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**FROM GLOBAL DISCOURSE TO
LOCAL ACTION?
TOWN COUNCILS AND
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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Abstract

Sustainable development is generally accepted as a policy imperative. However, it can be interpreted in very different ways and is perhaps best regarded as a discourse rather than as a precisely defined term. It is also generally accepted that 'sustainable development' requires actions at all spatial scales and by all levels of government, including the local. However, parish and town councils, which are the most local level of local government in rural England, are given no responsibilities in relation to sustainability.

This thesis is intended to investigate the potential of parish and town councils to take a leadership role in increasing the sustainability of their communities. A case-study approach is used, involving the study of five larger local councils in the county of Gloucestershire, in the context of larger-scale sustainable development discourses. Two case-study projects are also analysed to study how different discourses come together at the local level.

We find that the concept of 'sustainable development' has been adapted by UK government to conform to wider political discourses. However, government interpretations are not necessarily reproduced at the local level, where inherent contradictions become more apparent. Although parish and town councillors may express commitment to 'sustainable development', they tend to interpret it in terms of the local and the relatively short-term. A discourse of local council legitimation is identified by which councillors see their role as caring for their parish, with the benefit of local knowledge and holistic thinking.

The thesis concludes that if parish and town councils are to contribute to sustainable development, they must be given specific powers encompassing the global and long-term effects of local activities, and other local groups must see the local council as a leader of the community and 'sustainability arbiter', rather than as just another interest group.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of this thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other educational institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Carol Kambites

21st July 2004

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CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CDA	Critical discourse analysis
CDC	Cotswold District Council
CEC	Commission of the European Communities
CFC	Chloroflourocarbon
DA	Discourse analysis
DETR	Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions
DFID	Department for International Development
DoE	Department of Environment
EU	European Union
FDDC	Forest of Dean District Council
FoE	Friends of the Earth
GCC	Gloucestershire County Council
GMTF	Gloucestershire Market Towns Forum
GNP	Gross national product
GOSW	Government Office for the South West
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
LA21	Local Agenda 21
MCTI	Market and Coastal Towns Initiative
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
RDA	Regional development agency
RDC	Rural district council
SDC	Stroud District Council
SWRDA	South West Regional Development Agency
TBC	Tewkesbury Borough Council
UN	United Nations
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNGASS	United Nations General Assembly Special Session
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) defined 'sustainable development' as 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (WCED, 1987, p.8). Whilst sustainable development has become generally accepted as an international and national policy goal, it is 'a politically highly contested area' (Blair and Evans, 2004, p.1), and the rhetorical commitment arguably has failed to achieve the changes in attitudes and actions that are necessary to bring it to fruition. As Dresner says:

'The lack of substantial progress at the World Summit [Johannesburg, 2002] showed that global political efforts to bring about sustainable development had run out of steam, even as the environment continues to deteriorate.' (2002, p.59)

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, resulted in Agenda 21, which placed a specific responsibility for sustainable development on local government. Selman identifies the pivotal role of the locality in 'moving towards an environmentally sustainable future' (1996, p.3). However, at this level too, progress has been patchy.

The most local level of local government in rural England comprises parish and town councils. Hitherto, these local councils have not been seen as playing a role in relation to sustainability, although their profile has been raised by the 2000 Rural White Paper (Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions, 2000a). This thesis is intended to investigate the potential for larger parish and town councils to play a leading role in the implementation of sustainable development at the local level.

The settlements represented by parish and town councils, vary in size from very small villages to market towns. Although they have the same powers, small parish councils and large town councils may have little else in common. This research studies four market towns, which the Rural White Paper describes as playing 'a

critical role in helping rural communities to thrive' (DETR, 2000a, p.74), and one large parish.

Sustainable development is a contested term, described by Sachs as 'designed to maximise consensus rather than clarity' (Sachs, 1999, p.27). Hence, it is helpful to study it as a discourse that may encourage or impede action. This thesis studies discourses and implementation of sustainable development at the very local level of parish and town councils in the UK, within the context of national and sub-national discourses.

The research uses a multi-method qualitative methodology based on five case-study parishes, involving focus groups, interviews and documentary analysis. Documents and transcripts are analysed as discourses, in order to study the underlying conceptualisations of councillors and clerks. Two case-study issues are then examined in more detail to analyse how the discourses of councillors come together with those of other local actors and result (or fail to result) in action.

Section 1.2 will introduce the research objectives and questions. Then, section 1.3 will explain the background that I, as the researcher, bring to the research and the ways in which this could have affected the research process. Section 1.4 will explain the structure of the research. Lastly, the structure of the thesis will be described in section 1.5.

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

The aim of this research is to study the concept of sustainability at a very local level – that of parish and town councils – and to investigate how far there is potential for those councils to contribute to sustainable development. However, local discourses occur within the context of larger scale discourses and are likely to be affected by them, although they will not necessarily reproduce them in an uncomplicated way. Rather, these larger-scale discourses are likely to be adapted as they are brought to bear on local circumstances and issues. Thus, this research also studies discourses at

a number of more macro-levels in order to provide a context for the understanding of local discourses.

If local councils are to contribute to sustainable development other than by chance, local councillors would have to, firstly understand and sympathise with the concept of sustainable development, and secondly see a role for themselves as councillors in leading their communities towards sustainability. Additionally, local councillors would have to work with other local actors, who arguably would also need to sympathise with the aims of sustainability. The final stage of this research concentrates on exploring this last issue. Thus, the objectives of the research are:

1. To investigate how the discourse of 'sustainable development' is articulated at national and sub-national levels.
2. To investigate how 'sustainable development' is conceptualised and articulated by town councillors, within the context of these national and sub-national 'sustainable development' discourses.
3. To investigate how town councillors in market towns define their own roles and responsibilities in relation to their communities and to sustainable development.
4. To investigate how other local actors conceptualise sustainable development, and how their discourses interact with those of town councillors, resulting, or failing to result, in action on specific issues.

These objectives translate into the five research questions that have guided the research (splitting the last objective into two questions):

1. How is 'sustainable development' articulated as a discourse at national and sub-national levels?
2. How is 'sustainable development' conceptualised and articulated as a discourse locally by town and parish councillors?
3. How do town and parish councillors conceptualise their own role and do they see themselves as leading their community towards a more sustainable future?
4. To what extent are local councillors' conceptualisations shared with other local actors?

5. How do local discourses come together in the context of specific local issues?

1.3 Personal Context: A Reflexive Look at the Position of the Researcher

Arguably, any type of research will be influenced to a greater or lesser extent by the attitudes and ideas of the researcher. A social constructionist approach (see Burr, 1995; Redclift and Woodgate, 1997; Peterson, 1999) places the position and attitudes of the researcher centre stage, as he or she can only interpret the research results through the lens of his or her own attitudes. In addition, the design and implementation of the research process is also likely to be affected by the researcher's attitudes. This puts two responsibilities onto the researcher. Firstly, he or she can attempt to minimise the effects of his or her own views, for example by looking for what is in the data, rather than imposing categories upon it. Chapter 5 explains in more detail how this was attempted. Secondly, it is important that the position of the researcher is made clear at the outset, so that the reader can assess the research as knowledgably as possible. That is what this section is intended to achieve.

As researcher, I have two main interests in the research. Firstly, as a long-term and active member of the Green Party, I have an interest in encouraging progress towards a more sustainable society. Nevertheless, I was uncertain as to whether the concepts of 'sustainable development' and 'sustainability', as they are interpreted and used by UK government and local government, actually contribute to that progress.

Secondly, I am a town councillor in Gloucestershire, although my own town council was excluded from the research. This might be thought to introduce a bias in favour of the role of parish and town councillors, and it probably led me to be more sympathetic than another researcher might have been, and to look harder for positive contributions to sustainability. However, it also made me more sceptical of some of the claims made by councillors and clerks. In addition, I believe that my

position had several advantages. Firstly, it was useful in making initial contacts and persuading people to take part in the research. Secondly, my knowledge of council procedures and of the locality enabled a better understanding of the talk of councillors and clerks, without the need for lengthy explanations. Thirdly, it established a point of commonality between researcher and research subject, positioning me as an insider and thus improving the level of communication.

1.4 Research Structure

As the subject of sustainability at the very local level has received little detailed study, it was decided to analyse a few cases in depth rather than to undertake a larger-scale survey. Five case-study councils were studied through the use of focus groups and interviews as well as through analysis of relevant documentation. In order to analyse how different discourses come together at a local level around specific issues, two case-study projects were chosen for further study. The different scales at which the research took place are shown in Figure 1.

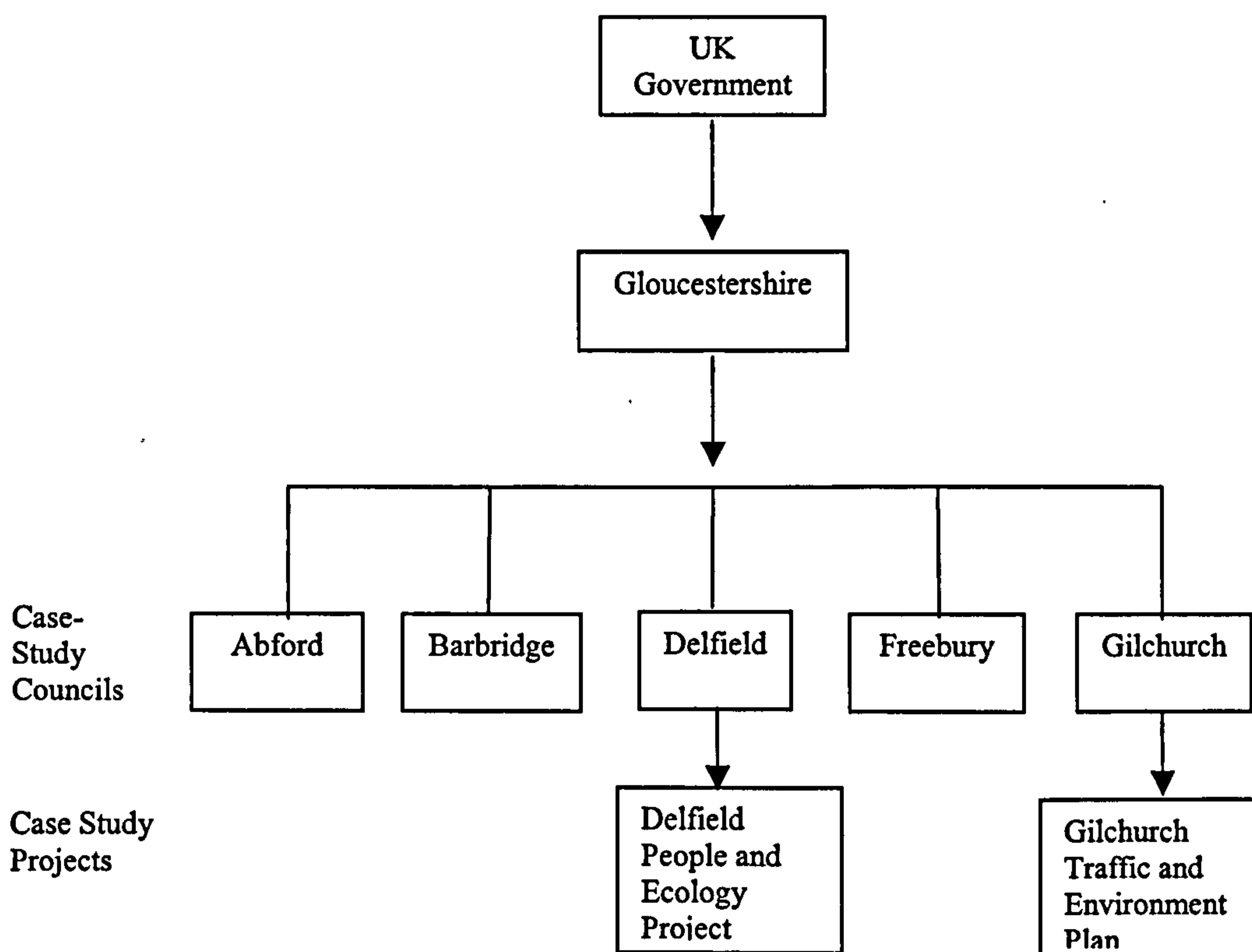


FIGURE 1: SPATIAL SCALES OF THE RESEARCH

1.6 Thesis Structure

Chapters 2 to 4 of this thesis address different aspects of theory. Chapter 2 analyses the concept of sustainable development, concluding that as a contested concept it can best be regarded in terms of discourse. Discourse is explained in greater detail in Chapter 3, which analyses different approaches to discourse and its analysis, settling on an approach based upon the critical discourse analysis of Fairclough (1992, 1995, 2000a&b, 2002, 2003) and van Dyke (1994, 1995, 1997, 2001). Chapter 4 examines the local level. Firstly, it discusses the concept of ‘local sustainability’ and identifies five dimensions of ‘local sustainability’; secondly, it analyses the contested concepts of ‘community’ and ‘locality’; and, thirdly, it considers the role of parish and town councils.

Chapter 5 describes and justifies the methodology of the research, covering case study selection and analysis of written documents and focus group and case-study material. It presents a ‘tree of discursive techniques’ as a basis for analysis. Finally, it discusses the validity and reliability of the research and explains how these were maximised.

Chapters 6 to 9 present and analyse the results of the research. Chapter 6 analyses discourses of sustainable development in the UK at national and sub-national level, with particular emphasis on national government discourses and county-level discourses in Gloucestershire. Chapter 7 analyses town councillor discourses of sustainable development and sustainability, based on written statements and on interview and focus group material. Chapter 8 analyses town councillors’ attitudes to their own role, to establish whether they see themselves as leading their communities towards sustainability. Chapter 9 looks at the discourses of other local actors involved in two case-study projects and attempts to establish whether these projects contribute to local sustainability, viewed in terms of the five dimensions developed in Chapter 4.

Thus, Chapters 6 to 9 relate closely to the four research objectives described above. Chapter 10 returns to the research questions and seeks to answer them in the light of the research. It concludes by retrospectively reviewing the methodology, before suggesting some policy implications and directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Sustainable Development – the global context

2.1 Introduction

Firstly, this chapter will look at the development of the concept of ‘sustainable development’ at an international level from the early 1970s, through the publication of the Bruntland Report (WCED, 1987) and the World Summits of 1992 and 2002 to the present day. I will draw out a number of points that are relevant to this thesis.

These are:

- The change in the use of the word ‘growth’.
- The extent to which a conflict is seen between the twin priorities of economic development and environmental protection.
- Whether fundamental structural change is needed.
- The scale, from international to local, at which action needs to be taken.
- Attitudes to knowledge.

Secondly, this chapter will look at the difficulty of defining the terms ‘sustainable development’ and ‘sustainability’ and will examine their meanings. Thirdly, it will look at how the two terms have been conceptualised and modelled academically, thus developing a model that will form the basis of this thesis. Fourthly, I will consider strategies for evaluating sustainable development. Fifthly, I will briefly review how sustainable development has been put into practice at the international level, looking first at international treaties and secondly at The European Union (EU). This will lead to a consideration of the concept of ‘ecological modernisation’ and how it relates to ‘sustainable development’. The chapter will conclude that such a flexible and potentially contradictory concept as ‘sustainable development’ needs to be studied as a discourse in order to understand how it is used to initiate, to guide and to avoid change.

2.2 The Origins of the Concept

2.2.1 THE BACKGROUND TO 'SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT'

'I do not wish to seem overdramatic, but I can only conclude from the information that is available to me as Secretary-General, that the Members of the United Nations have perhaps ten years left in which to subordinate their ancient quarrels and launch a global partnership to curb the arms race, to improve the human environment, to defuse the population explosion, and to supply the required momentum to development efforts.'

(U Thant, 1969, quoted in Meadows et al, 1972, p.17)

The above quotation from the then Secretary-General to the United Nations begins a period in which concerns for the achievement of an adequate standard of living for all and for the long-term protection of the environment come together on the international stage, raising two very basic questions. The first concerns the compatibility of the two aims - whether there is an irreconcilable contradiction between them or whether they can be achieved together. The second question concerns the extent that structural change in the operation of society is necessary to meet the two goals. This seems, therefore, a good place to start an exploration of the concept of sustainable development.

In the early 1970s, 'the environment quite suddenly became a political topic in Western societies' (Hajer, 1995, p.73); and concern with the environment and the future of humanity resulted in a number of important publications which brought together concerns with poverty and environmental protection. The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, which took place in Stockholm in 1972, was seen by the Northern countries, which convened it, as a conference on the world environment, until developmental concerns were forced onto the agenda by the poorer countries of the South (Reid, 1995). Thus, the early 1970s marked the linking of concerns for environmental protection and poverty eradication and therefore, arguably, heralded concern with sustainable development.

'If the words 'sustainable development' were not actually used at Stockholm, the idea was certainly in the air.' (Reid, 1995, p.38)

The early 1970s also saw the publication of four important books – *Only One Earth* (Ward and Dubos, 1972), *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al, 1972), *A Blueprint*

for Survival (The Ecologist, 1972) and *Small is Beautiful* (Schumacher, 1973) – which document the problems facing humanity as they were seen at that time. Together with the image of the earth from space taken in 1968, which is alluded to in several of the publications, they also form part of the background, or discursive context, from which the concept of sustainable development emerged. Hence, it is important to look at how the problem and its solutions were portrayed.

2.2.2 THE IMAGE OF THE EARTH FROM SPACE

The image of the earth seen from space and, later, Lovelock's (1979) metaphor of the world as Gaia, a giant organism, seem to have had a profound effect on ways of looking at the world. As Yearley says:

'The photographic portrayal of the globe viewed from an orbiting space craft has been used repeatedly to evoke the Earth's isolation in space, its fragility and wonder, and the sense that the beings on it share a restricted living space surrounded by an unwelcoming void.'
(1996, p.65)

Thus, the earth is seen firstly as complex, vulnerable and in need of care; and secondly it is seen as finite and to be considered as a whole. Sachs points out that the view of the Earth as finite also allows it to be seen as an object that can be managed.

'Without the photographs of the earth it would scarcely have been possible to view the planet as an object of management (1999, p.36)

References in *A Blueprint for Survival* to the earth as a spaceship and in the Bruntland Report (WCED, 1992) to the earth as a fragile ball reflect these interpretations. However, the image itself is not so apparent in later documents, although the management perspective has persisted. Chapter 6 will show a smaller scale reflection of Lovelock's metaphor in town councillors' use of biological metaphors when talking about their towns and villages as living organisms.

2.2.3 THE PROBLEM

In the early 1970s, the Club of Rome produced a series of computer models that predicted catastrophic consequences for unrestrained growth of population and

industrial output, publishing their results in 'The Limits to Growth'. They concluded:

'If the present growth trends in world population, industrialisation, food production, and resource depletion continue unchanged, the limits to growth on this planet will be reached sometime within the next one hundred years. The most probable result will be a rather sudden and uncontrollable decline in both population and industrial capacity.' (Meadows et al, 1972, p.23)

Limits to Growth, A Blueprint for Survival, which was based on the same computer models, and *Only One Earth* all portray the problem as 'growth', both of population and of industrial output with its associated resource usage and pollution. This is set against a desirable state of stable equilibrium, which is seen as attainable and able to meet basic needs.

'What is certain is that our sudden vast accelerations – in numbers, in the use of energy and raw materials, in urbanization, in consumptive ideals, in consequent pollution – have set technological man on a course that could alter dangerously and perhaps irreversibly, the natural systems of his planet on which his biological survival depends.' (Ward and Dubos, 1972, p46, emphasis in original)

'It is possible to alter these growth trends and to establish a condition of ecological and economic stability that is sustainable far into the future. The state of global equilibrium could be designed so that the basic material needs of each person on earth are satisfied and each person has an equal opportunity to realize his individual potential.' (Meadows et al, 1972, p.24)

2.2.4 SOLUTIONS

Although *Only One Earth* and *The Limits to Growth* concentrate on documenting the problem rather than advocating solutions, all four publications advocate a radical change in attitudes as well as action.

'We affirm finally that any deliberate attempt to reach a rational and enduring state of equilibrium by planned measures, rather than by chance or catastrophe, must ultimately be founded on a basic change of values and goals at individual, national and world levels.' (Meadows et al, 1972, p.195)

A number of theorists (Pepper, 1984; Hajer, 1995) have compared *The Limits to Growth, A Blueprint for Survival* and *Small is Beautiful* in more detail than can be

achieved here. Hajer points out that the emphasis on small-scale local solutions in *Blueprint for Survival* and *Small is Beautiful* comprises a more radical critique because it challenges existing centralised power:

‘Whereas Limits formed the basis for a coalition of forces that saw a further integration and co-ordination among the dominant social powers as the logical solution. *Blueprint* and *Small is Beautiful* became the catalyst of a coalition that sought to link the ecological crisis to a much broader social critique.’ (Hajer, 1995, p. 86)

The debate about whether we can provide for basic needs and protect the environment within existing political and social structures is still relevant today. However, as we shall see below, the attitude to ‘growth’ has changed radically and it is now seen as part of the solution rather than as the problem.

2.3 The Emergence of ‘Sustainable Development’

2.3.1 EARLY DEFINITIONS

The World Conservation Strategy (International Union for Conservation of Nature et al, 1980) is usually credited with the first use of the term ‘sustainable development’. According to O’Riordan, this document placed ‘the concept of sustainable utilisation [of resources] on the international political stage’ (1988, p.35). It defined sustainable development as follows:

‘Development is defined here as: the modification of the biosphere and the application of human, financial, living and non-living resources to satisfy human needs and improve the quality of human life. For development to be sustainable it must take account of social and ecological factors, as well as economic ones; of the living and nonliving resource base; and of the long-term as well as the short-term advantages and disadvantages of alternative actions.’ (IUCN et al, 1980, Ch.1)

The most frequently quoted definition of sustainable development comes from the Bruntland Report (WCED, 1987), described by Kirkby et al as ‘the key statement on sustainable development’ (1995, p.1) which ‘marked the concept’s political coming of age and established the content and structure of the present debate’ (Ibid). It defined sustainable development as:

‘development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.’ (WCED, 1987, p.8)

2.3.2 A CHANGE IN THE ATTITUDE TO GROWTH

The Bruntland Report marks a significant reversal of the attitude to ‘growth’. Whereas the publications produced in the early 1970s looked on ‘growth’ (of population, industrial production, resource use and pollution) as the problem and saw the solution in terms of stability and equilibrium, the Bruntland Report presents ‘growth’ (of the economy), albeit a new type of ‘growth’ which can meet the needs of the poor, as an essential part of the solution:

‘The problems of poverty and underdevelopment cannot be solved unless we have a new era of growth in which developing countries play a large role and reap large benefits.’ (WCED, 1987, p.40)

Nevertheless, the Bruntland Report does acknowledge the need for a change in the quality of growth, not only to reduce resource use but also to make its impact more equitable.

‘Sustainable development involves more than growth. It requires a change in the content of growth, to make it less material- and energy-intensive and more equitable in its impact.’ (Ibid, p.52)

The idea of growth that aids environmental protection has been developed, particularly within the European Union, into ecological modernisation, a concept that will be discussed below. The view that growth needs to be modified to meet the needs of the poor has been largely ignored. Instead it is still generally assumed that despite the persistence of absolute as well as relative poverty, and despite commitments to equity, that the wealth generated by growth will trickle-down to the poor and hence all will be better off.

2.3.3 CONFLICT OR SYNERGY?

The Bruntland definition, and indeed the whole Bruntland report, is based upon the assumption that it is possible to ‘meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.’ But

however 'needs' is interpreted, there are bound to be many conflicts between the needs of the present and those of the future, as well as conflicts between the needs of different groups of people in the present, as the report acknowledges:

'The link for common interest would be less difficult if all development and environment problems had solutions that would leave everyone better off. This is seldom the case, and there are usually winners and losers.' (WCED, 1987, p.48)

'Not compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' is usually interpreted as protecting the environment for future generations. Conflict between the developmental needs of the present and protection of the environment for the future was apparent at the 1972 Stockholm Conference, where the differing priorities of Northern developed countries for environmental protection, and Southern countries for development to meet basic needs, became clear. This North-South divide has been echoed in subsequent international negotiations on environment and development, including the UNCED conferences in Rio in 1992 and Johannesburg in 2002.

The existence of conflict between environmental protection and economic development is often glossed over or denied in policy statements. The European Commission, for example, clearly regards the two as being not only compatible but also complementary.

'Sustainable development is also a major opportunity for post-industrial Europe at the dawn of the knowledge or e-economy. If we can support and encourage the development of a greener market place, then business and citizens will respond with technological and management innovations that will spur growth, competitiveness, profitability and job creation.'
(Commission of the European Communities (CEC), 2001b, p.11)

However, the acceptance of economic growth as a necessity in order to meet the basic needs of the poor presents a potential conflict with resource conservation. If this conflict cannot be avoided or if no way is found of reconciling development with environmental protection, then sustainable development becomes impossible - an oxymoron, as alleged by Sachs (1999). Ekins analyses the difficulties of concurrently achieving both sustainability and economic growth and concludes:

‘The facile linking of sustainable development with GNP growth not only tends to obscure the scale of the technological challenge that is actually involved in rendering these two concepts compatible. It also fails to address the all-too evident past contradictions between GNP growth and a wider concept of development; and it tends to gloss over those areas where GNP growth and a wider concept of development are at present in irreconcilable conflict [...] [and] it makes no distinction between the development needs of North and South.’ (1993, p.93)

Ekins raises the distinction between development to meet basic needs and development as worldwide economic growth –a distinction that is frequently ignored. Thus, the need for development to meet basic needs in the South is used to justify economic growth in the North. As we shall see in Chapter 6, this equation of ‘development’ with ‘growth’ is apparent in the way that the concept of ‘sustainable development’ has been interpreted by the UK government. The portrayal of a synergistic relationship between environmental protection and economic growth is particularly apparent in the concept of ecological modernisation, which will be discussed below.

2.3.4 GOVERNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT – GLOBAL OR LOCAL?

The documents of the early 1970s stressed the need for radical change. Whether this always amounts to a commitment to structural change depends very much on how ‘structural’ is defined, and in particular whether it refers to the restructuring of industry or a more fundamental restructuring of society.

‘Reformulating the economic problem is about more than economic or industrial restructuring; it is about recreating the relationships between society, technology and nature’ (Davidson, 2000, p.41)

As we have seen, *A Blueprint for Survival* and *Small is Beautiful* call for decentralisation, i.e. a restructuring of society, rather than simply industrial restructuring. *Caring for the Earth* – a second report by the United Nations Environment Programme, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and the World Wildlife Fund, produced in 1991 - also contains a call for local, as

well as national and international, action, thus setting the tone for the now accepted participative aspect of sustainability:

‘Local communities are the focus for much that needs to be done in making the change to live sustainably, but there is little they can do if they lack the power to act. Subject to vital interests of the larger community they must be enabled to manage the resources on which they depend and to have an effective voice in the decisions that affect them’ (UNEP et al, 1991, p.5)

By contrast, the Bruntland Report, like *Only One Earth* and *The Limits to Growth*, called for global rather than local action. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992 did go some way to focussing attention back at the local level. In particular, Chapter 28 of Agenda 21, which emerged from this conference, stresses the importance of local authorities in the delivery of Local Agenda 21 (LA21). The opening paragraph of this chapter states:

‘Because so many of the problems and solutions being addressed by Agenda 21 have their roots in local activities, the participation and cooperation of local authorities will be a determining factor in fulfilling its objectives. [...] As the level of governance closest to the people, they play a vital role in educating, mobilizing and responding to the public to promote sustainable development.’
(United Nations, 1993, p.393)

However, it is worth noting that the level of governance closest to the people in most rural, and some urban, areas of the UK consists of parish, town and community councils. These local councils have not been given any specific role in the promotion of sustainable development, although there have been examples of neighbourhood or parish LA21 action plans (Webster, 1998). This thesis investigates the potential for action at parish and town level.

The call for participation and local action raises fundamental questions about the level and type of governance that is appropriate and most likely to be effective for sustainable development. Whereas there is room for action at a variety of levels, the diffusion of responsibility can lead to ‘passing the buck’ between levels and no effective action being taken. It is also by no means certain that local communities will take decisions that are sustainable (environmentally, socially or economically) in the long term. This may be a particular problem in developed countries where

people tend to be separated from the environmental and social impacts of their actions.

2.3.5 APPROACHES TO KNOWLEDGE

The Limits to Growth arose from The Club of Rome, an international group of experts who used computer models to predict the future of the planet under various growth scenarios. Thus, their concern was based on scientific and other expert knowledge. Although *A Blueprint for Survival* reached different conclusions, it was based on the same computer predictions and thus the same expertise.

The theme of scientific expertise has been stressed in UNCED reports, international negotiations, EU Programmes and UK government documents. For example, Kronsell (2000) points out the importance and influence of scientific knowledge in EU policy formation.

‘Scientific evidence has been, and is, widely used by policy-makers of all political colours – environmentalists and non-environmentalists alike. Scientific information about a problem is difficult to contradict. The mere official status of such data gives the participant who takes advantage of it, a strong argument without appearing to be political’ (2000, p.91)

Appeals to scientific knowledge are used to instigate and justify action, but they can also be used to oppose action or to justify lack of action. It is not infrequent for scientists to be arguing on both sides of a debate. Hajer (1995) shows how scientific and other expertise was used to justify and to oppose the installation of flue gas desulphurisation apparatus in the UK. Yearley considers the role of science in the negotiation of international environmental agreements, and concludes:

‘While the discourse of science is supposed to offer objectivity and disinterested authority, in practice the application of this discourse to global environmental problems does not resolve the issue once and for all.’ (1996, p.121)

Knowledge is always filtered through people and hence the action is always political. Science and other expertise can be used to justify what are essentially political positions and decisions.

Nevertheless, the concept of sustainable development has emerged from scientific expertise. Our knowledge and understanding of problems such as acid rain, global warming and ozone depletion are largely based on science, and hence they are removed from people's direct experience. Symptoms of these processes are increasingly being experienced at first hand, but the links between first hand experience and underlying cause are still made through scientific expertise. This removal of the problems from people's direct experience, and a growing distrust of experts, may make it less likely that people will change their lifestyles in response to calls for sustainability.

There is an increasing emphasis from academics (e.g. Warburton, 1998) and, as I will show, from local councillors and other activists, on other types of localised and anecdotal knowledges that can also make a positive contribution to sustainability.

2.4 Defining Sustainable Development

2.4.1 A PLETHORA OF DEFINITIONS

At least 70 definitions of sustainable development or sustainability have been identified (Kirkby et al, 1995, p.1), and the appendix to Pearce et al (1989) lists a 'Gallery of Definitions'. As Chatterton and Style assert:

'One of the few agreements within the sustainable development debate is that there is no clear agreement on what the term means.'
(2001, p.447)

This flexibility in meaning has been seen as an advantage, both to enable the concept to gain widespread support and to allow it to adapt to changing circumstances and ideas.

'The unusually widespread popularity of the concept may be attributed to the hidden contradictions and ambiguities of the term.'
(Fischer and Black, 1995, p.xiv)

'[The] ambiguity becomes part of the process of enriching and renewing the concept, and not simply a problem of implementation.'
(Myerson and Rydin, 1996a, p.99)

However, whilst Lélé admits that ‘to some extent the value of the phrase does lie in its broad vagueness (1991, p.607), he continues by arguing that ‘clarification is necessary if SD is to avoid being either dismissed as another development fad or being co-opted by forces opposed to changes in the status quo’ (Ibid, p.618). Other commentators express the difficulties of putting into practice a term with such flexibility of meaning. For example, Myerson and Rydin (1996b), Owens (1994) and Owens and Cowell (2002) point out the difficulties with respect to land-use planning.

2.4.2 THE BRUNTLAND DEFINITION

As the Bruntland definition is so prevalent, it is worth looking at it in some detail. It raises a number of questions, some of which have been alluded to above.

Equity

Firstly, the reference to ‘needs’ implies, but does not explicitly state, a commitment to equity. The report itself acknowledges the importance of intragenerational, as well as intergenerational, equity:

‘Concern for social equity between generations [...] must logically be extended to equity within each generation.’ (WCED, 1987, p.43)

Nevertheless, this is not necessarily ‘read into’ the definition when it is quoted out of context. And, as we shall see, this aspect of sustainable development has been sidelined in international agreements and by the European Union and the UK government, in spite of ‘an important and emerging realisation that a sustainable society must also be a just society, locally, nationally and internationally.’ (Agyeman et al, 2003)

Needs

Secondly, and related to the above, ‘needs’ could be interpreted as referring to basic needs or to the more sophisticated needs of modern society (Blowers, 1993), with significant consequences for resource use and for the necessity of economic growth as opposed to redistribution of existing wealth. The latter type of ‘need’ might

include a commitment to maintaining other forms of life either for human use or for their own intrinsic worth.

Whereas the Bruntland Report was, in accordance with its brief, written from an anthropocentric perspective, *Caring for the Earth* took a more ecocentric approach. Its first 'founding principle', which provides 'the ethical base for the others' (UNEP et al, 1991, p.5), is entitled 'Respect and Care for the Community of Life' and begins:

'This principle reflects the duty of care for other people and other forms of life, now and in the future. It is an ethical principle. It means that development should not be at the expense of other groups or of later generations (Ibid)

Thus, this principle contains a commitment to intergenerational and intragenerational equity and also, unlike the Bruntland Report, an ecocentric 'duty of care' to 'other forms of life', independent of their use to humans.

Development

Thirdly, unlike the World Conservation Strategy (IUCN et al, 1980), the Bruntland definition defines 'sustainable', but does not attempt to define 'development'. Furthermore, the meaning of the latter term is not apparent from the report as a whole. As McManus says:

'The Bruntland Commission appears to confuse various notions of 'development'.' (1996, p.66)

Myerson and Rydin argue that, the Bruntland Report 'fudge[s] the definition of development' (1996b, p.29), and so allows the term 'sustainable development' to be interpreted as sustaining the status quo:

'The new concept [sustainable development] subtly shifted the locus of sustainability from nature to development, while 'sustainable' previously referred to natural yields, it now refers to development' (Sachs, 1999, p.33)

As a consequence of this interpretation of 'development', Sachs (1999) has also described 'sustainable development' as an oxymoron, or as inherently contradictory; and O'Riordan and Voisey describe it as 'deliberately ambiguous' (1997, p.21). It is this failure to define either 'needs' or 'development' that allows

‘sustainable development’ to be interpreted in so many different ways, whilst still using the same definition.

Sachs asserts that the Bruntland definition was intentionally imprecise and ‘was designed to maximise consensus rather than clarity’ (Sachs, 1999, p.27). In spite, or perhaps because, of this it has been very influential and is frequently quoted including by academics (Ekins, 1993; Kirkby et al, 1995; Selman, 1996), the UK government (DoE, 1994; DETR, 1999; DFID, 2000) and business leaders (Watts, 1998).

2.4.3 WHAT IS DEVELOPMENT?

Lélé (1991) points out that ‘development’ can be a process or an objective. As a process it can mean growth and/or change; as an objective it means the fulfilling of the basic needs of the poor. Lélé argues that ‘development’ as process combined with sustainability in its literal meaning of keeping going leads to a ‘contradictory and trivial’ understanding of sustainable development; whereas ‘development’ as objective combined with the ecological and social meanings of sustainability leads to a ‘mainstream and meaningful’ definition of sustainable development.

However, ‘development’ as an objective, as applied to a country, has also come to mean becoming an advanced capitalist economy. Sachs (1993) credits the origin of this meaning of the word to President Harry Truman, who first defined poorer countries as ‘underdeveloped areas’, thus ‘suddenly a seemingly indelible concept was established, cramming the immeasurable diversity of the South into one single category – the underdeveloped’ (Ibid, p.4). In this way, the world is portrayed in terms of a progress towards development where some (the North) are succeeding and others (the South) are failing. This implicitly rules out other visions of the world – other ways in which basic needs might be met without destroying the environment; and, as Sachs argues, means that the concept of ‘development’ becomes an impediment:

‘The development discourse is deeply imbued with Western certainties like progress, growth, market integration, consumption

and universal needs, all notions that are part of the problem, not of the solution.’ (Ibid)

Of course, this is not the only way to interpret ‘development’. Barton et al, for example, argue for a broader interpretation:

‘The notion of development in the context of sustainability is broader than simply economic growth, or GNP. It implies improvement to:

- the quality of life
- health and nutritional status
- equity on access to resources and services
- per capita income
- perceived quality of human environment’

(Barton et al, 1995, p.8)

Many words have multiple meanings or shades of meaning; and are often used in such a way as to associate two (or more) meanings. Thus, ‘development’ which literally means ‘change’ or ‘bringing out potential’, has come to also mean both ‘economic growth’ and ‘meeting basic needs’, and is used in such a way as to conflate all these meanings. This is particularly apparent in the phrase ‘sustainable development’. As Sachs continues:

‘“Sustainable development” [...] has inherited the fragility of ‘development’. The concept emasculates the environmental challenge by absorbing it into the empty shell of ‘development’, and insinuates the continuing validity of developmentalist assumptions even when confronted with a drastically different historical situation.’ (1999, p.9)

In this way, ‘sustainable development’ is complicated by different meanings and interpretations of ‘development’; and, arguably, if ‘development’ is interpreted as simply economic growth, ‘sustainable development’ becomes an oxymoron. The term ‘sustainability’ may escape from some of these ambiguities and be a more helpful concept.

2.4.4 WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY?

O’Riordan attributes the idea of sustainability to the ancient Greeks:

‘As a specific notion, sustainability probably appeared first in the Greek vision of ‘Ge’ or ‘Gaia’ as the Goddess of the Earth, the mother figure of natural replenishment’ (1988, p.31).

More recently its use has been associated with concern with viable populations and ecosystems in biology (Pearce, 1993).

Many commentators use the terms ‘sustainable development’ and ‘sustainability’ interchangeably; and ‘sustainability’ has not escaped the debate over meaning that has dogged ‘sustainable development’. However, whilst they can be used to mean the same thing, there are, or can be, a number of differences in emphasis between the two terms. They could be viewed as having different but overlapping spectra of meaning, as shown in Figure 2.

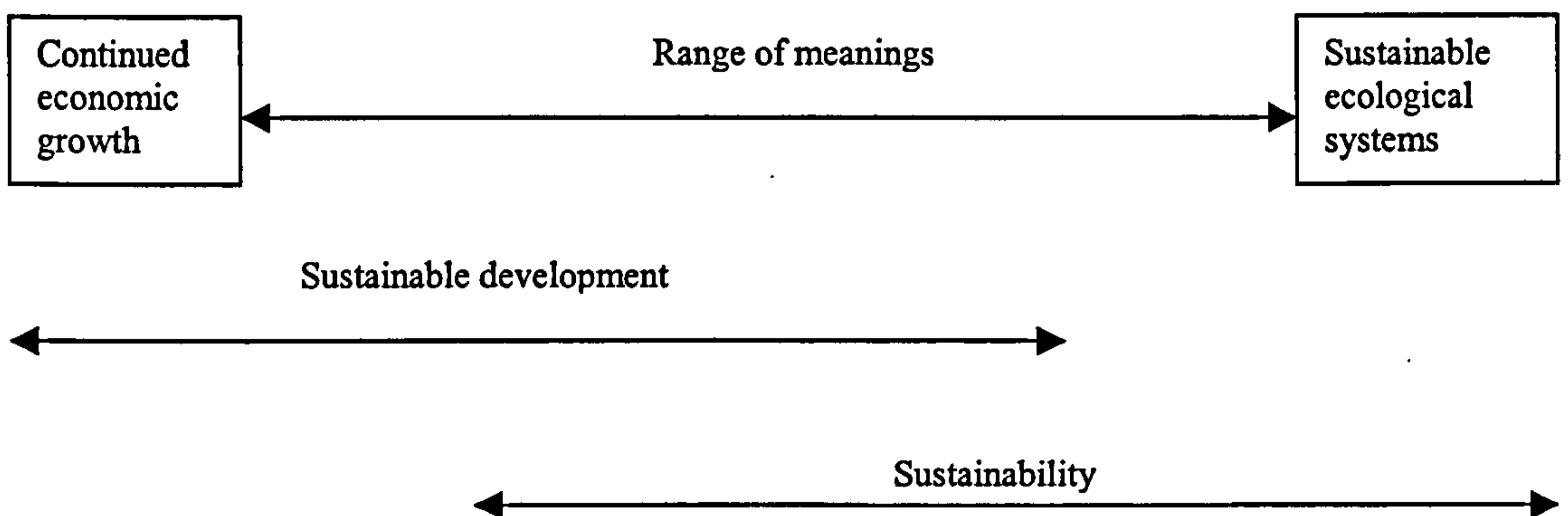


FIGURE 2: THE RANGE OF MEANING OF ‘SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT’ AND ‘SUSTAINABILITY’

Whereas the term ‘sustainable development’ is essentially anthropocentric, dealing with human needs now and in the future, this need not be true of ‘sustainability’.

**‘Sustainable development is, in my view, an anthropocentric notion in a way that sustainability need not (but may) be’
(Dobson, 1996, p.423)**

Lélé (1991) suggests three connotations of sustainability – literal, ecological and social. I will regard ‘sustainability’ as having a continuum of meaning based around the three spheres of sustainability represented in the familiar overlapping-circle diagram shown in Figure 3, with varying emphasis being given to the different

spheres. Thus, one use of the word might put more emphasis on the economic sphere and another might put more emphasis on the environmental or social sphere. This could be visualised as a triangle of meaning, whose apexes represent the three spheres of sustainability. A particular use of the word could be situated anywhere in the triangle, as shown in Figure 4.

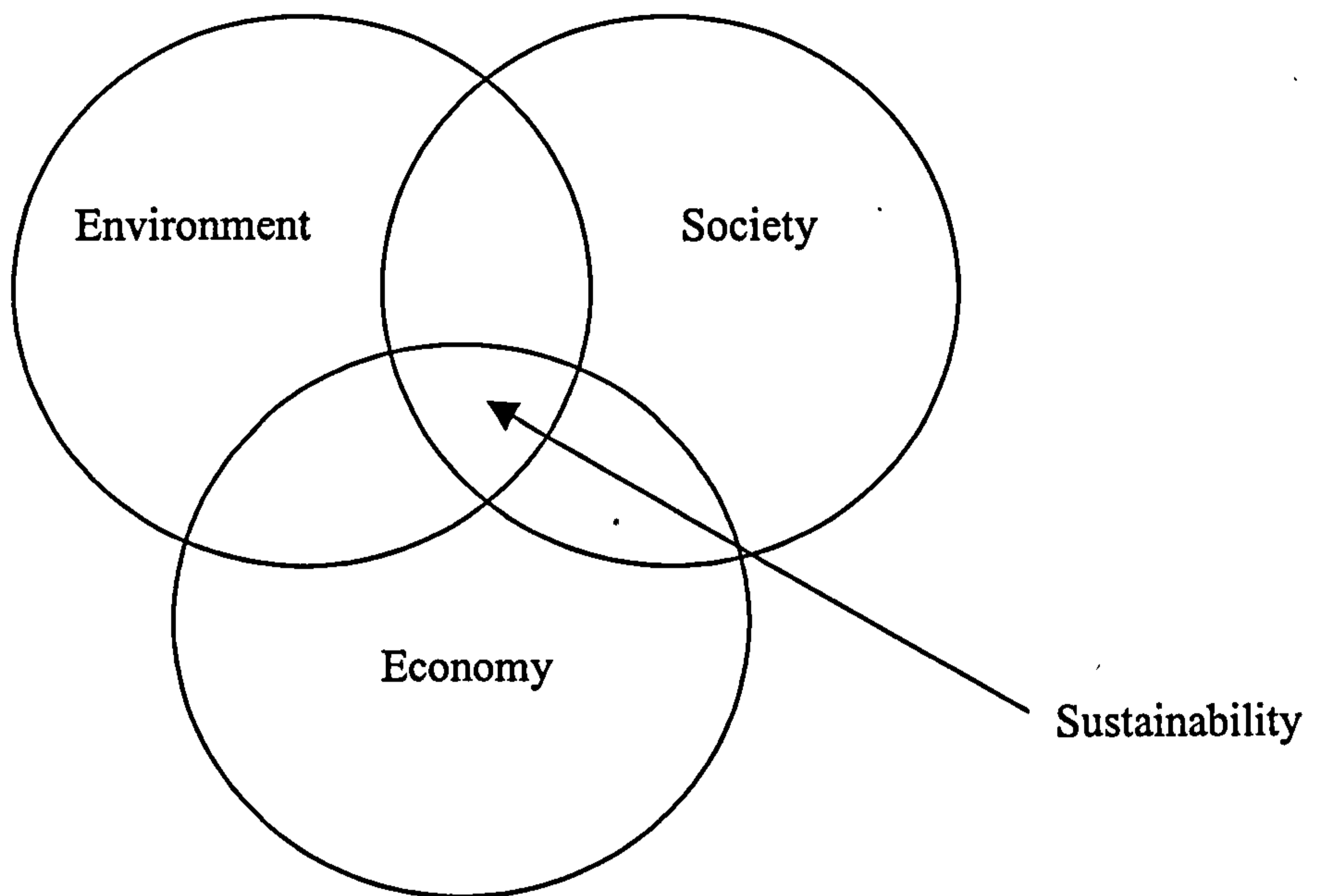


FIGURE 3: SUSTAINABILITY: THE OVERLAPPING CIRCLE MODEL

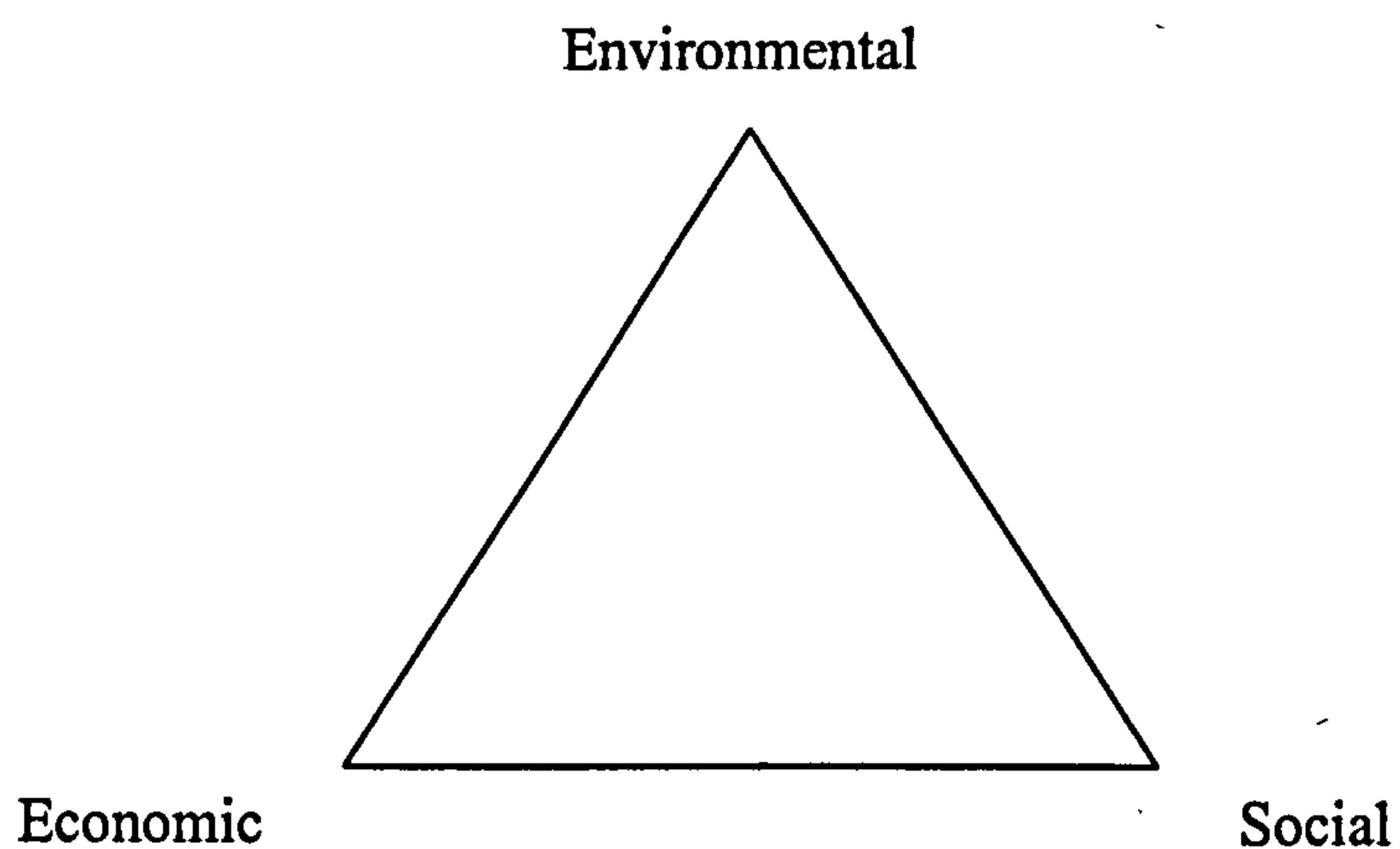


FIGURE 4: SUSTAINABILITY – THE TRIANGLE OF MEANING

This triangle could equally well be applied to ‘sustainable development’, although meanings of this latter term may be more likely to be situated close to the economic apex than if the term sustainability were chosen. In the remainder of this chapter, the terms ‘sustainable development’ and ‘sustainability’ will be both be used, reflecting their use in the source material being referred to. However, in Chapter 7, I will discuss the difference in the ways the terms are interpreted at the local level.

2.5 Analysing Sustainable Development

2.5.1 THE ‘CAPITAL’ METAPHOR

The idea of ‘natural capital’ was introduced by Schumacher (1973), to make the point that conventional economics ignores the erosion of environmental assets. It reappears as ‘ecological capital’ in the Bruntland Report, and is the basis of attempts to measure sustainability in economic terms (Pearce, 1993).

The concept of ‘social capital’ is adapted from the ideas of Bourdieu (Robbins, 2000). O’Riordan explains the term as follows:

‘Social capital has come to mean the capacity for civil society to organise itself into self-supportive groupings of creative order, constructive participation and supportive democracy in the face of dispute.’ (1999, p.12)

Selman puts it more succinctly:

‘Social capital may be understood as a glue which holds communities together through mutual interdependence’ (2001, p.14)

The idea of the three types of capital – manufactured, environmental and social - has been widely taken up (Owens, 1994; O’Riordan, 1999; Selman, 2001; Owens and Cowell, 2002). Moseley (2003) adds a fourth – human capital, which is concerned with individual capabilities. These will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Like the overlapping-circle diagram discussed below, the analysis implies that the different types of capital are comparable and equally easy to destroy and replace. Owens points out that the metaphor of ‘capital’ applied to the natural world may be

part of the problem because, together with words such as ‘assets’, ‘compensation’ and ‘stock’, it ‘implies a proprietorial and instrumental interest in the environment’ (1994, p.443). This use of economic metaphors for the environment is reflected in UK government documents on sustainability, as will be discussed in Chapter 6.

2.5.2 CATEGORISING APPROACHES

There have been several attempts to categorise interpretations of sustainable development and sustainability (e.g. Lélé, 1991; Voisey and O’Riordan, 1997; Davidson, 2000). Lélé’s ‘semantics of sustainable development’ is one of the most helpful because he considers different meanings of sustainability and of development, as we have seen above, and how they can be combined (1991, p.608). Baker et al put forward a ‘Ladder of Sustainable Development’ (1997, p.9); and Davidson (2000), based on Jacobs (1995), analyses conservative and radical approaches to sustainable development. Dobson (1996) identifies four conceptions of sustainability, only two of which are entirely anthropocentric and compatible with sustainable development.

In addition, a number of authors have identified lists of sustainability (or sustainable development) principles. (IUCN et al, 1991; Selman, 1996; Bell and Morse, 1999; Stevens and Morris, 2001). Rydin (1999) highlights conflicts and synergies between different aspects of sustainability. She shows how the different dimensions of sustainability – economic, social, environmental and political can be viewed as either conflicting or complementing each other. For example, ecological modernisation portrays the environmental and economic dimensions as synergistic, but economies can also be seen as environmentally damaging.

2.5.3 WEAK AND STRONG SUSTAINABILITY

The most common categorisation of sustainability is probably into weak and strong versions (Selman, 1996; Myerson and Rydin, 1996a; Wackernagel and Rees, 1996; Bell and Morse, 1999; O’Riordan, 1999). Weak sustainability allows the substitution of natural capital by manufactured capital, whereas strong

sustainability, whether from an anthropocentric or ecocentric perspective, holds critical natural capital as sacrosanct and irreplaceable. For example, an ecocentric advocate of strong sustainability would value nature for its own sake and would not accept any loss of biodiversity for economic benefit. An anthropocentric advocate of strong sustainability would value nature for its practical and emotional value to humanity, and hence would also not accept economic trade-offs. However, a supporter of weak sustainability would argue that loss of biodiversity could be justified when the environmental loss can be offset by economic gain. The weak sustainability approach is strongly associated with technocentrism – i.e. the belief that technology will provide answers to environmental problems.

There have been attempts to make the division into strong and weak sustainability more sophisticated. For example, Owens (1994) identifies three types of sustainable development - weak, strong and very strong – where very strong sustainable development ‘keeps critical natural capital intact as well as handing down *no less natural capital* than current generations enjoy’ (1994, p.443, emphasis in original). Pearce (1993) and Gibbs et al (1998) make even finer distinctions with their ‘spectrum’ from ‘very weak sustainability’ through weak and strong versions to ‘very strong sustainability’.

O’Riordan identifies ‘two fundamentally different attitudes toward the environment’ (1999, p.7). They are ecocentrism, which ‘embraces community scale, natural rhythms, and a morality based on ecological principles’ (Ibid) and technocentrism, which ‘is hierarchical, manipulative and managerial.’(Ibid). These can be seen (Pearce, 1993) as corresponding roughly to strong and weak sustainability respectively.

2.6 Models of Sustainable Development/Sustainability

Many models of sustainability and sustainable development have been produced, including Kirkby et al’s (1995) ‘Main Components of Sustainability’ – environment, growth, and equity, ‘Domains of Sustainability’ (O’Riordan and Voisey, 1998) and ‘The Roots of Sustainability’ (Bell and Morse, 1999).

Probably the most popular model is the representation of sustainability as three overlapping circles, shown in Figure 3 on page 42, with sustainability existing where they come together or overlap. This model has the advantage of showing that environmental, social and economic factors must all be considered. However, it is misleading because it puts equal emphasis on the environmental, social and economic spheres and implies that the three spheres can exist independently of each other, whereas in reality only the environment can exist in isolation from the other two. As Giddings et al say:

‘[The model] assumes the separation and even autonomy of the economy, society and environment from each other. This view risks approaching and tackling issues of sustainable development in a compartmentalised manner’ (2002, p.189)

These problems are avoided in the concentric circle model shown in Figure 5, in which the social sphere is seen as existing within the environment and the economy as existing within the social sphere.

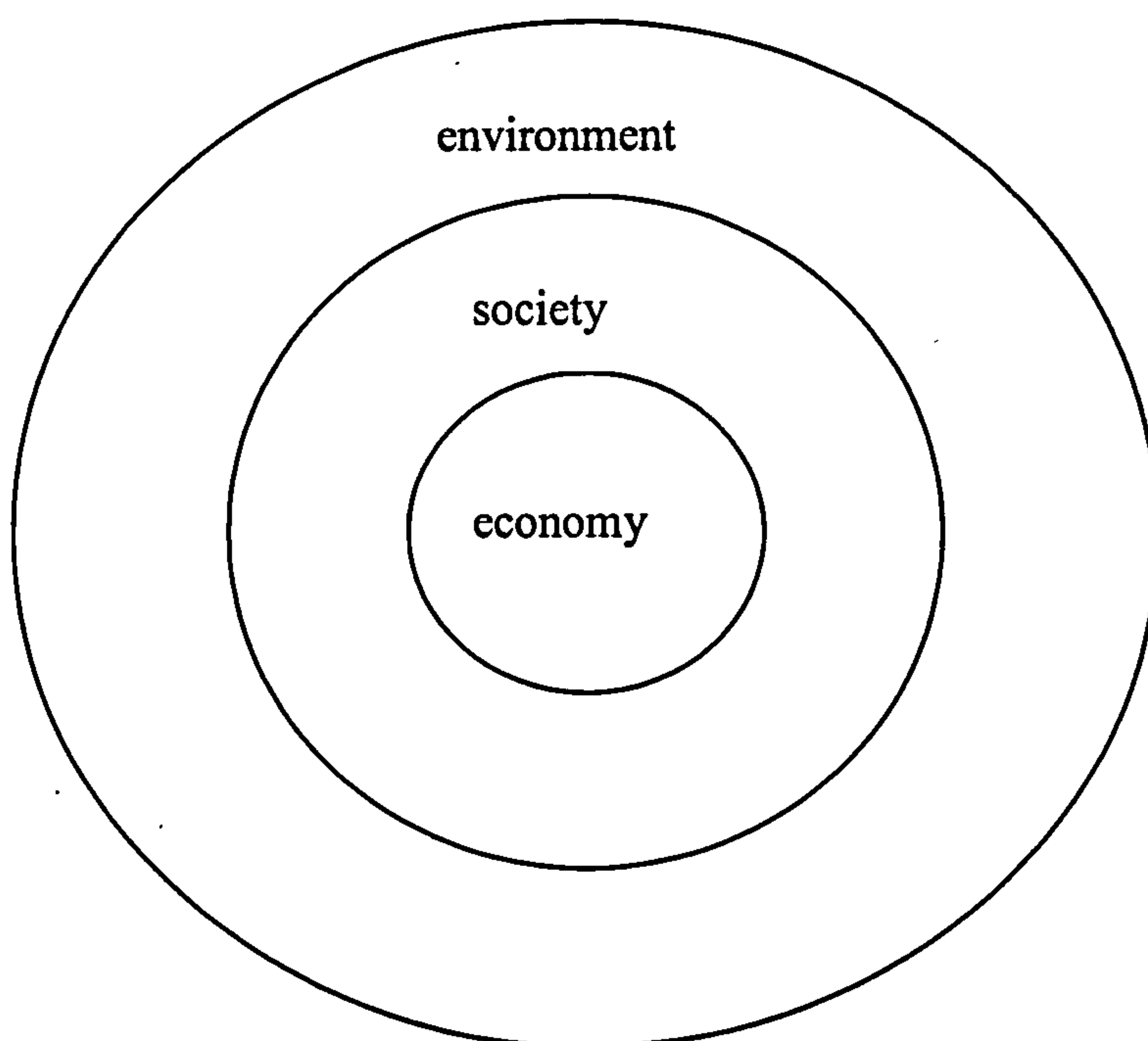


FIGURE 5: SUSTAINABILITY – THE CONCENTRIC CIRCLE MODEL

Whilst artificial boundaries and simplifications, such as the separation of economy, society and environment, are inevitable in analysis, they are seldom politically neutral. In addition, it is important to be aware that divisions that appear natural often represent a view of the world that reflects the dominance of particular ideologies. It could be argued that the separation of economy from society is a reflection of dominant Western ideas, and is an inadequate reflection of reality, particularly for the poor who, whether in the West or in the Third World, are not fully integrated into the mainstream capitalist economy.

Giddings et al (2002) modify the concentric circle model by not treating the economy and society as single separate spheres, because 'the effect of pretending that the economy and society are each a unified whole is to ignore diversity and difference and instead give preference to the dominant parts' (p.192). They combine society and economy into a single sphere, which they call 'Human Activity and Well Being' (Ibid, p.193). They also point out that the boundary between this new sphere and the environment is 'fuzzy' (Ibid), as shown in Figure 6.

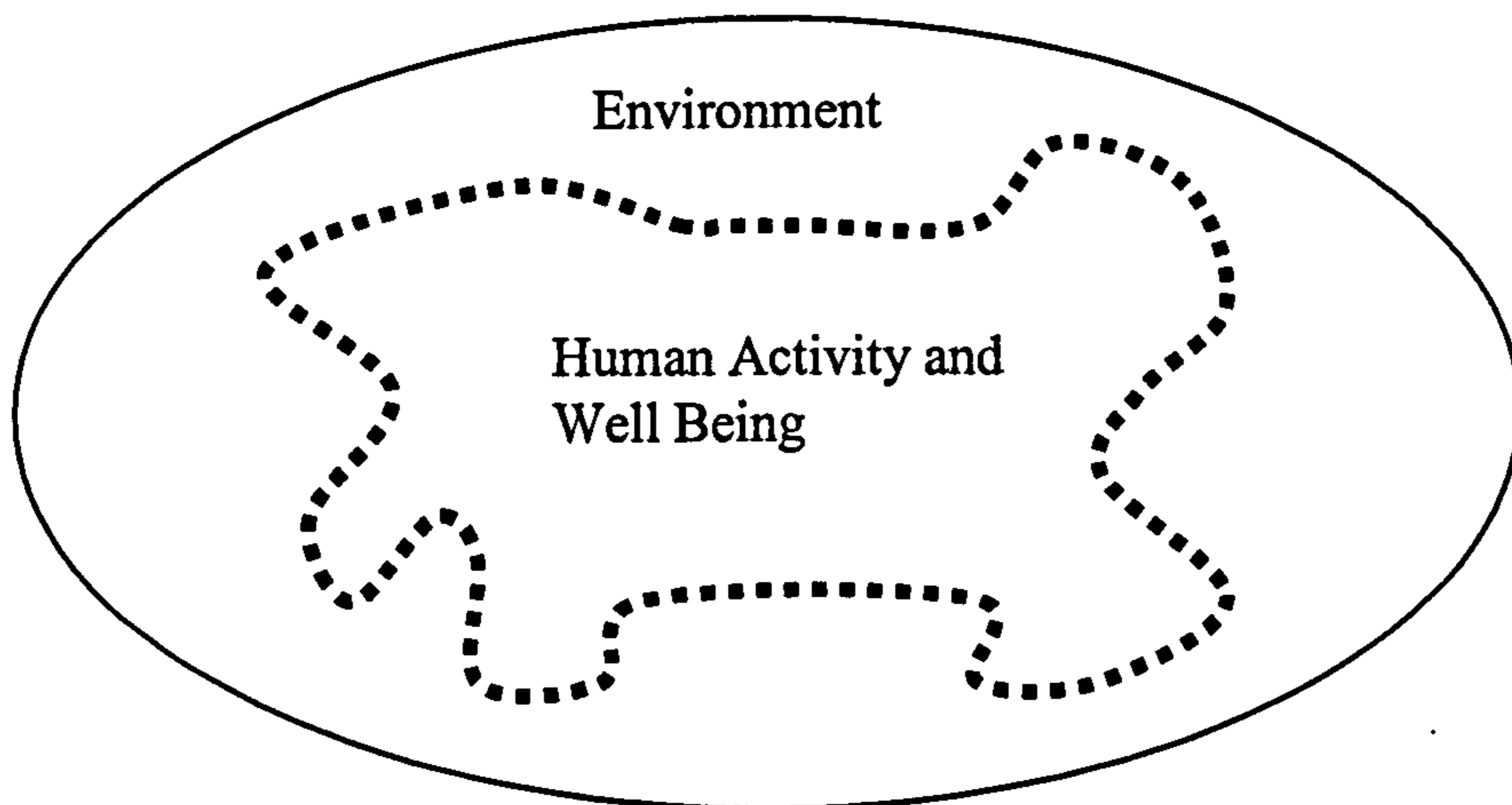


FIGURE 6: SUSTAINABILITY –THE FUZZY MODEL (FROM GIDDINGS ET AL, 2002)

It is often unclear as to whether models of sustainability represent the situation as it is or the situation as it would be in an ideal sustainable world. Macnaghten and Jacobs (1997) combine the first two representations shown above in their model of the sustainable development argument, shown in Figure 7.

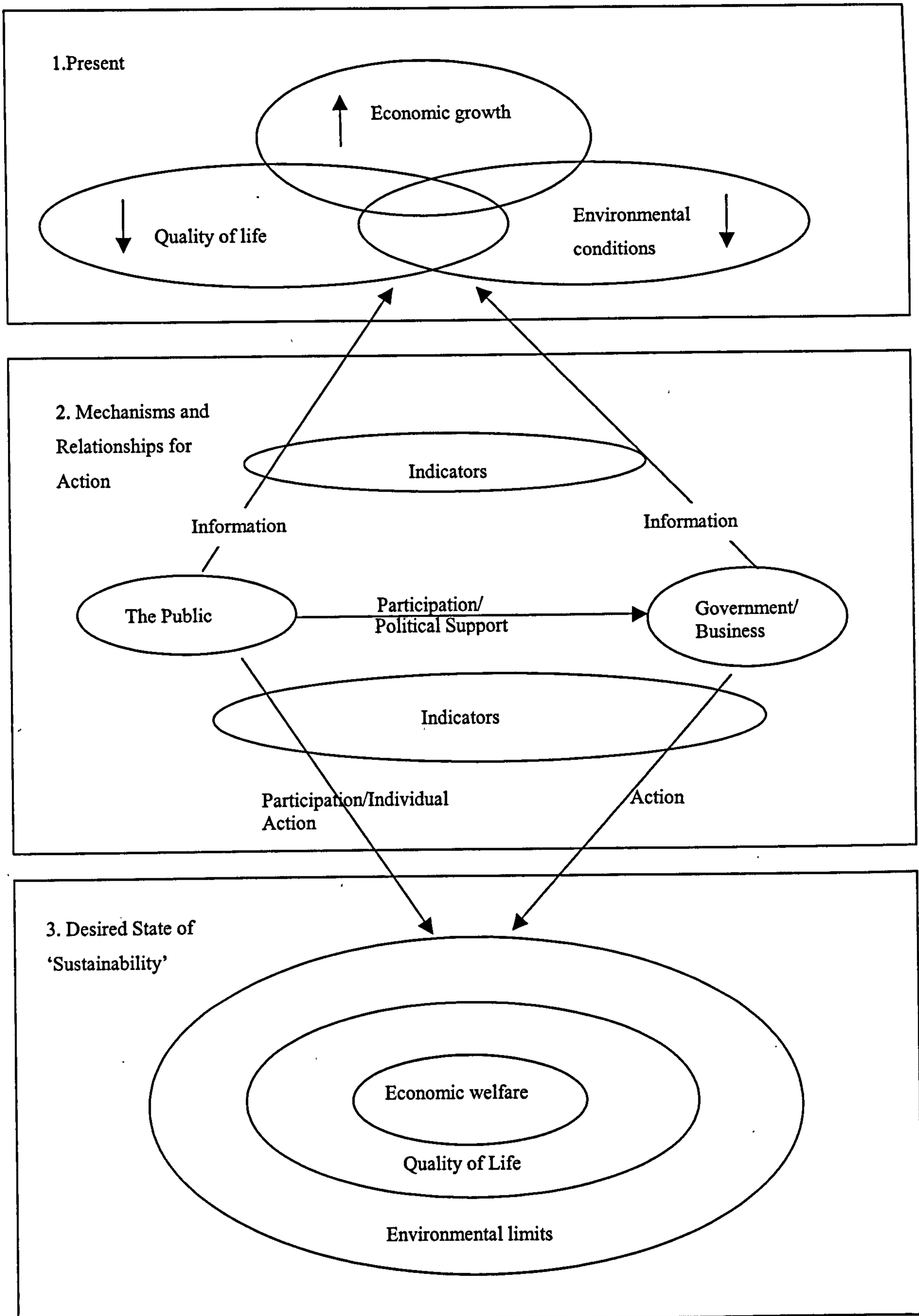


FIGURE 7: A MODEL OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ARGUMENT (FROM MACNAGHTEN AND JACOBS, 1997)

The overlapping-circle representation is seen as the present situation, with arrows showing increasing economic growth and decreasing quality of life and environmental conditions. Whereas the concentric-circle representation is seen as the 'desired state of 'sustainability' (1997, p.9), where economic welfare is seen as part of quality of life, and the whole exists within environmental limits.

Most sustainability models tend to obscure the conflicts that inevitably occur on the road to sustainability and thus, probably unintentionally, imply that there is a way of avoiding conflict. Campbell (1996) approaches sustainability from the viewpoint of land-use planning. His 'Planners' Triangle' adapts the basic overlapping-circle model to show the conflicts between the spheres, as shown in Figure 8.

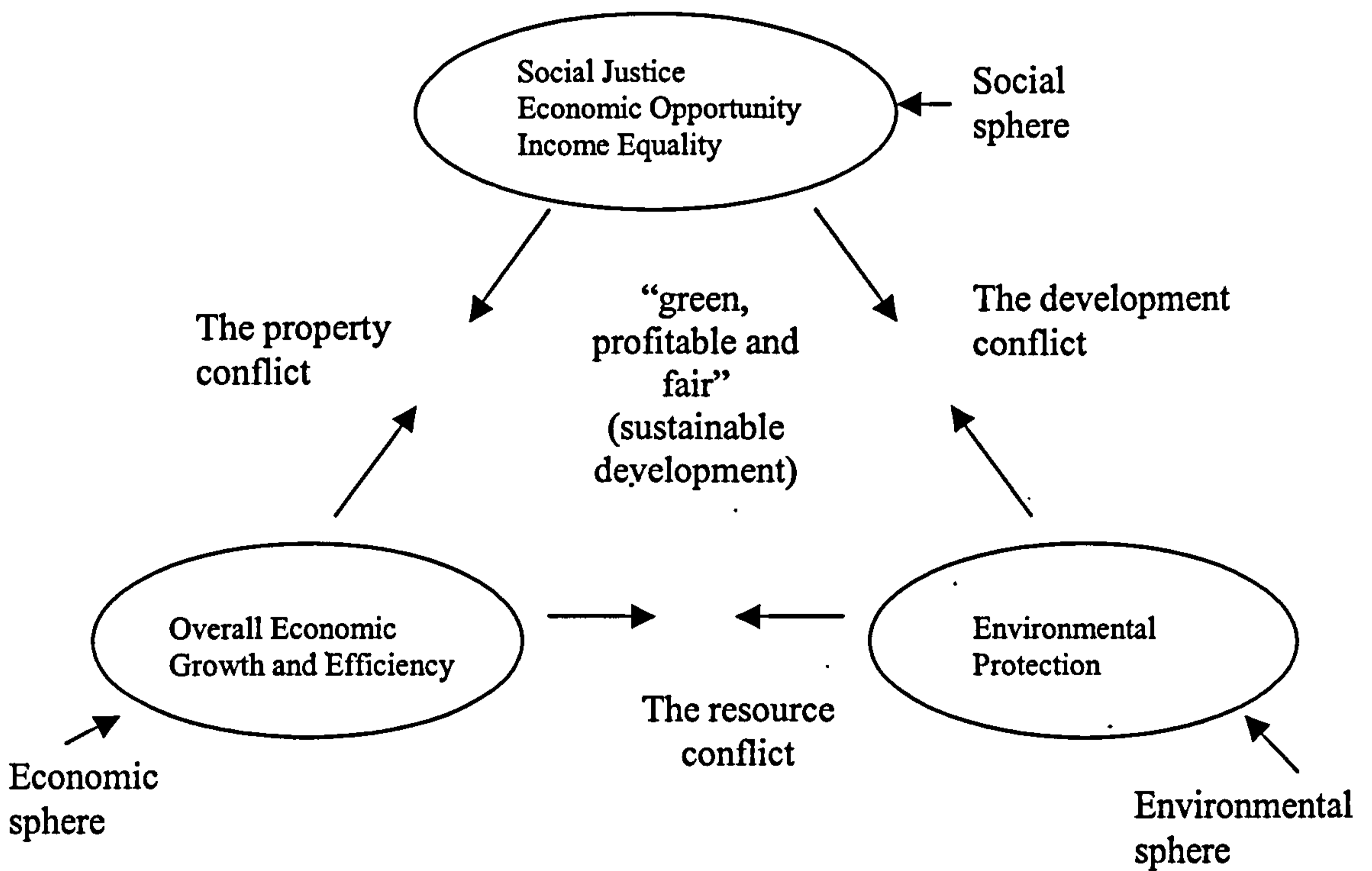


FIGURE 8: THE PLANNERS TRIANGLE (FROM CAMPBELL, 1996)

Campbell's model of the three conflicting goals for planners and the associated conflicts has relevance beyond the field of land-use planning. If Campbell's 'elusive ideal of sustainable development' (1996, p.298) as 'green, profitable and fair' (Ibid) in the centre of the triangle is represented by the 'fuzzy' model of

Giddings et al, we have an approximation of the present situation as portrayed by Campbell's triangle, the conflicts that need to be tackled through sustainable development as a process and the situation of sustainability for which we need to aim. This is shown in Figure 9.

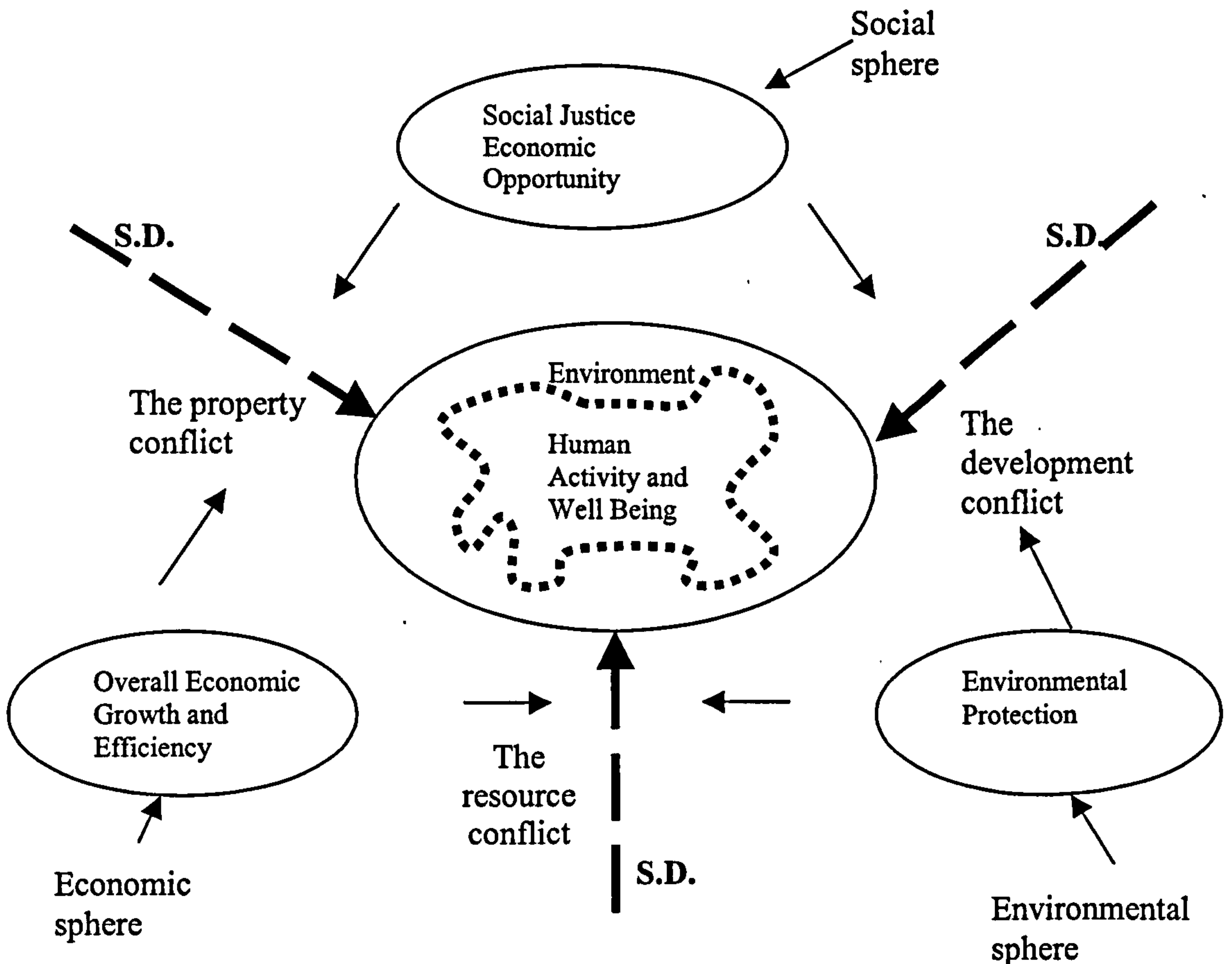


FIGURE 9: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AS A PROCESS OF RESOLVING CONFLICT (ADAPTED FROM CAMPBELL (1996) AND GIDDINGS ET AL (2002))

2.7 Can Sustainable Development be Measured?

The general acceptance that we should be aiming for sustainable development or sustainability raises the question of how we can tell if we are getting there or even moving in the right direction. This has led to attempts to measure or indicate sustainability. If sustainability can be measured it also makes it appear more 'scientific' and hence more credible. As Chambers says, 'quantification brings credibility' (1998, p.130). However, he continues:

‘Figures and tables can deceive, and numbers construct their own realities. What can be measured and manipulated statistically is then not only seen as real; it comes to be seen as the only or the whole reality’ (Ibid)

Or to put it slightly differently, we come to value what we measure, rather than measure what we value.

As might be expected from a term whose definition is not even fully agreed, measurement of sustainability is far from simple. Sustainability cannot be measured:

‘in absolute, traditional, reductionist terms because sustainability itself is not a single thing [...] or rather it can be done but it will be done badly, oversimplifying complexity and reducing a variety of views and understandings to the mindset of the scientist.’ (Bell and Morse, 1999, p.100)

International agreements are often formulated in terms of numerical targets, such as percentage reduction in greenhouse gas emissions or reduction in the number of people with no access to clean water. Hence, specific factors that contribute to overall sustainability can be measured. Several sets of sustainability indicators have been suggested along these lines (European Union Expert Group on the Urban Environment, undated; Barton and Bruder, 1995; DETR, 1999). Kuik and Verbruggen (1991) and Bell and Morse (1999) review the state of sustainability indicators and other more holistic measures of sustainability at local as well as international and national levels. Many local indicators have arisen from the Local Agenda 21 process (see MacGillivray et al, 1998). O’Riordan says of local indicators:

‘If well done, indicators are a product of an encompassing and empowering participatory process, as much as they provide benchmarks for performance and service delivery. To be effective, indicators need to have real meaning for community groups and engaged individuals.’ (1999, p.24)

Thus, indicators may help in assessing progress on specific targets and increasing public identification with these targets. However, the choice of targets is inevitably

subjective and they do not necessarily give an accurate picture of overall progress towards sustainability.

‘There can be doubt that the current interest in ‘Sustainability Indicators’ will provide a useful and thought-provoking series of standards against which policy action might be judged. However, it has to be recognised that these indicators cannot be a proxy for sustainability, and achievement of them does not equate with the achievement of sustainability.’

(Buckingham-Hatfield and Evans, 1996, p.5)

The Pastille Project set out to study the use of local sustainability indicators in four locations in Europe, and reached similar conclusions:

‘[Local level sustainability indicators] do not readily and automatically lead to changes in decision-making nor make major policy impacts. [...] [However,] indicators can and do serve a purpose in the continuing debate about sustainable development. They can help organisations assimilate and better understand stakeholders’ views regarding sustainable development; they can add to the process of governance; and, when local context is considered, they can help guide and mould policy decisions’ (Pastille Project Report, p.90)

There have been several attempts to measure sustainability in economic terms (e.g. Pearce, 1993). These are reviewed by Dresner (2002). However, putting a monetary value on environmental assets can be difficult, contentious and misleading. For example, whilst it is relatively easy to cost waste disposal, it is very difficult to put a monetary value on biodiversity or on constituents of social capital such as community spirit or commitment to sustainability.

Wackernagel and Rees (1996), take a different approach to assessing ecological sustainability. Their ‘ecological footprints’ represent use of environmental assets in terms of the area of land that would be necessary to replace them, and pollution in terms of area of land needed to deal with the problem. For example, production of carbon dioxide (a greenhouse gas) is measured in terms of the area of forest that would absorb that volume of carbon dioxide. Impacts of different activities can then be added. An ecological footprint can be estimated on scales ranging from individuals to whole countries (Ibid; IIED, 1995; Chambers et al, 2000); it can also

be used to estimate the impact of organisations, services and products (Chambers et al, 2000). Whilst ecological footprinting is only an estimation, it is an effective tool for raising awareness of the issues. However, it only estimates environmental impact and a parallel tool for estimating social impact – a social footprint - needs to be developed.

2.8 Putting ‘Sustainable Development’ into Practice

2.8.1 INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

The first United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, known as the Earth Summit, which took place in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, was the largest environmental conference ever (Kirkby et al, 1995), and was greeted as a significant step forward and ‘a landmark event’ (Desai, 2000, p.21) that ‘launched an unprecedented global partnership for economic and social development and environmental protection, founded on consensus at the highest political level’ (Ibid). However, the acclaim was not universal. Kirkby et al state:

‘The unholy alliance between Northern money, Northern self-interest and soft green concerns with the conservation of “pure” ecosystems has ensured that Rio 1992 is predominantly about the unimpaired growth of the North, implying accelerated extraction of resources from the South (driven by IMF adjustment programmes).’ (1995, p.10)

Thus the conflict of priorities between Northern and Southern countries, apparent at Stockholm in 1972, was still present; and at Rio Northern interests prevailed.

The twenty-seven principles in the resulting declaration include commitments to equity (Principle 3), development of scientific knowledge (Principle 9) and citizen participation (Principle 10) (Quarrie, 1992, p.11). The principles make frequent reference to sustainable development, but little consideration is given to its meaning. Whilst this vagueness about the key term may have been necessary to reach agreement, it may also have prevented decisive action and ‘progress since [UNCED] has been patchy’ (Osborn, 2000, p.xiv). The biodiversity convention and the climate change convention were ratified in 1993 and 1994 respectively, but by the ‘Rio + 5’ United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) in New

York in 1997 momentum had been lost. Fischer and Hajer comment that the 1997 conference ‘offered a very disturbing finding – none of the important commitments made at Rio had been kept’ (1999, p.1). Perhaps the most successful international environmental agreement has been the 1997 Montreal Protocol to restrict the production of ozone depleting chemicals, which is discussed in the next chapter.

Developmental issues were not totally forgotten after Rio, but conferences such as the UN Conference on Social Development, which was held in Copenhagen in 1995 and looked at issues such as debt and trade, failed ‘to attract either the publicity of the earth summit or, significantly, the support of several leaders in the North’ (Reid, 1995, p.202). Reid attributes the lack of success to a lack of synergy between ‘public concern and enabling government action’ (Ibid, p.220).

The Johannesburg (Rio +10) Summit in 2002 reaffirmed the commitment of the international community to sustainable development (Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development, 2002). It also introduced the idea of partnerships for the delivery of sustainable development objectives. Nevertheless, there was considerable disappointment at the lack of commitment to specific targets. In fact, according to Friends of the Earth UK:

‘with the Earth Summit proving such a failure, the value of global multi-lateral talks are themselves likely to be called into question.’
(Friends of the Earth, 2002)

2.8.2 THE EUROPEAN UNION

European policy on the environment has been increasingly influential in its member states. As Selman says, ‘one of its strongest areas of legislative influence has been the environment, especially certain pollution control and land use issues’ (1996, p.23). However, the European Common Market was initially set up to facilitate trade between its members, and as Baker notes:

‘Historically, the [EU] has based its environmental policy not so much on a belief in the legitimacy of environmental protection as such but rather on the assumption that environmental protection has economic and particularly trade consequences. Yet despite the

centrality of economic growth a new, albeit subordinate, imperative of environmental protection did evolve' (1997, p.92)

The EU has been proactive in the environmental field and has forced some of its less environmentally conscious members, such as the UK, to improve their environmental performances, so that it now has 'some of the most progressive environmental policies in the world' (Jordan, 2002, p.1). Nevertheless, there has been a constant tension between environmental protection and the economic agenda of free trade and economic growth. As Baldock says:

'At the root of the European Union's environmental policy can be found two sometimes conflicting imperatives. One is to prevent national policies diverging to the extent that they threaten the equilibrium of the common market and unsettle the 'level playing field'. The other is to elevate the Union into something other than a mere trading bloc by incorporating within it social, environmental and other objectives in keeping with the political culture of its constituent countries.' (1994, p.11)

In 1990, at the Dublin Summit, European Community leaders committed themselves to sustainable development, a principle that was enshrined in the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. In the same year, the Fifth Environmental Action Programme, entitled 'Towards Sustainability', was, according to Baker, a 'renewed attempt to reconcile' (1997, p.92) environmental protection with economic growth. It stressed the need for a more pro-active approach and saw 'sustainable development as the basis for all future developments in the EU' (Selman, 1996, p.24). In its own words:

'This Programme itself constitutes a turning point for the Community. Just as the challenge of the 1980s was completion of the Internal Market, the reconciliation of environment and development is one of the principal challenges facing the Community and the world at large in the 1990s.' (CEC, 1992, p.9)

It also expresses the need for action at local as well as national and international levels 'on the basis of a sharing of responsibility at all levels of society' (Ibid, p.19).

However, within the EU sustainable development has consistently been interpreted in terms of ecological modernisation. The European Community's Fourth Action

Programme, covering the years 1987 – 1992, was based on ‘the acceptance of the idea of ‘ecological modernisation’, a complex idea which holds that environmental protection is not in competition with, but rather an essential pre-condition for, growth and development’ (Baker, 1997, p.96). The formal commitment to sustainable development did not change this. The Fifth and Sixth Action Programmes reiterate the European Community’s commitment to ecological modernisation, although without using the phrase:

‘The increased economic growth expected will be unsustainable unless environmental considerations are taken into account, not so much as a limiting factor, but rather as an incentive to greater efficiency and competitiveness, with particular reference to the international market place.’ (CEC, 1992, p.17)

‘The new Programme provides the environmental component of the Community’s strategy for sustainable development, placing our environmental plans in a broad perspective, considering economic and social conditions. It also makes the link between environment and our European objectives for growth and competitiveness. (CEC, 2001a)

The 1992 quote in particular shows the influence of the economic growth imperative on EU environmental policy.

2.9 Ecological Modernisation – the Way Forward?

Ecological modernisation is best seen as a technocratic, economic response to the sustainable development agenda, centred primarily on the situation and needs of the Western world, and particularly Western industry. Its central premise is that Western industrial society can move to a new post-industrial stage, in which it adapts to, and profits from, the need to protect the environment.

The idea of ecological modernisation has become popular in academic writing on sustainable development, and the concept (although not the term) has appeared in national and international policy documents. According to Hajer, ecological modernisation ‘started to dominate ecological politics from about 1984 onwards’ (1996, p.248), and Buttel describes its rise as ‘meteoric’ (2000, p.57).

As has been shown above, the discourse, if not the practice, of ecological modernisation has been apparent in EU policy since the Fourth Environmental Action Programme in 1986. However, 'direct and final responsibility for carrying out EU environmental policy lies in the hands of the member states' (Hanf, 1996, p.213), and the adoption of the discourse and practice of ecological modernisation by member governments and other decision-makers has been uneven (Weale, 1992; Hajer, 1995; Fudge and Rowe, 2001). Nevertheless, Anderson and Massa say:

'Ecological modernisation gradually attained a degree of societal consensus, at least in countries such as Sweden, Denmark and Germany' (2000, p.339)

Like sustainable development and sustainability, ecological modernisation has been interpreted in different ways. Buttel continues:

'Nearly as remarkable as ecological modernisation's rising visibility and influence has been the diversity of the meanings and usages of this concept. (2000, p.58)

It is not possible to deal with all the possible interpretations here (but see Buttel, 2000; Murphy, 2000; Young, 2000 for summaries of interpretations). Hajer describes it as 'start[ing] from the assumption that economic growth and the resolution of ecological problems can, in principle, be reconciled' (1996, p.57). It is thus, like sustainable development, 'a critical response to – if not a decisive critique of – radical environmentalism' (Buttel, 2000, p.61). Buttel also describes it as 'a new, and in many ways improved, synonym for sustainable development (Ibid, p.63).

However, Langhelle argues that sustainable development is broader than ecological modernisation and 'attempts to address a number of issues about which ecological modernisation has nothing to say' (2000, p.308). These issues include global environmental problems and social justice. Similarly, in Rydin's 'Dimensions of Sustainability' (1999, p.470), ecological modernisation appears as one of many approaches to sustainability – one that combines the ecological sphere with the environmental sphere in a harmonious way. As Young says, it is 'twentieth century capitalism's response to the emerging environmental challenge' (2000, p.7). Young explains its appeal to both governments and industry:

'It offered a way of appeasing and accommodating parts of the environmental movement, not to mention undermining the appeal of green parties. (Ibid, p.19)

'Ecological modernisation was attractive from the perspective of governments because it addressed environmental issues without introducing the need for structural change (Ibid, p.20)

There is, however, a difference of opinion as to whether ecological modernisation requires structural change. Dryzek sums up the situation, when he says:

'Environmental degradation is seen as a structural problem which can only be dealt with by attending to how the economy is organised, but not in a way that requires an altogether different type of political-economic system' (1997, p.141)

Nevertheless, ecological modernisation does not require the kind of radical change in attitude, redistribution of wealth and participative democracy needed to achieve sustainability in its broadest sense. Hence, it allows governments and industry to tackle some aspects of sustainable development and to appear to be proactive, without making the radical structural changes needed to deal with the more substantive issues. As Harvey says:

'It can rather easily be corrupted into yet another discursive representation of dominant forms of economic power' (1999, p.170)

Ecological modernisation is a Western response in two senses – not only is it a Western idea, but, because it comes from a Western perspective it deals only with Western problems. It has nothing to contribute to social justice or the solving of large-scale global environmental problems such as global warming. Thus, ecological modernisation points to a possible way through, or a denial of, one of the conflicts of Campbell's triangle – the resource conflict, but has nothing to say about the property conflict and the development conflict. In addition, it has been found that although the innovations and improvements in production recommended by ecological modernisation result in decreased resource use and pollution per unit of production, this tends to be offset by increases in production and consumption. (Langhelle, 2000)

Ecological modernisation is normally seen as a partnership, based on government and business co-operating for their mutual benefit. As Dryzek says:

‘Conscious and co-ordinated intervention is needed to bring the required changes about. It is no good relying on any supposed “invisible hand” operating in market systems to promote good environmental outcomes [...]. Yet this intervention does not take place in adversarial fashion, in terms of government imposing design criteria and other policy measures on industry. Industry itself cooperates enthusiastically in the design and implementation of policy’ (1997, p.142)

Thus, ecological modernisation can lead to new corporatist forms of government, as well as new forms of industrial production. This new corporatism does not facilitate, and possibly hampers, the new forms of participative democracy advocated by sustainable development. It is also unlikely to result in redistribution of wealth either within or between countries, and consequently is unlikely to contribute to the sustainable development goal of equity. It remains to be seen whether by tackling one aspect of sustainability and ignoring other facets, it will contribute positively to overall sustainability or simply act as a smoke screen to prevent the necessary radical change.

2.10 Conclusions

The early 1970s marked the coming together of concerns with environmental protection and the meeting of basic human needs, and the awareness that radical change, including a change in outlook, was needed to tackle the two issues. The problem was seen as one of uncontrolled growth of population and industrial production; and the solution was seen in terms of a state of stable equilibrium. However, by 1987, when the Bruntland report was published, ‘growth’, albeit modified to meet the needs of the poorest, was seen as part of the solution.

The Bruntland report defined ‘sustainable development’ such that it could be interpreted in a variety of ways and therefore could be adopted by a wide range of individuals and bodies. Although this led to the rapid adoption of the concept, it made it difficult for action to be agreed and implemented. The international community and Western governments have been selective in their interpretation of

the Bruntland Report, emphasising those aspects which can be incorporated into the status quo, and downplaying those aspects, such as the commitment to equity which pose too great a challenge. In this way, the concept of sustainable development has been narrowed to become ecological modernisation and the other conflicts shown in Figure 9 have been ignored or implicitly denied.

This does not necessarily mean that nothing worthwhile has been achieved. Ecological modernisation and other environmental initiatives may have lessened the environmental impact of human activity as far as it affects the West, although much of this improvement has been counteracted by increased production and consumption. However, in order to move towards development that can meet basic needs in an equitable way whilst protecting the environment, it is necessary to acknowledge and tackle all three conflicts shown in Figure 9. Only then can we move into the centre of the triangle and achieve a society in which human needs are met equitably within environmental limits.

For this to happen, responsibility has to be accepted and action has to be taken at all levels, from the international to the individual. This gives a role to local communities in the North (possibly led by their parish and town councils) as well as in the South to initiate and guide their own sustainable development. This can only happen if local people are aware of the issues and willing to take responsibility for themselves and their impact on distant places and future generations, even when these impacts cannot be known through their own local or anecdotal knowledge.

The concept of sustainable development has certainly raised consciousness of the need to take into account environmental limits, but it could be argued that the process of sustainable development has not yet begun. As O'Riordan and Voisey say:

'To begin with, therefore the current approach to sustainable development can only be a chimera, a theoretical position that attracts attention, stimulates debate, and raises awareness about the scope and interconnecting complexities of the changes that will have to be made in the transition to a less unsustainable world' (1997, p.2)

Thus, if sustainable development is having an effect, this may well be largely through its rhetorical impact. This thesis will investigate this impact at the local level of town councils and other actors in a predominantly rural English county. In order to study the rhetorical impact of sustainable development it is helpful to consider it in terms of discourse. The next chapter will develop the concept of discourse and apply it to sustainable development.

Chapter 3: The Discourse Perspective

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has examined the concepts of ‘sustainable development’ and ‘sustainability’ and the ways in which the terms are interpreted and used. That chapter concluded that the terms can be, and are, interpreted and used in a variety of ways; and that the impact of the term is, at least in part, rhetorical. This thesis analyses the discourses that have arisen around these terms at different spatial scales in the UK, paying particular attention to the local level of parish and town councils.

This chapter will consider different approaches to discourse and discourse analysis, paying particular attention to critical discourse analysis as practiced by Fairclough (1992; 1995), Van Dijk (1994; 1995; 1997) and others. It will also show how the study of discourse can make links between global and local scales.

These ideas will be applied to the political discourses of Thatcherism and New Labour, which formed the discursive background to the introduction of the concept of sustainable development. I will examine how each was formed by combining potentially contradictory pre-existing discourses. Finally, I will analyse discourses of the environment and sustainable development and ways in which they are adapted to be consistent with political discourses.

3.2 What is Discourse?

3.2.1 INTRODUCTION: DISCOURSE, IDEOLOGY AND HEGEMONY

In this thesis, I will take a discourse to be a system of mutually reinforcing communication that constitutes a way of knowing and representing the world. Thus, the concept of discourse is closely linked to the related concept of ideology. An ideology can be defined as an underlying set of beliefs and assumptions, affecting the way in which people think, communicate and act.

'Ideology is present therefore in not only what we think, but what we think about, what we feel, how we behave and the patterns of all our social relationships' (Burr, 1995, p. 83).

Ideologies are transmitted and reinforced through discourse.

'Ideologies are preferably produced and reproduced in societies through forms of text and talk of social actors as group members' (Van Dijk, 1995, p.243).

An ideology becomes hegemonic when its assumptions become accepted as 'common sense'. Thus, hegemonic ideologies and their associated discourses are based on generally accepted assumptions and limit what can be said and taken seriously. Because hegemonic ideologies are presented and seen as commonsense, they are difficult to challenge. However, ideologies, even hegemonic ones, are also contested and challenged discursively.

3.2.2 A VARIETY OF INTERPRETATIONS OF 'DISCOURSE'

There is considerable disagreement about the meaning of the term 'discourse'. Mills (1997) points out that 'discourse' is often left undefined and has a wide range of possible meanings. The contributors to Jaworski and Coupland (1999) present a variety of ways of looking at and analysing discourse, showing that definitions or understandings of the term 'discourse' can vary over three dimensions – scale, directness/indirectness and mode of communication.

Firstly, in terms of scale, 'discourse ...can refer both to a single utterance or specific speech act (such as a private conversation) and to a more systematic ordering of language (such as legal discourse)' (Tonkiss, 1998, p.247). These scales are related to, but are not synonymous with, geographical scales. This thesis is concerned with the discourses that arise at different geographical scales around the concept of sustainable development and around the role of town councils. Although government discourses of sustainable development may be a lot less systematic than legal discourse, they are at the broader end of Tonkiss's scale. The local discourses studied may be less systematic, but, even locally, there are likely to be common understandings underlying individual utterances.

Secondly, and closely linked with the above variations, Jaworski and Coupland use a scale of 'directness-indirectness' to differentiate between approaches to discourse. Direct approaches 'remain quite close to the central goals of linguistics' (1999, p.14), and carry out detailed analysis of text, usually on a micro-scale. Indirect approaches, are more concerned with the relation of texts to their contexts on a macro-scale and 'assume that the most significant sorts of linguistic organisation are highly abstract, and not directly amenable to textual analysis' (ibid). However, Jaworski and Coupland admit that some theorists combine these approaches by using detailed textual analysis to study texts in context. Sustainable development discourses are formed in a political and economic context, and can only be understood within that context. In addition, local sustainable development discourses are formed within the context of larger scale discourses, but they can only be understood by a close analysis of texts. Thus, this last approach is most suitable to the study of sustainable development discourses at different spatial scales.

Thirdly, understandings of discourse also vary in terms of the modes of communication that are included. Benevista (1971) defines discourse as 'the domain of communication' (quoted in Mills, 1997, p.5) and Milton defines it as a process 'through which knowledge is constituted through communication' (1996, p.166). These broad definitions can include anything that carries meaning, including pictorial representations, music and style of dress, as well as spoken and written language. In fact, Burr says:

'Given that there is virtually no aspect of human life that is exempt from meaning, everything around us can be considered as 'textual', and 'life as text' could be said to be the underlying metaphor of the discourse approach.' (1995, p.51)

However, narrower definitions of discourse restrict the term to the use of spoken and written language. For example, it is defined by Fowler as 'speech or writing seen from the point of view of the beliefs, values and categories which it embodies' (quoted in Mills, 1997, p.5); and by Litfin as 'sets of linguistic practices and rhetorical strategies embedded in a network of social relations' (1994, p.3).

Within the context of this thesis, it is not possible to study all possible modes of communication. Instead, whilst recognising that ‘whatever signifies and has meaning can be considered part of discourse’ (Macdonell, 1986, p.3), I will concentrate on the communication of discourses of sustainability through speech and writing and then relate these discourses to action taken at the local level. In line with Fowler’s and Litfin’s definitions, I will look at speech and writing not in isolation but in a social context. As Fairclough says:

‘Discourse’ is for me more than just language use; it is language use, whether speech or writing, seen as a type of social practice.’
(1992, p.28)

3.2.3 RELATIONS BETWEEN DISCOURSES

There is a danger in thinking of a discourse as a discreet entity, whereas in reality discourses interact in many ways. They are continually subject to contestation and change and draw on each other in a process of interdiscursivity. Thus, their boundaries can best be thought of as porous and fluid. Discourse is perhaps best seen as made up of a number of overlapping and intertwined discourses around different topics, which sometimes reinforce and sometimes contradict each other. These discourses are socially and historically contingent and are always contested and subject to change.

‘The various discourses are intertwined or entangled with one another like vines or strands; moreover they are not static but in constant motion forming a ‘discursive milling mass’ which at the same time results in the ‘constant rampant growth of discourses’. It is this mass that discourse analysis endeavours to untangle.’
(Jäger, 2001, p.35)

Discourses are manifested through text (speech and writing) and other means of communication. Within a discourse, texts may reflect each other by using the same words and phrases and making similar assumptions - intertextuality. However, texts may reflect more than one discourse. Conversely, the same discourse may be articulated across different genres or modes of communication, such as political speeches, academic papers or everyday conversation.

For example, the political discourse of Thatcherism, as discussed below, is built around discourses of neo-liberalism, free-trade and individualism, as well as the potentially contradictory discourse of traditional family values. Thus, as we shall see, discourses can reinforce each other interdiscursively by using the same terms and making the same assumptions, even when they are potentially contradictory.

3.3 Analysing Discourse

3.3.1 INTRODUCTION

Discourse analysis involves the analysis of texts and other forms of communication in the contexts of the discursive and social norms within which they occur.

‘Discourse analysis refers to the process of analysing signifying practices as discursive forms.’ (Howarth, 2000, p.10)

Just as there are many different ways of defining discourse, there are many different approaches to its analysis and there is no set procedure or generally accepted set of rules for discourse analysis. As Fairclough points out:

‘... people approach [discourse analysis] in different ways according to the specific nature of the project, as well as their own views of discourse.’ (1992, p.225)

Potter (1997) considers the range of disciplines in which discourse analysis has evolved, leading to a variety of interpretations and approaches. These disciplines include linguistics, sociolinguistics, cognitive psychology and Potter's own field of social psychology. Within these disciplines, the term 'discourse analysis' is used in a different ways, some of which bare a close resemblance to other forms of linguistic analysis.

3.3.2 ANALYSING TEXT IN CONTEXT

Discourse analysis that is towards the indirect end of Jaworski and Coupland's scale, as described in the previous section, emphasises the relationship between text and context. Fairclough's (1992) model portrays discourse in terms of three layers,

with text situated within discursive practice, which in turn is situated within social practice, as shown in Figure 10.

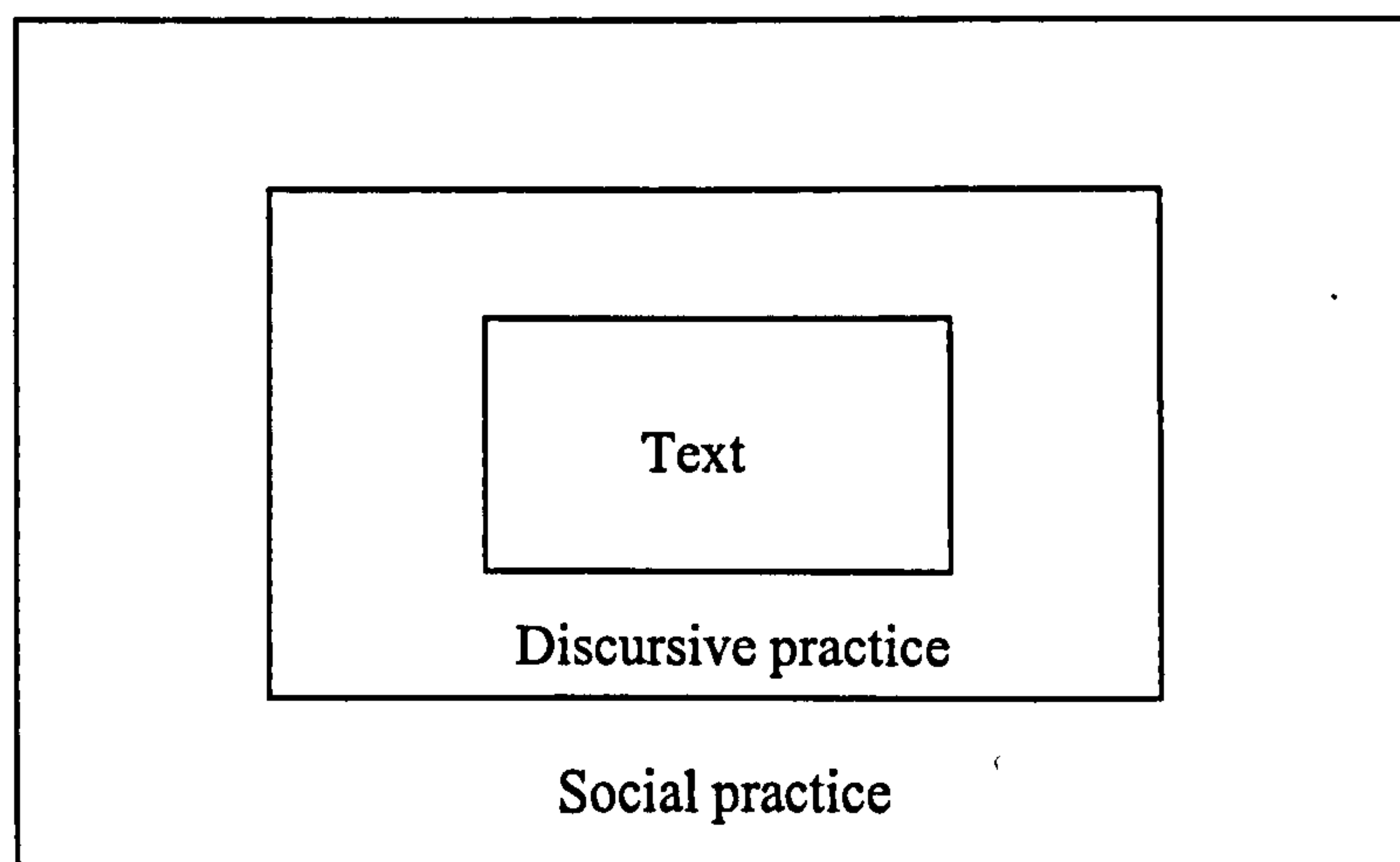


FIGURE 10: THE THREE LAYERS OF DISCOURSE (FROM FAIRCLOUGH, 1992)

As mentioned above, concern with discursive structures on a macro-scale does not preclude the detailed and systematic study of text. In fact, some practitioners, such as van Dijk (1993) and Fairclough (1992), insist that detailed and systematic analysis of text is essential to the understanding of text in context. Conversely, texts cannot be fully understood without knowledge of the context in which they take place. Van Dijk and Fairclough see discursive practice as a link between texts and the social context in which they are formed and interpreted.

‘Micro- and macro-analysis are [...] mutual requisites. It is because of their interrelationship that the dimension of discursive practice in my three-dimensional framework [Figure 10 above] can mediate the relationship between the dimensions of social practice and text; it is the nature of the social practice that determines the macro-processes of discursive practice, and it is the micro-processes that shape the text.’

(Fairclough, 1992, p.86)

This type of discourse analysis is concerned with the macro-structures of what can be said and who can say it, and the manifestation of these constraints in micro-level discourse. Thus, it tends to be ‘critical’ in the sense that it is concerned with the

ways that discourses reinforce and challenge hegemonic ideologies and power structures.

3.3.3 CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS (CDA)

The position and role of critical discourse analysis is summed up by Chadwick:

‘During the last 20 years, ‘critical discourse analysis’ has sought to forge links between mainstream linguistics and critical social theory in order to comprehend the role played by language use in producing asymmetrical power relations and social and political identity.’
(2000, p.284)

Van Dijk describes critical discourse analysis as ‘discourse analysis ‘with an attitude’’ (2001, p.96). He continues:

‘It [critical discourse analysis] focuses on social problems, and especially on the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power abuse or domination. Wherever possible it does so from the perspective that is consistent with the best interests of dominated groups.’ (Ibid)

Critical discourse analysis makes a conscious attempt to view the discourse it is studying from the outside and to question the unspoken assumptions behind it. This contrasts with conventional analysis, which attempts to view the situation objectively without questioning the discourses in which it is framed.

Critical research has been criticised for openly siding with the oppressed rather than aiming for academic impartiality.

‘A critical theory wants to explain a social order in such a way that it becomes itself the catalyst which leads to the transformation of this social order.’ (Fay, 1993, p.33)

For example, Meyer points out that Widdowson (1994) criticises critical discourse analysis as being ‘in a dual sense, a biased interpretation: in the first place it is prejudiced on the basis of some ideological commitment, and then it selects for analysis such texts as will support the preferred interpretation’ (Meyer, 2001, p.17).

However, it could be argued that all researchers hold some ideological commitment, and therefore all research is biased to some degree. Irwin points out that even natural science 'will reflect the social priorities and audience constructions of its sponsors' (1995, p.51). The selective use of evidence that supports a particular interpretation is often unconscious, and is not confined to critical research. Moreover, bias is easier to spot when the ideological position of the researcher is made clear. As van Dijk says:

'Biased scholarship is not inherently bad scholarship. On the contrary, as many scholars, especially among women and minorities, know, critical research must not only be good but also better scholarship in order to be accepted.' (2001, p.96)

Hence, the critical discourse analyst has to be self-critical as well as critical of his or her subject matter. He or she has to be reflexive and aware of his or her own biases and make them clear to potential readers. In this way, critical research can be valid without claiming total objectivity.

Fairclough and Wodak (1997) identify seven approaches, which vary across a number of dimensions including the extent to which they take a historical perspective, 'how they see the mediation between the text and the social' (Ibid, p.262) and methods of interpretation. There is, therefore, no one way to do critical discourse analysis and different practitioners approach their analysis in different ways.

Critical discourse analysis has been used to study the discursive exercise of power in many different situations. It is much used in feminist research; for example, Shaw (2000) studied gender differences in the ways that UK Members of Parliament managed to get speaking turns in the House of Commons, and Davies (2003) studied gender in the classroom. Mills (1997) discusses the implications of combining feminist theory with discourse theory. In addition, Said (1978, 1993) uses colonial and post-colonial discourse theory to study Western images of non-Western culture; and van Dijk (for example, 1992; 1993) has studied discourses of racism. The above research is critical in the sense of siding with the oppressed as well as being concerned with the nature of power. In some fields, such as Hall's (1988) and Phillips' (1996; 1998) studies, the discourse of Thatcherism and

Fairclough's (2000a) work on the discourse of New Labour, siding with the oppressed is not so straightforward. But this research is still critical discourse analysis because it is concerned with the use of discourse to protect and to challenge existing hegemonies.

Sustainable development discourse involves the exercising, defence and challenging of power, but it is not always easy to identify specific victims of 'unsustainable development'. In fact, it could be argued that we are all victims. This thesis uses the techniques of critical discourse analysis to study discourses of sustainable development and the ways that they are used to justify or challenge hegemonic ideologies and structures.

3.4 Linking the Global and the Local

A major concern of this thesis is whether and how the global concept of 'sustainable development' is manifested at a local level. Van Dijk identifies a 'regrettable macro-micro cleft in the social sciences' (1994, p.163); and he sees discourse analysis as being able to bridge that divide. Because local acts of communication occur within the context of larger-scale discourses, the study of discourse can aid understanding of the link between the local and the global. As Jaworski and Coupland say:

'Discourse analysis provides a way of linking up the analysis of local characteristics of communication to the analysis of broader social characteristics. It can let us see how macro-structures are carried through micro-structures.' (1999, p.13)

Van Dijk attempts to combine close scrutiny of individual texts with understanding of the wider level discursive structures within which they are produced and understood. He identifies a 'theoretical square of two levels and two dimensions' (van Dijk, 1993, p.122). The two levels are the local or micro level and the 'more global' or macro level. The two dimensions are the 'actual discursive practices of speaking and writing as well as their observable results on one hand ("texts and actions"), and the underlying cognitions of speakers and hearers, including the meanings or interpretations of such discourse, on the other hand' (Ibid.). This is represented diagrammatically in Figure 11.

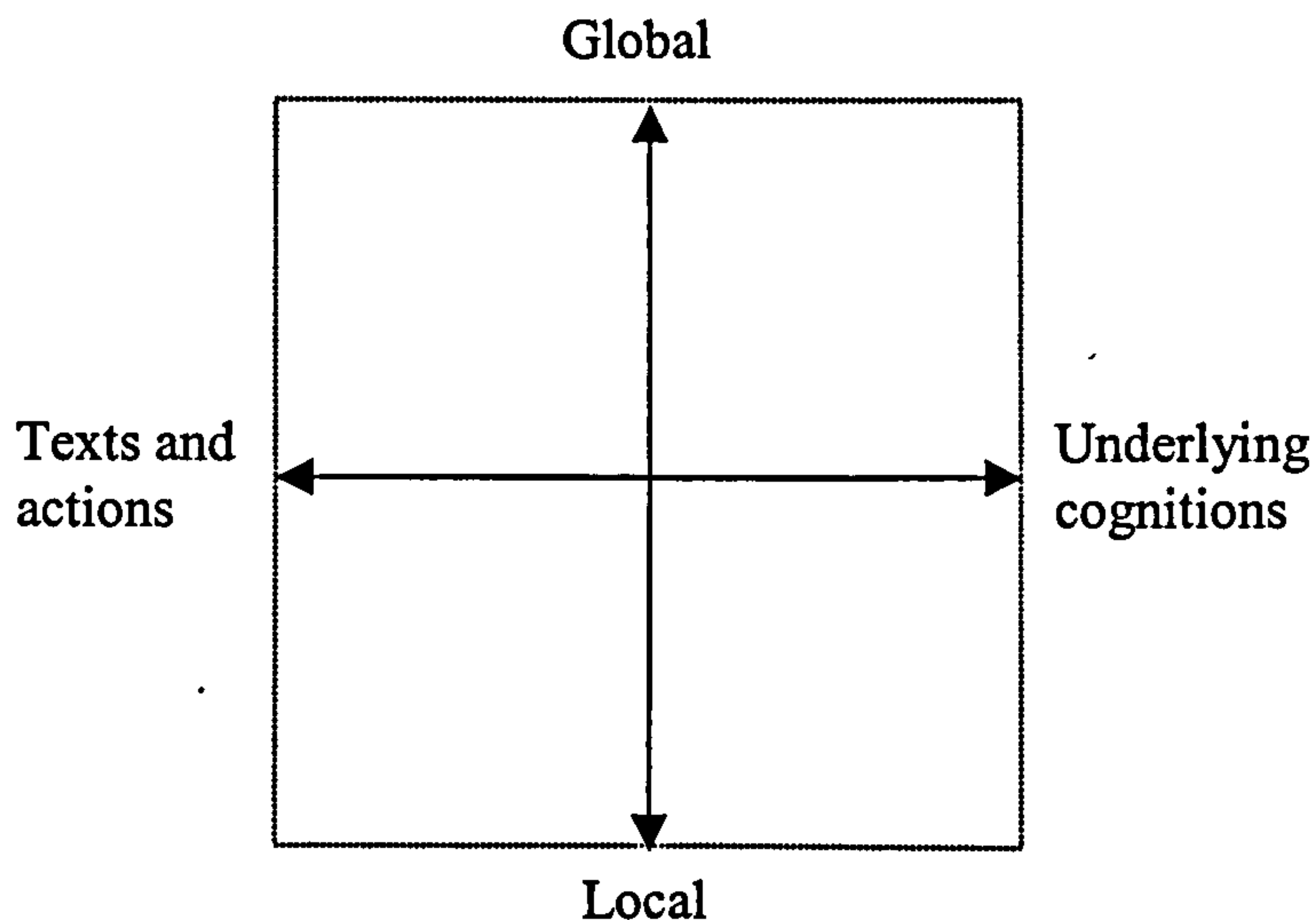


FIGURE 11: VAN DIJK'S THEORETICAL SQUARE (BASED ON VAN DIJK, 1993)

Van Dijk makes it clear that both texts and actions and underlying cognitions can exist at both a local and global level. From his investigation of racist narratives as discourse, he concludes:

'Racism as a system of white group dominance is reproduced at several levels. In addition to acts of individual and institutional discrimination, this system is especially reproduced through discourse and communication' (1993, p.139).

Thus, we can use the concept of discourse to understand how local texts, actions and underlying cognitions occur within the framework of larger scale texts, actions and underlying cognitions.

3.5 Political Discourse

3.5.1 INTRODUCTION

The discourse of sustainable development is essentially a political discourse. The concept has the potential to challenge existing political ideologies but, as we shall see in Chapter 6, it can also be adapted to be compatible with existing assumptions and priorities. This section will examine how existing political discourses are constituted, and the following sections will look at discourses of the environment

and sustainable development and how they conflict with or are integrated into political discourses.

According to Chilton and Schäffner, 'many political 'scientists' have moved towards the view that both the terms of political debate and the political processes themselves are constituted and communicated through text and talk' (1997, p.208).

As Luke says:

'Governmental discourses methodically mobilise particular assumptions, codes and procedures in enforcing specific understandings about the economy and society.' (1995, p.27)

Because governments and politicians (and others who wield power) communicate through discourse, the study of political discourse must be a key way of understanding the operation of political power. In addition, the concept of sustainable development had to be integrated into the political discourses of the day. It can therefore only be studied in the context of those political discourses. The following sections will analyse the discourses of neo-liberalism, Thatcherism and New Labour as background to the analysis of sustainable development discourse in Chapter 6.

3.5.2 THE DISCOURSE OF NEO-LIBERALISM

Arguably the most significant development in global politics of the late twentieth century was the spread of the ideology of neo-liberalism. Following the collapse of the USSR, communism ceased to be seen as a viable alternative to capitalism, and with the election of Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, social democracy in the Western world began to give way to free market capitalism. International institutions such as the International Monetary Fund then enforced the spread of capitalism and neo-liberalism to poorer parts of the world. The spread of neo-liberalism has important consequences for sustainable development – both in the ways in which the term is interpreted and in the ways in which it is, or is not, put into practice. This will be considered below.

Not only is the neo-liberal discourse about economic globalisation, it is also a globalised discourse, although open to 'diverse local interpretations' (Fairclough, 2002, p.164). However, the discourse is not yet, and perhaps never will be, hegemonic on a world scale. Although parts of it may be accepted as 'common sense' in the Western world, in the Third World the neo-liberal economic agenda is imposed, largely through economic instruments and occasionally by force. This imposition would be unnecessary if it became hegemonic and hence accepted as common sense.

Fairclough stresses the importance of language in the spread of neo-liberalism:

'The neo-liberal global order is an incomplete project rather than a *fait accompli*. Various resources are deployed in the struggle by the winners (the banks etc.) to pursue the project and extend the new order, including the symbolic resources of neo-liberal discourse' (2000b, p.148)

He goes on to describe the discourse that attempted to justify neo-liberalism and enabled it to replace the post-war consensus of social democracy:

'This discourse includes a narrative of progress: the 'globalized' world offers unprecedented opportunities for 'growth' through intensified 'competition', but requiring unfettered 'free trade' and the dismantling of 'state bureaucracy' and 'unaffordable' welfare programmes, 'flexibility' of labour, 'transparency', 'modernisation' and so forth.' (Ibid)

The discourse of neo-liberalism was not confined to overtly political texts. For example, Phillips (1996) shows how, in an example of intertextuality, the concepts of 'choice' and 'enterprise' were used to link political genres with everyday language. This is discussed below.

3.5.3 THE DISCOURSE OF THATCHERISM

According to Fairclough, 'the Conservatives under Thatcher realised that their project for radical social change was best achieved through the relatively slow and patient groundwork of changing attitudes, moods and cultures rather than head-on – through ideological means, and therefore through discourse' (2000a, p.72).

Thatcherism can be regarded as an amalgam of two potentially conflicting

discourses. The economic discourse of neo-liberalism, with its emphasis on the free market and individual choice, was combined with the old-style-Conservative discourse of paternalism and family values. As Hall says:

‘Ideologically Thatcherism is seen as forging new discursive articulations between the liberal discourses of the “free market” and economic man and the organic conservative themes of tradition, family and nations, respectability, patriarchalism and order.’ (1988, p.2)

These two discourses are potentially contradictory, because neo-liberalism requires individualism, innovation and a weak state, allowing the market to run its ‘natural’ course, whereas the conservative approach emphasises tradition, community and a strong state, to maintain law and order. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) show how elements of these different discourses are present in an interview with Margaret Thatcher.

Foucault believed that discourse is always contested and that there are moments of discontinuity when discursive structures undergo radical change (Mills, 1997). The Thatcherite discourse attempted to replace the discourse of social democracy and the welfare state, which had been hegemonic since the 1940s. However, it was not a sudden and complete break with the past. Rather, it emerged over time, with key themes having appeared in the 1960s, and built on aspects of the existing hegemonic discourse of social democracy, whilst exploiting the contradictions that existed within social democratic discourse.

‘“Thatcherism”, far from simply conjuring demons out of the deep, operated directly on the real and manifestly contradictory experience of the popular classes under social-democratic corporatism.’
(Hall, 1988, p. 50)

Phillips explains how ‘Thatcherite discourse was produced and spread, to a large extent by means of key words and formulaic phrases’ (1996, p.212). She identifies the main key words as ‘choice’, ‘enterprise’, ‘value for money’, ‘quality’, ‘community’ and ‘citizenship’, often used in ‘formulaic phrases’ such as ‘freedom of choice’ and ‘enterprise culture’. These key words and phrases were used to bridge the gap between official and everyday discourse.

‘The key to their spread lay in their roots in two different genres: the genre of *everyday, private interaction*, consisting of colloquial, informal language familiar to a wide range of readers and the genre of *the public, institutionalised world*, consisting of formal language.’ (Ibid, p.215, emphasis in original)

In an example of intertextuality, these keywords were taken up by the press, where ‘owing to the familiarity of the vocabulary, the terms were not revealed as rhetoric’ (Ibid). Thus, the use of familiar words, phrases and ideas in new ways made the ideology of Thatcherism accessible and acceptable to ordinary people.

‘The national economy projected on the model of the household budget.’ (Hall, 1988, p.47)

The appeal of this discourse was, at least in part, due to the positive self-image it allowed people to assume.

‘The essence of the British people was identified with self-reliance and personal responsibility, as against the image of the over-taxed individual, enervated by welfare-state ‘coddling’, his or her moral fibre irrevocably sapped by state ‘handouts’ (Ibid)

The Thatcherite discourse was contested, especially by the welfare state discourse that had preceded it. But the contestation had to take place, at least in part, in the language of the dominant discourse. Nevertheless, it is argued that the Thatcherite discourse never became hegemonic, in the sense of being accepted as ‘natural’ or ‘common sense’. As Hall says:

‘The hope of every ideology is to naturalise itself out of History into Nature, and thus to become invisible, to operate unconsciously.’ (1988, p.8)

Thatcherism was always contested by large sectors of society. However, as we shall see it did change political discourse and had a profound effect on the discourse of New Labour.

‘The Thatcherite struggle for hegemony took place partly in discursive practices, and [...] a crucial outcome of the struggle was change in the language in which people talk about politics. A key aspect of this change was the take-up by the Labour Party of elements of the discourse of Thatcherism.’ (Phillips, 1998, p.848)

3.5.4 THE DISCOURSE OF NEW LABOUR

Driver and Martell describe New Labour as post-Thatcherite ‘because it resists a return to the politics of postwar social democracy; and because it is simultaneously attracted and repelled by the politics of Thatcherism’ (1998, p.31). New Labour discourse has built on the discourse of Thatcherism at least to the extent that it is ‘totally committed to the neo-liberal global economy’ (Fairclough, 2000a, p.viii). It is also committed, at least rhetorically, to a strong state imposing law and order. Thus, it carries forward one of the intrinsic contradictions of Thatcherism. However, at the same time, ‘one of the most marked features of New Labour has been its ability to create new ‘discourses’ in key areas of policy’ (Jacobs, 1999, p.5). These new discourses had to be formed out of old ones.

Just as Thatcherism included old-style conservative doctrines in its new ideology, New Labour included the traditional Labour values of equality, rights for all and the need to tackle poverty. New Labour ideology was also marked by a commitment to communitarianism. As Driver and Martell say:

‘New Labour can [through a commitment to communitarianism] avoid the exclusive politics of Old Labour, reaching beyond the boundaries of class to all groups in society. Communitarianism also offers Labour modernisers a political vocabulary which eschews market individualism, but not market capitalism; and which embraces collective action but not the state.’ (1998, p.28)

Hence, New Labour presented itself as ‘the Third Way’, replacing conflict with compromise.

‘The ‘Third Way’ is pervasively represented in the discourse of New Labour as reconciling ‘themes’ which have been seen as irreconcilable.’ (Fairclough, 2000a, p.44)

In particular, ‘a crucial assumption is that the measures necessary to strengthen enterprise in the new knowledge-based economy are also the means of achieving greater social justice’ (Ibid, p.22).

Fairclough (2000a) describes the various discursive techniques that are used to present change, and in particular globalisation, as inevitable. Firstly, this is done by metaphorising change as a sort of irresistible tidal wave in phrases such as ‘this

change that sweeps the world' (Blair, 1998, quoted in Fairclough, 2000a, p.25). Secondly, agency, particularly that of multinational companies, is 'backgrounded' in phrases such as 'goods can be made in low cost countries' (UK Department of Trade and Industry, 1998, quoted in Fairclough, 2000a, p. 23) and 'capital is mobile' (Ibid). Thirdly, different types of changes are listed and presented as equivalent:

'We all know this is a world of dramatic change. In technology; in trade; in media and communications; in the new markets. In society; in family structure; in communities; in life styles.'
(Blair, 1998, quoted in Fairclough, 2000a, p.28)

Old Labour (and to an extent old Conservative) concerns were incorporated, but with subtle changes of words and meanings. Thus, 'poverty' became 'social exclusion'; 'equality' became 'fairness'; and 'rights' were coupled with 'responsibilities'. Words, such as 'enterprise' were incorporated from the discourse of Thatcherism; and other keywords such as 'partnership' were added. All these words and phrases were then 'knitted together' into a seemingly consistent discourse.

'This is essentially what the conceptual work of political language comes down to: working different vocabularies (and in more general terms, different languages) together into new articulations, and thus producing new articulations of political themes ie new political discourses.' (Fairclough, 2000a, p.89)

3.5.5 POLITICAL DISCOURSE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The environment did not form a central part of the discourse of Thatcherism or the social democratic discourse that preceded it. Giddens (1998, p.7-8) lists the main characteristic of both 'classical social democracy' and Thatcherism, and one of only three common factors is 'low ecological consciousness'. Neither is the environment central to the discourse of New Labour. As Jacobs says:

'It is evident that New Labour is not comfortable with the environment as a political issue.' (1999, p.1)

Similarly, Jacobs asserts that sustainable development is also marginal to New Labour discourse:

‘The concept of sustainable development has official government endorsement. But it has not become part of mainstream political discourse. Despite its claims to be an overarching framework, the term ‘sustainability’ is still used only by people active in the environmental field. Most of all, the environmentalist analysis has been studiously ignored by New Labour.’ (Ibid, p.2)

However, Giddens (2002) considers that New Labour has addressed environmental issues but that more needs to be done. He says that ‘the strategies needed to cope with ecological problems are actually consistent with the main emphases of the new social democracy’ (p.50). Giddens advocates an emphasis on ecological modernisation as ‘an essential part of the environmental agenda [which] should be integrated within New Labour’s wider modernisation programme’ (Ibid, p.51). The response of UK governments to the sustainable development agenda during the 1990s and early 2000s will be analysed in Chapter 6.

3.6 Environmental Discourse

3.6.1 CLASSIFYING ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSES

It is important to look at environmental discourse in context. As we have seen above, the environment is not a central part of political discourse. Nevertheless environmental discourses exist within the context of wider discourses including political and economic ones.

‘Environmental discourse begins in industrial society, and so has to position itself in the context of the long-dominant discourse of industrial society, which we can call industrialism. Industrialism may be characterized in terms of its overarching commitment to growth in the quantity of goods and services produced and to the material well-being which that growth brings.’ (Dryzek, 1997, p.12).

Dryzek classifies environmental discourses on two axes. He continues:

‘Environmental discourse cannot therefore simply take the terms of industrialism as given, but must depart from those terms. This departure can be reformist or it can be radical; and this distinction forms one dimension for categorising environmental discourses.’ (Ibid, p.13)

Dryzek's reformist/radical division might be seen as roughly equivalent to O'Riordan's (1981, 1999) categorisation of sustainability into technocentric and ecocentric approaches, discussed in Chapter 2.

Dryzek also divides environmental discourses into 'prosaic' and 'imaginative' responses to environmental problems – that is the extent to which they involve 'imaginative responses' to problems, seeing them instead as opportunities. Hence, his classification of environmental discourses has four categories, as shown in Figure 12.

	<i>Reformist</i>	<i>Radical</i>
<i>Prosaic</i>	Problem Solving	Survivalism
<i>Imaginative</i>	Sustainability	Green Radicalism

FIGURE 12: CLASSIFYING ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSES (FROM DRYZEK, 1997, P.14)

For Dryzek, sustainability is an imaginative reformist environmental discourse, competing with prosaic and radical approaches.

Adger et al study the environmental discourses associated with the problems of deforestation, desertification, loss of biodiversity and climate change. They identify 'two clusters of main discourses' (2001, p.701) – 'global environmental management discourses', which 'resonate with concepts such as ecological modernisation' (Ibid, p.702), and 'populist discourses', whose 'narratives are based on the perpetrators being global capitalism and the victims being the local resource users who are the villains of the managerial discourse' (Ibid, p.703). Adger et al point out that, in the four policy areas considered, global environmental management discourses 'dominate what Brosius has termed the 'globalised political space' of the environmental arena' (Ibid, p.708). They continue:

'This cluster of discourses dominates the institutions and policies surrounding international agreements and global blueprints and espouses global co-ordinated action and the creation of novel markets and property rights to solve the crises of environmental change. Each of the areas also has a competing populist discourse,

often constituted through non-governmental organisations and in alliance with particular state or sectoral interest groups.’ (Ibid)’

The discourse of sustainable development does not fit neatly into one of these categories. Whilst, at an international level it is largely concerned with global environmental management, at a local level the stress on participation echoes populist discourses. Thus it attempts to be both managerial and participatory. This could be viewed as a contradiction or fault line in the discourse of sustainable development.

3.6.2 EXPERTISE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSES

Discourses, particularly contested discourses that have not become hegemonic and accepted as ‘common sense’, are often justified and challenged by reference to expertise, especially scientific expertise. Environmental discourses are no exception.

Scientific expertise is an important component of many environmental discourses. Governments, environmentalists and others repeatedly appeal to scientific knowledge to reinforce their points, with the same ‘facts’ often being interpreted differently by each side of a debate. As Litfin says:

‘The cultural role of science as a key source of legitimation means that political debates are framed in scientific terms, questions of value become reframed as questions of fact.’ (1994, p.4)

Litfin studied the role of scientific expertise in the discourses that arose around the problem of ozone depletion. She says:

‘Science defined the parameters of the political debate and [...] certain modes of framing the knowledge had important political ramifications. For instance, the framing of the ozone problem as a human health issue rather than an ecological one conditioned the political context of the whole debate. Moreover, from the beginning, the existence of scientific uncertainty was used by all participants in the debate to support their particular positions.’ (Ibid, p.52)

Thus, science is used in environmental debate as much for rhetorical effect as to clarify facts.

'The use of science as a rhetorical device presupposes an implicit contrast with the irrationality of other ways of looking at the world' (Harré et al, 1999, p.52)

Other types of expertise, such as those of the planner or the economist, are also used to justify positions in environmental debate. However, as I shall show in later chapters, people often reject this expertise in favour of local and anecdotal knowledge.

3.7 Sustainable Development as Discourse

3.7.1 THE ORIGINS OF THE DISCOURSE

In the previous chapter, I discussed the difficulty in defining the terms 'sustainability' and 'sustainable development', and the variety of ways in which they can be interpreted. Yet the terms have been widely taken up. As Fischer and Hajer say:

'The concept of sustainable development should be credited with providing the 'generative metaphor' – or story line – around which different key economic and environmental interests could converge. As such it initially proved to be a very functional concept for setting out a common way of talking about environmental issues. Yet its conceptual basis has been weak from the start.' (1999, p.2)

This section will try to uncover how it happened that a conceptually weak 'story line' could become as widely espoused as sustainable development has been.

Hajer sees 'the present hegemony of the idea of sustainable development' (1995, p.12) as the outcome of a struggle between 'various unconventional political coalitions', which 'somehow develop and sustain a particular discourse, a particular way of talking and thinking about environmental politics' (Ibid). It looks then as if the discourse of sustainable development may be a potentially contradictory amalgam of different discourses, as were the discourses of Thatcherism and New Labour.

As we saw in Chapter 5, previous (pre-sustainability) notions of environmental protection and the desirability of stability and equilibrium, as put forward by publications such as *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al, 1972), were incompatible with the idea of perpetual economic growth and rising living standards. As Torgerson says:

‘While the source and style of ‘Limits to Growth’ provoked concern and attracted enormous publicity, its message was ultimately too blunt and dismal, too at odds with the ideological context, for it to be acceptable.’ (1995, p.8)

Perhaps reflecting what was seen as political reality, the concept of sustainable development, as put forward in the Bruntland Report (WCED, 1987), abandoned the aim of equilibrium in favour of growth that was modified to meet the needs of the poorest – a new form of development. Thus, the case was made for growth to achieve development in poorer countries. At the same time, it was also tacitly accepted that growth would continue in rich countries.

The flexibility in the meaning of the term ‘sustainable development’, and in particular the failure to define ‘development’, made it possible for dominant discourses to absorb the term and in doing so to subtly change its meaning. As Torgerson says:

‘The discourse on sustainable development includes ambiguities and associations which make for two crucial equations that appear in a more or less explicit manner:

1. Sustainable = sustained
2. Development = growth.

In the discourse of sustainable development, there is an explicit appearance of phrases such as ‘sustained development’ and ‘sustainable economic growth’. [...] sustainability is thus implicitly put at ease with what had appeared to be its opposite: sustained economic growth.’ (1995, p.12/13)

In this way, the concept of sustainable development has been made to appear compatible with an economic system based upon the assumption of perpetual growth.

‘Once the focus is put solely on the economic growth question, it legitimates the dominant positions of economics in our society. This in turn, works against the emergence of any policies that might tend to produce an alternative.’ (Leis and Viola, 1995, p.39)

Hence, Bruntland's acceptance of the need for growth and development is accepted; but its commitment to equity is lost in favour of a more vague commitment to spreading the benefits of development to the poorest. The contradictions are ironed out or hidden from view, and sustainability and economic growth can be presented as complementary, just as the New Labour discourse presents enterprise and social justice as complementary. However, the potential contradictions remain.

Sustainable development provided a way of making a commitment to environmental protection without abandoning the existing neo-liberal commitment to economic growth. Hence, it could be espoused by governments and industry, as well as those environmentalists who favoured (or were willing to accept) incremental rather than radical change.

3.7.2 KEY WORDS

Bourke and Meppem (2000) identify an emerging 'environmental discourse', of which they say:

'Determined to avert the tragic narrative of environmental disaster, this emerging discourse seeks a language that will rewrite the environmental epoch as an epic tale of human recovery and resolution with nature.' (2000, p.299)

The six key words of this discourse are 'community', 'sustainability', 'globalisation', 'diversity', 'democracy' and 'environment', which have been 'habitually favoured for their ability to evoke 'totalising' images of consensus, unity and common purpose' (Ibid). Thus, potential contradictions and disagreements are covered up and the impression is given that we are all working together for a better future.

The ambiguity of Bourke and Meppem's key words aids acceptance as a hegemonic discourse, but it may make it difficult to translate the discourse into practical policies. The words 'community' and 'democracy' imply that sustainable

development is not solely the responsibility of governments and international organisations, but is (or should be) shared by us all. As Batty says:

‘The consensual basis for sustainable development implies a particular form of social and political organisation, specifically, bottom-up participatory democracy.’ (2001, p.20)

As I will show in Chapter 6, this participatory aspect of sustainable development has been stressed by the UK government.

‘Official reports now present a sustainable world a requiring the participation of everyone.’ (Myers and Macnaghten, 1998, p.333)

Arguably, the oft-repeated imperative for responsibility for sustainable development to be shared removes some of the onus on governments to take responsibility for its implementation. Local responses to the call for participation in sustainable development will be considered in the next chapter.

3.7.3 A CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Van Dijk’s two dimensions of discourse, discussed above and shown in Figure 11 on page 71, put ‘texts and actions’ together, in opposition to underlying cognitions. However, in the case of the discourse of sustainable development, there appears to be a rhetoric-action gap at a global as well as a local level (and at levels in between), analogous to the ‘value-action gap’ (Blake, 1999) at an individual level that will be discussed in Chapter 4. Thus, it is necessary to distinguish between rhetoric and reality, or between text and action. Figure 13 is a modification of van Dijk’s ‘theoretical square’, in three dimensions to show the distinction between texts and actions.

Thus, we have a triangular prism with triangular faces representing local and global and rectangular faces representing underlying cognitions, text and actions. In this version, ‘underlying cognitions’, ‘texts’ and ‘actions’ are represented as theoretically distinct concepts. However, this does not mean they will not be consistent in practice, just that they may not be. Research can study either texts or actions but it cannot directly study underlying cognitions. Hence, discourse analysis

attempts to get inside the prism through the 'texts' face, and hence to study the relations between all five faces.

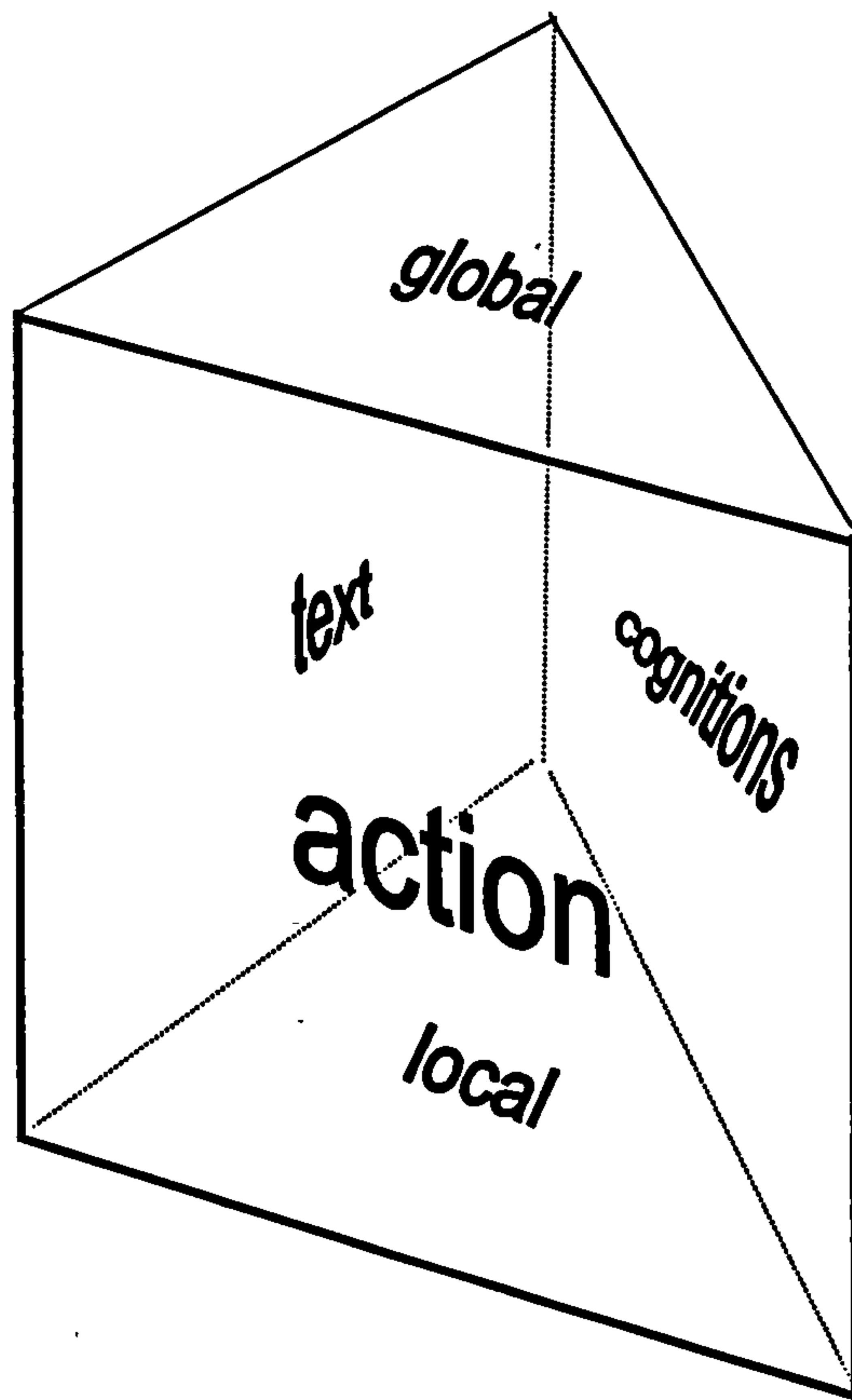


FIGURE 13: DIMENSIONS OF DISCOURSE (ADAPTED FROM VAN DIJK, 1993)

3.7.4 POLICY AND PRACTICE

Discourses of sustainable development affect its interpretation by policy makers and implementers. Thus they affect policy implementation. As Rydin says:

'Language can influence the policy process in a variety of ways: it can alter perceptions of interests and issues; it can define the object of policy attention; it can promote particular policy agendas; it can shape the nature of communication between actors; it can cement coalitions or differences between actors; and it can be diversionary, resulting in a form of symbolic politics.' (1999, p.476)

Arguably, sustainable development discourse does all these things. The extent to which it contributes positively to policy formation rather than becoming 'a form of

symbolic politics' may depend upon the internal coherence of the discourse. Luke argues that 'most sustainable development discourses are extremely conflicted. As discourses of a green governmentality, they are often little more than a bureaucratic conceit' (1995, p.30). However, others argue that sustainable development has made a difference to policy and to practice. To see whether this is so, we need to look at some specific areas of policy. Discourses concerning the environmental problems of acid rain and depletion of stratospheric ozone have been studied by Heyer (1995) and Litfin (1994) respectively. In addition, land-use planning has been seen as an important way of implementing sustainable development at a local level. These issues will be considered in turn below.

Acid Rain

Within the discourse of sustainable development, specific discourse coalitions and story-lines (Hajer, 1995) form around particular environmental issues. Hajer studied the discourse coalitions that formed around the problem of acid rain in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. In the UK, he identified two competing story-lines, which he called 'the traditional-pragmatist story-line' and 'the eco-modernist story-line', each of which was espoused by powerful actors and interests. Thus, in the UK there was no one hegemonic or dominant discourse. By contrast, in the Netherlands 'eco-modernist story-lines were quickly integrated into mainstream jargon yet they somehow failed to produce substantially different outcomes' (Hajer, 1995, p.175). Hajer attributes the lack of effective action in the Netherlands to a conflict between the acid rain discourse, which stressed the urgency of the problem, and the dominant culture of decision-making by consensus, which prevented effective action.

'The Dutch regulatory regime thus introduced eco-modernist notions but resisted the technocratic regulatory regime and stuck to the peculiarly Dutch tradition of accommodation.' (Ibid, p.229)

Integrating a concern into a dominant discourse does not necessarily lead, therefore, to steps being taken to solve the problem. The necessary action may be at odds with another part of the dominant discourse; and the apparent consensus on action may hide differing views and interests amongst the proponents of the discourse. As Hajer says:

'It can be shown that although these actors might share a specific set of story-lines, they might nevertheless interpret the meaning of these story-lines rather differently and might each have their own particular interests.' (Ibid, p.13)

The 'Ozone Hole'

In contrast to the lack of effective action to reduce acid rain, the depletion of stratospheric ozone was successfully tackled by the drawing up of an international treaty, the Montreal Protocol, reducing the use of ozone-depleting chemicals. Litfin (1994) found that the reaching of an agreement over the Montreal Protocol in 1987 could only be explained in terms of discourse, involving a 'complex interplay between scientific and political contexts' (p.80).

The discovery of the 'ozone hole' over the Antarctic coincided with the negotiations and, although the Montreal Protocol negotiators decided not to take this new evidence into account, it 'transform[ed] both scientific and political discourse on the ozone problem' (Ibid, p.96).

The metaphor of the 'ozone hole' and the publicity which the discovery of the Antarctic hole received led to considerable public concern. This concern formed a backdrop to the negotiations, making it easier for politicians to apply the precautionary principle, even though they had agreed not to take the Antarctic ozone hole into consideration. In addition, the politicians themselves were affected by the sense of uncertainty and urgency engendered by the discovery of the unpredicted hole. As Litfin says:

'The ozone hole created a sense of crisis that was conducive to the precautionary approach eventually sanctioned in the Montreal Protocol. [...] The hole was the clearest evidence that ... it was the ozone layer [rather than the CFC industry] that deserved to be treated as a fragile entity.' (Ibid, p.97)

The negotiations resulted in an agreement to reduce emissions of ozone-depleting chemicals by 50%, with a long-term aim of a complete phasing out of these chemicals. Thus, this example shows the power of unspoken background knowledge to influence attitudes and priorities and hence to affect decision-making.

Sustainability and Land-use Planning

Sustainability is not only affected by decisions taken by governments and in international arenas. This thesis is particularly concerned with decision-making at the local level. Land-use planning is an aspect of local decision-making that could have considerable potential to contribute to sustainability.

‘The various processes of land use planning and regulation have repeatedly been identified as key instruments for delivering a more sustainable society.’ (Owens and Cowell, 2002, p.4)

‘Land-use planning and sustainable development seem to be ever more inextricably intertwined.’ (Layard, 2001, p.1)

A commitment to sustainable development has been incorporated into planning policy guidance and local planning documents. However, Owens and Cowell suggest that:

‘In practice, land-use planning, with its relatively visible procedures and tangible results – has proved to be one of the most important arenas in which conceptions of sustainable development are contested. Here more than anywhere else, it has become clear that trying to turn the broad consensual principle into policies, procedures and decisions tends not to resolve conflicts but to expose tensions inherent in the idea of sustainable development.’ (2002, p.28)

The hidden contradictions within the discourse of sustainable development become apparent when attempts are made to put it into practice at the local level.

Nevertheless, the concept can still be of value in raising issues and considerations that might not otherwise be considered. As Owens and Cowell conclude:

‘Although some might see the original concept of sustainable development, subject as it has been to capture and manipulation, as something of an empty husk, we would conclude on a more constructive note. Like other broad but important concepts, that of sustainable development has performed (and could continue to perform) a vital task. It has done so not by resolving all planning conflicts but by focussing attention on the claims of environmental integrity, social justice and a dignified quality of life, and on the substantial moral and political task of adjudicating between claims that cannot always be happily reconciled.’ (Ibid, p.168)

Blowers points out that ‘planning cannot deliver sustainable development and environmental justice without changes in the whole realm of activities, structures and institutions which constitute and influence human existence’ (2000, p.390). On the other hand, he also sees a role for planning in challenging dominant discourses:

‘That is the challenge for planning. As a reinvigorated and purposive activity it can confront the dominant discourse of ecological modernisation and thus play a part in reversing the inexorable path towards self destruction of contemporary patterns of modernisation.’ (Ibid, p.391)

3.8 Conclusions

Discourse is an important tool with which to model and study the use of the terms ‘sustainable development’ and ‘sustainability’. By analysing the concepts as discourse we can increase understanding of the ways that the terms are used both to encourage change and to protect the status quo.

However, there are many ways of interpreting ‘discourse’ and of doing ‘discourse analysis’. Whilst recognising that the domain of communication is broader than the use of language, in this thesis I will take discourse as being language use in a social context. From a critical perspective, I will consider the ways in which dominant knowledges and ideologies are formed, transmitted, reinforced and challenged through discourse.

Political discourses are formed through the amalgam of pre-existing discourses that are often potentially contradictory. Discourse is becoming increasingly technologised (Fairclough, 1992, p.215; 1995, p.102), and increasingly professionalised techniques are used to hide potential conflicts and to present a seemingly coherent discourse.

Whereas ‘environmentalism disturbed the established discourse of advanced industrial society’ (Torgerson, 1995, p.3), the concept of ‘sustainable development’ was sufficiently flexible to be adopted into dominant discourses. However, in being made to seem compatible with the neo-liberal economic agenda, aspects of

sustainable development, such as the commitment to equity, were sidelined and the potential contradictions of 'sustainable development' became the win-win solution of 'ecological modernisation'. The effect of this discourse on policy and practice has been mixed, as competing interests and interpretations within the discourse become apparent at the point of implementation. The next chapter will focus on the local level, considering discourses around the concepts of 'local governance', 'community', 'locality' and 'local sustainability'.

Chapter 4: Local Sustainability and the Statutory Role of Local Councils

4.1 Introduction

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Agenda 21, which arose from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, 'gave a major endorsement of the role of local action in planning and implementing sustainable development' (Christie, 1996, p.29). It 'calls for *over half of the required policy steps to be carried out at local level*' (Ibid, emphasis in original). Agyeman and Evans also point out the importance of the local approach to sustainability:

'It is local action which is likely to develop enduring concern and involvement, and it is local action which will be needed to secure commitment and facilitate democratic control. Moreover, it is 'the local' which can enable experimentation and permit diversity. Although there must be international, national and regional frameworks and guidance, it is local policy and action which will ultimately deliver sustainability.' (1994, p.198)

This chapter will examine the literature on the application of sustainable development at the local level. It will argue that conceptualisations and articulations of local sustainability, and the likelihood of taking action in support of these, are heavily dependent upon ideas of 'locality' and 'community'. In addition, Chapter 7 will show that these concepts are central to the ways that local councillors see their own role with respect to their parishes.

Firstly, I will consider what is meant by 'local sustainability', and link it to ideas of environmental citizenship (Selman, 1996). As conceptualisations of local sustainability are closely linked to ideas of 'community' and 'locality', these concepts will be considered in the following two sections. Section 4.3 will analyse 'community', and consider how the powerful discourses around this concept are used to promote and justify particular views of society. Section 4.4 it will consider ideas of 'locality', 'local distinctiveness' and 'local knowledge' and relate these to

local sustainability. Finally, Section 4.6 will analyse the role of the town and parish council, in the context of the move from government to governance, and its potential to contribute to local sustainability.

4.2 Local Sustainability

4.2.1 INTRODUCTION

This section will consider what sustainability must mean at a local level if it is to contribute to global sustainability. It will then suggest the approaches that might be taken and the type of citizenship that will be necessary if this is to happen.

There are a number of advantages in tackling sustainability at a local rather than a global level. Global action necessarily involves complex negotiations between governments and others. It tends to be managerial in style, remote from the experiences of ordinary people and too inflexible to adapt to local conditions. In addition, 'relations of domination are left in place' (Bridger and Luloff, 1999, p.380).

'By shifting the focus on sustainability to the local level, changes are seen and felt in a much more immediate manner.' (Ibid)

In addition, Bridger and Luloff argue that if it is possible to 'generate concrete examples of sustainable development' at a local level, then 'the concept of sustainability will acquire the widespread legitimacy that has so far proved elusive' (Ibid).

4.2.2 DIMENSIONS OF LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY

Bridger and Luloff identify five dimensions of 'a sustainable community':

- 'Local economic diversity'
- 'Self-reliance' (not self-sufficiency)
- 'A reduction in the use of energy and careful management and recycling of waste products'
- 'The protection and enhancement of biological diversity and careful stewardship of natural resources'

- ‘Social justice’

(based on Bridger and Luloff, 1999, p.381)

It is worth looking at these dimensions in some detail.

Firstly, an area that is dependent upon one employer or one industry for the majority of its employment is vulnerable to factors outside its control. Local economic diversity therefore makes a local society more economically sustainable. Similarly, self-reliance, which ‘entails the development of local markets, local production, local processing of previously imported goods, greater co-operation among local economic entities and the like’ (Ibid, p.381) whilst remaining linked to larger-scale markets, contributes to economic security and sustainability. It also has the potential to reduce the environmental impact of unnecessarily transporting goods. Thus, these two dimensions are closely related and could be combined.

The following two points cover environmental sustainability and attempt to minimise the ecological footprint of the community.

The final dimension, social justice, is interpreted by Bridger and Luloff as providing for the needs of all the residents in an equitable way. Although they interpret social justice to mean empowering and meeting the needs of all residents, this perhaps needs to be made more specific. More importantly, this social sustainability component is incomplete in that it deals only with the social justice within the community and makes no reference to the social effects of the area on the wider world. This might be termed the ‘social footprint’¹ of the area, analogous to the environmental effect of the ecological footprint.

In order to overcome these shortcomings and as the concept of ‘a sustainable community’ is fundamental to this research, I have reworded Bridger and Luloff’s dimensions as follows:

¹ The ‘social footprint’ concerns the impact of the community’s activities on the livelihoods and quality of life of ‘others’, who may be distant in space or time.

- A diverse and self-reliant local economy
- The protection and enhancement of biological diversity and careful stewardship of natural resources
- Minimisation of the production of pollution and waste; and reuse, recycling and careful management of waste products
- Empowering citizens and meeting needs within the community in a socially just way
- Minimisation of the 'social footprint' of the community on the outside world.

These five dimensions are an aspiration rather than an achievable aim, but any particular project to increase the sustainability of a community or an area can be judged by its impact on the five dimensions. In practice, it may often be necessary to make difficult decisions that balance one dimension against another. However, a project could be said to have a positive sustainability impact if it has positive impact on at least one of the dimensions, without significant negative impacts on any of the other dimensions. I will return to these five dimensions of local sustainability, when considering the impact of the projects undertaken by the case-study parish and town councils in Chapter 9.

Achieving, or moving towards, the five dimensions of local sustainability is not easy. Bridger and Luloff see the key as empowerment:

'Exactly how communities can succeed in all five dimensions is not clear. However, it would appear that the primary means would be through local control over a wide range of decisions.' (Ibid, p.382)

There are three problems with this assumption.

Firstly, it assumes that *the community*, as more than a group of people who happen to live in the same place, exists. The complexities of the idea of 'community' will be discussed below.

Secondly, for the needs of *all* the community to be met, it is important that the empowerment is equitable, that is that the less vocal and less powerful community members are empowered more than the more vocal and influential members.

Thirdly, not all the dimensions of sustainability are of obvious or immediate advantage to the community. For example, minimising resource use may not show obvious local benefits, although it might save money for local businesses. There is, therefore, no guarantee that an empowered local community will act in the interests of sustainability. Whether or not they do will depend upon local circumstances and on the attitudes and perceived responsibilities of community members, particularly influential members such as local councillors. The next sub-section will consider attitudes to the environment and sustainability.

4.2.4 ATTITUDES TO THE ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

Public attitudes to 'scientifically-defined' environmental problems are affected by the distrust of expert (in this case, scientific) knowledge discussed above (Harrison and Burgess, 1994; Eden, 1998; Owens, 2000). As Burgess et al say:

'Lay publics are highly sensitive to the partiality of expert-political information and environmental debate, at least in the United Kingdom, is currently marked by high levels of doubt, cynicism and mistrust.'

(1998, p.1447)

As we have seen above, local environmental problems seem more real and immediate to people than global problems (Myers and Macnaghten, 1998); and 'expert' discourses of the environment are adapted to local circumstances according to people's personal experience and local knowledge (Burningham and O'Brien, 1994; Harrison and Burgess, 1994; Bickerstaff and Walker, 2001). In addition, Bickerstaff and Walker point out that attitudes to the local environment are heavily influenced by attitudes to the locality itself. They found that 'respondents who are highly satisfied with their neighbourhoods tend to be less aware than others of air pollution as a local phenomenon and to de-emphasise it as a problem' (Ibid, p.140). Attitudes to locality will be analysed in section 4.4.

Macnaghten and Jacobs studied public attitudes to sustainability. They found:

‘The lack of attention paid to the public resonance of sustainability is particularly significant in the light of the increasing emphasis its advocates have placed on ‘participation’ in recent years.’ (1997, p.5)

Since 1997, the emphasis on participation has, if anything, increased, and yet there is still very little attention paid to what ordinary people understand by sustainability, despite an increasing body of academic work on attitudes to the environment.

Macnaghten and Jacobs found ‘a remarkably high degree of awareness of [both local and global] environmental issues’ (1997, p.15) in most of their focus groups.

However, they continue:

‘Despite this environmental awareness, only two people in all the groups had heard the term ‘sustainability’. When introduced into the discussion by the moderator, the term was generally seen as a piece of abstract jargon; even ‘gobbledygook’.’ (Ibid)

Nevertheless, government schemes to encourage sustainable behaviour have tended to work on an ‘information deficit’ model, assuming that if people are given the right information they will act upon it.

‘Underlying most attempts at promoting participation in sustainability is an implicit model of communication as information transfer between an organisation and the public [...] The model assumes scientific realism, in which environmental problems are ‘out there’ objectively for all to see [...] It assumes instrumentalism, in which people will act when they see the problems, and the role of communication is to draw attention to them.’ (Myers and Macnaghten, 1998, p.334/5)

Whilst there are gaps in public knowledge and understanding which may be inhibiting public action, such as a common confusion between global warming and ozone depletion (Löfstedt, 1995), simply providing information has not proved sufficient to encourage public action on any considerable scale. As Owens says:

‘While greater knowledge may be worthwhile in its own right, barriers to action do not lie primarily in a lack of information or understanding. More important mediating factors are the framing of problems, social and political context, and personal and institutional constraints.’ (2000, p.1143)

4.2.5 FROM VALUES TO ACTION: ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZENSHIP

Professed commitment to the environment does not always result in action.

According to Harrison et al:

‘There does not appear to be any simple or consistent relationship between either the breadth or depth of environmental concern and action.’ (1996, p.217)

This ‘value-action gap’ (Blake, 1999) needs to be overcome, if local sustainability is to become a reality. Blake identified three barriers between environmental concern and action, as shown in Figure 14. These range from individual barriers to social/institutional barriers:

Blake adds: ‘which factors are important in any one case will vary for different individuals, environmental actions, and social or institutional constraints’ (Ibid, p.266). Individual barriers ‘are particularly important for people whose environmental attitudes are peripheral within their wider attitudinal structure’ (Ibid). As such they are linked with degree of concern. They are likely to be linked to prevalent discourses and attitudes within the society, on both a macro- and micro-scale, in which people live.

Although Blake calls his second barrier ‘responsibility’, he includes within it people’s perceptions of their own efficacy. Eden identifies two aspects of ‘environmental responsibility’:

‘First, ... the awareness of the consequences of behaviour influences perceptions of responsibility. Second, whether the self is perceived to be the main agent of pro-environmental behaviour, that is, that responsibility is ascribed to the self.’ (1993, p.1745)

Thus, we have two separate, but related, points. People may feel a responsibility to act, but nevertheless fail to do so because they judge that their actions will make no difference. I will deal with each point in turn.

Firstly, people have to believe that they have a personal responsibility to take action. Eden points out that this may be linked to a sense of privilege, in income or in locale, relative to others. Thus, responsibility may be linked to a sense of place. It

is also linked to perceptions of others' responsibilities, particularly those of government and of business. However, at the same time that people are reluctant to act because they feel that government is not playing its part, government seems to be attempting to shift responsibility to the local level.

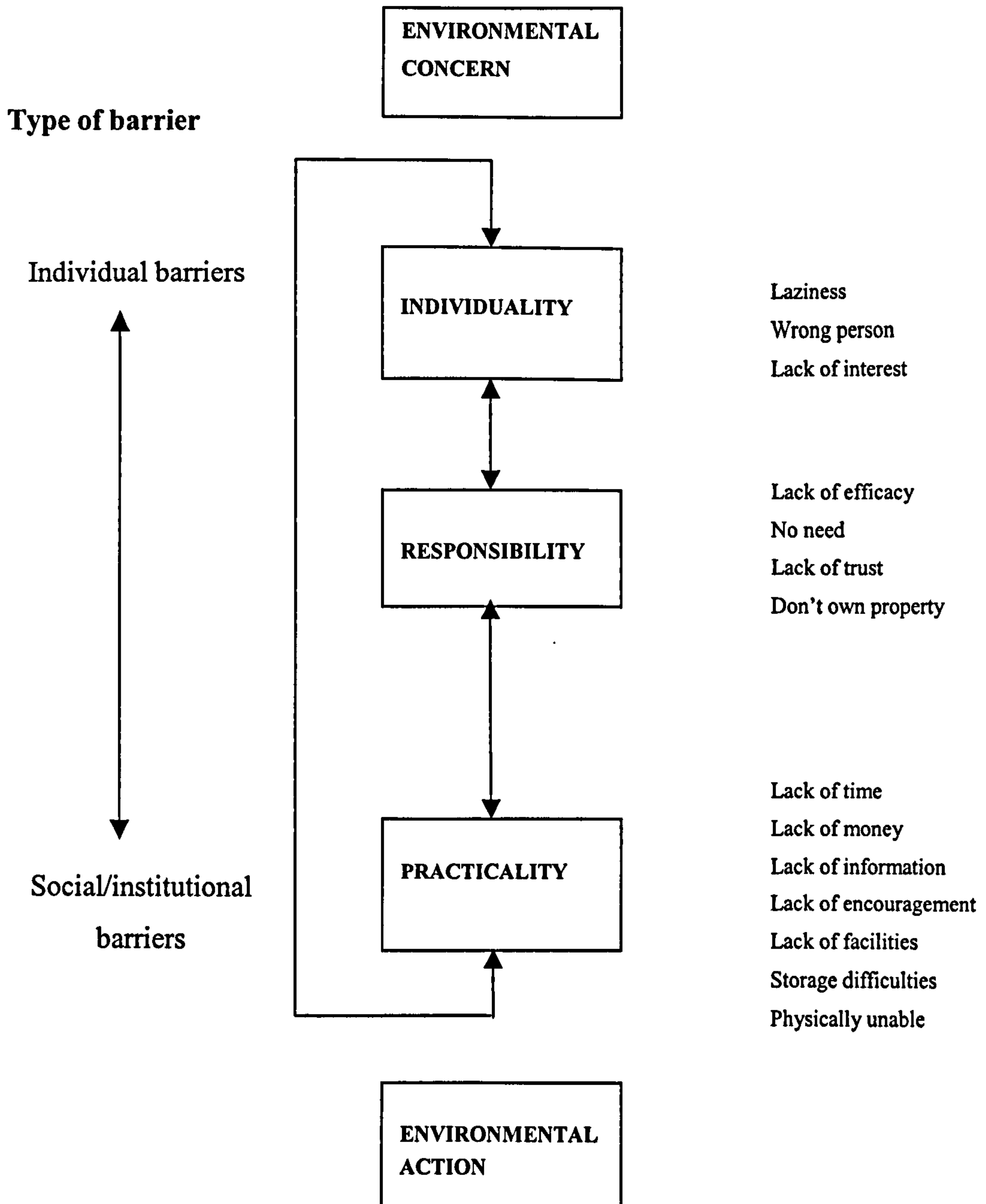


FIGURE 14: BARRIERS BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN AND ACTION (FROM BLAKE, 1999)

Secondly, people need to feel that their actions will make a difference. Hinchcliffe, studying people's reactions to the UK government's 'Helping the Earth Begins at Home' initiative, found that 'people expressed the futility of taking action in as an *individual*' (1996, p.61, emphasis in original). Harrison et al found that individuals, even in Eindhoven in the Netherlands where recycling rates are high, 'wanted evidence that their individual commitment in terms of time and effort had a tangible benefit' (1996, p.227). In addition, action is less likely to be seen as effective if it is not complemented by the actions of others, especially those of government, who are seen as being able to make much more difference than an individual. Thus, the perceived lack of action by governments and industry reinforced the feeling that there was little point in the small-scale actions that individuals could take. As Owens says:

'In many circumstances, people may be right to think that, in the absence of more radical change, what they do will make little difference, and rational in their ascription of prime responsibility to governments and other institutions.' (2000, p.1146)

In addition, governments may be using the rhetoric of participation and individual responsibility to mask their own lack of meaningful action on sustainability.

'There is a danger that ... local participation will, in effect, merely involve shifting responsibility to individuals and groups. By implication, this can legitimise inaction amongst other organisations (in particular local and national government) by allowing them to deny their own responsibility for environmental improvement.'
(Blake, 1999, p.273)

Chapter 6 will consider how far this apparent shifting of responsibility from governments to individual citizens and community is born out by government documents on sustainability.

Blake's third barrier, 'practicality', has been addressed by schemes such as the provision of recycling facilities, for which much of the impetus has come from the EU in the form of recycling targets for local authorities. Blake points out that the actions taken tend to be those that 'require the least alteration to existing policies' (Ibid, p.269). Other practical barriers, which present a more fundamental challenge

to the status quo and many of which require action by government or businesses, are less likely to be tackled. For example, Harrison et al found that:

‘People in both cities [Eindhoven and Nottingham] recognised that household recycling behaviour did nothing to stem the production of waste. The consumer society produced ‘mountains of rubbish’. Industry too needed to be seen to be doing something to cut down on waste production.’ (1996, p. 228)

To summarise, the three requisites for action are the acceptance of responsibility, the belief in being able to make a difference, and the ability to overcome practical barriers. All three of these, but perhaps especially the second, can be encouraged by empowering groups of people or whole communities through combined action. Dynamic individuals are usually needed to initiate and lead community action:

‘Another driver for the focus on sustainability is the radical vision of local movers and shakers who see an opportunity to promote the economic and social advantages of their localities.’
(O’Riordan, 2001, p.15)

Furthermore, local action can only be successful when it has the backing of local people, and it is of course individuals who comprise the communities, networks and partnerships that take local action for sustainability. Thus, sustainability requires new attitudes to responsibility and to citizenship. By building on local interests, concerns and activity, people can be empowered to change their own lives for the better. However, sustainability means more than this. Local sustainability must include consideration for the impact of the locality on the wider world and on future generations. Hence, people need to be not only good local citizens; they need also to be global citizens.

Parker defines citizenship as ‘an ‘envelope’ of rights, responsibilities, entitlements and obligations’ (2002, p.22). He identifies a particular type of good citizenship that has been encouraged by the UK government, which he terms ‘rather anodyne ‘active’ citizenship’ (Ibid, p.129), and which was encouraged by initiatives such as the Parish Paths Partnership. This active citizenship does not necessarily contribute

to sustainability. Christoff distinguishes between anthropocentric citizenship and ecological citizenship:

‘To become ecological rather than narrowly anthropocentric citizens, existing humans must assume responsibility for future humans and other species, and ‘represent’ their rights and potential choices according to the duties of environmental stewardship. (1996, p.159)

Thus, in the transition to sustainability, ecological citizens look beyond the immediate needs of the own locality both spatially and temporally, to the impact that their locality has on the wider world and on future generations. They will of course always be constrained by wider forces outside their control. However, this does not negate their role in the transition to sustainability; rather it broadens it to include use of the democratic system and consumer power, and perhaps even direct action, to achieve wider structural change.

**‘Environmental citizens [...] are thus expected to change their everyday habits, be responsible consumers, engage in public debate, keep elected officials accountable, and work with others.’
(Selman, 1996, p.155)**

Local leadership will be needed to encourage environmental citizenship. Parish and town councils are arguably in a good position to provide that leadership. Section 4.5 will consider the powers and role of local councils.

4.3 Community

4.3.1 INTRODUCTION

There is a history of research focused on ‘community’, not least in rural studies, where in the 1990s it ‘emerged once again as a signifier of both research scale and cultural meanings about social life and rurality’ (Liepins, 2000, p.23). Day and Murdoch (1993) and Liepins (2000) review the use of the term by academics, particularly in rural studies. However, this section is concerned chiefly with its use in political and everyday discourse, rather than in academic texts.

As we shall see in Chapter 6, the concept of community has been taken up with enthusiasm in political discourse, particularly in relation to local development, participation and sustainability.

‘... conceptions of ‘culture’ and ‘community’ have a particular resonance in rural settings, and a particular relevance for processes of *sustainable* rural development and governance’
(Day, 1998, p.89, emphasis in original)

The ‘particular resonance in rural areas’ is perhaps debatable, as there is much talk and action around the theme of ‘community’ and ‘community development’ in urban areas (see for example, Barton, 1999; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), 2003). Nevertheless, the limited size of rural settlements, including the larger villages and market towns studied in this research, may make it easier to think in terms of ‘community’.

‘Community’ is, however, a problematic concept, and tends to be used with little consideration for its exact meaning. Evans describes it as ‘a chimeric notion which cannot and should not be the object of public policy’ (1994, p.106). However, as I will show below, it is the very chimeric nature of ‘community’ that makes it useful in political discourse, and the term remains prevalent there as well as in public ‘everyday’ discourse. As Little argues:

‘Despite a long and varied history in political and social philosophy, the concept of community is arguably more important and contested now than in any previous era. It remains an idea that is perennially resistant to ideological categorisation. (2002, p.7)

4.3.2 WHAT IS COMMUNITY?

There have been many attempts to define community or at least to explain its meaning. Barton defines it as ‘a network of people with common interests and the expectation of mutual recognition, support and friendship’ (1999, p.5). According to Etzioni:

‘Community is defined by two characteristics: (1) A community entails a web of affect-laden relations among a group of individuals, relations that often crisscross and reinforce one another [...] and, (2)

community requires a commitment to a set of shared values, norms and meanings, and a shared history and identity – in short a shared culture.’

(1996, p.5)

This last definition raises a number of questions. The first characteristic - ‘the web of affect-laden relations’ – presents community as made up of personal, as opposed to economic or political, relations. This implies that people know each other personally and therefore has implications for the maximum size of a community in which such a web can exist. The requirement of ‘a shared culture’ raises more fundamental questions about the ability of communities to absorb people of different backgrounds. These problems will be discussed below.

Nash (2002) looks at ‘community’ from a policy perspective. She identifies three ways in which the word is used in policy literature. Firstly, it is used to refer to ‘community as agent’ – that is, a group of residents who will take part in an initiative. Secondly, ‘community as place’ is used as a synonym for ‘neighbourhood’. The third use is ‘community as a value ... where the focus is not just on groups of people or place, but on rebuilding certain valued sets of social relations’ (2002, p.iv). In Chapter 7, I will consider how the use of ‘community’ by councillors encompasses all these meanings.

The word ‘rebuilding’ in the last quotation above implies a return to some traditional type of ‘community’, which existed in the past and can be recreated. This association of community with the past is common and is discussed in the next subsection.

4.3.3 TRADITIONAL COMMUNITIES

For many, the word ‘community’ conjures up visions of a small-scale rustic utopia, in which everyone knows and cares for everyone else. Political discourses have used the term to encourage these associations.

‘Not surprisingly, when it appears in popular political discourses the call for community tends to be predicated on the romantic and backward looking nostalgia for previous forms of social arrangements that are deemed preferable to contemporary societies.’
(Little, 2002, p.76)

German sociologist, Ferdinand Tönnies, writing in 1887, contrasted this traditional 'gemeinschaft' view of community with 'gesellschaft' - larger-scale association or society (Little, 2002, p.16). Evans (1994) lists the characteristics of 'gemeinschaft' communities as 'social homogeneity', 'immobility' and 'the need to co-operate'; and concludes:

'It seems that if this kind of community does exist at all, then, in Britain at least, it is likely to be found in very few places with highly specific local circumstances.' (Ibid, p.107)

Present-day meanings of community are much broader than the traditional 'gemeinschaft', both in scale and in type, as discussed in the next section. However, the connotations of gemeinschaft are still present in the word, even when it is referring to a very different type of community.

4.3.4 TYPES OF COMMUNITY

Although this thesis is chiefly concerned with spatial communities – i.e. those within rural parishes - it is generally accepted that communities can go beyond the purely spatial and extend to communities of interest. This does not mean that any association of people is a community. Etzioni distinguishes between a community and an interest group:

'A community is a group of people who share criss-crossing affective bonds and a moral culture. By asserting this definition, I mean to indicate clearly that communities need not be local and are distinct from mere interest groups, in that they address a broad band of human needs. People who band together to gain privileged treatment for office equipment make an interest group; those who share a history, identity and fate a community.' (2000, p.9)

Hirst (1994) distinguishes between 'communities of choice' and 'communities of fate'. Similarly, Gorz (1999) distinguishes between 'associative' communities (which people choose to belong to) and 'constitutive' communities (into which they are born). Gorz considers that constitutive communities consist of stronger bonds than associative communities. Whilst this may well be true in that if you can opt into a community you can generally opt out again, Little (2002) points out that the

distinction is not always clear. For example, spatial communities are often given as examples of communities of fate, but for some people – those who are rich enough and mobile enough to choose where they live – they are communities of choice.

4.3.5 HOMOGENEITY, DIVERSITY AND POWER RELATIONS

One of the problems raised by Etzioni's definition above concerns the potential exclusiveness of communities.

'Community is an understandable dream, expressing a desire for selves that are transparent to one another, relationships of mutual identification, social closeness and comfort. The dream is understandable, but politically problematic, I argue, because those motivated by it will tend to suppress differences among themselves or implicitly to exclude from their political groups persons with whom they do not identify.' (Young, 1990, p.300)

This tendency to exclude those who are or appear to be 'different' may be a particular problem where communities are spatially defined. Spatial communities, especially in rural areas, are seldom socially homogenous. Even if they share a common culture, this culture may be based upon very unequal power relations. Silk puts this point strongly:

'The reality is that communities are riven by tensions, conflict, and 'difference', and do not escape the structural inequalities and power relations of the wider society.' (1999, p.12)

In addition, even where communities are, or are visualised as, homogenous, there is a danger that this homogeneity is defined with reference to an out-group that is seen as different. Thus, communities can be exclusive as well as inclusive. In addition, the idea of 'community' can be used to retain the power and privileges of select groups:

'Many territorially exclusive communities represent attempts to reduce conflict and preserve inequalities of wealth and power.'
(Silk, 1999, p.12)

There may be unequal power relations both within and between communities. These can lead to conflict and/or the consolidation of power by privileged groups.

The representation of power relations in terms of the community against outside forces is particularly attractive to local leaders and campaigners. By presenting the community as united it reinforces its homogeneity, both in perception and, perhaps, in actuality. This applies at all levels from the national, where the existence (or discursive creation) of an enemy is a powerful way of engendering support for a government, to a small village fighting for (or against) a bypass. Thus, external power relations reflect on internal ones.

Etzioni sees the solution to the problem of conflict between communities in terms of 'layered loyalties', with people being members of, and having loyalty to, communities at different levels from the locality to the nation. He adds the proviso that the overarching loyalty must be to the largest scale community, in order that intercommunity conflict can be avoided. However, he acknowledges:

'...until these layered loyalties encompass the ultimate community of communities, that *of all people*, intercommunity dangers will not be overcome, although they may be curtailed.'
(1996, p.10, emphasis in original)

The idea of a community 'of all people', whilst appealing, raises the question of whether it is possible to have a 'web of affect-laden relations' on such a large scale – or indeed on the scale of a nation or a region within a nation, as well as appearing to contradict Etzioni's own requirement of a shared culture. Nevertheless, it is just this loyalty to the community 'of all people', including people yet to be born, that is essential if local activists such as town councillors are to take into account the needs of future generations and distant places, in short, if they are to contribute to sustainable development.

4.3.6 IMAGINED COMMUNITIES

It seems then that the traditional *gemeinschaft* community is problematic in practice, particularly on larger spatial scales, and yet the idea of community persists. There is a sense then in which the concept of community is imagined. Anderson describes nations as 'imagined communities':

'[They are] imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or

even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion.’ (1991, p.6)

Arguably, this idea of the ‘imagined community’ is also relevant to much smaller spatially-based ‘communities’ such as the market towns and large parishes studied in this research, where it is virtually impossible for even the most active local citizens to know more than a minority of the 5000 or more inhabitants, although they may feel that they know almost everyone. Anderson continues:

‘In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined.’ (Ibid)

In this sense then, most spatial communities are imagined. But they may also be imagined in another sense. As I shall show in Chapter 7, the tendency, mentioned by Young in the quotation above, to yearn for the ‘understandable dream’ of community can easily lead to an unconscious exaggeration of the homogeneity and common ideology of the inhabitants of a settlement or neighbourhood, a glossing over of the differences and hence the suppression of dissent.

4.3.7 ‘COMMUNITY’ AS DISCOURSE

From a discourse perspective, the difficulty in agreeing a definition of community does not make the term meaningless or useless.

‘It is a very common error to think that if a word is meaningful then it should have a fixed and wholly determinate meaning.’
(Plant, 1974, p.8, quoted in Little, 2002, p.1)

As I have argued in Chapter 3, words often have a whole range of meanings, which can be present to a greater or lesser extent in any particular usage of the word. In addition, meanings change over time. As Warburton says:

‘... concepts such as community always have several meanings, any one or more of which may be dominant but which exist alongside other meanings which are emerging or waning.’ (1998, p.15)

As we have seen in the case of sustainable development, indeterminate meanings can be positively useful to political discourse. Schofield describes the ‘elusive

appeal' of community as 'a discursive resource of almost limitless potential' enabling 'the past to be painted in the golden glow of nostalgia', or alternatively, referring to 'a new social order rooted in human solidarity and mutual support' (2002, p.664). Thus, the term appeals both to the past and the future, or in Schofield's words, 'is a passport to both Arcadia and Utopia.' (Ibid). 'Community' can advocate change or the status quo but is always presented positively.

'Community can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships. What is most important perhaps, is that unlike all other terms of social organisation (state, nation, society etc.) it seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term.'
(Williams, 1988, p.76)

Hence, in spite of the difficulty of definition, there are certain ideas which are associated with the word 'community' and which are intended when the word is spoken or written and understood when it is heard or read.

'Community suggests all of the following: common needs and goals, a sense of the common good, shared lives, culture and views of the world, and collective action.' (Silk, 1999, p.8)

It follows that when the word 'community' is used, it conjures up a picture of all these things without usually being too specific about how they are to be achieved. This explains its popularity in political discourse. In particular, the word 'community' has been incorporated into the discourse of New Labour, where the concept of community and the related term 'community development' 'enables the otherwise separate institutional worlds of local and national government to be aligned with the particular interests and needs of specific locales.' (Schofield, 2002, p.675).

There is a second sense in which 'community' is a useful concept for governments. It provides a slightly more locatable, and more utopian, alternative to 'society', to which responsibility (but usually not power) can be devolved. This is evident in the phrase 'care in the community', and as I will show in Chapter 6, it is true of government response to the sustainable development agenda. Chapter 8 will show that the word 'community' is also very evident in town councillor discourse; and in

that chapter I will analyse in more detail the ways in which the term is used at that level.

We have seen that the chimeric nature of the word 'community' has made it a very powerful discursive concept. The next section will look at the related concepts of 'locality' and 'local distinctiveness'.

4.4 Locality

4.4.1 LOCALITY AND DISTINCTIVENESS

A number of studies have shown that people tend to be attached to the places where they live (Day and Murdoch, 1993; Rallings et al, 1994; Macnaghten and Urry, 1998; Macnaghten, 2003). In addition, environmental and social problems, although they may be national or global in origin, tend to manifest themselves locally. Thus, as Selman says:

'Clearly, the role of locality is pivotal in moving towards an environmentally sustainable future.' (1996, p.3)

However, 'there is by no means any settled agreement as to what 'locality' means' (Day and Murdoch, 1993, p.86). O'Riordan and Church describe it as:

'... the repository of a variety of forces and activities that flourish or disintegrate into patterns of place-centred distinctiveness.'
(O'Riordan and Church, 2001, p.12)

As places can be distinctive on almost any scale, this leaves open the possibility of using the term 'locality' to refer to anything from a region such as the Northeast of England to a small village or a street.

Because every place has a different history and is inhabited by different individuals, the ways that larger scale actions and discourses are interpreted will vary from place to place. This does not mean that they have nothing in common or that the same discourses and actions cannot be found in different places. Meegan attributes the distinctiveness of places to their unique social relations:

'Social relations make places, make local worlds ... The social relations that constitute a place – a place that almost by definition is

unique – are not all confined to that place ... This complex geography of social relations is dynamic, constantly developing as social relations ebb and flow and new relations are constructed. And it is the combination over time of local and wider social relations that gives places their distinctiveness.’ (1995, p.55)

This distinctiveness means that the challenge of enacting sustainable development at a local level will vary from place to place. However, it does not mean that lessons learnt in one place can never be transferred to another – just that care must be taken in doing so.

4.4.2 LOCALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainable development may be a global imperative, and action certainly needs to be taken at a global level. Nevertheless, as shown in the previous section, global discourses and problems cannot be looked at in isolation from their local effects and the local discourses and actions that contribute to them or challenge them. This thesis will look at the local in the context of global discourses of sustainability. As the places with which people identify most strongly tend to be small, this is perhaps the best scale to look at possibilities for implementing the sustainability agenda.

In addition, the local is the scale at which people are most concerned with the environment and are willing to take action to protect it. Macnaghten (2003) studied the reactions to environmental images of five groups, comparing global images with local people-centred images. He found that whilst global images produced temporary guilt, the local images, depicting people carrying out ordinary activities, were much more empowering.

‘This research suggests that people tend to value their personal environments, not as part of universal and generalised abstractions, but when connected to everyday practices and leisure pursuits such as gardening, therapy, walking, fishing, climbing, boating, even motoring.’ (Macnaghten, 2003, p.69)

This raises the question of whether it is possible to achieve sustainability through each person or community looking after his or her local environment, or whether a global vision is also needed. Selman supports the latter position:

'It is easy for a community to believe that it has 'greened' itself by making more use of recycling facilities and planting more trees, at the same time as it continues to be grossly profligate in resource use generally. Even if a locality is unable to take immediate direct action to reduce this impact, residents should at least raise their level of awareness of the magnitude and nature of their demands for materials and energy, and their export of pollution and wastes, which affect other locations.' (1996, p.4)

It could also be asserted that local communities should be aware of, and take responsibility for, their social and economic impacts on other localities. I will return to this point below.

4.4.3 DISCOURSES OF LOCALITY

Edwards (1998, based on Barnes and Duncan, 1992) identifies three 'subtexts' within the discourse of community action and development, involving place, people, and politics. These are shown in Figure 15 below.

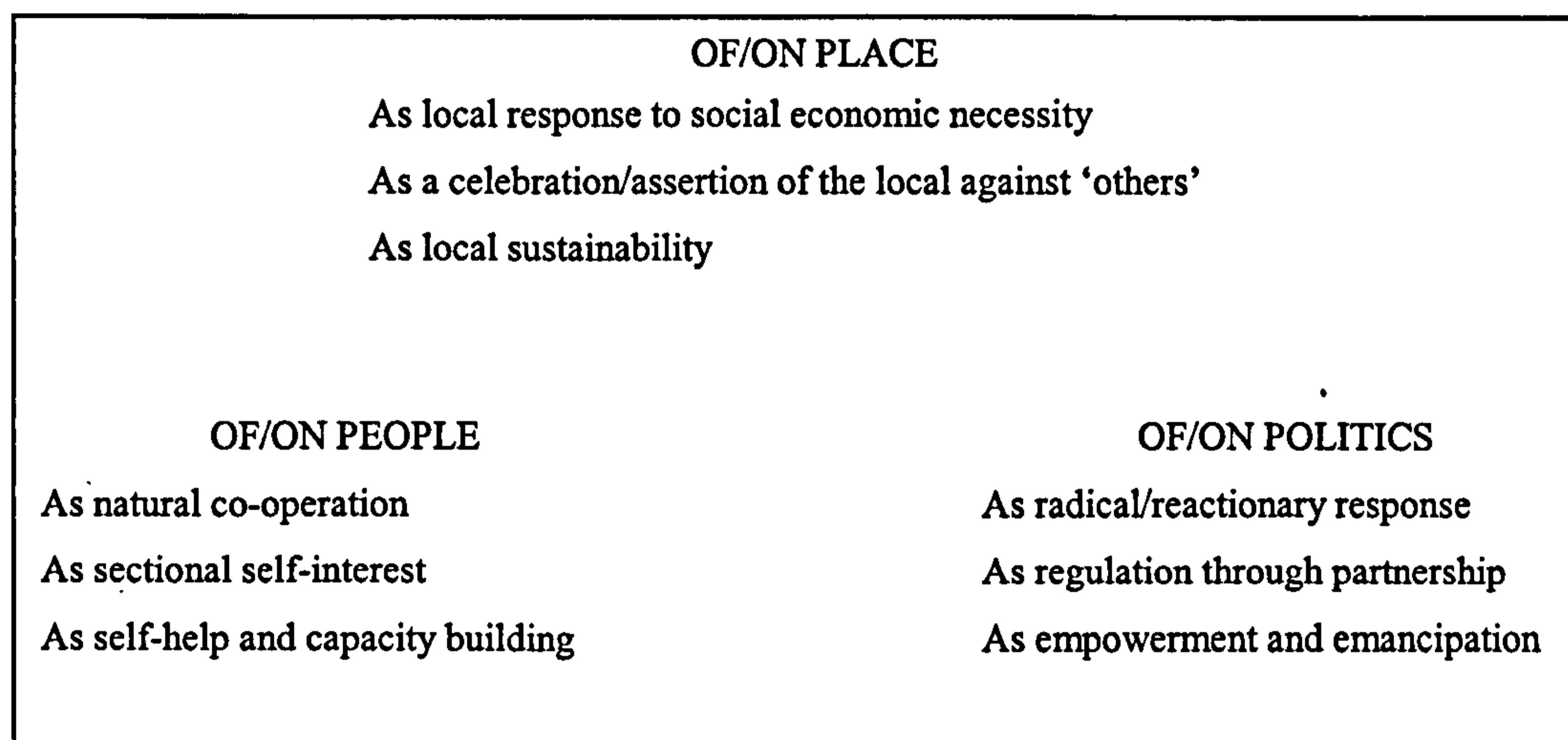


FIGURE 15: THE MULTIPLE DISCOURSES OF/ON COMMUNITY ACTION AND DEVELOPMENT
(from Edwards, 1998, p.69)

As Edwards says:

‘Participants in the process of community action may choose to rationalise their engagement through acknowledging any combination of [the discourses shown in figure 14] as motivation for action.’ (1998,p.69)

In his research on community participation in Wales, Edwards found different emphases on the three ‘subtexts’. Although the ‘political intent’ was present, it was articulated and prioritised by few people. Rather, the discursive emphasis was on people and place.

‘In all versions of community action people are prioritised, but in different ways and to different degrees by the different agents and agencies involved. Both local participants and agencies prioritise place, the former because it is the *raison d’être* for their action to celebrate its particularities, distinctiveness and needs; the latter to evaluate relative need and to deliver just and/or justifiable outcomes.’

(Edwards, 1998, p.75, emphasis in original)

If place and its distinctiveness are important to community activists to the extent that they are their ‘raison d’être’ for activism, it might be expected that town councillors would feel the same way. As will be shown in Chapter 8, this is a large part of their motivation.

Edwards points out that participants and agencies emphasise place for different reasons. For example, the reasons may be economic rather than personal. People with different reasons for emphasising locality will not only tend to stress different aspects of it, they are likely to have a different view of the place itself and a different vision for its future.

‘Social and cultural tensions arise from the different visions and expectations people have about the same place, reflecting their separate lifestyles and livelihoods.’ (Marsden et al, 1993, p.14)

These differing views of, and visions for, places may be best seen as competing discourses of place. Again, there may be a role for parish and town councils in

providing the structures through which these different discourses can be debated and channelled into community action.

4.4.4 LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

As we shall see in Chapter 7, discourses of locality are often framed in terms of 'local knowledge' or the knowledge that people have of their own locality, as a result of living and/or working there. Fischer defines local knowledge as:

'knowledge about a local context or setting, including empirical knowledge of specific characteristics, circumstances, events, and relationships, as well as the normative understandings of their meaning. As such it is a type of knowledge that owes its status not to distinctive professional methods but to casual empiricism, thoughtful reflection and common sense.' (2000, p.146)

It is easy to romanticise local knowledge, and it could be described as based on prejudice and parochialism as much as on 'thoughtful reflection and common sense'. Nevertheless, it is inextricably linked to attachment to locality, and is based on a more detailed knowledge of a particular place than an outside expert is likely to possess. As Fischer points out, local knowledge is important in problem identification and in finding and implementing solutions.

'[A] good deal of experience shows that citizen involvement in both defining a problem and searching for its solutions is an important factor in building the legitimacy required to implement policy effectively.' (Ibid, p.217)

Thus, sustainability requires a fusion of local and expert knowledge. Selman (1996, based on O'Riordan, 1994) advocates a 'civic science', combining expert and local knowledge, so that:

'Complex issues, normally negotiated between experts and politicians, are instead managed through a participatory process.'
(Selman, 1996, p.59)

In the field of local development local people are continually subject to the 'expertise' of planners and other 'experts', and may have little attention paid to their own 'local' knowledge. This thesis aims to shed some light on the ways that local activists, and particularly town councillors, perceive and deal with this situation.

4.5 Parish and Town Councils

4.5.1 INTRODUCTION: LOCAL COUNCILS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 refers to ‘the level of governance closest to the people’ (United Nations, 1993, p.393) as having a ‘vital role in educating, mobilizing and responding to the public to promote sustainable development’ (Ibid). In most of rural England, parish and town councils are ‘the level of governance closest to the people’, and yet they have not been seen as having the potential to contribute to the sustainable development of their parishes.

This thesis is concerned with the potential for parish and town councils in promoting sustainable development. If local councils are to play a leadership role in the move to local sustainability, firstly, and perhaps most importantly, local councillors must show competence, vision and commitment.

In addition, local councils need the powers and the tools to take effective action to further sustainability. This section will begin with a brief overview of parish and town councils in England. It will then consider their powers and the extent to which these powers are used, before returning to the question of their contribution to sustainability.

4.5.2 PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS IN ENGLAND

The last comprehensive survey, in 1991, found over 8,000 parish and town councils covering ‘some 30% of the population of England’ (Ellwood et al, 1992, p.17). This rose to 55% of the population in the South West region (Ibid). Since 1991 more areas, many in towns and cities, have been parished. On average a local council represented about 1,700 people (Ibid), but this hides considerable variation. Councils represent settlements ranging from small villages with populations of less than a hundred to reasonable sized towns of more than 40,000 people (Long, 2001, based on Coulson, 1998). 10% of local councils serve a population of more than

5000 people. These larger councils 'cover 53% of the parished population and spend 65% of total local council expenditure' (Ellwood, 1998, p.263).

Whilst these larger councils have exactly the same powers as smaller ones, in practice they often have more human resources as well as being able to take advantage of economies of scale. Thus, they may be in a better position to take on board the sustainability agenda and to set an example to smaller councils as to what can be done. Five of these larger councils are studied in this thesis.

Many of the larger councils choose to call themselves 'town councils', which enables their chair to be a 'mayor' but has no effect on their powers. In this thesis, for simplicity and to aid confidentiality, all five case-study councils will be called town councils and their chairs will be called mayors.

4.5.3 THE POWERS OF LOCAL COUNCILS

Local councils have 'some fifty statutory powers and duties, which can be used to benefit local communities' (Wendt, 1998, p.257). The more significant of these are tabulated in Appendix 1 (adapted from Howes et al, 2003). In addition they have a general power to spend up to a stipulated amount (£3.50 at the time of writing) per elector on anything that they consider to be of benefit to local people.

To finance their spending, local councils may raise a 'precept' on the council tax. Unlike principal authorities they are not limited by central government in how much they can raise, although in practice the amount is limited either by local public opinion or councillors' own disinclination to raise and spend money. In addition, some councils have other sources of funding – usually from facilities that they own or manage. In the case of larger councils this may amount to a considerable sum. However, in 1995/6, 70% of local councils' revenue came from the precept (Ellwood, 1998, p.265), whereas principal authorities (district and county councils and unitary authorities) obtained 16% of their revenue from council tax in the same year.

This dependence on local taxation has two potentially contradictory effects. Local councils have more freedom from government interference because, as long as they can justify their decisions as being for the good of the community, there are no restrictions as to how much they can raise. However, their income is limited by local public opinion, as a council which taxes more than people are willing to pay is likely to be voted out at the next election. This may be a particular problem in market towns, where residents may see themselves as paying for facilities that are also used by non-residents.

4.5.4 LOCAL COUNCILS' USE OF THEIR POWERS

If councils are to contribute to local sustainability they will need to be proactive and imaginative in using their powers. The amount of money that a council raises and spends is a rough guide to the extent to which it is using its powers to the full. Overall local council spending is rising, but there is a considerable variation between councils (Ellwood, 1998, p.266).

It is difficult to judge how far local council action is limited by lack of powers and resources and how much by lack of political will. However, when a council does not have a specific power, it can spend a limited amount of money under section 137 of the Local Government Act of 1972. If this power were used to the full it would indicate that council activity is limited by legislative powers. The 1997 Aston survey looked in particular at spending under section 137. The survey found that 52% of councils used the power in 1995/6 as compared with 29% in 1989/90. Nevertheless, only a small proportion of these councils spent close to the limit of their spending under this power or felt constrained by it (Ellwood et al, 2000, p.21).

Thus, it appears that local council activity is limited more by motivation than by statutory constraints. However, the new government attention to, and encouragement of, local council activity evident in the 2000 Rural White Paper (DETR, 2000a) and in particular the 'Quality Council' initiative, may result in increased activity and empowerment.

4.5.5 LOCAL COUNCILS AND THE MOVE FROM GOVERNMENT TO GOVERNANCE

Blowers identifies a 'broad change in the relationship between state and society' (2000, p.374) which he calls 'political modernisation' (Ibid). One of the features of 'political modernisation' is 'a decline in the influence of representative forms of government, notably local government' (Ibid). These processes, together with other changes such as an increased role for the private sector in the delivery of services, have been described as a move from government to governance (Goodwin, 1998; Rhodes, 1996; Stoker, 1996, 2000; Sullivan, 2001).

These changing relationships 'shift responsibility away from the state and more towards the private sector and to what might broadly be termed civil society' (Goodwin, 1998, p.8). Thus they involve, at least discursively, a shift from representative democracy, towards direct or participative democracy. This shift has coincided with, and perhaps in part been caused by, a growing disillusionment with elected representatives at national and local level.

'Ministerial support for 'community involvement' is certainly closely linked to the view that there is a need to 're-build' the relationship between government and the electorate. The public is seen as having lost confidence in politics and government.'
(Foley and Martin, 2000)

Participative democracy has been specifically promoted by national and regional government, which has encouraged the formation of partnerships, in the preparation of community strategies (DETR, 2000b) and as a condition for participation in government schemes, such as the Market and Coastal Towns Initiative (SWRDA undated).

As will be shown in Chapter 8, the shifting of responsibility from government to civil society is also apparent in government documents on sustainable development, and may be detrimental to the implementation of sustainable development at the national level. However, Edwards et al (2001) see partnerships as being able to link spatial scales around particular projects. This could be very important for sustainable development which, arguably, requires a concerted and co-ordinated effort on different scales.

Furthermore, local authorities have only limited powers and may be able to achieve more in partnership with other influential groups. This may be especially true of sustainability issues, which require actions from private businesses and individual citizens as well as elected governments. In addition, local, and national, government finds it extremely difficult to carry out actions that do not have public support. Governance procedures may make it easier to obtain public support, as people are directly involved in decision-making.

New Labour discourse has associated 'partnership' with 'participation' and 'community', allowing discourses of governance to benefit from the utopian connotations of 'community'. However, some partnerships are set up on scales far too large for communities to be anything but imagined, and the spatial boundaries at which partnerships operate are not necessarily those with which people identify. The need to bring together 'stakeholders' does acknowledge the existence of different interests, but in practice stakeholders may not represent the interests of all local people and are more likely to represent the better-organised and more 'official' groupings.

'Community organisations, or committees, are controlled by the few and not the many, and provide avenues for authority and power. That is even more true of partnerships, which inevitably involve those in communities who hold leadership positions.' (Coulson, 2000, p.113)

Thus, in reality, there are likely to be a significant number of 'unheard voices' – people who for one reason or another do not take part in governance and whose interests are therefore in danger of being overlooked. The role of local authorities, including parish and town councils, may be particularly critical here, providing a democratically elected counterbalance to those elements of civil society that become involved in local governance.

The discourse of governance also assumes that consensus is preferable to conflict. This is a break with the conflictual nature of government, which tends to operate along party lines at both local and national levels. However, in practice consensus

can gloss over minority (or even majority) views. Less influential groups and individuals may find that their views are overridden or their concerns never get onto the agenda. As Taylor says:

‘It is important to recognise that conflict is not always negative. Indeed it can be a sign that partnership is working insofar as different parties have the confidence to express difference. Conflict creatively handled can bring a richer more equal dialogue.’ (2002, p.99)

Although the concerns of less influential individuals and groups can also be overridden in decision-making by elected local authorities, they do at least have to be accountable to their electorate. Hence, as Owens and Cowell say:

‘We should pause, therefore in the uncritical rush for new and consensual procedures and reflect, with Flyvbjerg, on the possibility that ‘forms of participation that are practical, committed and ready for conflict provide a superior paradigm of democratic virtue [to those] that are discursive, detached and consensus dependant.’ (2001, p.172)

Again, parish and town councils may have potential here. As elected bodies that do not usually work along party lines, they can perhaps separate healthy conflict from party politics, without denying the existence of conflict and allowing stronger and more eloquently expressed views to pass as consensus where no true consensus exists. To fulfil this role, the councils’ first need is to acknowledge that there are different and competing interests within the ‘community’. The extent to which these differences are acknowledged in the case-study parishes will be discussed in Chapter 8.

If ordinary people are to be involved in governance then partnerships must be formed at a scale with which they can identify. Sullivan (2001) sees ‘citizen governance’ as taking place on a ‘sub-local’ scale. Also Edwards et al point out that:

‘The expansion of partnerships can be argued to involve a rescaling of rural governance. The strong identification of partnerships with community engagement has implicitly supported observations of a rescaling of governance downwards from the level of county and district councils.’ (2001, p.291)

In fact, the scale of many smaller partnerships, especially in market towns, is just that covered by many parish and town councils (and community councils in Wales). Edwards et al attribute this to the role of local councils in the partnerships. Thus partnerships can reinforce the role of local councils, but they can also threaten it. Edwards et al found that in the case of the Market Towns Initiative in Hay on Wye, existing bodies, including the town council, were deliberately excluded from the partnership, 'because it [the partnership] did not want to be allied to any existing power bloc in the town' (Ibid, p.305). They continue:

'In effect, however, the 'independent' strategy has empowered a new group of individuals taking action on issues which were previously the concern of the town council or the chamber of commerce.' (Ibid)

The above example is interesting not only as an example of a loss of power by a town council as a result of a governance process, but also for the fact that the town council was seen as a 'power bloc' rather than as a representative of local people. Chapters 8 and 9 will look at conceptualisations of the role of local councils in Gloucestershire, by councillors themselves and by other local activists.

4.5.6 LOCAL COUNCILS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Local councils can support their communities in two ways. Firstly they can represent their interests to other levels of government; and secondly, they can directly provide services. Pearce and Ellwood (2002) found that many local councils see themselves as primarily representatives of local opinion. Other councils see themselves also as providers of services. The 1992 Aston survey found that:

'... around half of all local councils spent money on providing or maintaining:

- churchyards, cemeteries or crematoria;
- outdoor recreation facilities;
- open spaces, village greens or commons;
- village halls or community centres;
- seats and shelters;
- signs, notice and information boards.

(Ellwood et al, 1992, p.42)

Most of these facilities contribute to the quality of life of the residents and could therefore be said to contribute to social sustainability. Open spaces and churchyards and cemeteries (when no longer in use) can also be managed to facilitate biodiversity, and contribute to environmental sustainability.

‘Parish councils may act as agents in the delivery of virtually any service on behalf of a principal authority’ (Clark, 1998, p.278) and there have been recent moves to encourage local councils to take over more service provision (DETR, 1998, 2000). The 2000 Rural White Paper, in particular, proposed ‘a new role for town and parish councils’ (DETR, 2000a, p.145), including ‘town and parish councils working in partnership with counties and districts to deliver more services locally, where this is best value’ (Ibid). However, these suggestions are linked to the ‘Quality Council’ initiative, and are likely to be taken up in the main by larger councils. Moreover, the devolution of service provision from principal authorities to local councils will not necessarily contribute to sustainability.

As we have seen above, as well as specific powers, local councils have the discretion to spend money on anything that is *of benefit to their community*. Furthermore, all local council spending is thoroughly audited and must be justified as of benefit to the community. This can make it difficult for councils to justify enacting sustainable development, which, arguably, requires a broader commitment to future generations and to a wider world and is not necessarily seen as of immediate benefit to local people.

Although local councils are, in theory, unrestricted in the amount of money they can raise from the council tax, in practice they are limited by the amount that local people are willing to pay. As high taxes and particularly sudden increases in taxation tend to be unpopular with the voters, this does limit the amount of money councils could have available for spending on projects to further sustainability.

In summary, while there is potential for local councils to contribute to sustainability, especially where it is of benefit to local people, there are a number of

constraining factors which may make this unlikely to happen in practice. The most significant of these may well lie in councillors' attitudes both to their own role and to sustainability.

Councillors, whether at principal authority or local level, are not immune to the tendency to prioritise the local over the global and the short-term over the long-term. In fact, their elected position may result in a tendency for them to reflect, rather than lead, local opinion in this respect. Pearce and Ellwood found:

'Most [parish and town] councillors are unable to connect to issues that do not relate to easily identifiable local issues.' (2002, p.39)

Thus, they are likely to have difficulty connecting the local to the global. Although not referring to parish and town councils, Blair and Evans point out that:

'... the new localism, if unfettered from centrally determined standards, may deliver the aspirations of that particular locality However, if the context within which this happens is not underpinned by some compact of ethical and moral principles that also include the notion of environmental justice, the realities could be damaging.' (2004, p.34)

This is a problem that needs to be tackled, both with respect to local councillors and with respect to the general public. However, it does not necessarily rule out a role for parish and town councils in contributing to local sustainability.

4.6 Conclusions: Linking the Local back to the Global

The linking of the local and the global is fundamental to sustainability. O'Riordan and Church stress the reciprocal relationship between the two scales:

'There is little, and maybe nothing, that is global that does not have some sort of a local manifestation. And each local manifestation changes the global context... Local perceptions are shaped by global influences, the combinations of which process local actions. These in turn are fuelled by local aspirations, many of which are the product of global images and expectations. All of these local activities accumulate to create chaotic but global outcomes.' (2001, p.3)

Local activities take place within a global context and are affected, but not determined, by that context. At the same time, the global context is itself formed

from a combination of many local actions. This is true of discourse as well as of action.

As we have seen in Chapter 3, local discourses take place within a wider global discursive context. At the same time, these local discourses reinforce and contest the larger scale discourses that make up their context. Thus, it is essential to look at both global and local perceptions and actions and the ways in which they interact. This thesis is intended to make a contribution to the study of these interactions.

This chapter has analysed the concepts of 'community' and 'locality' and found them both to be contested but discursively powerful and hence influential. It has also looked at how the concept of sustainability, discussed in Chapter 2, can be applied at the local level, identifying five dimensions of local sustainability, and concluding that action for local sustainability must be rooted in the local. However, it is vital that the concepts of local sustainability and of citizenship are extended to include responsibilities for broader impacts in space and time. In other words environmental citizens must 'think globally (and long-term) and act locally'.

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 will consider how the concepts of 'community', 'locality' and 'sustainability' have been conceptualised and articulated by local councillors and other local actors in five Gloucestershire towns. In addition, Chapter 9 will look at how the different discourses of local activists come together and result in local action; and whether this action can be viewed as a positive contribution to sustainability on a global as well as a local scale.

Chapter 5: Methodology

5.1 Introduction: Methodological Choices

The research studies the discourses of local councillors in Gloucestershire market towns. The methodology is based on a multi-method qualitative case-study approach (Creswall, 1998). As we have seen in Chapter 2, there have been many attempts to use quantitative methodologies to measure progress towards sustainable development. However, as Burgess et al point out, they 'are not suitable media for discovering feelings and meanings for environment' (1988, p.308). Consequently, in order to study discourses of sustainable development, a qualitative methodology is utilised.

A case-study approach allows the examination of a few cases in depth, and thus is more likely to shed light on the little studied phenomenon of local sustainability discourses. The cases are not selected to be representative of all local councils, or even of larger local councils in Gloucestershire. Rather, they are selected as relatively active councils, which vary over certain key characteristics, and hence are capable of raising significant issues and concepts that could lead to further study.

In addition, a case-study approach allows a combination of qualitative methods to be used (Hakim, 2000), allowing triangulation and flexibility of data collection as described below. Data on local conceptualisations was collected mainly through a combination of focus groups and semi-structured interviews, combined with non-participant observation and documentary analysis.

The research consisted of three main stages. Firstly, the background was established by the discourse analysis of selected national and county-level documents on sustainable development. Secondly, the local conceptualisations of councillors and clerks from five case-study councils were analysed to establish their conceptualisations of sustainable development and of their own role. Thirdly, two case-study projects were chosen for further analysis from the projects with which

the five councils were involved. This allowed the conceptualisations of other local actors involved in these two projects to be studied, to see how they complemented or conflicted with those of local councillors. It also allowed a number of local discourses to be identified, as described in Chapter 8.

The spatial scales at which the research took place are shown in Figure 16, reproduced from Chapter 1, and the methods used at each level are summarised in Table 1 on page 126.

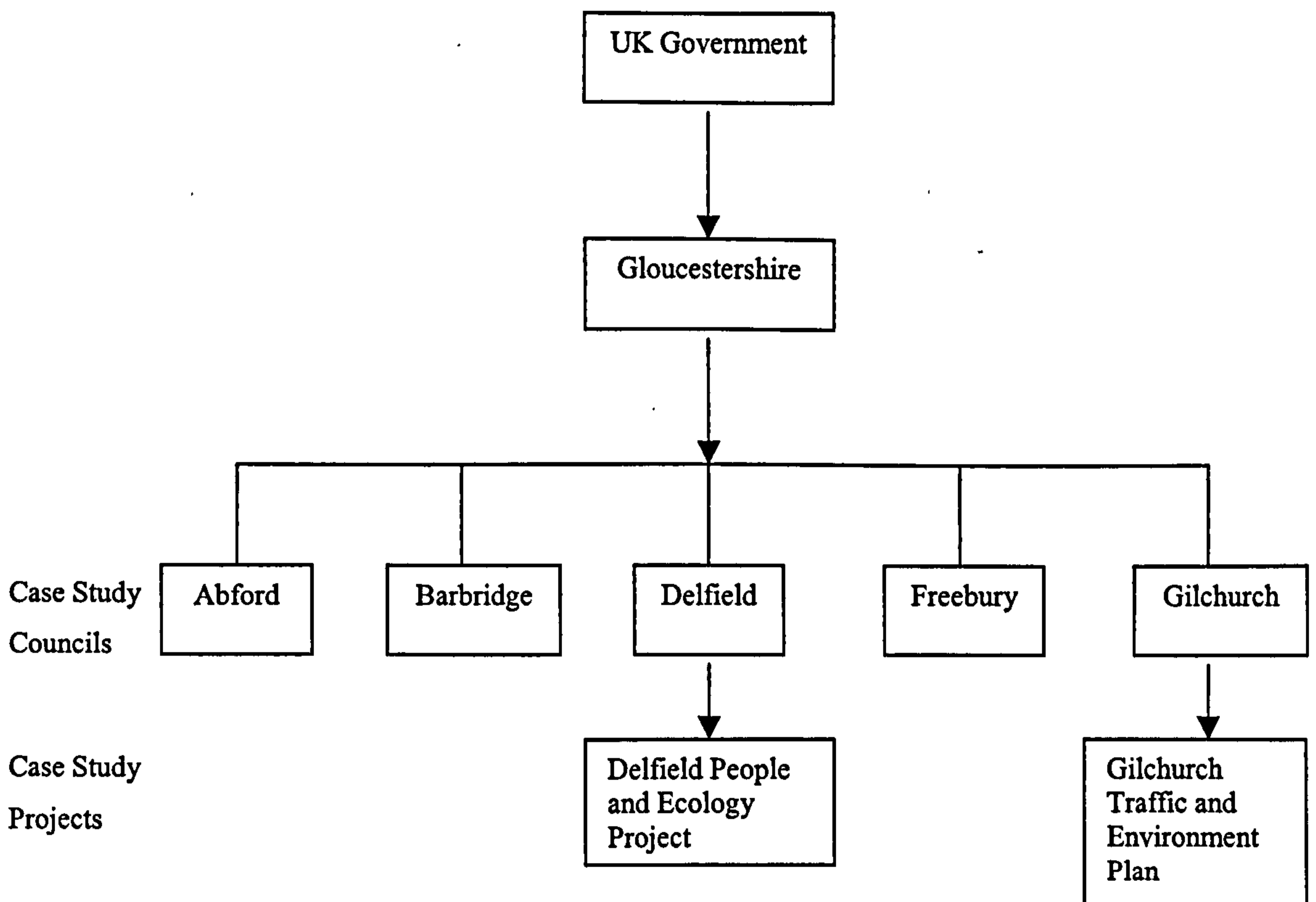


FIGURE 16: SPATIAL SCALES OF THE RESEARCH

The following sections give a detailed explanation of the process of carrying out the research. Firstly, section 5.2 explains the analysis of selected written documentation on sustainable development at national and sub-national levels, which forms part of the discursive background to local discourses. Secondly, section 5.3 covers the local context, the initial survey of the larger local councils in Gloucestershire, and the selection of the case-study councils. Section 5.4 and 5.5 explain the collection of data from the case-study councils and its analysis, respectively. Then Section 5.6

explains the selection of case-study projects and the collection and analysis of data on these issues. Finally, in Section 5.7 I discuss the validity and reliability of the research and describe the steps that were taken to increase its validity.

Level	Object of Study	Data Collection	Analysis
National	UK government documents		Discourse analysis
County	County-level documents		Discourse analysis
Local	5 case-study councils	Focus groups Semi-structured interviews Non-participant observation	Discourse analysis of transcripts and documents
Local	2 case-study projects	Focus groups Semi-structured interviews Non-participant observation	Discourse analysis of transcripts and documents

TABLE 1: METHODS USED IN THE RESEARCH

5.2 Analysis of National Documents

5.2.1 DOCUMENT SELECTION

Documents at national level were analysed to establish the discursive context within which local councillors' discourses of sustainability are formed and articulated. The documents analysed are shown in Table 2. The first three documents were chosen to cover national sustainable development strategy in three different administrations (those of Thatcher, Major and Blair), so that national governments' published attitudes to, and discourses of, sustainable development through the 1990s could be established. Two chapters of the 2000 Rural White Paper, 'Our Countryside: the Future', concerning parish and town councils and market towns, were also included in order to study government attitudes to these issues.

Document	Author	Date
This Common Inheritance	DoE	1990
Sustainable Development: the UK Strategy	DoE	1995
A Better Quality of Life	DETR	1999
Our Countryside: the Future (Chapters 7 and 12)	DETR	2000

TABLE 2: NATIONAL DOCUMENTS ANALYSED

5.2.2 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Chapter 3 discussed different approaches to discourse and discourse analysis, where discourse is here understood as:

‘speech or writing seen from the point of view of the beliefs, values and categories which it embodies’ (Fowler, quoted in Mills, 1997, p.5).

As that chapter explained, there is no set procedure for analysing discourse.

‘Discourse analysis is, then, a fluid, interpretive process which relies on close analysis of specific texts, and which therefore does not lend itself to setting up hard-and-fast ‘rules’ of analysis.’ (Tonkiss, 1998, p.254)

However, the lack of ‘rules’ makes it difficult to establish the validity of the research – a concept considered in more detail later. It is necessary, therefore, to give as much information as possible about how the analysis was carried out, and I will attempt to do this below by introducing the concept of a ‘discursive technique’.

The establishment of validity is made harder by the fact that discourse analysis is inevitably selective. It was not possible, or indeed desirable, to analyse every sentence of all the documents in Table 2 above.

‘When analysing data, it is not necessary to provide an account of every line of the text under study. It is often more appropriate and more informative to be selective in relation to the data, extracting those sections which provide the richest source of analytic material.’ (Tonkiss, 1998, p.253)

Moreover, as Fairclough says:

‘Textual analysis is also inevitably selective: in any analysis we choose to ask certain questions about social events and texts, and not other possible questions.’ (2003, p.14)

Thus, discourse analysis is always subjective, both in terms of the questions that are asked and the passages that are selected. This subjectivity can be minimised by avoiding predetermined categories of analysis, and hence looking for what is actually in the data rather than for what is expected to be there.

‘The researcher enters a different space in undertaking analysis, one in which it is best to suspend one’s own assumptions.’ (Tonkiss, 1998, p.254)

Suspending one’s own assumptions is, of course, never entirely possible. This makes it all the more important to explain as fully as possible both the background of the researcher and the process of analysis. Validity and reliability will be discussed further in Section 5.6.

Several authors (see for example Fairclough, 1992, 1995, 2003; Tonkiss, 1998) discuss features of texts that can contribute to their discursive effect or power. These may be used consciously or unconsciously, but increasingly, in government discourse, their use is carefully calculated. This ‘technologisation of discourse’ (Fairclough, 1992, 1995) has been discussed in Chapter 3. I will call these features ‘discursive techniques’. Based mainly on the work of Fairclough (2003), I have grouped them below under seven headings – ‘key words’, ‘classification’, ‘inevitability’, ‘actors and responsibility’, ‘positive and negative associations’, ‘assumptions’ and ‘authority’. These headings are neither comprehensive nor mutually exclusive; however, they do provide a guide for analysis.

Key Words

As we saw in Chapter 3 in the case of political discourses, discourses are often based around certain key words or phrases. These key words can be used to link a new discourse to an existing discourse by using some of the same key words, or to mark a break with an existing discourse and hence a change of emphasis, as New Labour substituted ‘social exclusion’ for ‘poverty’. Key words often have more than

one meaning, and hence can be used to bring together two or more ideas, as Phillips (1996) showed Thatcherism doing with the word 'enterprise'.

Classification

Chapter 3 also showed that discourses compete to become hegemonic or accepted as common sense. In order to do this they need to build on accepted discourses with the result that many discourses, such as those of Thatcherism and New Labour, are rather uneasy combinations of other discourses, on which they build through a process of intertextuality. They do this in part by using existing key words and phrases. New key words and phrases can then be introduced by association with existing ones. One way of doing this is by setting up chains of equivalence (Fairclough, 2003). This can be done by listing words or phrases, so as to make them equivalent – a technique often used by politicians. For example, Fairclough (2000a) quotes a speech by the Prime Minister to the CBI:

'I believe in this country, in its people and our capacity to renew Britain for the age in which we live.'

(Blair, 1998, quoted in Fairclough, 2000a, p.30)

Thus, renewal (or modernisation) is presented as equivalent to belief in Britain (or patriotism).

Equivalence can also be set up by interchanging words and phrases so that the text only makes sense if they are accepted as being equivalent. For example, Fairclough (2003) analyses an extract from a book by left-wing Labour MPs, Coates and Barret Brown. Three terms, 'transnational companies', 'transnational capital' and 'international capital' are used as equivalent. This brings 'companies' into the negative (in left-wing discourse) associations of 'capital'.

Antagonisms are also an important part of discourse. They can be set up at the same time as equivalences, and can help to establish equivalence. Howarth (1998) gives the example of the merging of different black identities in opposition to white domination in apartheid South Africa. The equivalences and antagonisms set up in a discourse amount to a system of classification, whereby some things are presented as good or desirable and others are presented as undesirable.

Positive and Negative Associations

Key words can be positive or negative. For example, we have seen in Chapter 4 how 'community' is used to give a positive impression. However, the same key words can be used in competing discourses, but in different ways. For example, 'globalisation' is portrayed as a good thing in neo-liberal discourse but as a bad thing in opposing discourses. It is therefore important to look at the immediate context of key words, and the other words with which they are associated.

Metaphors are also a useful discursive technique, for portraying things in a positive or negative way, and for setting up associations between totally different ideas. Thus, new equivalences and antagonisms can be set up and new discourses developed. As Myerson and Rydin say:

'Metaphors do not only decorate thought they actively shape it.'
(1996a, p.149)

The past can also be used to create or enhance a positive or negative impression. On the one hand, appeals to tradition and heritage are used positively (see Parker, 2002); on the other hand, phrases such as 'living in the past' are used negatively.

Actors and Responsibility

Where actors, i.e. people or organisations, are present in a text, they can be represented in different ways. For example, they can be portrayed as active or passive, named or classified and in a positive or negative light. The use of pronouns, especially 'we' and 'they', can also be significant, and can signify inclusion or exclusion. In addition, this research is particularly concerned with the ways that texts attribute responsibility for sustainable development between different actors such as governments, business and ordinary citizens.

Inevitability

Part of the process of discourses being accepted as common sense is the portrayal of certain processes or situations as inevitable. This is particularly marked in the case of neo-liberal discourse, where processes associated with globalisation are portrayed in this way. There are a number of discursive techniques for portraying or

implying inevitability. These include the ‘disappearance’ or ‘writing-out’ of the agent. This can be done by the use of the passive tense; by the use of process verbs (such as ‘change’) as nouns – a process of ‘nominalization’ (Fairclough, 2003); and by the ascription of agency to concepts such as ‘capital’ in phrases such as ‘capital moves freely around the world’.

Another way of portraying inevitability is the blurring of the distinctions between fact, value and prediction. Fairclough (2003, p. 114) identifies this process in a speech by Blair to the Labour Party Conference in 2001, which contains in the same paragraph:

- ‘But globalisation is a fact.’ [fact]
- ‘In the world of internet, information technology and TV, there will be globalisation.’ [prediction]
- ‘And in trade, the problem is not there’s too much of it; on the contrary there’s too little of it.’ [value]

Fairclough continues:

‘Graham (2001) suggests that ... the slippage between fact and value, and between fact and prediction, are general features of contemporary political texts.’ (2003, p.115)

Assumptions

As well as looking at what is present in a text, it is important to look at what is absent. Underlying assumptions are particularly important. As Fairclough says:

‘Texts inevitably make assumptions. What is ‘said’ in a text is ‘said’ against a background of what is ‘unsaid’, but taken as given.’
(2003, p.40)

Unstated assumptions rely upon the reader understanding, and perhaps sharing, the assumption. Thus they are reliant on other texts implicitly or explicitly making the same assumptions. Implicit assumptions often concern values; a particular entity or process is assumed to be either good or bad. For example, ‘X can be avoided’ implies that X is undesirable. In addition, as we have seen above, the distinction between fact and values can be blurred.

Authority

Under this heading, I have included a number of features of texts that contribute to the establishment of a case and the speaker's or writer's right to make that case. A common way of making or reinforcing an argument is by the use of carefully chosen (not necessarily representative) examples. This can be overt (clearly presenting an example) or covert (moving subtly between the general and the particular).

The authority of a text is also affected by its mood and its modality. The mood concerns whether the sentences are formed as statements, orders or questions; and the modality concerns the degree of the writer's/speaker's commitment to the text, and can be reduced by preceding a statement with phrases such as 'I think that' or 'some say that', or by replacing 'will' with 'may'. Fairclough (2003) points out that the modality of a text depends upon the authority, and hence the identity, of the speaker or writer. In addition, a text may appeal to particular sources of authorisation or expertise, such as scientific knowledge, to substantiate its allegations. Numbers are also often used to legitimate claims.

Summary

These discursive techniques are summarized schematically in Figure 17 on page 133. However, the diagram is necessarily selective and an oversimplification of complex relationships between different discursive techniques.

It should be noted that not all the discursive techniques described above will be prominent (or even present) in all discourses, and in any particular text it is likely that only some will be found. The process of analysis of the documents is described in the next sub-section.

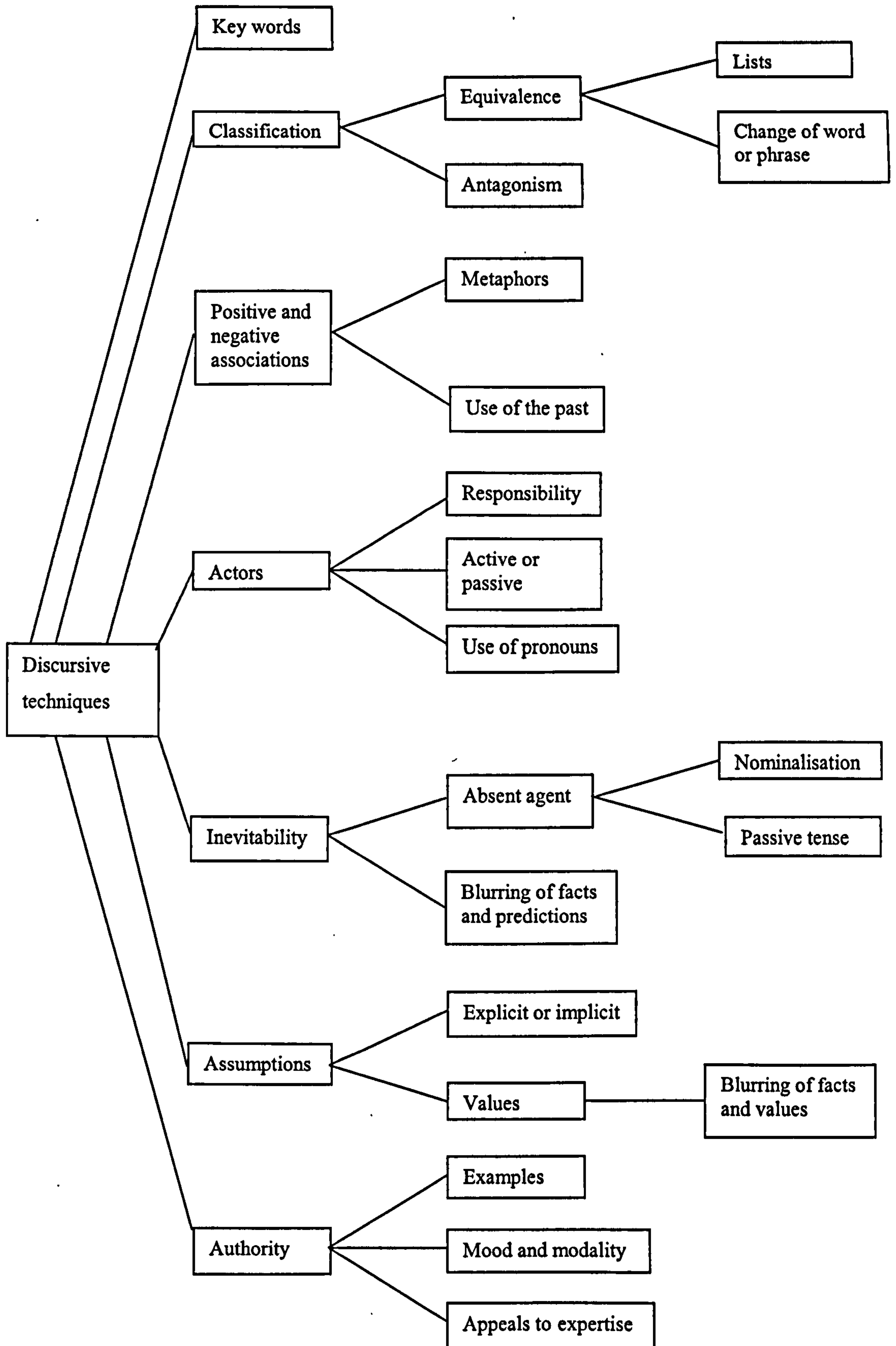


FIGURE 17: TREE OF DISCURSIVE TECHNIQUES

5.2.3 THE PROCESS OF DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS

The documents were analysed in turn by reading through and developing a coding system based upon the documents themselves, rather than using pre-determined categories. Themes were then followed through the various documents. The intention was to analyse the documents using the QSR Nvivo computer software. However, not all the documents were available in electronic format. Consequently, those that were only available on paper had to be coded partially by hand i.e. relevant passages were identified and either typed into the computer or entered into the computer coding system with a reference to the document.

The documents were analysed in relation to the discourses of Thatcherism and of New Labour of which they form a part, and which are discussed in Chapter 3. The results of the documentary analysis are presented in Chapter 6.

5.3 The Local Context

5.3.1 INTRODUCTION: THE COUNTY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE

It was decided to restrict the research to a single county in order to study a variety of councils within the policy area of a single county council. Although this inevitably limited the social, economic and ethnic diversity, it was felt that this research could not do justice to the diversity that exists throughout the country.

The county of Gloucestershire has four predominantly rural districts – Cotswold, Forest of Dean, Stroud and Tewkesbury - and two predominantly urban ones – Cheltenham and Gloucester, as shown in Figure 18 on page 135.

The rural districts are all distinct in character and are mostly parished, as are small areas of the urban districts. Thus, rural Gloucestershire contains a range of parishes and market towns with different social and economic, but not generally ethnic, bases. The market towns, together with some large parishes are affiliated to the Gloucestershire Market Towns Forum (GMTF) - ‘a unique organisation created by the community for the community’ (GMTF, 2002, front cover) which ‘aims to share

issues of common concern, forming a united and proactive voice for the County's small rural towns' (Ibid, p.2). The membership database of the GMTF was used to select the case studies.



FIGURE 18: GLOUCESTERSHIRE DISTRICTS
(Gloucestershire County Council, undated a)

5.3.2 ANALYSIS OF COUNTY-LEVEL DOCUMENTS

Another advantage of situating the research in Gloucestershire was the county council's pioneering approach to Local Agenda 21, which it handed over to a local charity. The process – known as Vision 21 - produced a radical programme for change – *Sustainable Gloucestershire* (Colbourne, 1996). As I will show, this document interpreted sustainable development very differently from government documents. The county council was then faced with the task of reconciling two potentially contradictory approaches, firstly in its structure plan and then in its own Local Agenda 21 strategy. These three documents (shown in Table 3) were analysed, using the same methods as for the national level documents, to see how far government discourse on sustainable development had permeated to this level, or whether alternative discourses were emerging.

Document	Author/ Publisher	Date
Sustainable Gloucestershire	Colbourne (for Vision 21)	1996
Gloucestershire County Structure Plan – 2 nd review	Gloucestershire County Council	1999
Local Agenda 21 Strategy for a Sustainable Gloucestershire	Gloucestershire County Council	2000

TABLE 3: COUNTY-LEVEL DOCUMENTS ANALYSED

5.3.3 THE INITIAL SURVEY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE MARKET TOWNS

An initial survey was undertaken to obtain a general perspective of sustainable development policy-making by town councils, and to identify councils for detailed study. The Countryside Agency defines market towns as ‘towns in rural England with a variety of backgrounds, usually with populations from 2000 to 20,000’ (2004). In practice some of the 26 members of the Gloucestershire Market Towns Forum are large parishes or suburbs of larger settlements rather than towns.

The clerks of all 26 of these parish and town councils were sent an initial questionnaire, which was intended mainly to identify councils for further study. However, it was also hoped that that it would establish some background information about local councils in market towns and large parishes in Gloucestershire and the issues which they felt were important. The questionnaire was kept as short and simple as possible to encourage response. Non-responders were followed up and given the chance to answer the questions over the telephone. In total, replies were received from 22 councils. The questionnaire is included as Appendix 2.

5.3.4 THE SELECTION OF THE CASE STUDIES

All but one of the members of the Market Towns Forum was from a rural district, the exception being a large parish on the edge of Gloucester. The distribution of parishes and GMTF members over the six districts is shown in Table 4.

District	Parishes	GMTF members
Cheltenham	5	0
Cotswold	87	9
Forest of Dean	39	4
Gloucester	1	1
Stroud	49	8
Tewkesbury	42	4
Totals	223	26

TABLE 4: PARISHES AND MARKET TOWN FORUM MEMBERS IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE

The clerks were also asked for vision statements, statements of long-term aims, environmental policy statements and/or ‘any other policies that [they] consider[ed] to be relevant to the environmental, social or economic wellbeing of [their] community’. In the event, many of the councils did not have any such documents. The case studies were chosen from those that did, as it was felt that it was important to have some written policies to compare with councillors’ verbally expressed discourses. This also biased the case studies towards the more active councils, which was not felt to be a bad thing as the aim of the research was to look at examples of what could be done rather than at a representative sample of councils.

Within this restriction, the case studies were chosen to cover a range of population sizes and economic bases (as described by the clerk on the questionnaire response) of the settlements. In the event, four of the settlements chosen were market towns (according to the Countryside Agency definition above) and one was a large parish adjacent to a market town. They will all be referred to as ‘town councils’ to help preserve anonymity. The towns were also given pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of respondents. The case-study councils and some of their characteristics are shown in Table 5.

Town	Population ¹	No. of Councillors	Economic Base ²	Influential Groups ²	Written Documentation
Abford	5,215	11	Shops, Restaurants Light industry	Abford Valley Initiative, Chamber of Trade	Committee Policy Statements, Newsletter
Barbridge	9,873	16	Tourism	Chamber of Commerce, Traders' Association, Civic Society, Friends of the Earth	Parish Blueprint
Delfield	8,472	15	Small industry	Environmental charity based outside the parish	Aims and Objectives, Forward Planning Overview
Freebury	8,329	13	Industry Services Tourism	Freebury Partnership, Chamber of Commerce	Regeneration strategy, MCTI ³ expression of interest
Gilchurch	19,271	15	Services Tourism Retail	Chamber of Commerce, Civic Society, Action Gilchurch	Environmental Policy, Purchasing Policy, Nature Conservation Policy

1. 1999 mid-year population estimates

2. as suggested by clerks in response to the questionnaire

3. Market and Coastal Towns Initiative

TABLE 5: CASE-STUDY COUNCILS

5.4 Focus Groups and Interviews

5.4.1 INTRODUCTION

Focus groups and semi-structured interviews were used to examine councillors' conceptualisations. They were guided by five key questions concerning:

- the role of the council in managing change
- the council's responsibilities to future generations
- the council's responsibilities to the local environment
- the council's responsibilities to the wider environment
- the councillors' understandings of and attitudes to 'sustainable development'.

In addition, interviews with town clerks were used to establish background information as well as to study the conceptualisations of the clerks themselves. Focus groups were then carried out with the councils; and subsequent individual interviews with councillors allowed the examination in more detail of some of the issues that arose from the focus groups.

5.4.2 INTERVIEWS WITH CLERKS

Four of the case studies began with an interview with the town clerk. The fifth clerk did not wish to be interviewed. The interviews were semi-structured, and designed both to elicit background information about the town and the council and to investigate the attitudes and conceptualisations of the clerk. These last were felt to be important, as the clerk to a town council is the main (sometimes the only) administrator and has considerable potential to influence the direction taken by the council.

A semi-structured interview format was chosen in order to give the interviewer some control over the course of the interview, whilst providing enough flexibility to allow the interviewee to deviate from the prepared questions. This flexibility was important, as part of the aim of the research was to investigate how clerks saw their own role and that of the council, particularly in relation to sustainability. A structured interview format would not have provided enough flexibility to ensure that the clerk's priorities had been covered; whereas an unstructured format would not have given the researcher enough control over the subject matter. An example schedule of questions for the interviews is provided in Appendix 3. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in full.

All the interviews with clerks were carried out in their council offices. This was partly for convenience and partly because a conscious decision was taken to talk to interviewees, as far as possible, on their 'home ground'. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, it was hoped that being in a situation with which they were familiar would give interviewees the confidence to speak freely. Secondly, it is generally accepted, within a social constructivist paradigm, that 'all data are context-bound'

(Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999, p.6); and expressed views may vary depending upon the context in which they are expressed. In consequence, it was decided to carry out interviews and focus groups in a context that was as close as possible to the situation in which the interviewees or focus group members would normally interact and take decisions.

5.4.3 FOCUS GROUPS

Following Macnaghten and Urry (1998), the research used focus groups to study conceptualisations of sustainability and environmental issues. Albrecht et al point out that personal opinions are not formed by individuals in isolation but 'derive from social, rather than personal, processes' (1993, p.54). Thus, it is often advantageous to study attitudes and opinions as they are formed and articulated in a group situation.

Focus groups are defined by Morgan as 'a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher' (1997, p.5). This broad definition distinguishes focus groups from, on the one hand, interviews where there is no group interaction, and, on the other hand, participant or non-participant observation of naturally occurring processes where the topic of conversation is out of the control of the researcher. Thus, focus groups are not just a convenient way of interviewing several people at once; they make use of, and study, the interaction that occurs between the participants. Bryman (2001) lists three criteria used to distinguish between focus groups and group interviews:

- focus groups focus on a particular topic;
- focus groups are not conducted simply to interview several people at once and so save time and money;
- focus groups study the interaction within a group.

This last point reinforces Morgan's definition, above. Barbour and Kitzinger agree:

'Crucially, focus groups are distinguished from the broader category of group interviews by the explicit use of group interaction to generate data.' (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999, p.4)

Hence, focus groups are useful for examining attitudes and perceptions and the discourses through which they are formed, reinforced and challenged; and the closer the focus group can be made to the situation in which those interactions would normally take place, the closer they will reflect that discourse.

Following the interviews with clerks, the intention was to carry out focus groups with each of the five councils. The approach broke several of the 'rules' of focus group inquiry. These involved group size, the use of existing groups rather than strangers and the 'piggy-backing' (Krueger, 1993) of focus groups onto existing events. Each of these dimensions will now be considered.

Size

Firstly, the focus groups tended to be on the large size. Krueger and Casey (2000) recommend that focus groups should ideally consist of 6 to 8 people; and Morgan (1998) suggests 6 to 10. However, Morgan points out that this can be varied; and he refers to a successful focus group that he himself carried out with 19 members. The town council focus groups varied from 6 to 14.

Use of Existing Groups

Secondly, it is often assumed that focus groups should consist of strangers, but for practical reasons, it was not possible to arrange this. Krueger (1994) identifies two disadvantages of using existing groups as focus groups. Firstly, power relations within the group can inhibit discussion. This is thought to be especially true of workplace focus groups. Secondly, Krueger points out that communication between people who know each other well is difficult to analyse, because they are likely to share certain unspoken assumptions that will not be known to the researcher. This was not expected to be too great a problem because, as discussed in Chapter 1, the researcher was a town councillor herself and also had some knowledge of the places involved.

In addition, there can be positive advantages to using existing groups as focus groups. Firstly, as discussed above in the case of interviews, the use of existing town councils as focus groups came as close as possible to the actual situation in

which councillors discuss issues and make decisions. Secondly, focus groups need to be internally homogenous, at least with respect to the issue under discussion (Krueger and Casey, 2000); and participants need have an interest in the topic. An existing group formed around this interest is likely to fulfil these criteria, through self-selection.

Finally, participants need to be reasonably at ease with each other in order to speak freely. Where they start as strangers, this may take time and require more than one meeting. Burgess et al (1988) have developed a method of in-depth discussion groups to explore attitudes to the environment. They distinguish these in-depth discussion groups from focus groups, in that they meet several times and are therefore able to develop better rapport and discuss issues in more depth than would be possible in one-off focus groups. Whilst supporting the use of one-off focus groups in certain situations, they argue that:

‘the once-only group, with its directed leadership and reliance on stimulus materials, is not the most appropriate method of exploring environmental values which are deeply held and which clearly reflect a complex interpretation of individual experiences and collective beliefs about nature, landscape and society. [...]we believe that the group needs much more time in which members can develop and establish sufficient trust to be able to explore feelings in ways which are not continually being directed or manipulated by the researcher’

(Burgess et al, 1988)

However, where participants already know each other and are used to interacting with each other, the one-off group is less of a problem, and arguably, can be used to explore attitudes, values and discourses.

‘Piggy-backing’

Thirdly, the focus groups were ‘piggy-backed’ onto council meetings. According to Krueger, ‘piggybacking focus groups can erode quality’ because ‘the climate of the conference or meeting can influence the nature of the comments made’ (1993, p.68). In this case, the intention was to study responses in a situation as close as possible to a council meeting, whilst focussing the agenda on the subject of the research i.e. sustainable development. The focus groups took place with four of the

councils, either immediately before or immediately after a council meeting. In one case this was a meeting of the full council; and in three cases it was a meeting of the planning committee in which case councillors who were not on the planning committee were also invited to attend.

The piggy-backing of the focus groups also made it much easier to get busy councillors together. This is shown by experience with the fifth council, where it proved impossible to attach the focus group to a council meeting. Several attempts were made to arrange a focus group with councillors from this council at another time, but this proved impossible.

The Conduct of the Focus Groups

A pilot focus group was carried out in the researcher's home, with three members of the researcher's own town council. The pilot was recorded but the results, although interesting, were not included in the data for analysis for a number of reasons. Firstly, it had been decided from the beginning that the researcher's own council would not be included because of dangers of bias. Secondly, the location, size and atmosphere of this group were very different from the others. As a result of the pilot, the introduction was altered to make it clearer that an informal discussion was intended and the schedule was shortened to fit into the time available.

Focus groups were successfully arranged with four out of the five councils. The researcher acted as moderator for all the focus groups; and two sessions also had an assistant moderator – a fellow PhD student with an interest in focus groups. All the sessions were recorded and three of the four were transcribed in full. In the fourth case the recording was not clear enough, and was transcribed as fully as possible with the aid of notes made by the assistant moderator. The moderator introduced each session by explaining that she was aiming for an informal discussion with contributions from everyone, but asking people not to interrupt and talk over each other. She also asked permission to record the conversation, whilst guaranteeing that all quotations would be anonymous.

The sessions ended with the moderator reminding participants of the aims of the research and asking if there was anything of significance she had missed. A focus group schedule appears as Appendix 4. The analysis of the focus group data is discussed in Section 5.6 below.

5.4.4 FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured interviews were used to follow up some of the issues that had arisen during the focus group sessions. At least five councillors were interviewed from each council, with a total of 26 councillor interviews. Councillors chosen were those who had raised interesting and relevant issues; but they were also selected, as far as possible, to obtain a gender balance and a balance of councillors who were also on principal authorities and those who were not. In each case the mayor and, if possible, the chair of the planning committee was included.

The councillors interviewed and some of their characteristics are listed in Appendix 5. It was not altogether possible to get either a gender balance or a balance of principal authority councillors and non-principal authority councillors. This was largely because of imbalances on the councils themselves.

The interviews were semi-structured and, for those councils where focus groups took place, concentrated on following up issues from the focus groups. In the case of the council where a focus group did not take place, the interviews were based on the focus group schedule of questions. In addition, all councillors were asked which local organisations influenced their policies and decisions. Most of the interviews were either at the council offices or at the councillor's home or place of work. One took place in the researcher's office, two in cafés and one in a pub. Only two interviews were not tape-recorded – one at the request of the interviewee and the other because of background noise.

In all, the case-study data collection comprised, in addition to documentary analysis, 4 interviews with clerks, 4 focus groups, 26 interviews with councillors and observation of 4 council or committee meetings.

5.5 Analysis of Case-Study Material

5.5.1 FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS

As with the documentary analysis, the transcripts were read through and coded according to ideas that emerging from the transcripts themselves, rather than according to preconceived categories. As discussed in Chapter 1, research results will always be dependent on the researcher's pre-existing views and attitudes. However, an attempt was made to keep these influences to a minimum consistent with the extraction of the data needed to answer the research questions, so that, as far as possible, the categories of analysis emerged from the data.

This research is interested in the discourses by means of which parish and town councillors make sense of the world and communicate their understandings to others. Hence, the data were analysed as discourse. The transcripts were analysed in terms of the 'discursive techniques', described in Section 5.2. The term 'discursive techniques' is not intended to imply intentionality (or the lack of it) on the part of the councillors. Nevertheless, it is likely that 'discursive techniques', which are used consciously in government discourses as described above, will be picked up and used unconsciously by others, so perpetuating and reinforcing the discourse.

Nevertheless, the discursive techniques used, consciously or unconsciously, by councillors do not make up the totality of their discourse. The issues and topics brought into the conversation are also part of the discourse, and it is difficult to separate the issues from the way in which they are spoken about. Consequently, the analysis of discursive techniques was not separated from the overall analysis of the data, and the discursive techniques were allowed to emerge from the data in the same way and at the same time as the other categories of analysis.

In the first instance, QSR NUD*IST 4 computer software was used for the analysis. At a later stage the data was transferred to QSR Nvivo to give more flexibility in the analysis. The interviews and focus groups were coded in turn, gradually building up

a 'tree' of categories with branches and sub-branches. The transcripts were then recoded in the light of the tree of categories that had been built up. Finally, the 'search' function of the software was used to check that references had not been missed. The final tree had over 400 nodes and included issues, concepts and projects that were discussed, and discursive techniques that were used.

The discursive techniques identified in the transcripts included metaphors, words that give a positive impression, words that give a negative impression and appeals to tradition and the past. These will be discussed further in Chapter 8. The major categories or nodes are shown in Appendix 6; the nodes concerned with discourse analysis are shown in more detail in Appendix 7.

5.5.2 LOCAL COUNCIL DOCUMENTS

The intention was to compare documents produced by town councils at the local level, with the national and sub-national documents discussed above. In the event, there were very few local documents, and those that did exist tended to be old. The relevant documents produced by the case-study councils are shown in Table 6 below.

These local documents were analysed to see to what extent they reflected the attitudes and discourses of the national and sub-national documents. These written articulations of local councils were also compared with the conceptualisations of councillors as revealed in the focus groups and interviews.

Council	Document	Date
Abford	Committee Policy Statements	1995/6
Abford	'The Fountain' newsletter	various
Barbridge	Parish Blueprint	2000
Delfield	Aims and Objectives	undated
Delfield	Forward Planning Overview	undated
Freebury	Regeneration Strategy	undated
Freebury	'Market and Coastal Towns' Expression of Interest	circa 2001/2
Gilchurch	Environmental Policy	undated
Gilchurch	Purchasing Policy	undated
Gilchurch	Nature Conservation Policy	undated

TABLE 6: DOCUMENTS PRODUCED BY THE CASE-STUDY COUNCILS

5.6 The Case-Study Projects

5.6.1 SELECTION OF THE CASE-STUDY PROJECTS

In order to study how councillors' conceptualisations and discourses interacted with those of other local actors and resulted, or failed to result, in action, two case-study projects were chosen for detailed examination. These were selected from the projects and activities referred to by the case-study councillors, when asked about projects they had undertaken that contributed to sustainability. The projects and activities that were mentioned are listed below:

- Use of recycled paper
- Printing on both sides of paper
- Installation of wind-powered lights
- People and Ecology Project – empowering people to study their local wildlife.
- Obtaining funding for a youth worker
- Drugs awareness activities
- Installation of a skateboard ramp

- Introduction of a walking bus (unsuccessful)
- The little green bus – a weekly bus connecting villages to the local market town.
- Organisation of festivals and other events.
- Setting up a farmers' market
- Setting up a tourist information centre
- A Traffic and Environment Plan – reducing through traffic, encouraging walking, cycling and public transport and improving the town centre environment.
- Taking part in the Regional Development Agency's Market and Coastal Towns Initiative
- Planning representations and disputes

The case-study projects were chosen from the above list, according to the following criteria:

1. They should be identifiable projects;
2. The town council and other local actors should be involved;
3. More than one dimension (environmental, social and economic) of sustainability should be covered;
4. The project should preferably be ongoing, so that it could be studied as it took place;
5. The town council must be willing to take part in more research.

The two projects chosen were the Delfield People and Ecology Project and the Gilchurch Traffic and Environment Plan. These were two quite innovative projects from two very different towns in different districts, which met all the criteria above. There was a considerable difference in size between the two projects, but this was thought not to matter, as the projects were to be complimentary rather than a comparison being carried out.

In order to explain how the research was undertaken, it is necessary to outline the two projects. Further details of the projects are given in Chapter 9.

5.6.2 DELFIELD PEOPLE AND ECOLOGY PROJECT

The People and Ecology Project was run by a local environmental charity based in a neighbouring town. The aim of the project was to involve people in studying their local biodiversity. It involved a large number of different activities, which are listed in Appendix 8. An enthusiastic, but quite small, group of local volunteers had been established, with others being involved from time to time. The aim of the charity was to hand over the control of the project to local people. However, this had not yet been realised.

The data collection involved four activities:

- Semi-structured interviews with the project manager, the project worker (who lived in Delfield and produced a local magazine) and an officer of the district council who had been involved with a controversial planning application, in which it was believed that the town council had used the results of the wildlife survey as evidence.
- Non-participant observation of a meeting of the project manager with some of the volunteers. This was used as an opportunity to make contact with the volunteers and arrange a focus group.
- A focus group with three of these volunteers in the home of one of them.
- Study of documents related to the project including town council minutes, submissions to the local plan, local newsletters and coverage in the local newspaper over a sample time period. The documents were used mainly to establish factual information but also, in the case of local plan submissions to study the way that the local environment and sustainability were used to make arguments for or against development.

For reasons explained above in the case of the local councils, the focus group and interviews were semi-structured, and carried out on the 'home ground' of the interviewees. An example schedule for the interviews and focus groups is shown in Appendix 9. People were asked about their involvement with the project, the benefits (social, economic and environmental) they thought it would bring and whether they felt that the project would contribute to sustainability. However, the

questions were slightly different on each occasion, depending on the individual circumstances.

5.6.3 GILCHURCH TRAFFIC AND ENVIRONMENT PLAN

This was a much bigger project involving many more people and organisations, and the data collection was thus more extensive. The Traffic and Environment Plan was a joint project of the county, district and town councils. It was an ambitious plan intended to reduce through-traffic in the town centre and restore the market place and hence to improve the town centre environment and provide better facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport. The project was run by a 'Steering Group' consisting of representatives of all three councils. Extensive consultation was carried out and a 'Users' Group' of interested parties was set up.

The intention of this part of the research was to investigate the competing discourses that came together in discussion and implementation of the project. Interviews were carried out with an officer and a councillor from each of the district and county councils, all of whom were members of the steering group. The officer and members of the town council on the steering group were not re-interviewed as the topic had been covered in the first round of interviews.

The users' group was too large to allow an interview with all its members, and organisations were selected from the membership list after consultation with the district council officer responsible for running the project. The complete membership of the users' group is shown in Appendix 10.

The six organisations selected were those who had been most influential, in the view of the district council officer, and who could be seen as representative of interests within the community. All were contacted and asked if the researcher could meet with one or more of their members to carry out a focus group or interview. Focus groups were the preferred method as it was felt that they would not only provide the views of more than one individual, but would also allow the researcher to see the members of the group interacting. In the event it was possible

to carry out focus groups with two organisations, a double interview with another and individual interviews with leading members of the remaining three, as shown in Table 7.

The focus group and interview schedules were similar to those for the Delfield People and Ecology Project. All of the interviews were tape recorded, as was one of the focus groups. The Friends of the Earth group did not wish to be recorded, but it was possible for the researcher to take quite detailed notes.

Group	Interview or Focus Group
Friends of the Earth	Focus group
Gilchurch 2000	Interview
Gilchurch Access Group	Focus group
Gilchurch Chamber of Commerce	Interview
Gilchurch Civic Society	Double interview
Market Place traders	Interview

TABLE 7: FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS WITH GILCHURCH TRAFFIC AND ENVIRONMENT PLAN. USERS' GROUP

A number of written documents were also analysed. These included the relevant minutes of all three councils, representations to the local plan by the groups concerned and newspaper coverage of what was, at times, quite a controversial project. Unfortunately the minutes of the project steering group and users' group meetings were not released to the public and the researcher was unable to gain access to them. A list of documents analysed for both projects is provided in Appendix 11.

Just as the data collection stage of the research was being concluded, the local elections in May 2003 resulted in a change of administration at the district council. The new administration withdrew the district council's funding from the Traffic and Environment Plan; and the scheme was subsequently abandoned, after the completion of only one of its four stages. However, this did not negate the value of

the research, which was focussed mainly on the discourses and processes through which decisions are made.

5.6.4 ANALYSIS OF THE CASE-STUDY PROJECTS

The transcripts of the focus groups and interviews were entered into the QSR Nvivo computer software and analysed in a similar way to the first-stage transcripts. They were entered as separate projects and coded separately, with a category tree built up for each project, as using the categories from the first stage analysis might have been inappropriate.

Finally, the results of the analysis of the case-study projects were combined with those of the local councils, resulting in the identification of five local discourses under the umbrella of a 'discourse of locality'. Chapters 7, 8 and 9 will discuss the results of the analysis.

5.7 Validity and Reliability

5.7.1 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The terms 'validity' and reliability' are frequently used to describe the quality or accuracy of research. 'Validity' is concerned with the extent to which the research measures or studies what it purports to measure or study. 'Reliability' is concerned with replicability.

'For research to be reliable it must demonstrate that if it were to be carried out on a similar group of respondents in a similar context (however defined), then similar results would be found.'
(Cohen et al, 2000)

Thus research that contained a systematic error could be reliable without being valid.

Transposing these ideas from quantitative to qualitative research can present problems, particularly when the research is undertaken in a social constructionist paradigm. Bryman (2001) discusses a number of approaches, ranging from

interpretations that are very close to those of quantitative research to radically different approaches, such as that of Lincoln and Guba (1985), who replace validity and reliability with trustworthiness and authenticity.

As this research is undertaken from a weak social constructionist position, it is not necessary to abandon the ideas of validity and reliability entirely. However, the concepts do need to be adapted in order to be applicable to qualitative research. Yin (2003) discusses the application of validity and reliability criteria to case-study research. He identifies four 'design tests' (p.34), relating to the concepts of:

- construct validity
- internal validity
- external validity
- reliability

I will discuss each in turn.

Construct validity

Construct validity concerns the selection of data gathering procedures in a way that will minimise bias. Yin lists three tactics 'to increase construct validity when doing case studies' (Ibid, p.35). Firstly, he recommends the use of 'multiple sources of evidence'. Secondly, he suggests the establishment of 'a chain of evidence' by which the process from data collection through analysis to the formation of conclusions can be made clear and verified. Thirdly, Yin recommends having the draft report 'reviewed by key informants' (Ibid). This last is a form of respondent validation (Bryman, 2001), which will be discussed below.

Internal validity

Internal validity concerns the internal consistency of the research and the logical processes by which deductions are made. Yin makes two points:

'First, internal validity is only a concern for causal (or explanatory) case studies, in which an investigator is trying to determine whether event x led to event y.' (2003, p.36)

As this research is essentially exploratory and descriptive rather than causal, this implies that internal validity is irrelevant. However, Yin continues:

**‘Second, the concern over internal validity, for case study research, may be extended to the broader problem of making inferences.’
(Ibid)**

As almost any analysis will involve making inferences, internal validity cannot be ignored and it is important that both the analyst and the reader are aware when inferences are made.

External validity

External validity concerns the generalisability of the research results away from the specific circumstances of the research. Arguably, this concept is not directly applicable to case-study research.

**‘It is virtually impossible to imagine any human behaviour that is not heavily mediated by the context in which it occurs. One can easily conclude that generalizations that are intended to be context free will have little that is useful to say about human behavior.’
(Guba and Lincoln, 1981 quoted in Schofield, 1989, p.206)**

However, Yin argues for a different interpretation of generalisability:

‘The problem lies in the very notion of generalizing to other case studies. Instead, an analyst should try to generalise findings to “theory”, analogous to the way a scientist generalizes from experimental results to theory.’ (2003, p.38)

Yin’s comparison with experimental research is problematic because a natural scientist’s assumption of the existence of general laws does not necessarily transfer to social science. Nevertheless, the idea of using case-study results to gain theoretical insights, which can be then be tested and further examined in other situations, is valid.

In this research, whilst it is not possible to claim that the detailed findings can necessarily be generalised outside the case-study councils, let alone outside Gloucestershire, it is hoped that the conclusions will form a useful model for further research. To facilitate this, and to increase the construct validity and the internal validity of the research, multiple methods were used, and triangulation and respondent validation were used to check the findings. The validation will be described in sub-section 5.8.2 below.

Reliability

As we have seen above, external validity is closely linked with the idea of reliability or replicability – a reliable piece of research being one that would come up with the same results if repeated. Hammersley defines reliability as:

‘refer[ing] to the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions.’

(1992, quoted in Silverman, 1993, p.145)

In doctoral research, it is not practicable to verify data and analysis using a different researcher. In addition, it is likely that had the interviews and focus groups been repeated with a different researcher, the results would have been rather different, as they were almost certainly affected by the particular dynamic between the researcher and the interviewee. In particular, they were affected by the fact that the researcher was also a councillor. This issue was discussed in more detail in Chapter 1. However, it was possible to talk to some of the interviewees, and to observe meetings, on more than one occasion. This did not show up any obvious discrepancies between the occasions.

The idea of reliability can also be applied to the analysis of the data. A different analyst may well have come up with different categories of analysis and hence different conclusions. This is inevitable in this kind of analysis which, although grounded in the data, will also be affected by the ideas that the researcher brings to the analysis process. Nevertheless, it can be ameliorated by the provision of detailed descriptions concerning firstly, the process of analysis, and secondly, the background of the researcher. The first has been described above; and the second was provided in Chapter 1.

The next section will describe the steps that were taken to maximise the validity and reliability of the research by checking the findings through the use of a variety of methods (triangulation) and through respondent valuation.

5.7.2 CHECKING THE FINDINGS

Triangulation

Triangulation was used at two stages. Firstly, the research involved multiple methods of data collection. Data was gathered through a combination of interviews, focus groups, observation and documentary analysis. The first three of these were particularly useful for cross-checking observations and ideas. In particular, interviews were used to follow up issues and concepts that had emerged from the focus groups. In addition, documents such as council minutes were used to check some of the factual parts of interview and focus group data, especially where there was disagreement between interviewees.

Secondly, the QSR Nvivo computer software provided a way of checking some of the qualitative analysis, quantitatively. When words or phrases that appeared to be key to a particular discourse had been identified, the software was used to select and count all incidences of these words in the transcripts. This process led to an adjustment of the analysis, as some words occurred less often than was thought. In some cases, closer analysis revealed that the concept was prevalent but was being expressed using different words. For example, the concept of holistic thinking was expressed in a number of different ways, such as 'thinking in the round' and 'bringing the issues together'. In addition, the software could be used to determine how often key words appeared together in the same item of speech.

Respondent Validation

One way of increasing the validity of qualitative research is through respondent validation. According to Bryman:

'Respondent validation has been particularly popular among qualitative researchers, because they frequently want to ensure that there is a good correspondence between their findings and the perspectives and experiences of their research participants.' (2001, p.273)

Respondent validation has been criticised (e.g. Silverman, 1993) for introducing bias into the research. However, it was felt to be especially important in this

research as a safeguard against the researcher's misinterpretation of the conceptualisations and discourses of councillors and other local activists. Consequently, after most of the analysis had taken place the researcher returned to the case-study councils to report orally on the findings of the research. This gave an opportunity to obtain the councillors' feedback on the results. Response was positive, with a high level of agreement with the results. The process also provided the researcher with an additional opportunity to observe the councillors, in the light of the research findings. Again, the framework derived from the analysis appeared to fit the observations well.

5.8 Conclusions

To conclude, the research used a qualitative mixed-method methodology. Data was collected mainly through focus groups and interviews, supplemented with documentary analysis and non-participant observation. The validity and reliability of the research were increased through a combination of making clear the position and background of the researcher, careful recording of methods, triangulation (where possible) and respondent validation.

Analysis of national, regional, county-level and district-level documentation, using the concept of discursive techniques, enabled the study of the discourses of sustainable development at different spatial scales. Local discourses, both spoken and written, were studied in the context of these larger-scale discourses, which will be analysed in Chapter 6.

The mixed-method approach based on case studies allowed flexibility and triangulation of data, and proved a suitable methodology for studying local discourses. The analysis of the case-study data involved a study both of the subject matter of the discussions and of the discourses in which they took place. Local council discourses will be discussed in Chapter 7 and 8.

The case-study projects allowed a more detailed study of the interaction of different local discourses around two particular issues, one of which was consensual and one

of which was quite strongly contested. The case-study data will be analysed in Chapter 9. Chapter 10 will then bring these different aspects of the research together to reach overall conclusions and answer the research questions.

Chapter 6: Discourses of Sustainable Development in the UK and Gloucestershire

6.1 Introduction

Chapters 2 and 3 have shown that, in order to understand how the term 'sustainable development' is used, it is helpful to look at it as a discourse. Chapter 5 developed an approach to the study of discourse through discursive techniques. This chapter will use that approach to study discourses of sustainable development in the UK at the national level and sub-national levels.

Three national government strategies will be analysed to investigate how discourses of sustainable development have been developed at this level. The emphasis will be on the most recent document, '*A Better Quality of Life*' (DETR, 1999), but this will be considered in the context of two earlier documents, '*This Common Inheritance*' (DoE, 1990) and '*Sustainable Development: the UK Strategy*' (DoE, 1994) in order to show how approaches to sustainable development have changed through the 1990s. Relevant chapters of the 2000 Rural White Paper (DETR, 2000a) will also be included in the analysis to throw light on government attitudes to market towns and to the role of parish and town councils.

This will be followed by a brief section on discourses of sustainable development in the Southwest region of England. Sections 6.4 and 6.5 will then examine how discourses of sustainable development are interpreted and constructed by Vision 21, Gloucestershire's Local Agenda 21, and by principal authorities in Gloucestershire.

These national and sub-national discourses form a background to the local discourses which will be analysed in the following three chapters.

6.2 UK Government Discourses

6.2.1 DOCUMENTS STUDIED

As explained in Chapter 5, I studied UK government discourses of sustainable development by analysing three documents produced in the 1990s, under three successive prime ministers. Two chapters of the 2000 Rural White Paper were also included, covering government attitudes to parish and town councils and to market towns. The documents are shown in Table 8:

Document	Author	Date	Prime Minister
This Common Inheritance	DoE	1990	Thatcher
Sustainable Development: the UK Strategy	DoE	1995	Major
A Better Quality of Life	DETR	1999	Blair
Our Countryside: the Future, Ch. 7: Market Towns and a Thriving Local Economy	DETR	2000	Blair
Our Countryside: the Future, Ch. 12: Local Power for Country Towns and Villages	DETR	2000	Blair

TABLE 8: NATIONAL DOCUMENTS STUDIED

6.2.2 CHANGING APPROACHES TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

'This Common Inheritance'

This Common Inheritance was published in 1990 - before the 1992 Earth Summit. It is subtitled 'Britain's Environmental Strategy' and makes little explicit reference to 'sustainable development'. When the term is introduced it is treated as an 'expert' term with which readers are unlikely to be familiar:

'We have a moral duty to look after our planet and to hand it on in good order to future generations. That is what experts mean when they talk about "sustainable development": not sacrificing tomorrow's prospects for a largely illusory gain today.'
(DoE, 1990, p.10, para.1.14)

Although the term is little used, the theme of the document is the reconciliation of economic development and environmental protection – a central concern of sustainable development:

‘For towns and cities no less than for nations, a good environment and a strong economy are dependent on each other.’ (Ibid, p.114, para.8.5)

‘Sustainable Development: The UK Strategy’

Sustainable Development: the UK Strategy was produced in 1994 - after the Earth Summit, to which the Prime Minister refers in the first sentence of his ‘Foreword’:

‘At Rio, leaders and representatives from over 150 states, developed and developing countries alike, adopted a declaration committing themselves to make future development sustainable’

(Major, in DoE, 1994, p.3)

Consequently the term ‘sustainable development’, as can be seen from the title, is much more central to this document. The Bruntland definition is used:

- ‘Most societies want to achieve economic development to secure higher standards of living, now and for future generations.
- ‘They also seek to protect and enhance the environment, now and for their children. “Sustainable development” tries to reconcile these two objectives.

‘A widely quoted definition of this concept is: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.’ (DoE, 1994, p.6)

Thus this document, like *This Common Inheritance*, is concerned with the reconciliation of economic development and environmental protection. It appears, then, that the adoption of the term ‘sustainable development’ was not accompanied by a change in philosophy or in policy priorities, rather the term was appropriated into the existing discourse.

The social dimension of sustainability is rarely mentioned except as it appears in the term ‘quality of life’, which is portrayed as a result of a thriving economy and a pleasant environment.

‘The debate is often presented in terms of a conflict between economic activity and the environment, as if it is only possible to pursue one at the expense of the other. But this is mistaken: economic activity and the state of the environment both affect the quality of life.’ (DoE, 1994, p.32, para.3.2)

In this way, 'quality of life' is presented as a concept that mediates between the economy and the environment. However, the term is developed in the next document, which adopts the phrase as a title.

'A Better Quality of Life'

In *A Better Quality of Life*, the Labour government develops its own four-part definition of sustainable development:

'It means meeting four objectives at the same time, in the UK and the world as a whole:

- social progress which recognises the needs of everyone;
- effective protection of the environment;
- prudent use of natural resources; and
- maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.' (DETR, 1999, p.8. para.1.2)

This definition has been carried forward into other government documents, including guidance to regional and local government, but with the points reordered so that the economic objective comes first. (See for example, ODPM, 2004.) I will show in the following sections that the influence of this definition has been considerable. This is demonstrated by its appearance in a number of strategic documents at regional and local level.

The first point to note is that the definition brings into consideration the social sphere in its own right. This is made explicit in the document:

'...a new approach is needed, which emphasises the social dimension of sustainable development alongside economic issues, the environment and resource use.' (DETR, 1999, p.10, para.2.3)

Social aspects of sustainable development are emphasised throughout *A Better Quality of Life*. Also, the wording of this objective makes a more explicit commitment to poverty alleviation than the Bruntland definition. This commitment to the eradication of poverty, both within the UK and internationally, is also apparent throughout the document:

'Eradicating poverty is indispensable for sustainable development. We must help developing countries to tackle widespread abject poverty. In this country, everyone should have the opportunity to

fulfil their potential through high quality public services, education and employment opportunities, decent housing and good local environments.’ (DETR, 1999, p. 22)

Secondly, the definition distinguishes resource conservation from environmental protection, increasing emphasis on the need to conserve resources. Thirdly, the reordering of the objectives in subsequent government documents, and hence the implied prioritisation of the economic imperative, is unlikely to be a matter of chance. It seems to indicate to regional and local government that they are expected to put more emphasis on economic aspects.

A Better Quality of Life is less explicit about the compatibility of economic development and environmental protection. Rather it becomes an assumption, and the policy is more concerned with establishing the need for economic ‘growth’ and its compatibility with, and necessity for, environmental protection and increased quality of life:

‘Abandoning economic growth is not a sustainable development option: to do so would close off opportunities to improve quality of life through better healthcare, education, and housing; to combat social exclusion; to revitalise our cities, towns and rural areas; and to protect and enhance our environment.’
(DETR, 1999, p.14, para.3.12)

Thus *A Better Quality of Life*, whilst maintaining the commitment to economic growth of the earlier documents, reveals a shift in emphasis towards the social dimension of sustainability and, in particular, towards poverty alleviation.

In summary, the New Labour sustainable development discourse builds on previous Conservative discourses, whilst combining them with a commitment to social equity. The analysis that follows will concentrate on this last document whilst referring back to the others for the purposes of comparison.

6.2.3 CONSTITUENT DISCOURSES: KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

As Chapter 3 shows, discourses tend to be built around certain key words and phrases. The most significant key words and phrases in *A Better Quality of Life* are shown in Table 9.

Key Word or Phrase	No. of Occurrences	Discourse
'Sustainable development'	289	
Community	106	Social democratic
Change	102	Progress
Indicator	87	Expertise
Sustainable/sustainability (not including sustainable development)	86	
Efficiency/efficient	80	Market
Trade	55	Market
Progress	47	Progress
Quality of life	35	Social democratic
Market	32	Market
Partnership	32	
Competitive/competition	31	Market
Science/scientific/scientist	31	Expertise
Social exclusion	31	Social democratic
Value	23	Market
Technology	22	Expertise
Research	15	Expertise

note: simple derivatives of the key words, such as plurals and adjectival forms, are included

TABLE 9: KEY WORDS AND PHRASES IN *A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE*

This is a complex discourse, made up from a number of constituent discourses, as shown in the third column of Table 9. The key words reflect discourses of social democracy, the market, expertise and progress, which will be considered in turn below. In addition, some key words can be identified as forming links between the constituent discourses.

Neo-liberal Market Discourse

This Common Inheritance and *Sustainable Development: the UK Strategy* were both produced under Conservative governments and were concerned with balancing economic and environmental imperatives and presenting the market as the solution to almost every problem:

‘New approaches to pollution control may be needed that increase reliance on the operation of the market, in contrast to the traditional approach of setting standards in laws and regulations.’

(DoE, 1990, p.67, para.5.15)

‘The Government's policy is to harness market forces more effectively to encourage waste minimisation.’

(Ibid, p.187, para.14.8)

Thus, they reflect the neo-liberal part of the discourse of Thatcherism.

We have seen in Chapter 3 that the neo-liberal free-market discourse was carried forward into the discourse of New Labour. It is reflected in *A Better Quality of Life*, by the use of the key words such as ‘efficiency’, ‘trade’, ‘competitive’ and ‘value’ (used to mean monetary value). ‘Efficiency’ in particular is often linked with energy or resources, linking market discourse to the environment.

‘We need to improve the efficiency with which we use resources’
(DETR, 1999, p.8, para.1.8)

‘Energy-efficient and resource-efficient vehicles are needed for sustainable transport’ (Ibid, p.47, para.6.67)

‘We need to create conditions in which trade can flourish and competitiveness can act as a stimulus for growth and greater resource efficiency.’ (Ibid, p.22, para.4.1)

Social Democratic Discourse

A Better Quality of Life was produced by a Labour government, and therefore might be expected to reflect the discourse of New Labour, as described in Chapter 3, combining a neo-liberal economic discourse with a modified social democratic discourse. Table 9 shows that by including key words such as ‘community’ and ‘social exclusion’ it does just that. ‘Social exclusion’ is frequently coupled with

'poverty' in phrases such as 'combating poverty and social exclusion' (DETR, 1999, p.22, para.4.1). It is also associated with 'crime' and 'environmental decline'.

'Crime imposes economic costs, reinforces social exclusion and can hasten the environmental decline of neighbourhoods.'
(DETR, 1999, p.17, para.3.19)

Links are also made between the discourses of social democracy and the market, for example by linking the concepts of 'enterprise' and 'community':

'Community-based enterprises can provide access to goods or services in areas where they might not otherwise be available or affordable, or enhance existing services.'
(DETR, 1999, p.58, para.7.36)

There is also one word, 'partnership', which links these two discourses in phrases such as 'partnerships between employers, employees and the wider community' (Ibid, p.39, para.6.36) and 'building partnerships between public, private and voluntary sectors' (Ibid, p.48, para.6.71).

The Discourse of Expertise

There are a group of words associated with a discourse of expertise, such as 'indicator' and 'technology', often linked to business or the environment.

'There are many opportunities for UK business in fast-growing markets for environmental technology, goods and services.'
(DETR, 1999, p.36)

This discourse is also apparent in the earlier documents:

'Commercial forces are the most effective spur for technological progress.' (DoE, 1990, p.218, para.17.12)

References to expert knowledge, especially scientific knowledge, are used to substantiate and reinforce statements or arguments.

'Decisions should be based on sound information and sound analysis of the risks, costs and benefits.' (DoE, 1990, p. 216, para.17.1)

'In the EU and internationally, the Government presses for emission reductions based on sound science and a thorough assessment of all the costs and benefits.'
(DETR, 1999, p.75, para.8.26)

The adjective 'sound' applied to science and information in the above two quotations implies that not all science can be relied upon, and John Gummer in his foreword to the 1994 document makes an explicit criticism of science.

'Science, which has enabled us to discover the intricacies and the wonders of our world, has not led us to treasure it. Instead it has fed our desire to dominate all things.' (Gummer in DoE, 1994, p.5)

There is an increasing emphasis on 'indicators', which form a central theme of *A Better Quality of Life*.

'Sustainable development objectives are broad. To deliver them, we must focus on specific issues. One way to do that is through indicators. They help to identify areas for action and connections between them.'

(DETR, 1999, p.13, para.3.2)

Indicators are designed to measure progress towards sustainable development. Thus, the emphasis on 'indicators' could be said to form a link between the discourses of expertise and of progress.

The Discourse of Progress

Finally, there are two words associated with the idea of progress; they are 'progress' itself and 'change'. The latter, apart from in the phrase 'climate change', is almost always portrayed as a positive thing.

'Such measures [economic instruments] can promote change, innovation and efficiency, and higher environmental standards.'

(DETR, 1999, p.26, para.5.7)

However, in the earlier documents the other, traditional Conservative arm of the discourse of Thatcherism is evident in frequent references to history and tradition, which will be discussed in more detail below.

6.2.4 CONSTRUCTION OF THE DISCOURSE:

Chapter 5 identified various discursive techniques that can be used to classify words, phrases and concepts and to give them positive or negative associations, and hence to construct a discourse. These were:

Classification:

- equivalence
- antagonism

Positive or negative associations:

- metaphor,
- reference to the past.

Equivalence

Equivalence of words and phrases can be established by the technique of ‘listing’. For, example, the compatibility of trade with environmental protection and equity is implied through including them in the same lists:

‘...we need international co-operation to overcome environmental problems, to allow trade to flourish and to help the world's poorest people as we move towards a more global society.’

(DETR, 1999, p.8, para.1.8)

In *A Better Quality of Life*, listing is perhaps most apparent in the four-part definition of sustainable development quoted above in Section 6.2.3, which lists economic, social, environmental and resource-use aspects of sustainability in that order. Whilst giving some priority to those listed first, this presents the four aspects as essentially equivalent. In Chapter 2 I discussed the tendency of the most common models of sustainability to present economic, social and environmental aspects as equivalent. As pointed out in that chapter it is also possible, and arguably more accurate, to view the economic sphere as existing within the social sphere, which in turn exists within the environmental sphere. The government’s definition implicitly rejects this model and implicitly presents them as equivalent, unlike the earlier documents in which the social sphere is largely ignored and the point about the equivalence of the environmental and economic spheres is made explicitly:

‘Economic development is just as important a concept as environmental protection, and we must find ways of achieving both together.’ (Gummer, in DoE, 1994, p.5)

Antagonism

An antagonism between welfare and work is very apparent in *A Better Quality of Life*. The word 'welfare' appears 15 times in the document, two of which refer to animal welfare. Of the remaining thirteen references, six involve the phrase 'welfare to work', one talks of 'employment rather than welfare' and one refers to 'the jobs which are essential to break cycles of poverty and dependence on welfare'. In addition, there are three references to 'welfare reform', and two to 'a new contract for welfare'. The emphasis is very much on getting people off welfare. This contrasts with the emphasis on providing support for those who cannot support themselves, which would be expected in a social democratic discourse.

The Use of Metaphor

The establishment of a positive association between economic development and environmental protection is a major message of the documents. The use of metaphor to establish the closeness and interdependence of these two concepts is particularly apparent in the earlier documents. In particular, the economic sphere is metaphorised in terms of the environment and vice versa, in phrases such as "working with the grain of the market" (DoE, 1990, p.14) and "living on the earth's income rather than its capital" (ibid. p.47).

In addition, in his introduction to *Sustainable Development: the UK Strategy* John Gummer, then Secretary of State for the Environment, portrays the economy as a living thing when he says:

"Growth is the only evidence of life": Newman's quotation warns us against suggesting that we should promote the shrinking economy as a basis for sustainability.' (Gummer in DoE, 1994, p.5)

The use of metaphor is less common in *A Better Quality of Life*. The synergistic relationship between environmental protection and economic development are now assumed and the argument is extended to the need for economic *growth* (rather than the rather more general term, development), and to the inclusion of the social sphere.

Reference to the Past

In these documents, reference to the past is not used as a classification tool. Rather, as discussed in the next sub-section, it is used to claim credibility and portray inevitability.

6.2.5 CLAIMS TO AUTHORITY AND EXPERTISE

Government documents claim a certain authority simply because they are written by governments. This is reinforced by the use of a capital 'G' in the word 'government'. This unspoken claim to authority is accentuated by the use of grandiose 'statesman-like' phrases, often referring to the past. For example, the second paragraph of *Our Common Inheritance* begins:

'There are moments in history when apparently disparate forces or issues come together and take shape' (DoE, 1990, p.8, para.1.2)

However, the documents also claim authority through other sources of expertise, particularly science.

'Britain is playing a major role in international steps to improve outdoor air quality. Our scientific understanding has given us a lead in many areas and has allowed us to help shape much of the present international legislation.' (DoE, 1990, p.160, para.11.93)

'New ways of promoting skills in science, engineering and technology for sustainable wealth creation and for improving the quality of life, are now central to government policy.'
(DoE, 1994, p.233, para.37.23)

'The Government aims to improve the public's understanding of science and to secure public confidence in how the Government uses the best available scientific advice in decision making.'
(DETR, 1999, p.29, para.5.23)

Nevertheless, as shown in John Major's introduction to *Sustainable Development: The UK Strategy*, there is also awareness of the limitations of science:

'We need a hard-headed approach to sustainability based on good science and robust economics. We also need to be sensitive to the intangibles that cannot be reduced to scientific imperatives and the narrow language of economics.' (Major, in DoE, 1994, p.3)

This emphasis on scientific expertise is particularly apparent in the earlier two documents, whereas *A Better Quality of Life* is more concerned with the use of sustainability indicators.

6.2.6 THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE ARGUMENT

As we have seen above, the central argument of government sustainable development discourse concerns the need to protect the environment and achieve economic development and growth, and the compatibility of these two aims. The basic argument is consistent with the idea of ecological modernisation as discussed in Chapter 2, and can be traced back at least to the Bruntland report. It is shown in Figure 19 on page 172.

Of the seven statements in Figure 19, Statements 1 and 2 are value statements, albeit values with which most people would agree. Statement 3 seems to follow from statement 2 but is, in fact, a generalisation from the unstated 'we must promote development in developing countries'. At this stage of the argument the term 'development' is still undefined. However, statement 4 is an assumption unrelated to the previous three statements but dependent upon a particular view of 'development'. Statement 5 follows logically from statements 3 and 4 and statement 6 is a deduction from statements 1 and 5. However, statement 7, whether or not it is true, does not follow from the preceding statements and could be regarded as wishful thinking. We could therefore rewrite the argument as shown in Figure 20 on page 173.

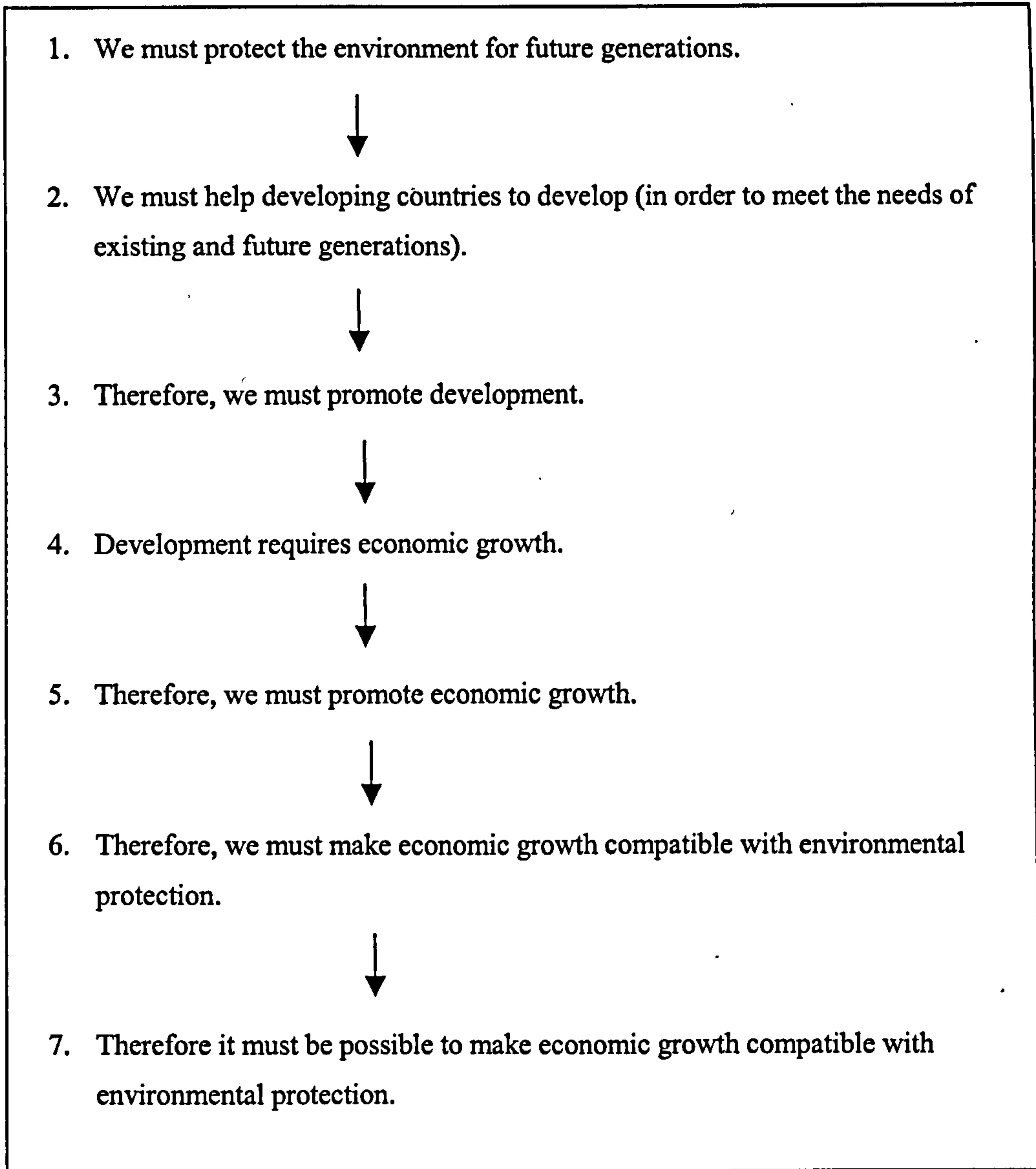


FIGURE 19: THE BASIC SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ARGUMENT

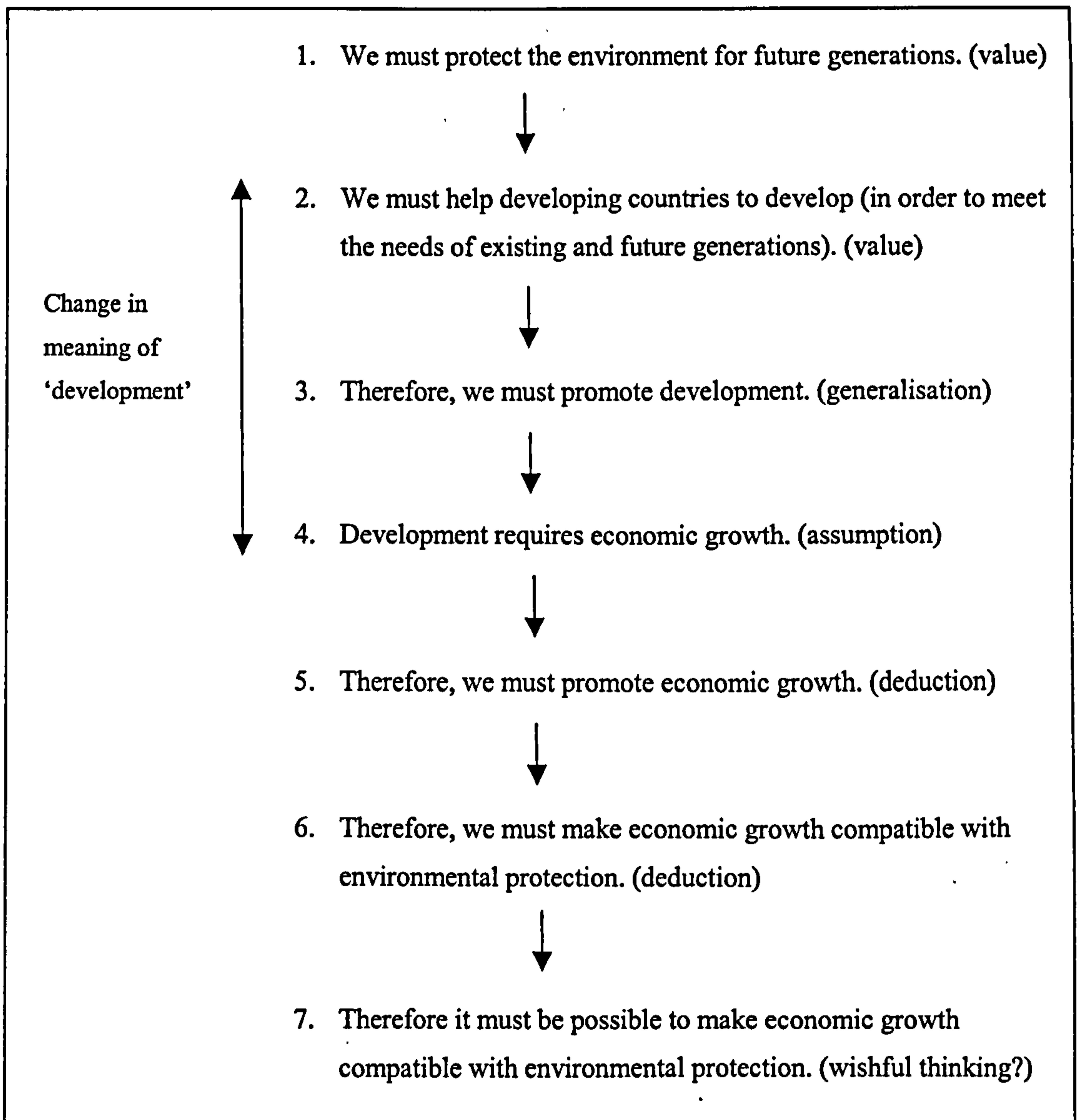


FIGURE 20: ANALYSIS OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ARGUMENT

It seems then that the argument that economic growth and environmental protection are, or can be made, compatible is more wishful thinking than logical conclusion.

6.2.7 SUBSIDIARY THEMES

Holistic Thinking

The documents show an awareness of the need to integrate different aspects of sustainable development rather than look at issues in isolation.

‘The Government needs to ensure that its policies fit together in every sector; that we are not undoing in one area what we are trying to do in another; that our policies are based on a harmonious set of principles rather than a clutter of expedients.’ (DoE, 1990, p.8, para.1.6)

This concern with integrated, or holistic, thinking is particularly apparent in *A Better Quality of Life*, reflecting the Labour government’s concern with ‘joined-up government’:

‘The need to look at policies together, in order to make sure that by working to improve some indicators we are not worsening others, is at the heart of this Strategy.’ (DETR, 1999, p.20, para.3.27)

Allocation of Responsibility

The ways in which responsibilities for sustainable development are allocated are of particular relevance to this thesis. The UK government attempts to spread responsibility for sustainable development from national government both upwards to the international scale and downwards to local government, other local organisations and individuals.

‘The responsibility for the environment is shared. It is not a duty for Government alone. It is an obligation on us all.’
(DoE, 1990, p.16, para.1.38)

‘The document sets out a future agenda - not just for Government but for business, for organisations and for individual men and women.’
(DoE, 1994, p.3)

‘The skills and enthusiasm of local people, voluntary bodies, and business are vital for change’ (DETR, 1999, p.50, para.7.4)

Thus, government documents often read as if the government is trying to reduce its own responsibility for sustainable development by allocating responsibility elsewhere. We saw in Chapter 4, that this is a common view amongst lay people.

6.2.8 NATIONAL VIEWS OF LOCAL RESPONSIBILITIES

In considering government attitudes to local responsibilities with regard to sustainable development, it is useful to bring into the analysis two chapters of the

Rural White Paper produced in 2000. They concern market towns (Chapter 7) and parish and town councils (Chapter 12). This section will consider national government attitudes to the role of the local council and to sustainability in market towns.

The Role of the Local Council

In spite of the emphasis on need for local action in all three sustainable development strategies, parish and town councils are mentioned only once and are not allocated any specific responsibility:

‘There are also some 12,000 smaller authorities in parts of Britain serving more local communities.’ (DoE, 1994, para.30.2)

By contrast, the Rural White Paper devoted a chapter to local councils, which it describes as “the most basic unit of local government [and] closest to their communities.” (DETR, 2000a, p.146). This document recognises the diversity that exists amongst local councils and expresses enthusiasm for enabling greater activity.

‘...there is a large variation in the size, role and vigour of local councils. [...] While some already set an outstanding example in community leadership, a large number could or would like to do more and we will help them achieve that.’ (Ibid)

It introduces two new initiatives - ‘quality council’ status and ‘parish plans’ – in an attempt to invigorate parish and town councils and increase activity at the local level. The emphasis of this chapter is very much on the social sphere. There is little mention of the environment or the economy, and none of sustainable development or sustainability. Thus, local councils are seen in having a role in the social development of their areas, but they do not appear to be seen as contributing to sustainability.

Sustainability in Market Towns

The three sustainable development documents do not explore the meaning of sustainability at the local level, let alone its meaning to the larger rural settlements that are the subject of this thesis. However, Chapter 7 of the 2000 Rural White Paper is devoted to the topic of market towns. It describes market towns as

‘play[ing] a critical role in helping rural communities to thrive and in regenerating deprived areas’ (DETR, 2000a, p.74). Their role in contributing to sustainability is also recognised:

‘We now need to reinforce the role of market towns and their potential to support a more sustainable pattern of development.’
(Ibid, p.75)

The Rural White Paper does not define sustainable development. In this chapter the focus is on the economic, and it is subtitled ‘a thriving local economy’. Under the heading ‘The future – what we want to see’, four bullet points are presented. Three of them are purely economic, but the second gives a vision for market towns that has social as well as economic aspects.

‘Market Towns as a focus for growth in areas which need regeneration, and more generally as service centres and hubs for surrounding hinterland, exploiting their potential as attractive places to live, work and spend leisure time.’ (DETR, 2000a, p.73)

There are a number of references to ‘enhancing the quality of the environment’ (Ibid, p.84). However, the environment seems to be seen primarily as an economic asset. The Regional Development Agencies are given the responsibility to encourage sustainable development by ‘recognising the value of the environment as an economic asset to be used sustainably;’ (Ibid, p82, emphasis in original)

It is significant that the regeneration of market towns is seen as a responsibility for Regional Development Agencies rather than for principal authorities or for the towns themselves. Indeed, town councils are not mentioned in this chapter, even though Chapter 12 of the same document is about the role of local councils and how it can be enhanced.

6.2.9 CONCLUSIONS

Government sustainable development discourse reflects the composite nature of government discourses generally. In particular, the sustainable development discourse of New Labour, as manifested in *A Better Quality of Life*, combines elements of neo-liberal and social democratic discourses.

The central message of government documents on 'sustainable development' is that environmental protection is compatible with economic development. This message is emphasised in the earlier two documents through the use of metaphor and other discursive techniques. *A Better Quality of Life* interprets 'development' in terms of economic growth; and extends the argument to the compatibility of economic growth with environmental protection. However, close analysis reveals that the argument is based on unsubstantiated assumptions and the lack of a clear definition of 'development'.

The social dimension of sustainability is largely ignored in the earlier two documents, but included in *A Better Quality of Life*, although in setting 'welfare' against 'work' it demonstrates a neo-liberal approach to the social sphere.

Government discourses emphasise the shared responsibility for sustainable development, to the extent that it can appear that government is trying to transfer its own responsibilities both upwards to international fora and downwards to the local level. Nevertheless, the sustainability of market towns is seen as a responsibility of the Regional Development Agencies rather than of local councils, although the potential of parish and town councils to contribute to their communities is beginning to be recognised.

The following sections will consider if and how government discourses of sustainable development are reflected and developed at sub-national levels.

6.3 Regional Discourses in South West England

6.3.1 INTRODUCTION

Gloucestershire forms part of the South West Region of England. This section will summarise the treatment of sustainable development by the three regional documents shown in Table 10. I will analyse them in terms of the five dimensions of a sustainable community developed in Chapter 4.

Document	Author	Date
A Sustainable Future for the South West: The Regional Sustainable Development Framework for the South West of England	Sustainability South West	2001
Regional Economic Strategy for the South West of England 2003 - 2012	South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA)	2003
Regional Planning Guidance for the South West	Government Office for the South West (GOSW)	2001

TABLE 10: REGIONAL DOCUMENTS ANALYSED

6.3.2 THE SOUTH WEST SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

The *South West Sustainable Development Framework* calls for sustainable development to have ‘top priority’ (Sustainability South West, 2001, p.4). It defines it in terms of quality of life and the interdependence of the economic, social and environmental spheres, whilst also recognising that the three spheres can conflict.

‘Sustainable development is about creating a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come. It means recognising that our economy, environment and social well-being are inter-dependent.’

(Sustainability South West, 2001, p.4)

The economy is seen as a way of achieving sustainability:

‘We need a robust economy to ensure that wealth is created for investment in sustainable strategies.’

(Sustainability South West, 2001, p.4)

Overall, the *South West Sustainable Development Framework* takes a holistic approach to sustainability, emphasising the need to integrate different aspects of policy making. Whilst this might be expected, the extent to which the theme of sustainability is picked up in the *South West Regional Economic Strategy* and the *South West Regional Planning Guidance* and the ways in which these documents interpret the term may be more significant in practice, as they provide structures for economic and land-use development in the region respectively.

6.3.3 THE SOUTH WEST REGIONAL ECONOMIC STRATEGY

The *South West Regional Economic Strategy* claims to be consistent with the Framework and adopts sustainable development as one of two 'cross-cutting themes'. However, it adopts a weaker conceptualisation of sustainable development which, perhaps predictably, portrays the environment chiefly as an economic asset.

'The high quality physical environment in the South West is recognised as a great strength and economic asset.' (SWRDA, p.18)

'In the South West, our environment and our cultural heritage are critically important to the economy.' (Ibid, p.49)

Thus, the holistic approach of the framework is replaced by an interpretation based on the protection of the environment as a prerequisite for a strong economy, rather than as an imperative in its own right.

6.3.4 THE SOUTH WEST REGIONAL PLANNING GUIDANCE

The role of the *Regional Planning Guidance* is to set up a structure for land use within the region. Nevertheless, its 'Vision' is concerned with sustainability and quality of life:

'Developing the region, in a sustainable way, as a national and European region of quality and diversity, where the quality of life for residents, the business community and visitors will be maintained and enhanced.' (GOSW, 2001, p.9)

The document's four aims reflect the four aspects of the government's definition of sustainable development:

- 'Protection of the environment'
- 'Prosperity for communities and the regional and national economy'
- 'Progress in meeting society's needs and aspirations'
- 'Prudence in the use and management of resources' (Ibid)

Unlike the *Regional Economic Strategy*, The *Regional Planning Guidance* treats the environment as important for its own sake and contains 'a very detailed (and uniquely comprehensive in terms of other RPG) table setting out specific targets for protecting and restoring 20 different types of habitat' (Counsell and Bruff, 2001, p.488). As far as its brief allows, it is also concerned with quality of life and social sustainability.

6.3.5 DIMENSIONS OF LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY AND THE REGIONAL DOCUMENTS

Table 11 summarises the inclusion of the five dimensions of local sustainability developed in Chapter 4, in the aims and objectives of all three documents. It can be seen that none of the documents has an explicit commitment to ‘a diverse and self-reliant local economy’, although the importance of diverse local economies is acknowledged in the Planning Guidance.

The Framework is committed to the environmental dimensions, and this commitment is picked up in the RPG but not in the Economic Strategy. These two documents are also concerned with meeting social needs locally. However, the Economic Strategy tends to see both the environment and social sustainability as economic assets. The external ‘social footprint’ (as explained in the footnote on page 94) of the region is not considered in any of the documents. That all three documents claim to be based on government guidance demonstrates the flexibility of interpretation associated with the guidance.

The next section will analyse the discourse of sustainability developed and used by Vision 21, Gloucestershire’s Local Agenda 21, and how Gloucestershire County Council interpreted Vision 21’s work in the light of national and regional discourses.

Dimension of local sustainability	Sustainable Development Framework	Economic Strategy	Planning Guidance
1. A diverse and self-reliant local economy;	<p>‘Increase the circulation of wealth within the region.’</p> <p>‘Encourage community involvement in local economies.’</p>	<p>‘To increase economic inclusion’:</p> <p>‘Accelerate economic participation by working locally to stimulate employment and business start-ups.’</p> <p>‘Support the regeneration of disadvantaged communities in the South West.’</p>	
2. The protection and enhancement of biological diversity and careful stewardship of natural resources;	<p>‘Protect and enhance habitats and species.’</p> <p>‘Ensure water, land, minerals, soils, forestry and other natural resources are used efficiently and with least environmental damage.’</p>		<p>‘Prudence in the use and management of resources’ including ‘minimising waste and pollution, avoiding loss or damage to irreplaceable natural and cultural assets and safeguarding the region’s resources of green fields, biodiversity, primary minerals and water’</p>
3. Minimisation of the production of pollution and waste; and reuse, recycling and careful management of waste products;	<p>‘Reduce pollution and improve water, land and air quality.’</p> <p>‘Promote wise use of waste resources whilst reducing waste production and disposal.’</p>		As above
4. Empowering citizens and meeting needs within the community in a socially just way;	<p>‘Promote stronger and more vibrant communities in the SW.’</p> <p>‘Provide safe, affordable and suitable housing for everyone.’</p> <p>‘Provide a safe environment in which people feel secure.’</p>	<p>To increase economic inclusion:</p> <p>This Objective is designed to improve the efficiency of the regional economy by ensuring that people and communities contribute fully to, and share in, the success of the regional economy.</p>	<p>‘Progress in meeting society’s needs and aspirations’ including ‘addressing the wide variations in prosperity between different parts of the region through regeneration and so reducing social exclusion and economic disadvantage, particularly in areas of special need’</p>
5. Minimisation of the ‘social footprint’ of the community on the outside world.			

TABLE 11: REGIONAL DOCUMENTS AND THE DIMENSIONS OF LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY

6.4 County-level Discourses in Gloucestershire

6.4.1 INTRODUCTION

This section will consider three documents produced in Gloucestershire, as shown in Table 12. They will be analysed in turn, looking at the extent to which they reflect and draw upon national and regional government discourses, the way that they use discursive techniques and whether they consider the five dimensions of local sustainability developed in Chapter 4.

Document	Author	Date
Sustainable Gloucestershire	Colbourne (for Vision 21)	1996
Gloucestershire County Structure Plan – 2 nd review	Gloucestershire County Council (GCC)	1999
Local Agenda 21 Strategy for a Sustainable Gloucestershire	Gloucestershire County Council (GCC)	2000

TABLE 12: COUNTY-LEVEL DOCUMENTS ANALYSED

6.4.2 VISION 21 AND ‘SUSTAINABLE GLOUCESTERSHIRE’

Vision 21

Gloucestershire County Council was innovative in handing over control of its Local Agenda 21 strategy to a voluntary organisation, The Rendezvous Society, which describes itself as ‘an educational charity that promotes global linking between Gloucestershire and her linking communities’ (Rendezvous Society, undated). The Rendezvous Society set up Vision 21 - ‘a network composed of a broad cross-section of people in Gloucestershire’ (Colbourne, 1996, p.1). Vision 21 held a number of conferences and visioning events and set up working parties to formulate policy on particular topics, as well as initiating and supporting practical projects. They produced a document, *‘Sustainable Gloucestershire: the Vision 21 Handbook for Creating a Brighter Future’* (Colbourne, 1996), containing reports from eight working groups.

Although *Sustainable Gloucestershire* was not officially adopted by the county council it has been described as ‘our first Local Agenda 21 statement’ (Bungard, 2000, p.2, my emphasis), where ‘our’ refers to Gloucestershire County Council, and

'was used to aid preparation of LA21 strategies and plans at county and district level' (Gloucestershire County Council, undated b). It is analysed here because it presents an alternative view of sustainable development based on the views of the people of Gloucestershire, forming an influential part of the background against which Gloucestershire County Council produced its own Local Agenda 21 strategy and its Structure Plans.

'Sustainable Gloucestershire'

Sustainable Gloucestershire is written for the general public and goes to great lengths to be accessible and non-threatening; to this end, it includes cartoons, children's drawings, photographs and a 'jargon buster'.

The document defines sustainable development as follows:

'development that enhances the quality of life for all (especially the most disadvantaged), without damaging the environment, or the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'

(Colbourne, 1996, p.1, my emphasis)

The emphases in the above quotation show where the Vision 21 definition differs from the classic Brundtland definition. It can be seen that it has been adapted to include explicit commitments to equity and to environmental protection.

There is a commitment to equity between nations as well as within Gloucestershire. For example, both can be found in the report of the Energy Working Group:

*'It may reasonably be argued that countries such as those in Europe and North America, which industrialised early, have **no inherent 'right'** to their present high "share" of the environment's capacity to absorb greenhouse gases and other pollutants.'*

(Ibid, p.75, emphasis in original)

'[A]ny changes made to achieve sustainability must be compatible with achieving affordable warmth and light for everyone.' (Ibid, p.76)

A working group of Vision 21 prioritised six 'challenges for Gloucestershire'. These aims are even more radical than the Vision 21 definition of sustainable

development. Firstly, there is an explicit commitment to far-reaching change, in both attitudes and behaviour, which reflects the Bruntland Report but is absent from the government strategies and regional documents analysed above. Secondly, there is an explicit commitment to ‘new decision-making processes and structures’ and ‘a holistic long-term approach’. Lastly, there is an explicit reference to the need to put less emphasis on economic considerations in order to prioritise the environment and the social sphere. This last point is in direct contradiction to the central message of the government strategies and of the *Regional Economic Strategy* – that economic development (and growth) is compatible with, and indeed essential for, environmental protection and improved quality of life.

‘Sustainable Gloucestershire’ and the Dimensions of Local Sustainability

Table 13 below shows the commitment of *Sustainable Gloucestershire* to the dimensions of local sustainability that were identified in Chapter 4 of this thesis. It shows that, unlike the national government or regional documents, it covers all five dimensions of local sustainability.

Dimension	Commitment
1. A diverse and self-reliant local economy;	Economics Working Group advocates ‘local production for local consumption’ and ‘creating employment through local initiatives’. (p.21)
2. The protection and enhancement of biological diversity and careful stewardship of natural resources;	First of six challenges: ‘enhance the physical environment, biodiversity and natural resources’ (p.14)
3. Minimisation of the production of pollution and waste; and reuse, recycling and careful management of waste products;	Waste and Pollution Working Group advocates minimisation of pollution and waste and the introduction of a waste hierarchy, which prioritises re-use and recycling over disposal.
4. Empowering citizens and meeting needs within the community in a socially just way;	Empowerment stressed in report and in practice. Commitment to equity explicit in definition of sustainable development and in working group reports.
5. Minimisation of the ‘social footprint’ of the community on the outside world.	Not mentioned explicitly, but implicit in opposition to the arms trade.

TABLE 13: *SUSTAINABLE GLOUCESTERSHIRE* AND THE DIMENSIONS OF LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY

'Sustainable Gloucestershire' as Discourse

Sustainable Gloucestershire differs from the documents considered above in that it was written mostly by amateurs, and is thus a less 'technologised' or professionalised discourse. Nevertheless, the writers may have used discursive techniques, consciously or unconsciously, to emphasise points or to create a particular impression. I will now consider the document from this point of view.

As mentioned above, *Sustainable Gloucestershire* is written to be accessible to the ordinary reader. This is emphasised by the use of the pronouns 'we' and 'you'. The first use of 'we' in the main body of the document refers to Vision 21:

'In 1995, Vision 21 surveyed a cross-section of residents of Gloucestershire [...] *We* found that although respondents felt quite privileged to live in Gloucestershire, they felt strongly that urgent work should be done ...' (Colbourne, 1996, p.7, my emphasis)

This exclusive 'we' is contrasted with 'you' in a paragraph headed 'Why this publication?':

'It is up to YOU, as an individual, or part of a group, organisation or community to take the ideas forward ... working with or separately from Vision 21.' (Ibid, p.11, emphasis in original)

Later 'we' is used inclusively, meaning sometimes humankind and sometimes the people of Gloucestershire, and hence including the reader:

'Almost everything *we* do affects our physical environment, both locally and globally.' (Ibid, p.14, my emphasis)

In contrast to this presentation as personal communication, the document takes an explicitly global perspective, referring frequently to global initiatives and global problems. The three section headings in the introduction are 'Facing the Future in Gloucestershire', 'A World Concern' and 'Bringing Rio Home'. Thus, the link between the local and the global and with the Rio summit that originated Local Agenda 21 is made early on. Metaphor is used to reinforce this link and to romanticise Agenda 21 in the phrase:

'Agenda 21 was to set alight the hearts and minds of millions of people.' (Ibid, p.9)

The emphasis of *Sustainable Gloucestershire* is very much on the future. Where there are references to the past, it tends to be contrasted with the need to look forward. For example, Chapter 2 begins with a quotation:

“Old fashioned ways which no longer apply to changed conditions are a snare in which ... feet... have always become readily entangled.” (Jane Addams)’ (Ibid, p.13)

Where metaphors are used they tend to emphasise the seriousness of problems. For example, there are references to resources being ‘stretched to breaking point’ (p.16) and ‘a gathering cloud of hunger’ (p.33), when describing the problems we face on a world scale. In addition, a spatial metaphor presents a triangular relationship between the built environment, the natural environment and the social environment, emphasising the links between the three concepts:

‘The built environment is one of the three sides of a triangular environmental relationship with the social environment which dictates change and quality of life issues, and the natural environment which provides our physical context and requires skilful management as both a local and global resource.’ (Ibid, p.62)

On the surface, the attitude to knowledge and expertise in *Sustainable Gloucestershire* is similar to that in government discourse. Most of the working group reports suggest information that needs to be collected and indicators that could be used to facilitate progress towards sustainability. In particular, the Waste and Pollution Working Group concludes:

‘Accurate information is required to find out where this vision is and how far off it we are. Reliable decisions cannot be made on the basis of assumptions alone.’ (Ibid, p.101)

However, Vision 21 also sees local people as important sources of knowledge:

‘We hope you will help us fill the gaps in our knowledge and turn this agenda into practical action.’ (Ibid, p.12)

In addition, expertise is seen as a resource to facilitate decision-making by ordinary people, as well as by governments.

Conclusions

Vision 21 represented a radical move to hand the control of Local Agenda 21 to local people. Although participants were self-selecting and therefore almost certainly not totally representative, it did have considerable success in involving different groups. In its report, *Sustainable Gloucestershire*, it presents a radical vision for Gloucestershire, which questions the basic argument of government sustainable development discourse. Rather than presenting economic growth as necessary for and complementary to social and environmental well-being, it calls for a change of emphasis from economic growth to meeting social and environmental needs.

Vision 21 looks at Gloucestershire in a global context, its interpretation of sustainability referring directly to the Rio Summit rather than to government. As a result, Gloucestershire County Council was faced with two contrasting discourses of sustainable development - from above (national and regional government) and from below (Vision 21). The next two sections will consider how the council reconciled these two discourses in their Local Agenda 21 Strategy and in the Gloucestershire Structure Plan.

6.4.3 GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S LOCAL AGENDA 21 STRATEGY

In 2000, Gloucestershire County Council produced its own '*Local Agenda 21 Strategy for a Sustainable Gloucestershire*' (Bungard, 2000). Although available to the general public, this short document was written by the Director of Environment as an internal document for councillors and officers. As an internal document, it is honest about the council's past failings:

'In 1991, we approved an Environment Strategy. This was meant to be the basis for future projects to improve our environmental policies but it had little effect.' (Bungard, 2000, p.2)

Under the heading 'What is Sustainable Development?' it quotes several definitions of sustainable development, including the Brundtland definition, the definition used

by Vision 21 and the government's four-part definition taken from '*A Better Quality of Life*'. Rather than settling on one definition, they are followed by a table comparing sustainable and unsustainable development, reproduced below as Table 14. It can be seen that the six features of sustainable development listed in the table are fairly uncontentious and are compatible with both government and Vision 21 discourses.

Sustainable development	Unsustainable development
Aims to improve our quality of life – based on social and environmental factors as well as financial ones.	Aims only to raise our standard of living – measured by welfare and happiness
Sees economic, social and environmental issues as being linked.	Assumes that a healthy economy will automatically lead to a healthy society and a secure environment.
Acts on the needs of future generations as well as the needs of people today.	Mainly leaves issues to do with the future up to those who will live in it.
Always considers the environment and its ability to support human activity.	Treats the environment as a luxury – to be protected if we can afford it.
Balances the importance of individual rights and joint responsibilities.	Focuses mainly on individuals and individual rights
Decisions based on co-operation between experts and ordinary people, to meet people's needs.	Planned by experts and specialists for others.

TABLE 14: WHY IS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DIFFERENT? (FROM BUNGARD, 2000)

The document commits the council to a vision of a sustainable Gloucestershire, which 'us[es] the conclusions of Vision 21's *Sustainable Gloucestershire* (1996) and recent government guidance' (Bungard, 2000, p.5). The main section, 'Building blocks for a sustainable Gloucestershire', also draws upon both *Sustainable Gloucestershire* and government guidance. It picks up most of the proposals from Vision 21 that are within the power of a county council. In particular, it includes ten bullet points under the heading, 'Community development and involving the public in making decisions' (Ibid, p.8), thus stressing the need for community involvement, which was a central theme of Vision 21. As well as all its own services, the county council specifies district councils and voluntary organisations as having a role in the implementation of this aim. However, it does not mention parish councils as agents of community involvement.

Key Words

Table 15 reproduces Table 9 from section 6.2 but includes an extra column to show the occurrence of the key words of *A Better Quality of Life* in Gloucestershire County Council's Agenda 21 Strategy. Although the Local Agenda 21 Strategy was a shorter document (24 pages to *A Better Quality of Life*'s 96 pages), it can be seen that there are several significant differences between the two documents.

Key Word or Phrase	No. Occurrences		Discourse
	A Better Quality of Life	GCC LA21 Strategy	
'Sustainable development'	289	29	
Community	106	23	Social democratic
Change	102	9	Progress
Indicator	87	20	Expertise
Sustainable/sustainability (not including sustainable development)	86	79	
Efficiency/efficient	80	0	Market
Trade	55	0	Market
Progress	47	6	Progress
Quality of life	35	19	Social democratic
Market	32	1	Market
Partnership	32	24	
Competitive/competition	31	0	Market
Science/scientific/scientist	31	1	Expertise
Social exclusion	31	0	Social democratic
Value	23	13	Market
Technology	22	2	Expertise
Research	15	5	Expertise

note: simple derivatives of the key words, such as plurals and adjectival forms, are included

TABLE 15: THE OCCURRENCE OF THE KEY WORDS OF *A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE* IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S LOCAL AGENDA 21 STRATEGY

Firstly, there appears to be a shift from the use of the term 'sustainable development' to 'sustainability' or 'sustainable' applied as an adjective to another noun such as 'future', 'results' and in particular 'Gloucestershire'. This avoidance of 'development' might be expected in a county where it is associated with building houses on greenfield sites.

Secondly, the market discourse is almost entirely absent. Although the word 'value' appears 13 times only 3 usages refer to monetary value. The social democratic discourse is drawn on selectively, with 'community' and 'quality of life' appearing frequently but 'social exclusion' not at all. The discourses of progress and expertise also seem to be present but to a lesser extent than in *A Better Quality of Life*.

Thus, in its Local Agenda 21 Strategy Gloucestershire County Council draws selectively on the discourse of *A Better Quality of Life*, shifting the focus from 'sustainable *development*' to sustainability and downplaying the neo-liberal economic discourse in favour of an emphasis on social and environmental issues.

6.4.4 THE STRUCTURE PLAN

The *Gloucestershire Structure Plan* for the period 1991-2011 was developed as *Sustainable Gloucestershire* was being produced. The Structure Plan refers to the Vision 21 process as follows:

'Integration Group was formed to facilitate the integrated evolution of the Vision 21 and Structure Plan process and through which progress towards attaining sustainability in Gloucestershire was accelerated.'

(GCC, 1999, section 3.2.4)

The structure plan was adopted in November 1999, after the publication of '*A Better Quality of Life*' to which it refers. However, rather than follow '*A Better Quality of Life*' by emphasising the compatibility of development and environmental protection, both the foreword and the plan itself refer to the need for a balance between them:

‘[T]he need to satisfy these demands and aspirations should be balanced against the need to protect and enhance the essential quality and diversity of the County’s environment. Not only is the well-being of future generations living and working in and visiting Gloucestershire dependent on the County’s environmental assets being conserved; but so too is the prosperity of the County’s economy and the quality of life enjoyed by its people in the more immediate future.

(GCC, 1999, para.2.1.4)

Thus, environmental protection is portrayed as being important for the wellbeing of current and future generations as well as for the economy. In turn, growth is portrayed as constrained by environmental factors.

‘To promote a level of growth which can be sustained within the constraints of the county’s natural resources, the quality of the environment and the provision of infrastructure.’

(GCC, 1999, section 4.1.7)

The structure plan contains a section on sustainable development and the concept is pervasive throughout the document, covering environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainability. As might be expected, the emphasis is on the use of land-use planning to reduce the need to travel, and especially the use of the private car.

‘The role of the Structure Plan is to plan for the longer term (the Plan period is mid 1991-2011), to improve the relationship between new development, employment locations and transport networks, in order to reduce reliance on the car and to promote the use of other, more environmentally benign forms of transport.’ (Ibid, section 4.1.5)

At the time of writing, the structure plan is in the process of being revised.

The deposit draft of the third alteration, produced in 2003, puts the emphasis on quality of life and environmental protection rather than on economic development.

‘Using the Structure Plan we aim to make sure we provide a better quality of life for everyone living and working in the County, now and in the future by:

- providing a sustainable Gloucestershire, with successful well-planned communities;**
- making sure there is access to jobs, homes and services;**
- developing a sustainable transport system;**

- protecting and improving the environment; and
 - promoting the sensible use of natural resources.’
- (GCC, 2003, section 1.3.1)

It sees its role as managing economic growth rather than promoting it:

‘Whilst the Structure Plan does not directly affect economic growth in the County it can encourage that growth to be managed in the most environmentally and socially sustainable way.’ (Ibid, section 3.1.2)

The revised version is structured around economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainability, and aims for a holistic approach:

‘The overall aim of this Third Alteration of the Structure Plan will be to secure the most appropriate levels and forms of development in the most appropriate locations, while taking into account environmental, social and economic well-being. This requires the creation of an holistic strategy which successfully addresses sustainable development issues, including the integration of land use and transport.’

(GCC, 2003, section 2.1.1)

The above quotation is also interesting for its use of the word ‘development’. Planners usually use the term to refer specifically to building development. It is clearly used in this way in the second line of the above quotation. However, later in the same paragraph it is used again as part of the term ‘sustainable development’, and this time its meaning is not so clear. This typifies the treatment of ‘sustainable development’ in planning documents. It is usually defined in terms of the Bruntland or national government definitions, but in practice, often used to apply to building development. Whilst this may be inevitable when the term is applied to land-use planning, the distinction needs to be born in mind.

6.4.5 COUNTY-LEVEL DISCOURSES: CONCLUSIONS

Gloucestershire County Council handed over control of its Agenda 21 process to a local charity, which set up Vision 21, taking an innovative approach to involving local people. In its report, *Sustainable Gloucestershire*, Vision 21 presented a radical view of sustainable development, prioritising quality of life and the environment over economic growth.

This left the county council with the difficult task of reconciling this approach with government and regional guidance which, as we have seen, has a tendency to present economic growth as a prerequisite for increasing quality of life and protecting the environment. Its Local Agenda 21 Strategy attempts this reconciliation by refusing to settle on a definition of sustainable development, and by developing the work of Vision 21 as far as possible without directly contravening government policy. In doing so, it retains the prioritisation of the social and environmental spheres. In terms of discourse, Gloucestershire County Council's Agenda 21 Strategy drew selectively on the complex discourse of *A Better Quality of Life*, rejecting the neo-liberal economic discourse but building selectively on the other elements. The Structure Plan adopted in 1999 and the deposit draft version of its revision, produced in 2003, follow the same lines, although they both use the government definition of sustainable development.

6.5 District-level Discourses in Gloucestershire

6.5.1 INTRODUCTION

The enthusiasm for and the innovative approach towards Local Agenda 21 of Gloucestershire County Council did not appear to carry over into its rural districts. Only one of the four district councils produced a Local Agenda 21 Strategy, although at least one other appointed a Local Agenda 21 officer, one produced a booklet of Sustainability Aims and Objectives and the fourth adopted the county council's Local Agenda 21 Strategy. Four documents (one from each council) were chosen to study discourses at this level. They are shown in Table 16 on page 194.

The Cotswold and Forest of Dean documents are very comprehensive and, although the emphasis is on the local, they cover all five dimensions of local sustainability. The two environmental statements refer to sustainable development and present themselves as part of the Local Agenda 21 process. As would be expected the emphasis of these last two documents is on the environmental aspect of sustainability. Both also refer to social and economic aspects, although the social is

more apparent in the Stroud document. The fact that the two councils produced environmental policies but, at least as public documents, not policies on other aspects of sustainability may indicate that they view the environment as the central sustainability issue.

Document	Author	Date
Sustainability: Aims and Objectives 2002 - 2003	Cotswold District Council (CDC)	2002
Towards a More Sustainable Future for the Forest of Dean – Local Agenda 21	Forest of Dean District Council (FDDC)	circa 2001
Environmental Statement 2000/2001	Stroud District Council (SDC)	circa 2000
An Environmental Strategy	Tewkesbury Borough Council (TBC)	2001

TABLE 16: SUSTAINABILITY DOCUMENTS OF DISTRICT COUNCILS

6.5.2 THE DISTRICT COUNCIL DOCUMENTS AND THE DIMENSIONS OF LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY

Table 17 on page 195 summarises the coverage of the five dimensions of local sustainability by the four documents. It can be seen that the district council documents cover the local aspects of sustainability quite thoroughly. However, there is a tendency to concentrate on the local and ignore the global environmental and social effects of the districts' activities. Although this might be expected from authorities that are essentially answerable to their local electorates, it could be argued that we can only move towards a more sustainable society when local authorities 'think globally' as well as 'acting locally'.

Dimensions	Cotswold	Forest of Dean	Stroud	Tewkesbury
1. A diverse and self-reliant local economy;	Covers all aspects	Covers all aspects	Local purchasing	Local purchasing and local production for local need.
2. The protection and enhancement of biological diversity and careful stewardship of natural resources;	Biodiversity; Energy and water conservation	Biodiversity; Conservation of local resources	Biodiversity training for officers; Resource conservation	Yes, but emphasis on local resources
3. Minimisation of the production of pollution and waste; and reuse, recycling and careful management of waste products;	Covers all aspects	Covers all aspects	Covers all aspects	Yes, but emphasis on local effects of pollution
4. Empowering citizens and meeting needs within the community in a socially just way;	Covers all aspects	Covers all aspects	Affordable warmth; Health; Equitable access to services	Affordable warmth; Health
5. Minimisation of the 'social footprint' of the community on the outside world.	Fair trade	Fair trade	No	No

TABLE 17: DISTRICT COUNCIL DOCUMENTS AND THE DIMENSIONS OF LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY

6.6 Conclusions

This chapter has analysed how the concept of sustainable development has emerged at the national level in the UK through the three governments of the 1990s, reflecting the dominant discourses, firstly of Thatcherism and then of New Labour. It shows that the concept was adapted to reflect the government ideology of the day.

Government sustainable development discourse stresses the role of the local level, especially local councils, in its implementation. However, it gives little consideration to what sustainability means for a locality such as a market town, and does not consider the role of the parish or town council in implementation.

The contradictions and flexibility in 'sustainable development', as discussed in Chapter 2, and in government interpretation of the term, allows different interpretations at sub-national levels. The regional documents studied all treat the term differently, in line with their own priorities, whilst purporting both to following national government interpretation and to be consistent with each other.

In Gloucestershire, Vision 21 took a radically different approach to sustainability, based on its interpretation at the Rio Summit and bypassing national government interpretations. This left Gloucestershire County Council with the difficult task of reconciling the two positions in its Agenda 21 strategy and its structure plan. Perhaps as a consequence, county council discourse drew selectively on government discourse, rejecting the neo-liberal economic aspects.

The district councils in Gloucestershire did not take up Agenda 21 with the enthusiasm that the county council had shown. However, Cotswold and Forest of Dean Districts in particular took a holistic approach to local sustainability and, like the county council, included all the dimensions of local sustainability discussed in Chapter 4.

The next chapter will analyse parish and town council discourses of sustainable development in five Gloucestershire parishes.

Chapter 7: Town Council Discourses of Sustainable Development

7.1 Introduction

Drawing on four interviews with town clerks, 26 interviews with councillors, four focus groups and analysis of town council documents from the five case-study town councils, Chapters 7 and 8 take up the concept of discourse as explored in Chapter 3 and apply it to parish and town councils in Gloucestershire.

This chapter will look at local councillors' discourses of sustainability and Chapter 8 will analyse their discourses of their own role in relation to their communities. Section 7.2 will consider whether the national government sustainability discourse identified in the previous chapter is reproduced at the local level. Then, sections 7.3 to 7.5 will analyse the ways that local councillors and clerks conceptualise sustainable development and the related concepts of environmental protection and responsibilities to future generations. The written documentation of the case-study councils (as listed in Table 6 in Chapter 5) will be considered together with the transcripts of the focus groups and interviews². Finally, section 7.6 will consider whether local councillors are committed to the five dimensions of local sustainability identified in Chapter 4.

² Note on Quotations: Not all focus group quotations were attributable to individuals, as it was not possible to be sure who was speaking. Therefore, all quotations from focus groups are simply attributed to 'focus group' and the pseudonym of the council. For purposes of confidentiality, quotations from interviews are attributed to 'clerk', 'mayor' or 'councillor x', followed by the pseudonym of the council.

7.2 National Sustainable Development Discourse at a Local Level

7.2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 6 analysed government sustainable development discourse in terms of discursive techniques and the main and subsidiary themes of the discourse. This section will analyse local discourses to see if they reflect the discursive techniques and themes of the national level discourses. It will look first at the key words and phrases of national discourse and see if they are reflected locally, then at the construction of the local discourse and the ways in which it reflects or fails to reflect the key themes of national discourse.

7.2.2 KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

In the previous chapter, the key words of national sustainable development discourse were identified. The focus group and interview material was examined to identify the occurrence of these key words in local councillor discourse. Table 18 on page 199 reproduces Table 9 from Chapter 6, but includes the occurrence of these key words in local councillor discourse. It can be seen that there are a number of significant differences between national and local discourses.

Firstly, the term ‘sustainable development’ is not used to any significant degree by local councillors. This is in spite of my repeated use of the term whilst interviewing them. In fact, questions asked about ‘sustainable development’ were frequently answered in terms of ‘sustainability’. This appeared to be because the word ‘development’ is associated with building development, especially on greenfield sites - generally regarded negatively by councillors in Gloucestershire, because councils have come under a lot of pressure from, on the one hand, developers wishing to build on greenfield sites in the county, and on the other hand, local residents wishing to protect those sites.

Secondly, the discourse of expertise, at least as used by government, is notably absent from local councillor discourse. The words ‘science’, ‘technology’ and

'research' are used very little; and 'indicator' is not used at all. Councillor attitudes to expertise and knowledge are explored further in the next chapter.

Key Word or Phrase	No. Occurrences		Discourse
	A Better Quality of Life	Councillor Discourse	
'Sustainable development'	289	12	
Community	106	145	Social democratic
Change	102	94	Progress
Indicator	87	0	Expertise
Sustainable/sustainability (not including sustainable development)	86	154	
Efficiency/efficient	80	4	Market
Trade	55	30	Market
Progress	47	14	Progress
Quality of life	35	10	Social democratic
Market	32	70	Market
Partnership	32	30	
Competitive/competition	31	3	Market
Science/scientific/scientist	31	2	Expertise
Social exclusion	31	0	Social democratic
Value	23	16	Market
Technology	22	3	Expertise
Research	15	5	Expertise

note: simple derivatives of the key words, such as plurals and adjectival forms, are included

TABLE 18: OCCURRENCE IN LOCAL COUNCILLOR DISCOURSE OF THE KEY WORDS OF NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE

Thirdly, market discourse is less prevalent amongst local councillors. The word 'market' itself occurs frequently. However, out of the 70 occurrences in focus groups and interview transcripts, 31 refer to market towns, 15 refer to farmers' markets and five refer to street or building names. 'Trade' was used frequently but

usually in reference to local traders or The Chamber of Trade. 'Value' was used 16 times, but not usually referring to market value. 'Competition' and 'efficiency' were little used.

Fourthly, social democratic discourse is taken up selectively. The word 'community' is particularly prevalent, 'quality of life' less so and 'social exclusion' is not used at all. One councillor distinguished 'quality of life' from 'standard of living':

'You can have a very high standard of living, but your quality of life may not be that great. I mean, you might be in a job where you'll earn huge amounts of money, but you work six days a week from seven in the morning to seven at night and you rush around like a dervish and you hardly see your children and you don't have time to relax. Your quality of life is not very great. But your standard of living, your physical standard of living might be very high; you might have a dishwasher, you know, and that sort of thing.'

(councillor 2, Delfield)

The frequent occurrence of the word 'community' indicates the importance to councillors of the social sphere. The use and meanings of 'community' will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Lastly, although local councillors use the key words associated with the discourse of progress, 'change' is often used negatively, whereas in government discourse it is usually used positively. There was also talk of 'managing change', whereas government tends to portray 'change' as an unstoppable force.

'That's what I see as the role of the council. That's what I sort of mean by managing the change. And to some extent, managing things to stay the same. Because at the same time that we're introducing new ideas and introducing new things, [...] you want to hold onto the good things as well.' (mayor, Abford)

The quotation above challenges portrayal of change as unstoppable as well as its inevitable association with progress.

Thus, local councillors' discourse reflects only some of the key words and ideas of government sustainable development discourse. The next subsection will look at the construction of the local discourse.

7.2.3 THE CONSTRUCTION OF LOCAL DISCOURSES

The discourse found in the focus groups and interviews, and to a lesser extent in town council documents, was qualitatively different to the discourse found in government and principal local authority documents. Government documents, in particular, are very carefully worded to give exactly the required message. Local plans and structure plans are also carefully worded, as they have to stand up to challenge at inquiries and planning appeals. Thus, both are examples of the 'technologisation' of discourse (Fairclough, 1992) in that professional expertise is being used to shape language to communicate in a particular way. Local councillors do not normally possess this professional expertise to the same extent. In addition, the interviews and focus groups were designed to reveal councillors' and clerks' underlying conceptualisations in a fairly informal setting where questions were not known in advance, and therefore answers were off-the-cuff rather than carefully thought out.

Hence, the discursive techniques used to shape national government discourses are unlikely to occur to the same extent at the local level – and when they do they are likely to be used less consciously. Nevertheless, a discourse was constructed by local councillors, using key words, metaphors, antagonisms and reference to the past. However, as it related more to the role of the councillors than to sustainable development, it will be discussed in Chapter 8.

7.2.4 ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY: CONFLICT OR SYNERGY?

As we saw in Chapter 6, the central message of government discourse concerns the compatibility and interdependence of economic development and environmental protection and the need to work for both together. As we have seen, this message originated in the Bruntland report and has been developed to become ecological modernisation. One of the aims of the focus groups and interviews was to determine whether this message was reflected in local councillor discourse.

Councillors were asked if they saw any conflict between economic development and environmental protection. Some councillors asserted that the two were compatible, at least in certain circumstances.

'Yes, that seems to be an economic benefit of the environment. We have the finest glowworm colony in the country, and there are tourists coming to it now to see the glowworm colony. Rather than conflict, there's economic benefits to the tourist industry.'

(focus group, Barbridge)

'The Farmers' Market in particular attempts, in a small way, to cut down the shopping miles, cut down on food miles and to stimulate the local rural economy at the same time.' (focus group, Freebury)

However, most councillors thought that there were conflicts and difficult decisions to be made:

'It's fitting all the economics and the social and all those things together, and environment. It's very difficult. And you've got to make up your mind sometimes which is the most important. And I think people are the most important at the end of the day.' (mayor, Delfield)

The prioritisation of the social sphere in the quotation above was typical of local councillor discourse.

The conflicts that were identified were mostly concerned with damage to the local environment as a result of economic activity. Nevertheless, the need for jobs and houses as well as environmental protection was usually recognised, and the desirability of compromise was often stressed:

'Most developers aren't in the business to ... protect the hedgerows. They're there to make money, if they're honest. And there is always going to be that conflict. The thing is to try and work together as much as possible right from the very beginning, so that everybody's aware of what everybody else's priorities are.' (clerk, Delfield)

We have to go along the line of more houses and all that, but at the same time we've got to make sure that it doesn't impinge too much on the countryside. (councillor, 3, Freebury)

The conflict was sometimes linked to conflicting needs and wants of different groups of people, such as incomers and locals or different age groups:

‘But there is a conflict. I mean, on the one hand, we've got to supply building. People need buildings. [...] But, on the other hand, we've got to look after the people that are already here, to safeguard their environment. And to get the balance right isn't easy.’
(focus group, Delfield)

Different priorities, that's right yes. I mean they're the people who say: 'No, Freebury's got to stay exactly the same as it is'. They don't think about all the youngsters and things like that, that need the jobs.
(councillor 3, Freebury)

Thus, councillors and clerks recognised that at a local scale conflicts emerge between economic development and environmental protection. This is not consistent with the central message of national government discourse - that the two are complementary rather than conflicting aims. However, as we saw in Chapter 6, the conflict is apparent in principal authority discourses. It looks as if conflicts can be ignored in national rhetoric but become more apparent when policies are put into practice at the local level.

7.2.5 SUBSIDIARY THEMES

In Chapter 6, two subsidiary themes of national government sustainable development discourse were identified. They concerned the need for holistic thinking and the diffusion of responsibility away from national government. These two themes will be considered in turn to see to what extent they are reflected in local councillor discourse.

Holistic Thinking

The importance of thinking holistically and linking the issues was repeatedly stressed by councillors. It was usually expressed in phrases such as ‘the whole picture’ or ‘joined-up thinking’:

‘Again, I think you’ve got to look at the whole picture before you believe that you’ve reached a good solution. And that is about being able to sustain that solution indefinitely’ (mayor, Delfield)

‘It’s got to be about integration and not having to compartmentalise things.’ (clerk, Delfield)

**‘Again I think it probably comes back to this joined-up thinking.’
(mayor, Abford)**

‘And that seems to be the biggest problem at the moment, or has been. Everybody’s been doing, you know, little bits and pieces, but there doesn’t seem to be an overall strategy.’ (clerk, Freebury)

District and county councils were thought to be incapable of ‘joined-up thinking’ because of their organisation into departments, which were thought not to communicate with each other:

‘I think it’s because the organisations we’re talking about, at district it’s bad I think, at county it’s even worse. It’s because they’re too fragmented as organisations.’ (mayor, Abford)

‘The only thing that I would say, just on that. Is one thing that, as a town council, that we have been trying to fight to get sorted out, we have suffered and I think everyone will agree, in a sense, piecemeal planning in Freebury.’ (focus group, Freebury)

Consequently, there was a general perception that holistic thinking happened only at the level of the town council:

‘There’s so many diverse things putting into it that it’s only here that it actually all comes together, and we have to look at it and make sure that it’s not contradictory.’ (focus group, Abford)

‘It’s all piecemeal and it could have been done much better. And as I said we’re fighting a rearguard action to try to integrate these mistakes over a long period of time.’ (focus group, Freebury)

Thus, local councillors echo government concern with the importance of holistic thinking. However, in emphasising its restriction to the local level, they appear to use it, at least in part, to justify their own role. I will return to this point in the next chapter.

Allocation of Responsibility

We saw in Chapter 4 that governments are often perceived as abrogating their own responsibilities for sustainable development, whilst encouraging others to change their behaviour. Also Chapter 6 showed that governments do attempt to spread responsibility both upwards to the international level and downwards to more local

levels, but without giving any specific responsibilities or powers to parish and town councils.

Councillors were asked how they saw their responsibilities towards the environment, future generations and sustainable development as a whole. The following sections analyse their responses, together with their written commitments to fulfil their responsibilities.

7.3 Responsibilities to the Environment

7.3.1 LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

Councillors' written documentation showed a commitment to the local environment. For example, Abford Town Council's *'Environment Policy Statement'* commits the council 'to take action [...] to safeguard and enhance the environment *within those areas that are owned or managed by the Council* and to take whatever action is appropriate and considered necessary in other areas, *all as specified below*' (Abford Town Council, 1996, my emphasis). Following this statement is a list of areas and issues - all within the parish. In an article in Abford Town Council's parish newsletter, *'The Fountain'*, the then Chair of the Environment Committee shows that the work of the committee builds on the natural environment as a habitat and educational resource, as well as being concerned with the appearance of the town.

'We have also started to put up bird boxes and an owl box in the wood, hoping to attract more birds into the woodland area and also to encourage children and adults to investigate the wildlife right on our doorstep. (Abford Town Council, Spring 2001)

Delfield is concerned with the protection of biodiversity within the parish.

'The Council is concerned to protect the valuable natural environment, and has commissioned a biodiversity study of the parish to identify important aspects, in order that they might be protected.

(Delfield Town Council, undated a)

The biodiversity study formed part of one of the case study projects discussed in Chapter 9. Although the 'Nature Conservation Policy' produced by Gilchurch Town Council does not mention biodiversity, it does commit the council to planting trees, and managing rivers and streams 'in an environmentally sensitive way' (Gilchurch Town Council, undated, p.2).

Barbridge Town Council produced a 'Parish Blueprint' (2000), consisting of 34 policies covering the local economy, the natural and built environment, social issues and the management of the council. Table 19 categorises the policies in this way, paying particular attention to the ways in which the policies are justified. It can be seen that the policies concerned with the environment tend to focus on the built environment, reflecting the nature of Barbridge as an historic market town. Concern with the natural environment also tended to be local.

Category	Number of Policies
Economic	5
Social	16
Built Environment	7
Natural Environment	4
Management of Council	7

Note: Some policies are included in more than one category.

TABLE 19: POLICIES OF BARBRIDGE TOWN COUNCIL

Freebury Town Council's *A Strategy for the Regeneration of Freebury* emphasises social and economic factors, with the environmental aspect being concerned mainly with the local environment. The environmental aim is amplified in the 'Objectives':

- 'a. Reduce pollution
- b. Enhance the appearance of the built environment
- c. Adopt a land-use policy
- d. Reduce fear of crime' (1999, p.7)

Thus, the environment is seen in terms of the appearance of the local area and the amenity of local people.

Councillors were also asked in the focus groups and interviews about their responsibilities to the environment. Nearly all councillors and clerks felt that they had a responsibility to protect their local environment:

‘We do see we have a role in sort of protecting and enhancing the environment.’ (focus group, Abford)

‘If you care for the next generation - kids, grandchildren or whatever, or in general, then everybody has that responsibility. And therefore as a town council, one has the responsibility as well. Perhaps as a town council, one has, one is in a better situation to do something.’ (councillor 4, Barbridge)

7.3.2 THE WIDER ENVIRONMENT

The documentation of the majority of the case-study councils did not show a commitment to the environment outside the parish. However, Gilchurch Town Council had produced an ‘Environmental Policy’ and a ‘Purchasing Policy’, as well as the policy on nature conservation mentioned above. The ‘Environmental Policy’ demonstrates a clear commitment to the environment, both locally and globally, including issues such as energy conservation and ‘maintaining public awareness of environmental issues’ (Gilchurch Town Council, undated, p.1). Perhaps more significantly, the ‘Purchasing Policy’ also shows a commitment to the local and global environment, including a commitment not to purchase peat-based products or products containing CFCs or harmful solvents.

Other councils were not so concerned with the global environment. Nevertheless, although the main emphasis of Barbridge Town Council’s ‘Parish Blueprint’ is on the parish, the council does justify its support for the Road Traffic Reduction Act in terms that could include the broader environment.

**‘Continued high dependence on the use of the car as the primary mode of travel will have serious implications for the environment.’
(2000, p.6)**

The article in Abford Town Council’s newsletter referred to above goes on to allude to a responsibility to a wider environment and to future generations;

**‘Indeed with the falling number of native birds in the countryside, we in Abford are perhaps doing our bit to help birds for the future.’
(Abford Town Council, Spring 2000)**

In the focus groups and interviews, councillors were also asked about their responsibilities to the ‘wider environment’. Initially, interviewees were left to interpret the words ‘local’ and ‘wider’ as they saw fit. They were then encouraged to interpret ‘wider’ as ‘global’ if they had not already done so.

Many councillors and clerks expressed a commitment to the wider environment:

‘I think we all, councillors or whatever, have a responsibility to the wider environment.’ (clerk, Delfield)

‘There are genuine desires to make sure we can do everything environmentally friendly.’ (focus group, Delfield)

‘There’s no point in having a utopia in the middle of a desert.’ (clerk, Freebury)

There was also awareness of the ways that local decisions impact on the wider environment, and the wider environment impacts on the locality.

**‘But I think whatever you do within your own boundaries will inevitably have an effect on neighbours, both near and distant. And likewise your neighbours will have an effect on you.’
(clerk, Gilchurch)**

‘You cannot just look after the environment in your own little area and let the rest go hang. Certainly, pollution does not work on that basis.’ (councillor 4, Barbridge)

However, whilst there was an emphasis on everybody’s responsibility to the wider environment, there was some doubt as to whether it was a specific responsibility of the town/parish council:

‘I think we see that as something we get involved in more overall, not as a councillor but as a person.’ (councillor 4, Freebury)

**‘Well not as a councillor, but as a citizen, yes.’
(councillor 2, Gilchurch)**

Moreover, when broader issues were seen to directly conflict with local needs, local concerns were nearly always prioritised. For example, the amount and cost of car parking was an issue in two of the towns. Both town councils supported free car parking in order to encourage people to use local shops and businesses, even though they were aware that the traffic created would have an adverse effect on the global and local environments.

7.4 Responsibilities to Future Generations

There is little reference to future generations in the documentation of the case-study councils. However, Delfield Town Council's 'Aims and Objectives' do contain a commitment 'to ensure that today's improvements do not cause future harm' (Delfield Town Council, undated b).

In the focus groups and interviews, questions about responsibilities to future generations tended to be answered initially in terms of the needs of the younger generations within the parish.

'I think most of our discussions are about the future, because there are a lot of youngsters in the town and we've had a few problems.'
(focus group, Freebury)

'Most definitely, and the town council has endeavoured to interact with the younger people in the town.'
(clerk, Gilchurch)

There was an awareness of the need to plan ahead.

'But I think you really should be looking ahead.'
(mayor, Delfield)

'From our own perspective we need to look at the here and now and 10 years, 20 years, 60 years down the line, because it has to be.'
(focus group, Freebury)

Obviously you've got to plan ahead. And I would like to plan ahead further than we do. I think we should be looking 10, 20, 30 years ahead.'
(councillor 3, Abford)

Councillors and clerks tended to mention time-scales of ten, twenty or at the most sixty years. However, it could be argued that a concern with sustainability involves looking considerably further ahead than this.

Some interviewees also stressed the difficulties of planning too far ahead:

‘So I’m always a little bit suspicious of thinking too far ahead, because there are so many things that... But you should certainly be able to plan five to ten years ahead. But I wouldn’t have thought, no further than that, because too many things come round.’ (councillor 1, Delfield)

‘But when we look too far into the future it is very difficult to be sure that what we’re doing is going to be effective.’ (clerk, Delfield)

Nevertheless, there was an awareness of the link between protecting the environment and looking after the needs of the future:

‘And of course in trying to look after the environment, we’re into the long-term vision and decision making.’ (mayor, Delfield)

In summary, councillors and clerks were aware of the need to protect the global environment and to take into account the needs of future generations. Nevertheless, not all councillors viewed this as part of their role as councillors. In practice, they usually prioritised the local, and thought of the future in terms of the life spans of today’s children. The next section will analyse councillors’ attitudes to the term ‘sustainable development’.

7.5 Sustainable Development

7.5.1 WRITTEN COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Two of the five councils made explicit written commitments to sustainable development, although neither attempted a definition. Barbridge Town Council’s ‘Parish Blueprint’ contained an environmental policy statement, which began:

‘The Council is committed to the principle of sustainable development and will subject all the projects it promotes or supports to environmental scrutiny.’ (Barbridge Town Council, 2000, p.9)

Delfield Town Council's 'Forward Planning Overview' was concerned exclusively with building development. It began with two policies. The first used 'the principle of sustainable development' as justification for protecting greenfield sites:

'This council supports the principle of sustainable development, and would thus advocate the development of brownfield rather than greenfield sites wherever possible.'

(Delfield Town Council, undated b)

Freebury Town Council's regeneration strategy, produced in 1999 by a 'Strategy Group' consisting of five councillors, listed four aims:

1. A more attractive town centre
2. Managed sustainable regeneration
3. A more prosperous parish
4. A better quality of life for parishioners'

(Freebury Town Council, 1999, p.7)

The second aim was amplified with the phrase, 'ensure sustained regeneration through sound management'. It is clear that the word 'sustained', although it appeared under the heading 'Sustainability', was being given its literal meaning of 'continuing'. Thus, sustainability was seen in terms of a stable economy - an overriding concern in Freebury, which had recently seen the closure of a major employer.

Abford and Gilchurch Town Councils did not use the terms 'sustainable development' or 'sustainability' in the documentation analysed, although Gilchurch was the only council to commit itself in writing to the global, as well as the local, environment. Hence, it appears that use of the terms 'sustainable development' and 'sustainability' may not correlate with commitment to environmental protection and the rights of future generations. It seems that the use of the terms 'sustainable development' and 'sustainability' does not necessarily lead to the adoption of the principles that might be considered to underlie it, and conversely the principles of sustainability can be taken on board without using the term. This can be seen in Table 20, which summarises the councils' commitment to the local and global

environment, future generations and sustainable development as revealed in their documentation.

Council	Local Environment	Global Environment	Future Generations	Sustainable Development
Abford	Yes	No	No	No
Barbridge	Yes, but mainly built environment	No	No	Yes
Delfield	Yes, including biodiversity	No	Yes	Yes
Freebury	Yes, but mainly built environment	No	No	'Sustainable regeneration'
Gilchurch	Yes	Yes	No	No

TABLE 20: STATED COMMITMENT TO THE ENVIRONMENT, FUTURE GENERATIONS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN COUNCIL DOCUMENTS

The rest of this section will analyse conceptualisations of sustainable development as revealed in the interviews and focus groups.

7.5.2 THE MEANING OF 'SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT'

Councillors were asked what they understood by the term 'sustainable development'. Although many councillors found this rather a daunting question, a variety of definitions were produced. There were broadly four categories of definition.

Firstly, a number of definitions appeared to follow Bruntland (WCED, 1987) in focussing on the needs of the present and the needs of the future:

'It's meeting the needs of today without compromising the needs of tomorrow' (clerk, Delfield)

'It's to allow a quality of life for people of the present to enjoy, that won't affect the people of the future, or won't have a disaster effect on the people of the future' (councillor 1, Delfield)

'I think the common view is that we can meet our needs without affecting the needs of future generations.' (councillor 3, Barbridge)

Secondly, some looked at sustainability in terms of resource availability:

'The world has got finite resources, and the rate at which those resources are used should balance the rate at which resources are replaced.' (focus group, Abford)

'You're being able to get your resources from where you are, and that they carry on being there as opposed to doing something where you're using up resources that aren't replaced.' (clerk, Abford)

Thirdly, there was also a cluster of definitions around leaving the place (from the world to the parish) better than you find it:

'To me sustainability is behaving, acting, living in a way that has only beneficial effects on this world as it affects my children and my grandchildren. In other words, you've got to leave the place a slightly better place than when you came.' (focus group, Barbridge)

'You want to leave the place [the town] a better place' (clerk, Abford)

One councillor neatly combined all three of these approaches:

'You're actually looking at the needs of the present generation and how to resource those needs without compromising those resources for future generations. So you're actually trying to address ... the present without negating anything for the future.' (focus group, Freebury)

Fourthly, several interviewees were concerned with the need to think holistically in order to achieve, or move towards, sustainability:

'I think you have to look at things in the round, rather than just look at one issue.' (mayor, Delfield)

Many respondents, including most of the above, looked at sustainability in terms of global issues, and one councillor said:

'When I start talking about sustainability, I'm talking about huge global issues now.' (councillor 1, Abford)

The importance of thinking on a global scale whilst acting locally was also explicitly referred to:

**‘Think globally, act locally is a very important slogan’
(focus group, Barbridge)**

However, other definitions were concerned with local issues and in particular with the sustainability of their own communities:

‘I see it at a local level, I think, [the town] being as independent as possible in providing for its own needs.’ (focus group, Abford)

‘It’s areas on which to build sustainable businesses, shops that can stay open and make a profit and will be used.’ (mayor, Freebury)

Although most councillors and clerks were willing to try to define sustainable development or sustainability, many pointed out the difficulties in defining the term and the variety of meanings it can have:

‘It is a word that everybody knows but everybody doesn’t always understand the same thing by it.’ (clerk, Delfield)

‘Well sustainable development and sustainability means different things to many people, you know.’ (focus group, Delfield)

‘If you ask fifty different people to give you their view on sustainable development, you get fifty different answers.’ (focus group, Freeford)

‘It’s very subjective terminology.’ (clerk, Gilchurch)

7.5.3 THE USEFULNESS OF ‘SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT’

Councillors and clerks were asked whether they perceived sustainable development to be a useful term and whether they thought it had brought about any real changes.

The term was criticised for being:

- imprecise:

**‘I think sustainability is something that’s become a phrase that trips off the lips, but doesn’t necessarily identify what we should do.’
(clerk, Gilchurch)**

**'even the different authorities interpret it differently'
(councillor 1, Delfield)**

- **emotive:**

**'I tend to steal away from the word; I think it's emotive and loaded.'
(focus group, Abford)**

- **inaccessible:**

'I think because it doesn't roll off the tongue, I think a lot of people have problems relating to that.' (councillor 3, Barbridge)

- **overused:**

'I don't know if it's becoming an overused term, to the extent that people are tripping it out but perhaps the real meaning is getting lost from overuse.' (clerk, Delfield)

- **not having a high enough profile:**

**'We'll have to think it through, but we can't do that until we raise the profile sufficiently to get people talking about it.'
(councillor 2, Abford)**

- **nothing new:**

'I think we'd like to say that we would have looked at it that way, regardless of whether the terms were there or not.' (mayor, Freebury)

However, it was also thought to be useful in that **'it does make people think about the wider issues'** (clerk, Abford):

'I think behind every project now, we've all got to think about sustainability' (councillor 2, Abford)

'it did make people think' (clerk, Delfield)

This last clerk continues to emphasise the role of the concept in encouraging a different way of thinking:

'And to think in a different context, not to think about housing and enjoyment and transport. But to get different projects working towards. If they can't really integrate now but you can see that in ten, twenty, thirty years time they will be.' (Ibid)

A councillor at all three levels (town, district and county) went further:

'It challenges you doesn't it? It challenges you in parishes and towns ... it's changing the whole local government thinking.'
(focus group, Abford)

It was also felt by some that sustainability could be misused:

'The great difficulty here is that people talk about sustainability, and they use it perhaps, and this is where it does become negative, to frustrate schemes that they don't like the look of.' (clerk, Gilchurch)

But as I say that [the use of sustainability to justify policies] can run counter to environmental concerns, I sort of suspect.' (councillor 3, Barbridge)

A number of councillors and clerks emphasised the need to be realistic when applying sustainability principles. Although this view came from three different councils it was used to make different, and sometimes contradictory, points. One parish had taken a lot of housing development and had now been suggested for industrial development. The council was particularly concerned with the impracticality of trying to reduce the distance people travel by providing homes, jobs and facilities in close proximity – a central plank of the county council structure plan's approach to sustainable development.

'Well that's all right in theory but it doesn't always work in practice'
(councillor 1, Delfield)

'You've got to be realistic.' (clerk, Delfield)

'Sometimes sustainability is impractical in my opinion' (focus group, Delfield)

However, a councillor from a different council supported the provision of housing and employment in close proximity and so reducing the need to travel:

'So we're talking about for instance having jobs and housing in the same place in the local plan that we talked about. We put that representation into the local plan, in order to try and cut down on emissions.' (focus group, Freebury)

Thus, attitudes to sustainability were guided by local circumstances. The flexibility of the term allowed many different approaches, and councillors were able to subscribe to the term whilst adapting it, or contesting its meaning, according to local priorities.

7.5.4 SUSTAINABILITY AND SCALE

Councillors tended to see solutions on a small scale. Support for the local economy was seen very much in terms of supporting local businesses rather than, and often in opposition to, larger-scale businesses. This was particularly apparent in the widespread view that supermarkets were to blame for the loss of small local traders.

‘Yes. We saw that particularly with the start of supermarkets. They worked completely against sustainability, because they were all built on size. You had to have the bakeries in one place, and the fruit has to come from one source. And what happens is, you then end up with lorries, some of them coming from the south of France, straight up through England, straight up through Scotland. This is crazy. The same with your bakery. You’re having vehicles going miles and miles and miles. Absolutely unnecessary. Local bakeries could do it much better. Local produce would be much done better, at the farm gate. And we’re beginning to see this now, with farmers’ markets. There is a start of a trend backwards to a smaller scale.’

(councillor 2, Abford)

Hence, while councillors may define sustainable development in global terms, unsurprisingly they see their own responsibilities in terms of the local economy, the local community and the local environment. The danger of looking at only local solutions is that the wider-scale effects of local decisions, such as those on the global environment, are likely to be downplayed or ignored. One councillor said:

‘We are responsible for our own corner of the globe. If we look after that and everybody else looks after theirs then everything should be alright.’ (councillor 1, Gilchurch)

The ways in which councillors see their responsibilities will be explored further in the next chapter, which deals with their conceptualisations of their own role.

7.6 Local Sustainability

In Chapter 4, I developed five dimensions of local sustainability. Chapter 6 tested sub-national documents against these criteria. Table 21 below summarises councillors' commitments to the different dimensions.

Dimensions	Abford	Barbridge	Delfield	Freebury	Gilchurch
1. A diverse and self-reliant local economy;	Local production for local need	Need for investment	Local service provision	Diverse economy for economic security	Diverse, clean economy
2. The protection and enhancement of biological diversity and careful stewardship of natural resources;			Biodiversity project		Environment and purchasing policies concerned with energy conservation
3. Minimisation of the production of pollution and waste; and reuse, recycling and careful management of waste products;	Support for recycling and wind turbine	Using recycled paper and printing on both sides Concern with recycling	Concern with recycling	Concern with wastage	Introduced wind-powered lights Purchasing policy concerned with avoiding environmental damage
4. Empowering citizens and meeting needs within the community in a socially just way;	Concerned with meeting social needs	Concerned with crime	Written commitments to 'improve quality of life' and to empowerment	Concerned with meeting social needs	Concerned with meeting social needs
5. Minimisation of the 'social footprint' of the community on the outside world.	Supported local fair trade initiative Newsletter encourages awareness of international links				

TABLE 21: TOWN COUNCILS AND THE DIMENSIONS OF LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY

It can be seen that most of the councils were concerned that the local economy should be diverse and self-reliant, and that the social needs of their community should be met. In fact, concern with the economy was generally based on meeting

the need of local people for employment. However, only one council was explicitly committed to the empowerment of local people.

In addition, most councils were concerned with recycling although they did not generally regard its promotion as part of their role, and there was some concern with energy conservation and sustainable electricity generation. However, in general, environmental concern was related to the appearance of the local environment rather than with the ecological footprint of the locality. Apart from Abford Town Council's support for a fair trade initiative there was also little concern with the social footprint of the parishes.

Thus, it is apparent that the councils were committed to attempting to create sustainable communities in their own parishes, but they did not see their role as being concerned with the wider effects of their activities either in space or in time.

7.7 Conclusions

Although councillors' spoken discourse is qualitatively different to government documents in that it is far less premeditated and 'technologised' (Fairclough, 1992, 1995), some comparisons can be made. In general, local councillors do not reflect national government discourses of sustainable development, although they use some of the same key words. Rather than support the central argument of national discourse that environmental protection and economic development are complementary, they reflect the discourse of Vision 21 and some principal authority discourses by identifying conflicts between the two goals. This supports the premise that the conflicts between environmental protection and economic development become more apparent at a local level.

Councillors are reluctant to use the term 'sustainable development', seeing it as difficult to define and understand. Whilst some saw value in the concept of 'sustainable development', others were suspicious of the way that national government and principal authorities used the term.

However, local councillor discourse does reflect a subsidiary theme of government discourse – holistic thinking. But whereas governments see themselves as bringing the issues together, local councillors see holistic thinking as happening almost exclusively at parish and town level.

The second subsidiary theme of government discourse concerns the allocation of responsibility for sustainable development. Parish and town councillors and clerks tend to see solutions in local terms. They are concerned with the local environment but do not generally see themselves as having responsibilities to a wider global environment. In addition, although they do see themselves as having responsibilities to future generations, they do not generally look beyond the lifetimes of the children of the parish. Consequently, their outlook tends to be constrained in both space and time, and even those councillors who are concerned with the global environment and with future generations tend to prioritise the local and the short-term when difficult decisions have to be made.

Thus, local councillors appear to exhibit a 'value-action gap' (Blake, 1999), as discussed in Chapter 4, in relation to sustainable development. This is likely to be connected with the way in which they see their role as councillors, which will be explored further in the next chapter.

Chapter 8: Town Council Discourses of Role

8.1 Introduction

Chapter 7 analysed local councillors' attitudes to sustainable development.

However, if town councillors are to contribute to sustainable development it is not only their attitudes to sustainability itself that are relevant, but also their conceptualisations of their own role and competence as councillors. In other words, councillors would need to accept not only that sustainability is desirable but also that its promotion is part of their role. Arguably, they would need to see themselves as having a responsibility for the environmental, social and economic development of their parishes, as taking a leadership role and to be open to working with and empowering local people, in an inclusive and equitable way.

This chapter will analyse the ways in which they do conceptualise their own role. A 'discourse of local council legitimation' is identified, in which councillors see themselves as the legitimate representatives of local people, and through which this role is justified by reference to history, local knowledge and the need for holistic thinking.

8.2 The Role of the Local Council

8.2.1 THE COUNCIL AND THE COMMUNITY

Delfield Town Council's 'Aims and Objectives' indicated how councillors see their role in relation to local people and other organisations. Three points out of the six referred to public participation:

- 'To provide a democratic representational voice for the people of Delfield'
- 'To give local people the opportunity to influence their future'
- 'To work in partnership with other agencies and all the people of Delfield to achieve its objectives'

(Delfield Town Council, undated b).

Although it is not clear whether 'its' in the final point refers to Delfield or the town council, the council seems to see itself as a representative and an enabler of local people.

The production of Freebury's regeneration strategy, produced in 1999 by a 'Strategy Group' consisting of five councillors, demonstrates that that council sees part of its role as having an overview of the development of the parish over the medium to long term. It lists four aims, covering environmental, social and economic factors:

1. A more attractive town centre
 2. Managed sustainable regeneration
 3. A more prosperous parish
 4. A better quality of life for parishioners'
- (Freebury Town Council, 1999, p.7)

In the interviews and focus groups most local councillors described their role as representing and looking after, and in some cases leading, the community. In general councillors were very conscious of their responsibilities to their electorate:

'I think first and foremost, councillors should always remember that at whatever level we are representing the people.' (councillor 1, Abford)

'We should be listening to what the parishioners want.'
(councillor 3, Abford)

'Well, we should be a voice for the local people. That's the thing. And it's a question really of making sure our voice is heard. We need to reflect the local population.' (councillor 3, Freebury)

Nevertheless, a few questioned how representative they actually were. The last councillor continued:

'Unfortunately, the council is tending to be on the older type of people, so we tend to reflect what our generation is, rather than the youngsters. So that's one thing that the council is aware of.'
(councillor 3, Freebury)

Also a councillor from a different council said:

'My concern is that it [the town council] is just not representative of the community.' (councillor 3, Barbridge)

However, it could be argued that if councillors are to contribute to sustainability they need to take a leadership role with respect to their communities, rather than simply representing existing views. One councillor bemoaned the lack of leadership in his own council:

‘The town council desperately needs some kind of leadership and organisation.’ (councillor 1, Barbridge)

But councillors from other councils saw the council as having a leadership role:

‘We have a role of leadership.’ (focus group, Delfield)

‘You’ve got to be prepared as a council to take the lead and to do the organising.’ (mayor, Abford)

8.2.2 PRESSURE GROUP OR PROVIDER?

Councillors perceived two ways that councils could contribute to the well being of their community - as a pressure group and as a provider of services. Arguably, both of these are needed if councils are to make a significant contribution to sustainability. Firstly, councils could act as an advocate for the local community for what they saw as the needs of the parish, especially to district and county councils:

‘We’re acting more as a pressure group than decision making without doubt.’ (focus group, Freebury)

‘I think it [the council] can be a conduit to making the right people aware of what the situation is on the ground.’ (councillor 3, Abford)

**‘One estate we did have an influence on, and that was the ... estate on the edge of town. And we actually asked for better improvements there, and we got them in the end. So that's one way.’
(focus group, Barbridge)**

An exclusive emphasis on this aspect of a council’s role tended to be associated with a negative view of the powers of a local council:

**‘You know, you haven't got that many powers on town council, but you've got to give a good sounding board and certainly a good pressuring group, if you work properly and that.’
(councillor 1, Delfield)**

'But it didn't take me very long to find out that in all honesty we have so little power as a town council. I suppose it's more of a lobby than it is decision making to any great extent about the things I was interested in.' (mayor, Freebury)

'One of the great things as town councillors you don't have enough power.' (councillor 4, Barbridge)

'I personally think that there is a great weakness in local government in the UK. First of all, I don't think there's enough power and responsibility resting at the local councils adjacent to the grassroots.' (clerk, Gilchurch)

We saw in Chapter 4 that parish and town councils tend not to use their powers to the full. So it seems that this perception was more imagined than real. Other councillors, felt much more empowered:

'You can do whatever you want, if the public are happy for you to do it.' (councillor 3, Abford)

These latter councillors tended to come from the more active councils like Abford and, although they were still concerned with influencing the policy of other bodies, they also emphasised the second role of the council in directly doing things for the community:

'If we see what needs to be done, we get on and do it and we raise the money and we do it.' (clerk, Abford)

'If its something for the good of the community and the community supports it, then it's right for the town or parish council to go ahead and fund it and complete the project.' (councillor 2, Abford)

They saw themselves as taking an overall view of the town and its needs, encouraging some processes and discouraging others:

'I see the role of the council as being one that, it's looking after the economic and social welfare of the town. Essentially, this is what we are about, making the town succeed as an economic and social unit. And to do that, we have to take an overview of the activities that are taking place in the town, both economic and social, and how those are developing. Now, if you're going to do that, you can't sort of stand back and be sort of an outside observer. It basically requires that you are then going to affect those activities, one way or the other. You are going to try and eliminate the ones that you see as being detrimental to the economic and social welfare of the town, such as vandalism [...]. And you're going to try and push forward the

ones that you see as being beneficial to the town, and so maybe youth provision in the town, maybe promoting events that would actually increase the footfall into the town.’ (mayor, Abford)

‘So you try your best to look after, you know, make sure the good things are kept as much as you can, and you don't let in the bad things, really.’ (mayor, Delfield)

Thus, there were quite marked differences between the councils in the ways in which they saw their own role and the extent to which they felt empowered to bring about change. These differences appeared to be linked to the nature, and particularly the history, of the places themselves.

8.2.3 PLACE AND HISTORY

The five settlements consisted of two historic towns, Barbridge and Gilchurch, two smaller market towns, Abford and Freebury, and the remaining settlement, Delfield, which was a group of villages on the edge of a market town that had taken a considerable amount of house building and consequently had become one settlement. This last was larger than the two smaller market towns but without the facilities that would normally be expected of a market town.

Although each settlement had its own particular characteristics that affected the way in which its councillors conceptualised their role, the most marked difference in attitude was between those representing the two historic market towns and those representing the other three settlements.

The Two Historic Towns

Barbridge and Gilchurch were both historic towns. Their councils had very formal meetings opening with prayers, and during which councillors had to stand if they wished to speak. These meetings took place in the council chambers that had once been occupied by the urban district council. As a result, the councils saw themselves as the successors to the urban district councils, and resented the loss of these councils in the local government re-organisation of 1974.

**‘It should have remained in the urban and rural Gilchurch councils. And that was how it should have been run and how it hasn't. [...] Now after having said that, all the wealth - or a lot of the wealth - of [the] district was taken from Gilchurch town into the district.’
(councillor 5, Gilchurch)**

**‘Then government reorganisation, when was it seventy-one, two? [...] Councillors from further away, the other side of Cheltenham and Gloucester, don't know much about Barbridge. They can hardly find their way round it. But they're sitting in judgement all the time. I think that was a mistake.’
(councillor 4, Barbridge)**

In general, Gilchurch and Barbridge councillors were very concerned with the historical importance of ‘place’, especially architectural heritage:

‘The other thing that I was passionately committed to was the preservation of old buildings and making the most of our environment. We have a very precious heritage here. We have some lovely old medieval streets.’ (councillor 2, Gilchurch)

However, there was also awareness, sometimes from the same people, of the constraints of heritage:

**‘No sometimes we would like to know what exactly we have got. I mean The Forum so-called - huge car park. It wasn't actually where the Roman forum was, as you probably know. But it does put the damper on any sort of development. I'm not against development. I want it to be sympathetic and fitting for Gilchurch. And yet we have spaces in Gilchurch, that are neutralised because of the Romans.’
(councillor 2, Gilchurch)**

In these two councils, in one case mitigated by a very enterprising clerk, concern with the past seemed to form a mental as well as a physical barrier to action, and sustainability tended to be interpreted as preservation.

The Other Three Councils

Concern with local government re-organisation was not confined to the historic towns, but references in other councils tended to be in terms of loss of local representation rather than loss of wealth and power:

‘Prior to 1974, in Freebury, you had [...] RDC and it was very much a council as we are here today really. You know that was a - it was

people from Freebury. [...] But I mean probably on any one committee [of the district council] we've only got one member representing Freebury, probably. Sometimes you haven't got one.'
(focus group, Freebury)

Local history was also important to all the councils, not just the two historic towns, but in rather different ways. The other councils tended to be more concerned with social aspects of history rather than with the built environment. They also seemed more willing to look forward as well as back to the past. In these three councils, references to the past were negative as well as positive.

Different words tended to be used depending upon whether the reference to the past was positive or negative. The use of the words 'heritage', 'history' and 'tradition' are discussed below, with reference to all five councils.

'Heritage'

The word 'heritage' was used mostly, but not exclusively, in a positive way:

'The heritage we have in The Forest needs to be kept.'
(mayor, Freebury)

'We have a very precious heritage here.' (councillor 2, Gilchurch)

'History'

References to 'history' were mainly positive, with a particular emphasis on the importance of local history to a sense of belonging and identity:

'And I believe that everybody needs to have some identity of where they come from. And the problem with when you've got people coming from all over to come and live in a place like Delfield is that there is a danger that you don't have the natural hand-down bit of: 'Oh with Granny, we used to go round here you know, and 'Granny used to get cream slices for tea', and 'That's where Granny lived' or whatever. So they aren't building in that natural history, that our children have been able to keep and cherish and love and never have to think about.' (mayor, Delfield)

'And those of us who became members of the project team felt that our history was important, because people do remember for the future, why the town is like it is and like it was, and why we're

trying to keep it looking nice as a little market town.’ (councillor 4, Freebury)

Both the above comments were made by councillors who considered themselves as ‘locals’, and were aware of a potential tension between incomers and locals. Local history seemed to be used to emphasise their attachment to place, and their greater right to represent and speak for that place because of their status as locals. In addition, there were references to the grandparent/grandchild relationship, such as the one quoted above, which could be construed as representing an appeal to historical continuity.

‘Tradition’

One council was particularly concerned with tensions between the need to move forward and yet to protect the past:

‘How do you manage to contain and conserve the good bits, in terms of the tradition and things like that, without making it into a museum?’ (councillor 1, Freebury)

As in the quotation above, the word ‘tradition’ tended to be used in quite a measured way, either neutrally or with regard to balancing the past and the present.

‘The Past’

There were also frequent references to ‘the past’, mostly comparing the way things are done nowadays (usually better) with how they were done ‘in the past’. This usage of the past compared unfavourably to the present, thus emphasising the idea of progress, was particularly apparent in the more empowered councils such as Abford:

‘The council, when it sponsors efficiency in the town, should best be starting to think about how it can promote that efficiency [...] rather than, as it used to do in the past, shrug our shoulders and say it's nothing to do with us.’ (mayor, Abford)

‘I mean, you know, young people were sort of a necessary evil, you know in the past.’ (clerk, Abford)

Historical Metaphors

Historical metaphors were used to challenge the past and emphasise the need for change. In particular, the word 'museum' was used metaphorically to symbolise the undesirable state of being dependent on tourism and unable to change:

'What we're looking at is trying to make sure we don't become a museum. That's the point, that we've got to look forward.'
(focus group, Freebury)

'But everyone has to admit that it changes or dies. And I think that's the problem with some of the older people, who want to, as I say, keep it like a museum.' (councillor 1, Freebury)

'because look at the NHS – a dinosaur, with the administration not having any grey matter at all, so it's a fossil in the head.'
(councillor 5, Gilchurch)

'They [younger councillors] tend not to be shackled by history.'
(councillor 3, Delfield)

... or in one case, to denigrate an aspect of the present – supermarkets:

'And you see I fear that things like huge supermarkets one day will become mausoleums to our madness ... or they'll become warehouses in the middle of towns because people by then will be using other ways of getting their shopping.' (mayor, Delfield)

Thus, like government documents, local councillors use references to the past both positively and negatively to make particular points or create a particular feeling, but they also appear to have a genuine appreciation of the history of their own communities. In addition, there was awareness, at least by some councillors, of the need to balance local heritage with the needs of the present and the future. Overall, there appears to be a more sophisticated appreciation of the complex relationship between past, present and future than appears in the government documents studied in Chapter 6 - an appreciation that, arguably, is necessary if councillors are to play a productive role in moving towards a more sustainable society.

8.2.4 APPROACHES TO KNOWLEDGE

As we have seen in Chapter 6, government strategies emphasise the need for expert knowledge, particularly scientific knowledge, to guide sustainable development. In

contrast, councillors stressed the importance of local knowledge. They saw themselves as having a unique position in local government by virtue of their knowledge of their communities. There were frequent complaints that principal authority councillors and officers did not know the area because they did not live locally:

**‘Less than a quarter of the [district] council, a third of the council or even less than that represent our areas around here.’
(councillor 1, Delfield)**

‘All of our [district council] officers live away and when we talk about something, are they really taking on board what the town wants, because they don’t live here? This is just a thorn in the flesh with most of us.’ (focus group, Freebury)

National government was also accused of lack of knowledge:

**‘But our feeling was it [the government proposal for Quality Councils] was written by people who hadn’t got the first bloody clue about a) local democracy and b) how local councils work.’
(clerk, Abford)**

Also in Freebury, the government was accused of being ignorant of the effects of returning sheep to the Forest of Dean after the foot and mouth cull, without providing the money to train them:

‘It’s been inbred into the sheep for generations.... You can’t just put sheep and expect them to know what to do’ (focus group, Freebury)

Town councillors also valued the local knowledge of other members of the community:

‘After all, who knows better than the people in that little district, immediately around the [planning] application, what is best? They know what the area’s like; they know how the traffic flows; they’re the people who know if the schools can take 50 extra children; whether they’re going to impose 50 children who will subsequently have to be bussed out. That’s all that local knowledge, and all that has to be taken on board.’ (councillor 2, Abford)

In Barbridge, some of the older inhabitants had been asked to talk to the council to try to determine whether the pattern of flooding had changed. And planners were accused of ‘ignoring what the locals know will happen in certain areas, particularly in Barbridge where we’ve got flooding’ (focus group, Barbridge).

Whilst councillors stressed the importance of local knowledge, they were also aware that local knowledge was often not taken seriously when set against recognised expertise. Consequently, they were willing to pay experts on occasion to argue a case for them. This was done in Abford for a planning appeal on an important site:

‘It was difficult in that particular case in that, you know, we had to hire a planning expert, which we did. So we spent a fair amount of public money in doing that. We felt quite justified in doing it because, you know, it was well beyond our expertise.’ (focus group, Abford)

Generally however, councillors’ approach to local knowledge contrasts with the centralised scientific approach to knowledge in the government strategies. If as argued by Selman (1996), a ‘civic science’ fusing scientific knowledge and detailed local knowledge is necessary for a holistic approach to sustainability, prioritising one type of knowledge over the other is unlikely to be helpful.

8.2.5 CONCLUSIONS

Town councillors see themselves as representing the views of local people and acting as advocates for local needs. Some councillors from the more empowered councils also see themselves as direct providers of facilities. Arguably both these roles will be necessary to contribute to sustainable development. However, the less empowered councils emphasise their lack of power, especially in relation to the urban district councils that they replaced.

Councillors legitimate their position by emphasising their local knowledge in comparison with other levels of government. Occasionally they attempt to combine their local knowledge with outside expertise – a fusion of different types of knowledge which, arguably, is necessary for sustainable development. Local history seems to be influential to the way that councillors see themselves. Whilst it can make it hard for councillors to look at their present situation and powers positively, it is used in a complex way to advocate both change and the status quo.

The next section will analyse the interview and focus group transcripts as discourse and establish whether there is a particular discourse through which local councillors legitimate their position and how this relates to their role in relation to sustainability

8.3 The Discourse of Local Council Legitimation

8.3.1 KEY WORDS

The previous chapter looked at the occurrence in local councillor discourse of the key words of national government sustainable development discourse, and found that only a few of the key words of government discourse were prevalent in local councillor discourse.

In addition, as we saw in Chapter 3, Bourke and Meppem (2000) describe an environmental discourse based around the words: 'community', 'sustainability', 'diversity', 'democracy', 'globalisation' and 'environment'. As this research is concerned, amongst other things, with how local councillors see their role in relation to the environment, the focus groups and interview transcripts were studied to see if this discourse is reflected in the way that town councillors speak about their role.

The occurrence of these words in the transcripts is shown in Table 22 on page 233, in which column 2 represents the number of speech units in which the word appears, where a speech unit is an item of speech which ends when either the speaker or the subject changes; column 3 shows the number of interviews or focus groups in which the word appears; and column four represents the number of councils (out of a total of five) which used the term. Use of the words by the interviewer has not been included.

Only three of the words appeared in the transcripts with some regularity. They were 'community', 'environment' and 'sustainability/sustainable'. The words 'sustainability' and 'environment' appeared in the questions asked by the interviewer, and therefore their occurrence needs to be treated with caution, as

responses may reflect the interviewer's language. We can see from this that there is then no straightforward reproduction of the discourse of environment as described by Bourke and Meppem.

Word/phrase	No. speech units in which word occurs	No. transcripts in which word occurs	No. of councils in which word occurs
Environment	186	31	5
Community	145	26	5
Sustainability	96	22	5
Diversity	1	1	1
Democracy	9	8	5
Globalisation	1	1	1

TABLE 22: OCCURRENCE OF BURKE AND MEPPEM'S KEY WORDS IN THE INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

However, other key words were apparent at this level. Words that were used by councillors and clerks in a positive sense were 'local', 'balance', 'vision' and the word 'green' relating both to the environment, especially in the terms 'green fields' and 'green space', and relating to political or philosophical views.

Thus, if we discount the words 'environment', 'sustainability' and 'sustainable' because they were introduced by the interviewer, the keywords of councillor discourse were 'community', 'local', 'green', 'vision' and 'balance'. The occurrence of these words in the transcripts can be seen in Table 23.

Word/phrase	No. speech units in which word occurs	No. transcripts in which word occurs	No. of councils in which word occurs
Local	159	30	5
Community	145	26	5
Green (environment)	44	25	5
Vision	41	13	5
Balance(ed)	32	14	4
Green (political)	30	12	4

TABLE 23: OCCURRENCE OF KEY WORDS IN THE INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

These words form the core of a discourse that is local in two senses. It is used by local people (in this case councillors and clerks) and concerns local issues. The key words all have contested meanings. Chapter 3 showed that discourse often achieves its desired effect by playing on multiple meanings or shades of meaning of a word. It is therefore important to analyse the ways in which the key words are used.

'Local':

The word 'local' appeared in all but four of the focus group and interview transcripts. In national political discourse, 'local' can mean anything from the region to a parish or a street, but the emphasis tends to be on the county and district level. Apart from its use in 'set phrases' such as 'local government' and 'local plan', in the context of this research the word was mostly used by councillors to mean the town or parish. This was not inevitable as it was also used to refer to a larger area, such as the Forest of Dean or the county, or a smaller area, such as the houses immediately around a planning application.

As an adjective, 'local' was applied to a range of different nouns, including organisations, businesses, produce, democracy, services etc. There were three particularly significant combinations. Two of these phrases, 'local history' and 'local knowledge' have been discussed above. In these cases the word 'local' can be read as meaning more than just a spatial locality. It also has connotations that there is something special and unique, and perhaps even superior, about the history or knowledge, thus helping to legitimate the position of local councillors, particularly in relation to principal authority councillors, who may not be 'local'.

Councillors used the third phrase, 'local people', in an inclusive sense and an exclusive sense. The inclusive use referred to all the people who live in the area – the whole community:

'Don't matter how good a representative you've got on the other authorities [...] the only people really who understand is the local people, the local communities and members who've served on the town council.' (councillor 1, Delfield)

However, the exclusive use referred only to people who were 'born and bred' locally, or at least had lived in the area for some time. In this exclusive sense, locals

were defined in opposition to 'incomers', who were often thought of as commuters and hence failing to contribute to the community:

'And 43 houses on the estate ... were bought; of which no more than a dozen were bought by local people. And that doesn't work, because not only do they work away, they shop away as well.'
(mayor, Freebury)

Usually, 'local' had positive connotations. There were however, a few cases of negative use, especially in the exclusive use of 'locals':

'In this community, ninety-five percent of the people that take an active role are not local... but the five percent of the locals that do take an active role consider themselves superior in some way for some reason – that their understanding of it is better or their opinion is a sounder opinion.' (councillor 3, Delfield)

Thus, 'local' does not always have an uncomplicated spatial meaning. Especially when applied to people, it can have two distinct meanings, only one of which is purely spatial. The exclusive meaning implies a superior right of 'locals' to represent the community, based on their superior knowledge of the locality and its history, although this right is often contested by incomers. Furthermore, the exclusive use of 'local' was only common in the two case-study councils where the dominant councillors were locals. The other three councils, which were dominated by incomers, did not see it as a major issue. Here 'local' was almost always used in its inclusive sense.

'Community':

The occurrence of the word 'community' was also striking, as it appeared in 26 out of the 34 interviews or focus groups. The range of meanings of the word 'community' has been discussed in Chapter 5. On the face of it, councillors and clerks used the term 'community' to mean 'a body of people in the same locality' (Chambers Dictionary, 1998), in this case the town or parish or, occasionally, on a smaller scale. Sometimes this spatial meaning was made clear by the context. In the following quotations it was used almost as a synonym for settlement, but with a slightly more utopian feel:

'As soon as you start looking at rural communities in Gloucestershire, for example, the first thing that tends to go is the shop.'
(focus group, Abford)

'If you look in this community alone, we've got more sheltered accommodation in Delfield than in than in any other town or village or community in the district.' (councillor 3, Delfield)

Another councillor provided a definition of community, which also has a spatial basis and a utopian feel:

'I was taught the interpretation of the word 'community' very early on in life. My father used it simply, by saying his community was wherever he could walk.' (councillor 2, Abford)

Nevertheless, behind the spatial meaning there were sometimes hints of the other meanings. As we have seen in Chapter 5, 'community' can imply 'homogeneity'. If homogeneity is understood to be part of the concept of community, this could put subtle pressure on local people to conform to the expected stereotype in order to be a 'proper' member of the community. Hence, the transcripts were examined to see to what extent the 'community' was seen as homogenous or diverse.

Some uses of the word could be taken to imply homogeneity or at least a common good:

'If it's something for the good of the community and the community supports it, then it's right for the town or parish council to go ahead and fund it and complete the project.' (councillor 2, Abford)

One councillor went further, when he argued that unemployed people should be required to sort rubbish for recycling:

'As long as there are people who are paid by the community, why can they not sort that on behalf of the community?' (councillor 4, Barbridge)

Thus, by talking about the relation between 'the unemployed' and 'the community' rather than 'the rest of the community', he set the unemployed outside of 'the community'. However, this exclusionary use of 'community' was not common.

Other uses referred to the diversity and variety of interests within a community:

'In every relatively small community there are different individuals. You propose something and it's opposed; you propose something else and it's opposed.' (mayor, Barbridge)

'Sometimes they [town councillors] may not reflect the majority of views of much of the local community. You do get a limited type of person [on the town council], you know, it doesn't always reflect the community.' (clerk, Delfield)

One councillor referred with some pride to the way the community has absorbed a diversity of people:

'Well in fact Delfield assimilated all those hundreds and hundreds of houses. Initially we didn't want them. Of course we didn't; we wanted our green fields left. But having got them we now see that it's a real responsibility to better facilities and more shops and things like that, because, you know, it's our community now. And their children are all in our little schools. And they're all mixing with whatever family, so they're all part of Delfield.' (mayor, Delfield)

The concept of a balanced community was also developed:

'I think it's balanced, because I've been in other communities which I don't think are balanced at all. And I think it's balanced in a number of ways. It's balanced generation-wise [...] And you get a good range of – a mix of – community. You get working people, professional people, retired people and it all seems to work very well.'

(councillor 1, Abford)

Another councillor specifically distinguished between 'the community' and 'the town':

'We've got lots and lots and lots of groups in Abford, or which I'm eternally grateful, because the work they do is what makes the town a community really.' (mayor, Abford)

In general, in spite of references to 'the good of the community', communities were regarded as diverse rather than homogenous. This is not to say that prejudices against minority groups, such as the unemployed, did not exist, but rather that the healthy community was seen as diverse, with a variety of interests that have to be balanced. However, the concept of 'community' as an entity arguably helped legitimate parish and town councillors as representatives of that community, and removed the need for them to be more typical in terms of social class and age.

'Green':

'Green' also has a range of connected meanings. Its simplest meaning is perhaps as a colour. This appears in the transcripts in phrases such as 'green fields' and 'green area'. However, there is more to these phrases than simply the colour of the fields or the open spaces. When the word 'field' appears, in the context of development, it is frequently preceded by the adjective 'green'. The phrase 'green field' – often merged into a one-word adjective in the phrase 'greenfield site' - seems to have come to mean a place that should be protected from development. It is frequently used in this sense (the environmental sense) in the transcripts:

'It acts as a buffer to stop there being development in the greenfield area.' (mayor, Abfield)

'They still feel that there should be a need of certainly a green field [dividing two settlements]' (councillor 3, Barbridge)

'We want to keep sort of green aspects in the centre of Delfield if possible.' (councillor 1, Delfield)

'That green area around the town, for instance, I think is invaluable.' (councillor 1, Freebury)

This environmental meaning of 'green' makes allusions to similar utopian ideals as do 'community' and 'local'.

'Green' was also used in the political or philosophical sense, applied either to the Green Party, which was active in the district in which Abford and Delfield were situated, and sometimes, more generally, to principles or ideology. For the sake of clarity, this use is denoted here with a capital 'G'.

'Although I'm a Labour councillor, I'm very much Green.' (councillor 4, Abford)

'I think the Green Party ... have brought this about in as much as they, you know, have brought it to people's attention and got them thinking, whatever we think of them politically.' (focus group, Delfield)

'I don't think as a general flow, the council is that Green or environmental.' (councillor 3, Barbridge)

‘Yes, we [the two councillors who are members of Friends of the Earth] try and be guided by some Green principles.’ (councillor 4, Barbridge)

‘We are very much Green. That latest scheme we put the windmills on the lights.’ (councillor 4, Gilchurch)

This political/philosophical meaning of ‘Green’ was also spoken of as positive, although less utopian. In spite of some criticism of the Green Party (for being too extreme), being ‘Green’ was generally seen as a good thing, with several councillors claiming ‘Greenness’ for themselves, their councils and their towns, as well as for particular projects, such as the wind-powered lights installed by the town council in Gilchurch.

‘Balance’:

References to balance varied in scale from very local to global:

‘I think you also find that when somebody wants a conservatory and the next-door neighbour doesn’t want it. But life is about balance and you have to look at it in the round – every application.’ (councillor 2, Abford)

Well, I think it’s broader, much broader. It’s worldwide. The world has got finite resources, and the rate at which resources are used should balance the rate at which resources are replaced.’ (focus group, Freebury)

As mentioned above, balanced communities and towns were thought to be important:

‘What comes to my mind is, in Abford, all the time, is the word ‘balance’. It seems to me a very balanced town, with business, industry and residents, you know. There’s a broad spectrum of types of housing; we’ve got everything. We’ve got social housing; we’ve got expensive housing. We’ve got all types of business; we’ve got small businesses; we’ve got vast businesses. ... And we didn’t – wouldn’t - want to be responsible – to see anything knock that off kilter.’ (focus group, Abford)

There were also references to the need to balance various conflicts, such as that between conservation and development:

‘People need buildings. I read the other day how many houses were needed. There is a shortage in the country so we got to take that on board. But on the other hand we’ve got to look after the people who are already here – to safeguard their environment. And to get the balance isn’t easy.’ (focus group, Delfield)

This contrasted with the government documents discussed in Chapter 7, which tended to deny the existence of conflicts, rather than advocate finding a balance between conflicting aims.

'Vision':

'Vision' is perhaps the most utopian word of all. It was introduced spontaneously in some of the first focus groups and interviews, and subsequently introduced by the interviewer where it did not arise spontaneously. Generally, councillors saw themselves as having a vision for their settlement, often in consultation with the rest of the community. In response to a question on leadership, one councillor said:

'It's about having a vision for the parish ourselves, but expecting other people to give us their vision so that we can really work out how to move on.' (focus group, Delfield)

This local vision was contrasted with lack of vision at other levels of local government:

'And lack of vision in the principal local authorities also stops you from doing what you are doing.' (mayor, Abford)

Of the other levels of government, only the RDA was credited with having a vision:

'They [the RDA] said: "We'll throw all that [the district council's plans] out, and what we'll do is look at the whole site. And we'll look at what we want to have that looking like for [...] and Delfield, with a vision for the next fifty, sixty, a hundred years probably." And it's been a very exciting project.' (mayor, Delfield)

When questions were asked about vision, most answers were positive and many respondents used the word again later in the interview. However, two problems were pointed out with the idea of 'vision':

'If you get too many visions, sometimes you never achieve anything.' (mayor, Delfield)

'There's possibly a danger that if you have a specific vision you could develop a tunnel vision.' (councillor 2, Delfield)

It is noticeable that references to vision were concentrated in some councils. These tended to be those that considered themselves more empowered, rather than those that saw themselves as simply reacting to events.

The word 'vision' also featured in the claiming (or partial denial) of legitimacy by locals and incomers:

'And, as I say, sometimes the people who have been born here are more visionary for the future than the people who've not been here long.' (mayor, Delfield)

'Well, I don't see that it's my place to particularly have a vision for Delfield. ... I want to be prepared to hear what other people say. Partly I suppose because I feel that Delfield isn't mine, in the way that I haven't been born and brought up here, so I kind of feel that I have to be very careful about imposing the views of. And also I may not be here forever.' (councillor 2, Delfield)

Key-Word Combinations

A test of whether these terms comprise a local discourse might be the extent to which they are used in combination in phrases such as 'local community' or 'green vision'. These combinations are not very common. 'Local community' appeared eleven times in six transcripts; 'sustainable community' appeared twice; 'local environment' is used regularly by the interviewer but only once by an interviewee.

However, if we look at whether combinations of these words are used in the same speech unit (where a speech unit is defined as a section of speech ending with either a change of speaker or a change of subject), we see that some combinations of words are much more likely than others. This can be seen in Table 24 on page 242. A cluster of words in the top left hand corner of the table - 'community' 'local' and 'sustainability' (and 'sustainable') - are mutually reinforcing terms that form the core of the discourse. However, it must be remembered that the word 'sustainability' was in the questions and therefore likely to be in the minds of the interviewees. Thus, there is a discourse centring on the social dimension of sustainability, particularly on the notions of 'community' and 'locality'.

	Community	Local	Sustainability	Vision	Green (environment)	Balance	Green (political)	Environment
Community	x							
Local	32	x						
Sustainability	16	8	x					
Vision	11	3	4	x				
Green (environment)	6	4	0	1	x			
Balance	4	4	1	1	0	x		
Green (political)	3	0	1	1	0	0	x	
Environment	1	1	1	2	1	0	8	x

TABLE 24: OCCURRENCE OF KEY WORDS IN THE SAME SPEECH UNIT

The concept of a sustainable economic base is seen as necessary for social sustainability rather than an end in itself. Environmental sustainability is central only in so far as 'green' spaces provide amenity value. As a result, the word 'environment' tends not to occur in close proximity to the other key words. However, 'environment' does occur with 'Green' in the political sense. This implies a separate discourse of the environment. I will return to this point in Chapter 9.

8.3.2 NEGATIVE WORDS

There were also a number of words that were generally used in a negative sense. These were 'politics', 'piecemeal' and 'compartmentalised', the last two referring mainly to principal authorities and their policies.

Politics:

All five councils used the word 'politics' in a negative way, referring to it as something undesirable:

'We leave politics at the door' (mayor, Delfield)

'I don't believe in politics in local government' (councillor 3, Gilchurch)

'I'm not political in any shape or form.' (clerk, Freebury)

'But politics, if you mean parties, doesn't really actually exist [on the town council], which is very fortunate.' (clerk, Abford)

'It's when politics tries to take over from what is common sense.' (councillor 1, Barbridge)

In contrast, references to democracy, even by the same individuals, were usually positive or neutral:

'Unfortunately speeding up decision making can often mean there's less democracy.' (clerk, Freebury)

Local councils were proud of being non-political unlike other levels of government, which were seen as being dominated by party politics. Councillors saw this freedom from party politics as enabling them to better represent their communities. This was despite the fact that many councillors were members of political parties, and might

represent those parties on other councils. This denial of the relevance of politics was justified on the basis that councillors know their communities well enough to take the needs of all members into account:

‘They’re also much more accountable than the other two levels, because not only do you have to stand for election every four years, but if you live in a town or parish you also have to walk down the road. And I can tell you, you are totally accountable because people stop you in the street.’ (councillor 2, Abford)

However, the denial of politics may help to cover up inequalities within the communities, where some people may have more access to councillors and other sources of power than others. It may also help to cover up the lack of democratic accountability of the councils, many of whose members were co-opted rather than elected, due to lack of competition for places.

‘Piecemeal’ and ‘Compartmentalised’:

The ‘piecemeal’ and ‘compartmentalised’ policies of the principal authorities were contrasted with the holistic approach of town councils:

‘I mean, it’s compartmentalised. There’s certain roles been attributed to certain levels of authority. And certain roles have been absorbed into central government and pushed back out again. (focus group, Abford)

‘When you look around at industry that’s come in, and where industry’s been allowed to go, even down to where public toilets have been built, it’s all piecemeal and it could have been done far better. And as I said we’re fighting a rearguard action to try to integrate these mistakes over such a long period of time.’ (focus group, Freebury)

This legitimises parish and town councillors as representatives of local people, using their local knowledge to form a holistic vision, while other authorities look at one issue at a time.

Conclusions

To summarize, the key words ‘community’, ‘local’, ‘green’, ‘balance’ and ‘vision’ all have a utopian feel, although this is sometimes challenged. They formed part of a discourse through which local councillors challenged the power and influence of

other levels of government, which were spoken of as 'compartmentalised'. Combined with negative references to 'politics', they may also have helped to hide inequalities of power and influence within the communities represented by the councils. Hence the failure of the council to represent the diversity of the community is concealed.

8.3.3 USE OF METAPHOR

Whereas the government documents studied in Chapter 8 contain metaphors concerned with bringing together the economy and the environment, metaphors at the local level were concerned with other topics. We have seen above how historical metaphors were used to emphasise the need to move forward and not 'get stuck in the past'. However, the most striking use of metaphor was the large number of biological metaphors applied to towns and villages, which were routinely described as if they were living things:

'Very complex organisms towns, aren't they?' (councillor 3, Abford)

'Abford has evolved' (focus group, Abford)

There were several references to green spaces as the lungs of the town:

'But at places where you feel the lungs of Abford ... should stay as they are to keep the green belt'. (councillor 4, Abford)

'We have a number of green open spaces which are a green lung, if you will, for Gilchurch.' (mayor, Gilchurch)

Even, when referring to the large number of houses built around a small village in the last fifty years:

'Delfield's been raped.' (councillor 4, Delfield)

Many of these biological metaphors, especially in Abford and Freebury, were about the need to keep their settlement alive, where a living settlement as seen as being one where people can live, work and shop:

'I would like to see more employment in Freebury, which is not manufacturing based. I think that's got to be crucial, otherwise it will die.' (councillor 1, Freebury)

'...we need to do more of a sort of resuscitation act' (focus group, Freebury)

In contrast to the biological metaphor of a living town was the dread of becoming a 'dormitory town' or a 'ghost town' with residents who worked and shopped elsewhere:

'You don't really want the town to become a ghost town, and they're not all that keen on moving shops to residential and things like that, because again you're going to get this ghost town, no shops, just like a dormitory. (clerk, Abford)

Although biological metaphors were usually applied to the interviewee's own settlement, two councillors applied them more widely:

'Everybody says well we want to keep the villages alive' (councillor 1, Delfield)

'Like in all our villages, we're trying to preserve them in aspic; we're not allowing a natural development of our villages.' (councillor 3, Delfield)

Biological metaphors were also applied to the community:

'I mean there's always been a vision to get that developed, that's our new council offices and shops, because that's sort of the heart of the community.' (councillor 1, Delfield)

'So it's keeping the heart of our community alive.' (councillor 3, Gilchurch)

'Those people will link arms with other communities.' (councillor 3, Delfield)

'I think that kills off the community' (councillor 3, Gilchurch)

In this way, towns and villages and their communities were seen as biological entities needing to be kept alive. During a focus group, one councillor explicitly drew a distinction between 'living' and 'existing' when referring to her town centre:

'That we can hand on something that is thriving, still living and not just existing for the sake of that.' (focus group, Freebury)

In summary, councillors saw their town or village as a unique 'complex organism' whose health needs to be carefully guarded, and in need of loving care from those

who know it well. Local councillors, who almost all expressed an emotional attachment to their town or village as well as an intimate knowledge of it, were in an ideal position to provide this loving care. Thus, biological metaphors helped legitimise the role of councillors.

This presentation of places and communities as living organisms could be considered to be a local reflection of Lovelock's (1979) portrayal of the Earth as a living organism, 'Gaia', discussed in Chapter 2. The metaphor, whether at a global or local level, brings together the environmental, social and economic aspects of the 'organism' and highlights their interdependence. As we have seen in Chapter 2 and Chapter 6, this holism is acknowledged as an important part of sustainability. It may also encourage a strong ecocentric approach to sustainability rather than a weak technocentric approach. However, there is a danger that the portrayal of places as organisms may encourage them to be viewed in isolation, rather than emphasising their links to other places.

Less commonly, biological metaphors were applied in a negative way to describe something considered undesirable as a predator, or an undesirable action as a predatory action:

'Now Tescos are diversifying, but they're killing – they're killing everything; they're like an octopus, you know.' (councillor 5, Gilchurch)

'They're killing off our hospital.' (councillor 3, Gilchurch)

'There is still an artery [a main road] running through the middle of what could be a beautiful medieval market town. So its ruined by traffic.' (councillor 1, Barbridge)

This last councillor, later repeated the artery metaphor, but in a more positive way:

'But with the spin off from that artery of people - river of people - the town ought to be doing better.' (councillor 1, Barbridge)

The image of people as the lifeblood of a town was an extension of the biological metaphors for settlements themselves and the distinction made above between a living settlement and one that simply exists.

Councillors from the less-empowered councils applied biological metaphors to themselves to emphasise their lack of power. Here, the negative image of the predator was turned on its head, and having no teeth was presented as a sign of impotence:

'We're a town council, but really have no teeth.'
(councillor 3, Gilchurch)

Instead, councils were presented as powerless organisms:

'There is very much the feeling that those [the principal authorities] are the big decision makers and we are just the worms and it's us that should be stepped on.' (councillor 4, Barbridge)

There appeared to be a general, though not universal, view of town councillors as eager to do things for their local community, but being prevented by the inactivity or obstructiveness of the principal authorities. The importance of being active and decisive was re-enforced by action metaphors, such as 'bite the bullet' (councillor 3, Abford, councillor 1, Delfield and councillor 3, Freebury) and 'grasp the nettle' (clerk, Gilchurch), and the conversely, 'going round and round in circles' (mayor, Barbridge). Action metaphors were also used to describe councillors' frustration at not being able to achieve as much as they would like, with phrases such as 'you're always fire fighting' (councillor 3, Delfield) and 'bashing your head against a brick wall' (councillor 2, Barbridge).

The 'brick wall' was also a spatial metaphor, signifying a barrier to action:

'What we get actually, in a lot of respects, is a brick wall ... put there by the next stage of government.' (focus group, Barbridge)

The metaphor of the 'silo', which arguably symbolised lack of action as well as a spatial barrier, was used to explain the difficulty of co-ordinated action between local authorities and between different departments within the same local authority:

'Yes they do live in silos. You have a silo that is the parish or town council, a silo which is the district council and a silo which is the county council. And they work like that. And even within those organisations – not in the parish because you can't do it really so much in the parish, because the same people are probably on the same committees and everything else. But in those organisations,

those two, there are silos within their own organisations.' (mayor, Delfield)

Thus, there were a variety of metaphors connected with councils, councillors and council officers, many of which were applied in a derogatory way to principal authorities. Most of these metaphors were used to reinforce the image of the parish as a living organism in need of care, and the town council as struggling to provide that care in spite of the unhelpfulness of other levels of government.

8.4 Conclusions: Sustainable Development and Councillor Discourse

Chapter 6 showed that national government and regional discourses of sustainable development tend to prioritise the economic sphere. In particular, the regional economic strategy treats the environment as important for its contribution to the economy. In contrast, town councillor discourse is predominantly concerned with the social sphere; the environment and the local economy are seen as important in so far as they benefit the community. Chapter 6 has shown how government sustainable development discourse, under New Labour, has developed the social side of sustainability, emphasising concepts such as community and participation. Local councillor thinking takes this a step further and views the social as paramount; the environment and the economy are seen as contributors to social well-being.

A concern with holistic thinking, identified as a central theme of government sustainable development discourse, is apparent in local councillor discourse. However, the discourse of local council legitimation portrays holistic thinking as only taking place at a local level, based on local knowledge. This may lead to global issues being downplayed or ignored. The concentration on local knowledge and distrust of outside expertise may also make the implementation of sustainability harder, although there are some signs that councillors are willing to combine the two forms of knowledge on occasion.

We have seen that councillor discourse is focussed on the ideas of community and locality. The discourse of local council legitimation uses these concepts to establish and justify the position of town councillors as legitimate representatives of local people. This discourse is constructed around a group of key words and an antagonism between the local knowledge and holistic thinking of town councils on one hand, and the compartmentalisation and lack of local knowledge of principal authorities and government. The message is accentuated by the use of powerful metaphors, particularly that of the settlement as a living organism.

However, the discourse of local council legitimation, with its emphasis on reflecting the priorities of the local community, makes it difficult for councillors to take a leadership role on broader concerns that may not be prioritised by their electors. In addition, the powerful image of the parish as a vulnerable organism in need of care may focus attention away from its impact on the wider world and on future generations. Thus, even councillors who are enthusiastic about sustainability tend to prioritise the local over the global in practice.

In the next chapter, I will analyse the discourses of other local actors in two of the parishes as they come together over the two case-study issues, to see to what extent they conform to the discourses of town councillors or those of national government. I will also analyse how these discourses combine or conflict, and result, or fail to result, in action over these particular issues.

Chapter 9: From Discourse to Action - Putting Sustainable Development into Practice?

9.1 Introduction

The selection of the case-study projects and the projects themselves were described in Chapter 5. In section 9.2 of this chapter, the projects will be examined from a discourse perspective. In section 9.3, five local discourses will be identified and their attitudes to sustainability will be examined. The conflicts and commonalities between these discourses will be analysed in section 9.4. Section 9.5 will return to the role of the local council and study its conceptualisation by other local actors. Section 9.6 will introduce the 'discourse of locality', an overarching discourse which is drawn on by most of the other local discourses. Finally, section 9.7 will analyse the contribution of the two projects to local sustainability.

9.2 The Case-Study Projects

9.2.1 INTRODUCTION

This section will analyse how different local priorities came together in the context of the two case-study projects. In section 9.2.2 I will analyse the Delfield People and Ecology Project, describing how the discourses of the natural environment and of community came together and resulted in the various activities around the project. In section 9.2.3 I will analyse how a larger range of groups and interests came together around the Gilchurch Traffic and Environment Plan and how they competed for influence on the plan.

9.2.2 DELFIELD PEOPLE AND ECOLOGY PROJECT

The People and Ecology Project involved local people in the study of their own natural environment. It grew out of a chance meeting between the mayor and the co-ordinator of an environmental charity based in a neighbouring town. Although

the town council financed some of the early stages of the project it was co-ordinated and guided by the charity:

‘So I basically put forward the idea of this project to them [the town council] - the framework to them. And to which they were supportive. And yes basically we've been developing the project really since then.’

(project co-ordinator, Delfield)

Thus, the ideology and discourse of the charity were dominant in the design and implementation of the project. As an environmental charity, they were concerned chiefly with the natural environment. However, there was a participatory element to the project from the start, in line with the philosophy of the charity.

‘The education - helping people learn about biodiversity, why it's important to have biodiversity about, and the relevance of it to them was the fundamental point underpinning the whole project. And [we are] very much an organisation that exists to work with communities, and to train communities, to give them the skills in environmental work.’ (Ibid)

Although the project was largely guided by the charity, it is unlikely that it would have happened, at least in the form and place that it did, without the interest and support of the town council. It was consistent with the town council's concern with looking after the parish, and their concern with involving people in the local ‘community’.

The project worker, in particular, was interested in the social aspects of the project.

‘Well the obvious thing primarily is that we contribute to [the biodiversity study], and in a useful way. But then it has all the little knock-ons of [...] trying to get the people of Delfield to own Delfield and care about it. (project worker, Delfield)

The volunteers generally came into the project because of an interest in the local environment:

‘And it was this word 'biodiversity' that caught me, because I wasn't particularly interested in housing development and all this sort of things that you could have discussed.’ (focus group, Delfield volunteers)

'I've always been interested in anything local and in natural history.'
(Ibid)

Nevertheless, they were also concerned with the social integration of Delfield.

'And we're not a homogenous group, like some local places, villages and things. But it [the project] has brought Delfield together. That is really one of the outcomes, which I hadn't expected. And it has made a community of it.' (Delfield volunteer)

Hence, the discourse of community was combined with the discourse of environmental protection.

The project worker was asked if she saw any conflict between the environmental and social aims of the project. The conflict she mentioned was between two aspects of the environment: the appearance of the local environment and action to protect the broader environment - recycling:

'Yes, I think they sometimes conflict. People are desperate to want to appear to be Green. I think that. [...] But people wanted to recycle but got terribly distressed about the fact that there were cardboard boxes by the cardboard recycling area. [...] So you go so far, but not so far. Yes, it's sort of trying to get people to actually do things environmentally. And they'll do the surface, the crust, but then it all gets a bit uncomfortable. And you know they think and then they back off. And that's a real conflict there.' (project worker, Delfield)

The involvement of local people was a central tenet of the charity's activities generally. Thus, it was essential that they used accessible language. It is likely that after considerable experience of working with different groups of people on environmental projects much of the language adaptation was unconscious.

However, on occasion it was deliberate:

'And we've then been updating the wildlife map. Sorry I call it a wildlife map now because it sounds much more friendly to people and encourages them to get involved, but essentially the land-use survey.' (Ibid)

'[lack of public interest] has led [the project co-ordinator] and me to step back and see how we go. You know, are we talking the right language? Are we contacting people in the right way?'
(project worker, Delfield)

In addition, the project's fusion of expert and lay knowledge was facilitated by a specially devised technique:

'And we're developing a special technique as well to enable people who don't know much about wildlife to be able to get involved. Because a lot of people said to me: 'Oh I can't get involved because I don't know anything about wildlife. I'm not an expert.' We say: 'It doesn't matter.' But it's very difficult to get that across to people. So this technique is being specifically developed so that everybody can ... and you don't have to be able to identify species.'
(project co-ordinator, Delfield)

One of the successes of the project was thought to be that it had made the town council itself more aware of, and more knowledgeable about, biodiversity:

'I think one good thing is that we've certainly made the town council more aware of biodiversity. They know a bit more about biodiversity, and I think they think about it more now.' (project co-ordinator, Delfield)

'It's very good, you know. It has informed us in a lot of ways.'
(clerk, Delfield)

To summarise, in Delfield the discourses of the natural environment and community were brought together in a project that addressed issues of biodiversity and social integration and involvement. The participants in the project generally had the same priorities and interests.

Differences of expertise were addressed by moderating 'expert' language and introducing popular terms such as 'wildlife map' and 'blue plaque scheme'. However, some technical terms, such as 'biodiversity', were used by volunteers and professionals alike. Hence, this project went somewhat towards the harmonious fusion of expert and local knowledge that comprises Selman's 'civic science' (1996).

The lack of controversy around the project can be explained by the fusion of two discourses and the self-selection of the participants on the basis of an interest in

wildlife and willingness to get involved in community activity. In addition, the project did not impinge in a negative way on people with other priorities.

9.2.3 GILCHURCH TRAFFIC AND ENVIRONMENT PLAN

Gilchurch Traffic and Environment Plan was a more complex project involving all three levels of local authority and a large number of often conflicting interests. It centred on the improvement of the town centre environment, mainly through the reduction of through traffic and the restoration of the market place.

Agreement: the Three Councils

The instigator of the project was a councillor at all three levels, and the project involved an unusually high degree of co-operation and joint working between the three councils. As well as increasing political credibility, this produced economies of scale that made the scheme viable:

‘You know, each bit in itself isn't really a viable scheme. And then the district council very much wanted the environmental enhancement. And so that's when they put in even more money. And then the whole thing becomes one big scheme that's ready to take forward.’

(county council officer)

The project was co-ordinated by the district council, whilst the county council dealt with the traffic issues. The town council supported the project throughout and also contributed a considerable amount of money. However, the importance of the town council's involvement was felt to go beyond the financial aspects:

‘I mean if they're not involved what's the point of trying to enhance somebody else's environment. It's like somebody else coming along and doing your garden for you, isn't it? And you thinking: 'what, what?' (county council officer)

The common agenda agreed by the councils was affected by national government policy, as the scheme was devised so as to qualify for Local Transport Plan money from the government. This encouraged the inclusion of pedestrian, cycling and

public transport facilities, hence increasing the scheme's contribution to sustainability.

'And things that score for the Local Transport Plan are really ... not so much to stop rat-running, but it's to make the whole environment a lot more pleasant, which I know adds up to the same thing ... and hence the pedestrian activity - so to get the funds for what you need to do. The big thing with funding is also transport - integrated transport, so if you can bring the two together and you manage get a viable scheme.'

(county council officer)

Thus, the three councils developed a common vision to improve the environment of the town centre by changing traffic flows, restoring the market place, improving conditions for pedestrians and cyclists and developing a public transport interchange.

This vision was concerned with the environment in two senses. Enhancement of the local town centre environment, by reducing through traffic and improving the appearance, was paramount. However, it looked as if the scheme, in order to access government funding, would also benefit the broader environment by encouraging a shift to more sustainable modes of transport. This last was described by an officer as 'a very convenient spin-off'. Hence, it was central (rather than local) government policy that resulted in the sustainable transport aspects of the scheme.

Disagreement: the Users' Group

The proposals were subject to an extensive consultation, which won an award from the Royal Town Planning Institute, and a Users' Group was set up to allow stakeholders to input into the process. In spite of this, there was considerable dissent and public criticism.

The members of the Users' Group included in the research are listed in Chapter 6. They had very different priorities for Gilchurch, as shown in Table 25 on page 257. These different priorities are reflected in different discourses, as discussed in section 9.3.

Group	Priorities
Civic Society	Preservation of the built environment
Friends of the Earth	Natural environment
Action Gilchurch	Built environment and business viability
Traders	Viability of small businesses
Access Group	Access for the disabled

TABLE 25: PRIORITIES OF GILCHURCH USERS' GROUP MEMBERS

9.2.4 CONCLUSIONS

This section has analysed the ways that interest groups and their different priorities came together around the Delfield People and Ecology Project and the Gilchurch Traffic and Environment Plan.

In Delfield, the discourses of the natural environment and of community combined harmoniously in a project which aimed to collect information about the local environment and increase residents' involvement in the community. The dominant discourse came from an environmental charity based outside the parish, but was adapted by the organisers and picked up by the local volunteers. This project was non-controversial and did not pose a significant challenge to other local discourses and interests. In addition, the town council already had a strong discourse of community. Hence, councillors found the combined discourse appealing, and it may have been lead them to give more consideration to aspects of the environment, such as biodiversity.

The project itself appeared to be successful in its environmental aim of providing knowledge about the wildlife of the area. Some specific environmental projects, such as the restoration of a pond, had also directly improved local habitats. The project had also increased the social involvement of the volunteers, although organisers and volunteers were disappointed that more local people had not become involved.

As for Gilchurch, its project was more far reaching and had effects, or perceived effects, on a large number of people. In addition, it would have considerably altered the appearance of an historic market town. Thus, in spite of an extensive consultation, it proved much more controversial. The co-operation between the three councils appeared to be productive and relatively free of disagreement in spite of the councils' differing priorities. They were able to combine their priorities in an ambitious scheme that capitalised on the strengths, interests and access to funds of the three councils. This success was attributed to two factors. These were: firstly, the role of particular individuals, including those who were councillors on more than one of the councils, one of whom chaired the steering group; and secondly, the fact that all of the steering group members were local in that they lived in or close to Gilchurch. From the town council's point of view, these two factors, and the enthusiasm of the influential town clerk, broke down the antagonism to the principal authorities in the discourse of local council legitimation.

However, the members of the Users' Group did not share in the consensus. Instead, they saw their own priorities being overridden by councils who were not listening to them. Even when priorities were shared, such as between the civic society and the district council, communication was felt to be difficult. There was also much criticism of the councils as being bureaucratic and concerned with 'ticking boxes' to obtain funding.

It was generally accepted that the first phase of the scheme had achieved a considerable improvement in the appearance of part of the town, but had failed to reduce traffic speeds. In addition, there was debate about the extent to which it had facilitated cycling and walking. The restoration of the market place was generally considered to be the centrepiece of the project but it was also one of the most controversial parts, mainly because traders were worried about the effects on their businesses. The plans for the transport interchange appeared to have been included mainly in order to access government funding.

After the first phase of the project had been completed, a change in the political make-up of the district council resulted in that council withdrawing its funding and,

in spite of attempts by the other two councils to rescue it, the scheme collapsed. However, the withdrawal of support did not appear to be a response to the controversy over the scheme as much as a decision to prioritise other calls on the money. This reflected a feeling amongst councillors from other parts of the district that Gilchurch had had more than its fair share of funding. Thus, district councillors' spatial and political loyalties combined to force the district council to withdraw from the scheme.

9.3 Local Discourses

9.3.1 INTRODUCTION

- The previous section showed that the participants in the Gilchurch Traffic and Environment Plan had different, potentially conflicting, priorities. These priorities were manifested as different discourses, as shown in Table 26.

Organisation	Discourses	Priorities
Civic Society	Heritage	Preservation of the built environment
Friends of the Earth	Environmental protection	Natural environment
Action Gilchurch	Business viability and heritage	Built environment and business viability
Traders	Business viability	Viability of small businesses
Access Group	Access	Access for the disabled

TABLE 26: DISCOURSES OF USERS' GROUP MEMBERS IN THE GILCHURCH PROJECT

In Delfield, project workers and volunteers harmoniously combined a discourse of environmental protection with a discourse of community. Taking the two case-study projects together, five overlapping discourses were identified. They were:

- the discourse of heritage
- the discourse of environmental protection
- the discourse of community
- the discourse of business viability
- the discourse of access.

The five discourses are summarised in Table 27 below. The discourse of local council legitimation is also included for the purposes of comparison.

Discourse	Used by:	Main concerns	Key Words	Metaphors
Local council legitimation	Local councillors	Town council as representative of the community	'community', 'local', 'green', 'vision' and 'balance'	Biological metaphors for places, also action and spatial metaphors
Heritage	Gilchurch Action Group, Gilchurch Civic Society, Some councillors	Preservation of the built environment	'heritage', 'history', 'preservation', 'environment' (usually meaning built environment) and 'local'	Emphasise value of built environment
Environmental protection	Delfield project co-ordinator, worker and volunteers, Gilchurch Friends of the Earth, Some councillors	The natural environment	'environment', 'green', 'local' and various words connected with biodiversity and wildlife.	'taming traffic' but metaphors not prevalent
Community	Delfield project co-ordinator, worker and volunteers, Councillors	Community belonging and participation	'community', 'local' and various words concerned with involvement	Spatial metaphors contrasting coming together with being fragmented
Business viability	Traders, Gilchurch Action Group Some councillors	Viability of small businesses	'business', 'local', 'shops' and (built) 'environment'	none
Access	Gilchurch Access Group	Access for the disabled	'access', 'disability', 'discrimination', and various words connected with being listened to	Emphasise powerlessness of sympathetic council officer

TABLE 27: THE SIX LOCAL DISCOURSES

It can be seen from Table 27 that councillors often subscribed to other discourses as well as the discourse of local council legitimation. This is to be expected as councillors often play multiple roles. For example, a councillor may also be a trader or an environmental activist. In fact, there were many individuals for whom more than one discourse is relevant. Thus, rather than the discourses being discreet entities, they overlap and can be used to reinforce each other.

There were also internal differences within discourses. This was particularly evident in the case of the Gilchurch traders, who had two representatives on the Users' Group because the traders in the Market Place did not feel that the Chamber of Commerce represented their interests.

9.3.2 LOCAL DISCOURSES AND SUSTAINABILITY

The differing priorities of the discourses were reflected in interviewees' attitudes to, and understanding of, the environment and responsibilities to future generations as well as to sustainability itself. 'Sustainability' or 'sustainable development' tended to be defined in terms of the priorities of the discourse. The discourses will be considered in turn below.

The Discourse of Heritage

The discourse of the Gilchurch Civic Society, also used by Action Gilchurch and some councillors and officers, is based around the idea of preserving an architectural heritage. This discourse was very strong in the two 'historic towns' – Gilchurch and Barbridge - but does not appear to be very significant in the other settlements.

The 'environment' is interpreted as the historic built environment of the town. This discourse can include the preservation of the 'natural' environment but for reasons of aesthetics and heritage.

'That [economic development] has to be done in preserving the character of the town and the immediate environment such as the Ham [an area of water meadow adjacent to the town]' (mayor, Barbridge)

In addition, responsibilities to future generations are seen in terms of the preservation of the built environment:

'Interviewer: Do you think the council has a responsibility to future generations of local people as well as the people who are here now? Mayor, Gilchurch: Yes, definitely, yes. To maintain our heritage and we've got some wonderful buildings in the town. And they've got to be held onto.'

In this discourse, sustainability is defined in terms of architecture and heritage:

‘Sustainability, presumably, you are meaning will it be around for future generations to look back and say: ‘Those guys back at the turn of the century did a bloody good job.’ (civic society, Gilchurch)

‘I don't know when the last building was put up in the Market Place but it certainly wasn't in the twentieth century. [...] Whoever was planning it then ... that was pretty sustainable, wasn't it?’
(trader, Gilchurch)

The Discourse of Environmental Protection

In contrast to the discourse of heritage, the discourse of environmental protection prioritises the natural environment, both locally and globally, over the man-made environment.

‘My personal feel is very much more for the environment to sustain our state of the world environment, than to protect the roads and make sure that the lights are there.’
(councillor 4, Abford)

It was the dominant discourse of the Delfield project and of Gilchurch Friends of the Earth. Sustainable development was a central concept to Gilchurch Friends of the Earth members and the co-ordinator of the Delfield project:

‘It's about sustainable development. We are about sustainable development, so everything we do has to take account of that.’
(coordinator, Delfield project)

However, in Delfield, the emphasis was mainly on the local, rather than the global, environment. The organisers of the project were aware that it was easier to interest and involve people in the local, and part of the project involved people studying the wildlife in their own gardens:

‘And then there was also, as part of that, running a ‘watch a plot’ scheme, where people can record the wildlife of their garden. And [pass the] information back to us, and then we can give them information about the wildlife they've got there and how to make their garden more wildlife friendly. It's all part of trying to find easy ways of getting people to start looking and being aware of the wildlife that's around - around in their parish. But also helping to

build up valuable information, which can then be used to work out how to look after wildlife in the parish after that.’
(Delfield project co-ordinator)

Also, the co-ordinator of the project defined sustainable development in terms of the local environment:

‘Well sustainable development is basically - well our mission statement says - if I can remember it rightly - to improve the environment of the Stroud District with the active involvement of everybody who lives works and visits the area.’
(coordinator, Delfield project)

Nevertheless, the concern of the organisers with global issues of resource use and global warming is apparent from some of their other projects:

‘But we were running all sorts of projects with schools and local communities, about helping them to learn about renewable energy and be more energy-efficient, use less energy, produce less carbon dioxide.’ (Delfield project co-ordinator)

Gilchurch Friends of the Earth also saw sustainability as being global as well as local. They complained that sustainability was not integral to the project but the part of the project most concerned with global sustainability – the transport interchange had ‘become fashionable and been tacked on’ (focus group, Gilchurch Friends of the Earth). They also saw sustainability as being long-term, and regarded UK government and local authority thinking as short-term. The five-year project was described as ‘quite a long time-scale for UK councils’ (Ibid). Friends of the Earth members talked of a ‘pure’ definition of sustainability, by which they meant protection of the global environment for future generations, to which the traffic and environment plan was ‘irrelevant’ (Gilchurch Friends of the Earth).

The Discourse of Community

The discourse of community was particularly prevalent amongst councillors. However, it was also associated with the discourse of environmental protection. This was particularly apparent in Delfield, where both the project worker and the

volunteers were concerned with the social health of their area as well as with the natural environment. Social development was seen mainly in terms of creating a community and a sense of belonging to Delfield and a sense of responsibility for it:

‘[The project] has brought Delfield together. That is really one of the outcomes, which I hadn't expected. And it has made a community of it.’ (Delfield volunteer)

As this discourse is so central it is worth looking at its construction. The key words - ‘community’, ‘local’ and various words concerned with involvement were set in opposition to phrases such as ‘individual families’ and the metaphor of a settlement as a ‘dormitory’:

‘It's becoming a dormitory area.’ (Delfield volunteer)

‘Trying to get the newcomers to stop seeing Delfield as a dormitory.’
(Delfield project worker)

The opposition between coming together as a ‘community’ and fragmented ‘individual families’ was expressed in terms of spatial metaphors.

‘Delfield - it's such a spread out sort of parish with bits here and there, and we haven't got a centre really. And we're not a homogenous group, like some local places, villages and things. But it's brought Delfield together.’ (focus group, Delfield volunteers)

‘And there was a picture of all these teenagers. And they're all banding together to save the cinema.’ (Ibid)

From within this discourse, sustainability tended to be defined in terms of communities:

‘I read that in your letter. I thought define sustainability - what does it mean? Community? Resources? Environment? Is it all of these things? I don't think the community spirit is sustainable any more. That's what we've been talking about, isn't it?’ (Delfield volunteer)

The Discourse of Business Viability

The discourse of business viability was concentrated on, but not confined to, local traders. It was concerned with the survival of small businesses, especially shops, in

what was seen as an inhospitable climate. These local businesses were seen as threatened by supermarkets, other large businesses and people's tendency to shop and do business away from their hometown.

Within this discourse, sustainability is seen in terms of sound local economies, based on a diversity of small locally based and owned businesses, often linked to a built environment that will attract shoppers:

'Well inevitably, sustainability requires there to be good economics - requires one to be creating something that people want to be involved in, come and see, an environment in which they will shop, an environment in which they're happy to live or to work.'
(Action Gilchurch)

The Discourse of Access

The discourse of access was a very specific discourse from the Gilchurch Access Group, most of whose members had disabilities and all of whom were concerned about access to shops and other facilities in Gilchurch for disabled people:

'One of our main objectives is to try and make sure we are not discriminated against, and that we follow the law to the very letter.'
(focus group, Gilchurch Access Group)

A distinctive feature of the discourse is the attitude to knowledge and expertise. Most members of the group felt that only the disabled could really have expertise in disability. Their 'experienced' knowledge was contrasted with that of people who could charge a lot of money for 'putting themselves up as experts':

'I think that too often now, too many people and too many higher-paid people put it upon themselves as experts. Well they're not. Unless they've got a disability, they're not an expert.' (Ibid)

The discourse of access is rather different to the other discourses discussed. Firstly, although concerned with the local, it makes unfavourable comparisons with other places; secondly, it shows less overlap with the other discourses; and thirdly, the Access Group did not attempt to define sustainability in terms of their discourse, rather, they questioned whom it would benefit.

‘Sustainability for the business people or for the disabled.’ (Ibid)

9.4 Discursive Interaction

9.4.1 INTRODUCTION

It can be seen from Table 26 that each discourse had a different priority. There were occasions where these priorities reinforced and occasions when they clashed. Table 25 shows that four of the discourses identified above are present in the Users’ Group. This gives six possible interdiscursive ‘combinations’ as shown in Figure 21. These ‘combinations’ may be positive or negative. That is, the discourses may clash or reinforce, depending on the circumstances. I will look at each combination in turn.

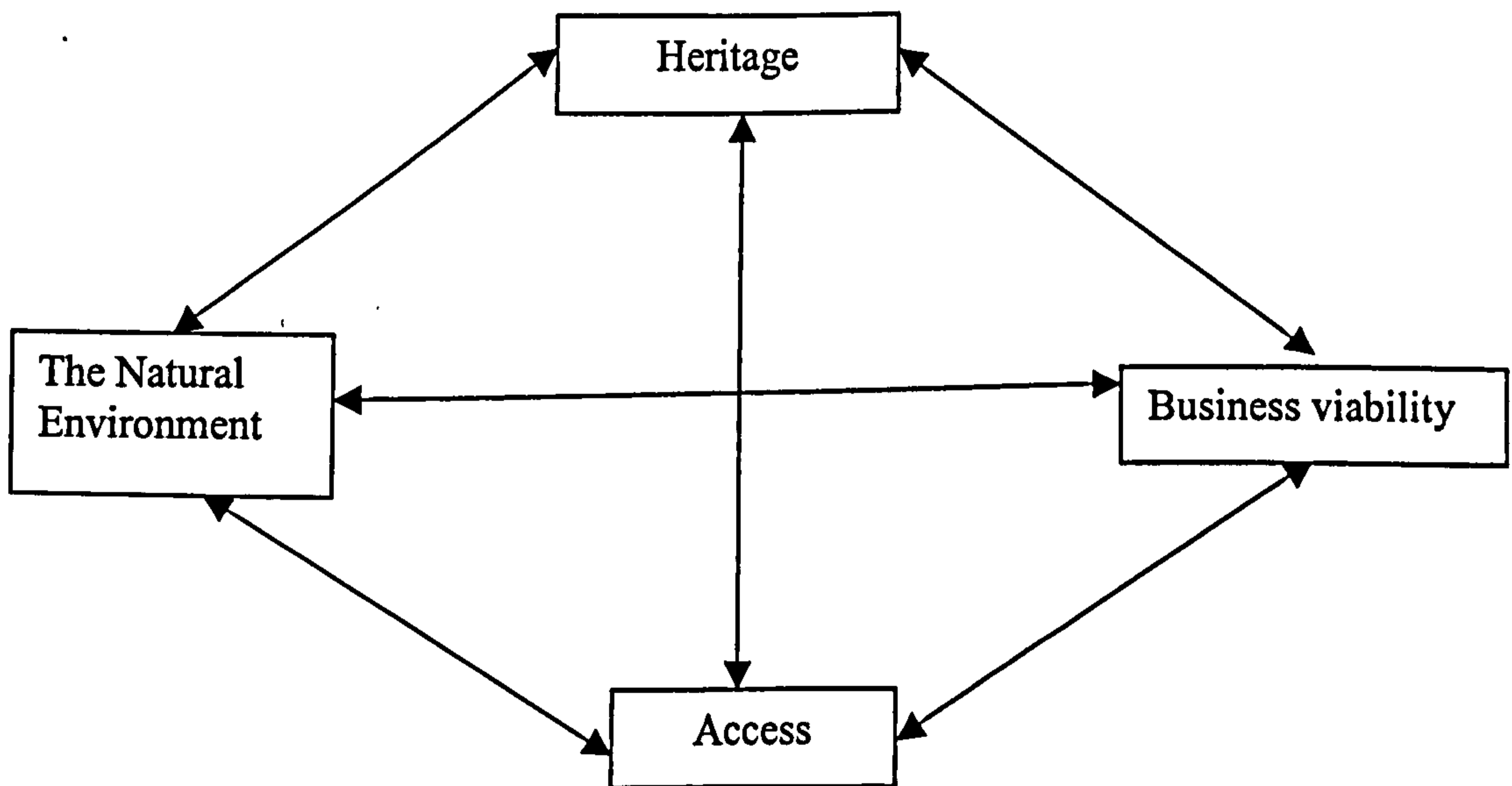


FIGURE 21: POSSIBLE INTERDISCURSIVE ‘COMBINATIONS’

9.4.2 COMPARING THE DISCOURSES

Heritage and Business Viability

These two discourses were largely complementary, and were combined by Action Gilchurch. Preservation and enhancement of the built environment was felt to attract more people into the town and hence to be good for business:

‘Sustainability requires there to be good economics - requires one to be creating something that people want to be involved in, come and see, an environment in which they will shop, an environment in which they’re happy to live or to work. So the answer is: yes, I think it [the traffic and environment plan] does significantly improve that environment, and therefore improve the economics.’

(Action Gilchurch)

‘The economic benefit will be the improvement in the environment [...]. Basically you can see it capitalising on an asset that we already have, which is a pleasant, relatively well-appointed well-shopped place, you know, for people to come to.’ (Chamber of Commerce)

Also, there is an undercurrent of wanting to return to a traditional economy based on a large number of independent traders and other businesses, which existed before the advent of out-of-town superstores. Conversely, small local businesses were regarded as part of the town’s tradition and contributed to the traditional appearance.

However, the two discourses clashed over the traffic and environment plan because traders were worried that by reducing traffic and parking spaces the plan would reduce the number of shoppers.

‘The main aim of the [plan] is to quotes 'remove through traffic' or get rid of the through traffic rat-running through Gilchurch. My own feeling is, and I think I do represent the Chamber of Commerce's, that's not a particular problem. Traffic coming into and through the town centre is, in some respects, is its lifeblood. And to cut that off is not easy. It would be a potentially difficult thing to do.’ (trader, Gilchurch)

Business Viability and Access

Members of Gilchurch Access Group were quite critical of local business people; whom they accused of not having disabled access, and of blocking the pavement with their goods:

‘Fifty percent of the shops are inaccessible. We counted up from our guide.’ (Gilchurch Access Group)

‘We've got a problem in Gilchurch with people putting things out in front of their premises.’ (Ibid)

Whilst some members implied that this was bad for local business as disabled people were shopping elsewhere, one member pointed out that it was not commercially advantageous to free the space necessary for wheelchair users:

‘I worked in business and commerce for many years as managing department stores and whatever. And I can tell you from roots level, they say: 'We don't want them in here.' A wheelchair takes up the space of five people. You have to realign your stand. Your percentage turnover per floor cubic foot goes down.’ (Ibid)

Thus, there appears to have been a conflict between business viability and access.

Access and Heritage

There were also problems reconciling access and heritage. Gilchurch had a large number of historic public buildings that did not have disabled access. Members of the access group felt that heritage was prioritised and elderly and disabled people were ignored in Gilchurch:

‘Gilchurch does not have any old people. They do not exist. Gilchurch does not have any disabled people. We do not exist. Gilchurch is an old-fashioned 1930s town. That's it. And that's the way they think of it, yes.’ (Ibid)

Environmental Protection and Business Viability

Although, the discourse of environmental protection was dominant in Delfield, in Gilchurch it was mainly limited to the Friends of the Earth group. Like traders, this group saw encouraging people to shop locally as part of sustainability.

However, when asked what they hoped to achieve from their involvement with the project, their replies covered 'improving the environment' and, more specifically, the promotion of cycling and walking and the 'taming' of traffic.

Traffic was a central concern of the project and the ways in which it is metaphorised provide a useful comparison between the discourses. The depiction of traffic as a wild animal needing to be controlled conflicts with the discourse of business viability which, although even traders talked of stopping 'rat-runs', generally metaphorises traffic in a positive way, portraying it as benign and essential for the health of Gilchurch:

'Traffic coming into and through the town centre, in some respects, is its life blood.' (trader, Gilchurch)

Environmental Protection and Heritage

There was also conflict between the protection of heritage and the built environment and protection of the natural environment. The traffic and environment plan was criticised as giving too much weight to the built environment.

'The improvement is cosmetic' (focus group, FoE)

The aim of reducing the amount of traffic and providing a 'better deal for pedestrians and cyclists' (Ibid) was felt not to have been fulfilled.

Environmental Protection and Access

There was no perceived clash or commonality between the discourses of access and the natural environment. Although the Friends of the Earth Group was concerned with access for pedestrians in general, they made no specific mention of access for the disabled. Similarly, the Access Group did not mention the word 'environment', even when asked about sustainability.

9.4.3 INTERDISCURSIVE COMMUNICATION

When two groups of people use different discourses, this is likely to make it difficult for them to understand each other's position. Communication between discourses is harder because they are based on different assumptions and different

priorities, and because words like 'sustainability' and 'environment' are interpreted differently.

There were many comments about difficulty of communication. In particular, people in power were thought not to be listening. For example, the following conversation took place in the focus group with Gilchurch Access Group:

'Can I just say though it was the council that asked to come to us on two occasions. [X] and [Y] came twice at their request.'

'And then they never took any notice, did they?'

'And then they didn't listen, no.'

'No, we all wasted our time.'

(Gilchurch Access Group)

This echoes the feeling amongst some councillors that principal authorities don't listen to them.

However, this was not the only source of communication problems. For example, Gilchurch Civic Society had difficulty communicating with the district council, although both were committed to preservation.

'I think what we experienced was that we were continuously alienated really and marginalized in the procedure.' (Gilchurch Civic Society)

One of the complaints of the Civic Society was about the mode of communication, or the genre, rather than the discourse, of the council. The Civic Society did not consider a computer simulation to be an adequate response to worries about the appearance of a proposed work of art.

'They put forward a scheme for a steel arch, which was an upside down masonry arch. My feeling, and I think probably the case with many of the members, was that this should be resisted but tactfully. So our initial charge was to say that we wanted more detail of how this could be achieved and how we could be assured, you know, that it would weather well. To that we got nothing but computer simulations, which didn't really satisfy.' (Gilchurch Civic Society)

9.5 Local Discourses and the Role of the Town Council

9.5.1 THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL COUNCIL AS SEEN BY OTHER DISCOURSES

I argued above that the ways in which local councillors see their own role are relevant to their ability to contribute to sustainability. In addition, if they are to lead their communities towards a more sustainable future, it is necessary that other members of the community see local councils as potential leaders.

Chapter 8 analysed the ways in which town councillors saw their own role in relation to the development of their community. Other local actors generally saw the role of the town council quite negatively. Some participants thought that the town council was not filling the role that perhaps it could or should. Both the representativeness of the local council and its leadership role were questioned:

‘In my view, the town council's done nothing to help the Access Group.’ (Gilchurch Access Group)

**‘I don't particularly feel represented by the town council.’
(Gilchurch trader)**

‘It could be a town council role. But the town council wasn't taking that lead. So I think it's really filling a gap that if you had a strong very pro-active youngish, forward-thinking town council, you might have found that there.’ (Action Gilchurch)

Other participants clearly had not thought about the role of the town council at all, but when asked did not consider it a significant actor.

However, principal authority councillors and officers had a different view. They spoke of the importance of the town council's involvement in the Gilchurch Traffic and Environment Plan:

‘It certainly couldn't have been done as well without them. I mean I wouldn't have liked to have done it without them, because, you know, they've got to be involved.’ (county council officer)

**‘The town council's probably, as you are aware, they've kept an amount in as a player really, which has always been very helpful.’
(district council officer)**

In addition, one county councillor justified the role of the town council in terms that could be considered part of the discourse of local council legitimation:

‘And they have made a useful contribution throughout, yes - the town council. No, I mean it's been important, because they're closest to the people, quite honestly.’ (county councillor)

9.5.2 THE ROLE OF THE COUNCILS IN GILCHURCH

The partnership of the three councils in Gilchurch was faced with the task of reconciling different, and sometimes conflicting, discourses and priorities. Their attempts were criticised from all sides, with all the groups being dissatisfied with the priority given to their particular issue:

‘When you've got to bloody well go somewhere else to do your shopping just because the [district] council are too mean to put in a shopmobility. And that's what it boils down to. They had their offices done. Oh yes.’ (Gilchurch Access Group)

In particular, they were accused of prioritising aesthetic aspects of the scheme:

‘The council's desire to improve aesthetics has been over-riding.’
(Gilchurch Friends of the Earth)

Indeed, the appearance of the built environment did seem to be the district council's priority:

‘And then the district very much want the environmental enhancement. And so that's when they put in even more money.’
(county councillor)

In addition, the district council officer responsible for the project clearly saw it in this way, talking of improving ‘the overall appearance of the public realm’; although she thought councillors saw the project as being more about ‘roads and traffic’:

In spite of the district council's emphasis on the built environment, the Civic Society did not always support them. As we have seen above, the Civic Society saw their relationship with the district council as problematic. Although they were keen to improve this, they appeared to view the Users' Group as in opposition to the

councils, talking of 'the combination of the town council, district council and the county council who were on one side, and then the various users, which were ... on the other' (Gilchurch Civic Society).

On the other hand, the Action Group was supportive of the district council, but accused the county council highways department of being ruled by bureaucracy:

'I think so far as [the district council] is concerned, I'm a full supporter of what they've done and what they've achieved.
(Action Gilchurch)

'I think one has to have a suspicion that the county council is very much ruled - and that's the highways department - is ruled by the highways book. [...] and I think it's been difficult to get the compromise necessary from the Highways Authority.' (Ibid)

Other groups also complained about bureaucracy:

'I think the problem is - people who are willing to help us, like [a council officer]- he's up against a bureaucracy that governs what he can and can't do.' (Gilchurch Access Group)

In particular, there were several references to 'ticking boxes':

'X referred to a ticking boxes the other day at a user's meeting, that if you don't tick these boxes -to provide coach interchanges and cycle lanes and so on - you don't get central government funding.'
(Gilchurch Civic Society)

'I think it is a tick the box exercise.' (district councillor)

Councillors were also criticised for being parochial and for not understanding sustainability;

'There's 115 parish councils and the members [of the district council] tend to look towards their roots.' (council officer in focus group with Gilchurch Access Group)

'Most council members don't have much idea [about sustainability]'
(Gilchurch Friends of the Earth)

In contrast to the other local groups, councillors and officers saw the project as progressing satisfactorily, even if it had not achieved all that was hoped for.

‘Well it's certainly enhanced the environment all around the bit that we've done. It's provided a lot better pedestrian facilities, particularly going to the museum.’ (county council officer)

**‘What it hasn't done unfortunately is slow the traffic down by much.’
(Ibid)**

They were enthusiastic about the co-operation that had been achieved between the councils, and about the expected outcomes of the project.

‘It's been supported the whole way through by officers and other members.’ (county councillor)

**‘Well we are all driving in the same direction, which is good.’
(county council officer)**

**‘The environmental gain in terms of the aesthetics - in terms of the overall appearance of the public realm, means that people can be proud to walk through and have a memorable journey.’
(district council officer)**

Thus, although councils were criticised by local groups for not giving enough priority to particular issues, they saw themselves as balancing different views and achieving a general consensus of support.

9.6 Towards a Discourse of Locality

We have seen that there are commonalities, as well as differences, between discourses. Indeed, many individuals subscribed to more than one discourse. For example, there were councillors who subscribed to the discourse of heritage or the discourse of business viability as well as the discourse of representation. This is not surprising, as many councillors play more than one role in the community; a councillor may be a member of a pressure group or run his or her own business.

In addition, different discourses share some common assumptions and use some of the same key words and metaphors. For example, we saw that the key word ‘community’ is common to both the discourse of representation and the discourse of

community. The word 'environment' is also common to a number of discourses, although with different meanings. In addition, both the discourse of representation and the discourse of access portray principal authorities as failing to listen.

However, the factor that is common to all the discourses, with the possible exception of the discourse of access, is an attachment to locality. The discourses appear to be united by, or to exist within, a broader discourse of locality, based around the uniqueness and the importance of their settlement and its surroundings. This discourse of locality is employed in various ways to reinforce the more specific discourses above. But it also forms a uniting theme, facilitating communication. For example, in explaining the successful co-operation between councils in the Gilchurch Traffic and Environment Plan, the county council officer said:

'Personalities have been a big part of it. We all sort of live and work around Gilchurch and have done for years. That probably helps. There's no sort of outsiders coming in to it.'

Thus, the six local discourses can be viewed as partially overlapping and existing within a broader discourse of locality. This is indicated diagrammatically in Figure 22 on page 276, in which the degree of overlap is indicative rather than precisely calculated. The dotted lines represent permeable discursive boundaries, through which ideas and concepts can be communicated and integrated into the different discourses. It can be seen that the discourses overlap in a complex way, but are mostly contained within an overarching discourse of locality.

Two discourses, the discourse of the natural environment and the discourse of access, extend outside the discourse of locality. In the case of the discourse of the natural environment this is because at least some of the adherents of this discourse are concerned with the global environment. The discourse of access is less firmly anchored within the discourse of locality, as it does not portray the attachment to place that is a core part of the other discourses, but rather makes unfavourable comparisons with other places that make better provision for people with disabilities.

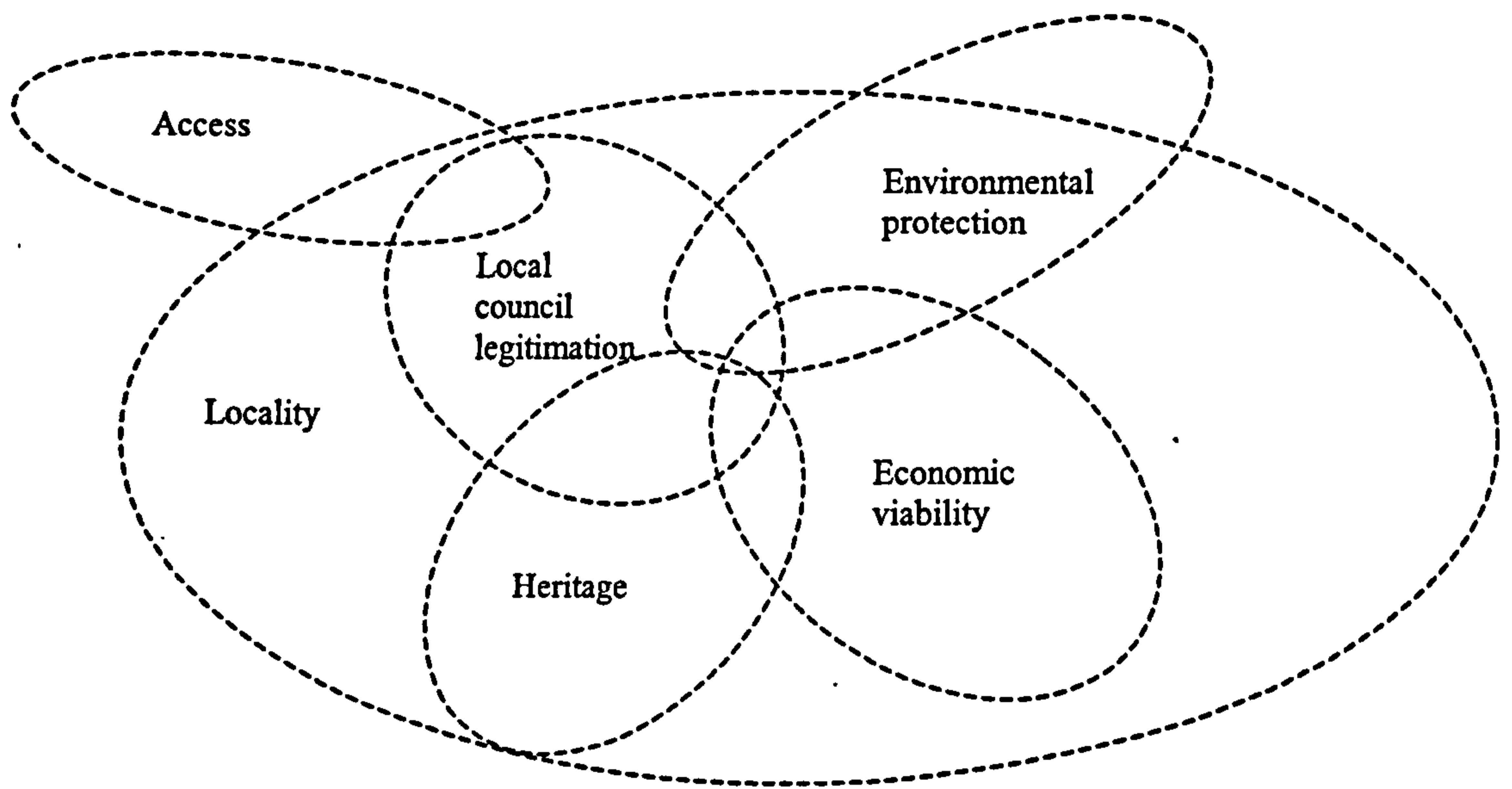


FIGURE 22: OVERLAPPING DISCOURSES

9.7 From Action to Sustainability?

9.7.1 INTRODUCTION

The two case-study projects were chosen, in part, for their potential to contribute to local sustainability. This section will consider the extent to which they meet the dimensions of local sustainability developed in Chapter 5, and reproduced below.

1. A diverse and self-reliant local economy
2. The protection and enhancement of biological diversity and careful stewardship of natural resources
3. Minimisation of the production of pollution and waste; and reuse, recycling and careful management of waste products
4. Empowering citizens and meeting needs within the community in a socially just way
5. Minimisation of the 'social footprint' of the community on the outside world.

9.7.2 DELFIELD PEOPLE AND ECOLOGY PROJECT

As we have seen above, the Delfield People and Ecology Project was guided by an environmental charity. Sustainable development was central to the philosophy of the charity, and was interpreted in environmental and social terms with a particular emphasis on empowerment:

‘It’s about sustainable development. We are about sustainable development, so everything we do has to take account of that. But obviously there are a huge different number of different ways of trying to make sustainable development happen. And our purpose is very definitely on empowerment really. It’s giving people the skills - and the knowledge.’ (project co-ordinator, Delfield)

This commitment was encapsulated in their mission statement ‘to improve the environment of the Stroud District with the active involvement of everybody who lives works and visits the area’ (Ibid). Most of the charity’s work centred on involving people in the preservation and improvement of local habitats. However, they had also done projects on energy use and were contemplating one on recycling. Consequently, their work covered dimension 2 of local sustainability and part of dimension 4.

We saw in Chapter 7 that Delfield Town Council’s written documents did not mention sustainable development or sustainability. Nevertheless, they did have commitments to the empowerment of local people and ‘to ensure that today’s improvements do not cause future harm’. The interviews and focus group showed that they were also committed to protecting the local environment, and recognised the needs for local service provision and local jobs.

Hence, the discourses of the charity and the town council had different emphases but common concerns with the local environment and with the empowerment and involvement of local people. The project volunteers were self-selecting for a concern for the local environment and were also concerned with social factors. These concerns came together in the project, which was successful in increasing knowledge of the local environment and improving specific habitats. It also led to the involvement of a group of local people, although this group was not as large as the organisers had hoped. Overall, the project had a positive effect on these aspects

of sustainability. As it did not have a significant negative impact on any of the other dimensions, it could be said to have a net positive effect.

9.7.3 GILCHURCH TRAFFIC AND ENVIRONMENT PLAN

As we have seen, the Gilchurch project was more complex, impacted on more people and involved conflicting priorities and discourses.

Although all three councils were committed to sustainability, at least on paper, the project was not generally seen in those terms:

‘Interviewer: So it's not really thought of ... in terms of say contribution to global warming and that side.

Officer: No. I mean that's a very convenient spin-off if it is, but no I've thought of it that way, but no.’ (county council officer)

Rather, it was seen as removing through traffic and improving the town centre environment, both by enhancing the appearance and by reducing air pollution. The sustainable transport input to the plan, consisting of cycle lanes and the proposed public transport interchange, were added in order to gain access to government funding. Thus, it was national, rather than local, government policy that brought this element into the plan. However, it was then backed by the councils, and the transport interchange was the element of the plan to which the town council contributed financially.

The Users’ Group members, each of whom had their own interests and discourses, contested the project and the role of the councils. Of the Users’ Group members, only Gilchurch Friends of the Earth claimed a commitment to sustainability. Nevertheless, the priorities and discourses of the other organisations could be considered dimensions of sustainability. For example, traders were concerned with the health of local businesses, an aspect of economic sustainability; and the Access Group was concerned with access for the disabled, a constituent of social sustainability and of equity. Table 28 on page 279 shows the five dimensions of local sustainability and the groups that were concerned with those dimensions.

Dimension of Local Sustainability	Organisation	Specific Interest*
A diverse and self-reliant local economy	Traders Action Gilchurch	Health of local businesses
The protection and enhancement of biological diversity and careful stewardship of natural resources	Friends of the Earth	
Minimisation of the production of pollution and waste; and reuse, recycling and careful management of waste products	Friends of the Earth Councils	Reduction of local air pollution
Empowering citizens and meeting needs within the community in a socially just way	Access group Councils	Access for disabled Meeting transport needs
Minimisation of the 'social footprint' of the community on the outside world.	None of the groups	

* where this is more specific than the dimension of sustainability

TABLE 28: ORGANISATIONS IN GILCHURCH AND THE DIMENSIONS OF LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY

The preservation of the built environment in line with the discourse of heritage - arguably the dominant discourse of the project - does not appear in Table 27, as it does not directly contribute to any of the dimensions of sustainability. However, it could be argued that heritage contributes to a sense of belonging and hence to social sustainability, and also that it contributes to the local economy by attracting people to the town.

In order to see if these discourses came together to result in a project with a positive contribution to sustainability, it is necessary to look at the outcomes of the project itself. In the event, only the first phase of the plan was implemented before the district council withdrew its funding. This phase resulted in a marked improvement to the appearance of the part of the town in which it took place. It also resulted in broader pavements and cycle lanes, facilitating cycling and walking. On the other hand, there were complaints about the design of the cycle lanes and difficulty for pedestrians in crossing the road. This may have been in part because it did not achieve the hoped for reduction in traffic speeds.

As the project did not have any significant negative impacts on other dimensions of sustainability, it could be judged to have contributed positively overall. However, for the amount of money, time and effort involved, the impact might be judged to be small. Had it been completed, it would have had a much more far-reaching impact on the sustainability of Gilchurch. It is likely that the overall effect would have been positive, although there were worries that it might impact negatively on economic sustainability.

9.8 Conclusions: Local Discourses and Sustainability

Five discourses have been identified, existing within an overarching discourse of locality. They are:

- the discourse of business viability
- the discourse of heritage
- the discourse of the environmental protection
- the discourse of community
- the discourse of access

These five discourses and the discourse of local council legitimation interact and can either reinforce each other or conflict depending upon the circumstances. Any individual or group can subscribe to more than one discourse.

In Delfield, the discourses of community and the natural environment complemented each other and were accepted by all the participants in the project. However, the number of local people willing to get involved was not as large as had been hoped, and lack of identification with this combined discourse may have been part of the reason for their non-involvement. The project made a positive contribution to local sustainability by improving the local environment and involving local people in their own community.

In Gilchurch, there was a clash of priorities and of discourses. Although the three councils worked together well until the district council withdrew its support, other local groups and individuals failed to agree either with the councils or with each

other. The impetus for sustainability came largely from the need to obtain government grants rather than from local people. Although the scheme enhanced the appearance of part of the town and made improvements for pedestrians and cyclists, the proposed public transport interchange was not introduced and the market place was not restored.

It is difficult to be sure how far the clash of discourses and interests over the Gilchurch project influenced the district council's decision to withdraw from the scheme, and hence its collapse after phase one. By contrast, in Delfield the discursive agreement appeared to help the project succeed in its aims and also encouraged the town council, as well as the volunteers, to be more aware of their local environment.

Although the town council was involved in both projects, in neither was it central to the project's implementation. In fact, there was very little correlation between local councillors' conceptualisations of their own role and the conceptualisations of other local actors. The discourse of local council legitimation portrays parish councils as having the support of local people, but being ignored by principal authorities. In contrast, local groups and individuals tended to have a view of town councils as marginal, even insignificant, actors, who either did not have a role or who did not fulfil the role that they could or should have. However, principal local authority councillors and officers tend to see the role of the town council in a more positive way.

The driving forces for both projects came from outside the immediate locality. The Delfield project was carried forward by an environmental charity based in a neighbouring town and the Gilchurch project was driven by an alliance of councils, in which the district council appeared to take the lead. In addition, the aspect of this project most obviously concerned with sustainability came from national government in the form of conditions on funding.

The consequences of these factors for the role of the local council in contributing to, and taking the lead in, local sustainability will be analysed in the final chapter.

Chapter 10: Conclusions

10.1 Introduction

The five substantive sections of this chapter will summarise the results of the research and link them back to the research questions listed in Chapter 1 and reproduced below:

1. How is 'sustainable development' articulated as a discourse at national and sub-national levels?
2. How is 'sustainable development' conceptualised and articulated as a discourse locally by town and parish councillors?
3. How do town and parish councillors conceptualise their own role and do they see themselves as leading their community towards a more sustainable future?
4. To what extent are local councillors' conceptualisations shared with other local actors?
5. How do local discourses come together in the context of specific local issues?

Thus, sections 10.2 to 10.6 will each address one of the five research questions. The methodology of the research will then be reviewed in Section 10.7 to assess how far it met the research objectives and how it might have been improved. Sections 10.8 and 10.9 will then look at the implications of the research results for policy and for future research respectively.

10.2 National and Sub-National Sustainable Development Discourses

Research question 1: How is 'sustainable development' articulated as a discourse at national and sub-national levels?

Chapter 6 analysed national and sub-national discourses of sustainable development, paying particular attention to national-level discourses in the UK and

county-level discourses in Gloucestershire. Although the analysis of government discourse was based on only three documents, it showed that governments adapted the concept of 'sustainable development' to enable it to be incorporated into the dominant political discourses of the time.

Sustainable development discourse in the early 1990s reflected the neo-liberal economic concerns of Thatcherism, described in Chapter 3. It stressed the importance of economic development and its compatibility and interdependence with environmental protection. This message was reinforced by the use of metaphors linking the two concepts.

Chapter 3 showed how New Labour political discourse built on the Thatcherite discourse but added a social dimension and a co-operative communitarian approach to politics. This 'third way' purported to replace conflict with compromise and unity and was reflected in the Labour government's approach to sustainable development as revealed in *A Better Quality of Life*. A number of significant departures from the preceding Conservative discourse became apparent. Firstly, the Labour government included the social dimension of sustainability. Secondly, it stressed the need for holistic thinking - the 'joined-up thinking' of New Labour discourse. Thirdly, although like the earlier Conservative discourse it appealed to scientific expertise, it relied heavily on the use of 'indicators' as a measure of progress towards sustainable development. Fourthly, the interdependence of economic development and environmental protection was assumed rather than stated, and the argument was extended to establish the compatibility and interdependence of economic *growth* and environmental protection.

Thus, the flexibility of interpretation inherent in the concept of 'sustainable development' allowed it to be adapted to fit two different, if related, political discourses. Arguably, this flexibility of interpretation also allowed successive governments to use the term to pay lip service to environmental protection and the needs of future generations, whilst avoiding taking the type of radical action necessary to bring it about.

As Chapter 6 made clear, this flexibility of interpretation is also apparent at the regional level, where the documents studied interpreted 'sustainable development' in different ways, whilst using the same definition and purporting to be based on government guidance and to be compatible with each other.

However, Gloucestershire's Local Agenda 21 (Vision 21) took its inspiration from the Rio summit, bypassing national government and regional interpretations of sustainable development. Although it was funded by the county council, Vision 21 was given a free hand in its interpretation of sustainable development. This freedom from government and local government guidance enabled it to take a more radical view, which differed significantly from government interpretations. It highlighted the contradictions apparent in the concept of sustainable development and recommended a new way of looking at the economy as well as at the environment. It also made a specific commitment to equity both within Gloucestershire and between nations, adapting the Brundtland definition of sustainable development accordingly. Moreover, it took a more radical approach to participation. Whilst, on the surface, the Vision 21 approach to knowledge and to participation appears to have mirrored that of the government, it puts a much greater stress on including people in decision-making and on building on local knowledge as well as external expertise.

Gloucestershire County Council had to reconcile the Vision 21 approach with central government guidance, and took a position somewhere between the two. The district councils in Gloucestershire did not take up Agenda 21 with the same enthusiasm that the county council had. Nevertheless, they did produce a number of documents on sustainable development and environmental protection.

When judged in terms of the five dimensions of local sustainability identified in Chapter 4, the local documents performed better than the national ones. Whilst on one level this might be expected, in the national government documents analysed there was a marked lack of concern as to what constituted sustainability at the local level. This was in spite of a professed commitment to the importance of local action for sustainability. Conversely, with some exceptions, notably Vision 21's

'Sustainable Gloucestershire', the local documents showed a reluctance to look at the global implications of local activity. In addition, the potential contradictions and difficult decisions inherent in the attempt to reconcile the economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainability were increasingly apparent at local levels.

10.3 Local Council Discourses of Sustainable Development

Research question 2: How is 'sustainable development' conceptualised and articulated as a discourse locally by town and parish councillors?

It became clear that local councillor discourses of sustainable development are not a straightforward reproduction of government discourse; rather councillors adapt their ideas to local circumstances and to their position as local councillors. There are a number of significant differences between national and local discourses.

Firstly, the term 'sustainable development' was little used by town councillors, possibly because of the association of 'development' with building development, which councillors tended to oppose. There were a variety of attempts to define 'sustainable development' and a widespread view of the difficulty of defining it. In addition, there were a number of criticisms of the usefulness of the term, although some councillors thought it was useful in that it 'made people think'.

Secondly, most local councillors identified potential conflicts between environmental protection and economic development and recognised that difficult decisions often needed to be made. This accorded with the view of principal authority documents, but contrasted with the main message of national government discourse that the two are compatible and interdependent. It seems again that contradictions are more apparent at the local level.

Thirdly, local councillors differed from government in their attitudes to knowledge. Whereas national government emphasised the importance of expertise, particularly scientific expertise, local councillors stressed the importance of local knowledge.

Fourthly, although councillors echoed the Labour government's concern with holistic thinking, they considered that it only happened at the local level of the parish or the town. Other levels of government were looked upon as compartmentalised and fragmented.

Local council discourse is based around words like 'community' which emphasise the social aspects of sustainability. The local economy and the local environment are seen as important but tend to be viewed as contributors to social sustainability or the quality of life of local people, rather than as ends in themselves. Arguably, this builds on the New Labour emphasis on the social dimension of sustainability.

Councillors were generally committed to the local environment. Also, there was some commitment to the broader environment, although it was not always seen as the role of the local council. Commitment to future generations tended to be limited to the lifetimes of today's children.

In general, councillors tended to prioritise the local and the short-term. Solutions were seen on a small scale i.e. in terms of local businesses and the local environment. Generally, councils were concerned with the local and short-term aspects of the five dimensions of local sustainability, although there were some exceptions to this.

Furthermore, there seemed to be no correlation between the use of the term 'sustainable development' and a commitment to the environment and future generations. Councils whose documents professed a commitment to sustainable development were not necessarily those whose councillors were interested in the environment or the welfare of future generations.

10.4 Local Council Discourses of Role

Research question 3: How do town and parish councillors conceptualise their own role and do they see themselves as leading their community towards a more sustainable future?

It might be thought that New Labour, with its emphasis on moving from government to governance, might see parish and town councils as key players in the governance process and hence in local development. Nevertheless, we have seen that although governments are paying more attention to parish and town councils, the latter are generally not seen as playing a significant role in co-ordinating local development. Rather they are seen as one local actor amongst many who may join a local partnership where a consensus is formed and action follows. This pluralist model of local decision-making is shown in Figure 23 on page 290.

However, local councillors saw the process differently. Rather than as just another interest group, they saw themselves as using their local knowledge to bring together and represent local views, usually in opposition to outsiders who do not fully understand the locality. Figure 24 on page 291 shows the process of local decision-making as seen by local councillors. In this model, a unified local position articulated by the town council is set against outside positions formed without the benefit of local knowledge or holistic thinking.

Councillors justified their position as representatives of local people through the discourse of local council legitimation. They used biological metaphors to present parishes as living things in need of care. They saw themselves as in an ideal position to provide this care by virtue of their local knowledge of the community and the holistic thinking that this enabled. By contrast, other levels of government were perceived as fragmented, compartmentalised and lacking in local knowledge.

If councillors are to lead their communities in sustainable development, it is important that councillors see themselves as acting as leaders of the community and having a vision for the locality as well as representing local views. We saw in Chapter 8 that 'vision' was one of the key words of local councillor discourse, although there was also an emphasis on practicality. Some councillors saw themselves as leaders, rather than just representatives, of the community but this was not a universal view.

In this respect, there were differences between the five councils that were studied. Although all councils regarded themselves as the legitimate representatives of local people, the less empowered councils saw themselves as fighting a losing battle in trying to represent local opinion to unresponsive principal authorities and government. By contrast, the more empowered councils saw themselves as direct providers for local needs, as well as representing local opinion to others. Arguably, both these roles are necessary for the furtherance of sustainability.

In addition, councillors saw their responsibilities as primarily local in nature. Because they emphasised their role in looking after their parish, which they portrayed as a vulnerable organism in need of care, the local was nearly always prioritised over the global and the present and near future over the distant future.

Thus, returning to question 3, local councillors conceptualise their own role as caring for their town or village and representing the interests of local people to higher levels of authority. Councillors from some councils also see themselves as leading public opinion and having a vision for the community. However, this is not universal and, as we saw in the previous section, does not include a commitment to all the aspects of local sustainability.

10.5 Other Local Discourses

Research question 4: To what extent are local councillors' conceptualisations shared by other local actors?

Chapter 9 analysed the discourses of the other local actors involved in the two case-study projects. Five more discourses were identified, each associated with a particular concern or priority for the locality, as summarised in Table 26 on page 259. Other case-study participants tended to see the role of the local council in a very different way from that of the local councillors themselves. The council was not regarded as a representative of local opinion, rather it was seen as yet another local group with its own priorities. The process of local decision-making as viewed by these other local actors is shown in Figure 25 on page 292. Local organisations

were seen as trying (usually unsuccessfully) to influence decisions taken by outside bodies.

As might be expected, sustainability tended to be interpreted in terms of the priority of the particular group. For example, Gilchurch Civic Society saw sustainability in terms of preservation of the built historic environment and that town's traders saw it as safeguarding the viability of local businesses. Thus, there would seem to be a clear need for a body to bring these different approaches together, and to take an overall holistic look at the sustainability of the locality. This could be a role for the local council, even though it is not at present regarded in this way by these other local actor or by other levels of government.

Most of the groups shared a commitment to the locality, and like the local council, they were interested primarily in the local and the short-term – the exceptions being Gilchurch Friends of the Earth and the environmental charity that ran the Delfield Project. Both of these groups interpreted sustainability as long-term and worldwide and prioritised environmental as well as social aspects.

Principal authority councillors and officers were more likely to see town councils as legitimate representatives of local opinion and to see a role for the council in bringing together those opinions. However, in spite of the rhetorical commitment of their councils to sustainable development, they did not seem to view the concept as central to local development.

Thus in general, local actors do not conform to the discourse of local council legitimation. They do not look on the local council as a community leader and representative, bringing together local views to present to external authorities. Rather, they see it as an interest group in its own right, with its own non – representative agenda. However, the research suggests that there is potential for local councils to combine these priorities into a vision for local sustainability, although without a significant change of outlook this is likely to be a vision that concentrates on the local and the relatively short-term.

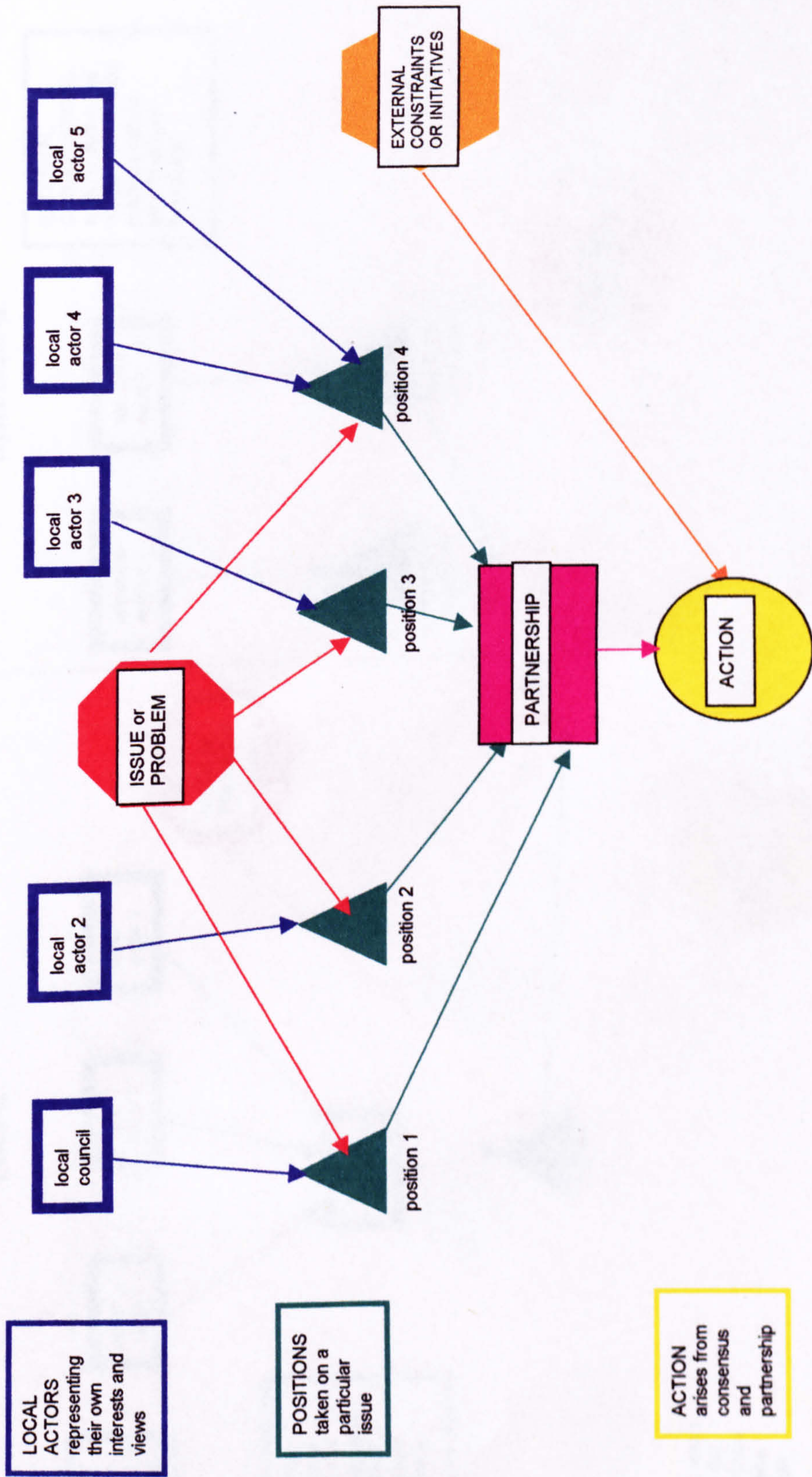


FIGURE 23: LOCAL DECISION-MAKING – AS SEEN BY GOVERNMENT

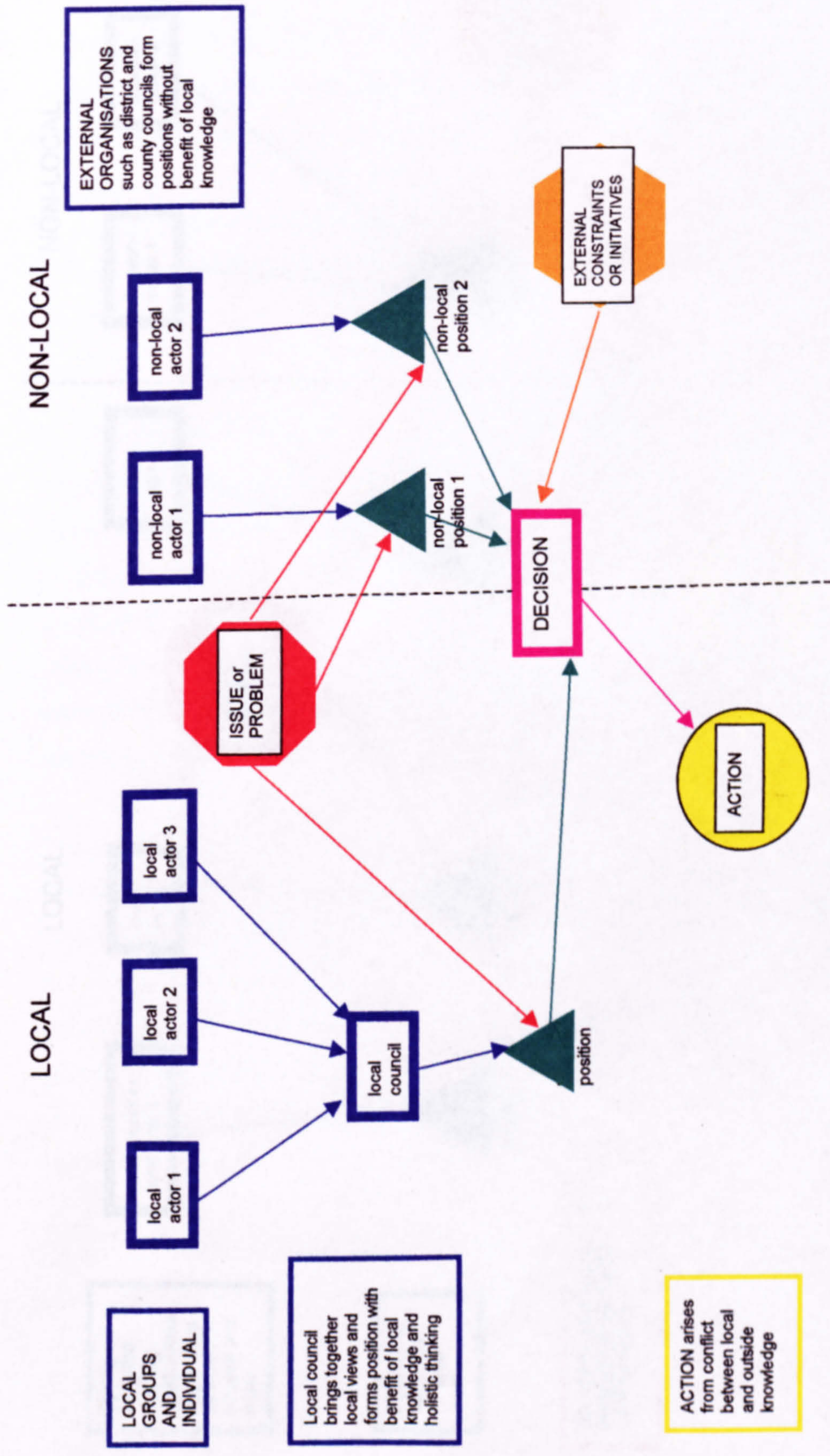


FIGURE 24: LOCAL DECISION-MAKING - AS SEEN BY PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

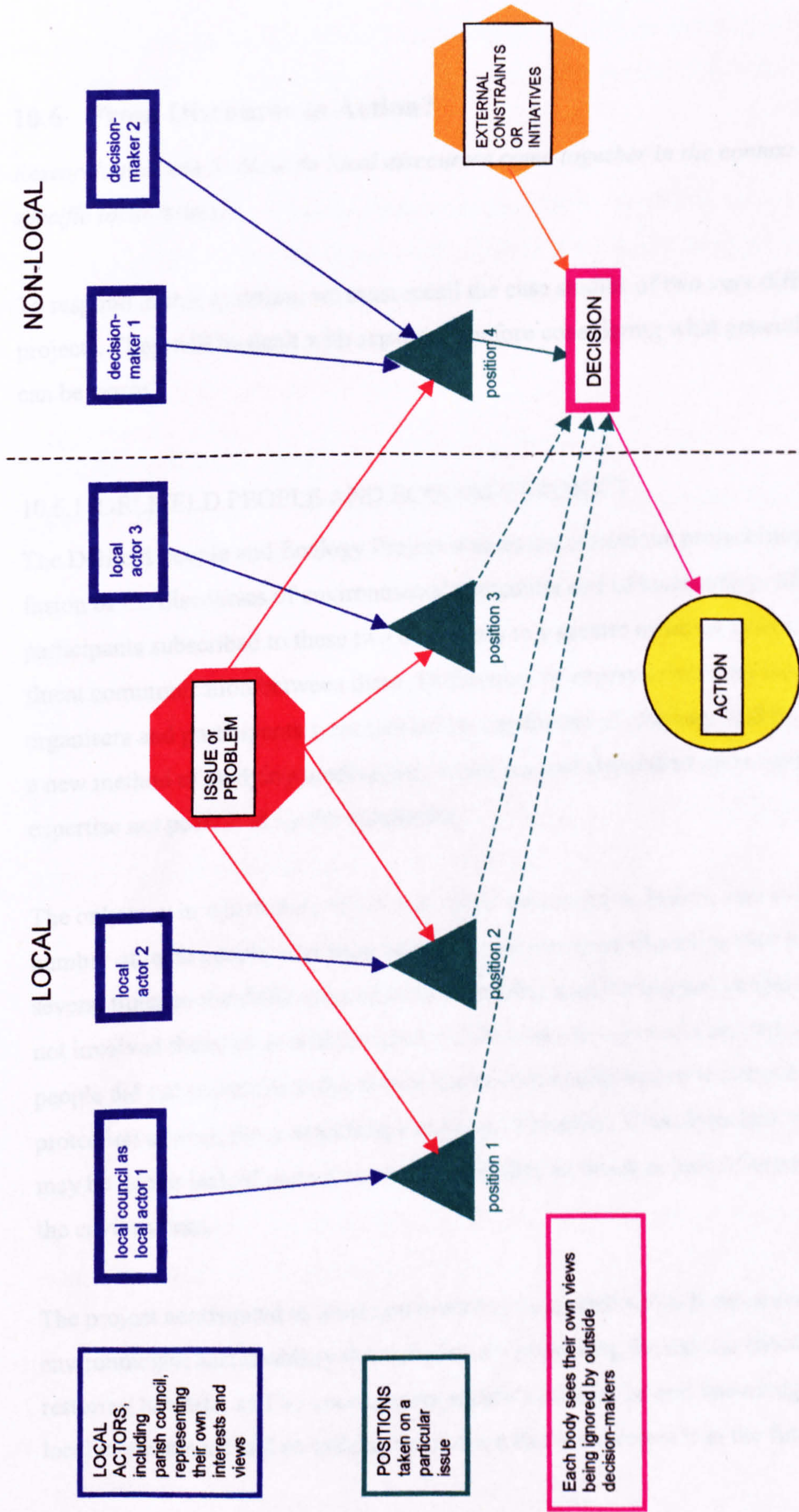


FIGURE 25: LOCAL DECISION-MAKING - AS SEEN BY OTHER LOCAL GROUPS

10.6 From Discourse to Action?

Research question 5: How do local discourses come together in the context of specific local issues?

To respond to this question, we must recall the case studies of two very different projects. They will be dealt with separately before considering what general lessons can be learnt.

10.6.1 DELFIELD PEOPLE AND ECOLOGY PROJECT

The Delfield People and Ecology Project was an uncontentious project involving a fusion of the discourses of environmental protection and of community. All the participants subscribed to these two discourses to a greater or lesser extent, enabling fluent communication between them. Differences of expertise between the project organisers and participants were tackled by careful use of language and by devising a new method of studying biodiversity which was not dependent upon types of expertise not possessed by the volunteers.

The only way in which the project was not as successful as hoped, was in the number of local people who were willing to get involved. Project workers referred several times to the difficulties of communicating with those local people who had not involved themselves with the project. This may have been in part because those people did not subscribe to the discourses of community and environmental protection or even the overarching discourse of locality. Thus, their lack of interest may be due to lack of commitment to the locality as much as lack of commitment in the environment.

The project contributed to local sustainability in several ways. It enhanced environmental sustainability through directly improving the natural environment by restoring habitats; and by encouraging people's interest in, and knowledge of, the local environment and so making them more likely to protect it in the future. Also it

contributed to social sustainability by encouraging community cohesion and improving quality of life through various activities such as meetings, nature walks and community radio.

Thus, the Delfield case study shows that a project can be successful when it brings together people with similar interests and priorities in a non-contentious local project, and discursive differences, in this case connected with differences of expertise, are consciously tackled.

10.6.2 GILCHURCH TRAFFIC AND ENVIRONMENT PLAN

Gilchurch Traffic and Environment Plan was a far more complex and contentious project involving a number of competing interests and discourses. The three levels of council formed a steering group and worked together well, although they had different priorities. This was helped by the fact that all the participants in the steering group lived in or close to Gilchurch and hence were able to combine local knowledge with their expertise as councillors and officers, and were not looked on as 'outsiders'. It was also aided by the fact that the aims of the district and county councils, to improve the town centre environment and to improve traffic flow respectively, were complementary rather than contradictory.

In contrast, the members of the Users' Group did not manage to reconcile their different priorities, either with each other or with the councils. For example, traders were worried that a reduction in town centre traffic would have an adverse effect on trade. The various discourses of the members of the Users Group included in the study were discussed in Chapter 9, and these seemed to present difficulties in communication with each other and with the councils. Each group felt its concerns were not being addressed. Even the civic society, which shared with the district council a concern for the appearance of the built environment, was not happy with some of the councils' decisions or with the way that the district council communicated with them.

In the event, only the first phase of the project was completed before a change in administration at the district council resulted in the withdrawal of funding and the subsequent abandonment of the project. The first phase of the project had resulted in what was generally accepted as a considerable improvement in the appearance of part of the town. However, there were complaints about various aspects of the scheme. Although this part of the scheme probably did contribute to the sustainability of Gilchurch by providing a more pleasant environment and encouraging cycling and walking, it was not thought to have had a significant effect on discouraging through traffic. Also, as it was very costly, it may not have been good value for money. The parts of the scheme that were intended to encourage public transport use, and hence promote environmental sustainability, did not take place.

10.6.3 LESSONS FROM THE CASE-STUDY PROJECTS

It is unsurprising that when discourses and priorities coincide, different groups of people can work together productively and produce positive outcomes. On the other hand, when groups have differing priorities, communication is difficult and agreement is not easy to reach. Problems in communication can be explained in terms of the difficulties of communicating across discursive barriers.

The Delfield project was conceived and guided by an organisation that was committed to sustainable development, and whilst the volunteers were interested in the local environment and community, the project built on their common interests and made an overall positive contribution to local sustainability. The more ambitious and contentious Gilchurch project achieved co-operation between the three councils, but failed to achieve consensus amongst other local groups whose competing discourses identified different and sometimes-conflicting priorities. Although the first phase was successful in some of its aims, it failed to reduce traffic speeds and volumes. Whilst both projects could be said to have contributed to sustainability, the smaller Delfield project probably made a greater contribution.

10.7 Review of the Research Methods Used

We move on to reflect on the research methods used in this study. Whilst there has been much attention to local government and sustainable development, especially regarding Local Agenda 21, there has been very little research on parish and town councils, and none on local councillors' attitudes to sustainability. Thus, this research was exploratory in nature and took an open-ended approach rather than imposing categories on the information collected.

In order to study councillors' attitudes in depth, a case-study approach was used. However, because councillors' conceptualisations are formed within the context of larger scale discourses, it was felt to be necessary to study those larger scale discourses as a background to the case studies. It was also felt to be important to study how councillor discourses resulted or failed to result in action at the local level. For this purpose, two case-study projects were chosen from the activities of the case-study councils. This resulted in a rather complex research structure, consisting of three stages:

- The study of the larger-scale discursive context to local discourses
- The study of local councillor discourses in five case-study councils
- The study of two case-study projects to establish how local sustainability discourses result in action.

The combination of these three stages and the detailed study needed for discourse analysis was perhaps over-ambitious for a doctoral research project. It also made it difficult to present the thesis as a coherent whole, rather than as three overlapping pieces of research.

Because the nature of doctoral research limits the amount of data that can be collected, only a small number of councils was studied and a representative sample was not attempted. By choosing larger local councils, the research concentrated on those councils that were likely to be more active, and perhaps more likely to contribute to sustainability. Even though the choice of council was limited to larger councils and to one county, considerable variation was found. Thus, generalisations between councils, even within Gloucestershire, cannot reliably be made.

Nevertheless, there were also common factors between the case-study councils, which may be replicated elsewhere.

Within the case studies, the discourse approach enabled attitudes to sustainability to be studied without imposing any preconceived definition of the concept. The combination of interviews, focus groups, observation and documentary analysis enabled a degree of triangulation and also facilitated a comparison between councils' written policies and informal articulations of councillors and clerks. The inclusion of questions on responsibilities to future generations and the wider environment enabled the separation of commitment to two of the components of sustainable development from understanding of the term itself. However, it might have been advantageous to have also included a question on intragenerational equity. Overall, this stage of the research worked well.

The case-study issues did not turn out quite as intended. In both cases, I was given the impression by councillors and clerks that the local council was more central to the project than actually proved to be the case. Whilst this misunderstanding was significant in itself, it made it difficult to study councillors' conceptualisations coming together with those of other local actors, as the town councillors' conceptualisations were not as significant to the projects as had been hoped. Also, due to the time available, this final stage of the research was based on a fairly small amount of data, and in neither case was it possible to observe direct interactions between the case-study participants. In retrospect, it might have been better to have chosen at the outset of the research one case-study project to study in detail, and then to have worked outwards to analyse the discourses of the town council and other local actors involved.

In summary, the mixed-method case-study approach enabled a detailed study of the conceptualisations and discourses of councillors and other local actors and how these come together around specific local projects. However, it did not provide an overall view of councils' contributions to sustainability. To achieve this, a much larger research project would have been necessary.

10.8 Some Possible Policy Implications

As mentioned above, this research was designed to shed some light on an unresearched topic. As such it was not designed to produce detailed policy recommendations. Nevertheless, I believe, it does point the way to some policy changes.

Blair and Evans identify a 'critical lack of capacity within local government to deliver sustainable development' (2004, p.56). They attribute this to a lack of 'clear direction from central government' (Ibid). Yet as an elected authority, local government is in an ideal position to lead and co-ordinate moves towards local sustainability.

This research has indicated a need for a 'sustainability arbiter' at the very local level, to bring together differing local priorities and take difficult decisions when they conflict. Ideally this body should have local knowledge and be recognised as representative of the community. Whilst local councils are not necessarily representative, this would be likely to be improved if their role and profile were extended and there were more competition for places. Also, an increase in the powers and profile of local councils would be likely to improve their relations with other levels of government – both because they would be taken more seriously; and because they would no longer feel the same need to justify their role by denigrating principal authorities. The local council would then be in an ideal position to fulfil the role of local sustainability arbiter.

As we saw in Chapter 4, local councils have a power to spend a maximum amount of money on anything of benefit to their communities - the 'section 137' provision. Although this limits councils' spending, councils seldom use the power to its full extent. Increased training of local councillors and clerks as a result of the Quality Council provision might encourage more use of 'section 137'.

However, this research has shown that approaches to sustainability by local councils and other local groups tend to focus on the local and the short-term. Both legally and politically, it is difficult for councillors to justify spending money that is not of

immediate and verifiable benefit to their electors. This is a significant problem, as a holistic approach to sustainability needs to be long-term and global.

The Local Sustainability Bill, a private members bill initiated by the New Economics Foundation, aims to empower principal authorities to improve the sustainability of their communities, and hence to 'give the power to local communities to determine their own agenda for environmental, political, social and economic sustainability' (New Economics Foundation, undated).

The sustainability indicators listed in the Bill cover both global and local effects of community activity. Although at present the Bill applies only to principal authorities, it is currently being redrafted and there are plans to include parish and town councils.

If parish and town councils were to be given a specific responsibility to consult with local groups and individuals and draw up a local sustainability strategy for their parish in consultation with other local groups, it could provide the impetus and legitimation to encourage local councils to form a holistic vision of local sustainability, including the global and long-term effects of local activity, and to take the initiative in leading their community towards that vision.

10.9 Suggested Future Directions for Research

This research has inevitably left a number of questions unanswered. In order to fully assess the potential of parish and town councils to lead their communities towards sustainability, it is necessary to know more about how town councils and other local bodies interact and how this results, or fails to result, in successful projects. There are several ways this research could be extended. Some specific suggestions are made below.

1. The extension of the research to other counties in different parts of the UK, in order to investigate how far its findings are peculiar to Gloucestershire.

2. The extension of the work to other countries, where local councils have more power and prestige, to see how their discourses and actions differ from those in the UK.
3. The identification of successful local projects in the UK, and the in-depth qualitative studies of the discourses of local groups involved in those projects, and the ways in which they contribute to success.
4. The monitoring of the 'Quality Council' initiative, with particular regard to its effects on councillors' attitudes, priorities and empowerment in relation to sustainability.

It is hoped that the local discourse model developed in this thesis might provide a suitable framework for further research to establish how local councils and other local actors conceptualise their own role in relation to sustainability, and can indicate how councils can be encouraged to play an enhanced role in the promotion of local sustainability.

10.10 Conclusions

This thesis was an attempt to shed light on a hitherto unresearched issue – the role of parish and town councils in the local implementation of sustainable development. Due to the contested nature of the terms 'sustainable development' and 'sustainability', and the existence of a value-action gap at the individual level and a rhetoric-action gap at larger scales, a discourse approach was used. This enabled the study of conceptualisations of sustainable development at a local level within the context of larger scale discourses.

Returning to the conceptual model described in Chapter 3 and shown in Figure 13 on page 85, the research concentrated on the spoken discourse of councillors at a local scale as revealed through focus groups and interviews. In this way, the triangular relationship between conceptualisations, texts and actions and the interaction of different scales was investigated. A modification of Figure 13 is reproduced below as Figure 26. It can be seen that this research attempted to investigate the relationships between underlying cognitions, texts and actions and

between local and national scales, by entering the prism through the 'texts' face at a number of levels and the 'actions' face at the local level. Whilst a relatively small piece of research cannot be expected to untangle the complicated mass of relations between cognition, text and action on one hand and between local and global on the other, it did illuminate some of the interactions in the field of sustainable development.

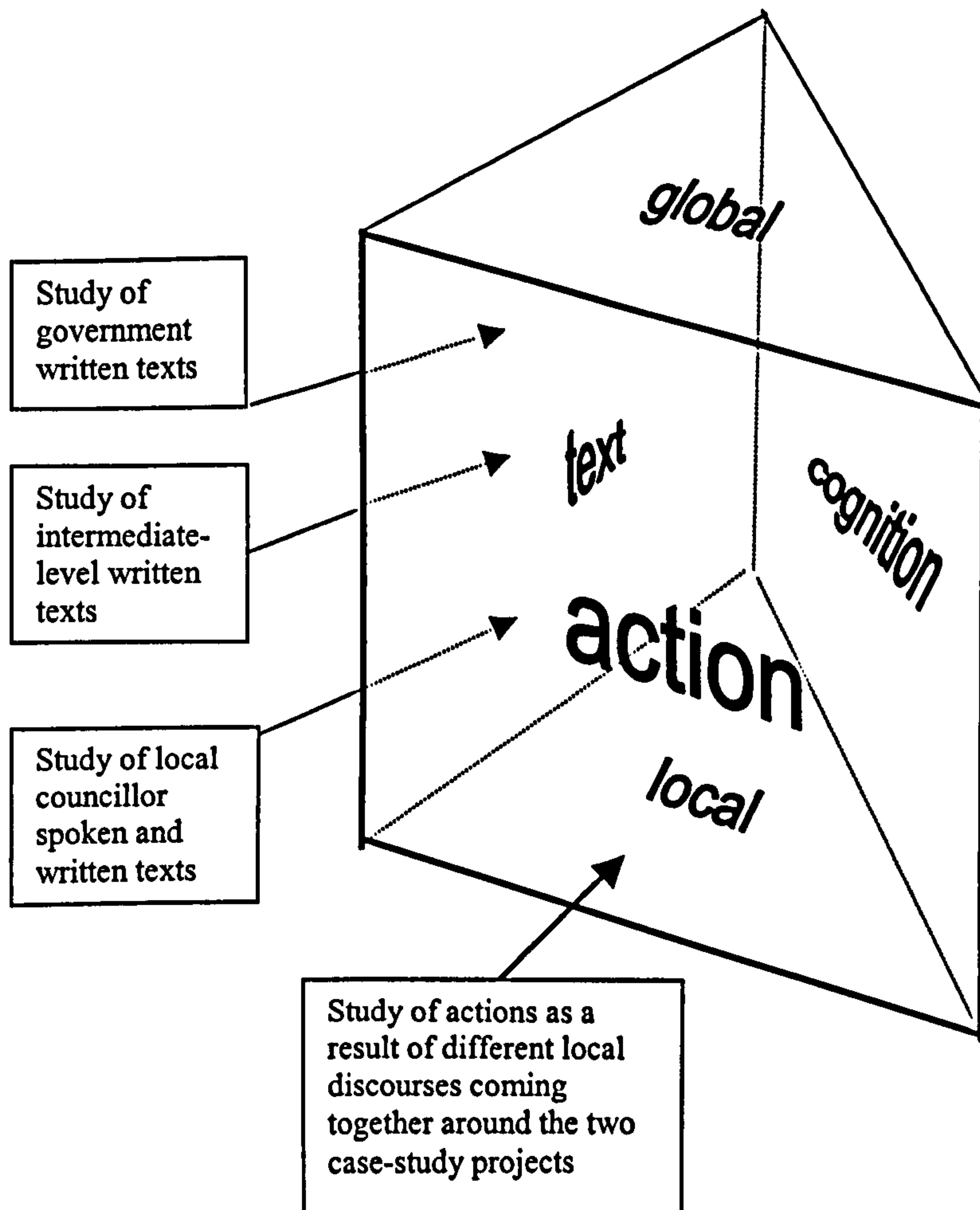


FIGURE 26: THE DIMENSIONS OF DISCOURSE AND THE RESEARCH

The concept of discourse provided both a model and a methodology for data analysis in this thesis. As a model, it allowed the conceptualisation of local discourses as overlapping and continually interacting entities as portrayed in Figure 22 on page 276. This in turn allowed the interactions between local interest groups around the case-study projects to be seen and in part explained in terms of

discourse. In particular, it allowed the detailed analysis of councillors' attitudes to sustainability and to their own role and revealed the importance of the concepts of 'locality' and 'community' to local conceptualisations of 'sustainability'.

A method of discourse analysis was developed, based mainly on the work of Fairclough (2003) and summarized in a tree of discursive techniques, as shown in Figure 17 on page 133. This method guided the analysis of national and sub-national documents and of documents and interview and focus group transcripts at the local level. It also made the process of the analysis clearer to the reader and so contributed to the reliability of the research. This method is not specific to sustainable development and could have wider application as a guide to discourse analysis in other fields.

Government discourses of sustainable development as revealed in the texts studied are an example of the technologisation of discourse. The concept of sustainable development is flexible enough to allow its expert incorporation into government discourse without any radical change needing to be made to the latter. In turn, this new composite discourse is drawn on selectively at more local scales. Hence, cognitions of sustainable development are not passed down from global to local level in an uncomplicated way. Rather, the local level draws upon texts from a number of other levels, as Vision 21 drew on the Rio Summit, and interprets the term according to local circumstances and priorities. Local actions result from the coming together of different local discourses, which may interpret sustainability in very different ways according to their own priorities.

The research found that although parish and town councillors may see themselves as leaders of the community and be committed as individuals to the environment and to the needs of future generations, they see their responsibilities as councillors in terms of the 'local' and the comparatively short-term.

Other prominent local actors tend to see sustainability in terms of their own priorities, and local councillors as just another interest group. Communication between these conflicting local discourses can be difficult, and there is a need for a

local 'sustainability arbiter' to bring together these conflicting local priorities and to include the 'unheard voices' of other less-influential local people. In many ways, parish and town councils, as local elected authorities, are in an ideal position to fulfil that role.

However, if parish and town councillors are to become 'sustainability arbiters' and to lead their communities towards sustainability, then there are two blockages that must be overcome. Firstly, town councillors must see themselves as working with, rather than against, other levels of government. This would be aided by raising the profile of and respect for local councils, so that councillors no longer need to concentrate on justifying their own role in opposition to principal authorities. The Quality Council initiative could contribute to this, but may not be enough. Secondly, local councils need a specific power to further local 'sustainability' as opposed to local wellbeing. This could be provided through the Local Sustainability Bill, if its scope were extended to include parish and town councils.

In summary, the role of parish and town councils must be redefined both formally by government and in the eyes of local groups. Only then can local councillors become empowered and motivated to fulfil their potential as contributors to local sustainability.

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APPENDIX 1: POWERS OF LOCAL COUNCILS (adapted from Howes et al, 2003)

Function	Powers and Duties
Allotments	Powers to provide allotments Duty to consider providing allotment gardens if demand unsatisfied
Burial grounds, cemeteries and crematoria	Power to acquire, provide and maintain shelters. Power to agree to maintain monuments and burials Power to contribute towards expenses of cemeteries
Bus shelters	Power to provide and maintain shelters
Byelaws	Power to provide byelaws for pleasure grounds, cycle parks, baths and washhouses, open spaces and burial grounds
Christmas lights	Power to provide to attract visitors
Citizens Advice Bureau	Power to support
Clocks	Power to provide public clocks
Closed churchyards	Power to maintain
Conference facilities	Power to provide and encourage the use of facilities
Community centres	Power to provide and equip community buildings Power to provide buildings for use of clubs having athletic, social or educational objectives
Crime prevention	Powers to spend money on various crime prevention measures
Entertainment and the arts	Provision of entertainment and support of the arts including festivals and celebrations
Highways	Power to repair and maintain public footpaths and bridleways Power to light roads and public places Power to provide parking places for vehicles, bicycles and motorcycles Power to enter into agreement as dedication and widening Power to provide roadside seats and shelters Power to complain to district councils regarding protection of rights of way and roadside wastes Power to provide traffic signs and other notices Power to plant trees etc. and to maintain roadside verges
Investments	Power to participate in schemes of collective investment
Land	Power to acquire by agreement, to appropriate and to dispose of land Power to accept gifts of land
Litter	Provision of receptacles
Lotteries	Powers to promote amusement
Newsletters	Power to provide information relating to matters affecting local government
Open spaces	Power to acquire land and maintain
Postal and telecommunications	Power to pay public telecommunications operators any loss sustained providing post or telegraph office or telecommunications facilities
Public buildings and village halls	Powers to provide buildings for offices and for public meetings and assemblies
Public conveniences	Power to provide
Parks and pleasure grounds	Power to acquire land or to provide recreation grounds, public walks, pleasure grounds and open spaces and to manage and control them
Recreation	Power to provide a wide range of recreational facilities
Town and Country Planning	Right to be notified of planning applications
Tourism	Power to contribute to organisations encouraging tourism
Transport	Power to spend money on community transport schemes
Village signs	Power to use decorative signs to inform visitors
War memorials	Power to maintain, repair, protect and adapt war memorials

APPENDIX 2: GLOUCESTERSHIRE MARKET TOWNS: QUESTIONNAIRE

1 About your council:

Please could you fill in the following information about your council?

- a) Name of Council:
- b) Contact name:
- c) Address:
.....
- d) Phone number:
- e) E-mail (if applicable):
- f) Total number of councillors
- g) Number of councillors who are also district councillors.....
- h) Number of councillors who are also county councillors.....

2. Policy:

- a) Does your council have a vision statement or statement of long term aims? Yes No
- b) Does your council have an environment policy statement? Yes No
- c) Does your council have any other policies that you consider to be relevant to the environmental, social or economic wellbeing of your community or its impact on the wider world? (This might include policies on transport, waste, housing, retailing, parks and gardens or any other topic you feel to be relevant)

If so please list:
.....
.....
.....
.....

It would be very helpful if you could enclose copies of these statements and/or policies.

- d) What do you consider are the most important policy areas for your council?
.....
.....
.....
.....

3. About your town:

a) What do you consider to be the principal economic activities in your town?

.....

b) In your parish, what do you consider to be the most influential local groups (chambers of commerce or trade, amenity groups etc.)?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

4. Availability of Documents

I would like to study any policy documents produced by your council.

Would you be willing to allow me to study these documents? Yes No

If yes, please tick one of the following:

- The documents are enclosed with this reply.
- The documents have been e-mailed to ckambites@chelt.ac.uk.
- The documents can be studied by appointment in this council's offices.
- Other (please specify)

5. Additional information

Please use the space below to tell me anything else you consider to be of particular significance about your town or your council or to complete any of the questions above.

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you very much for completing this form.

Please post it to me in the envelope provided by Wednesday 1st August 2001

Mrs. Carol Kambites, Countryside and Community Research Unit, Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education, Francis Close Hall, Swindon Road, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL50 4AZ

APPENDIX 3: SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR TOWN CLERK

1. What do you think local people value most about Abford?
2. From your answers to my questionnaire, you see the economic role of Abford as combining service provision – shops and restaurants- with light industry. How do you see this role developing in the future?
3. To what extent do you think the town council has a responsibility to influence these changes?
4. Do you also think that the council has a responsibility to protect/enhance the local environment?
 - Can you give me some examples of things that you've done to protect or improve the local environment?
5. Do you think the council's responsibility is limited to the local environment or does it extend to the wider national or international environment?
 - Can you give me some examples of things you have done to protect the wider environment?
6. Do you think the council has responsibilities to future generations of local people, or should it be primarily concerned with present generations?
 - How do you reconcile the needs of present and future generations?
7. Do you see a conflict between caring for the environment and the needs of future generations and social and economic development?
 - If so, can you give me an example of this conflict and how you try (tried) to resolve it?
8. What do you associate with the term 'sustainable development'?
9. Do you regard it as a useful concept?
 - If so, how do you find it useful?
 - If not, why do you think it isn't useful?
 - Does it help to deal with the conflict between environmental protection and economic development?
 - Does it help to balance the needs of present and future generations?
10. What bodies or individuals do you think influence your council on these issues?

APPENDIX 4: SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP AGENDA

Introduction

Introduce self. Explain research briefly. Recording. Confidentiality. Follow up.

Start tape

Opening Question (round table)

Christian name, committees and any particular responsibilities or interests on the council.

Introductory Question

There's been much talk recently about the changing role of market towns. How do you see the role of Abford changing in the next 5 or 10 years?

Transition Question

What, if anything, do you see as the town council's role in managing this change?

Key Questions

1. I've asked about the next 5 or 10 years. How far ahead do you feel your responsibilities lie?
2. Do you as town councillors feel you have a responsibility to future generations in Abford as well as present generations?
 - If yes, does this awareness shape your actions?
3. Do you think that the town council has a role in protecting/enhancing the local environment?
 - What do you see these responsibilities as being?
4. Do you think the council has a responsibility for the wider environment (beyond Abford)? [For example, in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.]
 - What do you see these responsibilities as being?
 - Do they involve the council's activities only, or should the council be trying to encourage others to reduce their wider environmental effects?
5. What do you understand by the term sustainable development?
 - Do you think it is a useful term to you as councillors?

Ending Question

Remind of aims of research – perhaps in more detail.

Is there anything that anything of importance or interest that you think I have missed out or anything you would like to add?

APPENDIX 5: COUNCILLORS INTERVIEWED

<u>Council</u>	<u>Councillor</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Principal Authority</u>	<u>Additional information⁴</u>
Abford	Chair	male	no	Green Party member
Abford	Councillor 1	female	no	vice chair
Abford	Councillor 2	female	district and county	
Abford	Councillor 3	male	no	chair of planning committee
Abford	Councillor 4	male	no	chair of environment committee
Barbridge	Chair	male	county	
Barbridge	Councillor 1	female ¹	no	vice chair and chair of planning committee
Barbridge	Councillor 2	male	no	architect
Barbridge	Councillor 3	male	district	FoE member ⁵
Barbridge	Councillor 4	male		FoE member
Delfield	Chair	female	county ²	
Delfield	Councillor 1	male	district	chair of planning committee
Delfield	Councillor 2	male	district	trader
Delfield	Councillor 3	female	district	
Delfield	Councillor 4	male	no	
Freebury	Chair	male	no ³	
Freebury	Councillor 1	female	no	
Freebury	Councillor 2	female	no	
Freebury	Councillor 3	female	no	trader
Freebury	Councillor 4	male	no	
Gilchurch	Chair	female	no	
Gilchurch	Councillor 1	female	no	
Gilchurch	Councillor 2	male	district and county	
Gilchurch	Councillor 3	male	no	farmer
Gilchurch	Councillor 4	male	no	
Gilchurch	Councillor 5	female	no	

Notes:

1. Barbridge council only had three female councillors out of 17.
2. Almost all the active councillors on Delfield Parish Council were also principal authority councillors.
3. Neither of the two district councillors on Freebury Parish Council appeared to be an active parish councillor, and neither was available for interview.
4. This is included where it appeared from the interview to be relevant.
5. FoE = Friends of the Earth

APPENDIX 6: FIRST ORDER NODES OF ANALYSIS OF TOWN COUNCIL DATA

- (1) /Town Councils
- (2) /Other bodies
- (3) /Land-use planning
- (4) /Metaphors
- (5) /Positive words
- (6) /Negative words
- (7) /Discourse analysis - miscellaneous
- (8) /Use of numbers
- (9) /Stories & analogies
- (10) /Sustainable development
- (11) /Agenda 21
- (20) /Concepts
- (30) /Conflict
- (40) /Local distinctiveness
- (45) /Environment
- (60) /Issues
- (65) /Initiatives
- (70) /Information flow

**APPENDIX 7: NODES OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS FOR TOWN COUNCIL
DATA**

(4) /Metaphors

- (4 1) /Metaphors/Towns & villages
- (4 2) /Metaphors/traffic
- (4 3) /Metaphors/bite the bullet
- (4 4) /Metaphors/Sight
- (4 5) /Metaphors/Councils
- (4 6) /Metaphors/Bringing together
- (4 7) /Metaphors/Death
- (4 8) /Metaphors/Bigger picture
- (4 9) /Metaphors/Innovation
- (4 10) /Metaphors/Community
- (4 11) /Metaphors/Information transfer
- (4 12) /Metaphors/Balance
- (4 13) /Metaphors/Environmentalism
- (4 14) /Metaphors/Nature
- (4 15) /Metaphors/Pulling up the drawbridge
- (4 16) /Metaphors/SD
- (4 17) /Metaphors/Misc~

(5) /Positive words

- (5 1) /Positive words/Green & green fields
- (5 2) /Positive words/Community & neighbourhood
- (5 3) /Positive words/Friendly
- (5 4) /Positive words/Grandparents & grandchildren
- (5 5) /Positive words/Diversity
- (5 6) /Positive words/Capacity building
- (5 7) /Positive words/Environment
- (5 8) /Positive words/Progress
- (5 9) /Positive words/Scientific
- (5 10) /Positive words/Grassroots
- (5 11) /Positive words/Democracy
- (5 12) /Positive words/Politically Green
- (5 13) /Positive words/Dynamic
- (5 14) /Positive words/identity & roots
- (5 15) /Positive words/Vision
- (5 16) /Positive words/Stewardship
- (5 17) /Positive words/Efficiency
- (5 18) /Positive words/Commitment
- (5 19) /Positive words/Compromise
- (5 20) /Positive words/Heritage
- (5 21) /Positive words/Quality of Life
- (5 22) /Positive words/Looking forward
- (5 23) /Positive words/Proactive
- (5 24) /Positive words/Grey matter
- (5 25) /Positive words/Countryside
- (5 26) /Positive words/Positive

- (5 27) /Positive words/local text search
- (5 28) /Positive words/Choice
- (5 29) /Positive words/enterprise
- (5 30) / Positive words/quality

(6) /Negative words

- (6 1) /Negative words/Political
- (6 2) /Negative words/Bureaucratic
- (6 3) /Negative words/Knee-jerk & piecemeal
- (6 4) /Negative words/Parochial
- (6 5) /Negative words/flogged off
- (6 6) /Negative words/Burden
- (6 7) /Negative words/Wasteland
- (6 8) /Negative words/chocolate-boxy
- (6 9) /Negative words/Impingement
- (6 10) /Negative words/Museum etc
- (6 11) /Negative words/Ignorance
- (6 13) /Negative words/Estates
- (6 14) /Negative words/Greed
- (6 15) /Negative words/Stuck there
- (6 16) /Negative words/Vested interest
- (6 17) /Negative words/Swamped
- (6 18) /Negative words/Talking shop
- (6 19) /Negative words/Tunnel vision
- (6 20) /Negative words/Negative
- (6 21) /Negative words/reactive
- (6 22) /Negative words/Dormitory town
- (6 23) /Negative words/Muddle & bungling
- (6 25) /Negative words/Destruction
- (6 26) /Negative words/Economists
- (6 27) /Negative words/Dumping
- (6 28) /Negative words/Silos
- (6 29) /Negative words/Jargon
- (6 30) /Negative words/Uncertainty
- (6 31) /Negative words/Paternalistic

(7) /Discourse analysis (DA) miscellaneous

- (7 1) /DA misc/Tradition
- (7 2) /DA misc/Ownership

(8) /Use of numbers

(9) /Stories & analogies

APPENDIX 8: ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE DELFIELD PEOPLE AND ECOLOGY PROJECT

Existing activities:

Land-use map of the parish,

Adult education course - 'Wildlife of Delfield'.

Hedgerow survey,

Pond survey

Pond day

Pond restoration

Parish boundary project

Parish map project

Community radio station,

Feasibility study on proposed village green.

Winter programme of wildlife talks

Summer programme of visits to wildlife sites.

Survey of valued green spaces

Doomsday 21 Book of Wildlife

Wildlife postcards

'Watch a plot' scheme (where people can record the wildlife of their garden and receive advice on how to make their garden more wildlife friendly).

Biodiversity day

Site survey and subsequent establishment of wildlife site

Market research amongst farmers and landowners to find out their attitudes to biodiversity.

Market research amongst local businesses on environmental attitudes

Advising the parish council on sustainability matters.

Planned activities:

Green plaque scheme, acknowledging beautiful views or endangered species

School grounds project

Boundary walk on Rogation Sunday.

APPENDIX 9: QUESTIONS FOR MEMBERS OF GILCHURCH USERS' GROUP

1. Can you tell me what you hoped to achieve from the Traffic and Environment Plan?
2. What do you think it is achieving?
3. Do you think there are environmental benefits?
 - If so what are they?
4. Do you think there are social benefits?
 - If so what are they?
5. Do you think there are economic benefits?
 - If so what are they?
6. Did the planning process involve any difficult decisions?
7. Can you tell me what you understand by 'sustainable development'?
8. Do you see the Traffic and Environment Plan as contributing to the sustainable development (sustainability) of Gilchurch?

APPENDIX 10: MEMBERSHIP OF THE GILCHURCH TRAFFIC AND ENVIRONMENT PLAN USERS' GROUP

Group	Interview or Focus Group
Age Concern	No
Churches Together in Gilchurch	No
Friends of the Earth	Focus group
Gilchurch 2000	Interview
Gilchurch Access Group	Focus group
Gilchurch Chamber of Commerce	Interview
Gilchurch Civic Society	Double interview/mini focus group
Gilchurch secondary schools	No
Gilchurch taxi firms	No
Gilchurch Visitor Information Centre	No
Gilchurch Volunteer Bureau and Citizens' Advice Bureau	No
Gloucestershire Ambulance Service	No
Gloucestershire Constabulary	No
Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue	No
Market Place traders	Interview
National Express Coaches	No
Road Haulage Association	No
Stagecoach	No
Thamesdown Transport Ltd	No

(adapted from The Gilchurch Traffic and Environment Plan, 1999)

APPENDIX 11: DOCUMENTS RELATING TO THE CASE-STUDY PROJECTS

Delfield People and Ecology Project

Minutes of Delfield Town Council from January 1997 to November 2002

Submissions relating to Delfield to the Stroud District Local Plan revised deposit draft 2001 to 2011

Local newspaper coverage of the project from December 2001 to August 2002

'The Pitch' community newspaper from February 2002 to August 2002

Delfield Parish Map

Delfield Land-Use Map

'The Greenspaces of Delfield Parish' (undated) Stroud Valleys Project

Delfield Parish Land Use and Biodiversity Survey – suggested plan for the next steps (undated) Stroud Valleys Project

'The Projects of Stroud Valleys Project' (undated)

<http://stroudvalleysproject.org/home.asp> accessed 25th November 2002

Gilchurch Traffic and Environment Plan

The Gilchurch Traffic and Environment Plan (1999) Cotswold District Council

Gilchurch Traffic and Environment Plan –consultation report (1998) Cotswold District Council

Minutes of Gilchurch Town Council, from February 1996 to September 2002

Minutes of Cotswold District Council, from September 1998 to November 2002

Minutes of Gloucestershire County Council from March 1997 to November 2002

Local newspaper coverage of the project from February 1996 to December 1997 and October 2002 to January 2003

Submissions by members of Users' Group to Cotswold District Local Plan review 2001 – 2011, first deposit