

INFLUENCING BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND LIVING SUSTAINABLY

Key Points

People are more likely to change their behaviour if they can see it that it will lead to an immediate, positive impact on their quality of life. Issues regarding the environment are not seen to affect day-to-day life and are less pressing. It is not necessary to communicate the whole concept of sustainability; linking sustainable development to other issues will make it more relevant to people's lives.

Successful initiatives and examples of good practice should be recognised. Celebrating and showcasing examples of good practice will provide participants with a sense of achievement and others with inspiration. If the public can see what is already happening in their neighbourhood and in their region they will realise what is achievable and how they can act more sustainably.

The public would like to see the government and other official bodies leading by example. By setting an example the public will be encouraged to follow, this will also signify the importance for *everyone* to act sustainably.

Removing barriers will increase the likelihood of people adopting different behaviours. For sustainable development to appeal to the public they must feel a sense of agency, sustainable development issues should seem relevant and the public need to believe that their actions will make a difference. Local initiatives which provide opportunities for community involvement have proved that combined individual action can make a difference. Community groups can also help set the norm and influence behaviour. Behaving sustainably needs to be seen as the social norm, people will then be willing to break their bad habits and conform to the rest of society.

Adequate infrastructure needs to be in place before a change in behaviour can occur. Infrastructure will reduce the inconvenience to act sustainably (this should be organised before any communication is initiated so that action can occur immediately).

Information should be provided along with facilities, alternatives, education and capacity. It is important to mix information with education, economic incentives and current policy. Raising awareness through supplying information alone will not change behaviour. Information should be of a high standard, consistent and easily understood by the target group. Caution should be used when using fear messages as these tend to make people apathetic, using guilt also has limited success.

Influencing behavioural change can be achieved using positive and inspirational messages. Concepts and language should be easy for the public to grasp as sustainable development can be a confusing subject due to its broadness and its complexity. Messages should be personal and practical making the issue relevant and possible action achievable.

It is crucial to target an audience and to identify and understand their main concerns, priorities, barriers and drivers. Different groups will have different abilities to connect with and deliver sustainable development. Understanding the target group will lay the foundations for the format and type of information provided, campaign or project.

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Introduction

There have been many reports and documents produced over that past few years advising on the best methods to promote behavioural change with regards to sustainable development, the barriers which people face and the drivers which help and encourage consumers to adopt more sustainable lifestyles. This report brings together the key messages and approaches identified when considering how best to engage people and encourage them to act more sustainably.

Government Approach

The Government believes that for behavioural change to be achieved we need to **enable** - provide information, remove barriers, provide capacity and facilities, **engage** - use networks, community groups and media campaigns, **exemplify** - lead by example and use examples of good practice, and **encourage** - use incentives and give recognition¹.

This model provided by the Government is now widely accepted as key to catalysing behavioural change.

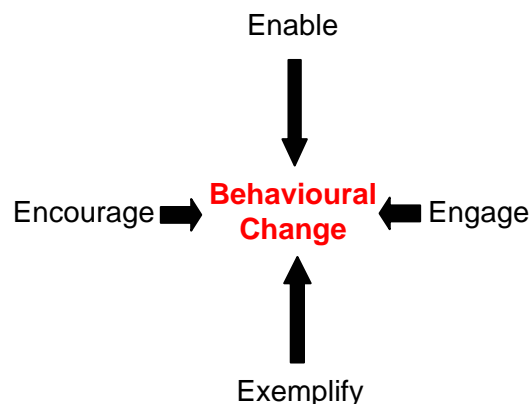


Figure 1. Diagram displaying the four key elements needed to promote behavioural

Another key message from the Government is to target groups; community involvement and action may be easier to achieve as individuals will know that they are not acting alone². If communities are actively trying to behave more sustainably it will be seen as the social norm for that community, this will encourage people to adopt similar behaviour.

¹ **Securing the Future; The UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy**, HM Government, 2005. <http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/publications/uk-strategy/index.htm> (sited 28/03/06)

² **I Will if You Will, Towards Sustainable Consumption**, Sustainable Consumption Roundtable, May 2006. http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications/downloads/I_Will_If_You_Will.pdf (sited June 2006)

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The Role of Information

Information on sustainable development and sustainable behaviour needs to be of a high standard, consistent and easy to understand. It needs to be readily available where ever decisions regarding sustainable consumption take place, this includes;

- in the home
- in the work place
- where we buy goods and services
- where we travel
- at leisure facilities
- at school/college/university³

All sectors must help to integrate sustainability by educating and involving people, this will help to raise awareness and encourage positive changes in behaviour.

When the public were asked where they went to seek advice or information on sustainability issues, nearly 50% of those surveyed looked to the internet for information⁴. Figure 2 shows the most popular methods the public accessed information and advice.

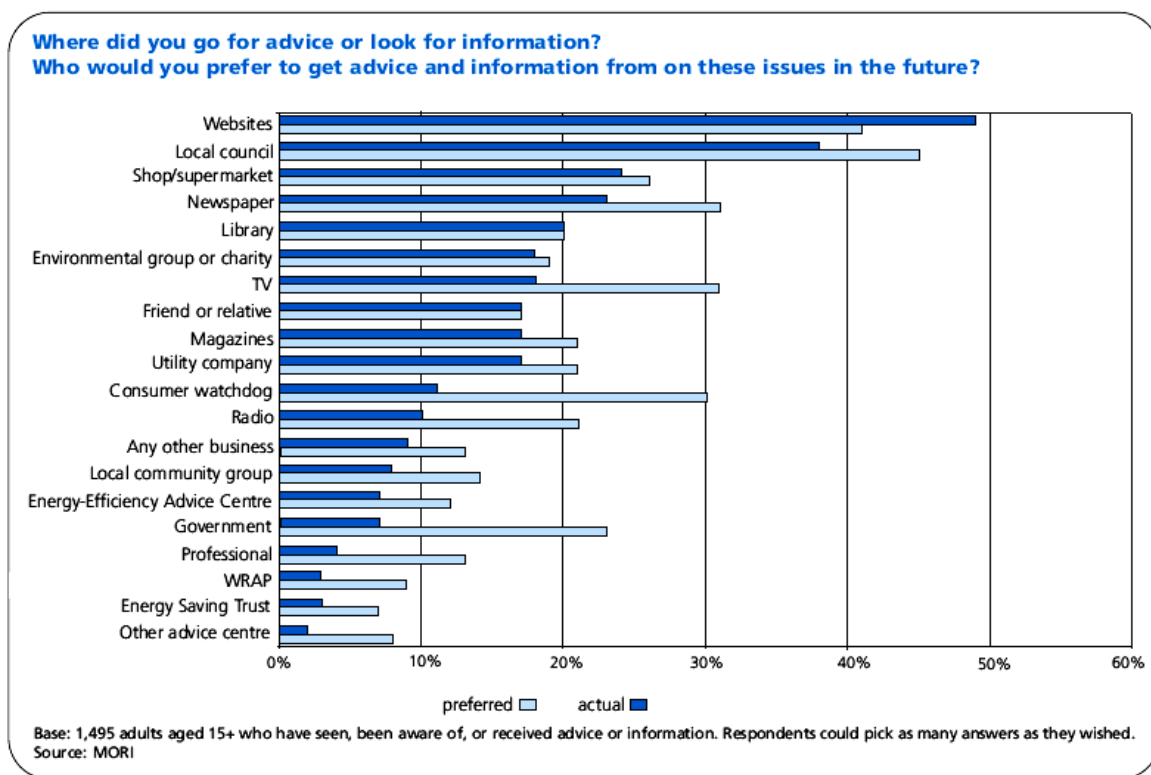


Figure 2. Bar chart taken from *Desperately Seeking Sustainability* (National Consumer Council) showing where people sought information.

³ *Taking It On; Developing UK Strategy Together*, HM Government, 2004. <http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/publications/pdf/consult.pdf> (sited 28/03/06)

⁴ *Desperately Seeking Sustainability?* Paul Steedman, National Consumer Council, 2005. <http://www.ncc.org.uk/responsibleconsumption/desperate.pdf> (sited 29/03/06)

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Low down on the list are the Government and the Energy Saving Trust. Consumers which seek more information are looking for an authoritative guidance and would like to receive it from authorities who are trusted and impartial or responsible for action.

There exists mistrust in individuals running responsible bodies and people feel they lack power to change things (particularly low-income consumers). Consumers believe national and local government workers should set an example and see local government as having a vital role in implementing sustainable consumption polices.

50% of seekers of information stated that their personal beliefs were their main reason to seek advice on how to act sustainably. TV was identified as the main prompt for non-seekers of information followed by a leaflet through the door. Figure 3 displays the other motivations for seeking information in order of importance stated by seekers⁴.

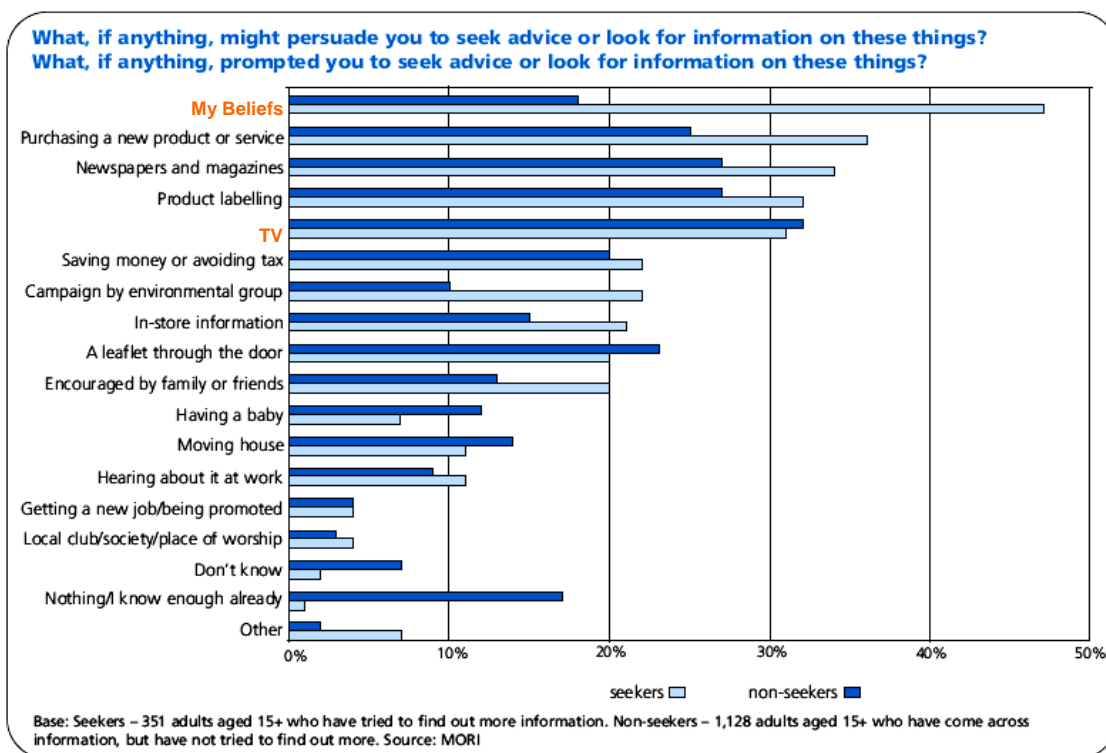


Figure 3. Bar chart taken from *Desperately Seeking Sustainability* (National Consumer Council) showing the motivations for people to seek information on sustainable development.

There is a strong positive correlation between those who find out more about a topic and the level of action on the topic. Community-level programmes could be very powerful as beliefs and behaviours can be assed and revised in a group environment. Individually marketed advice could also encourage non-seekers to engage with information.

Information should be well-publicised, contain simple messages, be tangible and close-to-home and have few practical barriers. The public prefer to receive their information in different ways so a variety of channels should be used.

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Information needs to be provided using an imaginative delivery targeted at the needs of specific groups. It should be produced in formats and languages which are appropriate to the audience.

Public Opinion

According to a recent MORI poll 99% of adults across Britain have heard of global warming yet 70% are unable to name the gas that most contributes to it⁵. There is currently a great deal of information and advice on sustainable lifestyles and climate change, with 81% of consumers having seen information on at least one subject on sustainable living⁴, but there are huge gaps in knowledge.

When asked in a consultation carried out by the Government, the public listed the following methods which they believed would successfully change behaviour (314 responded to the online survey);

- 110 favoured raising awareness and promotion
- 96 identified education at all levels
- 86 mentioned economic reform/fiscal measures (including carbon tax)
- 58 discuss regulation and legislation to prompt change
- 53 want leadership from the Government
- 49 mention incentives (financial or otherwise)
- 38 identified the need to support local initiatives and local communities/groups which promote sustainable living⁶

The public have identified raising awareness as key to promoting behavioural change. It is important to remember that information will not necessarily lead to awareness or awareness to action⁷. Information should be provided along with facilities, alternatives, education and capacity. Information alone will not change behaviour and so should be used along side education, economic incentives and current policy.

Education was identified as the second most influential tool by the public. Formal education plays a crucial role in raising sustainable development awareness; it develops skills needed to put sustainable development into practice whilst forming good habits from an early age. Sustainability can be linked into the education system by teaching about personal quality of life and the well being of communities around them. Schools, colleges and universities could also become showcases of sustainable development in the community¹.

⁵ ***The Day After Tomorrow: Public Opinion on Climate Change***, Andrew Norton and John Leaman, 2004, MORI Social Research Institute. http://www.climateprediction.net/schools/docs/mori_poll.pdf (sited June 2006)

⁶ ***Taking It On, Results and Analysis***, HM Government, 2004. <http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/publications/pdf/finalsummary.pdf> (sited 28/03/06)

⁷ ***Communicating Sustainability; How to Produce Effective Public Campaigns***. Futerra, 2005. <http://www.futerra.org/downloads/WebEN21.pdf> (sited 28/03/06)

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Economic instruments were discussed and can encourage innovation by providing incentives for behaviour which protects and improves the environment and deterring behaviour which damages it.

Encouraging Behavioural Change – The Dos and the Don'ts

The Dos

It is very important to establish a target audience; a greater difference in opinion can be found when audiences are segmented by demographics. Targeting a specific audience with a defined message is more effective than raising awareness on a grand scale. Different target groups have different abilities to engage in sustainable development initiatives, for example, consumers in certain areas may have poor recycling facilities or there may be infrequent/unsafe public transport. Different groups will also have different opinions and priorities- these should be fully understood before any communications take place.

When targeting an audience it is important to remember what issues may be relevant and important to them. It isn't necessary to communicate entire concept of sustainable development, it is more effective to focus on a single issue. It is important to remember that different types of people will respond to different messages.

When launching a campaign the following should be considered;

- Who is message aimed at?
- Who are aware but don't act?
- Who have no motivation to change at all?
- Is the aim to encourage certain behaviour or to stigmatise wrong behaviour?⁸

Determine the most appropriate language to use for the target audience through considering the level of understanding and the motivations of the group. One third of the public claim to have heard of the term sustainable development whilst only one tenth understood what the term means. Many civil servants are also unsure what sustainable development is⁹. Running a campaign explicitly on sustainable development is unlikely to build public engagement with concept and is even less likely to result in change in behaviour.

Information should be provided along with facilities, alternatives, education and capacity. It is important to mix information with education, economic incentives and current policy. Raising awareness through supplying information alone will not change behaviour.

Remember that human beings are **not** always rational. Providing information is not enough, it may raise awareness but on its own it is unlikely to change attitude or behaviour⁷. It is rare that people weigh up the options and make the most self-interested choice. More radical approaches which connect with heart not the head should be used, with a focus on a values-based, emotional response.

⁸ *The Rules of the Game*, Futerra, 2005. <http://www.futerra.org/downloads/RulesOfTheGame.pdf> (sited 28/03/06)

⁹ *Driving Public Behaviours for Sustainable Lifestyles*, Andrew Darnton commissioned by COI on behalf of Defra, 2004. <http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/publications/pdf/desk-research2.pdf> (sited 28/03/06)

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Recognise that there is often competition between rival behaviours. Social marketing takes a consumer perspective and builds from the beliefs and behaviours that the consumers start with. This method should be used trying to raise awareness.

Sustainable development issues need to be linked closely to an inspiring, compelling aim that will encourage and focus long-term objectives. People are concerned about the environment but they find other issues more important therefore sustainability should be linked to issues such as health, wealth, jobs, and home and self improvement. People may act sustainably without it being their main motivation, e.g. using public transport and reducing energy bills. Link sustainable lifestyles to positive desires/aspirations, home and self improvement, green spaces and national pride.

People need to know what to do and then decide for themselves to do it. It is more appealing if people can acquire information at their own pace as they want to know and understand what is going. This can be done by allowing people to participate and play a role in what is going on around them. People must have access to infrastructure and understand their contribution is important.

The public need to believe that they are not acting alone and their actions will have a positive impact on the environment and climate change. A recent survey carried out by the Green Alliance found that 73% of people were more aware of environmental problems than solutions and that most people fail to recognise that their individual actions make a difference¹⁰. Environmental issues do concern people but they are perceived to be beyond the ability of the individual, this perception needs to change if behaviours are to alter. This can be tackled through community action as the individual will feel part of the bigger picture.

Campaigns, initiatives and information should be personal and practical. Sustainable development issues should be relevant to people's everyday lives. There are high levels of public agreement on conservation issues but low priority of environmental concerns in personal lifestyle decisions. The public seem to lack interest due to the broadness and lack of immediate relevance; therefore environmental issues should be connected to people's daily lives and involve the local environment. Sustainable actions should be seen to benefit the individual as well as local, nation and global communities. It is more likely that people will act sustainably if they feel the issue is relevant to them.

Policies need to meet the needs of disadvantaged consumers; policies aimed to solely at protecting the environment are likely to fail to improve quality of life of the most disadvantaged consumers. If low-income consumers to seriously consider sustainable development local environments need to be improved, better facilities are needed, local communities need more control and information should be targeted¹¹. Policies need to integrate social and economic factors to improve disadvantaged consumers' quality of life.

¹⁰ **Carrot, Sticks and Sermons: influencing public behaviour for environmental goals.** The Green Alliance, 2003. <http://www.green-alliance.org.uk/publications/PubCarrotsSticksSermons/> (sited 28/03/06)

¹¹ **Green Choice: What Choice?** National Consumer Council, 2003. http://www.ncc.org.uk/responsibleconsumption/green_choice.pdf (sited 28/03/06)

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Use trendsetters as people learn through social interaction, targeting trendsetters will help deliver the messages and they will seem more trustworthy and appealing. However, explaining the difference between someone's attitude and actions on sustainability and climate change is more likely change their attitudes rather than their actions⁸. Behaviour spreads through conversations, social learning and peer group networks, also using intermediaries will increase trust.

Make behaving sustainably the social norm; people will then be willing to break their bad habits and conform to the rest of society. Local initiatives which provide opportunities for community involvement have proved that combined individual action can make a difference. Community groups can also help set the norm and influence behaviour.

Adequate infrastructure needs to be in place before a change in behaviour can occur. Infrastructure will reduce the inconvenience to act sustainably (this should be organised before any communication is started so that action can occur immediately).

Successful initiatives and examples of good practice should be recognised. Celebrating and showcasing examples of good practice will provide participants with a sense of achievement and others with inspiration. If the public can see what is already happening in their neighbourhood and in their region they will realise what is achievable and how they can act more sustainably.

Government policy and communications must be clear and consistent across all departments; links should be made across government goals and policies as these need to be in place to back up public behaviour - communications without policy will fail¹⁰. The public have also expressed that they would like to see the government and other official bodies leading by example. By setting an example the public will be encouraged to follow, this will also signify the importance for *everyone* to act sustainably.

Involve the industry and business sectors as they are key in making day-to-day sustainable consumption easier for consumers. Consumers state that if they were aware of the negative environmental impact of a product they would be less likely to buy it¹¹.

Use economic instruments to encourage sustainable behaviour and innovation by providing incentives for behaviour which protects and improves the environment and deterring behaviour which damages it³. Initiatives such as subsidies, voluntary initiatives, trading schemes and taxes can be effective in changing behaviour. There should be an overall public acceptance of a financial incentive and any changes must not exclude any vulnerable groups. Combinations of policy interventions should be used alongside education and communication.

The Don'ts

Don't use fear or guilt. Scaring people is unlikely to engage them, linking sustainable development issues to survival creates a feeling that nothing can be done will make people feel apathetic. Making people feel guilty about their lifestyles and purchasing habits also achieves limited success⁷.

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Don't assume that information leads to awareness or that awareness leads to action. Action is only likely to take place if costs are not prohibitive, supporting infrastructure is in place and the action is convenient. See below for a list of barriers which prevent/heed people adopting sustainable lifestyles.

Don't communicate without infrastructure or supporting policy. If the infrastructure to act sustainably is not in place for the public to make a contribution any information about doing so is pointless. Communication and policy should work together; badly planned, misplaced communication will not only fail to work but may also have negative consequences⁷.

Barriers

Removing barriers will increase the likelihood of people adopting different behaviours. For sustainable development to appeal to the public issues should seem relevant to their day-to-day life, the public also need to believe that their actions will make a difference. Table 1 shows some of the barriers for people to change their behaviour and to act more sustainable⁹.

Barriers	
Willingness To Act	Some are not interested in changing their behaviour. Others claim they do not have time or they cannot do any more to act sustainably.
Low Level Behaviours	Many everyday behaviours relating to sustainable consumption occur at low-levels of consciousness (e.g. boiling a kettle, throwing away rubbish). Environmentally significant behaviours tend to be personal habit/routine, bigger changes are harder to undertake as they upset routine.
Norms and Habits	There exists an unwillingness to change habits with an overestimation in the inconvenience of behaving sustainably. People need to realise their habits have to change before behaviour change will take place.
Other Concerns	People feel they have more pressing, immediate concerns than sustainability. Issues regarding the environment are seen not to affect day-to-day life and less pressing.
Convenience	People are unwilling to change their behaviour if it adds any inconvenience; this may be time, cost or effort. A successful example of which has overcome this barrier is fair trade foods which are now seen as being high quality products, easily identifiable, widely available, use a simple message and are only slightly higher price than a product which the consumer would normally buy.
Cost	High cost is given as a reason deterring sustainable behaviour and is a greater barrier to the less affluent. Cost often masks other barriers of inconvenience; there is an assumption that environmentally friendly products are the most expensive.

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Psychological Effects	People tend to discount environmental issues as people see environmental problems as too remote from their daily lives. Global issues are sometimes seen not to affect the individual as the consequences of not acting sustainably are only apparent in the long term.
Agency	A large barrier is people not believing that their behaviour will make a difference.
Terminology of SD	The concept of sustainable development is a major barrier along with the understanding of other terms such as quality of life, environment, local environment, community and sustainable consumption.
Relative Sustainability	The public are confused as to how they should be behaving. For example, if conventionally home-grown produce is sold next to flown in, imported organically grown produce which is more sustainable?
Lack of Facilities	If the infrastructure to act sustainably is not in place people cannot change their behaviour.
Inadequate Information	There are gaps in awareness with most consumers not knowing what facilities or information are available. Information provided is not understood and energy efficiency schemes are relatively unheard of.
Lack of Sustainable Products	Sustainable products may be harder to purchase due to lack of availability. It may also be seen as an inferior product.

Drivers

Consumers are willing to make changes which do not disrupt their daily routine and benefit to their day-to-day lives and environment. Table 2 lists drivers for people to change their behaviour⁹.

Drivers	
Norms and Habits	People tend to over claim they are recycling as they are aware they should be. A green box has become a status symbol signalling a community committed to recycling and it has now become the norm. This has put pressure on residents to join in with the rest of the community.
Key Influences	Social norms can be influenced through engaging key influencers such as community leaders. These key influencers then can encourage a particular behaviour to the community.

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Groups	Groups enable people with a low sense of agency to undertake behavioural change, if individuals act in a way which is seen as the norm it may be maintained and become a habit. Community groups are particularly able to meet people's needs and deliver a better quality of life.
Relevant Issues	People are more likely to change their behaviour if they can see it that it will lead to an immediate positive impact on their quality of life.
Infrastructure	The infrastructure must be in place before behavioural change is possible and should make the activity as convenient as possible.
Saving Money	Cost saving can be a significant motivator for changing behaviour and can be seen in behaviour towards domestic energy saving. However, the net savings must be seen almost immediately and worth the effort.
Financial Instruments	Financial measures can be very effective in driving public behaviour change and should be used in combination with other measures. Infrastructure should first be in place before any financial instruments are applied. Financial incentives have been proven to be more effective than levies and avoid the risk of social exclusion.
Information	Information needs to be clear and concise using targeted messages and an everyday life perspective. Practical information is needed as information about local facilities and opportunities is in demand.
Role of the Government	The public are cynical about the role of the Government driving sustainable development although the public would like the Government to take lead on sustainability issues and to lead by an example.

Conclusion

There is already a lot of information available and although the public know of climate change and global warming there are huge gaps in knowledge⁵. We have to evaluate where resources and time would be best spent; raising general awareness of sustainable development, informing public on how to act sustainably or a combination of both. It may not be appropriate to communicate the science of climate change as larger changes in behaviour could be achieved by focussing on a particular issue of concern to the individual or group and advising on how best they can act to improve it.

Most consumers do not know how to behave sustainably. The public see issues made of combination of environmental, social, economic problems but beyond public transport and recycling they are unsure of other sustainable activities. Information should be of a high standard, consistent and easily understood by the target group.

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When trying to change behaviour it is important to remember the following points¹²;

Information:

- Make any scientific or technical information relevant and easy to understand
- Target the audience and use appropriate messages and language
- Avoid terms which may cause confusion and disengagement
- Identify the underlying root of the problem
- Avoid disaster predictions, criticism and condemnation
- Use caution when using fear messages as these tend to make people apathetic, using guilt also has limited success
- Use positive and inspirational messages and methods which are emotional
- Discuss solutions rather than problems

People:

- People are not always rational - use emotional methods
- Recognise that different types of people have different values and motivations
- People feel they have more pressing, immediate concerns than sustainability
- Look for tangible, personal, close-to-home benefits. Environmental actions should carry a personal incentive
- Treat people on equal terms
- Make sustainable living as convenient as possible
- Make sustainable living the norm; people who don't join in are missing out.
- Allow people to understand the problem and decide to do something about it independently
- Make the point relevant to the individual's day-to-day life
- Personal benefits are usually more motivating than society level ones
- Explain how individual effort can combine to form a collective effort

Influencing behavioural change is a very complex issue, it is key to identify a target audience and understand their main concerns, priorities, barriers and drivers. It is not until we understand the target group that we can begin to identify with them and change attitudes and behaviour to sustainability and promote sustainable living.

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¹² **Painting the Town Green**, Green Engage, January 2006.
<http://www.transport2000.org.uk/library/PaintingtheTownGreenSummary.pdf> (sited June 2006)