

Environmental Legislation



Sustainability - Background & Legislation

In June 1992 the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development known as the Earth Summit took place in Rio de Janeiro. Leaders from around the world gathered to address the problems of environmental degradation and identify ways to promote sustainable development. Agenda 21, the social and environmental action plan for the 21st century, was created, and the need to protect endangered plants and species recognised. This has resulted in Hertfordshire's local authorities developing their own strategies and becoming partners in implementing 'A 50 year vision for Hertfordshire' - the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan aimed at conserving habitats and the variety of wildlife in the county.

European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development, May 2001

This strategy outlines the EU's plans to incorporate sustainable development. The focus is on tackling climate change, threats to public health, the depletion of natural resources, transport and land-use.

europa.eu.int/comm/environment/eussd/index.htm

There are increasing numbers of projects in existence in all sectors and at all levels, which focus upon the need to balance social and environmental costs with economic progress. The European Sustainable Cities Project assists the advance towards increased sustainability in urban areas, and the number of participants is increasing all the time.

In response to the 1992 Earth Summit, the UK Environment Act 1995 resulted in the government establishing the Environment Agency, the public organisation responsible for protecting and improving the environment.

www.environment-agency.gov.uk

In 1999, the Government produced its own sustainable development strategy 'A Better Quality of Life', which emphasised the importance of integrated policies and proposed indicators to measure progress towards the following objectives:

- Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone
- Effective protection of the environment
- Prudent use of natural resources
- Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment

www.sustainable-development.gov.uk

The Local Government Act 2000 required local authorities to prepare Community Strategies in partnership with local people, to improve the economic, social and environmental well being of their areas.

www.local-regions.dtlr.gov.uk

Climate Change Levy April 2001

Based on the Government's undertaking of the Kyoto agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, a levy was introduced for all non-domestic energy use, to encourage higher environmental standards from UK industry, plus supporting measures to improve energy efficiency, prevent pollution and reduce environmental impact.

www.defra.gov.uk/environment/ccl/index.htm

The Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act, November 2000

This provided a revision to the Homes Energy Efficiency Scheme to provide eligible elderly people and families on low income with heat retaining insulation and basic central heating measures.

Health and Social Care Act 2001

Aims to improve the performance of the National Health Service. Patients are encouraged to comment on the way the NHS works, and a system introduced to regulate practitioners aims to ensure protection for patients.

Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001

Provides an increased level of law enforcement particularly regarding anti-social behaviour. Elements include on the spot penalties for disorderly behaviour and the introduction of powers to implement child curfews.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Act 2001

Gives rights to children with special educational needs; focussing on the requirement of schools, colleges and universities not to discriminate against children with special educational needs.

Regional Sustainable Development Framework for the East of England, July 2001

Aims to increase both awareness of, and participation in sustainable development in the East of England region by guiding local and regional strategies.

www.sustainability-east.com

Next steps

Ten years after the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit, the 2002 Earth Summit will be held in Johannesburg. This 'Rio+10' summit aims to push for progress on sustainability, increasing accountability for environmental degradation and calling for public engagement in Agenda 21. New strategies to strengthen global commitment to sustainability and to form new partnerships between different stakeholders are part of the anticipated outcome.

In the UK, the Sustainable Development Commission was created in October 2000 to drive forward the sustainable development agenda.

www.sd-commission.gov.uk

Hertfordshire Environmental Strategy

In December 2000 the Hertfordshire Environmental Forum published the Hertfordshire Environmental Strategy, a document that outlines a common set of 20 sustainability principles that can be applied across all public sector agencies in the county. The strategy is now being rolled out, firstly to the local authorities in September 2001, to the Health Authorities in April 2002 and to other public sector agencies in October 2002.

www.hef.org.uk