We identified factors that influence people's environmental behaviour in low-income areas. Suggesting potential lessons and starting points for those supporting environmental behaviour change.
3. Explore links between local concerns and wider environmental problems	The overview identified evidence of the link between local concerns and wider environmental issues. Focus group participants saw connections between local and wider problems.
4. Review residents' impact on developing sustainable solutions	Local managers provided some evidence how local residents interact with service providers to solve local environmental problems. Participants in the focus groups detailed involvement in local action to address environmental problems such as practical environmental projects, clean ups and recycling.
5. Explore whether local responses lead to behaviour change for national/global environmental goals	We asked managers and residents about local environmental actions leading to wider behaviour change. We found energy saving and regeneration efforts as the main links.
6. Suggestions for public policy responses	We developed suggestions for public policy and practitioners who are trying to change people's environmental behaviour, based on our findings. These fed into the Sustainable Development Strategy and the Sustainable Communities Plan delivery.
7. Voice for low-income residents	Focus groups allowed residents in low-income areas to feed their experiences and thoughts directly into a national research programme on environmental behaviour. This was a unique contribution to the programme.
8. Explore whether tackling local environmental problems reduces outward sprawl and the polarisation of existing communities	Both residents and managers were asked about the impact of local environmental conditions on attitudes to community viability and sustainability. Evidence confirmed the impact of poor area environments on the survival of areas.

3. Methods

Overview of existing evidence

We reviewed existing quantitative and qualitative evidence to build a detailed picture of environmental problems, attitudes and behaviour in the UK, including specific evidence about low-income areas, different social classes and income groups. We identified existing evidence through our knowledge of, and involvement with, work in this field, together with internet and journal searches and a search of the UK data archive.

Low-income areas study

We chose 6 areas from 12 areas that have been carefully selected to reflect the characteristics and distribution of the most disadvantaged areas in Britain for the ESRC funded longitudinal Areas study (Lupton, 2003). This allowed us to link into a pre-selected representative sample of low-income areas where background information was already available. It also put our results about environmental issues into the context of a detailed picture of low-income neighbourhoods. Annexe 1 gives more information on the 12 areas.

The 6 focus groups attracted 75 residents in 6 low-income areas. The participants were recruited through local organisations, local workers and posters. Each focus group was facilitated by the project researcher, using a standard set of questions to guide discussion on environmental issues, concerns and action. We recorded the focus group discussions and produced transcribed records of the discussion. We also asked the participants to complete a questionnaire covering questions about environmental concern and action. Annexes 1 and 2 give more detail on participants and the focus group organisation.

In our interviews with local managers

We asked about environmental issues, action and concerns during interviews conducted as part of the CASE Areas study. Comments and discussion on these issues, with a total of 18 housing, regeneration, community and neighbourhood workers in our 6 areas, were made available as part of our study.

Think-tank event

We held a think-tank event at LSE with policy makers and practitioners in June 2004 to discuss our findings and gather views about the challenge of changing people's environmental behaviours from a wide range of 62 participants. We incorporated findings into our work. Annexe 4 provides more detail.

Analysis

We used Anne Power's well-established method for analysing both qualitative and quantitative findings from area based research to analyse our findings (Power, 1997). We used a grounded theory approach, starting with hypotheses from our existing work and knowledge in the field. We tested these and based our conclusions on the results.

We carried out a thematic analysis of the focus group transcripts, local manager interviews and think-tank findings. This involved grouping comments relating to the three main research issues. Findings were then categorised to identify themes illustrated by specific examples and quotes. We counted the number of times each theme was raised as significant, gave a clear weighting to specific issues. In addition, we put the questionnaire findings into SPSS to provide a quantitative analysis of responses from focus group participants.

Ethical considerations

We asked permission of the focus group participants to record their discussions and use them for the purpose of this study. We undertook to make identities and comments confidential, and have done so throughout.

We received permission from the ESRC Areas programme to include questions on environmental issues in their interviews with service providers, and have used the resulting information in accordance with their guidelines.

4. Results

A. Overview of existing evidence

Environmental issues in low-income areas – environmental inequality

The quality of the local environment – i.e. the places where we live – is very important to people and their quality of life, and ‘liveability’ issues, such as the state of streets and parks, rank in the top four issues that people say would improve the quality of life in their area (ODPM, 2003). Local environmental problems are worse in low-income areas. For example, approximately 80% of dwellings situated in neighbourhoods with poor local environmental quality are in the most deprived 40% of wards (ODPM, 2003). Between two and four times as many people from the lowest income group in urban areas report problems such as vandalism, poor quality homes, noisy neighbours and attacks as being ‘common’ or ‘very common’, compared to people reporting these problems from the highest income group (ODPM, 2003). These local environmental conditions are reflected in greater dissatisfaction and serious impacts on quality of life for those living in low-income areas (Mumford & Power, 2003). In addition to worse local environments, evidence suggests that low-income areas also suffer disproportionately from other environmental problems, such as air pollution, traffic problems, and proximity to polluting factories and sources of carcinogenic emissions (e.g. Walker et al., 2003; Friends of the Earth, 2001; Environment Agency, 2002).

Wider environmental issues

Surveys of the British public have generally shown a picture of fairly high environmental concern (e.g. DETR, 2002; MORI, 1997; Park et al. (eds), 2001). For example, environment/pollution ranked as the fourth most often mentioned issue when people were asked the open question of what issue the Government should be dealing with; a quarter of respondents mentioned this issue (DEFRA, 2002). 71% of respondents to a MORI survey disagreed with the statement that ‘too much fuss is made about the environment these days’ (MORI, 1997).

Environmental actions in the UK

Levels of environmental action vary widely, depending on the type of action. At the highest end, for example, three quarters of respondents in two major national surveys report switching lights off when they leave a room for a short time, and 66% said they regularly avoided using pesticides in their garden (Park et al. (eds), 2001; DETR, 2002). Around 50% of respondents reported recycling paper and 56% said they took action to encourage wildlife in their gardens (Park et al. (eds), 2001; DETR, 2002). Lower numbers reported, for example, paying attention to the amount of wrapping or packaging on a product before buying it, recycling cans, or cutting down on the use of their car for short journeys (30% reported these three). 18% said they bought organic food (Park et al. (eds), 2001; DETR,

2002). Actions are not usually motivated by environmental reasons. Only around 15% of respondents said that they cut down on gas, electricity or car use specifically to help the environment or reduce pollution.

Barriers to taking action vary depending on the action in question. In the case of recycling, lack of convenience or effort involved are the most commonly reported barriers (DETR, 2002). With cutting down on car, or energy, use the most common barriers were that the respondent felt they could not use any less than they already did (DETR, 2002). The majority of respondents felt that they could make a difference to environmental problems with individual action (72%), but less felt they could do so unless others were doing the same (57%) (Park et. al., 2001).

Attitudes, concerns and actions in low-income communities

Existing evidence shows some differences between people in different social classes or income groups in terms of environmental actions and attitudes. However there are no significant differences in relation to levels of environmental concern and knowledge (e.g. DETR, 2002; Park et. al. (eds), 2001)

Respondents from the highest social class were more likely than those from the lower social classes to recycle, compost and say they had bought organic food, or regularly used energy saving light bulbs (DETR, 2002).

Respondents in the highest social class were less likely than those from lower social classes to report cutting down on electricity, gas or water use, with little difference between the other four classes (DETR, 2002). Respondents from the highest two social classes often gave protecting the environment as a reason for cutting down on electricity, gas or car use, more than lower social classes, while more respondents from the lowest social classes gave 'saving money', as a reason why they had cut down on car use (DETR, 2002).

No differences were apparent in other examples:

- avoiding buying products that cause damage to wildlife, deciding not to buy a product because it had too much packaging, and cutting down on use of a car (DETR, 2002)
- what people thought were most important for Government to be dealing with, levels of environmental knowledge and levels of concern expressed about a pre-set list of environmental issues (DETR, 2002)
- how environmentally active a person was. However the single biggest factor having an influence was degree-level education. This is obviously more common in higher income areas (Park et. al. (eds) 2001)

How local environmental problems interact with global environmental problems

What happens at the local level clearly often has wider implications. For example, car use and poorly insulated buildings lead to more carbon dioxide emissions that contribute to global warming. One specific example from existing literature is the link between the state of local neighbourhood and urban environments and the processes of area decline, city sprawl and green field development.). Poor local environments are a key factor in making people want to leave an area (Rogers and Power, 2000; Mumford and Power, 2002).

Knowledge about human behaviour and influencing how people act

There is a wide body of knowledge and theory about how people behave and the factors that influence their behaviour, much of it developed in the psychology, marketing and public health fields. We have drawn on reviews of behaviour change theories (Halpern et. al., 2004).

A basic model of human behaviour, is that people act rationally to maximise their welfare by weighing up different options in terms of costs and benefits. This popular model has been shown to be too simplistic for understanding people's behaviour – for example, people rarely act entirely 'rationally' and are just as likely to follow emotional cues. However, it is still often used as a basis for interventions designed to change people's behaviour, for example, the provision of information so people can make better informed rational choices.

A wide range of more sophisticated theories and models have been developed to better explain people's behaviour. They tend to acknowledge the influence of multiple interacting factors on people's behaviour, acting at different levels, in different ways and often in different directions. These more complex theories address factors:

- at the level of individuals, such as the fact that people use mental short cuts and generalisations
- relating to the effect of others, such as peer pressure and the importance of social relationships in shaping behaviour
- that operate at the level of communities and institutions, such as the ways in which ideas spread through societies

Environmental issues are often complex, with unclear solutions, and often low political and media profiles (Demos/Green Alliance, 2003). Environmental problems offer some specific challenges in relation to the role of people's behaviour, and how to change it (Demos/Green Alliance, 2003; Park, et. al. (eds.), 2001). For example, global environmental problems are collective problems, for example, climate change affects us all. Meanwhile, causes are often diffuse, for example, many individuals drive cars. But any benefits that follow from individual behaviour changes tend to be seen at the collective level. For example, stopping driving your car has little immediate personal benefit, rather a long-term collective benefit.

Different theories to understand people's environmental behaviour are in use, and these often lead to different approaches to the task of trying to change behaviours. For example, the conventional economic viewpoint of consumption behaviour as a pursuit of well-being, as distinct from the sustainable development viewpoint that consumption can reduce well-being by creating greater inequality and environmental damage (Jackson, 2004).

Some studies have explored the factors that actually influence environmental behaviour (e.g. Barr et. al., 2003; MacNaughten and Jacobs, 1997). An important finding from this work has been that different environmental actions can be fundamentally different in nature, and be influenced by different factors. For example, recycling behaviour was primarily determined by access to good kerbside recycling facilities, good knowledge of existing facilities and experience that recycling is easy and convenient. Reduction and re-use, on the other hand, are much more private behaviours, and are influenced by factors, such knowledge and concern about waste issues, and whether people think these actions will make a difference (Barr et. al., 2003).

B. Results from our focus groups study

Participants discussed a wide range of problems in their local areas, illustrating the significant difficulties faced by residents living in low-income areas. As reported in previous studies, participants' responses gave a wide definition of local 'environmental' problems, which fell under three broad categories:

- physical problems such as lack of green space, dirty streets and poor quality housing
- social problems such as crime, unemployment, antisocial behaviour, and tensions between established and new communities in areas
- problems specifically relating to services or facilities, such as poor transport, too few police, lack of recycling facilities, and service providers not involving the community

Some participants talked about wanting to leave the areas because of poor local environmental conditions.

Wider environmental problems

Focus group participants identified many wider environmental problems that they were aware of and concerned about, including, for example, biodiversity loss, global warming, and concern about overuse of the world's resources. The discussion also showed that many participants understood these issues, as opposed to having just heard of them. Participants discussed the mechanisms and complexities underlying many of these global problems, including the role of the consumerist system and population growth putting pressure on resources.

This knowledge and concern was widespread among the participants – not just a concerned few. Approximately 40 out of the 75 participants in the 6 focus groups raised new global environmental issues in their focus group discussion, issues that no-one else had already raised. Over half raised new issues in each of the 6 focus groups. Only four people out of the 75 participants in the six focus groups said that they did not have much to say about wider environmental issues, were not worried about them, or thought that it should be something for younger generations to worry about. We recorded 80 individual comments relating to wider global environmental or sustainability issues during the six focus groups. Participants readily identified ways in which global problems impact on their everyday lives, such as through changes to the weather, increased risk of skin cancer and loss of jobs in Britain due to globalisation.

Two examples of typical comments follow:

'Walking around with the dog....I see a lot of the sort of environment in the area, and you can just tell, there are things..[in flower]..that you just wouldn't have normally. It just brings it home sometimes. When you hear about global warming it seems like something theoretical, then you can begin to sort of see the signs of it in the local community'.
Sheffield, Male

'The whole air pollution, car fumes, factories, and everything else because it's had a dramatic effect on people's health. We've seen that by the increases in the cases of asthma in young children and how that's escalated in the last 10 years'.
Knowsley, Female

Responsibility for environmental problems

Participants demonstrated an awareness and understanding of many of the causes that lie behind the local and global problems that they had identified, ranging from inequality and consumerism to too few litter bins and lack of investment in public transport.

Participants put a strong emphasis both on the role of individuals and society. The most common single response to the question of who is to blame for local and global environmental problems was 'we are' or 'people', and over a half of all responses to this question related to the role of individuals or society. For example, the way young people are brought up, and the fact that we have become a 'throwaway society'. Talking about the problem of throwing rubbish around, one said: 'Everybody's got pockets'. Another added in:

'It's right, people need to take responsibility, but there aren't many bins around here and they are often overflowing'. Sheffield, Female

However, participants put this emphasis on individuals into a wider context. They acknowledged that businesses and government, as well as individuals, were to blame and discussed how people's individual behaviour is constrained and manipulated, how social changes and norms have an influence, and the role of factors beyond individual control which shape what happens:

'It's a bit of both. Industry are actually pressurising us to buy these things, telling us 'you can have this, you can't live without a DVD player..'. So it's a bit of both, it's society changing but I think it's the global, the large corporations are a lot to blame...It's very difficult to break the cycle because a lot of these multinationals are bigger than countries, they have more sway over the world than even individual countries do.....so we as a small community we can do our bit to recycle but we're not going to get past a certain [level of impact]...' Redcar, Female

Environmental action

During the focus group discussions, the participants – unprompted – reported a wide range of personal actions with potential benefit to the local and global problems they had been discussing. For example, cleaning up their local area, community action to influence service providers, cutting down on car use and growing their own food.

When asked about a pre-set list of potential personal actions through the questionnaire, actions with direct relevance to wider environmental problems were commonly reported, with nearly 60 of the 72 respondents reporting that they turned lights off when not using them, and used energy saving light bulbs. Less common actions included belonging to a local environmental action group (reported by 20 out of 72), and buying dolphin friendly tuna (reported by 17 respondents).

Only three out of the 72 participants who filled in a questionnaire said that they did none of the pre-set list of actions. The participants were aware of the range of desirable actions that they could take to help address environmental problems, including clearing up rubbish in their local area, walking and cycling more, consuming goods with less packaging and using less electricity.

During discussion, respondents, unprompted, raised many barriers to taking action on local or global environmental problems in 3 main groups:

- Barriers to accessing solutions, such as lack of or poorly designed facilities (for example, no recycling scheme), cost/poverty (for example, cannot afford organic food), inconvenience or lack of knowledge/skills (for example, does not know about free bulk waste collection). The most commonly mentioned barriers related to facilities or infrastructure
- Barriers to motivation, such as lack of incentive, mixed messages/lack of clarity about whether actions are worthwhile and more immediate problems taking precedence
- Barriers relating to the wider social or cultural context, such as the difficulty of opting out of the consumerist system and inbuilt obsolescence of goods

The majority of the barriers mentioned relate to the context in which people are acting, such as problems with facilities or prohibitive costs. A much smaller number of barriers relate to individuals in and of themselves, such as people being too lazy or feeling that they cannot use their car less.

What people think government should be doing to help

Participants thought that Government could respond to local and global environmental problems, in four main ways:

- practical services, such as providing more bins and recycling schemes, higher profile policing and developing more environmentally friendly alternatives
- economic or legal actions, such as fines and incentives, polluter pays, and restricting people's actions
- empowering people, by giving greater control over decisions and resources to local communities alongside more information and education
- international action, such as cancelling developing countries' debts, encouraging jobs in Britain, and working to get international agreement on pollution control (including the Kyoto agreement)

The relationship between local and global problems

When asked to rank a series of local and global issues in order of importance on the questionnaire, on average the participants ranked local issues, such as tackling crime, clean streets, and safe parks, above global problems, such as stopping global warming and the hole in the ozone layer. For example:

'They're important but they're not as important as what you live in. So I mean if I was in the European Union or something like that then I'd probably say global warming is really important to me, or the rainforests, I'd go along with that. But while you're living in an area like this, they go on the back burner'. Redcar, Female

On average, the participants put the lowest priority on 'saving money personally'.

When we analysed unprompted discussion about the relationship between local and global issues during the focus groups, the emerging issues fell into three categories:

- the importance of starting at the local level with people, for example addressing local problems before people can move on to wider problems, stressing that if everyone looked after their own area this would add up to wider improvements
- the effect of global issues on people's local experiences, such as the loss of jobs when companies re-locate to take advantage of weaker environmental regulations abroad

- interlinked causes, for example, growing populations putting pressure on local resources, such as schools, as well as global resources

C. Findings from local managers

We interviewed 18 housing, regeneration, community and neighbourhood managers and workers in the 6 focus group areas. Managers talked about many local environmental issues, but rarely linked these to global environmental concerns. The main issues raised were:

- decay, vandalism, lack of maintenance, housing abandonment
- litter, rubbish, dumping, abandoned cars
- ugly, poorly used spaces, unwanted bare sites
- fear of crime and disorder keeping people away from green spaces bad behaviour, poverty and ignorance (leading to neglect, dumping etc)
- lack of maintenance and repair
- poorly maintained gardens, paved over front gardens

Managers often get overwhelmed by problems and under-resourced to tackle them.

Some measures were being taken to address environmental problems, often in response to community pressure to tackle local environmental problems. Most had some impact, including:

- neighbourhood wardens and rapid response squads
- extra clean ups, stricter supervision of areas and more skips
- selective demolition leading to the creation of open spaces
- Warm Front and other anti-fuel poverty measures

But many environmental issues remained unresolved:

- inadequate recycling measures made it difficult for residents to take action
- trees and shrubs were removed to make areas easier to clean

Many staff believed that poverty needs made environmental problems less significant and environmental issues were generally low priority except for neighbourhood workers. Local managers in housing and regeneration had scope to influence behaviour and decisions in favour of more environmentally friendly approaches. However, generally, they did not see it as high priority and were less concerned than residents about the environment.

The information provided by local managers led us to several conclusions. Action on local environmental problems is patchy but where taken it does have a positive impact and offers the wider environmental benefit of stabilising turnover in some neighbourhoods and revaluing property that otherwise might have been demolished. The links with energy efficiency, recycling and global environmental problems are not generally made. Poverty and deprivation are seen as a cause of environmental problems and an excuse for inaction. Local environments reflect area poverty, bad behaviour (i.e. environmental damage) and poor services (i.e. inadequate cleaning). This makes the areas visibly unattractive and drives demand for housing elsewhere. This results in selective local demolition and new building, both of which have significant environmental impacts.

5. Conclusions

Overall our findings show that our five hypotheses were supported by the evidence we uncovered. The study shows an awareness of environmental problems and actions among residents in low-income areas that belies many firmly held assumptions. People in low-income areas are aware of wider as well as local environmental problems and possible solutions. People can also relate global problems to their everyday lives

Individual environmental action can often be dependent on a supportive context and ease of execution. This requires a framework that makes action relatively easy, that involves many people, and that has obvious benefits, both locally and more widely to do so. But barriers to action are often serious, for example, lack of options or facilities for recycling. Local managers highlighted the potential for a stronger environmental response in poor areas but showed weak motivation and generally unimaginative ideas of what could be done

Many residents in poor areas share a similar view of sustainable development with the rest of the country. There is no big gap in understanding. Many people already agree that action on environmental problems is necessary, and are willing to act. They need more support, incentives and a clear sense of direction.

6. Impacts

Through Anne Power's wider advisory role in Government our work has fed directly into the following fields, leading to new policy debates and a refocus of thinking in relation to low-income areas:

- the Government Sustainable Development Strategy launched by the Prime Minister in March 2005 has developed a much stronger emphasis on community involvement in low-income areas;
- the Sustainable Communities Plan delivery is being revised in response to our findings on environmental impacts and sustainability in low-income areas;
- the ESRC funded Areas and Families study has incorporated environmental issues into a work programme at Trafford Hall;
- the National Tenants Resource Centre has embarked on a training and grants programme for environmental action in low-income areas;
- the Treasury and ODPM are reviewing VAT on repair to existing buildings;
- ODPM is funding research into the sustainability of existing buildings and communities;
- new ODPM ministers are reviewing demolition plans in the light of environmental impacts and community responses.

7. Future research

The most important future research question is what makes existing communities attractive and accessible to low income as well as higher income residents? How can we achieve sustainable communities and how can we make the existing built stock environmentally as well as socially beneficial? At the finer scale, further investigation of how differences in circumstance influence people's environmental concerns, motivations and action; and of the practicalities of supporting the transition to action.

Please see Annexes for supplementary information.

8. References

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9. Annexes

1. Background information about the six focus group areas
2. Details of focus group participants
3. Focus group organisation
4. Questionnaire
5. Focus group study results tables
6. Data archives

Annex 1– Background information about the six focus group areas

The table below provides an overview of the 12 Areas study areas and neighbourhoods, as summarised by the Area study’s principle researcher. The six areas we chose for our focus groups study are indicated with asterisks. More detailed background on the 6 study areas follows the table. The names of the areas have been changed.

Area	Current fortunes	Type of area	Environmental issues (mentioned by local interviewees, and observed by researcher)
*‘West-City’, Hackney, London	Improving	Inner city, 1960s flats	Traffic pollution Lack of safe green space Dirty environment, neglected buildings
*‘East Docks’, Newham, London	Improving	Inner city, 30s/40s council estates and flats	Ugly pylons, dominating road layout, lack of safe green space, bleak appearance
*‘Overtown’, Knowsley	Declining	City edge, 30s/40s council estates	Very poor local environment, empty houses and lack of green space
‘Riverlands’, Nottingham	Stable	Inner city, 1970s council housing	Nice environment, especially in parks
‘Shipview’, Newcastle	Declining	Outer city 30s/40s estates	Litter, dog mess, neglected gardens
*‘The Valley’, Sheffield	Declining	Inner city, mixed housing	Parts are nice, parts are seriously run down
‘High Moor’, Blackburn	Stable	Industrial town, mixed estates and older street properties	Good neighbourhood management, improving
*‘Middle Row’, Birmingham	Improving	Inner city, Victorian terraces	Pollution, traffic, rats, dumped rubbish, no open space
‘Fairfields’, Caerphilly	Declining	Mining village, mixed housing	Ex-mining sites being greened over, but dumped cars
*‘Southside’, Redcar and Cleveland	Declining	City edge, industrial, mixed housing	Lot of contaminated land, historically industrial pollution
‘Kirkside East’, Leeds	Declining	Outer city, 30s/40s council estates	Large open areas, improved neighbourhood management, but still problematic
‘Beachville’, Thanet	Improving	Seaside town, mixed estates	Some regeneration, but many run down streets

‘West City’ in **Hackney**, London was a densely populated inner-city area consisting mainly of council flats. West-City had been a white working-class community but its character had changed rapidly in the 1990s, with a growing minority ethnic population, including significant numbers of Turks and Kurds, Africans and Asians, as well as an increase in higher income households, because of its proximity to central London.

‘East-Docks’ in the Docklands area of **Newham**, inner London. Like West-City, East-Docks was formerly a white working-class area but was becoming much more ethnically diverse. Extensive bomb-damaged in the war, it had been rebuilt with a mix of family houses and high-rise flats, and was mainly council owned. It suffered steep economic decline with the collapse of the docks in the 1970s and 1980s, but in the late 1990s had begun to recover, with a major new exhibition centre, hotels and retail developments.

‘The Valley’ in **Sheffield** was an inner-city area with a mix of housing types; large Edwardian houses, Victorian terraces and modern council houses and flats, and high numbers of empty properties in pockets. It was close to the city centre but also to Sheffield’s steelworks, and had suffered serious economic decline in the 1970s and 1980s. At the start of the Areas study, unemployment was high and the area had a reputation for crime and drug dealing. An extremely diverse area, it had a white majority, a long-established Caribbean population, significant and growing Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups, as well as smaller minority ethnic groups such as Somalis and Yemenis.

‘Middle Row’ in inner-city **Birmingham** consists mainly of Victorian terraced homes, many of them in poor condition and occupied by owners on very low incomes. The area had a predominantly Pakistani and Bangladeshi population and was extremely deprived, with very high unemployment and benefit dependency, and poor health. It was, nevertheless, a popular area among the Asian community and a vibrant one, with plentiful shops, restaurants and other small businesses.

‘Overtown’ in Knowsley, **Merseyside**, a white working-class area consisting mainly of council housing estates built in the 1930s and 1940s. Employment on the nearby industrial estates collapsed during the 1970s and 1980s and the area had exceptionally high levels of worklessness, benefit dependency, lone parenthood and teen pregnancy. Housing demand was falling and there were pockets of empty housing.

‘Southside’, on the banks of the River Tees in the Borough of **Redcar and Cleveland** was made up of three small adjoining towns forming one urban area. It had a predominantly white working-class population and depended for its employment on the huge steelworks, shipyards and chemical plants that still dominated the landscape. Massive industrial decline in the 1970s and 1980s had led to depopulation and long-term unemployment. In the early to mid 1990s, parts of the area began to suffer severe crime and disorder and extensive housing abandonment.

Annex 2 – Details of focus group participants

The following table provides details about the residents we spoke to in our six areas (information provided by the participants through self-completed questionnaires).

<i>Gender</i>	Female	30
	Male	45
Age	16-21	5
	22-30	4
	31-45	13
	46-60	18
	61+	20
Ethnicity	Non-white ethnic minority background	20
	White	42
	Other	6
Involved with a community group	Yes	55
	No	13

Area	Number of focus group participants
Hackney	12
Newham	7
Sparkbrook	16
Hyton	16
Burngreave	13
Southbank	8

Annex 3 – Focus group organisation

We began the focus groups by talking about the local area. We first asked participants to tell us about one thing that they liked about their local area (with prompts, if necessary, to get people to talk about a positive aspect).

Next we asked participants to write down three environmental problems in the area where they lived that concerned them. The focus group facilitator then went around the group asking each participant in turn to read out/talk about the problems they had listed. We documented these.

After discussing the local problems that people were concerned about, the focus group facilitator asked the participants about wider environmental problems. This was done: by directly asking whether there were wider environmental problems that people were concerned about (usually with some examples, such as ‘global warming’, ‘rainforest destruction’, or ‘recycling’); or, where people were unclear about this, by asking whether participants could think of anything we do which is bad for the environment, and then moving on to ask about any other wider environmental problems that people were concerned about, or whether they thought they were important.

We also asked participants whether they thought that these wider global environmental problems affected their day-to-day lives, and whether they could think of any ways in which they did so.

We asked participants who or what they thought was to blame, or was responsible, for the local and global problems they had identified and discussed. Although we did not ask people directly in the focus groups, we also noted any actions that participants talked about carrying out.

We recorded points made during discussion, which related to barriers to action, although we did not ask a direct question about this.

We also asked participants in the focus groups what they would do if they were living in an ideal world, to try and help address the local and wider environmental problems they had raised. We wanted to get a feel for what the focus group participants thought Government or others should be doing to address the local and global environmental problems they had raised. We asked the focus group participants what they would do to try and tackle the (local and global) problems they had been talking about if they were Tony Blair, or ‘in charge’. This approach elicited clear responses which we tabulated under common themes.

Annex 4 – Questionnaire

1. Gender: Male Female **2. Age:** 16 – 21 22 – 30 31 – 45 46 – 60 61 +

3. Is your landlord (please tick):

- A Housing Association A Housing Action Trust (HAT)
 A local authority/the Council A private landlord
 An EMB or Tenant Management Organisation None (Owner – Occupier/Right to Buy)

4. Please tick the category that describes you

- Black, African Black, Caribbean Black, Other Chinese
 Indian Bangladeshi Pakistani White Other

5. Are you involved with any community groups? (please tick) yes no

If YES please specify which one

6. How long have you been living in this area?

7. What do you think about the local environment where you live?

- I like it I don't like it

WHY?.....

8. Please rank the following in order of importance (using numbers 1- 10)

Issue	Rank 1= most important 10= least important
Tackling crime	
Stopping global warming	
Saving money (personally)	
Safe parks	
Fixing the hole in the ozone layer	
Animal welfare	
Clean streets	
Having an energy efficient home	
Good public transport	
Building a good community	

9. Do you? (please tick any of the following that apply to you)

Recycle paper, bottles or cans Try not to drop litter Buy dolphin friendly tuna

Use energy saving light bulbs Turn lights off when not using them

Re-use bags or jars Have any energy efficiency improvements in your home (e.g. double glazing)

Belong to a local environment action group (please specify)

.....

Other environmental activities (please say what)

.....

NONE OF THE ABOVE

10. What would make you recycle more? (please tick any that would help)

If there was a closer recycling bank If all my neighbours did it

If I was given separate boxes and they were collected from my home

Nothing Other (please say what)

.....

All information will be treated confidentially.

THANK YOU!

Annex 5 – Focus group study results tables

Table 1: Local environmental problems

Local environmental problems that bother people		Number of times mentioned
Physical problems	Problems with cleanliness and lack of care, for example litter, fly tipping, dog fouling and graffiti	83
	Problems with low demand and abandonment, for example derelict houses, people and businesses not wanting to move into the area, loss of shops and facilities	14
	Problems with open spaces, such as lack of green space/parks not safe, wasteland and bad lighting	14
	Problems with traffic/cars, for example problems with parking and congestion, speeding, too many cars in not enough space	12
	Problems with housing, for example poor quality, poorly maintained, lack of refurbishment	12
	Pollution and environmental health problems, such as air pollution, engine fumes and asthma	5
	Noise, for example fireworks, scooters, in general	4
	‘Dirty neighbour’ – landfill site, rubbish tip, incinerator	3
	Total	147
‘Social’ problems	Antisocial behaviour and problems with young people	28
	Crime and drug related crime	27
	Immigrants/new communities/newcomers, for example not learning English, not mixing, different facilities (perceived lack of fairness)	3
	People’s attitudes, for example apathy, ‘let the council do it’, disheartened	3
	Private and absentee landlords	2
	Unemployment	2
	Total	65
Services and facilities	Problems with facilities and services, for example privatisation, poor transport services, not enough litter bins	26
	Problems with police/wardens, for example not enough on the streets, lack of trust in the police, unresponsiveness	8
	Problems with recycling facilities, for example lack of recycling initiatives, poorly designed or implemented	3
	Lack of community involvement/not working with the community	2
	Total	39
Overall total of local environmental problems raised		251

Table 2 – Global environmental problems mentioned in focus groups

Global issues raised that bother people	Number of times mentioned
Pollution, including chemical pollution from industry, global pollution generally	16
Tree clearance and forest destruction	9
Problems relating to cars and engines – resulting pollution and emissions	9
Concern about future implications of current behaviour/secretcy and lack of knowledge	8
Global warming and changes to weather	7
Biodiversity loss – local and global	6
Globalisation/unequal power and economic power	6
Throwaway society/wastefulness/not recycling enough	4
Ozone layer	2
Other, including population and nuclear proliferation	12
Not much to say on wider problems/sticks to local problems	11
Total	90

Table 3 – Ways in which global environmental problems affect people’s everyday lives identified by focus group participants

Problem	Day to day effect identified	Number of times mentioned
Global warming	Weather changes	7
	Skin cancer (sic)	1
Air pollution	Asthma	6
Globalisation/ consumerism	Sucked into consumerism/materialism/hard or impossible to opt out of ‘the system’/food no longer seasonal/loss of jobs in Britain/migration pressures	5
	Growing inequality/political repression/lack of power to influence decisions	3
Destruction of natural ecosystems	Loss of natural ecosystem functions, e.g. trees/water pollution/loss of fish stocks	2
Other/various	Concern about children/future generations	4
	Changes to food, including GM, no seasonal foods, blander taste/poorer quality	2
	Loss/degradation of countryside/water shortages	2
Total		32

Table 4 – Who or what participants thought was responsible for local and global problems

Who is to blame	Example	Number of respondents mentioning
Individuals or society	‘We are’/‘people’	15
	Society – e.g. we live in a consumer/throwaway society; social norms; way young people are brought up; cultural differences	13
	No respect/no stake in the area – from people passing through/vandalism/laziness/apathy	6
	Lack of knowledge/education, for example about recycling opportunities or how to grow your own vegetables	3
Government	No search for/haven’t pushed alternatives (e.g. wind farms, transport, LPG)	3
	Not putting enough pressure on bad practices/governments elsewhere in the world; letting other countries come and dump things	2
	Building more motorways rather than improving public transport like other countries such as Scandinavia; given into car lobby/should be setting an example (John Prescott – 2 cars)	3
Business and making money	Pressurising people to buy things/packaging industry	6
The local authority	e.g. Haven’t got the resources to enforce regulations; not enough litter bins; recycling scheme poorly designed	5
Western world/consumerism/globalisation	For example, destroying forests to produce beef for McDonalds	4
USA	e.g. Biggest users of trees; Bush won’t sign Kyoto	3
Other Inequality/poverty	e.g. poverty; greed	3
Total		66

Table 5 – Number of respondents reporting a range of environmentally friendly behaviours (derived from 72 questionnaires)

Action	Number of respondents reporting action in questionnaire
Try not to drop litter	62
Turn off lights when not using them	59
Use energy saving light bulbs	58
Re-use bags or jars	52
Recycling paper, bottles etc.	41
Have energy efficiency improvements in their home	39
Belong to a local environmental action group	21
Buy dolphin-friendly tuna	17
None of the above	3
Total actions recorded	349
Average actions reported per respondent	5

Table 6 – Personal environmental actions reported by participants

Action	Personal/community action	Number reporting (not prompted)
<i>In response to local environmental problems</i>		
Personal action:	Cleaning up	6
	Challenging the behaviour of others	4
	Reporting problems/trying to influence service providers	4
	Introducing themselves to new neighbours	1
Involvement in community action:	General (including helping run services/facilities)	5
	Specific environmental improvements, (including planting)	3
	Lobbying/trying to influence service providers	7
<i>In response to wider environmental problems</i>		
	Recycling/re-use	4
	Protesting/member of an environmental pressure group	3
	Work to enhance wildlife/volunteering on environmental project abroad/grow own food	3
	Deliberately not using car	2
	Installed double glazing (with grant from the council)	1
	Total	43

Table 7 – Barriers to environmental action recorded during the focus group discussions (responses not prompted)

Barriers	Examples	Approx times mentioned by participants
Accessing solutions		27
Lack of, problem with, or poorly designed, facilities/infrastructure	no recycling scheme; pensioners cannot lift the recycling bins	13
Cost/poverty	public transport too expensive; can't afford to buy organic food	5
Inconvenience	'I don't want to have to walk 5-10 minutes to put something in the [recycling] bin'	4
Lack of knowledge/education/skills	lack of knowledge about free bulk waste collection; young people are not taught how to grow anything	3
Problem out of circle of influence of an individual – need support to act	such as recycling, or double glazing	1
Concern for safety of young people	so won't allow to walk to school	1
Lack of 'buy in'		19
Lack of incentive	"I cannot use my car less than I do"	5
Mixed messages/unclear benefits	used to recycle until saw something in the media which made me think it was not worth while	3
People too lazy/get bored/not their problem/no point		4
People don't <u>have</u> to act /can get away with it	laws are not enforced; people don't have to pay true costs	2
More immediate local problems to address first		1
Experience of not being listened to/being disappointed		4
Barriers relating to the wider social or cultural context		8
Difficulty acting when the 'system' constrains what you can do	in-built senescence in goods and products; 'we're all sucked into capitalism'	4
Social factors	difficulty challenging behaviour of others; peer pressure	4
Total		54

Table 8 – Personal actions respondents said they would, or would like to take in an ideal world

Actions suggested/advocated		Approximate number of times mentioned
Social actions	Try and influence others to improve their environmental behaviour, for example by providing information, through discussion, get together a group for a national clean up day	11
	Encourage more community interaction/get people together to share problems and ideas/talk to people more/try and build a closer community	6
	Take part in practical environmental improvement work, for example improving parks, also international volunteer work	5
Changing consumption	Recycle	8
	Get rid of my car; walk or cycle more where possible	5
	Use less electricity	2
	Try and consume items with less packaging/try and organise consuming so it is less environmentally damaging	2
	Other e.g. opt out of consumer society	3
Small practical actions for local improvements	Clear rubbish from in front of my house	3
	Plant more plants, for example pot plants/keep home nice – nice place to return to	2
Work to influence the wider picture	Work/lobby for better youth facilities/campaigning and lobbying	4
Other personal	Try and empathise more with the natural world/self education about alternatives	2
Nothing, I do enough		1
Total		54

Table 9 – What respondents said they would do to address environmental problems (both local and wider) if they were ‘in charge’

Actions suggested/advocated		Number of times mentioned
Economic, legal and enforcement	Fines/punishment	12
	Enforcement	11
	Incentives	8
	New laws to protect plants, trees and environment	5
	Polluter pays/those who benefit put more back, for example those benefiting from globalisation should put money back into Southern countries	4
	Restrict what people can do, e.g. limit car use for short journeys	2
Changing/influencing/empowering people	Influence education/social norms; try and change attitudes/ increase respect	19
	More bottom up approach/local solutions and control of resources by local communities	13
Practical actions	Provide new facilities/services, for example trams, more bins, recycling schemes	11
	Develop alternatives at the national level, for example alternative fuels	4
	Clean up the area to make people want to move here	4
	Higher profile/ better policing	3
	Put transport back into public ownership	3
International action	Help empower developing countries ; cancel debt	6
	Be more proactive internationally, for example get worldwide agreement on pollution reduction, get all countries to sign Kyoto	5
	Keep jobs in Britain	2
Other	Greater equality; reduce wasteful consumption; more information	12
Total		124

Table 10 – How the respondents ranked different pre-determined issues in order of importance – issues presented in order of average ranking – based on questionnaire feedback

Issue	Ranking
Tackling crime	1
Building a good community	2
Clean streets	3
Safe parks	4
Good public transport	5
Having an energy efficient home	6
Stopping global warming	7
Fixing the hole in the ozone layer	7
Animal welfare	7
Saving money personally	10

Note: 1 = most important
10 = least important

Annex 6 - Data archives

The data generated by this study is archived at the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion at LSE. The data archive covers:

- electronic versions of transcriptions of focus group discussions
- typed notes from interviews with managers and officers
- typed full overview of existing evidence
- reports and records collected during the study