



CHRISTIAN ECOLOGY LINK

YOUR CHURCH AND LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY

A Briefing Note

Agenda 21 was the name of one of the documents adopted at the Rio Summit in 1992. The 2002 Earth Summit will be reviewing the progress made. All over the world local authorities have been drawing up programmes for environmentally responsible development for the 21st century ("Local Agenda 21"). Most councils in Britain have done this and in some cases local churches have been closely involved. In others churches seem to have been left out. But things are changing — including the names. This may cause complications but it does bring new opportunities for church involvement whether by individual churches or groups of churches and particularly by ecumenical groups.

We are now at an important stage in carrying out this agenda. In one sense Local Agenda 21 (LA21) is over and some councils are no longer using the term. But all of them are now required by Act of Parliament to have a local strategy for social and economic well being, which must contribute to sustainable development. In so doing it has to consult local people and community groups. LA21 now becomes part of this strategy This involves each area setting up a Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) including public, private, business and voluntary bodies.

What can you do?

Government guidance has drawn the attention of all local authorities to the importance of involving "faith communities" in their strategies. Is your church or your local Churches Together involved? If not find out about what is happening in your area; there will be some activity under one title or another. (One London borough is using the title "Future Network"!)

Some larger authorities have set up more local groups for specific areas called Neighbourhood Partnerships or Forums.

If your church already has an environmental programme consider how it can be related to wider environmental action in your area. If you have no such programme, perhaps because the church is small, there may be scope for the church or groups of churches to participate in the council's programmes.

Activities in which individual churches have contributed to Local Agenda 21 programmes include:-

- Placing recycling boxes on church land
- Organising a street clean up
- Collecting articles for reuse, including sending them to Third World countries
- Organising a LETS project (Local Exchange and Trading Scheme)
- Setting up a Credit Union
- Cleaning ponds
- Building and maintaining footpaths
- Promoting Fair Trading
- Developing Third World links
- Youth employment schemes
- Encouraging use of local produce, including "Farmers' Markets"
- Improving graveyards as wildlife areas or as educational resources

In addition there may often be opportunities for individual church members with particular skills or experience to participate in the local authority's volunteer organisation for Local Agenda 21 (or Sustainability, Strategy, Environment etc.)

In some parts of the country there are church activities relating to Local Agenda 21 or the environment generally over a wide area — a diocese or other regional denominational or ecumenical structure.

Finally

Don't be put off by this question of titles. If there is no sign of Local Agenda 21 in your area ask your local councillor (or at the Council offices or public library) what the council is doing about "sustainable development" or "community strategy". Find out how your authority will be observing European Car Free Day. (22 September in 2002) There may be a local news bulletin on these matters .

And when you or your church group get involved try to see that the emphasis is on the sustainability rather than the development!

NOTES

Module 11 of the EcoCongregation Resources Pack describes LA21 activities in a number of churches (see the website <http://www.encams.org/ecocongregation>) The module also gives details about LETS. [CEL has a leaflet on this in the pack "Steps Towards Sustainability " Leaflet 7. Another leaflet in that pack deals with Sustainability.]