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Improving poor environments: summary report

Science Report: SC050018/SR1

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Author(s):

Richard Buckingham, Brook Lyndhurst
Sarah Colston, Brook Lyndhurst
Phil Downing, Brook Lyndhurst
David Fell, Brook Lyndhurst
Mike Pedler, Sustainable Futures
Neil Spencer, Sustainable Futures
Gillian Thomas, Telling Research
Diane Wade, Sustainable Futures
Diane Warburton, Sustainable Futures
David Wilkinson, Sustainable Futures

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Research Contractor: Brook Lyndhurst, London House (18), 271-273 King Street, London, W6 9LZ; 020 8233 2972

Environment Agency's Project Manager:

Helen Chalmers, Social Policy Advisor, Environment Agency, Head Office, Rio House, Waterside Drive, Aztec West, Almondsbury, Bristol, BS32 4UD.

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Steve Killeen
Head of Science

Executive Summary

In 2005, Brook Lyndhurst consultants were commissioned by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Environment Agency to help develop a system to identify the poorest environments in England and Wales and ways of improving them.

This report reviews current initiatives to improve disadvantaged areas and ways of extending and spreading good practice; and presents a system for identifying poor quality environments to inform proposals for rolling out partnership programmes of action between local authorities, local service providers and communities.

The report provides a summary overview of the more detailed findings and recommendations set out in:

Brook Lyndhurst (2007a) Improving Poor Environments 2: Perceptions and attitudes of residents and other local stakeholders

Sustainable Futures (2007) Improving Poor Environments 3: The role of learning architectures in developing and spreading good practice

Brook Lyndhurst (2007b) Improving Poor Environments 4: Identifying poor quality environments and devising a programme of intervention

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the project

In 2005, Brook Lyndhurst¹ consultants were commissioned by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Environment Agency to help develop a system to identify the poorest environments in England and Wales and ways of improving them. This report summarises the evidence base and our proposals for rolling out partnership programmes of action between local authorities, local service providers and communities.

While the overall quality of the UK's environment is improving, the quality of this environment can vary between different areas and communities. There is now a large body of evidence that shows that people who are socially and economically disadvantaged often live in the worst environments.

The causes of these inequalities are often complex, long standing and cumulative. Often these environmental problems are caused by the actions of others who do not live in the affected community.

There has been a growing interest in and recognition of the relationship between deprivation and environmental quality - there is now a large body of UK-based evidence that shows that people who are socially and economically disadvantaged often live in the worst environments.

Respective reviews of the evidence base undertaken by Brook Lyndhurst (2004) for the ODPM NRU and Lucas *et al* (2004) for the Sustainable Development Research Network (SDRN) both found the following:

- Environmental inequality is a real and substantive problem within the UK;
- Patterns of environmental inequality are varied and complex, cautioning against over generalisations;
- Nonetheless, problems of environmental inequality afflict many of our most deprived communities;
- Environmental inequality has a detrimental effect on the quality of life experienced by members of those communities;
- The causes of these environmental inequalities are often complex, long standing and cumulative;
- In some cases not only are deprived communities disproportionately exposed to environmental risk, they are also disproportionately vulnerable to its effects.

Some action is already being taken by the Environment Agency and others at a local level through local strategic – and community planning partnerships, neighbourhood renewal and Communities First programmes. But further action is needed.

The UK Sustainable Development Strategy (Defra, 2005) provides a national framework for addressing environmental inequalities committed to: *'develop a system for identifying the*

¹ Brook Lyndhurst is a research and consultancy practice specialising in sustainable development – www.brooklyndhurst.co.uk

poorest quality local environments which need most enhancement to improve people's health and quality of life, which can be used as a basis for encouraging all local service providers through local authorities and LSP to focus on these areas, in consultation with the communities who live there, for example through Local Area Agreements' (Defra, 2005: 134).

The Environment Agency is committed to help improve local environments, particularly in disadvantaged areas of England and Wales, and in 2006-2011 will be working to develop 50 partnership programmes of action in the poorest quality environments (Environment Agency 2006, p9).

This science project builds on earlier research by Staffordshire University and the London School of Tropical Medicine to understand how to assess and address multiple environmental inequalities and their cumulative effect on people's health and quality of life (Stephens *et al.* 2007).

1.2 Aims of the project

The overall purpose of the work was two-fold:

- to assist the Environment Agency and Defra develop a mechanism for identifying those locations where environmental quality is poorest, and/or where disadvantaged communities are most exposed to poor environmental quality
- to devise a programme of sustained support and intervention so as to tackle environmental disadvantage in such locations

1.3 Research components

The research built on other recent and in some cases ongoing research², and comprised four elements:

1. Analysis of a variety of **indicators of local environmental conditions**, and the development of a mapping tool bringing these indicators together both to support both the identification of locations with poor local environmental quality, and to enable local stakeholders to engage with local environmental issues
2. Case study investigation of the **attitudes and perspectives** of residents and other local stakeholders towards poor quality environments
3. Review of evaluations of recent "**Area-Based Initiatives**", or ABIs, in the UK, drawn from a review of formal evaluations undertaken of ABIs across a variety of policy domains including regeneration and health
4. In addition to these elements undertaken by Brook Lyndhurst, a parallel exercise, conducted by the consultancy Sustainable Futures, investigated possible **mechanisms for learning** and for spreading good practice that might emerge from the IPE programme, both amongst practitioners and the policy and research communities

On the basis of the research, Brook Lyndhurst designed a **recommended programme of intervention** – "Improving Poor Environments", or IPE - with both pilot and mainstream

² Full references are provided in the Full Reports

elements, intended to tackle poor quality local environments in both the short and longer term.

Full results from research element 2 are the subject of a single, separate report from Brook Lyndhurst (2007a); elements 1, 3 and 5 are presented together in a further report from Brook Lyndhurst (2007b); element 4 is presented separately in a report from Sustainable Futures (2007).

2 Developing a system for identifying poor quality environments

2.1 The data challenge

This section summarise our analysis of a variety of indicators of local environmental conditions, and outlines the development of a mapping tool bringing these indicators together both to support both the identification of locations with poor local environmental quality, and to enable local stakeholders to engage with local environmental issues.

In one sense, there is a superabundance of environmental data, statistics and indicators available for local areas in England and Wales, whether through the Index of Multiple Deprivation, Neighbourhood Statistics, BVPI, Local Quality of Life indicators or through the Environment Agency's own data.

However, and as Brook Lyndhurst remarked in our report to the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit in 2004:

“The superabundance is more apparent than real – progressively closer inspection of both statistics and indicators reveals more weaknesses. Data are collected in different ways by different organisations; data refer to different and inconsistent geographical areas; data are available for some places and not others; data are rarely available for very small geographical units (of the size typically used in defining areas of social exclusion, for example); data are in many cases gathered but not collated, or collated but not analysed, or analysed but not used”

The challenge of identifying particular locations in which the IPE programme should operate is therefore a considerable one.

2.2 Guiding principles for identifying poor quality environments

Our approach to the challenge was thus a pragmatic one, with the following “guiding principles”:

- **Definition** – there is no fixed or widely agreed definition of “environmental inequalities”, so a mechanism is needed that allows for both evolution over time, and that acknowledges variation in perspectives
- **Choice of indicators** – it is important to select a manageable number of indicators, spread across the range of issues encompassed by the notion of “poor local environments”, whilst acknowledging data quality
- **Composite indicator** – an overall indicator poses a wide range of methodological problems, but is implicit to any method for identifying particular locations on an “overall” basis. The use of weights to amalgamate indicators is thus imperative

- **Weights** – weights provide a means of amalgamating indicators in ways that reflect relative importance. Relative importance is highly subjective, however, so a mechanism is required to capture variation in stakeholder values
- **User needs** – key prospective users of the IPE indicators operate at national, regional and local level. Judgments on the relative importance of environmental factors at national level will not hold for each and every location. A system is needed that allows both top-down and bottom-up perspectives to be taken into account, and in such a way that is easily accessible for non-specialists
- **Number of locations** – the indicators and mapping tool need to be “fit for purpose” so as to identify a particular number of locations. Given the Environment Agency’s ambition to work with a pre-determined number of local partnership, the target number of location is currently set at 50. The system is not required to distinguish a set of locations that are ‘different’ from other locations, in the way – for example – that the 88 NRU areas were identified
- **Size of IPE locations** – the system needs to use data at small levels of resolution (Super Output Areas) but should not presume that the IPE programme should focus on areas of a fixed size – in some cases, neighbourhood level initiatives will be appropriate, in others District-wide approaches will be appropriate
- **Top-down/bottom-up** – given the weighting issues, variation in local environmental circumstances, differing user-needs and the variability in the size of possible IPE locations, the system needs to allow the centre (the ‘top-down’) to use the indicators to allow identification of Districts/Boroughs where environmental circumstances are considered to be poor; and local partnerships (the ‘bottom-up’) to work with the same indicators to identify particular foci for effort at the sub-District level
- **Designation & blight** – the use and presentation of the material must be sensitive to the risks of ‘blight’ through designation as having a ‘poor quality environment’; the top-down/bottom-up model is a key element of achieving this

2.3 Indicators of environmental quality

In order to identify the poorest quality environments in need of most environmental enhancement, the Environment Agency proposed a small and manageable set of indicators reflecting national and local environmental priorities. The proposed indicators build on those issues identified by residents and local stakeholders in the case study areas, as well as those already used by government to identify areas of multiple deprivation. Drawing on work undertaken by the Environment Agency throughout 2005, and in the light of the principles just referred to, we have assembled a dataset comprising the following indicators:

- Ambient air pollution (PM_{10s})
- Industrial air-borne releases (SO₂)
- Green space
- Bio-diversity
- Derelict land
- Flood risk
- River water quality
- Street cleanliness

- Housing in poor condition
- Fly-tipping

These indicators, together with the Index of Multiple Deprivation (for comparative purposes) were then loaded into a mapping environment, described below.

2.4 A Multi-Overlay Mapping tool for identifying poor environments

A Multi-Overlay Mapping tool (MOM) has been constructed, incorporating all the indicators listed above, and designed in the light of the principles described earlier. User-controlled weighting frames enable the data to be combined and then represented graphically in a variety of ways. The MOM tool has two principal applications:

- Firstly, it provides a means whereby government, the Environment Agency and other bodies, using a commonly-agreed set of weights³, can identify the areas of England and Wales where poor environmental quality is most pronounced. From this 'central' or 'top down' perspective, the 'designation' is at the level of Districts/Boroughs. The system has been configured so as to identify the 50 districts where, under any given weighting frame, environmental conditions are poorest
- Secondly, the MOM tool is a resource available to local stakeholders in the designated locations with which they can further refine the precise specification of target areas – to a spatial level considered appropriate at that local level, and which may be as small as a single 'neighbourhood' or estate, or as large as an entire District - bringing together not only the data represented by the indicators, but also other data (hard and soft) that is available at local level

The approach thus embodies the notion of top-down and bottom-up. The approach is intended to enable national organisations – as the enablers and guiding force of the agenda - to specify/select up to a certain point; and for local stakeholders to make more precise, localised choices, consistent with the idea of devolved local decision-making and accountability. Furthermore, the system has been designed in such a way as to be easily updated, through the addition or replacement of alternative indicators.

³ Brook Lyndhurst has recommended a set of three weighting frames.

3 Perceptions and attitudes of residents and stakeholders in poor quality environments

3.1 Methodology

This section of the Summary reports on the case study investigation of the **attitudes and perspectives** of residents and other local stakeholders towards poor quality environments.

Research was undertaken in January – March 2006 in 5 case study neighbourhoods⁴ which suffer from poor quality environments:

- *Residents and community groups* – a suite of participatory qualitative techniques (including accompanied tours, depth interviews, and job shadowing) was used in an effort to gain an insight into views on environmental inequality, their suggested solutions, and the role they are willing to play
- *Local service providers and agencies* – one-to-one or small group interviews with representatives from the council, the local strategic partnership (LSP), local providers of environmental services and the Environment Agency

3.2 Residents' perceptions of environmental inequality

While there was naturally variation in the life experiences and situation of the residents we spoke to, a number of commonalities were evident, including: long term health problems, complex family structures, unemployment, and regular interactions with social services, the police and council officials.

In terms of poor environmental quality and its causes, the research finds that:

- Residents recognised that the local area faced problems, and focused particularly on local environmental issues, anti-social behaviour and crime. They used language such as 'run down', 'rough' and 'boggy' to describe the area, whereas terms such as 'disadvantaged' and 'deprived' had little currency
- In spite of the problems, many of the people we spoke to saw many positives and did not want to move. This was largely due to the people in the area – whom residents felt were 'like them' - and a strong affinity to the area based on family connections going back over generations

⁴ West Thornton (Croydon); Longsight (Manchester); Pillgwenlly (Newport); Manor Estate (Sheffield); and Parkfield (Stockton on Tees).

- ‘Liveability’ issues, unsurprisingly but tellingly, were top of mind and often cited spontaneously without mention of the term ‘environment’. Key concerns include vandalism and graffiti, fly tipping and litter, dog fouling, green space, and vehicle speed
- Other environmental issues such as air quality, land contamination and flooding were less likely to be spontaneously mentioned
- In looking for causes, it is noteworthy that residents did not seem to blame local agencies (although these were considered remote and not in touch with the reality of life in the area). Instead, most people we spoke to believed the problems were ‘just how things are’ or the result of the behaviour of other residents in the area

Turning to *what residents feel should be done* about environmental inequalities, the research finds that:

- Residents felt that there were no easy answers to the area’s problems. Many people had seen numerous good initiatives fail and their expectations not been met, and so were cautious about suggesting things that had been tried before
- Residents put forward the following ideas: fair siting of ‘problem buildings’ and ‘problem people’; more activities for young people; “clever” design of public space; and (better) enforcement

In terms of *what residents are themselves prepared to do* to improve their environment, the research finds that:

- Residents cited multiple and significant barriers to getting involved in collective action. The most significant seems to be that many people deliberately stayed in their homes as much as possible in order to keep out of trouble and avoid crime. In addition, many of the perceived solutions listed above, such as enforcement and design issues, seemed beyond the influence of individuals

Nonetheless, there were numerous examples, whether individual or communal, of people already doing positive things to help improve the quality of their communities. These include: *gardening and flowers/hanging baskets; Clearing up and clean ups; participation in community meetings; supervising children; and “sticking up for the area”.*

3.3 Perceptions among local stakeholders

The research explored the views of local agencies towards the environment, environmental inequalities and current policy responses. It finds that:

- There is a sense that ‘environmental’ issues, in general, have become more important in recent years - although more so in fairly narrow and aesthetic terms concerning the ‘condition’ of the local area. Wider, and less visible, issues such as air quality also receive attention but not to the same extent
- Opportunities for linkages between economic, social and environmental objectives are still not being fully utilised. The links with the public health, regeneration and crime reduction agendas present immediate and clear opportunities
- It is clear that much of the language of environmental inequalities is new, as is the explicit focus on disparities *between areas*

- There was some acknowledgement that *certain issues* are more prevalent in some areas than others (e.g. litter and graffiti), but on some issues (e.g. air quality) the presence of an inequality was in fact not recognised
- In keeping with residents, many took the view that to some extent the inequalities were actually the result of residents' own behaviour. Less consideration was given to those issues which are not the result of patterns of behaviour – such as proximity to industrial sites, air pollution or flood risk

In terms of the response of local service providers to poor quality environments, the research finds that:

- There have been a number of responses to environmental problems, although the bulk of the focus has been upon the liveability agenda
- There are few examples of integrated responses to environmental issues which also address economic and social challenges, but where such an approach has been adopted there appear to be substantial benefits
- Local agencies cite a number of wider and important issues and questions for policy moving forward, including:
 - ⇒ A shift towards the behavioural determinants of liveability issues, alongside end of pipe solutions aimed at addressing problems as they manifest
 - ⇒ Differentiation of services according to need
 - ⇒ The need to find the right balance between enforcement and engagement
 - ⇒ The leadership role of the LSP in ensuring effective partnership working

The latter has potentially important implications for the Environment Agency, since there was agreement that someone needs to play an advocacy role on the LSP. Agency staff were keen to provide such a role, but acknowledged this would require a step change from their current function which has implications for their skills sets and systems for learning.

4 Learning from existing area-based initiatives

4.1 Reviewing ABI evaluations

Research was commissioned to evaluate where interventions have been targeted into particular areas to inform approaches to addressing environmental inequalities. This section of the Summary presents a review of evaluations of recent "Area-Based Initiatives", or ABIs across a variety of policy domains including regeneration and health. The central purpose of this element of the research was to inform the design of the IPE programme.

4.2 Area-based initiatives

The ODPM Regional Coordination Unit (2003) defines ABIs as:

"Publicly funded initiatives targeted towards areas of social or economic disadvantage, which aim to improve the quality of life of residents. They are usually aimed at particular geographical areas; are managed through regional, sub-regional or local partnerships; are intended to support a number of objectives locally which are the responsibility of more than one department; and they are put forward as pilots or pathfinders for programmes that will ultimately be rolled out nationally".

ABIs have been trailed across most government departments covering a broad range of themes, including: health; community engagement; public space; regeneration; employment; crime; energy; and business.

We make two overarching observations about the current experience of ABIs:

- There is no 'agreed' single model for designing an ABI. In particular, recent literature on targeted approaches to inequalities makes a clear distinction to be made between ABIs which are essentially *additional funding streams* instigated centrally and administered regionally or locally and ABIs which are formed on the basis of local decisions to target areas or groups differentially from *within mainstream local budgets*. This section looks at both.
- The overall success of ABIs to date has been varied and patchy

4.3 Success factors for partnership programmes of action in targeted areas

The literature points to a wide range of issues that influence the operation and success of an ABI, which vary in their importance according to local circumstances. In this sense there is no definitive set of success factors that can be readily applied and transferred from place to place. Nonetheless, seven common and key themes do emerge that need to be borne in mind in the design of any area-based initiative. These are:

1 Understanding the local ‘state of play’

The literature is clear that one of the most important factors in the design and operation of an ABI is the need to understand the local context. This takes several forms, e.g. understanding local demographic characteristics, environmental risks, local political/decision-making structures and local community networks.

2 The nature and strength of external partnerships

The nature and strength of partnerships emerges as a key theme in the literature. ABI partnerships are wide reaching and can involve engagement with community groups, local politicians, steering groups, agencies, public bodies and businesses.

The role that community groups play in the success of ABIs is one of the most prominent themes highlighted in many of the evaluations. The Home Office review of community involvement in ABIs states that it fosters social cohesion and capital, leads to better planning and delivery of services, and ensures decisions have legitimacy and local ‘buy in’ (Abbot *et al.* 2004).

3 Staffing and diversity

The National Evaluation of the New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme cited the recruitment, retention and skills of staff as one of the most critical problems affecting delivery of the programmes, and this conclusion is mirrored in many of the other evaluations (NRU 2003).

4 Importance of location

Many evaluations mention how the exact localities they operate in have a bearing on the outcomes of their programmes. Delimiting the boundaries of ABIs is therefore a highly significant issue, but something that needs to be decided on an individual basis.

5 Duration, exit strategies and ‘mainstreaming’

The duration of ABIs, and what will happen in areas after official initiatives end, are key themes that arise from evaluation literature, although they do not receive as much attention as other factors discussed so far.

6 Specific design considerations

Three key issues are identified from evaluations as being integral to the successful *design* of ABIs: adequate finances, flexible management and appropriate project aims. Although the pitfalls surrounding these issues are discussed in the literature, not a great deal is said about ways to overcome them, and they are not explored in the same depth as many other themes.

7 ‘Bending’ mainstream service provision

“Bending” mainstream services involves using or tapping into existing funding at the local level, as opposed to additional funding streams instigated nationally or regionally. So, for example, a local authority may explicitly recognise variations in deprivation across its wards and target services accordingly. This is a relatively new development and, through vehicles such as Local Area Agreements (LAAs), represents in some respects is the evolution of traditional forms of ABIs.

Across these seven issues, the most important to take away is that of *flexibility/ adaptability* towards local contexts. It underlies every aspect of ABIs design, structure, delivery, engagement and development, and failure to be flexible/ adaptable is a significant and regular contributor to failure.

5 Developing and spreading good practice

One of the most significant findings from the review of ABIs was that flexibility and adaptability towards local contexts underlies every aspect of the successful design, structure, delivery, engagement and development of ABIs. Yet exact mechanisms for reaching flexibility remain scarce in the literature.

Research was therefore undertaken to highlight the kinds of arrangements that might enable those working in local partnerships to adapt their behaviour towards the needs of local contexts, and to address any constraints they might encounter. This section presents some of the key findings of this research, drawing on examples of current practice across several public sector domains in the UK.

Key findings are that:

- **Traditional training approaches meet with limited success** in supporting adaptation of working practices to fit local partnership contexts.

One reason for this is that many training programmes designed to support ABIs and other innovations in local service delivery are themselves not sufficiently adapted to local context and need.

- **There is increasing understanding of the need for a different approach to support learning in these contexts.**

For learning to be effective in these contexts, it requires a focus on 'learning by doing'. This is achieved by tying learning much more closely to the daily job of managing and partnership working, and by providing regular opportunities for interactive reflection on what is being learned.

- **A new more contextualised approach to learning is emerging**, based on a wide range of tools and techniques

These include action learning, coaching and mentoring, learning protocols, structured visits, local learning networks and participative events.

- **There is also a growing extent to which organisations are orchestrating this range of approaches** into learning infrastructures which provide a much more coherent and systematic approach to learning than in the past.

- **Attempts to transfer good practice from one area to another often fail.**

Just as it can be difficult to develop flexibility/adaptability in any particular location, so too it can be difficult to transfer good practice when it does occur. The reason for this again seems to be linked to the need for flexibility and adaptability: in many cases the transfer process focuses on the wrong issue – on the 'lessons learned' in the good practice case rather than on the process by which the lessons were learned in the good practice case.

- **In some cases learning networks are being used to support the spread of good practice.** These approaches are more successful because they focus on the process of

learning rather than trying to transfer lessons that may not be appropriate in another context.

These findings have been used to design an 'infrastructure for learning' that informs the recommendations for Improving Poor Environments programme.

6 Designing a programme for Improving Poor Environments

6.1 Developing a systematic approach to improving poor environments (IPE)

In this final section of the Summary, we set our proposed design of a **recommended programme of intervention** – “Improving Poor Environments”, or IPE - with both pilot and mainstream elements, intended to tackle poor quality local environments in both the short and longer term.

The IPE programme has been designed in full acknowledgement of the fact that a great number of local projects have, or are presently, addressing local environmental conditions, and that the Environment Agency and a wide range of other organisations have been instrumental in bringing these about. The distinguishing feature of the proposed IPE programme is the attempt to develop a *systematic approach*, in terms of identification of locations, methods and types of intervention, and appropriate mechanisms for developing and spreading good practice.

In the longer term, it is hoped that the IPE programme will help to move the issues of local environmental quality, and inequality, into the mainstream of national and local governance.

6.2 11 design issues

We identified 11 design issues for the IPE programme, in the light of the research elements highlighted above: We identified 11 design issues for the IPE programme, in the light of the research elements highlighted above:

1. **Defining ‘Poor Environments’** – it is important to use definitions and designations that are sensitive, appropriate and understood
2. **Resident & Other Stakeholder Perspectives** – it is essential to take on board the perspectives and attitudes of local stakeholders, throughout both the development and implementation of IPE
3. **Area-Based Initiatives** – it is imperative to take on board the lessons learned from recent evaluations of ABIs
4. **Other Programmes** – it is important to acknowledge that multiple funding streams – from regeneration, public health, housing and so forth - will already be in operation in any particular location where the IPE programme is focused, and achieving synergy rather than duplication will be a priority

5. **Multi-Agency Working** – multi-agency working is increasingly ubiquitous, and sets a key challenge for IPE, particularly since different agencies are more or less experienced at multi-agency working, and patterns and histories of multi-agency working vary from one location to another. Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and Local Area Agreements (LAAs) will be central
6. **Spatial Issues** – it will be essential for the IPE programme to have considered, and addressed, the relationships between agencies and organisations at different spatial levels (i.e. national, regional, local and neighbourhood), as well as to have a flexible approach to the precise geographic scale at which IPE operates
7. **Local Variation** - Local variation is manifest not only in terms of environmental conditions, but also in terms of the projects, agencies, communities, relationships and funding at play. Accordingly, an approach is required that both acknowledges ‘top down’ objectives whilst respecting ‘bottom up’ perspectives
8. **Timescales** - Unwinding or unpicking environmental inequalities will take considerable periods of time. Initiatives that are too ‘short-lived’ will be and will appear ephemeral and will not engender trust or commitment; initiatives with timetables that are too long may appear insufficiently focused on ‘doing’ something
9. **Resources & Funding** - In the short-term, specific resources have been identified by the Environment Agency for the purposes of funding a pilot exercise (see below). Since further dedicated funds are not presently available, the IPE programme needs to be developed in such a way that it can capitalise upon, or segue into, a range of possible future funding and resourcing mechanisms as and when they become available
10. **Learning infrastructure** – both for the development of good practice during the pilots, for the short term transfer from a pilot phase to a wider programme of intervention, and for the longer term maintenance of expertise and capacity, the IPE programme needs a bespoke learning infrastructure in place
11. **Monitoring & Review** - Finally, there is no doubt that the IPE programme will (a) need careful monitoring and evaluation as it rolls forward, and (b) offers excellent opportunities for (participatory) research so as to continue the development of our collective understanding of ‘cumulative environmental disadvantage’ and the methods we may have at our disposal to address those disadvantages

6.3 Specification

We identified 11 design issues for the IPE programme, in the light of the research. Given these design issues, the proposed IPE programme has the following elements:

- A means of **identifying locations** in which effort should be focused (as set out in section 2 above)
- Clear guidance on **nature of the effort** that could/should be expended in these locations
- Appropriate **support materials** to facilitate the expenditure of that effort

- An initial focus on **Pilot locations** in which the programme can be tested
- A preliminary procedure for **rolling out** from the Pilot locations to a wider set of locations

6.4 Processes for partnership and action

The IPE programme will, in each location, be concerned with two types of task:

6.4.1 A – The Partnership Process

The *process* of identifying opportunities for partnership programmes of action will need to involve partners in:

- working with the multi-overlay mapping tool to visualise and explore the multiple environmental issues in local areas
- developing a joint understanding of the impacts of these issues for people’s health and quality of life
- developing joint agreement on which issues (or sets of issues) most need addressing, and of opportunities for delivering multiple benefits
- developing joint understanding of the options for addressing these issues, and of the cost effectiveness of different options, both for the short, medium and longer term
- integrating research needs, and monitoring and evaluation requirements, within the decision-making process
- where appropriate, seeking suitable funding to implement the most cost effective solutions

For the Environment Agency, it will be important to understand which solutions it will lead on, which solutions will require a partnership approach, and which can be left to others. The initial partnership approach will be critical to identifying this mix.

6.4.2 B – The Action

A very wide range of possible actions could emerge from the partnership processes outlined. The IPE programme, it is proposed, should therefore have a very simple set of guidelines, or rules, to delimit such actions within any given district/borough, as follows:

- Any actions **MUST** be concerned with at least **THREE** issues from a pre-determined list (such as ‘flooding’, ‘green space’ and ‘biodiversity’, or ‘pollution’, ‘capacity’ and ‘traffic’)
- Any actions **MUST** be focused on communities that are disproportionately environmentally disadvantaged
- Any actions **MUST** have been determined in a transparent fashion by the Partnership Process referred to above

Possible actions could therefore include:

- Capital development projects, such as integrated flood protection & green space reclamation projects that promote both biodiversity and social inclusion
- Training for local residents to conduct their own air quality monitoring at busy junctions
- Use of consultants to deploy deliberative engagement techniques (NOT consultation) so as to develop community capacity around environmental issues
- Funding ‘planning for real’ exercises around new physical developments likely to have consequences for environmental equalities
- Provision of small-value equipment to disadvantaged communities to conduct community clean-up operations
- Developing a local ‘impact assessment tool’ to append to e.g. Health Impact Assessments specifically to take account of environmental inequalities
- School-based or faith-based outreach projects to raise awareness of environmental issues among disadvantaged communities

6.5 Support materials

So as to enable any given local partnership the means to progress this agenda, and in the absence of a ‘from the centre incentive’ [in the form either of a funding stream or a KPI], a range of support materials is proposed.

We have identified SEVEN key requirements

- **Background material** – briefing material explaining the IPE concept and programme
- **MOM** – the mapping tool, with appropriate documentary guidance
- **Funding sources** – indications of potential funding sources, together with guidelines on ‘the rules’ for such funding
- **Issues** – outlining both the IPE issues in general, as well as specifying the ‘Actions’ requirements referred to above
- **Perspectives** – summary of the kinds of language and conceptualisation used by different stakeholder groups around the IPE agenda
- **Learning** – access to the learning infrastructure associated with the IPE programme, so as to share and learn in an ongoing fashion
- **Examples** – information on illustrative examples of indicative projects

Two other factors are also worthy of attention at this point:

- **Helping hands** – it is likely that, both at inception, and at points during the IPE process, some sort of ‘helping hand’ will be required. This may be needed to facilitate partnership dialogue, or to explain the MOM tool, and so on
- **Institutional arrangements** – notwithstanding the immense variability in the pattern of stakeholder interaction in different localities throughout England and Wales, the roll out of the IPE programme will require a range of co-ordinated actions by key organisations

6.6 Piloting action in disadvantaged areas

The Pilots will focus on action to improve poor environments in disadvantaged locations. They will combine a focus on 'learning by doing' and a focus on research. The aim of the 'learning by doing' will be not only to bring about positive change in the pilot locations, but to facilitate the wider roll out of the IPE programme, by developing good practice in both processes of partnership development and of implementing action, and to ensure effective dissemination of good practice.

The research element also provides an opportunity to extend understanding of cumulative impacts, building on a recent study commissioned by the Environment Agency (Stephens et al 2007).

At present, the dedicated budget available, over a period of two years, is judged sufficient to fund TWO pilots. In the event that further, or re-allocated funding, becomes available, then additional pilots would advantageous.

Given evidence provided from the indicator set referred to above, evidence from the case study research undertaken by Brook Lyndhurst, interest from regional and local Environment Agency partners, assessment of 'on the ground' capacity and input from the IPE Advisory Group⁵, the two proposed pilot areas are:

- **Teeside** - the suggested pilot location is in Stockton on Tees, because of its social and environmental deprivation
- **London** - the likely pilot location is in East London, in the Lower Lea Valley, close to the main 2012 Games development site, where social and environmental disadvantage is very pronounced, where communities are at risk of further marginalisation by the development process, where Agency engagement is already beginning but not well developed, and which should be consistent with work on the environmental disadvantage agenda already in play

6.7 Spreading good practice

Propositions for the wider roll out of the IPE programme are, inevitably, less well developed at this stage. In broad terms, and assuming the IPE involves targeted effort in 50 locations around England and Wales, a background set by national guidance and data will enable regional and then local partnerships to engage in the process of identifying those areas most needing structured intervention to address environmental inequalities.

Implicated agencies include Central Government (notably Defra and ODPM), the Environment Agency (at national, regional and local level), Natural England, Groundwork, the Wildlife Trusts, as well as regional Government Offices, Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs), Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and, potentially, Regional Development Agencies, as well as LSPs, local authorities and local communities.

⁵ In addition to the Environment Agency, Defra, Brook Lyndhurst and Sustainable Futures project team, the Improving Poor Environments advisory group comprises: Ann Power (Sustainable Development Commission); Carolyn Stephens (London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine); Chris Church (Community Development Foundation); Maria Adebowale (Capacity Global); Maxine Holdsworth (London Borough of Islington).

In broad terms, this process could/should take [perhaps] a year⁶, during which time the two Pilots will have had the opportunity to – crucially – test the proposed support material, and initiate the proposed learning infrastructure. The intention would therefore be to roll out to a wider group of disadvantaged areas during the second year of the Pilots.

⁶ This is roughly the amount of time allocated to the 88 NRU areas to undertake a similar exercise.

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List of abbreviations

ABI	Area Based Initiatives
Defra	Department for the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
IPE	Improving Poor Environments programme
LAA	Local Area Agreements
LSP	Local Strategic Partnerships
MOM	Multi Overlay Mapping tool
NDC	New Deal for Communities
NRU	Neighbourhood Renewal Unit
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
PCT	Primary Care Trust
PM ₁₀	Particulate matter smaller than 10 micrometres in diameter
SDRN	Sustainable Development Research Network
SHA	Strategic Health Authority
SOA	Super Output Area
SO ₂	Sulphur Dioxide

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Environment Agency
Rio House
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Tel: 0870 8506506
Email: enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk
www.environment-agency.gov.uk

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