Introduction

Environmental issues are deeply linked to both the neighbourhood renewal and social exclusion agendas. Tackling “a poor physical environment” has rightly been made into a key objective of the Government’s strategy for neighbourhood renewal. But there are not yet adequate or sufficient measures within the strategy or other key strategies to ensure that this objective is met. There are a number of ways this can be overcome. Indeed, environmental issues can justifiably be placed at the heart of this agenda. Doing so would have multiple benefits, and meet a number of Government objectives simultaneously. This briefing addresses each of these points in turn.
**Environment – social exclusion links**

Environmental problems hit the poorest people hardest. This is a major contributor to social exclusion. Clear examples include air pollution from factories, and air pollution and other effects of traffic.

**Air pollution from factories**

A comparison of the Environment Agency’s pollution inventory data and the Government’s Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), carried out in 2001 [1], showed that

- 66 per cent of industrial carcinogenic emissions to air come from factories in the most deprived 10 per cent of wards
- People in the most deprived 10 per cent of wards have on average fifteen times as many carcinogenic emissions from factories in their communities, compared with the average of the other 90 per cent of wards.

**Air pollution from traffic**

In 1998 the Government’s health body COMEAP estimated that air pollution kills over 8,000 people prematurely each year [2]. New COMEAP research in 2001 [3] estimated that the long term health effects of particulate pollution are at least ten times greater than the short-term effects estimated in 1998. COMEAP estimates that a reduction in average concentrations of 1 $\mu g$ m$^{-3}$ would save 200,000 - 500,000 life years, and in response the Government has proposed reducing its particulates target from 40 to 20 $\mu g$ m$^{-3}$. Particulate pollution comes mainly from transport.

- In London poorer people are exposed to higher levels of air pollution, and have higher levels of respiratory illness [4]
- In Bradford more deprived wards have higher levels of particulate and nitrogen dioxide pollution [5].

**Other traffic problems**

Over 3,000 people are killed on Britain’s roads each year. A further 40,000 are maimed [6]. These effects are not distributed evenly within society.

- Children from social class V are five times more likely to be knocked down than children in social class I [7]
- Children from ethnic communities are more likely to be knocked down than other children [8].

Fast, heavy traffic also damages people’s health and quality of life in other ways - in that it makes roads dangerous and unpleasant to use, particularly for people walking and cycling, and severs communities - making them less attractive and sociable places to live in. These problems are worse for poorer and socially excluded people, who live with heavier traffic and who use walking and cycling more, as shown in the table [9].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>poorest ten per cent of households</th>
<th>richest ten per cent of households</th>
<th>average income households</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of all trips by foot</td>
<td>43 %</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Overall, environmental problems are concentrated in more deprived areas, exacerbating the problems of social exclusion, ill-health and health inequalities, often directly creating barriers to people’s involvement in normal, day-to-day activities.

**Environment in the neighbourhood renewal strategy**

The Government’s January 2001 National Strategy Action Plan - A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal - makes clear statements that a poor physical environment contributes to social exclusion. This strategy:

- Makes “poor housing and physical environment” one of five main areas to be priorities for action (alongside crime, employment and economies, education and skills, and health)
- Includes environmental improvement in one of its two long-term goals: “to have lower workless ness; less crime; better health; better skills and better housing and physical environment in all the poorest neighbourhoods”
- States that “The inclusion of housing and the physical environment as an additional outcome following the consultation recognises the poor state of housing and the physical environment in many deprived areas, and the part it plays in social exclusion”.

There are also 2 (out of 11) “floor” targets on environmental issues, as part of cross-Governmental Public Service Agreements (PSA’s).

**Overall, this is excellent recognition of, and commitment to tackling, the environmental problems which worsen social exclusion.**

**Delivery**

Despite this recognition, there are not sufficient or adequate subsequent actions in the strategy or consequent guidance to address the poor state of the physical environment in deprived areas. There are a number of reasons for this:

The “environment and housing” goal is downplayed or missing in many subsequent documents and guidance - in two ways:

i. The aims of the strategy are shortened and/ or do not include environmental goals.
   - “The Vision for Neighbourhood Renewal”¹
   - Local Strategic Partnerships Guidance (Chapter 4 and Annex B ²)
   - Neighbourhood Renewal Fund: Special Grant Report No. 78 ³

ii. Summaries of the Public Service Agreement “floor” targets omit the environmental PSAs
   - Local Strategic Partnerships Guidance ⁴

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¹p1 of Neighbourhood Renewal Unit website, [http://www.neighbourhood.dtlr.gov.uk/](http://www.neighbourhood.dtlr.gov.uk/)

²Chapter 4 “Local Strategic Partnerships and Neighbourhood Renewal”, p24 (paras 4.2 & 4.4); Annex B, “Neighbourhood Renewal Fund: Supplementary Guidance”, p55

³Special Grant Report No. 78, Annex B (paras. 1 & 2) and Annex D (box)
Environmental issues and neighbourhood renewal

Some reference to the environmental targets and aims is made in some documents however. This confusion needs clarifying by ensuring that environmental objectives are consistently part of summary versions of the strategy.

Guidance for delivery strategies for the Action Plan downplays or ignores environmental aspects of exclusion.

For example:

i. The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund Guidance does not mention environment floor targets.

ii. Local Strategic Partnership Guidance does not include environmental actions

The environmental PSA’s themselves are weak

The first environmental PSA is to improve air quality in the most deprived areas to meet the targets in the Government’s Air Quality Strategy. These are targets for all authorities to achieve, deprived or not.

The second PSA is to increase recycling and composting in line with the Government’s waste strategy. Again, these targets are for all authorities to achieve anyway. Moreover, it is not clear how this will improve the local environment, nor whether any particular mechanisms are in place for achieving it (most authorities are failing badly at present).

The environmental PSA’s are not broad enough – there are no transport PSA’s

One of the main aspects of a healthy environment is whether communities are safe, or “liveable”. Heavy traffic has a direct impact on health - through noise, danger, actual accidents, community severance, and reducing the potential for walking and cycling. First, there need to be PSAs to reduce transport’s direct impacts on socially excluded communities.

Second, there should be a transport PSA to address lack of access to the transport system - so that barriers to access to jobs, schools, shops and hospitals are removed.

Overall

- Environmental and transport factors are underplayed, despite the claim in the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit’s vision that they are important
- Guidance for those organisations executing the strategy will mean environmental and transport actions are a very low priority

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4p6 (Box 2)

5 For example, in Neighbourhood Renewal Unit website, “Public Service Agreement Targets”; A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal: National Strategy Action Plan, p10, p27; Local Strategic Partnerships Guidance, p9 (Box 1), p25 (para 4.6), and Annex B, p57 (q2)
**Action needed...**

We recommend six actions which would help rectify these problems. Taking such action would have the added benefit of helping the Government to meet its targets on reducing health inequalities.

1. The PSA’s should include explicit transport and environment floor targets, at least one aimed at reducing the negative impacts of traffic, and one concerning access to services (see also pt 5 below).

2. Amend the guidance for Local Strategic Partnerships to include mention of the environmental PSA’s and discussion of environmental actions.

3. Establish links with the process for agreeing Local Transport Plans, especially concerning ‘liveable streets’.

4. Strategies for encouraging employment should focus on creating local jobs: this would have the combined benefits of reducing the amount of time that employees spend travelling and reducing the environmental impact of transport. This could be reinforced by investment in public transport which delivers more jobs per pound invested than equivalent spending on road building. Such jobs tend to be more local, which keep more money within the local area.

5. The Index of Multiple Deprivation needs to be re-formulated. It needs to explicitly include an environmental component, while the present ‘Access to Services’ component is flawed in that it is based on travel distance and not travel time.

6. Further research is needed to support this work, especially on pts 1 & 5.

**References**


