

'Rainforests are a long way from here'

The environmental concerns of disadvantaged groups

Kate Burningham and Diana Thrush

The **Joseph Rowntree Foundation** has supported this project as part of its programme of research and innovative development projects, which it hopes will be of value to policy makers and practitioners. The facts presented and views expressed in this report are, however, those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation.

© Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2001

All rights reserved.

Published for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation by YPS

ISBN 1 84263 028 8

Prepared and printed by:

York Publishing Services Ltd

64 Hallfield Road

Layorthorpe

York YO31 7ZQ

Tel: 01904 430033; Fax: 01904 430868; e-mail: www.yps-publishing.co.uk

Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements	iv
Executive summary	v
1 Background and introduction	1
Background	1
Defining 'disadvantaged groups' and 'environmental concerns'	3
Methodology	4
Structure of the report	5
2 Site profiles and summary of focus group discussions	6
Possilpark	6
The Peak District	8
Cefn Mawr	11
Bromley-by-Bow	13
Conclusions	16
3 Exploration of key themes	18
Local concerns	18
Wider environmental concerns	31
Environmental organisations	33
Individual environmental action	35
Local participation	37
4 Conclusions and implications	39
Local environmental concern	39
Small things matter	39
The language of environmentalism	39
Things look different from the inside	40
Environmental inequalities	40
Environmental action	41
Are social and environmental concerns in conflict?	42
The potential of group discussions	42
Further research	42
Key messages	43
Bibliography	45
Appendix 1: Key informant interviews	48
Appendix 2: Profiles of focus group participants	49

Acknowledgements

We are indebted to Rosemarie Simmons and Liz Blakeway of Surrey Social and Market Research for project administration and the organisation of the fieldwork. Particular thanks also go to Michael Warren for conducting focus groups and writing reports for the Peak District and Possilpark.

Thanks are due to Bill Wright for carrying out key informant interviews in Glasgow; to AGRONI for recruiting participants in Bromley-by-Bow and for conducting (and translating) the focus group with Bangladeshi women; and to Liz Cameron of The 1st Centre for Disabled People, Possilpark for recruiting participants for us. We have many people to thank for help with organising focus groups in the Peak District: Frances Ward of Derbyshire Rural Community

Council; Frank Hall of Age Concern; Graham Hinds of the Derbyshire Rural Helpline; Rob Ward and Rosie Rumble of Derbyshire Coalition for Inclusive Living; and Sue Walton from The Housing Volunteer Project.

Our thanks also go to all our key informants for valuable information, contacts and advice.

Most importantly, we would like to express our gratitude to everyone who participated in the focus groups. These were fascinating, enlightening and enjoyable sessions and we hope that our findings will ensure that their concerns will be taken seriously.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the contribution of our Advisory Group who have helped guide this research and have supported us throughout.

Executive summary

Background to the study

Early in 1999, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) Housing and Neighbourhood Committee initiated a new programme of research identified under the general heading 'Reconciling environmental and social concerns'. In recognition of the fact that poor people are often those worst affected by environmental problems, and because environmental policies may at times be in conflict with the social and economic well-being of certain groups and communities, this study was commissioned as part of the programme.

Aims and objectives

The aims of this study are twofold: to develop a detailed understanding of the environmental concerns and interests of disadvantaged groups; and to access their perspectives and understandings of environmentalism. The study addresses the following issues:

- What is the meaning of 'environment' and 'environmental problems' for members of disadvantaged groups?
- What concerns do they have for the immediate environment of their own homes, their localities and for the wider national and global environment?
- What kinds of environmental improvements (at all levels) would they like to see?
- Whom do they identify as responsible for environmental problems and who is seen as responsible for implementing improvements?

- To what extent are they involved in environmental action (individual and collective), and what barriers exist to such action?
- Are environmental policies and the green movement considered as worthwhile and as addressing issues of concern to them?

Methodology

An initial literature review served to establish definitions of disadvantaged groups and environmental concern. It also identified a broad range of work theorising the relationship between social and environmental disadvantage and research on the distribution of environmental attitudes and actions in the population.

The second stage of the project consisted of interviews with key informants. These provided insights that might have been missed in a review of published material. They also facilitated the selection of appropriate case study areas and informed the design of our focus groups. We interviewed individuals from environmental groups or organisations representing disadvantaged people both within and outside our specific areas of study.

During the final stage, focus groups were conducted with members of various disadvantaged groups in four UK sites as follows:

- 1 an urban locality (older people; unemployed young men; parents SEG (socioeconomic grade) D and E; disabled people)

- 2 a rural area (women SEG D and E; older people; farmers; disabled people)
- 3 an area in which people live close to a potentially polluting factory (unemployed men with families to support; lone mothers; parents SEG D and E; people with long-term illness)
- 4 an area where people live near busy roads (Bangladeshi women; lone mothers; older people).

Research findings

Analysis of focus group discussions suggests that:

- The environmental concern of disadvantaged groups focuses on the impact of local problems on health and well-being. Some individuals also demonstrated wider environmental concern and understanding.
- Environmental concern often focuses on what may appear to be relatively minor issues such as dog fouling and litter. People are keen to see such problems tackled. Small problems are, however, often seen as indicators of wider social and economic problems.
- What appear from outside to be the most obvious environmental problems for a locality are not always the issues of most concern to the people who live there. Residents were troubled by negative perceptions of their neighbourhoods and emphasised positive aspects of their ‘homes’.

- Participants were largely unfamiliar with the language of environmentalism. They were often aware of their limited knowledge and commented on the lack of accessible local information.
- Environmental organisations were largely seen as important though little was known about them beyond media stereotypes. Orientation was predominantly to local groups and activities.
- Experience of successful campaigns or projects plays a key role in encouraging further participation. Where this is absent, motivation is severely inhibited.
- Practical and financial considerations are the prime motivators for individual environmental action.
- In deprived neighbourhoods, examples of the inextricability of social, economic and environmental goals were more striking than examples of these goals in conflict. In the attractive rural area, however, conflicts between environmental and social demands were evident.

Implications

These findings suggest the following implications:

- Environmental policies with a strong local focus are more likely to attract public interest and engagement than those which rely on a global consciousness. Support for local projects may be better motivated by talk of local improvements

than by reference to the environment which many feel unqualified to discuss.

- Solving small problems can have a significant impact on local quality of life but long-term, sustainable solutions require underlying social and economic problems to be addressed.
- Whilst the observation that disadvantaged people tend to live in poor environments is an important one, it may well be perceived as patronising and unhelpful by those who live in places so identified.
- Environmental groups should consider how best to develop a local presence amongst disadvantaged groups and engage with their everyday concerns.
- Individual environmental action may best be encouraged by emphasising practical and financial benefits.
- Local environmental improvements must be tackled in tandem with social and economic improvements. Careful evaluation of the social equity implications of planning, transport and environmental policy is crucial.

1 Background and introduction

This chapter provides a brief background to the project and outlines our research aims and methods.

Background

There has to date been little research into the environmental concerns of disadvantaged groups within the UK. Given that they are often those worst affected, however, they may well be expected to have distinctive perspectives on environmental problems.

Extensive work within the US has demonstrated that poor and minority ethnic communities are often disproportionately exposed to environmental health risks from hazardous facilities and waste sites (Bullard, 1999). Research is now emerging which indicates that a similar correlation between the location of hazardous facilities and poor populations also exists in the UK (McLaren *et al.*, 1999). The likelihood of proximity to polluting facilities is the most familiar but by no means the only example of environmental inequality. People on low income are also more likely to endure the worst environments in terms of poor quality housing, busy roads, dirty streets, dereliction and inadequate local amenities. Whilst these aspects of environmental quality are more mundane than exposure to pollution, they may be no less significant in terms of their effect upon the health and quality of life of local people. Surveys suggest that these factors are among the most significant in determining residents' dissatisfaction with the place in which they live (Burrows and Rhodes, 1998).

Just as environmental 'bads', such as pollution and run-down neighbourhoods, have

a disproportionate effect on certain sections of society, access to environmental 'goods', sufficient energy, healthy food, clean water and so on, is also unequally distributed. Poor people spend a disproportionate amount of their income on energy, on food and on water bills (Herbert and Kempson, 1995). They are more likely to live not only in badly insulated and poorly maintained properties, meaning that they are unable to afford sufficient energy to heat their homes (Boardman *et al.*, 1999), but also on estates where local shops stock a limited range of goods at inflated prices (Donkin *et al.*, 1999).

Existing research on environmental concern has seldom engaged with these issues. Surveys to date have tended to focus on attitudes towards conservation or adherence to green values with the result that the concerns of disadvantaged groups are underrepresented. Such research usually suggests that levels of environmental concern and individual domestic action (e.g. recycling, green consumerism) are highest amongst urban residents, the young, the middle classes, those with higher levels of education and the politically liberal (see Greenbaum, 1995; Witherspoon and Martin, 1992). These findings have usually been explained in the light of the post-material values thesis (Inglehart, 1990), which suggests that poorer members of society are too preoccupied with meeting the basic material needs of food, warmth and security to give priority to more abstract environmental issues. This thesis has sometimes been interpreted as suggesting that environmentalism is a middle-class concern. This suggestion is true, however, only when adopting a limited definition of environmental concern; when issues of local pollution, dirt and

decay are included, then poorer members of society are found to be especially concerned (DETR, 1998).

Whilst environmental concern is not limited to a particular sector of the population, the majority of members and employees of environmental organisations are middle class and white (Taylor, 1993; Wright, 1998). The need for the movement to become more socially inclusive and to represent the environmental concerns of all sectors of society is increasingly recognised (e.g. McLaren *et al.*, 1999; McNally and Mabey, 1999; Templeman, 2000).

Environmental improvements can result in substantial improvements to quality of life for members of disadvantaged groups. Environmental policies pursued in isolation from social and economic considerations, however, can have the opposite effect and exacerbate the hardship faced by poor people. Examples include such diverse things as: the disproportionate effect of increases in energy and fuel prices; the conflicting demands of rural conservation and the need for affordable housing in the countryside; and the desire to maintain industrial employment versus that of minimising pollution. These issues highlight the need for integrated policies that concurrently deliver environmental and social equality improvements (Boardman *et al.*, 1999).

The discourse of sustainable development links environmental, social and economic goals. A good example of the way in which these goals may be addressed together is through local environmental regeneration projects. These can also play a key role in the process of social renewal (Christie and Worpole, 2000; Church *et al.*, 1998; Lucas, 2000; Worpole, 2000). The process of local environmental decision-making

is increasingly recognised as important in itself. Facilitating participation from all sectors of the community can play a part in tackling social exclusion, improving democracy and involving people in decision-making that will affect their lives (Bloomfield *et al.*, 1998; Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, 1998). To date, however, the perspectives of disadvantaged groups have seldom been incorporated into environmental planning, policy or decision-making (Evans and Percy, 1999).

It is within this context that the current research was conducted. This study aimed to develop a detailed understanding of the environmental concerns and interests of disadvantaged groups, and of their perspectives and understandings of environmentalism. It addresses the following issues:

- What is the meaning of ‘environment’ and ‘environmental problems’ for members of disadvantaged groups?
- What concerns do they have for the immediate environment of their own homes, their localities and for the wider national and global environment?
- What kinds of environmental improvements (at all levels) would they like to see?
- Whom do they identify as responsible for environmental problems and who is seen as responsible for implementing improvements?
- To what extent are they involved in environmental action (individual and collective) and what barriers exist to such action?

- Are environmental policies and the green movement seen as worthwhile and addressing issues of concern to them?

Defining 'disadvantaged groups' and 'environmental concerns'

Disadvantaged groups

Contemporary discussions of social disadvantage draw heavily on debates about social exclusion which has a strong spatial dimension. The Social Exclusion Unit defines social exclusion as 'individuals or areas suffering from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown' (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998). The Government's approach to tackling social exclusion is focused upon areas containing a high proportion of individuals or households who experience a range of deprivations, either singly or in combination. An area-based approach may, however, gloss over the fact that not all the individuals and households in a deprived area will experience deprivation and, conversely, not all disadvantaged people live in deprived areas. This approach has been particularly criticised by those concerned with rural poverty; many rural households experience extreme poverty in areas that are viewed as picturesque and desirable residential environments. It also fails to acknowledge that people may be disadvantaged by their 'community of identity', for instance by virtue of membership of a minority ethnic group.

For the purposes of our research, we took 'disadvantaged groups' to mean those people in socioeconomic groups D or E within both urban

and rural environments. Within this broad definition, we sought to include individuals experiencing different aspects of disadvantage: those with a long-term illness or disability; unemployed people and those on low incomes; lone parents; members of ethnic minorities; older people; and those living in remote rural areas. We also included a group of farmers. Although farmers are usually categorised as a higher socioeconomic category, we wanted to include this group because they are currently facing particular hardships and may also be expected to have distinctive environmental views.

Environmental concerns

As outlined above, surveys of environmental concerns within the population tend to be based on a limited definition and fail to address attitudes towards the local environment (which may be phrased in terms of concern about amenity, health or safety rather than the environment *per se*) either in terms of individuals' homes or the area in which they live. They also adopt a narrower view of environmental concern than that embodied in discussions of sustainable development, which argue for a move away from considering environmental concerns in isolation from economic and social issues. Recent qualitative research into people's perspectives on the environment has adopted this broader definition of environmental concern (encompassing a local dimension and taking a sustainable development rather than a 'green' perspective), framing its initial questions in terms of perceptions regarding quality of life or the most important problems in society (Kasemir *et al.*, 1999; Macnaghten *et al.*, 1995).

In common with these recent projects, this research utilised a broad definition of environmental concern. Our primary interest was to identify what it is that socially disadvantaged people view as problematic in their own environments, whether or not it is framed as ‘environmental’, and to reach a deeper understanding of their perspectives on environmental problems and environmentalism. Rather than devising indicators of environmental concern (as is usual in attitude surveys), we adopted a qualitative approach that allows respondents to talk about issues in their own terms.

Methodology

The research was planned in two stages:

- 1 in-depth interviews with key informants and site selection
- 2 focus groups and in-depth interviews with members of disadvantaged groups.

Key informant interviews

The purpose of the key informant interviews was threefold: to gain insights into those aspects of disadvantaged groups’ environmental concerns which might not appear in a review of published material; to help in the selection of suitable case study sites; and to obtain suggestions for focus group discussion topics. The interviews were planned in two phases. First, we interviewed a number of individuals connected with environmental groups or with organisations representing the concerns of disadvantaged people. Having identified suitable sites for our case studies, we then conducted further interviews with individuals

working within each area in order to learn about specific local concerns. We also discussed appropriate recruitment strategies and focus group venues (see Appendix 1 for a list of interviewees).

Site selection

Site selection proceeded in tandem with key informant interviews. The interviewees assisted in identifying categories and suggested places that would be suitable within each category.

The four site categories and final locations were as follows:

- 1 an urban locality: Possilpark in North Glasgow
- 2 a rural area: the Peak District
- 3 an area in which people live close to a potentially polluting facility: Cefn Mawr in North Wales, where people live very close to a chemical factory
- 4 an area in which people live close to a busy road: Bromley-by-Bow in East London, where people live very close to the A102 Blackwall Tunnel Northern Approach and other major roads.

Profiles of each site appear in Chapter 2.

Focus groups

We were committed to conducting qualitative research for two reasons: to allow participants to discuss issues in their own terms; and to explore some of the complexities of environmental concern not previously illuminated by existing survey research. In order to access the views of a large number of people in a short time, focus groups rather than one-to-one interviews were

chosen as the primary investigative tool. Whilst they furnish less detailed individual views than one-to-one interviews, they have the advantage of providing a window on areas of agreement and dispute between local people. This was something that particularly interested us. Focus groups were conducted with members of disadvantaged groups in all four sites. Group categories in each locality were informed by interviews with local key informants. Details of participant profiles for each group are provided in Appendix 2.

The concepts of social disadvantage and environmental concern are extremely wide, ranging from considerations of local quality of life to perceptions of what is meant by 'environmental problems'. In order to enable such diverse issues to be discussed in depth, we employed a research design whereby each group met on two occasions (see Macnaghten *et al.*, 1995; Walker *et al.*, 1998). Discussion in the first meeting concentrated on perceptions of the quality of local life and, in the second, moved on to more explicitly environmental issues.

Structure of the report

This chapter has outlined the background, objectives and methodology of our study. Chapter 2 provides background information for the case study sites and summarises focus group discussions in each locality. In Chapter 3, we draw out some of the key themes emerging from these discussions focusing on participants' local concerns, wider environmental concerns, perceptions of environmental organisations, participation in individual environmental actions (such as recycling and saving energy), and involvement in local activities and projects. In Chapter 4, we draw conclusions about the character of the environmental concerns and actions of disadvantaged groups, and outline some implications of our research for environmental policy-makers, local authorities, those working in environmental regeneration and environmental organisations.

2 Site profiles and summary of focus group discussions

This chapter furnishes background information and a summary of the focus group discussions for each case study area.

Possilpark

Background

Possilpark in North Glasgow covers the postcode G22.5, ranked as the most deprived in Scotland by the Scottish Area Deprivation Index (Gibb *et al.*, 1998). The decline of industrial employment in the area has left a legacy of contaminated vacant land, high unemployment, poor social housing stock and a steadily falling population.

Possilpark has a mixture of Victorian tenements, pre- and post-war housing and late-1960s' high-rise flats (Possilpark Community Profile, 1997). Most accommodation is local authority or housing association owned; levels of owner occupation are very low. Properties have been poorly maintained over the years and damp is a particular problem. In 1994, Glasgow City Council initiated an Area Renewal Strategy resulting in the demolition of thousands of properties and the transfer of several estates to housing associations (primarily the Springburn and Possilpark Housing Association). Despite this move to improve housing conditions, the strategy produced several negative outcomes. Where blocks have been demolished for redevelopment, derelict land has now become the target of drug dealers and fly tipping. This has further degraded the local environment and resulted in many people leaving the area.

Educational attainment in the area is low; truancy is a problem and tertiary educational

attendance among residents is negligible. Levels of male, youth and long-term unemployment in the area are amongst the highest in Glasgow. The population has high morbidity levels with 22 per cent of the population registered as long-term sick. Many health problems can be linked with poor quality housing (e.g. bronchial and asthmatic conditions) and with drug and alcohol abuse (Glasgow North Regeneration Alliance, 1998). Possilpark has acquired a reputation both in the media and in public perception as an area with particular drug problems; however, the recent introduction of CCTV cameras and an initiative by Strathclyde police have reduced drug dealing and related crime.

The decline in population associated with the area's redevelopment has had an adverse effect on local shops, particularly those selling fresh fruit and vegetables. There are now only two shops stocking a range of such products and, owing to falling demand, the quality of the produce is impaired by longer storage. Proposals are now in place to regenerate the shopping centre.

Possilpark is well served by public transport and is within easy access of the city centre and countryside to the north. Levels of car ownership in the area are very low with around 83 per cent of households having no car (Possilpark Community Profile, 1997). The vast majority of residents are white Europeans.

Group categories

Focus groups were conducted with older people on state pension, unemployed young men, parents SEG D and E, and disabled people.

Summary of focus group discussions

Participants varied in their evaluation of the neighbourhood. Our older interviewees saw the area in a largely positive light and remembered a time when Possilpark was a 'lovely place', offering plentiful employment, good neighbourliness and a sense of security. With families living nearby, it was still considered a friendly place and most would not choose to leave even if they could. The disabled people interviewed were also positive about the area, emphasising the strength and resilience of local people: 'most of the people that live [here] are very good ... they realise the stresses that they live under and try to do something about it'. The parents' group, however, were far more negative, initially finding 'nothing at all' good to say about the area but eventually agreeing that 'Possilpark is getting better' and indicating that shared experience bound local people together: 'we're all in the same boat'. The young men who were interviewed differed from other participants in that not all were long-term residents of Possilpark, some having become homeless elsewhere in Glasgow and moved into a hostel in the area. They, too, found it difficult to think of good things about the area but noted that 'everybody sticks together'.

Participants also valued Possilpark's proximity to the centre of Glasgow, its satisfactory public transport and adequate local shops. The older people appreciated the provision of centres and lunch clubs in the vicinity, and the young men identified as an advantage the fact that there was somewhere to play football. The most positive aspect of local life for the disabled group was their involvement with The 1st Centre for Disabled People through which they participated in a

range of activities; networking; fund-raising; and other local regeneration initiatives (e.g. the Social Inclusion Partnership Board and the Community Forum).

All groups expressed concern about local drug use and related crime. Unemployed and bored young people were blamed for local crime and vandalism: windows broken; cars stolen and set alight; bus shelters shattered; and the destruction of new facilities in a local park. All agreed that the police were ineffective at dealing with these problems. Older people considered the area safe during daylight, though risky at night, a view echoed by the young men, for whom drugs that are 'causing fights in the street' were the biggest problem. The parents mostly felt safe in the area but expressed fear of repercussions should they complain about the anti-social behaviour of other residents. Despite their concerns about these issues, all the participants resented the 'media hype' about local drug use. Much dealing was thought to involve outsiders and the problem was assessed as 'no worse than anywhere else's'. As participants saw a dearth of opportunities for young people as the root cause, most argued for improved youth facilities, although some of the disabled people argued that this would help only if the community became involved in the administration.

Unemployment was regarded as a core problem by the older people who recalled a time of secure industrial employment and expressed concern for the fate of young people without jobs. Participants in the parents' group indicated that employment was available locally but offered low wages and demanded shift work. Each of the unemployed young men expressed a

desire to work but available jobs and wages were seen as 'pure taking the piss'.

There was much discussion of housing problems with a focus on damp, the cost of heating, rat infestation, 'junkies' coming into tenements and broken intercom systems. Recent improvements to the housing stock were noted, however, and there was a general sense that the area was improving.

Although none of the participants spontaneously described any local issues as 'environmental', they were happy to reframe difficulties connected with their surroundings in this way when asked directly about local environmental problems. Dog mess, drugs and car theft constituted the most serious problems for the older people. Parents' local environmental concerns were principally health-related, a key issue being the relationship between damp homes and childhood asthma. Rat infestation, derelict sites, stray dogs, litter, blocked drains and sewers that 'keep collapsing' were also discussed. For the disabled participants, issues of local accessibility were central. Although a 1st Centre campaign had increased the provision of ramps, many people still had difficulty accessing shops, and the GP's surgery and holes in pavements caused problems for wheelchair users. One disabled woman summarised the state of the locality by saying: 'there's a lot to be done on the environment in the Possil area, a lot needing done'.

The unemployed young men expressed very little concern for the state of the local environment: '[I] don't care what happens to it'. Asked whether the area was clean or dirty, one said: 'it's us that makes it dirty anyway; we light fires and haul up slabs and smash the

windows'. He explained that: 'it gets them to pull it down quicker and get something done with it'.

Unless prompted, few participants knew of any environmental groups. Greenpeace was mentioned by the young men, who associated it with 'campaigns against whales getting killed and trees getting cut down', and by the parents who considered they did valuable work but were 'too heavy, they just go overboard'. There was little discussion of wider environmental problems; the conversation quickly returned to local issues. Evidence of environmental action was sparse, although energy-saving measures were attempted for economic reasons. Arson attacks had closed local bottle banks and no one knew of any recycling services, apart from a private individual who collected cans for charity. Again, it was members of the disabled group who were most active in local initiatives; one worked on a local allotment and another was involved in a project to repair local eyesores.

The Peak District

Background

The Peak District, one of the most beautiful rural areas in northern England, forms an oasis in the midst of the urban concentrations that house one-third of the population of England and Wales. The area attracts around 22 million visitors each year. Its 'chocolate box' image tends to disguise social and economic problems, exacerbated by incoming of middle classes (Scott *et al.*, 1991). Deprivation is often hidden because poor people are scattered in their distribution, not physically segregated from their more affluent neighbours; many middle-

class rural residents assume that social deprivation is not present in the countryside and poorer residents are often unaware of their welfare rights or reluctant to admit their needs (Scott *et al.*, 1991).

Traditional employment opportunities in the Peak District centred upon agriculture, mining and quarrying. All these have been in decline for many years. Tourism, which has an increasingly high profile, offers some work opportunities though is largely characterised by low-paid jobs which demand long hours yet frequently offer only seasonal or part-time employment. Approximately one-third of all jobs in the area yield less than £5,000 per annum; some two-thirds offer less than £10,000 and only 5 per cent pay more than £15,000 per year. Levels of employment, however, are high. It is not uncommon for people to boost their incomes by taking multiple jobs, a practice that has social, health and family implications. Low income is exacerbated by poor employment and training opportunities, a dearth of child care and the low take-up of welfare benefits which is not uncommon in rural areas (Peak District Rural Deprivation Forum, 1996).

Costs of living in this rural area are high for many essential items. Shopping for basic needs is often done at village or mobile shops and prices have been estimated to be some 15 per cent dearer than in city supermarkets (Peak District Rural Deprivation Forum, 1996). Difficulties in accessing services are particularly acute for those without cars. Although ownership of cars is higher than the national average, almost 20 per cent of Peak District residents have no car. Bus services provide the main mode of public transport.

Group categories

Focus groups were conducted with women SEG D and E, older people on state pension, farmers and disabled people.

Summary of focus group discussions

Discussion amongst Peak District groups differed considerably from those elsewhere as the local environment was viewed as predominantly quiet, clean and safe. The focus of discussion also varied between the groups recruited in this site; farmers from remote settlements, older and disabled people living in Bakewell and the surrounding villages, and women living on a low income in Buxton had quite distinct experiences, priorities and concerns.

The beautiful countryside of the Peak District was seen as a major advantage of local life. Although there were some differences between those living in the towns and villages, most participants rated their environment as 'very good' and clean with little graffiti or litter. In the villages, the small amount of vandalism that existed was blamed on 'people coming in ... not village people' and, despite one or two experiences of being burgled, the majority of participants felt safe. The area was described as quiet and peaceful, though some participants complained of noisy lorries and difficulties in crossing busy roads. For those in Buxton, the local environment was thought to be 'good' though 'there's just not enough to do', particularly for young people.

The area's status as a tourist destination was seen as 'a double-edged sword'. Whilst economic benefits were acknowledged ('We rely on the tourists, don't we, we've got to face it'),

many participants felt the local authority targeted revenue from tourism unfairly: 'not at the people that live in the area, it's for the people that come into the area'. The main disadvantage of living in what many would consider a desirable part of the countryside was the lack of affordable housing, particularly for young people. House prices are now beyond the range of many local people. The sale of village properties as holiday homes was seen as having damaged day-to-day life; the older people said that there are 'very few [people] we know now'. Tourism has also affected the provision of local services. There is, for example, a plethora of tourist shops yet an inadequate provision of necessities in villages.

Transport was a problem for many participants. Many villagers lived far from main roads relying upon private transport for work and domestic needs. Public transport was seen as largely irrelevant and 'mainly for tourists'. The farmers' group displayed considerable concern over the cost of fuel and transport policy (thought to be aimed at reducing vehicle use). The disabled and older people were heavily reliant on friends and family to take them shopping or bring provisions to them. Transport was also a problem for the women living in Buxton. They assessed their local shops as expensive; most travelled to larger and more economical shops and often relied on expensive taxis in order to carry heavy shopping. Shift-workers also needed taxis at night, making it 'hardly worth working because it's more than half your wage'.

Disabled participants experienced distinct transport problems; one blind man mentioned difficulties travelling by trains (few staff, names of stations unannounced) and walking (low-

level road signs and overgrown hedges). Difficulties for wheelchair users included narrow pavements in towns, compounded by parked cars and crowded pathways, and the introduction of cycle paths, which had reduced pavement size still further.

The women interviewed in Buxton experienced particular problems of poverty. All were recruited through the local housing aid office and had suffered serious accommodation and family problems. Those living in housing association properties described them as 'lovely', contrasting them with the expensive, damp and badly maintained private rented accommodation many had endured. Most found it difficult to balance winter expenditure between food and heating; one claimed she would 'rather go without food than have the children be cold' and several had only one meal a day. All agreed that life was 'a struggle'.

The farmers had a distinctive perspective on their environment. Those living in remote farmhouses felt their existence differed from life in 'the villages' and claimed that people in Bakewell were 'on a different planet'. Despite the considerable changes in farming, there was a sense that it was still a distinct 'way of life', though one under serious threat. Stringent regulations and the supermarkets' ability to reduce prices were seen as key problems. These men considered themselves to be conservationists, resenting the fact that they were often characterised as destroying the countryside. Whilst conservation organisations were thought to have 'a part to play' in protecting the countryside, the farmers felt that their extensive experience was often overlooked in favour of more theoretical knowledge.

In terms of general environmental problems, pollution was the issue that received most attention. Both the farmers and the disabled people linked pollution from vehicles with climate change; some felt that it was 'overrated as a problem' whilst others raised the difficulty of doing anything about it. Conversation quickly focused on the local issue of visible smog from car exhaust in the valleys, particularly when tourist traffic is intense. Those who lived in villages were also concerned about the impact of heavy lorries on local roads, making them dangerous and noisy, and there was talk of the need to move freight from roads to railways. Another specific local environmental problem raised by the farmers was that of aircraft dropping fuel on the moors.

The Buxton women identified war, drugs, starvation and homelessness as wider environmental problems but discussion quickly returned to concerns about local poverty and housing: 'we need to look after people here'. This group named Greenpeace (described as dealing with animal rights, trees, nuclear power and whaling), RSPCA, Scope and Oxfam as environmental organisations. One participant mentioned a successful local campaign against reopening a quarry. There was little discussion of environmental concern amongst the older people, however; none expressed interest in wider environmental issues or organisations.

All participants thought that recycling was a good thing but, unless household collections were provided, many found it difficult as facilities were often out of reach for those without cars. Even car owners said that they had 'to think about it' because 'you have to load your car up and drive perhaps five or six miles to the nearest one'. Where recycling occurred, it

was often driven by practical considerations. For instance, one woman always tried to recycle bottles, fearing that broken glass in rubbish bags might injure her children.

Efforts at energy conservation included the lowering of thermostat settings and the use of Economy 7, undertaken primarily for financial reasons though there was an awareness of environmental considerations. Some 'low consumption light bulbs' had been supplied and they were welcomed. The Buxton women were concerned about energy costs and 'expensive' water meters and some cut costs by putting a brick in the cistern and taking showers rather than baths. Recycled and organic products were too expensive for this group to entertain. The farmers mainly left choices regarding household energy use and shopping to their wives.

Cefn Mawr

Background

Cefn Mawr is a village in the North Wales Border country, close to Llangollen, Wrexham and Chirk. Built on a hillside, it is set amongst beautiful countryside and is close to famous tourist attractions that include the Pontycysyllte Aqueduct, Chirk Castle and the Horseshoe Pass. Cefn Mawr has a population of around 5,000. Census figures for 1991 show that the number of residents with long-term illness is high (17.8 per cent); the unemployed and the economically inactive make up almost half of the population (49.2 per cent).

The village grew up around the coal and slate industries and possessed a thriving economy. Nowadays, only some 13 per cent of residents is employed in the mining industry (1991 Census). One factory dominates a large

part of the village, the chemical plant belonging to Flexsys Rubber Chemicals Ltd (previously Monsanto pre-June 1995). Other factories close by include Air Products in Acrefair, and Kronospan and Cadbury Schweppes in Chirk.

The chemical plant formerly provided plentiful employment but significant cuts in the work force have had an impact on local unemployment and many employees are now drawn from the surrounding area rather than from Cefn itself. At the time of data collection, the management had recently announced a further 160 redundancies. Following a hydrogen sulphide gas leak in 1995, Flexsys was ordered to pay compensation to some 300 local residents. A similar successful claim was lodged in 1994 (Vidal, 2000). Flexsys has also been fined by the Environment Agency for an unauthorised release of a proscribed substance in 1996.

The village is 'divided' into two parts: 'top Cefn' containing most of the shops and some accommodation (particularly flats above shops); and 'bottom Cefn' where there is a large council estate. Ty Mawr Country Park with access to the River Dee is situated at the bottom of the village. The Country Park and a small recreation ground on the estate provide open spaces. Roads and pathways in the upper part of the village have been the target of recent improvements by the Council; shops and other buildings, however, are in a state of disrepair. In the lower part, roads and paths are poorly maintained and there is a derelict and rubble-filled area on the site of the old Co-op. Almost 40 per cent of households have no car (1991 Census).

Nearly half the housing in Cefn is council property and much of the stock is old. Many houses are large, having been built to accommodate big families, and most have

gardens. Some, which are due for renovation, are of steel construction. More than 35 percent of households were without any form of central heating at the time of the last Census.

Group categories

Focus groups were conducted with unemployed men with families to support, lone mothers, parents SEG D and E, and people with long-term illness.

Summary of focus group discussions

All groups placed very high value on the friendliness and extended family ties in 'the Cefn'. The quiet, rural aspect of village life was also praised, as was the surrounding beautiful scenery, which 'makes you feel proud'.

Unemployment was seen as the major problem especially by the men who contrasted the present situation with earlier years when 'they built the villages round the jobs' with coal mines, slate quarries and factories ensuring plentiful employment. Local employment opportunities were now said to be sparse; those that were available offered low wages and were often some considerable distance from the village. One man said: 'I'm 31 now. I'm being honest here, the way it's going I don't think I'll ever work.'

The run-down appearance of the village was another major problem. Decaying and derelict buildings; badly maintained roads and paths; dog mess; litter and graffiti all contributed to a general feeling of dilapidation. One man said Cefn is 'such a beautiful place and it's going to rack and ruin'. Many felt that the streets were unsafe at night because of young people's drug and alcohol abuse (a product of 'nothing for them to do') Policing was thought to be inadequate.

Most participants lived in council houses and were happy with their homes. Those built on a disused colliery, however, were damp and mouldy, and the steel houses were ‘freezing cold’ in winter and hot in summer. Many people had difficulty heating their homes and few had central heating. Local shopping was compared unfavourably with earlier times; many participants travelled to Wrexham by bus and paid for a taxi home. One of the men recalled: ‘When we were young ... we didn’t have to go out of Cefn for anything. I think it’s a crying shame for the village.’

There was much discussion about Flexsys. Many people thought that safety standards at the factory had improved over recent years but the effects of pollution on health were still a source of concern. Although the factory no longer employed many Cefn residents, it still commanded considerable loyalty because of its past employment record and the investment it had made in village life. A TV programme about Flexsys was considered by many to have exaggerated the dangers and was seen as damaging to the village. Ill feeling was expressed towards those villagers who had lodged formal complaints and claimed compensation for exposure to emissions.

Participants did not naturally talk of Cefn as their ‘local environment’ but understood the term to mean ‘your surroundings’. Within this definition, the pollution from Flexsys and general dilapidation of the village were considered to be the most pressing local environmental problems.

A number of issues were identified as being of wider environmental concern: pollution (nuclear, from cars and factories); food safety (GM crops and BSE); a decline in wildlife; the

dumping of toxic waste; radioactivity and climate change. The extent of interest varied considerably between individuals and the conversation often returned quickly to local issues.

Little was known of environmental groups beyond media stereotypes of direct action. Whilst some considered that the activities of such groups were important, others argued that they went ‘overboard’ and were ‘a little bit foolish’; negative views of local Friends of the Earth members trying to close the Flexsys plant contributed to this assessment. Participants felt that they lacked sufficient information about the activities of environmental organisations.

Most people attempted to save money by using less energy at home. Some recycled glass and papers but storage was difficult and few facilities were available for those without transport. Some car owners argued that: ‘I wouldn’t make a special trip because I would use more petrol’.

Bromley-by-Bow

Background

Bromley-by-Bow lies in the north-eastern part of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The area has all the usual indicators of urban deprivation: high unemployment; poor housing; low levels of education; and a high proportion of single-parent families. Tower Hamlets is an ethnically diverse borough with the largest proportion of Bangladeshis of any London Borough; the 1991 Census classifies 33.9 per cent of its population as black or Asian.

The 1991 Census records that 58 per cent of Tower Hamlets residents rent their homes from the local authority. Most of the local authority

housing in Bromley-by-Bow has been transferred to the management of Poplar HARCA (Housing and Regeneration Community Association). Many people are accommodated in flats, often in poor conditions. As in other deprived areas, health is extremely poor and mortality rates are well above national averages (Bromley-by-Bow Centre Annual Report, 1997–98).

Access to healthy, affordable food is difficult. For residents of the Bow Bridge and Devons Road Estates, there is a small Londis store, a small Halal shop and a fruit and vegetable stall. Tesco’s on Hancock Road provides a wider and more competitively priced range of foods but the A102 must be crossed to reach it. Many of the shops in the Aberfeldy estate shopping parade have been boarded up as the provision of a bus route to Tesco’s has changed local shopping patterns.

The area is criss-crossed with transport infrastructure. Major roads surround the Bow Bridge and Devons Road Estates: the A102 Blackwall Tunnel Northern Approach to the east; the A11 Bow Road to the north; and a triangle of major roads (A102, A13 and B125) entirely enclose the Aberfeldy Estate. These roads are difficult and dangerous to cross with few designated pedestrian crossings and underpasses that are perceived as dangerous. Whilst suffering the ill effects of living near major roads (asthma and other respiratory diseases are prevalent), local residents experience few benefits from motor travel. Car ownership is extremely low: 61 per cent of the population of Tower Hamlets had no car in 1991; the figure rises to 68 per cent for the Bromley Ward. In addition, the Limehouse Cut canal, the Lea and Bow Back Rivers and the

Docklands Light Railway (DLR) are physical barriers to easy movement round the locality, though the DLR (with London Underground and bus services) also contributes to the excellent public transport provision in the area.

There are few parks or open spaces suitable for recreation. Bromley-by-Bow Gardens, managed by the Bromley-by-Bow Healthy Living Centre on behalf of the Local Authority, provides a children’s play area, large open space, wild-flower meadow and community gardens, and, on the Aberfeldy Estate, a Millennium Green is currently being landscaped and planted. The Lea and Bow Back Rivers provide urban green space within a few hundred yards of residential estates but deterrents to using the towpaths for recreation include: major roads inhibiting access; physical barriers, aimed at preventing motorcycle access, which impede passage of bicycles or push chairs; the proximity of unpleasant and unsightly trade (mostly waste transfer and scrap dealing); fly tipping; and overgrown, narrow and flooded paths (Lower Lea Project Annual Progress Report, 1999–2000).

Group categories

Focus groups were conducted with Bangladeshi women, lone mothers and older people on state pension.

Summary of focus group discussions

The older participants described Bromley-by-Bow as a ‘nice’ place with friendly neighbours and good public transport. Though generally positive about the area, the group agreed ‘it isn’t like it was years ago’ when there were more community activities, better shops, cleaner streets, small houses rather than flats and a

greater sense of community responsibility. The lone mothers were far less positive in their evaluation of the area but agreed that the main advantage of living in Bromley-by-Bow was that it provided easy access to shops and schools, and an excellent transport system that allowed them to travel around London with ease. All had family close by. They assessed the area as 'friendly once you are known' and participated in a range of activities at the two community centres. The Bangladeshi women interviewees all lived on the Aberfeldy Estate. They varied in their evaluation of the area, though all appreciated the community atmosphere and a decrease in racism. A number of participants in the groups took part in activities organised by the various community centres, which they valued highly.

The main concern for all groups was the anti-social attitudes of young people whose threatening behaviours included burglary, loitering on staircases of flats, playing loud music, drinking, drug taking, and urinating and spitting in communal areas. A lack of suitable jobs and activities was blamed. The generally dirty appearance of the estates was another shared concern with dog mess and litter in parks and streets; spitting, urination and excrement in communal areas of flats; and rubbish in the nearby canal and River Lea all identified as problems. Those with young children were concerned about the lack of safe play spaces.

All groups noted the poor quality of local shops, considering them expensive and with limited stock. Most of the participants used public transport to shop elsewhere. A variety of housing problems were discussed. Whilst the older people were generally happy with their homes, others were concerned about poor

security and dampness. The Bangladeshi women were particularly concerned about the standard of their housing and talked of the difficulties they faced keeping their damp and uninsulated homes warm. Problems were also experienced with overcrowding.

In all groups, the phrase 'local environment' was understood to refer to local surroundings. For the older people, notions of cleanliness and community responsibility were central and the Bangladeshi women interpreted the term as covering buildings, schools and education, roads and people, especially neighbours. The most serious local environmental problems were issues already discussed above, though not designated as 'environmental' *per se*. Pollution and danger from major roads were also identified as local environmental problems.

Conversation regarding wider environmental problems was limited in all groups with discussion usually focusing on local concerns. All groups mentioned vehicle pollution as a major problem. The lone mothers and older people discussed the loss of green space in the UK, and the Bangladeshi women also identified global warming, nuclear waste and over-population as problems.

Views on environmentalists were mixed. Most agreed that the work of environmental organisations was 'very important' though few were clear about what they did. Some of the lone mothers characterised 'eco-warriors' as 'silly' whilst others considered their activities to be important 'for the future'. Participants felt they had insufficient information or opportunity to learn more about environmental issues, activities and organisations.

The majority of those from the Bromley-by-Bow estates recycled newspapers and glass

using the facilities at Tesco's. By contrast, none of those resident on the Aberfeldy Estate (Bangladeshi women) recycled household waste as there were no bins nearby. Practical explanations were offered for individual environmental actions such as recycling bottles to avoid broken glass in rubbish bags and choosing products with least packaging to lighten the shopping load. Some enabling of individual environmental actions was considered discriminatory; for example, low energy light bulbs were provided only to people on benefit, and boxes for paper collection only to those living in houses. The Bangladeshi women felt unable to conserve energy as their homes were too cold, although the benefits of doing so were understood in terms of saving money and trying to prevent climate change.

Conclusions

What emerges from these conversations is that the overwhelming majority of our interviewees saw aspects of their locality in a positive light, even in areas of obvious dereliction and decay, and were defensive against what was seen as misrepresentation by outsiders. Family ties and friendly neighbours were highly prized. Community centres, too, were important and a sense of community spirit flourished in several areas.

A key concern everywhere was a lack of proper facilities for children and young people with many local problems seen as stemming from boredom. Concerns over drugs, drunkenness, vandalism, ineffective policing, unemployment and poverty were commonplace.

Views on housing were mixed; commonest causes for concern about the quality of housing focused on the presence of damp and mould, decay and disrepair, and inadequate and costly heating. Residents of the Peak District faced the particular problem of escalating property prices and the ensuing lack of affordable housing. Many participants considered local shops expensive with limited stock and out-of-town shopping was blamed for economic decline in many villages. Evaluations of public transport differed according to area, rural transport being the most inconvenient and expensive.

Possilpark, Bromley-by-Bow and Cefn Mawr are all neighbourhoods characterised by a concentration of social deprivation. In these localities, problems of dirt, degradation and pollution were commonplace with dog mess, litter, dirt and dereliction, traffic and pollution of various kinds frequently mentioned. In contrast, many of those interviewed in the Peak District lived in affluent and attractive villages; they valued the surrounding countryside highly and regarded their environment as clean and quiet. Living in a high quality environment does not necessarily alleviate hardship; problems of poverty may indeed be exacerbated by the high cost of rural housing and the inconvenience of public transport.

Few people used the term 'local environment'; 'it's just home isn't it'. Most understood it to mean 'your surroundings' and the things within it. During discussion of national or international environmental problems, a broad range of issues was identified. Conversation at this wider level was limited, however, and returned quickly to local matters. Little was known about environmental

organisations. Many thought their work important but 'going overboard', even 'foolish'. Though no one belonged to any environmental group, local or national, a number expressed interest but lacked opportunity and information. Individual environmental actions were usually motivated by practical considerations and cost.

Whilst there were many areas of consensus, it is important to recognise that there was considerable variability in participants' accounts of their locality. There was often disagreement about the good and bad aspects of each area.

Focus group data cannot claim to provide access to the views of a representative sample of local residents. We are confident, however, that the opinions voiced in our groups are not merely a minority view since they closely echo the issues identified as important by the key informants interviewed in each locality. In addition, our observations about both the character of local concerns and the focus of environmental concerns are backed up by the findings of large-scale surveys (see Todorovic and Wellington, 2000).

3 Exploration of key themes

This chapter provides details of the environmental concerns raised by participants in our focus groups. As illustrated in Chapter 2, the focus of discussion varied between groups depending on the knowledge, experience and interests of group members, and local circumstances.

We begin with a detailed consideration of local concerns. First, we ask whether it makes sense to conceptualise all concerns about local life as ‘environmental’ and briefly outline some of the ways in which discussion varied between the groups. We then explore local environmental concerns within deprived neighbourhoods with particular focus upon the following: degradation of the physical environment; the desire for safe parks; and the particular problems of busy roads in Bromley-by-Bow and industrial pollution in Cefn Mawr. Having detailed some of the problems of living in run-down areas, we highlight the extent of local pride and emphasise that the emergent concerns must be interpreted within participants’ positive evaluations of their neighbourhoods as ‘home’. We examine different problems faced by poor people living in the picturesque rural environment of the Peak District and explore the experiences, shared by many of our participants, of being unable to access sufficient resources of healthy food and warmth. Lastly, the chapter considers participants’ views of wider environmental issues and environmental organisations, and reports the extent of their own environmental action and participation.

Local concerns

Are individuals’ principal concerns ‘environmental’?

Although many concerns were area-specific, we found some striking parallels: Possilpark groups worried about drug abuse, ineffective policing, dereliction, unemployment and poor housing; Bromley-by-Bow discussions centred on anti-social youth behaviour and poor policing, lack of play spaces, dirty streets and communal areas; in Cefn Mawr, unemployment, pollution and inadequate facilities for young people were key concerns. Given their universal agreement about the high quality of their local environment, Peak District groups differed from other groups. Their concerns focused on transport, investment in tourism at the cost of local people and the provision of affordable housing. However, none of our focus groups initially framed these problems as ‘environmental’, apart from the issue of pollution in Cefn Mawr.

The phrase ‘local environment’ was foreign to most participants although, after discussion, a broad definition usually emerged that included various aspects of the ‘surroundings’. The following exchange illustrates this well:

Facilitator: Some people call the area where they live their local environment. Now is that a term that you would use or not?

[Long silence]

Male (M): It’s not, it’s not a way that we, you know, look at where we live.

Facilitator: *Right. What does the word 'environment' mean to you? Is it a word you ever use?*

M: *No!*

M: *Not really.*

[Laughter]

Facilitator: *What does this word that you don't use very often conjure up?*

M: *Housing, the landscape round you. What's happening as well.*

Facilitator: *Okay. Do the rest of you agree or not?*

M: *And work too.*

M: *I'd go along with that anyway.*

M: *Well it's how to live rather than where you live I guess, that's what it conjures up for this area. (Cefn Mawr, unemployed men)*

Once a definition of this kind was established – encompassing all aspects of life in the area – problems could be reformulated within an environmental framework. It is, however, important to question the value of representing them as 'environmental' since participants did not spontaneously label their concerns in this way. Describing them as 'environmental' risks obscures the pressing social and economic concerns in each locality. It is perhaps more meaningful to interpret the discussions in terms of local sustainability in which environmental, social and economic issues are inextricably linked.

Do concerns differ across groups?

As illustrated in Chapter 2, the focuses of concern differed somewhat between the sites, most notably between the Peak District and other areas. Concerns might also have been

expected to vary between group categories and some examples were indeed apparent. Older participants tended to evaluate their environment more positively than younger ones, although accounts were often characterised by reference to better days. The more negative evaluations of parents incorporated concerns for the health and safety of their children. Those with long-term illness or disability raised issues of access and mobility, and discussions with unemployed men often focused on work. Whilst there was only one small group of young, single, unemployed men, their nihilistic attitude towards their surroundings is striking. As we conducted only one focus group with members of a minority ethnic group, we do not feel confident to make comparisons based on participants' ethnicity.

Observations concerning the differences between the groups should, however, be treated with caution because of the small numbers of people interviewed and, more significantly, because of the considerable amount of shared concerns and perspectives across groups.

Social and environmental concerns in deprived neighbourhoods

Crime, policing, unemployment and the quality of local housing were amongst the main problems in Possilpark, Cefn Mawr and Bromley-by-Bow. These topics will not be discussed in detail here, but it should be remembered that these critical social and economic issues form a backdrop to any discussion of 'environmental' issues. Those we interviewed implicitly (and occasionally explicitly) understood the relationship between social, economic and environmental elements. For example, the anti-social behaviour of 'kids'

without jobs and with nothing to do was a common topic which, whilst not an environmental problem *per se*, constitutes a social and economic issue with important ramifications for the safety and amenity of the locality. In turn, an improved physical environment was expected to reap social dividends. One Glaswegian man commented:

If you're in a different environment you wouldn't talk the way you talk here, or fight the way you fight here, because the people would be different you know, folk over here ... they've no pride in the environment.

Living in a dirty and degraded environment

Peak District residents considered their surroundings beautiful, clean and safe, contrasting with concerns about the general state of the area in Bromley-by-Bow and Possilpark. Underlying causes varied: dog mess in streets and parks, human excrement and spit in blocks of flats, litter and waste in Bromley-by-Bow; derelict buildings, waste ground, rat infestation, blocked drains and broken sewers, and vandalism in Possilpark. Cefn Mawr residents considered themselves lucky to be surrounded by beautiful countryside but reported problems of dirt and dereliction in the village; they were particularly concerned about waste disposal. All these things adversely affected the appearance, and outsiders' perceptions, of localities:

Female (F): People that live outside the area would say it was a dump.
(Bromley-by-Bow, lone mothers)

F: It's just that the place is very, very run-down and it does need tidying up.
(Cefn Mawr, lone mothers)

Discussion of local degradation often raised health concerns, particularly about children. This was most evident amongst parents:

F: Well I know in my block it's the dirt, I can go in my lift and nine times out of ten you can guarantee someone's peed all over the lift. They've spat all over where you've got the buttons to press what floor you want to go on ... there's phlegm all over it so you don't exactly want to touch it because you don't know.

F: You don't want to risk it.
(Bromley-by-Bow, lone mothers)

M: Another thing I've noticed in this area as well is ... when it rains the drains are all blocked and the water just rises up and that's a health hazard ... because the kids play in it you know.
(Possilpark, parents)

F: It is very, very run-down. Like, you know, you've got the old Co-op in Cy Gwillam Lane and that. They've knocked it down ... but they've just left all the rubble ... I mean it is dangerous you know ... they've got bricks and pieces of wood and I mean somebody's going to get really hurt.
(Cefn Mawr, lone mothers)

Dog mess, litter and excrement were blamed on irresponsible individuals and these problems were seen as difficult to address since the underlying cause was that people 'don't care'. Participants believed that individuals should be fined for littering or allowing their dogs to foul public spaces but noted that such penalties were often unenforceable because perpetrators could not be identified. Many interviewees expressed the need to have people around to observe anti-social behaviour and enforce regulations, be it caretakers, park wardens or police walking the

streets. Older people in Bromley-by-Bow remembered days when caretakers imposed standards on the estate, suggesting this is 'what they should do now'. The idea that improvements could follow from the introduction and enforcement of tougher regulations was echoed elsewhere. The women in the Peak District, for instance, mentioned a local housing association that imposed strict conditions on residents' behaviour, employing an estate manager and security guard. Regulations were described as 'wonderful' and knowing there were people with a responsibility for the estate made residents 'feel that little bit safer'.

Councils were seen as primarily responsible for remedying problems. Although some participants felt councils did their best, much criticism emerged: they fail to understand 'how difficult it is' (Bromley-by-Bow lone mothers); they are uncaring and uninterested, 'they don't give a toss for us' (Cefn Mawr unemployed men); they pass the buck, 'they say it's no' their responsibility so you get a phone number and then another phone number and they just pass the buck' (Possilpark parents); they delay repair and improvements, do not deal with individuals responsible for mess and litter, and spend public money on the wrong things. Failure to remedy problems quickly led to further deterioration:

The place hasn't been looked after if you like by the council itself ... you look at the buildings just by here on this street and they're empty. Nothing's ever been done about it to stop the rot because the further you let things go, degrade, the more it costs the area but if you keep on top of things it's not going to cost as much.
(Cefn Mawr, unemployed men)

Urban parks and recreation

The need for safe play spaces for children was emphasised in both Bromley-by-Bow and Possilpark. Parents of young children wanted safe playgrounds while those with teenagers wanted places where their children could play football. Places for 'adults to sit and chat while the kids are playing' were also seen as important. These different requirements were sometimes in conflict, with parents of young children feeling that parks were unsafe if there were 'teenagers hanging around'.

Parents in both areas mentioned a number of local parks but pointed out their limitations. For instance, one park in Bromley-by-Bow was surrounded by busy roads; another had a pub in the middle of it 'people are drinking in there' and all faced the problem of fouling by dogs. The banks and green spaces around the River Lea could also be used for recreation. Although some participants identified this as a nice area for walking, concern was expressed about the safety of children ('I'm scared they're going to fall in') and also about personal safety ('it's just a spooky place, I wouldn't walk down that canal on my own'). The river was also considered to be dirty:

You want to walk down the canal and see a nice little pretty canal. Nah! You walk down our canals, you're bound to see a shopping trolley, sometimes you might even see a motor bike, crisp packet, everything you could possibly dream of in a canal.
(Bromley-by-Bow, lone mothers)

Perceived ethnic segregation in the use of parks posed an additional problem. The white parents identified one park as 'for the Bengali kids' and felt that their children could not play there, while the Bangladeshi women talked of

another which was predominantly used by white children and noted that Bangladeshi parents did not let their children play there: 'because they fear bad influences on their children, maybe they fear bullying in spaces used by white people'.

Vandalism was the main problem with parks in Possilpark. One new park was said to have been vandalised the day after it opened ('they pulled all the grass up') and a children's playground had had the stainless steel slide 'stolen during the night by the scrap man'. The disabled people identified access as another problem – one of the parks had '40 stairs up to it' and another had a gate that was too narrow for many wheelchair users.

Participants in Possilpark indicated that some recreation facilities had been provided without adequate consideration of what was actually needed. For instance, one new park had no 'swings and chutes and things like that' and was described as 'just a show, that's all it is'. Another had a skateboard area that was said to be rarely used; steel girders 'just on the ground with bare edges ... anybody could fall on that and smash their head wide open' and 'two big concrete feet just standing there on a block, honestly, that must have cost them about £10,000 alone. For what reason?' Similarly, the new recreation centre did not have a swimming pool, the facility most said they would welcome, but did provide badminton courts. One of the young men said: 'I don't even know what a badminton racket looks like'. In addition, the centre was open only to those aged over 18 and provided 'nothing for the weans'.

Busy roads in Bromley-by-Bow

Health threats from roads were most extensively discussed in the lone mothers' group. Initial complaints concerned speeding on minor roads within the estate; major roads were discussed only after the facilitator raised the subject. The Bow road, dubbed the 'death-trap road', was considered particularly dangerous. One effect of living close to dangerous roads was that parents were concerned about allowing children out alone:

F: Well, you think really about letting your kids out you know ... you might think yeah your kid's OK but you don't know the person behind the steering wheel, what they're going to be like.

Older people seemed more pragmatic about the dangers:

F: It's just automatic to us that you just wait for the lights. I always think I'm a bit brave, but I wouldn't cross the road till I see them lights.

Busy roads also hindered access to everyday services and amenities. One Bangladeshi woman mentioned a local park surrounded by busy roads 'so it's not that practical or accessible'.

Air pollution from traffic was also a worry. This only emerged during the second meeting, however, when groups talked about explicitly 'environmental' issues. It was not spontaneously mentioned as a general problem about living in the area:

F: I walked down here the other day, the dual carriageway, I had to walk along that road and it's terrible, it was terrible.

F: *You can just ab out breathe.*

(Lone mothers)

F: *... sometimes the fumes as you're walking along the A13 are so thick they could choke you.*

(Older people)

Car fumes were associated with asthma and participants worried about effects on children's health. Traffic noise from the road was simply part of the experience of living in the area. As one older person said; 'we've grown up with it. I mean we can hear the tubes, can't we'.

Traffic calming was recommended for roads within the estate and improved crossing points for major roads. The problem of pollution was seen as intractable, however, because 'everyone wants to drive a car'.

Industrial pollution in Cefn Mawr

Pollution from local industry was a key topic of discussion amongst groups in Cefn Mawr. The main concern focused on the possible health threats from emissions from Flexsys (still referred to by many as Monsanto).

Participants recounted graphic examples of past pollution:

M: *I've seen the river flowing blood red, literally like blood, very thick, red. It's not right when that happens.*

(Man with long-term illness)

M: *You'd white specks that used to go in your eyes and it used to corrode the cars.*

M: *And burn holes in your clothes.*

(Unemployed men)

Despite agreement that safety standards at the factory had improved considerably over the years, there were still grounds for concern: the

River Dee was still believed to be polluted; waste 'like black soot' was observed on some of Flexsys' land; sulphur dioxide emissions were identified as a concern; and 'you do still tend to get a smell from the plant'. Some felt that management was not 'very open with us' and 'dread[ed] to think' what was manufactured at the factory.

Pollution from Flexsys was tentatively linked to a range of health problems:

F: *There are a lot of chest problems in Cefn and I've noticed and, I hope I'm not talking out of hand, but I've noticed there's a lot of disabled people in Cefn.*

F: *Yes. Arthritis is a big problem here ...*

F: *For babies. A lot of people have had miscarriages.*

All: *Yes.*

F: *A lot of people have something wrong with their children that have been born in the area. Whether that's to do with air you don't know, whether it's something that's in the air.*

(Lone mothers)

The plant was also associated with early deaths among past employees:

You hear a lot of cases where a chap who'd worked there all his life and retired at 55 or 60 or 65 and a lot of them have died within a few short years. Now whether ... the chemicals have actually killed them it's hard to say.

(Unemployed men)

The relationship between pollution and ill health, though clearly of concern, was a risk that was part of local life. One woman commented: 'we've put up with it for so long, to me it's not a problem now' and an unemployed man

provided a striking analogy to convey the reality of living with the factory:

M: I don't think of it as a problem. Perhaps it's because I've grown up with it as most of us have. It's like a wart on the back of your neck. You know it's there, but it doesn't really bother you. You know it's there. Occasionally you'll go for a hair cut and the barber will nick it and it will bleed. It's the same kind of problem with Flexsys. It's there.

There was considerable ambivalence about the factory. In the past, Monsanto was a significant local employer and a strong sense of its importance for the village remained even though the factory now employed very few local people and was thought to be 'closing down'. Generations within families had been employed there and the factory had invested in the very fabric of the community by providing houses for workers. There was much debate about the extent to which Flexsys continued to make a significant investment in local life but there was still a loyalty to the plant because of its past history.

Those villagers who had successfully sought compensation from the company for the effects of a recent chemical leak were denounced as doing it 'for the money' and reportage in a television programme was thought to be 'really over the top'. Local activists were perceived as disloyal:

The ones that are trying to close Monsanto ... it doesn't matter to them that their grandparents used to work there, so that's where they've been bred from.
(Lone mothers)

Local pride

The picture so far supports the observation that residents of deprived neighbourhoods often live in environments characterised by pollution, decay and dereliction. Our examples provide an insight into the depressing reality of living with such problems on a daily basis. They do not, however, tell the whole story. These difficulties, though often severe, constitute only one aspect of life for our interviewees, one that is not necessarily the most significant.

Attempts to put complaints in context and emphasise the universality of their problems were common. A recurring sentiment for all groups, whether discussing drug abuse, anti-social behaviour, pollution or unemployment, was that 'it's the same anywhere'. Most found something to praise about the locality, whether it was the surrounding countryside, the excellent community centres or the location. In Cefn Mawr, Possilpark and Bromley-by-Bow, relationships with friends and family were central. Families had lived in each of these areas for generations, creating a strong sense of local identity and loyalty:

F: Well, you can go out and you can just, say, go to the shop and you're out for about an hour because you're going along and maybe see somebody and you talk and then you go further and you're talking.
(Cefn Mawr, lone mothers)

F: You couldn't get a friendlier place than Possilpark.

F: That's right.
(Possilpark, older people)

Perhaps most importantly they saw their locality as home:

M: I found when I was away in the army travelling around it was nice to come back here. You know you'd go to these exotic places abroad, it's all very nice for a few months but it's always nice to come back.

M: There's no place like home as they say.

M: It's where your roots are isn't it, that's what counts.

(Cefn Mawr, unemployed men)

F: I just say it's home if you've lived here all your life ... I mean, I've got brothers who've moved out and even ... they say Bow's home.

(Bromley-by-Bow, older people)

Participants were concerned and angered by negative images of the place they regarded as home. The older people in Bromley-by-Bow worried that outsiders might think 'oh my God, look at the squalor there' and one of the lone mothers was sure that 'people that live outside the area would say it was a dump'. This was also true in Cefn Mawr where the main concern was with the damage done to the area's reputation by television coverage of a chemical leak from Flexsys:

M: ... it's done damage to the area ... a lot of people round here I've seen have failed to sell their houses ... They've got into negative equity because they can't sell the houses cos of the programme. So it ruins things for people.

M: It made it look a dump didn't it, and it's far from being a dump here isn't it?

(Unemployed men)

In Possilpark, participants were troubled by the press 'hype' about the area's status as 'the smack capital of Europe'. This led to animated discussion in the group of disabled people when one took another to task over her acceptance of 'the hype':

M: But I think that's the hype you know, that's what folk think about the Possil area.

F: It's no', I'm no' trying to say that people in Possil are bad, they're no' ...

M: I know what you're saying, I know exactly what you're saying but what I'm saying is how do you know that? How did you find that out or how did you know that? Because you've been listening to somebody else talking about what happens in Possil, no?

F: Probably in the media and stuff.

M: Exactly.

F: But I know that's no' true because the biggest majority of people in Possil are nice people like anywhere else.

This evidence of local pride might be understood in terms of a poverty of aspiration that often characterises the views of people trapped within a deprived area with little sense of wider opportunities. Whilst this may be partly true, we found that it was sometimes those with a broader perspective who expressed most commitment to their area. This was the case both for individuals with wide experience of other places, as demonstrated by the man from Cefn quoted above, and for those whose social horizons were broadened, as in the example of the disabled people in Possilpark involved in several regeneration initiatives.

Some participants were aware of, and strongly rejected, the notion that they defended their neighbourhood simply because they were unable to leave it, suggesting that they would stay even if they won the Lottery.

An alternative explanation for the degree of local loyalty that was displayed might be that we spoke only to those who had a particularly positive regard for their area, perhaps by virtue of involvement in local activities. Again, whilst there may be an element of truth in this, we feel that it cannot explain all of the commitment expressed. Some groups were recruited through community centres and it is indeed likely that these participants were more positive about local life than a random sample of local residents. Not all participants were recruited in this way, however, and the payment of incentives ensured that we also heard the views of individuals who were not engaged in any organised community activities.

Whilst it is important to try to understand why people feel proud of an area which they themselves describe as dirty and run-down, it is important not to underestimate the very real sense of local commitment and identity expressed by our interviewees. Whereas the negative features of a place may be the most striking to outsiders, for those who live there they are only a part of the local experience. We found that those we interviewed were keenly aware of the negative perceptions of their neighbourhoods and, by extension, of themselves. Even where effects of such perceptions were less tangible than, say, the difficulty of selling property in Cefn Mawr, local people felt offended and stigmatised by these unfavourable depictions of their home. This highlights the need to think very carefully about

the manner of presenting any link between disadvantaged people and poor environments. Many of our interviewees would not see themselves or their environment as unequivocally poor and would resent such an assumption.

Social and environmental concerns in an attractive rural environment

Academic and policy discussions of the relationship between environmental and social disadvantage tend to focus on the experience of pollution, dereliction and decay within areas where conditions of social deprivation are concentrated. Although poor residents of attractive rural villages do not face the stigma attached to living in neglected areas, beautiful countryside does not in itself alleviate hardship. There are distinct problems associated with rural poverty. This section considers some of the particular problems faced by respondents in the Peak District.

The isolation of rural poverty

Since poor rural residents often live in villages that contain much wealthier households, the experience of poverty is more isolating than in areas of concentrated deprivation where it is likely to be shared (as was clear amongst respondents in our other case studies). This isolation, coupled with traditional ideas about self-sufficiency, means that rural poverty is often stigmatised and hidden. These factors compound the experience of social exclusion. They also make it very difficult to gain access to socially disadvantaged people for the purpose of research. This was a particular problem for us in the Peak District. We initially hoped to interview village women living on a low income

but found it impossible to recruit a group with these characteristics in the time available, so assembled the group of women in Buxton instead.

Tourism – a ‘double edged sword’

One of the anticipated advantages of living in a high quality rural environment might be that tourism brings additional revenue into the area. Whilst some participants acknowledged this (‘It brings in a lot of money’), others questioned how much revenue was actually received from tourists:

M: Well we live too near the cities you see. The people that come in come here for the day and then gone again aren’t they so they don’t leave with anything only litter. They don’t leave any money in the valley as such do they?

M: The least. It’s the second most heavily used National Park in the world and they leave the least money per head of any.
(Farmers)

Not only were tourists thought to bring in little money, their presence was believed to encourage the local council to spend money on extravagant schemes to promote tourism rather than investing in basic maintenance of infrastructure essential to local residents:

M: Cycle ways up here that nobody uses, millions of pounds they can spend on those sort of things.

M: And nobody does use them ... there’s not many guys here cycle to work ...

M: You just need to take the little square in Bamford, it isn’t as big as this room and they spent sixty thousand pounds ... that’s a white elephant that thing is.

M: Yeah but it’s money that is spent on the people that come into the area not for the people that live in the area. The people that live in the area are secondary.
(Farmers)

F: But the main thing that sticks in my mind is your money from your council tax all the council side of it is just poured into Bakewell, into Buxton, pedestrianising it and yet the services that we require in the villages ... you might be in a tourist region and you have hundreds of cars coming along and the roads are in a really bad state.
(Disabled people)

The influx of tourists was also associated with localised pollution:

M: When the tourists are about in the high season and there’s no wind the readings at the Lady Bower for pollutants are the highest anywhere.

M: It’s on the A57 ... it’s something to do with the length of the traffic queues on a busy weekend and bank holidays.
(Farmers)

Attitudes towards tourism were different in Cefn Mawr. Participants there were keen to see their area better promoted as a tourist destination, perceiving this as a way to bring in revenue and jobs to replace what had been lost with the decline of industrial employment.

The cost of housing

One of the most severe consequences of the perception of the Peak District as a picturesque area is its effect on the cost of local housing. The price of local property was said to be ‘absolutely

astronomical' and beyond the means of local people. A lack of affordable rented accommodation was also noted. Many properties on the market are sold to commuters or as holiday homes:

There's a lot of houses occupied as holiday houses, so there's strangers coming in, a whole lot of strangers come into the village to live just for holidays and they've taken over the property that the youngsters can't buy now. That is one of the troubles.

(Older people)

This influx of newcomers was thought to have had a negative effect on community life in the villages:

Well we knew everyone when I was young, we knew every family, every child and now you don't know people.

(Older people)

Shops

Another consequence of the area's status as a desirable residential and tourist environment is that village shops tend to cater for tourists rather than poorer residents. One of the disabled people interviewed noted that there were no shops in her village selling affordable food, yet there was 'a shop for paper, it's almost a tourist shop you know ... it's a gift shop'. Local shops had also declined with the rise of large supermarkets in the towns and out-of-town shopping centres. Older people noted that there were now more people living in the villages but far fewer shops. This posed little problem for affluent incomers 'because they've all got two cars' but left those without cars dependent on car-owning relatives or friends, or

on the inadequate public transport service for access to shops that carried a range of goods at affordable prices.

The decline of local shops was also evident in Cefn Mawr where those without cars tended to travel to Wrexham by bus to shop and often relied on expensive taxis to get home ('that's six pounds and it's a lot of money').

Where village shops remained in the Peak District, the price of goods was much higher than in towns:

F: I mean my young carer will say to me she paid 89p for a two-pound bag of sugar that was on offer in the supermarket at 35. Well I mean it's a lot of money you know.

(Disabled people)

Transport

Whilst high prices and limited range of stock are also problems for residents of urban estates, they are likely to have the advantage of cheap and accessible public transport enabling them to shop elsewhere. This was certainly the case in Possilpark and Bromley-by-Bow. For those in the Peak District, public transport was often not a realistic option. Those who could afford their own cars saw them as 'absolutely vital' and those without tended to rely on relatives or friends with cars. Public transport was labelled infrequent and impractical for those living in remote locations.

Messages about the need to reduce car use to protect the environment were seen as irrelevant and threatening to rural residents who relied on their cars for work and domestic uses ('we can't do anything round here without a car'). Cost was their principle concern:

M: *I've not had that [car] a year yet and I've done 20,000 miles. It's the only car we have and my wife is now commuting in it to work in Sheffield and then all the other use it has as well ... and the cost of fuel and the cost of maintenance and everything, what is it, 47p a mile or something. Because you have to worry and think about that every time you go anywhere, about transport costs.*

M: *Yeah, what's it going to cost me? Can I afford it?*

M: *And you try combining your journeys all the time so you know you're doing several things in one trip you know.*

(Farmers)

The issues of transport costs and availability were also raised in Cefn Mawr. A regular daytime bus service from the village served Wrexham and other major towns but there was little public transport to rural destinations. One of the most serious problems was getting to work on Wrexham Industrial Estate. The cost of private transport and insufficient public transport provision often made it hard for people to take jobs involving shiftwork. The following exchange illustrates this well:

M: *If you try to get a job in Wrexham Industrial Estate it's something like £3.60 an hour, where if you'll pay ten quid for petrol, 15 quid in petrol, it's not particularly a lot is it ...*

M: *No and taxis, what's that?*

M: *About £8 return, yeah.*

M: *Yeah it is a problem. There isn't a very good bus service from Wrexham town to the Industrial Estate.*

M: *No there isn't and there's one or two factories that supply buses but I don't know if they go at the right times ... Jeff [a private bus service] does*

a run from Cefn, he goes to Wrexham and then on to the Industrial Estate once a day and that's at ten past seven that's for an eight o'clock start.

M: *Most factories start at six and as I said unless you've got your own transport you are relying on lifts ...*

Facilitator: *Yes, so if you've got a car you're OK?*

M: *In a fashion but as I say it does take a chunk of your pay and every pound counts you know.*

(Cefn Mawr, unemployed men)

The usefulness of a rural–urban distinction?

Whereas the problems faced by poor people living in a rural location such as the Peak District clearly differ from those of residents of Possilpark or Bromley-by-Bow, a simple distinction between rural and urban locations is not always helpful. This is well illustrated by Cefn Mawr, a village set in beautiful countryside yet experiencing the industrial pollution and decaying infrastructure more usually associated with urban areas. Residents there shared urban participants' experience of dirty, neglected local streets and buildings but lacked the advantages associated with city life (good public transport, proximity to a city centre). They shared the frustrations of poor public transport provision with those interviewed in the Peak District and in addition faced the distinctive problem of the health effects of industrial pollution.

Distinguishing between problems of rural and urban environments can also obscure the issues of common concern for poor people wherever they live. These include concerns about employment, things for young people to do, the price of food and the cost of fuel (for heating homes and for transport).

Access to essential resources

This section considers problems associated with food and warmth often faced by disadvantaged groups.

Food

Everyone discussed shopping for food. In London and Glasgow, the sometimes dubious quality of local shops was alleviated by the location and availability of good public transport that allowed easy access to other centres. The more severe problems faced by rural residents with poor local shops and inadequate public transport provision have already been outlined. For older people everywhere, and the less mobile, the decline of local shops posed more of a problem because of the difficulties often associated with bus and train travel.

The difficulty of affording a balanced diet as well as other necessities was discussed by the women interviewed in Buxton, one describing how she would 'rather go without food than have the children be cold'. The experience of missing meals was common for this group:

F: I just have one meal a day.

F: That's all we have.

Facilitator: When do you have it?

F: Later on in the day, sometimes early evening.

Facilitator: So what do you do for breakfast?

F: I don't have it.

F: Don't have breakfast.

F: I don't eat breakfast.

The unemployed young men living in a hostel in Possilpark shared similar difficulties:

M: See like, if you go out and buy yourself the amount of food that should do you, you know what I mean because you are meant to eat like a breakfast, a lunch and a dinner and maybe a snack at night, see if you go out and do that you've got no money at all.

They were familiar with the argument for spending money on healthy food instead of alcohol and cigarettes, but considered this unrealistic:

M: So the staff seem to think you know you should be sensible enough to not drink and not smoke and not do that but nobody does you know.

M: Stuck in there all day I mean what else are you going to do? There's not a lot really happening you know and I mean right now there's not even like a telly in the main TV room and if you've not got a TV in your flat then what are you going to do, you know, that kind of thing.

Warmth

Several groups raised the problems of keeping homes warm. The Bangladeshi women complained about the expense of heating their damp and draughty flats:

F: ... our houses are always cold due to poor insulation – no double glazing, also dampness, requires twice as long to heat the house than normal. This means our fuel bills are higher.

Some of the lone mothers interviewed in Bromley-by-Bow experienced similar problems, with damp and 'all black moss up the walls'. The story in Cefn Mawr was the same:

Facilitator: I want to ask you a couple of things about the houses like damp and

[Laughter and chatter]

F: *It's like a black death in Cefn.*

F: *Yes, yes.*

Facilitator: *That's unleashed something then!*

F: *Black death, everybody's got it here.*

Facilitator: *The houses are damp then!?*

All: *Yes, yes, they are.*

(Cefn Mawr, lone mothers)

The reason given for the problem was that 'Cefn is built on an old colliery, so the damp is coming up through the footings'. Keeping warm was particularly difficult for those living in metal houses. As one single mother explained; 'In the steel houses, we are freezing, we are cold in the winter'. The majority of interviewees in Cefn relied on coal fires for heating. These were reportedly ineffective for heating the whole house:

Facilitator: *Can you keep warm with just coal fires?*

F: *Just in the front room. You have to get all the three-piece huddled round the fire.*

Possilpark residents also complained about damp and mould, their problems being associated with the porous bricks used in old tenement buildings. The installation of central heating was seen as an improvement; however, as one man pointed out: 'no' everybody can afford to run the central heating'. Some participants paid for their electricity via a pre-paid card system that they found difficult to understand, expensive and inconvenient:

M: *See electricity man that's a job an' all. But I mean I'm on the power card right and I'm at least 20 quid a week man, 15, 20 quid a week right but I've run out, I've done it because I've just got to put it in now, I need 15 to 20 pound to put it back in there but I've no' got it.*

(Possilpark, Parents)

As discussed above, the Peak District women's group spoke of the difficulty in meeting their needs for warmth and food, usually choosing the former over the latter. One explained this choice:

F: *I think a lot of it I remember when I was little cos me mum was on her own and we were freezing in this flat in the winter and it's something that's always stuck with me you know, no heating on it's horrible.*

Wider environmental concerns

Everyone was asked whether or not they were concerned about any national or international environmental problems. There was rarely much discussion on this topic but participants identified a broad range of issues as environmental problems, including such things as war, drug abuse, homelessness and immigration as well as the more obviously 'environmental' issues of pollution, climate change, nuclear power and GM food. This very broad interpretation of environmental issues harks back to the point made earlier: if environment is interpreted as surroundings, then everything can potentially be regarded as an 'environmental' problem.

A distinctive feature of discussions on wider environmental issues was the rapidity with which participants returned to specific local concerns. This preoccupation with local issues might be regarded as a demonstration of the post-material values thesis; owing to our participants' significant concerns about their basic material needs, the majority had little time for 'post-material' concerns about wider or more abstract issues. Indeed, some explained that they just lived from day to day, unable to see beyond the present:

'Rainforests are a long way from here'

M: I don't even know where I'll be in one [year] I just do every day as if it's my last, I've done that for years.

(Possilpark, unemployed young men)

F: I don't think in the long term. Like I say I live for the day and see what tomorrow brings so I don't overly worry about these things.

(Cefn Mawr, parents)

Others conceptualised environmental problems as too distant (either geographically or temporally), arguing that priority should be given to immediate problems:

F: Well this is it, you have enough problems with your own to cope with so you don't worry about things that aren't actually affecting you at the moment ...

F: Well places like that are a long way from Cefn.

F: Well they are, rainforests are a long way from Cefn, but this is how I look at it, they're not affecting me at the moment so don't tempt fate by thinking about it.

(Cefn Mawr, parents)

The post-material values thesis should not, however, be accepted uncritically. For some, it was the fact that environmental problems were seen as frightening that led them to be ignored:

F: But then, if you're like me, if I find something like that come on my telly I switch it off ...

because it scares me, I just don't want to know.

(Cefn Mawr, lone mothers)

Although the language of environmentalism was unfamiliar to most of our participants, a number of global environmental problems were identified, with pollution of all types being the major issue. This may be because the problem of

pollution, with its clearly identified causes and consequences, is relatively easily understood; it may also be because many people have direct experience of pollution, particularly in deprived neighbourhoods. Pollution was also the issue where awareness of a global–local link was most evident, with individuals identifying incidents of local pollution as part of a wider problem. Discussion of this relationship, however, usually took the form of a recognition that pollution was a global problem followed by a return to local examples rather than an elaboration of the ways in which local activities might contribute to wider problems. This was particularly evident in Cefn Mawr and Bromley-by-Bow where local pollution was a key issue. The following exchange amongst women in Bromley-by-Bow provides a clear example:

Facilitator: I want to move on to these bigger environmental problems you know the more widespread environmental problems ...

F: pollution ... there are too many cars on the road. I mean because of all the gas they give off from the cars ...

F: A lot of children now and even adults suffer with asthma and there's a lot you find it every day there's someone suffering with it, I think it's to do with pollution.

F: Yeah and they stick us right on the dual carriageway which is really busy come five, half five it is just packed going to Blackwall Tunnel. Now if you're going to the train station can you imagine how much fumes go in your face.

(Bromley-by-Bow, lone mothers)

An important aspect of environmental consciousness is concern for future generations. We found considerable evidence of concern for

the future of young people. This was largely anxiety about a future without secure employment although some interviewees expressed broader concern about the environment that will be passed onto future generations:

You sometimes wonder if you had this same meeting in 50 years' time when we're all gone and our kids are sat round here, what the problems are going to be facing them and what state the world will be in or what state the environment will be in.
(Peak District, farmers)

Other core environmental ideas that emerged included an awareness of the importance of protecting biodiversity (a female interviewee in Bromley-by-Bow said that killing whales 'upset the balance of nature') and a general unease regarding the unknown and potentially negative consequences of interfering with nature:

F: What is GM anyway? What is it?

F: It's genetically modified food. It's all genetics. It's not grown natural ... It's something that they've modified, like you had that sheep, it's like cloning ...

F: I think people are interfering too much with nature now ... they should leave well alone and not go overstepping the mark.
(Cefn Mawr, lone mothers)

We've just progressed without thinking of the consequences of insecticides and chemicals, it's only now they've found out that that's done harm.
(Cefn Mawr, man with long-term illness)

Levels of interest in, and concern about, wider environmental issues varied considerably between individuals. Some displayed a keen interest in environmental issues, a desire to know more about them and concern about a lack of accessible information:

F: I don't think we know a lot about that cos I mean we've left school years ago and we only pick up what we've seen on the newspaper and on the telly.
(Cefn Mawr, lone mothers)

This perceived lack of knowledge seemed to cause some reluctance to talk to someone they saw as an 'expert' (the facilitator) about what many considered a specialist area.

Environmental organisations

Participants knew little about environmental organisations. Some could not name any and others displayed considerable uncertainty, confusing Greenpeace with the Green party and the National Trust with the British National Party. Organisations that would not usually be termed 'environmental' were mentioned in this context (e.g. homelessness groups, RSPCA, Scope). Again, this may best be explained by the broad definition of 'environment' adopted by our groups.

Where participants were familiar with the activities of environmentalists, they tended to know about 'eco-warriors' and Greenpeace direct action. There was some ambivalence about the role of such activists who were often regarded as too extreme, 'behaving like stupid little kids':

'Rainforests are a long way from here'

M: I mean I'm all for Greenpeace, you know what I mean, the environment, but they're too heavy. They just go overboard know what I mean, they cause deaths and everything.
(Possilpark, parents)

In Cefn-Mawr, there was particular antipathy towards people believed to be members of Friends of the Earth who it was thought wanted to close down Flexsys:

F: ... you've got Friends of the Earth round here, but to me ... ones that live round here, they're idiots. They want to close Flexsys, to be honest they are stupid. Now they're all living in houses that were built by Flexsys for God's sake and a lot of the houses were given to their grandparents.

F: One of them, she walks around and she just looks so dirty.
(Cefn Mawr, lone mothers)

The local campaign against Flexsys was seen as driven mainly by self-interest. A key campaigner was said to hold a grudge against the factory after having been refused a job. Interestingly, the lone mothers' antipathy towards the campaigners had not translated into a general dislike of Friends of the Earth; one suggested; 'they don't really belong to it ... it's just an excuse'. The idea of direct action being 'too extreme' did not go unchallenged and participants often pointed out that environmental activists were engaged in important work:

F: Yeah, maybe they shouldn't go and live up trees but I mean sometimes you feel that's the only option to try and sort of like stop ... I mean while you're in the tree they can't cut it down. I mean nine times out of ten they don't do any good anyway but at least they've tried.
(Bromley-by-Bow, lone mothers)

F: I mean we all take the mickey out of things, Friends of the Earth, Eco warriors ... but to be honest they are fighting for the earth. They're fighting to keep it clean ... they're fighting for our rights and we're taking the mickey.
(Cefn Mawr, lone mothers)

Direct action apart, there was usually agreement that environmental organisations did important work and that 'somebody has to stand up'.

No one we interviewed belonged to any environmental organisation. This was usually explained in terms of their lack of local presence ('there's none round here') and insufficient information:

M: I mean locally, unless you see somebody that's collecting in Wrexham, you have no contact with them ... there's nobody that would come round and recruit. You would never see anybody coming round and say, 'Come and join the WWF [World Wildlife Fund]', 'would you like to join the National Trust'.
(Cefn Mawr, unemployed men)

F: We don't know what's on offer. We're in darkness. Before I had small children so I didn't really have the time. But now they're growing up, and I think it's important for me to know what's happening around us. I also have more time to spare.

F: If we knew about these things then maybe we would join.
(Bromley-by-Bow, Bangladeshi women)

As outlined in Chapter 2, the farmers' group held a distinctive perspective on activities of environmental organisations. They depicted the knowledge of conservationists as narrow and

theoretical, contrasting it with their own everyday understanding of the whole environment. They resented the implication that their knowledge was inferior:

M: All we are is a bit of grass sticking out the side of your mouth aren't you, what do you know about it? You haven't got a BA or some letters behind your name so you know nothing and that hurts.

Negative stereotypes of farmers causing environmental harm were unequivocally rejected:

M: We get tarred with the brush that we're not conservationists but we are.

M: We're the biggest band of conservationists.

M: We are conservationists but we're never given the chance.

M: There's nobody more conservation minded if you think about it.

M: Hill farmers never, you will never get closer to nature in this country than being a hill farmer.

Individual environmental action

In all groups, individual environmental actions were discussed. Conversation about recycling, purchasing behaviours and energy-saving measures was most extensive amongst women who were largely responsible for household decisions.

Recycling

Recycling was the most familiar action with the majority of participants seeing it as worthwhile. The participants seldom made explicit the underlying rationale for recycling, beyond a general belief that 'it's more environmentally

friendly'. Some participants argued that they needed more information about this:

F: And I think if it was explained to people why you're recycling it and tell us what can be recycled, explain it all to us, because we really don't know as much ... but I think if it was explained as to why we're recycling them and give us the opportunity to do it, I think a lot of people would do it.
(Cefn Mawr, lone mothers)

People who did recycle often gave practical reasons for their actions, particularly notable in relation to glass. A number of mothers thought that putting bottles into bottle banks was safer than putting them out with the rubbish:

F: It's safer. It's safer than putting bottles in the bin that get smashed and the kids might, you know ... it's safer.
(Peak District, women)

Those who did not recycle anything at all proffered practical explanations: facilities were unavailable, too far away or their homes lacked sufficient space to store materials for recycling. These were particular disincentives for older people and those with mobility problems:

F: You've got several miles to travel, you have to load your car up and drive perhaps five or six miles to get to your nearest one ... You have to think about it.
(Peak District, disabled people)

F: There's no recycling bins in this area, so, even if we wanted to, the facility just isn't there.

F: There's one ... that's half an hour's walk or you have to take the bus. I am not doing that every time I want to throw something away.
(Bromley-by-Bow, Bangladeshi women)

Household collections were considered the best way of collecting recyclable materials and were rated highly by those familiar with them. A household paper collection had been introduced in Bromley-by-Bow but was unavailable to flat-dwellers; however, one of the older interviewees was determined to participate in the scheme:

F: We saw all these salvage people coming round the street and we asked could we partake and at first they said no, but well what I started doing was putting all the papers into a carrier bag and then when they come round I said 'Can you take these?'. Eventually they gave us a bin to put the papers in.

Green consumption

Green consumption was not part of many of our interviewees' lives and most had never considered it. As one Glaswegian said, 'no, I never give it a thought'. The one clear exception to this came from a parent in Cefn Mawr who presented a clear critique of consumption. She explained that she felt herself to be partly responsible for environmental problems:

F: Because I am actually a consumer of what they produce ... we all need the basics but I mean there's other things that they make that we don't need to buy like ornaments, I've just got this thing about ornaments, I just don't buy things like that cos I think they're just unnecessary, they may be pretty and they're nice to look at but I think what's gone into making that? What have we had to destroy or use to make something like that?

Many expressed confusion about claims made for 'green' products, some of the older people being particularly puzzled over organic

and non-GM food. Apart from a lack of understanding of possible merits, the most commonly cited reason for avoiding 'green' purchasing was that it was too expensive. When asked whether they ever bought organic food, one Buxton woman exclaimed: 'You're joking! ... £1.38 for a pound of carrots? I don't think so!'

The issue of excess packaging was also raised with an extensive discussion in the Bromley-by-Bow lone mothers' group. Their concerns covered size ('sometimes you get a big box ... you get it open and there's a tiny little thing'), cost ('we are paying for the rest of that packing') and added difficulties with carrying shopping. Older people in Bromley-by-Bow also found heavily packaged items difficult to undo, making them feel 'helpless and useless'.

Women interviewees in the Peak District did not buy loose fruit and vegetables, finding them more expensive than the ready-packaged equivalent. They based their calculations on a comparison of prices charged by small, local shops and major supermarkets.

Conserving resources

Participants were familiar with ways of trying to save energy and water, and engaged in several practices in their homes: turning off lights and dripping taps; putting a brick in toilet cisterns; lowering thermostats; using microwaves rather than ovens; and heating only the required amount of water in the kettle. Low energy consumption lightbulbs were also a topic of conversation. They had been issued free of charge to participants on benefit and were rated highly. Those not qualifying for free bulbs tended not to use them because of the initial outlay.

Energy conservation was attempted mainly for financial reasons although many participants were aware of the environmental benefits:

... like in the winter now I turn everything off an hour before we go to bed like the heating because we just can't afford to, you know, it's such a big house, you know, so we have hot water bottles and go to bed. But you know that way I'm helping the environment!
(Cefn Mawr, lone mothers)

A few participants claimed 'money doesn't come into it'; they simply hated to see the valuable resources of fuel or water wasted. Although energy saving was widely recognised as beneficial, this issue was clearly irrelevant for some individuals.

Local participation

The extent of involvement in local groups and activities varied between the groups. Seven groups were recruited through community centres and therefore contained people who participated in at least some local activities, most of them social. Information concerning local groups and events was largely disseminated by word of mouth. Frequently, the biggest problem was making the first step; once people were involved in one activity, they learnt about other things on offer:

... if you're not involved like, you're an outsider like, if you've just moved in here or you don't go out much, then I think it's hard for you to actually find out what's going on until you've actually made a few friends and they take you here and there and they show you what's going on.
(Bromley-by-Bow, lone mothers)

Few felt they had much say in local decision-making. Some of the older people in Bromley-by-Bow attended regular meetings run by the council, finding them useful and informative. Others mentioned writing to their MP, visiting local councillors or signing petitions. In Bromley-by-Bow, flat-dwellers had petitioned for a caretaker, new lifts and CCTV; in Cefn Mawr, the subject of petitions included home security, traffic calming, household waste collection and chemical emissions. There was, however, little confidence in the effectiveness of such actions:

F: The council don't take no notice; they'll just say 'yes thank you very much' and away we'll go.
(Bromley-by-Bow, lone mothers)

M: ... petitions go to the councillors and get shoved in the bottom drawer.
(Cefn Mawr, unemployed men)

Interviewees in Cefn Mawr were particularly dismissive of their local councillors, saying that they had not listened to public concerns over a new waste collection scheme and had failed to represent their interests. The failure of their elected representatives to act on their behalf engendered a sense of pointlessness in trying to effect change:

M: I mean if the county councillors can't be bothered, I mean I know there's literally hundreds and hundreds of local residents signed petitions but our two county councillors did not even show up at the meeting ... if they can't represent us what futures have we got?

M: If nothing happens, then enthusiasm dies down.
(Cefn Mawr, unemployed men)

Conversely, the experience of successful initiatives seemed to be empowering. The disabled people in Possilpark displayed the clearest sense of the potential of collective action to improve local life ('the people are the power aren't they?'). Many had been active in campaigning to set up The 1st Centre for Disabled People and some now participated in local regeneration organisations such as the Social Inclusion Partnership Board and the Community Forum.

Getting activities off the ground was often considered problematic. Unless enough people were involved from the start, initiatives often collapsed for lack of support. The greater the number of people involved in an activity, the more attractive it appeared to others:

F: ... if you found out that 20 of my friends from Cefn were in that, that would motivate somebody else to get involved ... whereas if there's just one person talking about it you're not going to take much interest are you? But I think if there was big organisations and groups, you would do.
(Cefn Mawr, parents)

Participants often felt, however, that people had little interest in getting involved. This related to a general belief about the decline of community spirit and sense of collective responsibility:

I don't think there's too many people that would get involved round here.
(Cefn Mawr, man with long-term illness)

Conclusion

This chapter has considered a range of issues, which provide an insight into the local and wider environmental concerns of disadvantaged groups. The conclusions and implications drawn from our findings will be outlined in Chapter 4.

4 Conclusions and implications

Local environmental concern

We found evidence of a considerable interest in the quality of the local environment. The environmental concern of disadvantaged groups tends towards a material environmentalism with a focus on the effects of local environmental problems on health and well-being. The distinction between material and post-material values seems to us, however, to be misplaced. Concerns were expressed not simply about health and survival but also about quality of life. Despite an overwhelming orientation towards local concerns, some individuals demonstrated a concern for and understanding of the wider environment. Concern for the young and for future generations was also prevalent.

A focus on local conditions is unlikely to be restricted to members of disadvantaged groups; people generally find it easier to think about local than global problems. This suggests that environmental policies with a strong local focus are more likely to attract public interest and support than those that rely on a global consciousness.

Small things matter

We found that environmental concerns often focused on what might appear to be relatively minor issues such as dog fouling, litter and other waste in public spaces. This is in line with the findings of several surveys and suggests that small-scale changes could make an important difference to people's quality of life. By responding to these issues, local authorities could address local cynicism regarding their commitment to improving conditions for ordinary people.

We found that people were keen to see enforcement of local environmental regulations, whether in terms of penalising those whose dogs foul the streets or informing residents of expected codes of conduct. The presence of caretakers or wardens with the power to encourage and enforce better behaviour was widely welcomed.

Understanding residents' priorities is crucial. We found some examples of projects that local people saw as irrelevant and money-wasting. Lack of effective consultation about proposed changes reinforces a sense of powerlessness and lends weight to the perception that local authorities are out of touch.

It is essential to recognise that many of the small problems identified were interpreted as symptoms of deeper and more complex social and economic issues. Participants identified a lack of good jobs and leisure facilities for young people as the root cause of many local amenity and safety problems. Sustainable solutions to local environmental problems require these wider issues to be addressed; cleaning dirty streets and enforcing higher standards are not sufficient to deliver lasting change. This highlights the need for integrated environmental, social and economic policy.

The language of environmentalism

Participants were largely unfamiliar with the language of environmentalism, seeming to lack confidence to discuss a 'specialist' topic in the presence of someone they saw as being an expert. Few of our interviewees would refer to their surroundings as their local environment and talk of wider environmental issues was often difficult. People were often aware that

their knowledge was sparse and commented particularly on a dearth of accessible local information. The language of environmentalism is often suffused with jargon that excludes those who are unfamiliar with it.

There are potentially important gains to be made for the environmental lobby in presenting environmental issues as everyday concerns rather than as the preserve of experts. Environmental information needs to be made widely available at a local level and should engage with local issues. Interest in and engagement with environmental projects may best be encouraged in terms of local improvements rather than by reference to the environment.

Things look different from the inside

What may appear from outside to be the most obvious environmental problems for a particular locality are not necessarily of most concern to the people who live there. We found this to be the case in Bromley-by-Bow; once the topic was raised, participants acknowledged the dangers of busy roads but said they were simply a part of the fabric of life in the area. To some extent, the same was true of the chemical factory in Cefn Mawr though attitudes here were more complex, with health-related concerns modified by feelings of loyalty.

We found that residents of Cefn Mawr, Bromley-by-Bow and Possilpark were troubled by negative perceptions of their areas as polluted, run-down or plagued by drug problems respectively. It is important to remember that such places are not unequivocally poor environments: excellent regeneration and community projects may be

found in run-down estates; derelict streets may be surrounded by outstanding countryside; and a sense that things are getting better may pervade even the poorest neighbourhoods. More importantly, these places are 'home' to those who live there, underpinned by close ties with friends and family. Casual descriptions of localities as 'poor' or 'polluted' offend residents, stigmatising their homes and, by extension, themselves.

Whilst neighbourhoods must demonstrate the extent of their poverty and environmental degradation in order to attract regeneration funding, being identified as living in a poor environment is often unpalatable and may have the effect of reinforcing the negative aspects of residents' lives. The poor reputation of an area often persists despite considerable spending on regeneration (see Hastings and Dean, 2000), adversely affecting local people and hindering the chance of attracting new residents and businesses. This highlights the need for proactive measures to improve an area's negative image; these should be undertaken as an essential part of any regeneration initiative.

Environmental inequalities

The conceptualisation of local environmental issues as part of a wider agenda about justice and equality has proved to have powerful mobilising potential in poor communities in the US. While the situation in the UK differs in important respects (see Walker and Bickerstaff, 1999), the extent of residents' local pride may provide a fertile basis for campaigns to protect and improve the quality of neglected localities.

There is a danger, however, that the language of environmental justice with its link

between poor people and poor environments serves to reinforce the negative image of particular places. Environmental organisations using such discourse in their campaigns need to be aware of this and ensure that they are sensitive to local circumstances and perspectives.

Interest in the relationship between social and environmental disadvantage often focuses attention upon the experiences of residents in areas where social deprivation is concentrated. In order to develop a more complete understanding of environmental inequalities, there is a need now for further exploration of the problems arising from the experience of poverty in high quality rural environments.

Environmental action

We found that much individual environmental action was motivated by practical considerations. People will recycle household materials so long as facilities are convenient and it is perceived to be safer or easier than adding materials to their waste. Conversely, if facilities are distant or if storage is impractical, they are likely to be deterred from recycling. Cost was a hugely important factor; actions that save money are popular and those bearing a cost are not. Just as interest in local environmental projects may not be best motivated by reference to the environment *per se*, so may individual environmental action be better fostered by an emphasis on practical and financial benefits.

We found that most people were aware of the benefits of saving energy and recycling but often could not do either. It is unrealistic to expect everyone to be 'doing their bit' for the

environment unless it is made cheap and easy for members of disadvantaged groups to do so.

Many participants believed environmental organisations do an important job although little was known about them beyond media stereotypes. Our interviewees oriented to groups at a local level; lack of knowledge and involvement was explained in terms of organisations lacking a local presence. This suggests that, if environmental groups want to increase their relevance beyond a predominantly white, middle-class membership, they must consider ways of raising their profile amongst disadvantaged groups and engage with their everyday concerns.

Very few of those we spoke to had been involved in any local environmental initiatives. Indeed, most had no idea what we were talking about and could not think of any example of local projects. These are the first barriers to participation. Many people have no experience of local environmental initiatives and find them difficult to imagine.

Initiatives that fail to make a difference act as a disincentive to further engagement. Where involvement has been successful, however, it reinforces a belief in the potential of collective action and an ability to make improvements. Getting an initiative off the ground seems to be one of the biggest challenges. If too few people are involved from the outset, others are discouraged from joining in and the project may fail from lack of interest.

In all our target areas, participants raised the issue of young people having nothing to do and the concomitant behaviours that were destructive to the physical environment and

threatening to other people. This leads us to conclude that regeneration projects able to involve young people would be especially welcome; if, however, the attitude of the young men interviewed in Possilpark is a typical one, motivating young people to participate could present a particular challenge.

Are social and environmental concerns in conflict?

One of the questions underpinning this research was whether there is conflict between environmental goals and the social and economic concerns of disadvantaged groups. We found some predictable examples: the cost of fuel (whether for home heating or for a car) falls heaviest on poor people and there is a perceived tension between protecting jobs and preventing environmental pollution in industrial areas. It was in the Peak District case study, however, that a conflict between environmental and social demands was most evident. The desire to preserve and market the rural environment for tourism was seen to conflict with the needs of residents for affordable housing and everyday amenities. In addition, current transport policy was perceived as insensitive to their reliance upon cars. These examples highlight the need for careful evaluation of the social equity implications of planning, transport and environmental policy.

In deprived neighbourhoods, however, the links between environmental, social and economic needs were more striking than any conflicts. Participants made implicit, and even explicit, connections between the state of their physical surroundings and local socioeconomic conditions. The futility of considering these

spheres as separate was clear. Local environmental improvements have little chance of survival unless employment and activities are available for young people; conversely, any improvement in local social and economic conditions will affect the safety and amenity of local surroundings.

The potential of group discussions

Our focus group discussions lend weight to the notion that environmental attitudes and concerns are not fixed but develop in the course of dialogue with others. In some groups, we were aware of some individuals shifting their position in the light of others' comments whilst others grew in confidence and expressed views on unfamiliar issues. Focus groups provide an excellent forum for collective learning about environmental issues.

Involvement in group discussions may assist and empower those who take part. There were many examples of individuals passing on useful information to others: the location of recycling facilities; details of a mother and toddler group; or how to conserve water in the home. We also had occasional glimpses of the possibility of collective action through the expression of shared dissatisfaction. These observations suggest that discussion groups are an important way of involving people in local environmental projects or decision-making, at the same time helping to build social capital.

Further research

This research has explored the environmental concerns of disadvantaged people in a variety of settings. Many concerns were common

regardless of location or of the composition of the group – facilities for young people, the cost and accessibility of transport, the state of housing and the quality of local shops were common themes. There were differences between the problems faced by people living within deprived neighbourhoods and those living in a high quality rural environment; the former suffer neglected and polluted surroundings and the latter struggle to afford housing and transport. Our research has not examined whether or not members of minority ethnic groups have particular environmental concerns; this issue deserves separate investigation.

Whilst our focus throughout has been on the concerns of disadvantaged groups, observations regarding preoccupation with local matters, low

levels of knowledge concerning wider environmental issues, and barriers and incentives to environmental action and participation may well be echoed throughout the population. It is very likely, therefore, that many of our conclusions will have a wider application.

Key messages

The following box summarises the main messages from the above discussion for environmental policy-makers, local authorities, those working in environmental regeneration and environmental organisations. Some messages will be relevant to more than one constituency:

Key messages

For environmental policy-makers

- Environmental policies with a strong local focus are more likely to attract public interest and support than those that rely on a global consciousness.
- Integration between environmental and social policy is essential. The social equity implications of national and local environmental policy initiatives should always be evaluated.
- Many small problems are symptoms of deeper and more complex social and economic issues. Sustainable solutions to local environmental problems require these wider issues to be addressed.
- Individual environmental action may best be encouraged by emphasising practical and financial benefits.
- It is unrealistic to expect everyone to be 'doing their bit' for the environment unless it is made cheap and easy for members of disadvantaged groups to do so.

For local authorities

- Tackling everyday problems such as dirty streets could provide a way for local authorities to demonstrate their responsiveness to local concerns.
- The presence of caretakers or wardens with the power to encourage and enforce better behaviour was widely welcomed.
- Lack of effective consultation about proposed changes reinforces local people's sense of powerlessness and lends weight to the perception that local authorities are out of touch.

For those working in environmental regeneration

- Interest in and engagement with environmental projects may better be encouraged by talk of local improvements than by reference to the environment.
- Proactive measures to improve the negative image of areas should be undertaken as part of regeneration initiatives.
- Regeneration projects able to involve young people would be especially welcome.

For environmental organisations

- Environmental organisations should consider ways of raising their profile amongst disadvantaged groups and engage with their everyday concerns.
- Environmental information must be available at a local level.
- Care should be taken to ensure that the language of environmental justice does not reinforce the negative image of particular places or ignore the problems faced by rural residents.

Bibliography

- Bloomfield, D., Collins, K., Fry, C. and Munton, R. (1998) 'Deliberative and inclusionary processes: their contribution to environmental governance', paper given at ESRC conference, 'Environmental governance: responding to the challenge of deliberative democracy', University of London, 17 September
- Boardman, B. (1991) *Fuel Poverty: from Cold Homes to Affordable Warmth*. London: Belhaven/Wiley
- Boardman, B. with Bullock, S. and McLaren, D. (1999) *Equity and the Environment: Guidelines for Green and Socially Just Government*, a Catalyst paper in conjunction with Friends of the Earth. London: Catalyst [<http://www.catalyst-trust.co.uk>]/Friends of the Earth [<http://www.foe.co.uk>]
- Bromley-by-Bow Centre (1997–98) Annual Report September 1997–August 1998. Bromley-by-Bow Centre, 1 Bruce Road, London E3 3HN. Tel. 020 8980 4618
- Bullard, R. (1999) 'Dismantling environmental racism in the USA', *Local Environment*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 5–19
- Burrows, R. and Rhodes, D. (1998) *Unpopular Places? Area Disadvantage and the Geography of Misery*. York: Policy Press/Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- Camacho, D. (ed.) (1988) *Environmental Injustices, Political Struggles: Race, Class, and the Environment*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press
- Christie, I. and Worpole, K. (2000) *Modernisation and Democratisation on Solid Ground*, a Groundwork discussion paper. Birmingham: Groundwork UK [<http://www.groundwork.org.uk>]
- Church, C., Cade, A. and Grant, A. (1998) *An Environment for Everyone*. London: Community Development Foundation
- Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) (1998) *Digest of Environmental Statistics*, No. 20, Chapter 10 (summary of results from 1996/97 Survey of Public Attitudes to the Environment for England and Wales) [<http://www.environment.detr.gov.uk/des20/chapter10/1.htm>]
- Donkin, A., Dowler, E., Stevenson, S. and Turner, S. (1999) 'Mapping access to food at a local level', *British Food Journal*, Vol. 101, No. 7, pp. 554–64
- Evans, B. and Percy, S. (1999) 'The opportunities and challenges of local environmental policy and action in the UK', in S. Buckingham-Hatfield and S. Percy (eds) *Constructing Local Environmental Agendas: People, Places and Participation*. London: Routledge, pp. 172–85
- Gibb, K., Kearny, A., Keoghan, M., Mackay, D. and Turok, I. (1998) *Revising the Scottish Area Deprivation Index: Volume 1*. Edinburgh: The Scottish Office Central Research Unit
- Glasgow North Regeneration Alliance (1998) *Possilpark Action Plan*. July
- Greenbaum, A. (1995) 'Taking stock of two decades of research on the social bases of environmental concern', in M. Mehta and E. Ouellet (eds) *Environmental Sociology: Theory and Practice*. North York, Ont.: Captus Press, pp. 125–52
- Hastings, A. and Dean, J. (2000) *Challenging Images: Housing Estates, Stigma and Regeneration*. York: Policy Press/Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Herbert, A. and Kempson, E. (1995) *Water Debt and Disconnection*. London: Policy Studies Institute

Inglehart, R. (1990) *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

Kasemir, B., Dahinden, U., Gerger, A., Schüle, R., Tabara, D. and Jaeger, C. (1999) 'Fear, hope and ambiguity: citizens' perspectives on climate change and energy use', ULYSSES Working Paper [<http://www.zit.tu-darmstadt.de/ulysses/docmain.htm>]

Lower Lea Project (1999/2000) 'Bow Back Rivers Consultation and Monitoring programme, annual progress report 1999/2000'. The Lower Lea Project, The Miller's House, Three Mill Lane, Bromley-by-Bow, London E3 3DU. Tel. 020 8980 4626

Lucas, K. (2000) 'Two for one and one for all? Exploring the potential for integrating the sustainable development and social exclusion policy agendas in the UK', Centre for Sustainable Development, University of Westminster, London

McLaren, D., Cottray, O., Taylor, M., Pipes, S. and Bullock, S. (1999) 'Pollution injustice: the geographic relation between household income and polluting factories', report for Friends of the Earth [<http://www.foe.org.uk/pollution-injustice/poll-inj.html>]

Macnaghten, P., Grove-White, R., Jacobs, M. and Wynne, B. (1995) 'Public perceptions and sustainability in Lancashire: indicators, institutions, participation', report by the Centre for the Study of Environmental Change commissioned by Lancashire County Council

McNally, R. and Mabey, N. (1999) 'The distributional effects of ecological tax reform', WWF unpublished draft discussion paper. Contact Richard McNally [rmcnally@wwfnet.org] or Nick Mabey [nmabey@wwfnet.org] for copies

Peak District Rural Deprivation Forum (1993) *Low Income in the Peak National Park*. Hope, Hope Valley: Peak District Rural Deprivation Forum

Peak District Rural Deprivation Forum (1996) *An Alternative Rural White Paper*. Hope, Hope Valley: Peak District Rural Deprivation Forum

Possilpark Community Profile (1997) Compiled 19 June, Possilpark Library

Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (1998) *Twenty-first Report: Setting Environmental Standards*. Cm. 4053. London: HMSO

Scott, D., Shenton, N. and Healey, B. (1991) 'Hidden deprivation in the countryside: local studies in the Peak District National Park', report commissioned by the Peak Park Trust. Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of Manchester

Social Exclusion Unit (1998) *Bringing Britain Together: a National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal*. London: Cabinet Office

Taylor, D. (1993) 'Minority environmental activism in Britain: from Brixton to the Lake District', *Qualitative Sociology*, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 263-95

Templeman, S. (2000) 'Agency puts 'environmental equality' centre stage', Environment Agency press release, 31 August

Todorovic, J. and Wellington, S. (2000) *Living in Urban England: Attitudes and Aspirations*. London: DETR

Vidal, J. (2000) 'Eco-soundings', *The Guardian*, 21 June [<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4031617,00.html>]

Walker, G. and Bickerstaff, K. (1999) 'Polluting the poor: an emerging environmental justice agenda for the UK?', unpublished manuscript, Sustainable Environment and Risk Research Group, Division of Geography, Staffordshire University

Walker, G., Simmons, P., Wynne, B. and Irwin, A. (1998) *Public Perceptions of Risks Associated with Major Accident Hazards*. Sudbury: HSE Books

Witherspoon, S. and Martin, J. (1992) 'What do we mean by green?', in R. Jowell, L. Brook, G. Prior and B. Taylor (eds) *British Social Attitudes: the 9th Report*. Aldershot: Dartmouth

Worpole, K. (2000) *In our Backyard: The Social Promise of Environmentalism*. Green Alliance

Wright, M. (1998) 'Do you have to be white to be green?', *Green Futures*, November/December, pp. 24–8

Appendix 1: Key informant interviews

The following individuals and representatives of the organisations listed, were interviewed:

Black Environmental Network (BEN)
Bromley-by-Bow Healthy Living Centre
BTCV Aberfeldy Estate
Chris Church
Communities against Toxins (CAT)
Community Health Exchange Glasgow
CSV Environment Glasgow
Derbyshire Rural Community Council
Derbyshire Rural Deprivation Forum
Eleanor McDowell
Environment Agency (England)
Environment Agency (Wales)
Friends of the Earth Northern Ireland
Friends of the Earth Scotland
Glasgow North Regeneration Alliance
Groundwork Hackney

Lower Lea Project
National Energy Action England
National Energy Action Northern Ireland
North Glasgow Community Forum
North Glasgow Community Health Project
Northern Ireland Environment Link
Powys County Council
Public Health Association Scotland
Reclaim the Streets (RTS)
Rural Community Network, Northern Ireland
Rural Development Partnership Derbyshire
Springburn and Possilpark Housing Association
Sustain
The Countryside Agency
UK Public Health Association
UK Public Health Association Cwmru
Western Regional Energy Agency and Network,
Northern Ireland
Women's Environmental Network

Appendix 2: Profiles of focus group participants

Cefn Mawr

People with long-term illness

Three one-to-one interviews were carried out. All were with men. One was in age range 25–34 years and two in age range 55–64 years. All suffering the effects of long-term illness, two had very limited mobility. All white European.

Unemployed men

Five participants. Two were in age range 25–34 years, one in age range 35–44 years and two in age range 45–54 years. Four lived with a partner and had children under 16 in the household. The other participant had a partner and child but did not live with them. All unemployed (SEG E). All white European.

Parents

Three women, one in age range 25–34 years and two in age range 35–44 years. All lived with a partner and had children under 16 years in the household. One working full time, two part time (SEG D). All white European.

Lone mothers

Five participants, all living alone with children under 16 years in the household. One in age range 18–24 years, two in age range 25–34 years and three in age range 35–44 years. None were in paid employment (SEG E). All white European.

Bromley-by-Bow

Older people

Six participants, two men and four women all retired and living on state pension (SEG E). Four aged over 70 years and two in age range 65–69 years. Three lived alone, two lived with their spouse and one lived in a family group. One African Caribbean, four white European and one Bangladeshi.

Lone mothers

Six participants all living alone with children under 16 years in the household. One in age range 20–24 years, two in age range 25–34 years and the other three in age range 35–44 years. One participant had part-time employment (SEG D), the others all identified themselves as unemployed or as ‘homemakers’ (SEG E). One participant was Indian, one defined herself as Arab/Asian British and the others were all white European.

Bangladeshi Women (Aberfeldy Estate)¹

Ten participants, all living in family groups with children under 16 years in the household. All unemployed or ‘homemakers’. Four in age range 25–34 years, three in age range 35–44 years and three in age range 45–54 years. All Bangladeshi and SEG D or E.

Possilpark

Parents

Six participants, four men and two women. Two in age range 25–34 years, two in age range 35–44 years and two in age range 45–54 years. One was in full-time employment (SEG D) and all the others were unemployed (SEG E). All lived with a partner and had children under 16 years in the household. All white European.

Young, single, unemployed men

Three in first group, two of whom plus three new participants turned up for second group. All in age range 18–24 years, single and unemployed (SEG E). All white European.

Older people

Four men and two women all retired and dependent on state pension (SEG E). Three in age range 60–64 years, one in age range 65–69 years and two aged over 70 years. Four lived alone and two lived with their spouses. All white European.

Disabled people

Five women and one man, all with physical disabilities or chronic illness. Three in age range 25–34 years, one in age range 45–54 years, one in age range 55–64 years and one in age range 65–69 years. All lived alone. All white European.

Peak District

Older people

Five women and two men (no information available about one of the women). All aged over 70 years and living alone on state pension. All white European.

Women

Six participants. Two in age range 20–24 years, four in age range 35–44 years. Four lived with a partner and had children under 16 years in the household, one was a lone parent with children under 16 years in the household and one lived alone. Two were in part-time employment and the others were all unemployed or 'homemakers'. All SEG D or E. All white European.

Disabled people

Five participants, three women and two men. One woman attended on behalf of her severely disabled husband; all others had chronic illness or physical disability. One in age range 25–34 years, one in age range 35–44 years, one in age range 45–54 years and two in age range 55–64 years. Three lived alone and two lived with their spouse or partner. All white European.

Farmers

Nine male participants. Seven worked as farmers, one was a National Trust warden and one a mobile mechanic. One in age range 18–24 years, one in age range 35–44 years and seven in age range 45–54 years. Five lived with a partner and had children under 16 years in the household, two were married with no children and two were single. All white European.

Note

- 1 The Aberfeldy estate is not actually within Bromley-by-Bow; it is about one mile further south in Poplar. Residents of the Aberfeldy estate were recruited as the estate is entirely surrounded by major roads.