

Local Authorities and Sustainable Development

Guidelines on Local Agenda 21

June 1995



Foreword by the Minister

Agenda 21, the major document produced at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, is a blueprint for meeting the challenges of environment and development into the next century. The global partnership which it established must build on national, regional and local efforts to achieve a more sustainable future.

The Government is committed to preparing a National sustainable Development Strategy; this will strongly emphasise the relationship between environmental quality and socio-economic growth. Sustainable development depends on concerted efforts at every level of government and society to change behaviour and consumption patterns which deplete natural resources and exceed the carrying capacity of the environment.

Agenda 21 recommended that local authorities should by 1996 develop a consensus on a local Agenda 21 for their communities. This is an important opportunity for local authorities, both in their internal operation and in the wider exercise of their powers and functions, to support and contribute to sustainable development. These Guidelines provide background on the issues involved and suggestions for carrying forward a Local Agenda 21. But the Guidelines are no more than a suggested framework; it will be for local authorities to lead by example in their areas, and to give democratic expression to the vision of the communities they represent.

Many of the foundations for a Local Agenda 21 process are already in place. Building on the strongly representative character of the local government system, on its key functions notably in the areas of planning and land use, environmental protection and infrastructure provision, and on the opportunities for co-ordination afforded by the regional authorities, Local Agenda 21 can give new emphasis and direction towards the goal of sustainable development. This is a long-term goal, but vision, commitment and action are needed now if we are to choose the right path towards its attainment.

In working towards a National Sustainable development strategy, I regard it as very important that awareness of sustainable development issues should intensify at all levels of government and society. I look forward to the wide participation of local authorities in Local Agenda 21 initiatives.

Brendan Howlin, T.D.,
Minister for the Environment

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“Because so many of the problems and solutions being addressed by Agenda 21 have their roots in local activities, the participation and co-operation of local authorities will be a determining factor in fulfilling its objectives.”

Agenda 21

Agenda 21, the United Nations Action Plan to achieve global sustainable development in the 21st century, calls upon local authorities worldwide to draw up Local Agenda 21's by 1996, to promote sustainable development at the local level.

In Ireland, the Government is committed to the preparation of a National Sustainable Development Strategy, to be published in mid-1996, which will address all areas of Government policy which impact on the environment. While this strategy will provide a framework for the integration of national environment and development policies, local government policies and programmes have a very substantial influence on the definition and achievement of environmentally sustainable development regionally and locally. It is therefore appropriate that local authorities should initiate the development of Local Agenda 21's while the national strategy is being developed, so that local initiatives complementing the national strategy can also be brought forward in 1996.

The achievement of sustainable development depends on the integration of well-defined sustainability criteria into all programmes and activities concerning environment and development. Local authorities have a key role to play in this regard, because of their wide-ranging responsibilities and functions in relation to the environment, planning, development, housing and the provision of other physical and

personal services. Activities which are largely controlled at local level, for example in regard to land use, waste disposal and water services, have a major impact on the environment. The planning of these activities and services, and their subsequent administration, therefore, has a critical role in securing balanced environmental protection and socio-economic development. This balance, respecting the capacity of the environment to sustain human activity now and into the future, and meeting public social, economic and cultural aspirations, is an essential basis for sustainable development.

This booklet is intended to explain briefly what Local Agenda 21 means, and to provide some guidelines for local authorities in preparing Local Agenda 21's. As the detail of this process, and its outcome, will vary from area to area, depending on the local environmental situation and the development priorities of each local authority and its community, it is not opportune for the guidelines to be narrowly prescriptive. However, it is hoped that general guidelines will usefully focus the main concerns of Local Agenda 21, and help to stimulate the reshaping of policies, programmes and activities to achieve its objectives.

Chapter 2

Background

Sustainable Development

At the UN Conference on Environment and Development (“the Earth Summit”) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, Ireland was one of over 150 nations which endorsed Agenda 21, a major blueprint for how the world’s nations can work individually and collectively towards sustainable development for the 21st century. Copies of “*The Earth Summit’s Agenda for Change*”, a plain language version of Agenda 21 and the other Agreements, were circulated to all local authorities by the Department of the Environment in October, 1993.

What is sustainable development? A standard definition was given in the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland report):

“development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

Sustainable development is not just about environmental protection, although this is important; it is also concerned with the quality of life, the range and distribution of resources and benefits, the interactions between environment and development, and provision for the future. In effect, it seeks to reconcile the socio-economic aspirations of society with the ability of the natural environment and its resources to accommodate those aspirations; to ensure that development is within the carrying capacity of the environment. This need to strike an appropriate balance between development and conservation is at the heart of sustainable development.

“The only way to assure ourselves of a safer, more prosperous future is to deal with environment and development issues together in a balanced manner.”

Agenda 21

Local Agenda 21 is intended to translate sustainable development principles and objectives into practical action at the local level.

Some of the major aims of Agenda 21 include:

- reducing the amount of energy and raw materials society consumes, as well as the pollution and waste it produces;
- protecting fragile ecosystems and environments;
- bringing about a fairer distribution of wealth, both between countries and between different social groups within countries – placing a special emphasis not just on the needs but on the rights of poor and disadvantaged people.

Achieving these aims will require positive action at all levels: local, regional, national and international. Sustainable development cannot be imposed; it can only be brought about by co-operation and partnership between all social and economic groups and interests.

Local Agenda 21

Local Agenda 21 is part of the process of defining and articulating sustainable development considerations at a local/regional level and identifying how they can be approached and achieved. It presupposes local policies, plans or programmes, the implementation of which will place development on a sustainable path for the long-term. Consultation and consensus-building are essential elements, but local authorities may choose different ways of reporting its outcome and defining an appropriate Local Agenda 21 for their areas. It is important, however, that the process should have concrete results which reflect local dialogue, review or redirect current programmes and activities, and place a new focus on sustainable development as both a strategic and a practical goal.

The principles of sustainable development which underpin Agenda 21 at global, national and local level, are paramount and should guide the overall approach. Many of the principles upon which Agenda 21 is founded were included in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. A number of them are reproduced below.

“People are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.”

“Development today must not undermine the development and environment needs of present and future generations.”

“In order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process, and cannot be considered in isolation from it.”

“Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens. Nations shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making environmental information widely available.”

“Peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indivisible.”

Rio Declaration on Environment and
Development, 1992

These guidelines illustrate some of the main concerns of Local Agenda 21 and provide suggestions on how they can be put into action, with particular reference to their integration with the performance of local authority functions. While the details of Local Agenda 21 will be decided at local level, the following outline may be a useful guide to the elements involved:

relevant policies, plans or programmes should be reviewed or developed to address environment and development concerns fully and reflect the overall vision of the community regarding sustainable development;

- the main issue of concern in the local authority area, and objectives and specific targets for achieving sustainable development, should be identified;
- the action to be taken, and by whom, to work towards these objectives and targets should be specified;
- details of how progress will be assessed, and a review process, should be defined;
- finished products encapsulating the above (such as an environmental charter, a policy document, a review of the Local Agenda 21 process and future outlook) should be clear, simple and acceptable to the wider community, and should be published and made widely available.

Role of Local Government

“As the level of government closest to the people, [local authorities] play a vital role in educating and mobilising the public around sustainable development.”

Agenda 21

Local government, because of its position in society, has a major role in promoting and working towards sustainable development. It is the political and administrative structure most closely related to local development. In discharging its role in the context of Local Agenda 21, the direct involvement and vision of the elected members is centrally important, as are the internal performance of local authorities and their overall approach to the planning, development and servicing of their areas.

Having regard to the different levels of local government in Ireland, it is suggested that, for the purposes of Local Agenda 21, the pivotal role should be taken at county/county borough level, where there is a major concentration of functions, responsibilities and capabilities which will be central to implementing sustainable development. There is also a role for borough corporations, urban district councils and town commissioners to add their own particular focus, and local dimension, within an overall county initiative.

Clearly, however, environment and development concerns are not confined within county boundaries. Regional authorities have the statutory role of providing regionally based co-ordination between local and other public authorities, and their vision and commitment in this regard will be an important element in achieving regional national development objectives. It is also recognised that a catchment based approach to environmental management may be an appropriate response in particular circumstances, for example to address deterioration in lake water quality, or other environmental remediation needs arising from multiple development pressures on sensitive natural resources.

In the light of regional aspects of sustainable development, and in view of their task of promoting co-ordination of public services in their regions, the regional authorities may also wish to play an active part in the

development and implementation of Local Agenda 21, taking a wider view of the issues involved so as to facilitate coherence and co-ordination between the initiatives of their constituent local authorities.

Local Agenda 21 can provide a mechanism for local authorities to consider the social and environmental impacts of their various activities, as well as the interaction between these activities and the practical objectives of sustainable development. Local Agenda 21 encourages local authorities to find ways of conserving resources, minimising adverse impacts on the environment and on society, and obtaining the maximum benefit – in financial, social and environmental terms - from the discharge of their functions. Detailed suggestions, focusing on performance issues and on key policies and activities are included in Chapter 3.

A Local Agenda 21 should involve the whole community, its local elected members and other community and representative groups. Ideally, there will be a broad collaborative approach guided and facilitated by local authorities. This will require the provision of information and raising of awareness, public consultation and feedback, partnerships between authorities, businesses and communities, and a continuous monitoring of progress towards sustainability. Ideas for action in these areas are outlined in Chapter 4.

“All of our decisions matter. The environment is dependent on our collective actions and tomorrow’s environment depends on how we act today.”

Dublin Declaration on the Environment,
European Council, 1990

The process of developing Local Agenda 21 can build on existing partnerships involving local government, and provide a framework for changes in attitudes and in practices, which can help move society towards the overall goal of sustainable development. In many cases, this work will already have begun. Local Agenda 21 can identify and encapsulate an overall, coherent vision of where it is leading, and allow local authorities to draw together their various commitments towards a more sustainable society in the long-term.

Local authorities are empowered under the Local Government Act, 1991, to take such action as is considered necessary to promote the interests of the local community. They are specifically empowered under section 5 to represent the interests of their communities. Their powers in this regard include ascertaining the views of the community, promoting interest and involvement in local government affairs, and promoting, organising or assisting in research, surveys and studies regarding the local community. These powers ensure that local authorities can develop Local Agenda 21 initiatives with the full participation of the public which they represent.

Chapter 3

Local Agenda 21: Action by the Local Authority

Leading by example

To be credible in promoting Local Agenda 21, local authorities should first ensure that their own house is in order. A local authority can make an “internal” contribution to Local Agenda 21 by

- looking at its own policies and practices and assessing how environmentally sustainable they are, and taking appropriate steps to ensure an environmentally responsible ethos throughout the organisation. Consideration could be given to a number of options and procedures for improving internal environmental performance, including:
 - **adopting an environmental charter or mission statement**

This can be useful as a means of defining the organisation’s environmental role and its commitment to sustainable development. As a statement of core aims and values, it should be carefully developed, guided by the elected members, widely publicised, and – most importantly – given practical expression in the internal and external functioning of the local authority. The process of developing a charter can promote self-examination, foster corporate commitment, encourage new initiatives and influence other environmental and development organisations.
 - **adopting a voluntary environmental management system**

Systems such as the Irish national standard, IS:310(1993), or the EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) can be adapted to provide an explicit framework, assisting authorities to define their relationship with the environment, identifying major impacts and influences. A management system can also determine and develop appropriate policy and practical responses, and specify actions and targets to implement those responses, and lead to a focused implementation programme with suitable review and reporting mechanisms.
 - **pursuing green housekeeping measures**

The direct impacts of local authorities on the environment can be improved through measures such as –

 - energy conservation in buildings, services and use of equipment
 - using recycled products and recycling facilities
 - ordering minimum quantities to avoid stock build-up, minimise storage requirements and reduce potential obsolescence
 - giving preference to environmentally-friendly products in specifications for tenders, etc.
 - using environmentally-friendly products in the management of parks/recreational grounds and for weed control on roads and kerbsides
 - waste minimisation
 - providing alternatives to one-use disposable products, such as non-refillable pens and paper/Styrofoam cups
 - using unleaded petrol and fuel efficient vehicles in vehicle fleets

- **staff training and information**

This is a very important element of any internal strategy, an vital to the process of disseminating ideas outside the organisation; if staff are not aware and committed, no charter or plan can be successfully implemented. A skilled and committed staff is one of the most important resources for an organisation putting Local Agenda 21 into practice

- **budgeting**

Environmental objectives should always be considered when budgets are being prepared. While additional funding for environmental purposes and activities will require due justification in any organisation, a focus should also be maintained on maximising available resources through efficiencies and value for money in the delivery and use of environmental services, resourcing areas where the benefits of action can offset the costs, and participating in an effective, targeted way in joint ventures with business and community interests.

Policies and Activities

“Human activities must be adapted to fit within the limits of nature, so that the healthy functioning of ecosystems can be preserved.”

Agenda 21

Local authorities have many opportunities for incorporating the aims of Local Agenda 21 into their policies and activities. Some areas to consider include:

- **land use/development policies**

Land use policy and controls are a critical means of ensuring sustainable development. The development plans of the local planning authorities are the principal policy statements on land use, and may include, in the appropriate urban and rural contexts, development objectives with regard to the “zoning” of land for particular uses, the renewal of obsolete areas, the provision of environmental services and the preservation of amenities, including the built environment, natural features and quality landscapes.

Although planning authorities have extensive experience and expertise in the exercise of development planning and control functions under the Planning Code, and of environmental functions affecting development under the Air and Water Pollution Codes, development and settlement policies raise key issues in a sustainability context. These include, for example, rezoning issues adjacent to urban areas, local concerns about the siting of particular industries, rural settlement patterns – resources, and agriculture, forestry, tourism and aquaculture development impacts on the landscape and natural resources.

In the context of the Government's commitments on land use and sustainable development, the Department of the Environment is preparing land use policy guidance in parallel with the preparation of a national sustainable development strategy. In the interim, planning authorities may need to review

their development plans as part of their work towards Local Agenda 21, to ensure that planning and development policies are fully consistent with environmental sustainability objectives. Regional authorities may additionally consider regional sustainability as a relevant issue in assessing the consistency of the development plans of their constituent authorities with one another and with the overall development objectives of their regions.

- **urban development**

Around 60% of the Irish population lives in cities, towns and villages and experiences the interaction between environmental and quality of life issues in an urban context. Urbanisation is part of the development process and urban authorities are well placed to address sustainability issues experienced within cities and towns. The challenges of urban sustainability differ with the scale and nature of urban development, and the following concerns may be more or less relevant to local authorities in particular circumstances:

- urban air quality and smoke control measures
- energy saving in housing, public buildings and new developments to reduce CO₂ emissions and conserve natural resources,
- traffic measures to reduce air pollution and CO₂ emissions (see also separate section on transport)
- urban land use policies to address population decentralisation, suburbanisation, dereliction in central areas and general reductions in quality of life,
- the relationship between the urban area and its rural hinterland
- urban renewal programmes to halt decline in physical fabric and socio-economic conditions, and protect and enhance urban heritage and architecture,
- the creation of the new environmentally-friendly economic activities to sustain and increase employment and training opportunities created by/from local authority expenditure,
- urban housing policies incorporating environmentally sound design, infill, open space and mobility considerations,
- the creation of a green urban structure through the provision of parks, landscaped areas and the planting trees, shrubs and flowers,
- the underpinning of environmental and social sustainability through promotion of initiatives, and participation in community based action, to reduce and recycle waste, eliminate litter, use energy and water wisely, clean up local areas, develop and protect amenities, etc.

It might be appropriate to incorporate participation in the Tidy Towns Competition in Local Agenda 21; the focus of the competition on architectural heritage, cultural identity and environmental concerns in the widest sense can both improve the quality of life for the local community and also enhance the tourism potential of towns and villages. In the context of the European Nature Conservation Year, 1995, Tidy Towns are being invited to draw up long-term plans for the protection

of the natural environment in their areas; this aspect, too, could be a natural element of Local Agenda 21.

- **provision of services**

This is intrinsically linked with the location and desirability of different forms of development; questions, which can help to bring sustainability into focus, include:

- why are these services necessary? do they meet actual demand or lead to new demands?
- why here? is there an alternative development location, perhaps with services already in place?
- is the best environmental option being used? are there alternative approaches?
- what are the energy and natural resource consumption implications?
- how will emissions be managed and minimised?
- what are the conservation issues, and how are they dealt with?
- who are the key target users of the services, and what measures will be taken to promote sustainability in use/operation?

“Systems for the return, collection and recycling of domestic and commercial waste should involve local authorities who have the major role at present in relation to the planning, organisation, authorisation and supervision of waste disposal.”

Recycling for Ireland

- **transport policy and traffic management**

Local authorities can help reduce the demand for additional transport infrastructure by reducing the need to travel. Bringing services to people, where this is economically feasible, may reduce transport requirements, and can improve the quality of life in areas of dispersed settlement.

Local authorities can encourage environmentally-friendly mode of transport by providing safer facilities, such as cycle lanes and secure bicycle parks for cyclists, special pedestrian areas, and footbridges and (where appropriate) underpasses for walkers and cyclists.

Equally, local authorities can significantly influence the quality of life in inner urban locations, and protect historic areas and urban architectural heritage, by developing innovative traffic management initiatives, restricting the through-traffic in residential areas, and optimising traffic flow on urban arterial routes.

Public support for public transport is essential. Local authorities can help to promote and integrate public transport by liaising with services providers on appropriate routes and on ticketing practices, by supporting the provision of park + ride and interchange facilities and the connection of public transport systems to parking areas outside the city/town centre, etc. They can also support public transport by pursuing land use and other policies which facilitate its increase use and which discourage all-day car commuter parking in town centres where public transport provides an adequate alternative to car use.

“Transportation strategies should reduce the need for motor vehicles by favouring high-occupancy public transport, and providing safe bicycle and foot paths.”

Agenda 21

Large urban areas with major traffic densities may have particular environmental significance in the context of CO₂ emissions. The national climate change/CO₂ abatement strategy noted that transport is a significant source of CO₂ emissions and that measures in this area will play a key role in containing overall national CO₂ emissions.

- **housing**

Social housing policy places emphasis on, amongst other things, an expanded local authority housing programme, housing integration, the quality of the living environment and improved management of housing estates.

Local authorities can contribute to sustainability through their new housing developments and the refurbishment of older dwellings. This can include taking account of environmental factors in site selection, and design and landscaping of new developments; incorporating high standards of energy efficiency in buildings; providing facilities for recycling and other environmentally-friendly activities on estates; and involving tenants in the management and maintenance of their homes and communities.

“Local authorities, as the initiators of housing projects, must take full account of the changing nature of the needs for which they have to cater in the planning and design of new accommodation.”

Social Housing – The Way Ahead

- **tourism**

In the context of Local Agenda 21, local and regional authorities can work with tourist authorities to facilitate environmentally responsible tourism development, provide services for the tourist population, ensure that facilities for tourist are environmentally-friendly, co-operate in providing environmental/tourist information, maintain a quality environment protecting natural heritage to encourage eco-tourism, and promote environmentally sound management of local hostels, guest houses and other facilities.

“Human health depends on a healthy environment”

Agenda 21

- **health**

Environmental improvements can form an important element of preventative health care, and have a beneficial effect on community health. Good air quality, safe drinking water, clean bathing waters and sound waste water systems all contribute to effective public health protection and support a healthy lifestyle. Local authorities can co-operate with health boards to increase awareness of the

links between environment and health, and help formulate and implement relevant strategies in their areas.

- **action for equality**

Local authorities can take positive action in areas where there are linkages between economic, social and environmental deprivation. It is important to consider how public actions affect the quality of life of disadvantaged members of society, and to take positive action where appropriate to promote a more sustainable social balance. In this regard, measures to improve public transport, to respond to homelessness, to accommodate travellers or to improve access for people with disabilities are important.

- **environmental activities**

Local authorities have extensive environmental responsibilities and can initiate and support more explicitly sustainable activities in areas such as waste reduction and recycling, management of environmental media and nature conservation. These can involve protecting natural amenities, resources, landscapes and habitats; promoting and catering for environmentally-friendly leisure activities and facilities; and supplying information for users on how to achieve and maintain a “greener” local environment.

Chapter 4

Local Agenda 21: Action in the Community

Provision of Information

“... promote sustainable consumption through education, public-awareness programmes and the positive advertising of products and services that encourage sustainability.”

Agenda 21

Information and awareness are essential catalysts in motivating people to take action, individually or collectively, to protect and enhance the environment. Information to promote sustainable development must not only identify the state of the environment but also advise people on the issues and constraints affecting sustainable development, the pressure impacting adversely on the environment and the trends towards or away from sustainable use of resources. Local authorities have many opportunities to provide information, and can do so in the light of their environment and development responsibilities, by

“Make environment and development education available to people of all ages.”

Agenda 21

- **supporting environmental education**

This can relate to all educational levels within their area, including adult education, and could include encouraging local business/industry to do likewise. Appropriate support could be financial, or could take other forms, such as supplying groups with materials or premises, or sending personnel to talk to students;

- **liaising with local schools/colleges**

Local authorities can consult with educational institutions on providing appropriate lectures or courses on the environment and sustainable development for the community;

- **supporting the initiatives of local voluntary groups**

Local groups can be well placed to identify the particular needs of their communities; local authorities can help by providing additional information, display facilities or other support for their activities;

- **compiling and publishing local environmental information**

In addition to compiling environmental information, local authorities can pursue many options to make it widely available – for example, by using their own public library facilities, citizens' information centres, community groups, local radio stations (especially community radio), or by publishing it in their annual reports, local or community newspapers and magazines;

- **setting up focus points**

Local authorities could develop environmental information desks for their areas – either centrally or through their public library services and building on ENFO networks and information holdings;

- **holding open days**

Local authorities could hold open days at designated environmental facilities, for example, water or waste water treatment plants, to show the public how environmental issues are dealt with in this context;

- **drawing up their own information policy statements**

Such statements would constitute a user-friendly guide to the type of environmental information held by the authority and to arrangements for dealing with requests for this information. An information policy statement could refer to public registers as well as information covered by the Access to Information on the Environment Regulations, 1993;

- **maintaining statutory registers**

Local authorities should ensure that all legal requirements to maintain registers of information – for example, planning registers, registers of use of sewage sludge and registers of licences issued under Air and Water Pollution legislation – are fully complied with; registers should be kept up to date, and the availability of the information they contain should be publicised.

Public Consultation

Extensive public consultation procedures have been incorporated into environment and development legislation, in regard, for example, to the adoption of development plans, environmental impact assessments, development by local authorities within their own jurisdiction, and decision-making on individual planning applications. Local Agenda 21 can build on and extend current consultation mechanisms, and seek broad community involvement as well as individual participation to increase interest in the issues of, and consensus on the approaches to, sustainable development.

Agenda 21 recommends that each local authority should “enter into a dialogue with its citizens, local organisations and private enterprises and adopt a local ‘Agenda 21’.” Consultation is a two-way process in which local authorities and the public can exchange information and experience and deepen an understanding of the range of actions and interaction contributing to sustainable development.

“... learn from local, civic, community, business and industrial organisations, and acquire the information need for formulating the best strategies.”

Agenda 21

Many organisations and groups already exist in any local authority area: these can form a basis for involving the entire community in the consultation process. They may include:

- residents'/tenants' associations
- youth clubs, senior citizens' groups
- environment/conservation organisations
- womens' associations and groups
- sports clubs, activity/hobby societies
- Chambers of Commerce, other business organisations
- local magazines/papers, community radio
- schools, adult education/training groups
- local heritage/historical societies

Whatever consultation arrangements are devised in preparing a Local Agenda 21 must be accessible. This is particularly important in rural areas where the population is scattered, in suburban areas removed from local government offices, and in respect of people with disabilities.

Local authorities should be creative in methods of consultation. Information provided should be clear and attractive, and invite public response. Most importantly, a Local Agenda 21 should fully address the views of consultees, reconcile differences, and reflect and accommodate all that is valid in the context of locally sustainable development.

Some approaches to consultation and involvement, which might be considered, include:

- setting up a special environmental or Local Agenda 21 forum to discuss, and propose solutions to, environmental problems; these for a should involve representatives of various groups – women, youth, local community groups, businesses and professions, special interest groups, etc – all of whom have a valuable perspective on local issues;
- neighbourhood based initiatives (e.g. involving residents in environmental planning, improvement and management of their own estate or area);
- presentations to/Local Agenda 21 meetings with local organisations and groups;
- encouraging local communities to prepare special area profiles, identifying valuable environmental resources and amenities, and recommending community / authority based action for their protection and enhancement.

Public consultation is valuable in its own right, and local authorities may wish to consider the above, or other, consultation mechanisms as part of the implementation and review, as well as the preparatory process for Local Agenda 21.

Partnerships

Local authorities have a wide competence to promote the interests of their local communities, and, in the context of a Local Agenda 21, it is desirable to work in partnership with key groups which are influential in the delivery of sustainable development. It is important to remove any apparent barriers between the

different sectors – "authority", "business", "environmentalists" and "residents" - and promote common interest to define and deliver environmental, economic, social, cultural and community objectives.

Consideration could be given to ways of building sustainability considerations into existing partnership arrangements, whether these are formal (e.g. County Enterprise Boards, Area Based Partnerships, LEADER groups, EU Regional Operational Committees) or informal at present, and to appropriate forms of partnerships with local business and enterprise representatives, etc.

"The composition of the County Enterprise Boards represents a partnership between elected representatives, State agency personnel, the social partners at local level and local business and voluntary sector representatives (including representatives of Chambers of Commerce, local enterprise groups and other local advocates for small business)."

Operational Programme for Local Urban and Rural Development

There is a range of options to pursue partnerships for sustainable development, for example, through

- standing committees or working groups within a local authority, between authorities on a regional basis, or between local authorities and State agencies for development / conservation to promote environmental protection and environmentally responsible development;
- working with Government Departments/ agencies, the private sector and conservation groups to achieve urban and village renewal;
- working with the farming community, regional tourism organisations, LEADER groups, etc., to encourage new/alternative forms of development to sustain a dispersed rural population;
- working with business and enterprise organisations to develop eco-industry and environmental service.

As well as ongoing activities, there is also a place for once-off meetings and seminars, which can relate to specific issues, or can be used as a starting point to consider more formal methods of working together.

The national local authority representative bodies organisations such as the EU Committee of the Regions and the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities provide opportunities to develop links and contacts for the sharing of information and expertise.

Monitoring Progress

Once a Local Agenda 21 has been adopted democratically, arrangements should be made locally to monitor and report on progress towards its objectives in regard to the achievement of long-term sustainable development. Local Agenda 21 strategies or other defined plans should desirably be subject to periodic review to ensure that they continue to meet the aspirations and needs of the

community. Review arrangements should consider objectives and targets set for the local authority itself and for other sectors/bodies, as well as overall performance, direct and indirect actions impacting on progress, and indicators of progress, towards sustainability. It will also be important to ensure that public information services, including statutory registers, are kept up to date so as to maximise public access and participation in the review process.

Methods of obtaining the necessary information for such monitoring and review include:

- **participating in monitoring programmes**

This involves local authorities undertaking participation in local, national and international programmes, for example, monitoring of air/water quality, emissions and waste produced and performance of environmental services.

- **local state of the environment reporting**

A national state of the environment report is currently being prepared by the Environmental Protection Agency, and will be published later this year. Local authorities could produce local / regional reports, if appropriate, adapting the format of the national report. Publication and dissemination of information will be important for the continuing consultative and participatory process of Local Agenda 21.

- **devising local indicators of sustainability**

Although both national and international work on sustainability indicators is at a relatively early state of progress, it may be appropriate for Local Agenda 21 to adapt / develop some ideas and approaches in this regard, so as to give a local measure of progress towards the objectives of sustainable development.

Local indicators of sustainability should -

- be relevant to both the local authority and to the wider local community
- be clear and easy to understand
- be meaningful, both individually and collectively
- show progress/trends on an ongoing basis, against targets and objectives set
- be relevant to the objectives of a Local Agenda 21, and feed into its review.
- Examples of indicators in the local area, which, by indicating pressures on the environment and the responses to those pressures, help to measure progress towards, or away from, sustainable development, would include:
 - % of surface waters unpolluted, slightly polluted or seriously polluted

- quantity of waste water produced and treated
- quantity of municipal waste generated and recycled
- % of drinking/bathing/salmonid etc. waters meeting statutory environmental quality standards
- urban air quality standards / performance
- physical planning performance indicators including, e.g. planning statistics, special amenity areas, tree preservation orders, listed buildings
- % of area/number of sites identified for conservation (e.g. Natural heritage areas, sand dunes, bogs, wetlands, bird areas, bat sites, woodland)
- % of area afforested
- areas of natural, landscape, geological, archaeological, heritage or other particular interest
- % of area degraded (e.g. Derelict sites, exposed tip-heads, unreclaimed mining sites, contaminated land).

As far as possible, objectives and targets should be set to redress environmental impacts and threats, and they should be used as part of the approach to monitoring progress in implementation of a Local Agenda 21.

Chapter 5

The Way Ahead

Local Agenda 21 is a wide, participatory exercise at local level and should therefore have the guidance and direct involvement of the elected members of local authorities.

The structure and content of Local Agenda 21 should reflect the local vision of sustainable development, with reference to specific local concerns/problems. The participation of all local community interests will be important in this regard. The local vision, however, should not be a narrow one: regional authorities are well placed to promote co-ordination and consistency between Local Agenda 21s in the interests of a balanced and coherent approach at regional level.

A Local Agenda 21 should contain clear priorities and targets, wherever possible. Initial targets might usefully be set in the area of local authorities' own environmental responsibilities; some examples might include –

- improved drinking/bathing water quality
- improved demand management/ conservation of water supplies
- defined programme for urban waste water treatment
- re-use of sewage sludge
- stabilisation/reduction of municipal waste
- Increased recycling rates.

It is important to identify the actors who are to work towards the targets set; in the above examples, these will be the local authorities themselves. In general, considerations related to long-term sustainability and balanced environmental protection and socio-economic development should inform all relevant activities of the authorities. If targets are set which involve other actors, it should be clear where responsibility for action towards a particular target lies. While short-term goals are an important incentive, and help to maintain momentum, sustainable development is a long-term objective, and targets which require significant policy or practical reform and conversion should be set in a realistic way, so as not to undermine the process involved.

Some indicators of progress towards local sustainable development should be devised; more information in this regard will be provided to local authorities as the subject is developed at national and international level.

Arrangements should be made for monitoring of Local Agenda 21 outputs, including measurement of progress towards specified targets, and for review of the approaches proposed to meet them. The review process should also provide for changing situations to be taken into account.

There is a relationship between Local Agenda 21 and the National Sustainable Development Strategy, which will be published in mid-1996. The two undertakings have a common objective: work at national, regional and local levels should intensify the awareness of sustainable development requirements at all levels of government and provide sound foundations for policy implementation.

Appropriate opportunities for exchange of information will be taken during the course of 1995/early 1996. Both nationally and locally, publication of a plan or strategy will be the beginning, rather than the end, of a sustainable development path. Provision for monitoring and review will allow developments at national and local levels to be integrated and cross-referenced as necessary, so that there will be an appropriate degree of coherence and balance in working towards sustainable development for all.

Chapter 6

Further Information

The following are suggested as sources for further reading, general information and ideas which might be appropriate for Local Agenda 21.

Publications

"Agenda for Change: A Plain Language version of Agenda 21 and the other Rio Agreements",
The Centre for Our Common Future, 52 rue des Paquis, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland. (available from ENFO, 17, St. Andrew Street, Dublin 2).

"Our Common Future"

(The Brundtland report); World Commission on Environment and Development, Palais Wilson, 52 rue des Paquis, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland.

"Towards Sustainability"

(EU Fifth Programme of Action on the Environment); Office for Official Publications of the European Community, Luxembourg. (available from the Government Supplies Agency, 4-5 Harcourt Road, Dublin 2)

"Ireland: Climate Change/CO2 Abatement Strategy" Stationery Office, June 1993.

"Recycling for Ireland"

Department of the Environment, July 1994.

"Social Housing - The Way Ahead",

Department of the Environment, May 1995.

"Operational Programme for Local Urban and Rural Development, 1994-99;

Stationery Office, 1995.

"National Standards Authority of Ireland Environmental Management Systems - Guiding Principles and Requirements"

(IS:310:1993);

National Standards Authority of Ireland, Dublin 9.

"Visions and Actions for Medium-Sized Cities"

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 1994.

"Partnerships for People in Cities"

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 1995.