

New Deal for Communities

The National Evaluation

Research Reports

Enhancing the Neighbourhood Environment: The Role of NDCs

Research Report 58

The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently sponsoring the 2002-2005 national evaluation of New Deal for Communities. This evaluation is being undertaken by a consortium of organisations co-ordinated by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the NRU/ODPM.

Those wishing to know more about the evaluation should consult the evaluation's web site in the first instance <http://ndcevaluation.adc.shu.ac.uk/ndcevaluation/h>



Sheffield
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Enhancing the Neighbourhood Environment: The Role of NDCs

Research Report 58

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Executive Summary

This report explores environmental improvements undertaken in NDC areas. It examines the nature of initiatives, their impact, connections with other strategies, mainstreaming and sustainability and the role of environmental improvements in enhancing the local 'community'.

Context

- Good quality public spaces are viewed as key building blocks for the creation of sustainable neighbourhoods, particularly in poorer areas where access to and maintenance of public space can be more problematic.
- Residents of poor neighbourhoods are more likely to report concerns about the local environment.
- A modest improvement has been recorded in environmental and liveability concerns across NDC areas between 2002 and 2004, although quality of life measures in NDCs still lag behind the national average.

Activities in NDCs

- Many NDC partnerships are working within poor local environments, characterised by a lack of public space, a history of poor maintenance and crime.
- Responses to what are generally 'localised' environmental issues have been varied. Improvement activities range from housing improvements, through to improvements aimed at facilitating increasing use of public space, for example, through the provision of community gardens and tackling environmental crime.
- The objectives underpinning environmental improvements in NDC areas are wide ranging and often relate to all five NDC themes. Improving the quality of life was an overarching objective fundamental to efforts to improve and create better public spaces, tackle ASB, improve safety in public spaces, promote increasing use of public space and engender social interaction between different groups.
- An integral part of many environmental improvement initiatives was partnership working. Partnerships were fostered with a range of statutory and voluntary agencies. Local authorities were often the key partners as owners and maintainers of public space.
- The formation of strong and representative community groups to work with delivery partners is an effective method of involving local people in the improvement process. However, NDCs and local authorities should be aware of the burden placed upon volunteers.
- NDCs and other delivery partners are keen to establish local ownership of new public spaces. Whether or not this is an effective approach to management of public space remains unclear. Engendering a sense of pride in public spaces can lead to greater usage. However, it is difficult to ensure that different groups and interests in the area share in a sense of local ownership.
- Long-term sustainability of public space projects should be a key priority for NDC. This is especially relevant when NDC capital and revenue investment is involved. Ensuring long-term maintenance, usually by the local authority, is a key factor for achieving sustainability.
- Successful sustainability and adequate maintenance can be achieved by early agreements with local authorities and ensuring that NDC projects are aligned to wider strategic aims, and correspond to local authority management and maintenance budgets.

Impacts of Environmental Improvements

- The impacts of environmental improvement initiatives can be hard to isolate and measure. Officers and local residents, however, referred to various positive impacts, including: the improved visible appearance of the neighbourhood; greater access and use of public space, in turn facilitating social interaction; a greater feeling of safety and security and; related opportunities for education, training and employment.
- NDCs can make a difference to the visual appearance of neighbourhoods by improving local environmental services and by creating new, and regenerated public spaces.
- Environmental improvement initiatives have extended the usability, accessibility and safety of public space, producing benefits for health and social interaction.
- Environmental improvement projects can have an immediate visual impact on a neighbourhood. When community participation is successful in such projects, it can encourage people to get involved with other NDC projects where the outputs and outcomes are less obvious or tangible.
- Environmental improvement initiatives have played an important part in raising the profile of NDCs locally.
- While there are examples of effective monitoring and evaluations, NDCs may wish to give this a higher priority, and consider 'measurables' and 'achievable' at the inception of initiatives.

1. Introduction

A consortium led by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University is undertaking the National Evaluation of New Deal for Communities (NDC). This report from the Housing and Physical Environment (HPE) Theme Team for the National Evaluation explores environmental improvements undertaken in NDC areas. It examines the nature of initiatives, the impacts made, the connections with other strategies, mainstreaming and sustainability, and the role of environmental improvements in enhancing 'community'.

1.1. Research Approach

This project was undertaken in three phases. Phase 1 involved a broad review of environmental improvement initiatives carried out throughout the 39 NDCs, using delivery plans and annual reports of NDC partnership activity undertaken by the national evaluation team. In Phase 2, a detailed review was undertaken in a sample of 10 NDCs using a wider range of documents including delivery plans, strategies, project monitoring reports, appraisals and other background documents. The NDCs involved were Islington, Knowsley, Leicester, Manchester, Newcastle, Newham, Lewisham, Luton, Salford, Southwark and Wolverhampton. Brief telephone calls were made to collect background information sources and verify details about initiatives. Phase 3 involved fieldwork studies in two partnerships (Newcastle and Newham), including a review of background data, interviews with NDC staff, partner agencies and local resident beneficiaries. In addition, more detailed telephone interviews were undertaken with key stakeholders in Lewisham NDC.

This report analyses the findings in the following areas:

- the policy context for environmental improvement initiatives
- the nature of environmental improvement initiatives in NDCs; what they are, why they are developed, how they are funded and who is involved
- the involvement of, and benefits for, local communities and individuals
- opportunities for mainstreaming and the sustainability of environmental improvements, including the relationships with wider strategic and policy aims
- the impacts of environmental improvements in NDCs
- key issues for NDC Partnerships to consider

1.2. Defining Environmental Improvement

For the purposes of this study, environmental improvement is defined as the physical creation, regeneration, improvement and/or management enhancement to public space. Many different kinds of public space can exist in any one neighbourhood. Box 1 summarises the typology adopted by the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce in 2002, which distinguishes between green spaces and civic spaces.

Box 1: An Urban and Open Green Space Typology

Green Spaces	Civic Spaces
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • parks and gardens • provision for children and teenagers • amenity green-space (most commonly, but not necessarily, in housing areas) • outdoor sports facilities (with natural or artificial surfaces) • allotments, community gardens and urban farms • cemeteries and churchyards • natural and semi-natural urban green-spaces, including woodland or urban forestry • green corridors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sea fronts (including promenades) • civic squares (including plazas) • market squares • pedestrian streets • other hard-surfaced pedestrian areas

Source: DTLR (2002)

1.3. Case Studies

Newcastle NDC

Newcastle NDC is home to around 9,500 people. Its housing stock is a mix of pre-1919 terraced housing and more recently-built flats, maisonettes and tower blocks. Over half the stock is in the social sector, with 43.6 per cent owned by the Council and 12.9 per cent by RSLs. Housing management responsibility for the Council's 34,000 homes now rests with an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO). In the private sector, 17.5 per cent of housing stock is owner occupied and 26 per cent is in the private rented sector. Management standards and quality in the private rented sector are variable; however, significant improvements can be attributed to the NDC's Private Rented Project (www.privaterentedproject.co.uk) which has recently rolled-out across the city. The NDC has carried out a number of environmental improvement projects including:

- **Nunsmoor Park** - a project aimed at increasing the amenity and safety of a run-down park in partnership with Newcastle City Council, the Nunsmoor Park Users Group and the Friends of Nunsmoor Park
- **Rye Hill Play Area** - a completed project driven by a local Tenants and Residents Association (TARA) who wanted to provide younger people with an alternative from hanging around on the streets. The multi-purpose play area opened in October 2003 and includes infant and junior play areas and a multi-games court, popular with local sports teams
- **Elswick Park** - a project to re-develop existing parkland including two play areas, an all weather sports area, improved lighting, designs to limit crime and new furniture. Funding difficulties have temporarily delayed implementation
- **Litter Prevention Project** - an ongoing project employing a 'litter development worker' who provides education and training to reduce litter problems in the NDC area

Newham NDC (West Ham and Plaistow)

Newham NDC is situated in the East of London, to the west of the London Borough of Newham and sandwiched between the major centres of Stratford and Canning Town. It has a population of just under 9,600 people in approximately 3,900 households. The Black/Black British population is the largest of the area's non-white groups being 39.0

per cent of the population. Over half the population live in social rented housing - 40.0 per cent renting from the Local Authority and 14.7 per cent renting from Registered Social Landlords. Some 30.5 per cent of households are owner occupied, compared with 43.6 per cent for Newham as a whole. The private rented sector in the NDC accounts for 14.8 per cent of households and experienced the largest growth in market share of any tenure between 1991 and 2001 with an increase of 5.5 per cent. The NDC has undertaken a number of related environmental improvement initiatives, including:

- *Urban Design Framework* - The Urban Design Framework provides an overall strategy for improving the area's physical environment and creating safe pedestrian links between separate neighbourhoods. Specific projects include two home zones (see Box 6), improvements to local parks and open spaces and improvements to school boundaries, all of which involves intensive public consultation
- *Clean Team* - The Clean Team employs local residents to tackle environmental problems such as litter, graffiti removal, removing posters from lampposts and the safe disposal of syringes. They report incidences of bulk rubbish and fly-tipping to Newham Council who have agreed to respond within 24 hours and report incidences on abandoned and un-taxed vehicles. It is run by Newham's Community Recycling Project (known as 'Wombles') and is being piloted in the West Ham and Plaistow area thanks to funding from the NDC
- *Neighbourhood Management* - The Neighbourhood Management initiative aims to improve local services and make them more responsive to local needs. The Neighbourhood Management Team co-ordinate and enhance a broad range of local services including environmental maintenance, street cleaning and refuse collection, community liaison, consultation and support. The creation by Newham Council of a Public Realm Department to help deliver a neighbourhood management clean and safe agenda across the Borough builds upon the work in the NDC

Lewisham NDC (New Cross Gate)

Lewisham NDC is located at New Cross Gate in southeast London and to the north of the London Borough of Lewisham. It has a population of around 8,300 living in approximately 3,600 households. The area is ethnically diverse. Some 50.2 per cent of the population is non-white, with the Black/Black British group accounting for 37.2 per cent of the total. Over half of all households live in social rented housing - 48.1 per cent rent from the Local Authority and a further 8.6 per cent rent from Registered Social Landlords. There is a lower proportion of owner occupied households in the NDC than in Lewisham as a whole - 30.1 per cent compared with 50.1 per cent - however this sector has experienced the largest growth in market share of any tenure between 1991 and 2001, increasing by 10.3 per cent.

The NDC Partnership is carrying out various projects designed to improve the environment through the provision of both facilities and services. The *Community, Environment and Enforcement Project* aims to remove graffiti and fly tipping, address environmental crime levels and encourage work with residents to raise awareness. This builds on NDC-organised 'clean-up days', recycling services and collection services for items that might otherwise have been fly-tipped. Physical improvements to parks and play areas are underway, including the Pocket Parks project that acts as a pilot for improving green spaces (for more information about Pocket Parks see www.pocketparks.co.uk). Worthy of special mention is the *Besson Street Community Project* - a community garden designed to increase community involvement and act as a training and educational resource (see Box 2).

2. The Context for Environmental Improvements

2.1. National Policy Context

In recent years quality of life and the quality of the local environment have become more prominent in policy debate, and coined the 'liveability agenda' (Shaw, 2004). The Sustainable Communities Plan stressed the importance of good quality public spaces to the sustainability of neighbourhoods and the quality of life for its residents. In the policy statement *Living Spaces: Greener, Safer, Cleaner* (ODPM, 2003) the Deputy Prime Minister stated that:

Successful, thriving and prosperous communities are characterised by streets, parks and open spaces that are clean, safe, attractive - areas that local people are proud of and want to spend their time in.

This agenda is particularly relevant to the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal and to the New Deal for Communities Programme. Indeed, the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) has produced two recent policy and practice guidance notes (NRU, 2003a; NRU, 2003b). New funding commitments support the policy. For example the Liveability Fund provides £89 million in grants to local authorities to deliver innovative programmes for creating new public spaces. More information about national strategies to improve public space in the UK is available from www.cabespace.org.uk.

While issues of access to, and poor maintenance of, public space are apparent in many areas of the UK, there is evidence that suggests poorer neighbourhoods are affected more. The English House Conditions Survey 2001 examines the extent and distribution of environmental problems in neighbourhoods, and the differences apparent in 'poor neighbourhoods' (ODPM, 2003). It finds that:

- residents of poor neighbourhoods are more likely than those living elsewhere to view their neighbourhood as having a wide range of environmental problems
- the most likely environmental problems of private sector poor neighbourhoods are: nuisance from street parking (27 per cent); litter and rubbish (22); heavy traffic (19); and neglected gardens (17)
- the most likely environmental problems of local authority-built poor neighbourhoods are: neglected gardens (30 per cent); litter and rubbish (26); vandalism (23); graffiti (19); and neglected buildings (18)
- in terms of perceptions, the greatest differences between households in poor neighbourhoods compared to elsewhere are the former's greater likelihood of identifying problems with litter and rubbish (23 per cent difference), problems concerning drugs (16), general level of crime (15), the state of open spaces and gardens (15), vandalism and hooliganism (15), troublesome teenagers/children (14) and fear of being burgled (14)

2.2. The Context in NDC

For the NDC Programme overall, there are some indicators of successful outputs and outcomes surrounding the physical environment. A recent programme note from the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU, 2004) highlighted the following findings from the NDC Programme that "give grounds for cautious optimism:"

- for 15 NDCs measuring resident satisfaction, there has been a six per cent increase in satisfaction with factors such as the area as a place to live, the standard of accommodation and the cleanliness of the area

- general satisfaction with the area as a place to live has increased from an average base line of 58 per cent to 60 per cent
- satisfaction with various aspects of the environment, including litter and the quality of parks has increased from 47 per cent to 59 per cent

Key findings from the NDC MORI/NOP 2004 household survey also reveal some modest improvements in key environmental indicators across the Programme compared with 2002. Table 1 highlights these improvements. While the problems of abandoned cars and vandalism have reduced significantly, NDCs continue to fall beneath the national average. Figures for the three case study NDCs are presented in Appendix 1.

Table 1: Perceptions of Quality of Life in Selected NDCs

	NDC Aggregate %			National %
	2002	2004	<i>Positive Change</i>	
Very/fairly satisfied with area	60	66	+6	86
Quality of life in area very/fairly good	76	78	+2	83
Litter and rubbish a serious problem	37	33	+4	15
Abandoned and burnt out cars a serious problem	21	11	+10	4
Poor quality or lack of parks and open spaces a serious problem	23	21	+2	-
Vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage a serious problem	33	26	+7	12
Teenagers hanging around on the streets a serious problem	41	39	+2	18

Source: MORI/NOP Household Survey 2004

Evidence from the main evaluation phase of NDC suggests that for the housing and the physical environment theme, the difficulties in tackling core housing problems have led Partnerships to focus most activities on environmental improvements, “addressing the ‘liveability’ agenda, both for its own sake and as highly visible evidence of progress and change” (CRESR, 2004). In focus groups conducted for the National Evaluation, a number of participants stated that areas were ‘cleaner’ as a result of NDC activities such as environmental clean-ups, removal of abandoned cars, improvements to allotments and the regeneration of public gardens and parks.

2.3. Summary

- good quality public spaces are viewed as key building blocks in creating sustainable neighbourhoods, particularly in poorer neighbourhoods where issues regarding access to and maintenance of public space are more prevalent
- residents of poor neighbourhoods are more likely than those living elsewhere to view their neighbourhood as having a wide range of environmental problems
- the quality of life across NDC areas is perceived to have improved modestly between 2002 and 2004 in relation to key indicators related to environmental and liveability issues
- however, NDCs still fall behind the national average

3. Environmental Improvement Activities in NDCs

This section outlines the type of environmental improvement initiatives occurring in NDCs. The reasons for pursuing such initiatives is discussed as is the nature of the initiatives including the form they take, objectives, delivery mechanisms, partnership arrangements, community participation and mainstreaming and sustainability.

3.1. The Need for Environmental Improvements in NDC Areas

In the three case study NDCs and across the programme there is evidence of poor public space provision, poor maintenance and specific problems associated with this. The main reasons for environmental improvements were:

- the lack of public space, particularly green space
- poor maintenance and neglect of existing parks, playgrounds and other public spaces
- problems with crime such as youth disorder, anti-social behaviour (ASB) and a fear of crime in public spaces
- the isolation and dislocation of neighbourhoods
- problems with derelict sites, often associated with demolition
- problems associated with traffic
- resident's prioritisation of environmental problems

There are several reasons for the attention given to environmental improvement initiatives by NDC Partnerships. Partly it reflects the difficulties of undertaking more substantial housing initiatives, and also the opportunity for NDCs to raise their profile within the local community. However, the overwhelming reasons for initiatives were the range of environmental problems identified in neighbourhoods (above) and the prioritisation of these problems by local residents. As one NDC Officer said:

It was what people in the areas wanted, and demanded.

3.2. The Nature of Environmental Improvement Initiatives

Environmental improvement initiatives in NDCs take many forms and relate to different aspects of the physical environment, covering the majority of urban and green spaces identified in Box 1. They have involved the creation of new public spaces, the regeneration of existing public spaces and enhanced services to deal with aspects such as abandoned cars, fly-tipping and graffiti (see also Green *et al*, 2003). The following bullet-points characterise the kind of initiatives undertaken:

- housing estate improvements including external improvement of flats, improvements to paths and pavements, providing secure entrances and improving lighting (for example Southwark NDC)
- urban design approaches involving the planning, creating or re-modelling of defined areas in the public realm (for example the Newham NDC Urban Design Framework)
- community gardens and allotments involving the creation or regeneration of gardens open to all residents (for example Knowsley NDC and Lewisham NDC - see Box 2)
- play and sports facilities for children of different ages (for example Newcastle NDC). See also Barraclough *et al*, 2004 and Fordham *et al*, 2004

- parks usually involving the regeneration of existing parks (for example Nunsmoor Park, Newcastle NDC - see Box 3) and also including smaller open spaces such as Pocket Parks (for example Lewisham NDC) and doorstep greens (for example Leicester NDC)
- improving the connections and linkages to different public space; for example school-routes (for example Bradford NDCs *Living Streets* initiative; Luton NDCs *Sustrans Art* project which aims to improve paths and cycle-ways, and making them outdoor art galleries)
- tackling 'environmental crimes' such as abandoned cars, graffiti and litter (for example Leicester NDC)

3.3. Objectives

NDCs have a wide range of objectives for environmental improvement initiatives, not surprising given the diversity of projects that fall under this umbrella term. Objectives often cut across NDC themes of crime, health, education and occasionally worklessness.

Improving the quality of the neighbourhood environment was for most NDCs the key objective. As an NDC officer from Newcastle said:

'We want to create more pride in the area for people living here and improve its image across the city.' (NDC Officer)

Tackling ASB, particularly involving younger people, was a common objective for projects involving parks and playgrounds. These related to tackling the effects of 'youth nuisance' on other residents and providing younger people with places to go and things to do.

'There was nothing for kids to do, they hung around in gangs, there were riots. Something needed to be done, the kids needed something better to do.' (Local Resident)

Improving safety in public spaces was a key objective for some projects. In Newham NDC, schemes to install home zones were designed to provide safer environments for residents by giving greater priority to pedestrians and calming-traffic. In Newcastle NDC, increasing safety in a local park was a key factor in encouraging residents to use it more:

'Safety was a major concern, people thinking people might be hiding in overgrown shrubs and bushes and not knowing who might be round the corner.' (Local Authority Officer)

For some initiatives, creating more social interaction and providing new venues for people to meet were key objectives. In Lewisham NDC for example, a community garden project aimed to act as a social meeting place, bring together people from different cultural backgrounds and be a venue for local community events.

3.4. Partnership Working

For the successful delivery of environmental improvement initiatives, effective partnership arrangements are vital. The most common linkages are between the NDC and local authorities, police, fire service, voluntary organisations, community groups and schools. A number of NDC improvement initiatives also link to other government

initiatives operating locally, including SureStart, Sports Action Zone and Health Action Zone.

The most common and arguably the most important partnership is between the NDC and the local authority. The local authority often owns and maintains public spaces, and usually becomes responsible for long-term management and maintenance. The partnership between NDCs and local authorities was most effective where it existed at a strategic level *and* at the project level. Some NDCs had successful links with local authority strategies including Community Plans, Community Safety Strategies, Neighbourhood Warden schemes and Open Spaces Strategies.

The establishment of Newham NDCs Urban Design Framework (UDF) is a good example of effective partnership working at a strategic level. The NDC established a working group with representatives from various departments of the council including the leisure and highways service. The group met once a month over a six-month period to discuss and approve the outcomes of consultation exercises and detailed proposals drawn-up with consultant architects. This proved to be an effective way of engaging and contracting with the local authority, enabling the adoption and approval of the UDF by all parties.

3.5. Community Participation

Another common and important partnership arrangement was with local community groups. The majority of environmental improvement initiatives had links with residents through an existing residents or community group, ad hoc consultation or residents forming a new group to drive the project forward. In Newcastle NDC two park projects involved resident groups who worked closely with the NDC at all stages of implementation and delivery.

Resident involvement was viewed by the majority of respondents in interviews to be a vital element for getting projects off the ground and making sure improvements are what residents want and will use.

Box 2: Lewisham NDC's Community Garden

Besson Street Community Garden has been transformed from an under-used and run-down space into a multi-cultural garden. It has plants from around the world that reflect the ethnicity of the area's residents and it hosts a wildlife area, a poly-tunnel and a study centre. The garden now acts as a meeting place and a venue for local events - a recent art exhibition by local artists for example.

Capital funding was provided by Lewisham NDC, and the local authority has contributed by providing support from their Nature Conservation Worker and by a commitment to assisting with maintenance. There is the possibility that some future funding may come from one of the large RSLs operating locally.

The local community had a central role in the design and planting of the garden and will continue to maintain and develop it. A local resident now acts as a development officer, informal training for volunteers is ongoing and training towards accredited horticulture qualifications is planned. The NDC hopes that Besson Street Community Garden will inspire other projects in the area, particularly the development of Pocket Parks, and will encourage people to take more interest in their own gardens. Plans are even afoot to enter the 2005 London in Bloom competition.

Working with Community Groups

Environmental improvement initiatives can take a long time to deliver and face a number of hurdles. The evidence suggests that strong community groups and individuals play an important role in conceiving projects, keeping delivery on-track and generating wider public support.

Newcastle NDCs Rye Hill Play Area was inspired and driven forward by a strong local residents group - the local Tenants and Residents Association (TARA). Box 5 explains the project in more detail. Support from the NDC in terms of funding and assistance with consultation, and from the Council, was an important aspect of the project's success. However, the NDC were clear that the main factor for success was the vociferous community group:

'They [the TARA] stated what they wanted and they got what they wanted.' (NDC Officer)

For the community group involved, there were significant barriers to overcome. Despite some significant investment in Rye Hill up to 1999 from SRB and other funding streams, no progress had been made in creating better open spaces or making provision for younger people. The arrival of NDC was an opportunity to put into action the TARA's plans for a multi-purpose play area. However, the group encountered problems in the early days of NDC:

'We felt belittled, there was the council hierarchy and lots of jargon, we were conned but we stuck in there for what we needed.' (TARA member)

For the TARA, the local authority was viewed as a major barrier to delivery:

'The local authority was a real block. They were stalling about the size of the ball court area. They said if it was bigger it would attract too many people from outside the area. They like to tell you what your getting and don't listen to what you want.' (TARA Member)

The TARA's relationship with the NDC was much better, and their support eventually helped to overcome differences with the Council.

While the TARA was the main driving force for the project, support and involvement from the wider community was gained, mainly through a series of consultation exercises, including:

- the establishment of a TARA working group that involved other people in the local community

'A lot of local people of different ages have been involved in the development of the play area - parents, young kids. We did a lot of knocking on doors and got a lot of support for the project. People were happy to get involved.' (TARA member)

- door-to-door surveys and information drops
- open-days for residents to talk about schemes and say what they wanted
- visits to other parks for adults and children

The Rye Hill Play Area proved to be a difficult project to deliver, taking a long time and putting a heavy burden on un-paid volunteers. TARA member's views of the experience were mixed:

'The key lesson is you have to keep going and never give in.' (TARA Member)

'Don't get involved, it's bad for your health and life, you're not getting paid and it takes up a lot of your time.' (TARA Member)

The Rye Hill experience is of a strong community group emerging to address a particular issue, and in effect initiating the agenda. Elsewhere, working groups involving local people have been established to help steer through a specific project. For example, Newham NDC established the Rudolph Road Home Zone Residents Group to ensure a successful consultation process by gathering information, taking views from residents and stakeholder agencies and feeding back to local people. For example, the group attended a Home Zone conference and made site-visits to established home zones. Ideas and comments were then fed-back to the design team and incorporated into the scheme.

'The residents group were very enthusiastic about the whole thing and that's quite nice in a way 'cos they look at it in an overall sense; they have a sense of ownership about it.' (Local Authority Officer)

'The residents group was a great benefit for us [the NDC] and the consultation. They gave a local voice to the process in a constructive way.' (NDC Officer)

'Developing a specific [residents] group was a great idea. They met regularly and got much more involved in the specifics of design. So if you like, they were kind of resident's champions who would then bring the scheme forward to the rest of the residents.' (Consultant Architect)

In addition a range of consultation events were held which included:

- public meetings
- leaflets and newsletters
- an open day/community barbeque in a local park
- permanent displays in public places.

At Nunsmoor Park, a key challenge for Newcastle NDC and the City Council was working with a number of community groups and trying to reach a compromise solution.

'There's the Friends of the Play Centre Group and the Friends of the Park Group, both of which had different views about what needed doing in the park. There was a bit of conflict. To overcome this we simply had meetings to go through the plans which went back and forward and finally a compromise was reached.' (Local Authority Officer)

Local 'ownership'

Another important aspect of community participation is local 'ownership' of new public spaces. It has become accepted wisdom that engendering a sense of ownership, control and pride in a new project will help to prevent damage, misuse and vandalism. However, the evidence for this is largely anecdotal, and more detailed evaluation and enquiry are required to establish the effects of ownership. It is difficult to imagine all individuals in a locality gaining that sense of ownership and as is all too common, vandalism, damage and ASB can be perpetrated by a handful of individuals.

'It only takes one or two bad 'uns to spoil the place for everyone else.' (Local Authority Officer)

Perhaps it is more likely for key groups or individuals to show leadership and act as guardians of public space or role models for other local people.

Despite this, fostering a sense of local ownership in public spaces is a worthwhile objective, and respondents regarded it to be an important factor. There were clear linkages between effective consultation exercises and local ownership:

'Taking adults and kids to visit other parks, showing them what's possible and letting them have a say on the proposals will hopefully give them a sense of ownership and increase their pride in the local area.' (Local Resident Activist)

Box 3 (below) outlines the importance of community involvement to the regeneration of Nunsmoor Park, Newcastle NDC:

Box 3: Community Involvement at Nunsmoor Park, Newcastle NDC

Nunsmoor Park was run-down and underused. The NDC in partnership with Newcastle Council has helped to regenerate the park to the benefit of the local community, formerly deprived of decent open space provision. The scheme aimed to improve safety and amenity in the park by opening-up existing parkland, re-landscaping shrubbery, improving lighting, installing new furniture and providing better play spaces for younger people.

Local residents played a key role in the project and have been involved at all stages of its development. In particular, two local resident groups, the *Nunsmoor Park Users Group* and the *Friends of Nunsmoor Park*, have worked effectively alongside Newcastle Council's Parks and Countryside Department and the NDC Environment Team. At one public consultation exercise, designers presented their ideas for the park and invited residents (including children) and other agencies to rate their designs by placing coloured stickers on the drawings (photo below). The agencies we spoke to saw resident involvement as a critical aspect of the project:

We consulted residents, e.g. through the NDC appraisal process, we showed them equipment and provided them with a choice. I think this helped bring people back to the park and created a sense of ownership of the park as they view it more as 'their park and equipment'.

It's very important to get local people involved, ask them what they need and then they are a lot more likely to use it.



Two children take part in the consultation exercise

3.6. Sustainability and Mainstreaming

NDC Partnerships are well-placed to make environmental improvements through their ability to engage with local residents, partner with external agencies and provide funding either through leverage, bidding or drawing on their own resources. While there is some evidence of NDCs drawing on other funding sources for environmental improvement projects, a significant proportion of expenditure has come direct from NDC. NDCs need to think carefully about the long-term sustainability of capital expenditure, both in terms of the longevity and durability of new public spaces and the long-term maintenance burden. In the majority of cases, the local authority will be the agency responsible for maintenance, therefore early agreements are critical for mainstreaming and sustainability. Local authorities have specific budgets for the maintenance of public spaces. Therefore, negotiations about projects that may lead to increased maintenance costs should be an early consideration.

In Newcastle NDC, agreements with the local authority over maintenance have ensured that investments and projects can be successfully mainstreamed.

'The improvement of the park [Nunsmoor Park] has already been mainstreamed as its maintenance is now managed by the Parks and Countryside Department of the Council, and it has a dedicated Park Keeper.' (Local Authority Officer)

For the Rye Hill Play Area, however, there are some challenges to its long-term sustainability. The play area has been developed on land owned by a local church and leased for 10 years. This is a surprisingly short-term arrangement, which could cause difficulties when it comes up for renewal. Indeed the TARA that led the project were deeply unhappy with this aspect of the project, but along with other partners took the view that the benefits of the development outweighed the risks. The short-term lease may also have an impact for maintenance. As it stands, the agreement between the NDC and the Council states that maintenance will be undertaken by the Council, funded for the first three years by the NDC (£5,000 per year) and after that wholly by the Council. However, maintenance arrangements may be put at risk when the lease comes up for renewal. The presence of a powerful, dedicated and vociferous local community group goes some way to alleviating that risk.

For park schemes in Newcastle NDC, maintenance and sustainability is more straightforward - placed wholly with the local authority. There is always a risk that local authority management and maintenance budgets are cut, leaving new spaces created with NDC funds to fall into disrepair. Newcastle NDC has alleviated this risk by planning capital expenditure and initiatives around, and within, the broader strategies and plans of the local authority. This ensures closer alignment between the burden of maintenance costs and the Council's ability to cover it. For example, the Nunsmoor Park project aligns with a number of Newcastle City Council's (NCC) strategic aims:

- the NCC Parks and Countryside Department's mission statement is: "As many people should use parks and open spaces as possible"
- the NCCs charter states that people should feel safe in their environment, improve health and liveability

By ensuring that projects and initiatives are consistent with the resources available for maintenance, and that initiatives at the local level are consistent with wider strategic aims, sustainability and mainstreaming opportunities are maximised.

3.7. Summary

- many NDC partnerships have to deal with a variety of negative issues regarding the local environment, including a lack of public space, poor maintenance of public space and crime
- tackling environmental issues is a key concern for many residents in NDC areas
- responses to what are generally 'localised' environmental issues have been varied. Improvements range from housing improvements, planning and design to improvements focusing on increasing the use of public space, for example the provision of community gardens and tackling environmental crime
- the objectives underpinning environmental improvements in NDC areas are wide ranging and often impact on all five NDC themes. Improving the quality of life was an overarching objective that involves improving and creating better public spaces, tackling ASB, improving safety in public spaces, fostering increased use of public space and engendering social interaction between different groups
- an integral part of many environmental improvement initiatives was partnership working. Partnerships were fostered with a range of statutory and voluntary agencies. Local authorities were often the key partners as owners and maintainers of public space
- the formation of strong and representative community groups to work with delivery partners is an effective method of involving local people in the process. However, NDCs and local authorities should be aware of the burden placed upon volunteers
- NDCs and other delivery partners are keen to establish local ownership of new public spaces. The evidence for whether this is effective is unclear. Engendering a sense of pride in public spaces can lead to greater usage and the benefits that bestows. However, it is difficult to ensure that everyone in the locality shares that sense of ownership
- long-term sustainability of public space projects should be a key priority for NDC. This is especially relevant when NDC capital and revenue investment is involved. Ensuring long-term maintenance, usually by the local authority is a key factor for achieving sustainability
- successful sustainability and adequate maintenance can be achieved by early agreements with local authorities and ensuring that NDC projects are aligned to wider strategic aims, and correspond to local authority management and maintenance budgets

4. Impacts of Environmental Improvements in NDCs

4.1. Introduction

This section examines the impacts that environmental improvements have and can make to NDC areas. Impacts are often hard to measure, particularly given the relatively short time in which most projects have been active. However, evidence in this study suggests that there are a number of positive impacts for neighbourhoods and residents and that environmental improvements have an impact across themes, especially crime and health and to a lesser extent education and worklessness.

In general, environmental improvements have had a positive impact upon neighbourhoods for the benefit of residents. The 2004 NDC household survey (MORI, 2004) indicates modest improvements for certain environmental variables since 2002 (see Table 1). However, interviews with officers and beneficiaries involved with specific projects demonstrate that important benefits have been achieved in terms of

improvements to the quality of public spaces. Environmental improvements were found to impact in a number of key ways:

- improvements to the visual appearance of neighbourhoods
- greater accessibility to, and usability of, public space
- better social interactions between people and enhancements to community capacity
- increased feelings of safety and security linked to the abatement of crime and anti-social behaviour
- better recognition of NDC by the local community
- opportunities for education, training and employment
- promotion of physical activities
- general improvement to the quality of life

4.2. Visual Appearance

NDCs have attempted to improve the visual appearance of local neighbourhoods through improvements to services that tackle environmental crimes such as fly-tipping, abandoned cars, and graffiti. For example, Newcastle NDC's litter prevention project has helped to create a cleaner environment, reducing the health implications of rubbish in the streets and increasing awareness of the issues and impact of littering amongst residents. Similarly, Newham NDC's 'clean-up' campaigns responded to immediate visual problems in the neighbourhood by identifying and dealing with hotspots for fly-tipping and by running 'skip-it' days for residents to get rid of bulky items in a responsible way. While these one-off campaigns proved to be successful, a longer-term and ongoing approach was required. Newham NDC now funds a Clean Team that employs local residents to tackle environmental problems such as litter, graffiti removal, removing posters from lampposts and the safe disposal of syringes. It is run by Newham's Community Recycling Project (known as 'Wombles') and works in partnership with Newham Council to deal with fly-tipping and abandoned cars.

In addition to service-led approaches, many NDCs have improved the visual appearance of neighbourhoods by regenerating existing public spaces or creating new ones. Respondents in Newcastle NDC stated that the main impact of Nunsmoor Park's regeneration had been improvements in visual appearance:

'The park's a lot nicer and it just feels better; it's more positive. People are now more interested in the park.' (NDC Officer)

While there have been improvements, all the case study NDCs were aware that more needed to be done and that long-term maintenance by the local authority was a key factor for continued success.

Box 4: Environmental Improvements in Manchester NDC

Manchester NDC's *Environmental Improvement Programme* has been a highly visible and a highly successful aspect of Manchester NDC's work. The programme, which includes community projects, alley-gating, parks and play areas, maintenance and streetscape, works in partnership with local people, Groundwork, the City Council and Eastlands Homes to improve local facilities and the general environment for all residents. In 2003/4 several new projects were delivered, including the Community Peace Garden at the Eden project in Openshaw, St Vincent's Homespace, Clayton Children's Centre, the Green Streets project at Harding Street and Planet Medlock Park.

The programme combines larger projects (such as work on Phillips Park) with a small grant scheme for environmental improvements of up to £4,000 per grant. These often help residents groups to supplement larger projects - planting schemes in alley-gates for example.

Improved open space at Jubilee Gardens



Before ...



... and after

Photos: Manchester NDC

4.3. Accessibility and Usability

Environmental improvement initiatives have had a positive impact by improving the usability and accessibility of public space, both in terms of absolute numbers and for different groups of people. Improvements to parks, playgrounds and gardens in particular have provided better, more usable environments for people to use.

Initiatives often attempt to create public spaces that are accessible for all, and cater for different groups - of different ages, abilities and ethnicities. Children and families are particularly well provided for by new initiatives in NDCs. A range of projects took a child-focussed approach concentrating on play provision for children of different ages and abilities.

'Kids of different ages now have somewhere to go, for example the older kids have a football team that plays on the ball court, it gives them an alternative to hanging around on the street.' (Local Resident)

Other projects are accessible by a broader cross-section of local communities. Good examples are the community garden initiatives running in Knowsley NDC and in Lewisham NDC. In Knowsley, the community garden has created disabled access, a garden club for adults now exists and there are links with local primary schools. In Lewisham NDC, the community garden has plants from around the world to encourage multi-cultural use and interest (see Box 2).

4.4. Social Interaction

Environmental improvements in NDCs are having an impact on the level of social interaction. In many of the projects reviewed, more people were being brought together, sometimes in passive ways generated by more people using public space...

'it brings people together; people know each other now. They walk through the park and speak to each other.' (NDC Officer)

...but also in more active ways. For example, gardening clubs have been created in Lewisham and Knowsley's community gardens and sports clubs have formed directly because of better pitches and facilities in Rye Hill, Newcastle.

For the majority of projects reviewed, community consultation and participation was a key factor in delivering new projects. There is evidence that the impact of this has been to increase resident involvement generally.

'More people are getting involved with each other.' (Local Resident)

'One of the wider impacts is that it spreads the word to the general public that things can be done if the right people are involved. We can work on those principles for work elsewhere.' (NDC Officer)

Indeed, for NDC, environmental improvement projects have proved to be a good way of highlighting the benefits and opportunities that NDC can bring. This is especially true for projects that have had an immediate visual impact:

'When people see what's been achieved, perhaps they realise that [the NDC] can achieve something.' (Local Authority Officer)

Box 5: Community-led Environmental Improvements in Newcastle NDC

A local survey revealed that residents of Rye Hill, Newcastle were unhappy with the lack of play provision for younger and older children. Kids had nothing to do and just hung around on the streets. The local tenants and residents association (TARA) developed the idea of constructing a multi-purpose play area on a piece of land where houses had been demolished and had been left vacant for a number of years - a site that had become a haven for joy-riders and where cars were frequently abandoned and set on fire.

The success of the project was testament to residents' hard work and perseverance. The project took five years to reach fruition, finally completed in October 2004 with the support of Newcastle NDC. Local residents, including children, were consulted about designs and play-equipment, including visits to other established projects. This has helped to foster a sense of ownership of the play area, which it is hoped will limit problems with vandalism and misuse. The result is an environment used by children of all ages that includes a young play area, a junior play area, a multi games court (popular with local clubs) and communal seating areas designed to provide parental viewpoints.

It is hoped that the facility will help reduce ASB in the area and provide children with an alternative to hanging around on the streets. The NDC will maintain the area for the first three years, after which time Newcastle City Council will take over.

Residents were clear on lessons they had learned. They told us:

Stand your ground, don't give up and be prepared to give up a lot of your time. Don't let agencies intimidate you or try and baffle you with jargon.

Find out what the community wants and what the kids want, and provide them with choice so you give them what they need then they're more likely to use it.

4.5. Safety and Security

For a number of projects reviewed there was some evidence that environmental improvements had made a positive impact by reducing anti-social behaviour. In the main, this is associated with problems of youth nuisance that has been overcome by “giving them something to do and somewhere to go”.

'There is always ASB. Before, kids used to chase around in the park and make dens in the shrubbery. But now the shrubbery has been cut back there are less dens and places for people to hide and the teen shelter has given kids somewhere to go where they aren't a nuisance to others.' (Local Authority Officer)

'I think the play area will help reduce ASB in the area, like thieving. At least with the play area we will know where the kids are and instead of them hanging around on the street.' (Local Resident)

In Newcastle NDC's Nunsmoor Park, a gazebo was installed overlooking a new play area to act as a shelter for parents. However, teenagers have begun to use it to hang-out - a use not intended, but seen by officers and involved residents as a positive impact:

'It's good that teens are using the shelter in that they're hanging around in one place, not by people's houses and not on the street. We know where they are and they have the feeling that they have a place of their own. There have been some problems with broken glass but at least we know where it is rather than kids finding it in overgrown bushes. We are also hoping to develop some outreach work with teens.' (Local Authority Officer)

'I think it would be a good idea for services to use the fact that kids will go and use the area and they could go to the kids rather than the kids having to go to the services.' (Local Resident)

In Newham NDC, the home-zone project aims to have a positive impact on pedestrian safety in the public realm. By reducing the speed of traffic and giving priority to residents over vehicles, the scheme will create a safer environment in the vicinity of resident's homes (see Box 6).

Box 6: Creating Home-zones in Newham NDC

Launched by the Children's Play Council in 1998 the 'Home Zone' initiative promotes the development of residential areas that prioritise the needs of resident pedestrians and cyclists above that of car users, and so improve residents' quality of life. The concept goes further than traffic calming measures by involving the re-design of social space by changing road layouts, using high quality surfacing and tree planting. Home Zones are not anti-car - equal attention is given to appropriate and safe parking. The vision is that this will make a residential area more attractive and more desirable.

The Rudolph Road Home Zone has been developed through a partnership of the NDC and Newham Council. Local residents were consulted about proposals over an 18-month period prior to implementation. Consultation events included a wide range of local meetings and walks around the area. At all stages, comments received from residents were fed back to the design team and incorporated into the final proposal. Work began in November 2004 and will be completed in early 2005.



Artistic impression of Rudolph Road Home-Zone

4.6. Education, Training and Employment

Environmental improvement initiatives can generate opportunities for education, training and employment. Amongst the NDCs reviewed, there are numerous examples:

- Newham NDC's Clean Team employs local people to tackle environmental problems such as litter, graffiti removal, removing posters from lampposts and the safe disposal of syringes
- at the Besson Street Community Garden, Lewisham NDC, a local resident now acts as a development officer
- also at the Besson Street Community Garden, informal training for volunteers is ongoing and training towards accredited horticulture qualifications is planned
- in Newcastle NDC a 'litter development worker' provides education and training to reduce litter problems in the NDC area
- regeneration of an urban public space in Luton NDC hopes to increase employment by sustaining local businesses and attracting new investment
- Lewisham NDC's *Community, Environment and Enforcement Project* will work with agencies and voluntary bodies to deal with 'enviro-crimes' by educating residents and providing training and work opportunities for local people
- Manchester NDC's *Positive Open Spaces* programme has created opportunities for education and skills development amongst local people
- in Newcastle NDC, one of the Rye Hill scheme working group resident members now has a job with the Council's regeneration team as a result of the experience and skills gained

4.7. Monitoring and Evaluation

Officer respondents in the case study NDCs regarded evaluation and monitoring as important. This study provided little evidence that it was taking place however. There are several explanations for this. This is a limited study using a limited sample. Initiatives are, in many cases, only recently implemented and evaluations are planned for the future. For example, Newcastle NDC is planning to monitor the impact of the Rye Hill Play Area by collecting data on the number of people entering the area, the number of clubs using the ball courts and the number of people joining those clubs. Similarly, Lewisham NDC intends to conduct an evaluation of Besson Street Community Garden with a view to securing external funding to ensure its long-term sustainability. Informal measures of success are also being adopted:

'The Council is going for the Green Flag Award of the park and hopefully they will get it and this will be a good measure of success.' (Local Authority Officer)

Formal evaluation has taken place in other NDCs. For example, in 2001 Manchester NDC asked consultants Quaternion to evaluate the success of the *Community Environmental Programme* in terms of:

- measuring the impact of the programme in terms of reducing anti-social behaviour, building community spirit and reducing fears of crime
- providing an analysis of the role played by Community Link Workers in the development and implementation of the environmental improvement programme
- identifying how local communities have been engaged and how successful the programme has been in managing the expectations of, and meeting the needs of local communities
- making recommendations about how contractors could improve the delivery of their services

The report enabled the dissemination of good practice, and made recommendations for the future success of the programme. The report can be accessed online at www.beaconsndc.com.

4.8. Summary

- the impacts of environmental improvement initiatives can be hard to measure and to attribute to a specific initiative. However, officers and local residents express positive impacts in relation to: the improved visible appearance of neighbourhoods; greater access and use of public space, in turn facilitating social interaction; a greater feeling of safety and security; and opportunities for education, training and employment at different levels
- overall, environmental improvement initiatives have met their main objective and enhanced residents' quality of life
- NDCs can make a difference to the visual appearance of neighbourhoods by improving local environmental services and by creating new, and regenerating existing public spaces
- environmental improvement initiatives have extended the usability, accessibility and safety of public space, producing benefits for health and social interaction
- environmental improvement projects can make an immediate visual effect on a neighbourhood. When community participation is successful in such projects, it can encourage people to get involved with other NDC projects where the outputs and outcomes are less tangible

- a number of education, training and employment opportunities have been created through NDC environment programmes
- environmental improvement initiatives have also played an important part in raising the profile of NDCs locally
- while there are examples of effective monitoring and evaluations, NDCs may wish to give this a higher priority, and consider ‘measurables’ and ‘achievable’ at the inception of initiatives. While there are costs and complexities, particularly for small-scale projects, local evaluations are vital for an understanding of the contribution that environmental improvement initiatives have to neighbourhood renewal

5. Key Issues for Policymakers and Practitioners

Environmental improvement initiatives have been embraced by the majority of NDC Partnerships and this study highlights a number of promising projects that improve the usability and accessibility of public space. In some instances, enhancements to public space include opportunities for building community capacity by creating new venues for organised activities and promoting more informal social interactions.

There are a number of key issues that emerge from this study that NDC Partnerships and other agencies may wish to consider.

Processes

- tackling environmental issues is often a key concern for many residents in NDC areas. Early and wide-ranging consultation exercises will help to pin-point priorities
- environment improvements can range from housing improvements through to improvements designed to facilitate increasing use of public space, for example, through the provision of community gardens and by tackling enviro-crime
- environmental improvements can meet a number of aims and objectives that cut-across all five NDC policy themes. These can include improving people’s quality of life, improving and creating better public spaces, tackling ASB, improving safety in public spaces, improving health, fostering increasing use of public space and engendering social interaction between different groups
- partnership working is integral to many environmental improvement initiatives. Productive partnerships can be developed with a range of statutory and voluntary agencies. Local authorities were often the key partners as owners and maintainers of public space
- the formation of strong and representative community groups to work with delivery partners is an effective method of involving local people in the process. However, NDCs should be aware of the burden placed upon volunteers
- NDCs and other delivery partners are keen to establish local ownership of new public spaces. Whether or not this represents an effective management arrangement is unclear. It is certainly true, however, that engendering a sense of pride in public spaces can lead to greater usage and the benefits that bestows. However, it is difficult to ensure that everyone in the locality shares in this sense of local ownership
- long-term sustainability of public space projects should be a key priority for NDCs. Ensuring long-term maintenance, usually by the local authority, is a key factor for achieving sustainability. To this end, early agreement should be reached with the local authority regarding ongoing maintenance and management. It is also

important to ensure that NDC projects are aligned to wider strategic aims and correspond to local authority management and maintenance budgets

Impacts

- the impacts of environmental improvement initiatives are hard to identify and measure. The main impacts identified in this study were:
 - the visual appearance of neighbourhoods - improving local environmental services, regenerating existing public spaces and creating new public spaces
 - the usability, accessibility and safety of public space, producing benefits for health and social interaction
- environmental improvement projects can have an immediate visual impact on a neighbourhood. When community participation is successful in such projects, they can also encourage people to get involved with other NDC projects where the outputs and outcomes are less tangible. In addition, environmental improvement initiatives play an important role in raising the profile of NDCs locally
- NDC Partnership should consider the opportunities for education, training and employment opportunities associated with the delivery and ongoing management and maintenance of environmental improvements
- while there are examples of effective monitoring of the impacts of environmental improvements, NDCs need to more readily consider how to measure and monitor 'measurables' and 'achievable' at the inception of initiatives. While there are costs and complexities associated with doing so, local evaluations are vital for understanding the contribution that environmental improvement initiatives to neighbourhood renewal and informing the design and focus of subsequent initiatives

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Appendix 1: Environmental Indicators in the Case Study NDCs

	NDC Aggregate %		Newcastle NDC %		Newham NDC %		Lewisham NDC %		National %
	2002	2004	2002	2004	2002	2004	2002	2004	
Very/fairly satisfied with area	60	66	63	72	54	58	60	62	86
Quality of life in area very/fairly good	76	78	77	78	74	69	73	72	83
Dogs causing nuisance or mess a serious problem	16	15	12	12	18	17	15	13	8
Litter and rubbish a serious problem	37	33	45	41	36	41	27	30	15
Run-down / boarded-up properties a serious problem	19	15	13	9	9	8	4	6	-
Abandoned and burnt out cars a serious problem	21	11	5	4	33	12	25	8	4
Speed and volume of road traffic a serious problem	31	27	12	17	25	17	45	34	21
Poor quality or lack of parks and open spaces a serious problem	23	21	14	14	20	20	31	20	-
Vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage a serious problem	33	26	23	18	30	26	24	24	12
Teenagers hanging around on the streets a serious problem	41	39	32	33	45	42	35	34	18

Source: MORI/NOP Household Survey 2004