



Shifting opinions and changing behaviours

A Consumer Forum report by Opinion Leader Research, May 2006



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About the Sustainable Consumption Roundtable

The UK's Sustainable Consumption Roundtable is an initiative jointly hosted by the National Consumer Council and the Sustainable Development Commission. Funded by Defra and the DTI, the Roundtable brings together a small group of leading experts in consumer policy, retailing and sustainability to advise Government on how to create consumer choices that stay within environmental limits. It is due to report in early 2006, following which the Government will set out a plan for further action on sustainable consumption.



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Foreword

Today's consumer society offers unprecedented comfort, convenience and choice. And yet the way we live is far from smart, as it also destabilises our climate, contributes to the loss of over nine million hectares of forest each year and is taking fish stocks to the edge of collapse. To put it simply, if consumer life helped to get us into an environmental mess, is there a chance that it could get us out of it?

To explore this, we used the innovative research technique of a structured, deliberative Consumer Forum. Drawing on previous work by government and related research, we commissioned Opinion Leader Research to run a major event, in which over a hundred people from all walks of life deliberated on their aspirations and how these fitted with ideas of policies to encourage more sustainable consumption

So what did we learn? There are five major conclusions which stand out.

1. There is space for change

Government can be bolder about driving markets and getting incentives in place for behaviour change. A mass of people are ready and willing to see new policies introduced that will help them change their behaviour in the face of climate change and global poverty – but they need the government to set an example and make it easier for them to do the right thing.

2. You have to start from where people are

Fewer than one in three people have heard of the term 'sustainable development'; and qualitative studies suggest that very few, even of these, can explain what it means. So it makes sense to start from how people understand their own lives, and the connections to the world around them.

We have identified that four areas of our lives generate four-fifths of our overall impact on the environment around us: how we run our homes, the food we eat; how we get around; and how we travel on our holidays. The way to connect with people's aspirations in these areas is to promote symbolic and effective action that touches their everyday lives.

3. Don't put the burden solely on the green consumer

When people act as shoppers, they expect some issues to have been dealt with. They are generally not aware that Government and retailers are delegating to them the responsibility of choosing society's way out of unsustainability. The complexity of information required to make a judgement on product sustainability can leave even the most dedicated green consumer confused and disempowered. Government, manufacturers and retailers need to work together to edit out unsustainable choices on consumers' behalf and get new sustainable products onto the shelves instead. Choice editing for sustainability is cost-effective and popular, and will create new markets for business.

4. Show people they're part of something bigger

People are willing to change, but they need to see others acting around them to feel their efforts are worthwhile. Fairness matters. A combination of incentives, community initiatives, pledges and feedback will reassure people that they are part of a collective movement that's making a real difference.

3. Develop the tools and momentum to tackle more difficult issues

Finally, there are ways in which sustainability imperatives collide with contemporary consumer aspirations, particularly when it comes to foreign travel and the car culture. With the right process, government should not be scared to engage people and business in dialogue on thorny issues.

To take these forward, we tested with participants a range of policy innovations that have emerged from our work, including ideas of a recycling lottery, carbon permits, home-grown energy and making air passengers aware of the cost to the climate when you fly.

Above all, we want to acknowledge the time and contribution of the people that participated in the Consumer Forum. While this challenge is far from simple, it is one that people are willing to take ownership of. And it is one that they can offer sophisticated and insightful solutions to. Put simply, the challenge of a sustainable future is one that cannot be guarded by tub-thumping campaigners and defensive policymakers. It needs to be shared, because it is this that opens the way to new solutions.

Ed Mayo

Alan Knight

Co-Chairs of the Sustainable Consumption Roundtable

Aims and methodology

The Sustainable Consumption Roundtable commissioned Opinion Leader Research to conduct a major deliberative event looking at sustainable consumption. The aims of the forum were:

- To explore views and attitudes towards potential interventions
- To understand current consumer aspirations
- To provide insights that can shape and influence future policy-making

The event took the form of a Consumer Forum with 110 people recruited from the Manchester area to ensure 100 participants on the day. People were recruited to reflect the demographics of the area. The event was conducted in Manchester on 6th and 7th October, 2005 and 105 participants took part in the actual event.

The Forum lasted over 1½ days and involved a mixture of plenary and smaller breakout sessions. At various points in the day, the 105 people were divided into breakout sessions that involved 10 to 11 people

- On the first evening, no reference was made to the environment and sustainable consumption by the Opinion Leader team. The event was positioned to participants as a forum on future consumer trends.

During the first evening, we explored consumers' aspirations and dreams. In addition to looking at their overall aspirations, different break-out groups looked at specific areas of consumption and life – food and drink, getting away, getting around, at home and family and community.

- At the start of the second day, Andrew Lee from WWF made a presentation on sustainable living and climate change. This introduced the topic of the day, and ensured that participants were 'bought up to speed' on the key issues.

Consumers then looked at specific areas of consumption - food and drink, getting away, getting around, at home, carbon use – and interventions in those areas. We ensured that the various breakout groups looked at interventions in an area in which they had explored their aspirations the night before. (See Appendix C for details of interventions tested). Prior to looking at specific interventions, we gave participants information on the environmental challenges posed by certain key areas of consumption (See Appendix B for details of handouts.)

- Towards the end of the Forum, consumers identified next steps and implications for business, Government and consumers. They presented their favourite ideas, and discussed what they feel Government, business and consumers should do.

The demographic breakdown of the 100 people recruited for the event is as follows:

Men	53
Women	57
16-24	17
25-44	43
45-64	31
65+	19
AB	18
C1	37
C2	33
DE	22
White	86
Black	12
Asian	12
Registered disabled	12
Living at home	8
Single: cohabiting / flatshare	14
Married kids < 11	26
Married kids > 11	32
Empty nesters / retired	14
Single / separated / divorced	16

The interventions explored were:

At home

- Banding council tax – linking energy efficiency with council tax
- Variable waste charging – where consumers ‘pay as they throw’
- Recycling lottery – where recycling is linked to a lottery scheme.

Food and drink

- Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) logo - an environmental standard which fisheries can apply for to show that their methods are sustainable
- School dinners reform – introducing a more sustainable diet in schools.

Getting around

- Car labelling – cars are ranked according to carbon dioxide emissions, and tax is weighted accordingly
- Road user charging – drivers are charged on a ‘pay as you drive’ basis
- Car clubs – consumers use a pool of cars, rather than owning their own car.

Getting around

- Making flights cost more through added tax
- Carbon offsetting on flights.

Carbon use

- Carbon credits – each person is given a certain amount of carbon credits to spend
- ESCOs (Energy Services Companies) – an energy company that ensures energy is supplied as efficiently as possible.

Key themes and issues

The Consumer Forum produced a series of insights that have important implications for those looking at policy and communications on sustainable consumption. Our deliberation with consumers shows that there are a number of opportunities to be capitalised on, and a set of threats and challenges that need to be tackled by policy-makers and communicators moving forward.

The opportunity

The Consumer Forum clearly demonstrates that there is political ‘space’ for action on sustainable living. People accept that there are a set of major environmental challenges that need to be tackled, and there is a willingness to engage with possible interventions, and an acceptance and acknowledgement that the status quo needs to change.

During the first evening of the event (when no mention had been made of the reason behind the consultation), consumers made many spontaneous references to issues and topics that they connected with environmental and ‘green’ issues. People talked about global warming, the ozone layer, food additives, pollution, Hurricane Katrina and flooding, which demonstrates that the environment in its broadest sense is on people’s agenda.

‘I worry about the environment we’ll be living in, the ozone really, the ozone, the hole in it, how big it’s getting, how much we, as consumers, are using all the natural resources, like the oil...we’re not taking care of what we’ve got.’ (excerpt from Thursday evening session.)

Prospect of change

Our conversations with consumers about changing behaviour revealed co-existing attitudes. When considering change that could lead to more sustainable consumption, consumers are both doubtful and positive at the same time.

On one hand, they feel change is difficult, and openly acknowledge that they are ‘locked’ into high levels of consumption and harmful behaviours. Within this area, consumers talk about using their cars a lot, flying regularly, and household set ups such as having two fridges.

However, consumers also say they feel positive about change when they think about how certain behaviours have evolved over time. There is discussion over how certain interventions and actions which would have seemed far-fetched and fanciful a few decades ago are now commonly accepted – for instance, the wearing of seat belts in cars and smoking bans in offices and bars.

‘People go out and buy a car because they want a car.’

‘They said that about the car, that people aren’t going to use seat belts, but now it’s law.’

Shifting the blame

However, initiatives that aim to bring about behavioural change will need to acknowledge consumers' desire to often shift the blame for environmental problems onto others.

As a key part of this, consumers feel that reform is somewhat futile given the high level of consumption and perceived hostility towards 'green' issues in the US. Consumers who are more engaged in international news also cite the rapid industrialisation of China and India, and question whether reform in the UK can have any impact given problems elsewhere. In terms of a more specific issue, consumers who looked at the topic of decreasing fish stocks had a tendency to blame 'foreign fishermen' rather than UK fishermen or themselves.

As a result, there is a default tendency amongst some to think 'why bother' when thinking about changing behaviours – in terms of *what's the point when other countries are worse?*, and *what difference can I make on my own as an individual?*

'I mean we're all right talking about it here but America just won't do it at all. They just won't. They just consume.'

'America, there's different people, but as whole they will not enter a debate, will they, about global warming.'

'I think it's highlighted the disparity between here in the UK and say in America and in China, the disparity between what we consume here and what America consumes.'

'You feel powerless to change it...it's the same with global warming, you know, you think right, well, we recycle at home, everything goes in the box, and then you put the news on and it's still going on, and you think, what more can I do?'

'China, in Beijing there's eight lanes traffic, which is mad, just packed with cars, they're never going to give those up easily. They don't care.'

Shifting the onus

Connected to this, consumers tend to look to the Government and business to bring about change rather than themselves. Importantly, this stance is particularly pronounced in areas of consumption where consumers find it difficult to imagine making a personal sacrifice – such as car use, flying and shopping – that puts an emphasis on convenience and choice. From a consumer perspective, it is easier to ask others to grapple with potential sacrifices than to make those hard choices on an individual basis.

'Really we need to go back to basics and nobody will do that because you don't want to give up your comforts, your lifestyle, the things that you've got.'

'Once you've tasted it, it's harder to manage without.'

The importance of leadership

The Consumer Forum shows the premium people place on leadership in this area. People are seeking leadership and guidance from Government, and to a lesser extent business, on how they can live more sustainable lives. From a consumer perspective, this primarily revolves around the Government playing a key role as an 'educator'. They want to hear from the Government on what they can do to improve the environment. Consumers openly state that their knowledge of 'good things' to do tends to only revolve around recycling, and that they need to know how they can make more of a positive impact.

I think we're all waiting for direction of what to do.'

I totally agree you need someone to be in control...it's not just about the Government, it's about us as well...but you need a leader and that's it, that's the only way forward really.'

'Somenhere along the line somebody's got to take responsibility haven't they? And every single person as an individual is not going to ever. So somebody up there that we... we look up [to] and is supposed to be looking after us, needs to do something, needs to take control ...'

However, for Government efforts to be effective, consumers need to see politicians and policy-makers setting the right example. People want to see politicians following their own guidance and advice, for instance using smaller cars instead of big limos. For consumers, this is critical as they will call into question any communication on behavioural change from someone who does not seem to be 'practising what they preach'.

Public lights of the country are singing from one hymn sheet and doing it completely different 'cos Tony Blair drives around in a dirty great big Jag doesn't he? And the Queen, a prime example of a woman who could have influences, how many Rollers, how many Daimlers, how many Aston Martins, how many houses?'

'What I'm saying as well, you've got the likes of John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister running round with two Jaguars and a Rolls so why don't they set the example?'

The Forum does show, however, that there is space for Government to act and intervene on issues around sustainable consumption, as long as consumers believe the motives and intentions behind the Government's thinking. Moreover, the credibility of the spokesperson behind the policy is as important as the credibility of the intervention.

In terms of the broader context around leadership, the impact of Jamie Oliver's school dinners campaign on consumers was clear from the Forum. There was a high level of awareness of Oliver's arguments, and this was matched by a high level of support for change on school dinners. Indeed, this demonstrates the power of bold leadership. Of course, in light of levels of trust towards Government, it is unlikely that communications from a politician will be as trusted as that from a celebrity chef. However, the 'Jamie's Dinners'

campaign does show how bold leadership coupled with imaginative communications can change the public debate.

Above all else, the Forum shows that consumers are looking to the Government to lead. When asked in the post-Forum questionnaire about who is responsible for addressing the issue, 80% say that Government is the most responsible (18% for business and 18% and 17% for consumers and communities respectively).

Ideal hallmarks

The main part of the Forum was devoted to exploring reaction to specific interventions that could lead to a more sustainable society.

From looking at a broad range of interventions and initiatives, a series of ideal hallmarks emerge from the consumer discussions.

a) Double-win benefit

Consumers respond to ideas where they feel there is a 'double benefit'. A double benefit is an intervention that offers a personal benefit together with a wider benefit to the environment and society.

For example, micro-generation resonated with consumers as they felt that they would save money as well as contribute to a better environment. Banding council tax also offered a similar double gain; and sustainable school dinners reform was seen to offer a benefit to both 'your kids' and the wider environment.

Consumers are largely unwilling to make a sacrifice without a personal benefit. The sole exception to this in the Forum was concept of banning cod sales.

[On making your home more energy efficient] *'The only way an adult will do it is if there's some sort of financial reward.'*

b) Fair and equitable

Consumers place a premium on interventions being fair. Firstly, this is about social justice and equity. They want to ensure that new initiatives are not open to manipulation by rich consumers. For example, concerns are raised that wealthy consumers could buy up lots of carbon credits, or would benefit more from council tax banding.

Worries are also expressed that less affluent consumers could 'lose out' with certain interventions. If carbon was rationed, there were concerns that pensioners would not be able to heat their homes in winter. In addition, consumers from a low-income background fear that they will not be able to fly as much if tax went up on flights.

The other element of fairness revolves around perceptions of a 'fair' link between action and consequence. Labelling and road user charging are seen as fairly linking behaviour with consequences. However, it is important to note that consumers react against the idea of a link between flying and higher taxes on flights.

In Manchester lots of homes are these poor terraces and it's poorer people that live in them. Does that mean you would get a double penalty – you live in a cold home and you get higher council tax as well?

c) Tangible and specific

Successful interventions also tend to offer consumers something tangible and specific. As a result, micro-generation and banding council tax are liked in part as they are easy to understand. Logos on products and services such as the MSC logo also resonate as they provide a tangible offer and an easy to understand shortcut.

In addition, some participants suggested a 'Climate Card' – modelled on Nectar or the Boots Advantage Card – which would give people points and rewards for good actions. The 'Climate Card' concept is popular as it is tangible, specific and offers a 'double benefit'.

The desire for tangible interventions is partly based on a wider frustration that they often struggle to see the benefit to the environment of anything they can do as an individual.

'Yeah clearly we're all going to have to adjust but I think I'd like to have a carbon meter, have a kind of meter in the house so that you can actually become aware of how much you are using because we don't know do we.'

'We were asked to give two really good ideas. The first one was the climate card. We decided that we loved the Boots card, and that we wanted a climate card, where if you were recycling and if you were energy saving in your home, energy efficient light bulbs etc., that you would gain points, and those points could be used to get money off your bills, off your council tax etc. We thought that was a great idea.'

d) Collective action - social norms

When thinking about interventions, consumers need assurance that they will be acting in collaboration rather than isolation.

Amongst many, there is a default assumption that they would be making an individual sacrifice for no guaranteed outcome or benefit. Indeed, acting in isolation is seen as stupid and counter-productive.

This came out clearly when discussing variable waste charging; where some felt it would be foolish to 'play by the rules' if others were throwing their rubbish in their

neighbours' bins or in the street. In addition, during discussions on making changes at home to improve energy efficiency, there was a willingness to improve things, but people want to see evidence of others doing their part.

Leading on from this, the Forum shows that interventions need to become social norms to be truly effective and successfully. Interestingly, there was support for an opt-out rather than an opt-in in relation to carbon offsetting for flights. It was felt that this would become a social obligation that people would feel ashamed for avoiding.

'Well I don't mind if we collectively sacrifice but I don't want to sacrifice, me and my family when the bloke next door isn't.'

e) Positive and can-do

Interventions also succeed when they are seen as positive and upbeat. Consumers react against anything that seems too gloomy and depressing, or unachievable.

Micro-generation is partly liked because it feels like people can make a positive contribution to the environment. In contrast, discussion on reducing carbon use following a Carbon Calculator exercise, depresses participants – as they feel that the target is unachievable and far-fetched.

(An earlier version of the Carbon Calculator software is available at: www.cat.org.uk/carbongym/carbongym.tmpl?section=reception.)

Language is also important, with consumers preferring to see terms framed in positive language. For example, when discussing car labelling, consumers much prefer the term 'raising minimum standards' as opposed to 'banning'.

f) Balance and choice

Consumers also want to feel that there is an element of choice and flexibility when it comes to interventions. Participants react most negatively to options which are seen as overly-coercive; most notably car clubs and carbon rationing. (Importantly, car clubs were presented as a voluntary concept – however, the high level of consumer attachment to the car meant they saw it as a policy which would involve them having to give up their cars).

Some consumers talk about being able to make their own trade-offs and balances. For example, they may drive a sports car, but they will 'make up for it' by doing another beneficial act.

'I won't give up my Audi TT for anybody because I'm doing my bit by walking and cycling'

'I think it's about getting a balance, if you know you're going to take a long haul flight or lots of short flights then you should not maybe use the car as much that year.'

g) The right motives

Beyond the ideal hallmarks, consumers also demand evidence that Government and business has the right motives when it comes to promoting interventions and initiatives

Reflecting low levels of trust towards institutions, there is a high level of scepticism towards the motives of both business and Government. As part of this, some consumers see certain money-raising interventions as 'just another tax'. Significantly, hypothecation helps overcome this, but consumers say they would demand evidence to see that hypothecation is actually occurring. Above all, interventions need to be seen to be motivated by environmental concerns, rather than revenue-raising reasons.

Likewise, there is a strong perception that business' motives are not 'pure' when it comes to sustainable issues. Examples of this where consumer anger towards the perceived high price of British Gas' home turbine kits and supermarkets putting a perceived mark-up on organic foods.

[Participant discussing car labelling, and seeing the initiative as a way just to raise revenue.] *'When the government starts doing things like this, though, don't you think there's a bit of hypocrisy? All they're doing is saying, they're not banning things...all they're saying is, if you want to chuck out more crap from your car, you just have to pay more for it.'*

[On the mini wind turbine] *'I can see private businesses making these things and selling them, trying to flannel people that you can cut the bills in half.'*

Exploring aspirations

On the first evening of the Consumer Forum, we explored people's aspirations and hopes. Through a series of creative exercises and techniques, we looked at what people hope their lives will be like in 10 years. In addition to looking at their aspirations and dreams in general, we also asked different groups to think about what they wanted in the future from the four areas of consumption, and from family and community. We also explored what consumers saw as the barriers and obstacles to them achieving their dreams.

At this point in the Forum, we had not mentioned that the event would be looking at issues around sustainable consumption. As a result, references made by participants to the environment and 'green' issues were completely spontaneous and unprompted.

Through the use of techniques such as guided fantasies and 'psychodrawings', we were able to unlock several powerful insights into how consumers view the future.

Family and community - non-material aspirations

In all the break-out groups, consumers showed a real desire to focus on non-material and non-monetary aspirations. Participants talked about the importance of relationships, family and community when discussing their aspirations for the future. Good health is also seen as essential to future prosperity, and a real barrier to achieving what you want. This is particularly pronounced amongst older consumers.

[On future hopes] *'To see my oldest child with a great job after further education.'*

'My little daughter's happy and successful and my son well cared for.'

'My daughter's 20 now, and that's my main thing, is I want her to be happy. Whatever she does, whatever it is, I just want her to be happy'

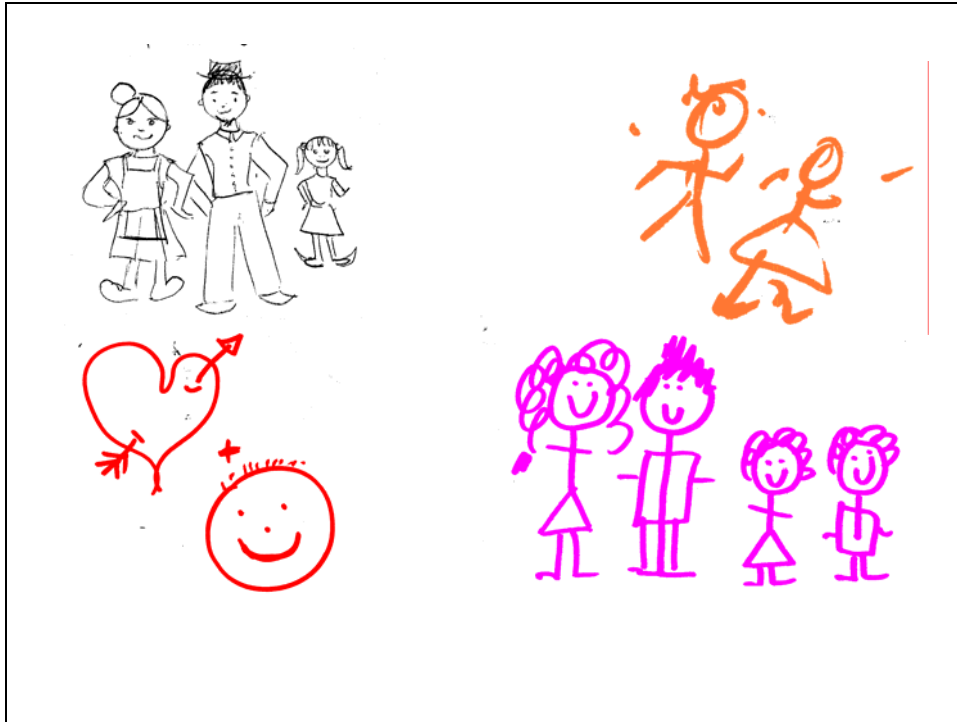
Many people feel that a sense of community has been lost, and that this had led to series of issues around anti-social behaviour and youth crime. Importantly, this view is cited by young consumers in their 20s and 30s as much as by older participants. This view feeds into wider concerns about the future that people's children and grandchildren will have.

'Well I mean safety and the likes of that. I mean you can't go walking the roads or streets of a night time, so what's it going to be like for them kiddies in the future.'

'Seeing a community would be nice. I don't think I feel like I really have a community, you just keep yourself to yourself'

'You can't live in a vacuum can you? You have to interact with the world around you. So you need somewhere where that feels safe and happy.'

'It's not all about houses and cars, and what you've got.'



Psychodrawings - Non-material aspirations

Material aspirations

It is important, though, to acknowledge that consumers also express very materialistic aspirations. This is particularly pronounced amongst younger consumers (20s, 30s), who still have major consumer aspirations in terms of big homes, nice cars and lifestyles.

'£545,000 house with swimming pool and an Aston Martin DB9'

'A house over in Spain and a house over here'

'I've always wanted a Bentley and they cost £225,000 new and I know that because I'm a car salesman!'

'A slightly nicer car, maybe a slightly nicer house'

'Ideal life would be a debt-free home owner, nice girlfriend and a yacht would be nice and I'd have a fleet of sports cars'



Psychodrawings - Material aspirations

Security

In the aftermath of the 7th July bombings in London, concerns around security are high amongst consumers. However, security as a theme goes beyond the issue of terrorism and national security, and links together crime and public safety, pensions and future financial security, and wider worries around community cohesion. In terms of financial security, lack of provision for the future is identified as major obstacle to realising your aspirations.

'Security, which means obviously again, me being in a stable, secure job, and showing me to be able to provide for my kids, and have a decent home.'

'Financial security comes out in as well, don't it? About pensions and secure, stable job.'

'Financially you'd want to be secure to be able to take care of them [your family]'

A place in the sun

Importantly, overseas travel represents a major aspiration for consumers. Participants speak of their attachment to flying abroad for sun and for short breaks. Amongst C2D consumers, there are numerous references to how the low-cost carrier boom has opened up travel to a wider section of the population. Younger consumers also tend to speak of a desire to travel the world. Indeed, people want to fly further, faster and in greater comfort.

Beyond holiday travel, the desire to live abroad in the near future is also prevalent. France, Spain, Australia and Florida are the most commonly cited places that people would like to move to. When probed on the reasoning behind their choices, consumers talk about the poor weather in the UK, but also connect their dream to a wider narrative of Britain 'in decline'.

'I want to do some more travelling and stuff like that, and experience other people's worlds.'

'I'd just like to see other countries.'

'You just want to experience as much as you can, and learn about the different ways of living as well, and you can't do that by staying around the same people.'

'I'd live in Australia ideally, they have a more outdoor lifestyle and better weather.'

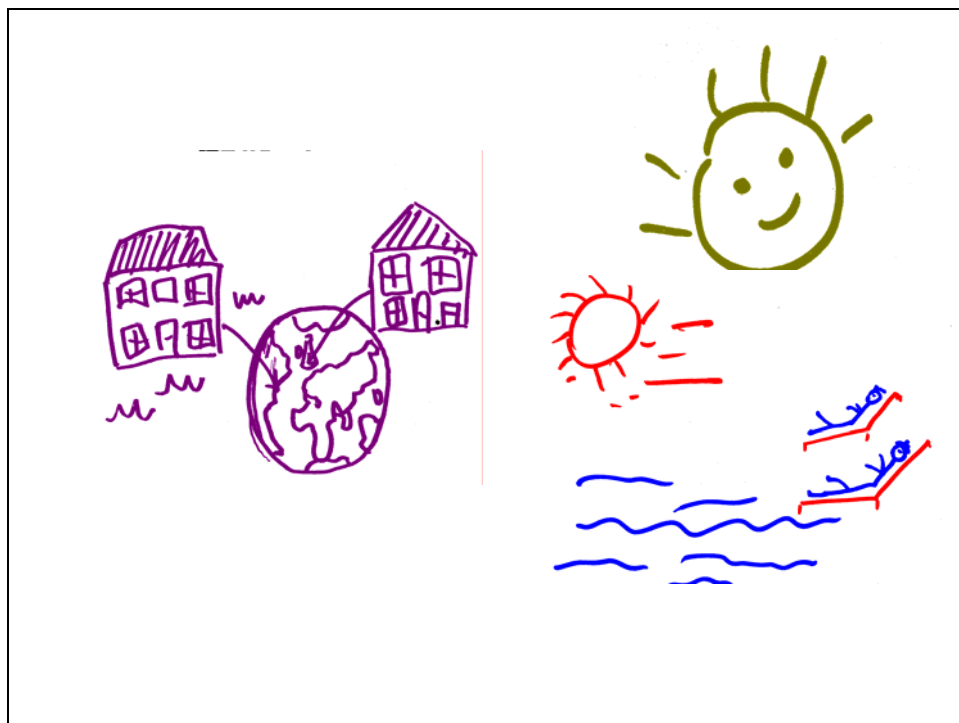
'The UK is becoming an increasingly dangerous place to live.'

'I hope I can take a holiday wherever and whenever I like.'

'The world's shrinking, you can fly all over it at the drop of a hat nowadays.'

'A lot of people go for the experience, don't they? They go for the first experience of going abroad, of flying, the new experience.'

'I think I want to do some more traveling and stuff like that, and experience other people's worlds...'



Psychodrawings: A place in the sun

Food and drink: divide

Discussion on aspirations around food and drink reveals an interesting divide between those seeking more sustainable choices and those wanting more immediacy. Some consumers talk about wishing to see more organics, less chemicals in food, and a growing focus on local produce and Farmers' Markets. However, others wish to see food purchasing become even more accessible, speedy and convenient.

This demonstrates the media's impact upon perceptions in terms of demands for quality/freshness, but also the degree of consumer attachment to convenience and choice in food (particularly around 'fast food' options). In general, younger consumers show more attachment to fast food/convenience than older consumers.

'We want to do away with processed food, close McDonald's. We don't want insecticides. We want local farm produce. We want to see allotments come back.'

'We kind of wanted McDonald's to stay, I'm afraid, and a delivery service as well.'

Getting around: saliency of environmental issues

Interestingly, references to the environment are most salient during the discussion on aspirations about 'getting around'. The Forum shows that consumers are attached to their cars or the concept of car ownership, with many hoping to upgrade their current model or own a car for the first time. Some also speak of their desire for a sports car or a top-of-the-range model.

However, there are also spontaneous references for the need for cleaner fuels and for finding 'greener' ways of getting around

'The combustion engine has got to go'

'I love walking, you take in a lot more of the world'

Rising saliency of environmental issues

Beyond this, we need to acknowledge the numerous spontaneous references to the environment and green issues during the first evening. In spite of the fact that the moderators made no reference to the sponsoring organisation, concerns were voiced about global warming, natural disasters such as the Asian Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina, pollution in general and food additives.

Within the context of thinking about aspirations, there is an emerging sense of a series of uncontrollable events may impair people's future prosperity. Consumers do not, though, make wider connections between various events and developments, and this sense of concern is driven by fear rather than knowledge. People do not link different events into a single narrative.

'The environment is at the forefront really, at the moment, of people's agendas. And it's the world isn't it? If we don't look after the world, it won't be here for the grandchildren or the great-grandchildren.'

'These freak weather things didn't used to happen did they?'

'I remember a pretty hot summer five years ago when I bought four fans, the next year I had to get air conditioning: what will it be like in 10 years time?'

Considering change: introducing the topic

Andrew Lee from the WWF opened the full day session on the Friday by making a short presentation on sustainable consumption to participants. The presentation focused on the challenge posed by climate change, and how the issue connects seemingly disparate topics such as food, flying and home energy use. He particularly focused on the need to move from '3 planet living' to '1 planet living', as a way to illustrate the concept of living within ecological limits.

The presentation had a powerful and important impact on Forum participants. After the presentation, there was a candid acknowledgement that environmental issues are not as top of minds as issues such as schools, hospitals, crime and terrorism. After hearing the talk, many spoke of how they found the facts particularly alarming and worrying, and were surprised at how different issues linked together.

Importantly, participants spoke about how they were shocked at the immediacy of the problem. There was a common assumption that environmental problems would hit in 50 to 100 years, rather than with a decade. Revealingly, the argument that we only have 10 years to avert a critical rise in the earth's temperature was cited spontaneously by participants throughout the rest of the day.

'We hear global warming and it just flies over my head. I think Andrew put it in perspective, we really have got to start thinking about it.'

'What was significant in what he said was that what we in the UK do will have an impact on my children and my children's children and it only takes 10 years.'

'I remembered them facts from the presentation – they were hard hitting, they really made me sort of think "... shit, am I using three planets worth, bloody hell what can I do, what can I do to get it down?"'

For some, the presentation led to feelings of guilt about their material dreams and aspirations. This often revolved around guilt about the differences between levels of consumption in the UK and the Third World.

'I think we all feel guilty now, don't we?'

'Yeah because if you think about it, it's like wanting something that you know is going to muck up everything, and I feel guilty about: it makes you aware.'

'I think we all feel guilty about that now...we've got ten years to become a third of what we're using, and I'm like, I didn't know. But it's shaming.'

'I think it's highlighted the disparity between what we consume here and what America consumes and what a family in Bangladesh consumes. And it's the disparity between us and I'm ashamed.'

However, it is important to note that this guilt lessened during the course of the day. When discussing interventions around flying, supermarkets and cars, consumers reverted to a much more individualistic stance.

Areas of consumption: at home

Consumers see the 'home' as a place in which they make a real difference to the environment. As they feel they can control the environment in which they live, there are positive towards making changes to their homes. Many already say they are 'doing their bit' by recycling. However, others admit that they are not currently as 'green' as they could be, but realise the need to change their actions and behaviour.

Importantly, consumers are seeking evidence of leadership from Government and evidence that they are leading by example. In addition, whilst acknowledging their own individual responsibility, they want to see evidence of others doing their bit in order to make their contributions seem worthwhile. Business and government have roles to play in terms of making 'green' choices easier for consumers

'If we all do our bit and then we could see an impact'

'We're all saying the government needs to do this, but I think everybody needs to take responsibility for their own actions 'cos ... you're just passing the buck on to somebody else; "well you sort it out 'cos I can't be bothered doing it.'"

'Why should I give it up if no one else does?'

At home: spontaneous ideas and barriers to change

Prior to looking at specific interventions, we explored consumers' spontaneous views on how they could lead more sustainable lives at home.

Consumers' ideas revolve around energy efficiency measures. Examples include turning lights and appliances off when they are not in use, buying energy efficient appliances, using low energy light bulbs and turning central heating down. Some talk of how they are already doing this.

'I've got energy saving light bulbs, I walk around the house and turn all the flaming lights off, I do a wash at 40 degrees.'

'I've got a garden bin that I bought, you know a compost bin that I bought. I was recycling before I got all the council provided stuff, I've got energy saving light bulbs, I do go round turning all the lights and electricity off'

'Turning the boiler off a bit earlier, we should do that.'

Consumers also call upon businesses to promote energy efficiency by ensuring places of work are energy efficient or raising the profile of energy efficient products. They also feel strongly that businesses could reduce junk mail and wasted packaging.

'Every time you go to the supermarket you get about 20 plastic bags don't you?'

I got shouted at for reusing my bags in Tesco's. Yeah, she told me off.'

'Say you go away for a week and you come back and 95% of your mail is junk. You don't even read it, it goes straight in bin.'

'Manufacturers, they can use the packaging when we recycle paper. Cardboard, recycle cardboard.'

'Or if you've got toothpaste, there's no need to put a box on it, is there, I don't know'

'Lots of hospitals now have things where you go into a room and the lights go on. Some office blocks are the same – if nobody's in the room for a long time it shuts down, that's a good idea those sensors.'

The Government in turn, should introduce reward schemes for energy efficiency, and penalise businesses who fail on efficiency. They should set the lead in energy efficiency too, for instance by turning down the heating in every Government building by one degree Celsius. There is also a wider discussion about the Government needing to educate consumers on energy efficiency.

'You could reduce your temperature heating, temperature thermostat, by one degree or whatever it is that would make a lot of difference couldn't it?'

'Enforcing change... You could do by basically saying we're not going to let anybody produce normal light bulbs any more, every light bulb is going to be an energy saving light bulb.'

'I think what the government could do is give us some money or grant to put perhaps a solar panel in your roof so you could get some help that way.'

'Forcing change through education.'

'Teaching for all ages I think.'

'There should be more education in schools about energy efficiency, like switching a light off after you've been in the room or the TV. The kids need to be aware of it as well. If it starts in school you learn it for life.'

When asked about barriers to change, there is a view that people are generally ignorant and unaware of what to do. The consumer frame of reference is very much dominated by recycling, and some struggle to think about other ways in which they can make a difference. There is also a wider sense that energy is an area of consumption that is 'hard to picture' and to quantify in your mind. A few also say that energy-efficient products are expensive.

'You know about recycling but I didn't really know about anything else. We need help and guidance with this – how are we supposed to know? I might try one thing I think is good and actually be causing more harm somehow'

Intervention - banding council tax

In the 'At Home' groups, we explored reactions to the idea of linking council tax to energy efficiency.

Overall, there is an openness towards banding council tax. Connecting with the wider narrative around 'double benefits', consumers feel it would provide a real incentive to make your home energy efficient and that it offers a personal financial benefit as well as a wider environmental benefit. Most feel fed up with the status quo around council tax which leads to a particularly positive response.

'Sounds good, sounds a good idea.'

'If you're saving on your council tax and you're helping the environment. I think it's a good idea.'

'I think it's a good idea providing the reduction in the Council Tax is noticeable'

As part of this, consumers feel strongly that local councils should take the lead in promoting energy efficiency with their own properties. They place a premium on councils leading by example in this area.

'I mean at the end of the day they're the biggest landlord in the country aren't they? So if they want change to happen, you start with the biggest person not the smallest person.'

'The owner of the house is the council, so why are the council saying to normal people will you do that please? The council should get its own house in order first'

However, concerns are voiced about the fairness of the scheme. Several believe only well-off consumers will actually be able to afford the necessary measures, and that as a result, low-income consumers will lose out. There is discussion around the council providing grants to low-income households, in order to help them meet the costs.

'What worries me is if you couldn't afford it'

'I think it penalises the poor, that's what I think.'

'I think...the council could maybe make grants available so that anyone who bought that house would be given a grant to get it up to an A efficiency'

'I think it's good ... good idea in principle as long as people who can't afford to insulate their house are give help to insulate it.'

As part of the discussion on the fairness of the scheme, concerns are raised that it would be unfair to those who have already had work done on their properties, or those who live in houses where it would be impossible to add extra insulation. These comments refer to the idea of a one-off rebate on council tax when insulation is fitted, rather than the idea of permanent banding of council tax.

I think my main concern is that people like myself who, I mean I've done all my cavity wall and my loft insulation, I've done all that already. What benefit am I going to get out of it? See what I mean? I've already done that, been there, got the t-shirt, forked out all the money, done it. I'm getting nought.'

What happens if you're house is nicely insulated already. Do you still get money off?

'Certain houses can't be cavity wall insulated. Mine can't...It's a 1900 Cheshire semi and there is oh a gap of that much between the bricks so you can't physically do it.'

Taking it further

However, some suggest taking the concept further and recommend providing incentives for solar-powered lights or for alternative energy sources. One group suggests providing financial incentives to house-sellers to improve the energy efficiency of their homes before they put it on the market.

This all indicates real political 'space' for linking local tax and environmental factors. People like the fact that this represents something positive, tangible and links together collective and personal benefit.

If we're that concerned on energy why don't we put solar panels in every roof?

'Solar power, all that, they'd probably all agree on that rather than putting all the shit back up into the atmosphere, yeah but we can't afford to pay three times as much to implement it on our properties'

'Why hasn't anyone thought about issuing out the solar panels then you can pay it off over a certain period of time? Keep the price down, but by the time you use that form of energy you're going to be saving on electricity bills anyway. A top idea.'

Intervention - variable waste charging

In principle, the idea of variable charging is acceptable to consumers. There is a consensus, however, that waste 'allowances' must be calculated according to the size of the household rather than set on a per-household basis, in order to ensure the fairness of the intervention. Consumers who produce low levels of waste believe it would result in positive financial benefits for them and some believe the scheme would encourage composting and recycling.

I think it would make you much more aware of what you were actually throwing away.'

I like the volume based schemes, mini bins to larger 'cos, I think that's a good idea 'cos mine is always like half full. So I can live with that.'

I would certainly reduce the amount of waste I had if I knew I was paying between 50p and a £1 for a bag.'

[On a volume-based system] *I like that one...I think it's simple. It gives, you know you get the one bill when you've got a small bin or a big bin. They can just bill you once a year and it's your choice, like this lady lives on her own, at least she'd get a discount.'*

I think some of these schemes have got to be more cost effective than the Council run ones. I think the more broad ones like people choosing their bin size, that's sort of simpler to administer.'

If you've got a family you're going to have more bags than say two people, or one person'

Per person you might not actually be throwing away more waste. .. between four and five black bin bags weekly get thrown away from my house. But there are four or five people in there so are we saying that a person who lives on their own only produces one black bag of rubbish 'cos I wouldn't say they do.'

However, consumers raise many concerns around the implementation of the scheme. Worries revolve around some consumers abusing the scheme, and throwing their rubbish in neighbours' bins or in the street; and around the council mis-calculating amounts or using the scheme as just a cynical way to raise revenue. Indeed, for some, cynicism towards local government means they see the intervention as just another way to tax residents.

Well we're already paying aren't we for our rubbish to be removed'

'So I go to the tip quite a lot so what I'd end up doing is humping all me black bags into me boot of me car and driving round the tip once a week'

'You'll get a lot more people fly tipping and a lot more bin bags dumped.'

People complain about the gas bills, phone bills, I mean contesting bloody meter readings so how the hell they're going to do it on weighing of a plastic bag that you weren't even involved in.'

I have me doubts. I mean who's going to go round weighing, you'd be arguing with them'

It's just a logistical nightmare. I can't quite see how it would work. I don't think the Council would be able run that.'

I would not trust the Council.'

Intervention: recycling lottery

The idea of a Recycling Lottery is seen as a fun and clever way of shifting behaviour. People believe it would grab people's attention and create a buzz around recycling which would encourage people to take part.

However, it is not considered an effective way of changing the behaviour of the nation in the long-term. Consumers feel people would get bored of not winning – comparing this is to the perceived decline in Lottery ticket sales - and lose interest. Although some suggest if it was introduced in schools it could help change the behaviour of 'the next generation.'

'I think it's a good idea. I mean it's just fun.'

'I couldn't be bothered squashing all them cartons.'

'Children, let them know the ideas for recycling. Educate the children now, we've only been educated in the last few years.'

'I'd become disillusioned and I'm finding I'm not winning, and then I'd give up.'

'And people are bored with the National Lottery, they're not buying tickets anymore.'

A few raise concerns over data protection and cost levels of implementing and running the scheme. One breakout group suggested a scheme where the council rewards an entire area by linking total number of recycled bags with council rates.

'I wouldn't put my name and my number on.'

'Shall I tell you what's worrying me? The thing what's worrying me is there's a £14,000 prize and 20 runner ups. Where the hell's that money going to come from? Our council tax?'

'Where would this prize money come from?'

'I'm sorry, it's just nonsense, it's just a logistical nightmare.'

Areas of consumption: food and drink

Discussion on the topic leads consumers to see the links and connections between food and transport, water use and waste which they had previously been unaware of. Concerns around diet and health are highly salient in terms of food, and resonate much more than environmental factors. However, the extent to which food has to 'travel' to reach consumers shocks many.

'I think that's more likely to have an effect on people yeah ... I've got high cholesterol so I have to go without things I used to enjoy, I can't have them anymore, a lot of them are dairy products. So I have to reduce on that because it's affecting my health.'

'Yes whatever issue you've got, mine's cholesterol so I look at things that are going to affect me. So that would be my criteria if you like.'

'The transport is crazy isn't it? Flying, well bringing lettuces from Spain, I don't know, I don't know why we do that.'

'It's like me saying I'm going to get my newspaper from Devon instead of the corner shop.'

Within the area of food and drink, reforming school dinners represents a clear winner for consumers. In the wake of Jamie Oliver's campaign, the issue is highly salient and topical. Participants cite spontaneously many parts of Oliver's argument, and support his aims. In terms of changing school dinners, they are drawn to the idea of a 'double benefit' as both people's kids and the environment would benefit from this intervention.

Throughout the discussion on food and drink, consumers grappled with their conflicting attitudes towards supermarkets. On one hand, consumers claim they wish to see more local produce and local shops. However, they are also candid and admit that they like the low cost and easy convenience of supermarkets. Consumers, though, are fond of saying that the dominance of supermarkets means that they do not have a choice.

'Tesco's can stay open 24 hours a day now, the local shopkeeper does not want to sit behind his counter for 24 hours does he?'

'It's time as well, you're tied up with jobs, finish late, when do you shop?'

'People go to the supermarkets as well for the simple reason you walk in there you can go in, you can buy your shopping, you can go and buy a pair of pants and you can go and buy a television all at the same shop.'

'We lie in the hands of these big supermarkets.'

'How can you boycott these big stores 'cos there's not enough small stores to go around is there?'

'We haven't got a choice.'

Food and drink: spontaneous ideas and barriers to change

When thinking about how they could lead more sustainable lives when it comes to food, consumers suggest many ideas, but admit that they feel 'locked into' supermarkets. As a result, there is a tendency for consumers to look to supermarkets themselves to change their practices, or for Government to intervene. However, many acknowledge that the supermarkets are only responding to public demand, and that Government does not have the power to be that coercive.

Consumers' own ideas on more sustainable behaviours revolve around local choices, seasonal purchasing and less waste. They suggest shopping in local shops selling local produce, stopping shopping in supermarkets, paying a premium on food miles, buying British produce, buying seasonal products only, growing more of your own food and generally being less wasteful.

However, consumers are brutally honest that they are attached to supermarkets and their choice and convenience. There are also complaints that organic foods are more expensive (particularly from low-income groups) and some acknowledge that they like buying exotic and unusual foods from other countries and foods out of season. There is a feeling that it would be hard to change this behaviour.

'Go in to your supermarket and tell them that you're not going to buy that product anymore because it's not locally produced.'

'And this here is what we said we wanted, more seasonal food, more local food, better quality food, that was what we said we want for ourselves so that's obviously what you'd want at school too.'

'Yeah but it's more expensive to eat organic.'

'If you're in a supermarket and you've got an organic product that's a pound and a non organic products that's 50p, what are you going to do?'

'In years to come that could change, but we obviously don't feel that it's anything to think about right now, as naive as that may sound but it's just the way of life, you walk in to a shop and you'd get whatever's cheapest at a reasonable quality because you can afford it, and that's it, that's the way of life.'

'I'm not saying go for Tesco value all the time, I'm just saying you just go for the Tesco products and, do you see what I mean so, I don't know, I'm not going dirt cheap but it's always going to be cheaper than organic.'

'I eat a lot of food out of season, I think that's the way, it's a changing world, isn't it? Going back 10 or 15 years ago, strawberries weren't in January ... it's not going to change ... we're not going to want to change back.'

'You're used to getting strawberries in January now.'

'And I think I don't know enough about when things are in season because I'm so used to it all year around, I don't know when strawberries come.'

'You want to do your shopping in an hour, you don't want to spend 20 minutes in 10 different shops that are half a mile apart ...'

As part of the wider theme around shifting the onus, consumers call on supermarkets to do their part and suggest that big chains support UK producers over foreign suppliers, promote intelligent consumption through the labelling of food miles and country of origin, and cut out unnecessary packaging and wastage. There is also discussion around using other methods of distribution, such as trains over lorries.

'And the same for us, say the labels in the supermarkets, I don't know where the food is from, in season or not...it would be sensible to put a label, saying, this is where it's from etc. this is where it's going, you'd be more conscious about what you want to buy.'

'You were talking about food miles, is it not a case where the big supermarket chains and the government need to reorganise their distribution points.'

'You know like they do delivery services and stuff like that? Why do they deliver in the packaging, they could just deliver it fresh or something like that.'

'But there are alternatives, aren't there? There are, there just isn't the funding for them, [there is a] train system, in almost every area of the country.'

'If you go to McDonald's, I understand they've got a timescale ... up to a certain limit, if no one's coming to order it, they throw it. It's dreadful.'

Yet, there is an acceptance and acknowledgement that supermarkets are merely responding to consumer demand for choice.

There is also discussion over how Government should intervene and more tightly regulate supermarkets. Consumers talk about imposing a premium tax on products 'high' in food miles, and incentivising business to sell British produce. There is talk of monitoring waste from businesses and penalising accordingly. However, there is marked view that such actions could be seen as too restrictive or would be illegal under EU law. Above all though, consumers see Government as the only actor who re-shape the market.

'They should monitor companies' waste, how much food they're wasting and then maybe fine them.'

'I think if you still put a tax there or you can't have strawberries in January ... I think people will be up in arms – "God the government's ripping us off, they've already done it with grapes."'

'It's down to governments again, if the government's said, "right no more battery chicken farming", then we'd have to live with it ... we don't necessarily need to agree with it.'

'What real control do we have over how businesses do it? They're there to make a profit and they will all cut corners, won't they? It's got to be imposed I think, with businesses, because they're not going to do it willingly, they're making so much money at the moment.'

Intervention: thinking about fish and the MSC logo

There is some awareness amongst consumers of decreasing levels of cod stocks but it is not a well-known issue. After exploring what options for change exist, there is a hard-headed acceptance that cod sales need to be banned in the UK. Consumers do not see this as an issue, as they feel they are plenty of other alternative fish that people can eat and that banning offers quite a simple way to solve the issue.

'Most people wouldn't even notice, you wouldn't notice that it was banned, would you?'

'If you go to a fish shop, there's a whole range of fish and...there's no cod, you can't buy cod, end of story really.'

'I feel unhappy about it but if it's going to replenish the cod stock then I'm quite happy to move on to something else.'

Discussion, though, on the issue of fish stocks underlines the tendency of consumers to 'blame others' for the problem. Many seek to blame Spanish or French fisherman for the problems with cod stocks.

'It's the Spanish that enter our waters and pinch our fish.'

'The Spanish invading our territory, taking all our fish.'

'I think it's Spain and some of the other countries that aren't towing the line, which is why all the boats are tied up now, we don't have a fishing fleet as such in the country.'

'If we do it then everybody else has got to do it as well, Norway and Spain.'

'I think some of the foreign fishermen are over fishing and the English fishermen are sticking to the restrictions. All these foreigners are just fishing it dry.'

After exploring the issue around decreasing fish stocks in general, we tested reactions to the MSC logo.

Participants identify the logo as a potentially effective shortcut for consumers. When evaluating the logo, people talk about how they use other logos and standards to guide their buying choices, whether that be free range eggs, Fair Trade or organics. Some also make a connection with the 'dolphin friendly' label on tuna, which is seen as a universal success. The logo is generally liked for its design and look.

Importantly though, consumers feel that the logo needs to be supported by an education campaign. There is common agreement that the logo at present does not provide a compelling enough reason to buy sustainable fish. As consumers are unsure of the specifics behind the scheme, they feel it will not be enough of a powerful factor when shopping for fish. There is

also a wider narrative around the fact that there are seen to be too many logos now, and that this could just be another logo that gets lost in the clutter.

'It's stark, though, isn't it, I would look for it, I think many people would look for it if they knew about it.'

'If you knew what it meant, if you knew that that meant this fish has been responsibly fished...it needs explaining to people.'

'The only problem is you can have so many labels on the products that it gets so confusing for the people that are buying things... and all they do is they put the price up.'

'Look what happened with dolphin-friendly tuna. It happened eventually ... more people are going to be looking for that and eventually demand will be [so big] that everyone will want to adopt that as their standard.'

'It's like the dolphin-friendly tuna because I'm not really a label freak but I always check for the dolphin-friendly tuna.'

'If people are driven by convenience and cost, they won't give a damn about a pretty logo on piece of chicken or a logo on a fish and chip shop, it wouldn't mean anything to them.'

Intervention: school dinners

Change on school dinners represents a clear winner for consumers. Jamie Oliver's TV programme and campaign has raised awareness of issues, with many spontaneously citing arguments that Oliver used about children's health. On the evidence of the Consumer Forum, his campaign has clearly increased the saliency of the issue. Moreover, it underlines the powerful role of bold leadership.

There is unanimous support for change on school dinners involving the use of more sustainable ingredients. At the heart of this, change is seen as a 'double benefit' as it helps ensure the health of people's children, and the 'health' of the environment and local economy. Parents unequivocally state that they would be willing to pay more to fund sustainable school meals. Partly this is based on altruism, but it is also caused by the fact that the cost does not seem that much more than existing 'fast food' options.

'It's a good idea as long as they're giving you healthy meals. You look at the prices, I can't say that's dear, you go to McDonalds and buy a burger and chips, which is a load of crap for £2. So if you're getting a healthy meal for under £2, how can you say it's expensive?'

'I think a responsible parent who can see a benefit will take it up.'

'I suppose everybody needs to, cost is important 'cos as I say you have a budget. But I think like with Jamie school Dinners as well, they just focus so much on cost that we've ended up with these revolting Turkey Twizzler things when actually people probably would spend a little bit more and have something that's a much better quality.'

Areas of consumption: getting around

When exploring views and behaviours around the car, there is a high awareness that the car has a highly damaging impact upon the environment, and a few consumers say they actively look for alternative modes of transport or walk where appropriate.

Yet, consumers are candid and open about their personal attachment to cars. The Forum reveals that the car for many represents a personal symbol of status and identity. In addition, there is a common view that public transport does not represent a credible alternative at all for people. As a result, consumers struggle greatly with the idea of cutting back on driving.

'Cars are a very emotive subject aren't they? It's a personal thing – I don't even like my wife driving my car.'

'It's an area I'm aware about. However what can I do about it? You can't do anything, you've got to get from A to B and usually there's no other realistic option – and by that I mean cheap, reliable and safe – available.'

'I don't see any point in standing in the rain waiting for a bus that never comes when you've got a lovely clean...comfortable, and safe, car sitting on your drive.'

'Public transport takes twice as long and is twice as expensive. It's a no-brainer isn't it? Stand in the cold rain, freezing to death and pay a lot for your bus fare or drive a beautiful car?'

Shifting the onus

As part of their unwillingness to think about cutting back on car use, consumers are particularly keen to shift the onus towards business and Government. People feel businesses should encourage car pooling and working from home, and that the Government should invest heavily in public transport to give people another viable choice. However, many consumers express immense scepticism about whether these represent realistic ideas, and whether or not it would really decrease people's attachment to their cars.

In terms of car use, there are particularly strong calls for politicians to show the lead in this area with regard to their own behaviour. This is based on the perception that politicians could easily be accused of being hypocritical if they told consumers to stop using their cars, when they are seen to rely on chauffeur-driven Jaguars.

'The message needs to come from the top and unfortunately it doesn't. What do you think would happen if Tony Blair started driving around in a hybrid vehicle? I think sales of them would go up 1000% overnight.'

'If [the Government] start looking at it then we'll start addressing it. But it's "don't do as I do, do as I say" from them. They're not going to downgrade their nice big cars so why should we downgrade?'

'If the Government turn around and say actually if you get rid of your 4x4 we'll give you some kind of tax break or something then maybe I'm going to listen and think 'hold on, that's good.'

Interventions: labelling

Labelling cars based on emission levels gains an overall positive reaction. Consumers accept the premise that cars which produce more carbon dioxide should be taxed more, and importantly see this as a 'fair' initiative. However, the current differential between the highest and lowest bands of road tax is not seen as prohibitive. Connected to this, consumers perceive that those who drive high emission cars tend to be rich, and can cope with the extra tax. A few minority voices see labelling as a pure money-making exercise for the Government rather than a green initiative.

'It's still a good idea for the labelling to make people aware'

'Yes, it's a good scheme, but I think we said this last night about this sort of thing, didn't we? If you've got the money, you'll get the biggest car.'

'If you've got a bigger car and a bigger engine you know you are going to pay, it's going to cost you more.'

There is surprise at which cars fall under Class E and F and could be potentially banned. This is particularly the case for the Beetle, as it is not seen as a 'fast car' which is immediately associated with environmental damage. Some male consumers resent the idea that certain brands/makes will be banned and see this as restrictive.

'I would have never pictured a Golf GTi as pumping out so much emission. It's not exactly a big car, is it?'

Terminology is important as 'raising minimum standards' is received better than 'banning'. 'Raising minimum standards' connects with consumers' belief that the onus lies with manufacturers to improve their standards, rather than consumers feeling their choice is limited. This fits with a wider finding from the research around the use of positive language rather than negatives terms in order to encourage consumers to change their behaviour.

Intervention: road user charging

Views are very polarised on road user charging. Half of the consumers are sceptical about whether charging could achieve a 40% reduction in congestion, and do not see how they would reduce their car usage. Several mention concerns that it could harm business and those who rely on cars for work, and lead to higher prices in supermarkets and shops. The view is also raised that it represents 'just another tax', and is a charge that well-off consumers will be able to absorb in contrast to low-income consumers (particularly those working on shifts).

'I think I'd still use my car, no matter what, but it could stop some people I suppose.'

'I think it punishes people that are going to work on shifts who have to go to urban areas.'

'You've got the vulnerable people who are having to come home late at night from shifts, who have to go out, so they need their car and you're punishing them by charging them more, because it's not safe to go on the bus if you're a girl on your own, or an elderly person.'

'The more money you've got, the more it doesn't have any effect.'

However, half of consumers support the idea, and the notion that you should pay depending on usage. They like the direct and tangible connection between the amount you drive and the amount you pay. In addition, there is a wider sense that personal benefit is linked to environmental benefit, in that if you drive less, you pay less. Some also talk about how the charge would ensure that they cut down on the number of occasions when they drive.

'I would say that if you have to pay every time you're on the road, then you would prevent yourself from being on that road. So yeah I would say it's a good idea.'

'I would say it would definitely make a difference because I know there's half a mile journey that I make in a car that I shouldn't be making in a car... [it's just] convenience. I will drive to the shop a few hundred yards up the road rather than walk. Guilty.'

'I actually think it's a very good idea. I've seen it happen in London and basically, I don't know quite what traffic's like now, but I would say that if you have to pay every time you're on the road, then you would prevent yourself from being on that road.'

Intervention: car clubs

In contrast, there is universal disapproval of car clubs. When the concept is introduced to consumers, there are strong negative reactions from people. The antipathy towards car clubs is shaped by the fact that the intervention runs counter to consumers' attachment to their cars, and that the idea is seen overly statist and controlling.

Beyond their emotional reaction to the idea, consumers also believe that car clubs would be inconvenient, impersonal and impractical. They raise multiple issues around implementation (cleaning, legal disputes and safety checks), and as a result, they struggle to see any advantages to the scheme.

'So they're going to take away our cars and turn the whole country into a parking lot are they?'

'I don't want one of those bloody parking bays right outside my house with people queuing up forever.'

'What if somebody bashes it? [a car from a car club]'

'I can't see it working whatsoever.'

'Cos once you've had the car, why should I go back to not having the car and having to plan and having to organise and having to share?'

Areas of consumption: getting away

Mirroring their attachment to cars, consumers struggle with the idea of flying less. They candidly acknowledge that the prospect of cutting back on flights was extremely unattractive. As the evening session on future dreams showed, flying abroad represents a major aspiration for consumers. Indeed, many currently enjoy flying to European destinations on a regular basis. In addition, cutting back on flying is also very unattractive as consumers feel that there are few alternatives – they have a disdain for the level of service on trains, and believe that the UK is not a hugely attractive holiday destination.

'We went down to Devon...it was fish and chips and that was it, and there was loads of youths hanging around. It just wasn't Spanish.'

'There's so much negative feedback on the trains. You wouldn't bother would you?'

'I think the thing about that is flying can be a lot cheaper than taking the train. And it's a lot quicker.'

Reflecting in part their unwillingness to look at personal sacrifices, consumers call on Government and business to lead by example. They want to see politicians actively flying less, and business using videoconferencing on a more regular basis.

'Like the councillors going somewhere hot for two weeks, supposedly for a conference, and having fun. They do, don't they though? And government bodies as well. They go on flights ... 12 of them for a half hour conference and then, why do that?'

'I don't know how this could be implemented, but on business flights, when people are making business flights, they should sort of prove it's necessary, what they're going to do couldn't be done by another method, we said like by video-link up or something.'

Increased ticket prices are seen as a way to stop people flying as much, but are widely seen as unfair. Participants predict consumer anger along the lines of the 2000 Fuel Crisis if this was passed. Importantly, increased prices are widely seen as penalising low-income consumers more, as richer consumers will be able to comfortably absorb the costs. However, support for increased tax does grow once the concept of hypothecation is introduced.

'But people with money, they're just going to anyway, they're not going to care, are they?'

'It's discriminating.'

'I don't think we'll ever accept that. I don't think anyone will accept that.'

'There'll be a big outcry against it.'

Intervention: carbon offsetting

The break-out groups who looked at carbon-offsetting show that there is space for action in this area. There is an acceptance of carbon offsetting, as long as the revenue is hypothecated in a clear and transparent manner. Consumers are willing to support the initiative if revenue was put into the UK train system or public transport. Importantly, without hypothecation, the intervention is seen as another tax or a wily way to raise extra revenue.

Revealingly, there is a marked preference for ‘opting out’ as opposed to ‘opting in’ on carbon offsetting. This is based on the view that consumers would feel shameful if they actively had to opt out of something which would be positioned as beneficial to the environment. There is even a suggestion that those that ‘opt out’ should be made to sit at the back of the plane.

‘We don’t like being taxed but...if I knew it was going to a good cause then I’d be more willing to part with that money than if I was told that it was an extra 20 quid tax on my flight.’

‘I’d rather have that money in my pocket, but if I know it’s going to a good cause in the end I wouldn’t mind giving that.’

‘I’d have to agree, I’d be more than happy to pay.’

‘I don’t see the opt in, I just see there being a different figure for me to pay for my flight. And yes I’d like to see a thing ... the tax for like BOAC [BA] or whatever else ... I’d be happy to see that, but I’m not going to make any choice about it ...’

‘You wouldn’t pay it if you could opt out.’

‘My uncle was the tightest man you’d ever met, not that he can’t afford it, he’d just say no to it. Just, so that, no, I’d say it’s compulsory, definitely.’

[On opting in] *‘No-one’s ever going to say yes I’m going to pay more.’*

[On shaming consumers who opt out] *‘Would all the opt out people please go to the back row?’*

Tying it all together: carbon use

In order to see how consumers react to the issues when they saw them 'in the round', a number of break-out groups looked at the issue of carbon use.

As a way to stimulate and provoke debate, break-out groups worked through a computer exercise that estimated how much carbon they use on an ongoing basis. Each group worked together on going through the series of questions on consumption as part of the Carbon Calculator, and then discussed the overall result.

In all four groups who undertook the exercise, there was surprise, shock and concern at the amount of carbon they consume. Though none of the groups were particularly extravagant (e.g., very limited long haul travel), the average carbon use was much higher than the suggested amount.

Many consumers feel they live quite modest lifestyles, and as a result, they are surprised by the outcome of the Calculator. A few comment that they feel they are being environmentally aware in their lifestyle choices already (recycling, energy efficiency light bulbs), and so are disappointed that this does not have more of an impact. In addition, there is real shock and a degree of guilt at the difference between developed nations and the Third World.

'That's scary, 'cos that was just average, we didn't go excessive on anything.'

'It's a shock, it hits home how much we are actually using and because as regards those questions they're all pretty reasonable answers that we gave, weren't they?'

When probed on how they could reduce their carbon use, consumers very much struggle with the task. As the exercise shows the large impact flying has on levels of carbon use, there is discussion around cutting back on flying. However, consumers tend to pull back from this after a while. In the absence of strong knowledge about initiatives that could help reduce carbon use, and partly as an avoidance technique, consumers talk about how they will try and recycle more.

Above all else, the carbon exercise somewhat depresses consumers as they feel change seems impossible. The exercise causes some consumers to start bemoaning how consumerist modern society is, and how it will be immensely hard to reverse current trends of buying and purchasing.

'Really we need to go back to basics and nobody will do because you don't want to give up your comforts, your lifestyle, the things that you've got.'

'Once you've tasted, it's harder to manage without.'

Intervention: carbon credits

The idea of ‘pots’ of carbon seems acceptable in principle but there are many issues raised around practicalities and implementation.

Connecting with the wider narrative around fairness, people are concerned that well-off consumers will buy up lots of credits from less well-off people; leading to a growing class divide in society. As part of this, anxieties are raised over a black market emerging if carbon becomes restricted. People also raise question marks over how businesses fit into the programme and a few feel the idea is just too extreme and controlling.

It's a belting idea, but you imagine trying to put that in to practice! ... very Big Brother 'cos you'd have so much power over people really. It's good but the spin-off in terms of crime would be quite colossal.'

'You'd get a really big black market on that...people would be selling it underhand and doing it illegally.'

I just don't like the idea of being able to have to save credits or not have enough credits to pay for my gas or electric whatever I'm using to have to do without one of them.'

People who have these big cars that use loads of petrol or go on holiday loads of time, they're wealthy people anyway so it won't probably affect them 'cos they'll have the money to buy the extra credits, it's the people who haven't got much money who will suffer.'

Intervention: micro generation

In contrast, micro generation is an appealing concept as people like the idea of having something that is personally tangible and specific in their own homes. In common with other interventions that resonate, it offers a ‘double benefit’ of both financial gain and environmental contribution.

In terms of set-up, people like the idea that homeowners would be able to pay back the initial cost over time, as there is a feeling that very few people would be able to afford the full amount up-front.

A few people voice some concern about the aesthetics of a wind turbine on their roof and how it would be positioned. However, in one break-out group, there is discussion over how people would get used to the idea over time.

Energy audits are also received favourably with a few people having had experience of this already, either personally or for an elderly relative.

I like the idea if it was going to produce enough power. I think that would be perfect.'

I think it's a good idea...you've got the Sky dish and everybody's objected to that but everybody's got Sky dishes now and it's just something you've got used to with time, and I think you would with this.'

I just can't imagine a wind turbine in everyone's back garden, I just can't see it. It's not the safest thing in the world is it?

I know my mum – 'cos she's a pensioner - I don't know who, they were from, I don't know whether it was from the gas board, British Gas or whoever, but she had a visit and they gave her advice about insulation and all this.'

Yeah I think it should be a free service to everybody, if the government want us to get our act together and start saving, I think they should send somebody out over a period of years.'

Intervention: energy services companies (ESCOs)

The primary negative that people highlight is being tied into a long contract with an ESCO. People have default scepticism towards energy providers, and some say they would only trust ESCOs if there were non-profit organisations with a genuine interest in the environment.

But at the moment you can choose from quite a big range of suppliers, presumably if you choose one supplier to fit this and you commit to a contract, you're then tied in and you can't then benefit from the competition within the industry.'

I think that [a long contract] would be an issue. I think if we're then talking about it being a government led thing at cost price then that could then make it a separate thing from who actually supplies your gas or your electricity. So I think that would be a good idea to separate it, so you can still decide that no I don't like ... I'm going to change to British Gas, or I'm going to change to whoever you want to use as your supplier.'

Some question whether the savings ultimately emerge, as their experience with current energy service providers has made them sceptical of seemingly good deals. Some also feel the saving outlined is not great enough to warrant the potential effort of having a wind turbine installed.

Others feel the benefit is too drawn out, and will not benefit those who move a lot. This is especially voiced by younger consumers. Some feel the Government should subsidise the cost of installation.

I think the idea is fine if it was cost effective. If it did dramatically reduce your bills, if it did dramatically reduce the carbon, but I'm dead sceptical on that.'

That sounds good for younger people because younger people have obviously got more lifetime to actually get the benefit out of it, whereas older people, pensioners, whoever, it's going to cost them £1500 to get it fitted in the first place, 10 or 15 years after that.'

'And you are tying yourself in to a supplier, so you're not going to be able to move.'

'And how much is the servicing?...it could end up ... the same price.'

Implications and next steps

The Forum underlines the importance of leadership. It shows that there is a clear opportunity to connect with consumers' concerns and worries. The high awareness and support of Jamie Oliver's campaign on school dinners shows the power of bold leadership coupled with imaginative communications. At the heart of the future challenge for Government and business, the consumer frame of reference needs to be widened beyond recycling.

Consumers also feel that business has a key role to play. Mirroring Government, business needs to lead by example. This could involve less business flights, businesses turning lights off when workers are not around, and that temperatures are turned down in offices. Business should invest more too and communicate more on R&D and innovation. In terms of sectors that were looked at in the Forum, consumers have specific demands for supermarkets and retail; they call for them to cut down on packaging, buy local produce and use more local distribution networks. Car manufacturers should also seek to innovate and improve

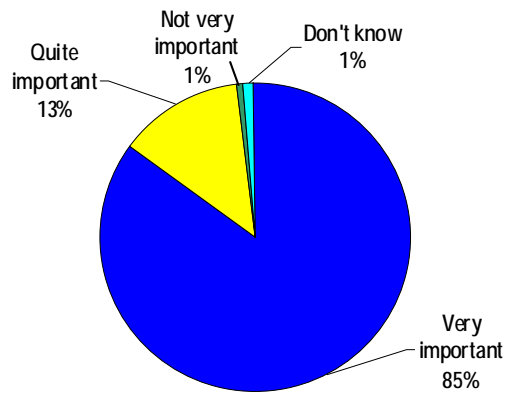
'The lead has to come from the councils and primarily from the Government.'

'We want businesses to be doing things as well. Also let us know what they are doing so that we can actually see them doing it.'

'I think they should actually make themselves be seen to be trying to make a difference, so that long term they'll actually make us want to buy their products.'

'Businesses could help by using existing technology...they can use video conferencing links, otherwise it's a complete waste of resources, time and everything.'

The experience of taking part in the Forum led the majority of participants to feel that the issues considered were of great importance. Our post-Forum questionnaire also revealed that participants were concerned about the immediacy of the problem under discussion. Coming out of the experience of the Forum, participants spoke about how the day had made them think hard about serious issues, and caused them to rethink and review their lifestyles.



Q1: How important do you think it is that sustainable development is addressed having participated in this forum?

What concerns/worries you about the issues you heard?'

We need to change now / we don't have much time left to act / have to act now	22%
The scale of the problem / amount of damage we are doing	18%
Global warming / climate change	13%
The need to preserve our planet for the next generations / for our children	13%
Aeroplane emissions	10%
The need for a global approach / for the whole world to act responsibly	10%
How bad things will be in 10 years time	6%

Recommendations

Drawing on the insights and lessons learned from the Consumer Forum, we would make the following strategic recommendations to politicians and policy-makers:

- **Seize the opportunity** Consumers are open to hearing more about sustainable consumption, and accept that the status quo is not acceptable moving forward.

In response to recent events and wider concerns, environmental issues are rising up the public agenda. The opportunity is there for Government to act upon this.

- **Demonstrate leadership** There is scope for Government to lead the debate on sustainable consumption, and to widen the consumer frame of reference beyond recycling.

In light of consumer issues around trust and government communication, policy-makers should seek to involve non-traditional spokespeople (i.e. celebrities) to promote messages, and frame communication in everyday language. This is also the potentially about all-party consensus on issues.

- **Walk the talk** Importantly, consumers are looking for the Government to lead by example. They want to see politicians using their cars less, and flying less – and this needs to happen in order to ensure consumer receptiveness to Government messages.

Likewise, business needs to also lead by example, and demonstrate its commitment to sustainable consumption. This has particular relevance to the retail and automotive sectors.

- **Resonating with consumers** Interventions have the potential to resonate with consumers and prove effective if a series of factors are met. They need to demonstrate a ‘double benefit’ – both personal benefit plus collective gain. They need to seem tangible and specific, with a sense of an achievable target. Importantly, they must be framed in a positive, can-do way rather than appearing too negative.

The motives behind the interventions need to be seen as honest and compelling. For example, interventions cannot be seen as just another way to raise revenue.

Implications for Defra

In addition to gaining insights into views towards specific interventions, the Roundtable was also interested in learning how Defra could hold a larger deliberative event on environmental issues/sustainable consumption in the near future.

From the Manchester Forum, there are several important findings which should be borne in mind:

- In line with other deliberative consultations, there is no doubt that consumers are able to grapple with new ideas and thinking in a relatively short period of time. In the period of a day and a half, consumers were exposed to complex and difficult terms, and easily discussed and debated various arguments.
- The event benefited enormously from the expert witness presentation on the morning of the second day. It gave consumers the wider context, and helped frame the debate for the rest of the day. Andrew Lee's presentation was clear, concise, and jargon-free. In terms of the proposed Defra event, careful consideration will need to be given to the role of expert testimony.
- Case studies are also very important in terms of ensuring a quality output from a deliberative event. The Manchester Roundtable benefited from case studies that were written in clear and accessible language; and which drew heavily on tangible and specific examples. This helped bring the interventions 'to life' for consumers.
- At a proposed Defra event, we also feel that it would be important to understand the wider context first around consumer aspirations, concerns and interests, before looking at specific issues around environmental and 'green' issues. This approach at the Consumer Forum ensured that that we understand the wider context first, and avoided shoehorning people into thinking in a particular way.
- Defra should also consider conducting pre-Forum events on specific issues prior to the large-scale deliberative event. Divisive and controversial topics such as car use and flying could be the focus of pre-events, and what is learned from those sessions could then feed into the wider forum.
- Defra should also look at the use of electronic polling approaches to capture quantitative insights, and differences by groups and sub-groups. With an event that involves 1,000+ people, it will be possible to merge qualitative and quantitative approaches in a meaningful and robust way.
- Above all, the Defra event should demonstrate that Government Ministers and officials are committed to listening to participants' input. The Forum benefited from the fact that Roundtable members sat in on the proceedings, and participants welcomed the fact that Roundtable figures were engaged in their conversations. This approach needs to be replicated with the larger event.

Appendix A: discussion guide

Consumer Forum

Agenda

Manchester

6-7 October 2005

6 October

6:30-7:00

Arrival, and getting settled

Participants arrive and register

Complete pre-forum questionnaire

Tea and coffee and sandwiches

Directed to plenary room

7:00-7:20

Introduction to the day [PLENARY]

Welcome from *Viki Cooke* - Opinion Leader Chair

- Thank you all for coming
- A Consumer Forum - a chance for people to come together to discuss issues that matter
- Today - we're looking at what you want out of life, and what your hopes and aspirations are for you, your family and friends - tomorrow, we'll move onto some new areas
- Opinion Leader Research - independent agency who have been commissioned to conduct this research.
- Start of an ongoing process to find out what the consumer agenda is when it comes what you want out of life
- About the evening/day...Your chance to contribute
- Let me outline the agenda (sometimes all together, sometimes in small break-out groups, you will hear from experts too)
- No right or wrong answers / no expertise needed / ok to disagree

- Housekeeping (mobiles, fire exits)
- As you all know - note on media presence / filming [important]
- Note on breakout groups - who's going where!

7:20-8:00

Exploring aspirations [IN BREAK-OUT GROUPS]

Guided fantasy exercise on 'what you think your life will be like in 10 years'

I want you all to close your eyes and imagine what you think your life will be like in ten years. Think about where you'll be living, what you'll be doing, who you will be with. Think too about what you'd be doing during the day, but also what you'd be doing in your spare time. Also think about what would be important to in your life, and what things you would hold dear. This could be stuff that you own, and also values and principles that would be important to you.

Now keeping your eyes shut, I want you to think about what you ideally love your life to be like in ten years. Now of course, not everyone will have won the Lottery and be married to David Beckham or Angelina Jolie, but think about your ideal life in ten years... What would be you doing? Where would you be living? What would you own? What would be important to you? What things would you hold dear?

[Participants to open eyes and be encouraged to write down 'stream of consciousness']

Moderators to ask participants to recount their images/perceptions, starting with the second 'ideal section'

- Explore what they will want out of the 'ideal life' in ten years
- What are their hopes? What are their dreams?
- What are the barriers to you achieving what you want in terms of that ideal life?
- Thinking though about the first bit we did on what you thought your life would be like in ten years, were there any differences between that and your ideal vision? What/why? [probe on differences between 'realistic' and 'idealistic' vision]
- What are the barriers/obstacles to you achieving your ideal life in ten years?

- What do you think will be your concerns? What will be your worries?
- Explore individual, community and national aspirations

[If any references to 'environmental' issues are made, explore in detail but do not give game away]

8:00-8:10

Comfort break - use whenever!

8:10-8:50

Drilling down on aspirations [IN BREAK-OUT GROUPS]

Exercise on hopes/aspirations in specific areas of consumption

Group 1 and 2 At home

Group 3 and 4 Getting around (limit to getting around in your area)

Group 5 and 6 Going away - travel

Group 7 and 8 Food and eating

Group 9 and 10 Family and community

Each participant to draw a 'psychodrawing' on what they hope for/aspire for in that area

Think about what you ideally want in that area - what your hopes and dreams are, what you would like to have in 10 years, what would make your life easier/more enjoyable

Participants discuss their individual psychodrawings

Explore common themes and ideas, differences

Participants stick psychodrawings on one sheet, and develop a presentation on what they aspire in that area [seek/choose volunteers to present back]

8:50-9:30

Presenting back [IN PLENARY]

Spokesperson from each group presents back to Forum as a whole

Opinion Leader moderators (Jo and Hazel) flipchart common themes

Open floor discussion

Viki Cooke wraps up the Forum for the evening

(Moderators: Remember to collect up name badges from your group)

7 October

9:30-9:45

Day registration and coffee

9:45-10:15

Introducing the issues [IN PLENARY]

Viki Cooke to introduce Andrew Lee

Andrew Lee to make a short presentation on the purpose of the day, the SCR, and why this is all important

- We are looking at what you want out of life, but also ways in which you can get the most out of life without damaging the environment
- Why are we doing this? - we are the Sustainable Consumption Roundtable (who we are, what we do)
- And this is the problem we all face
 - If we keep on consuming too much, the environment will suffer
 - Indeed, it already is
 - Here's how: Climate change, landfill issues, etc
 - And if we carry on consuming, this could happen...
 - But at the SCR, we believe there are practical and imaginative ways in which we can meet our aspirations but also protect our environment - and today we want to get your reaction to them

Q&A from the floor - witness has opportunity to respond

10:15-11:00

Topic 1: Challenges and Suggestions

Group 1 and Group 2: At Home

Discuss responses/issues raised by expert presentation

Discuss briefly whether it has made them think about their aspirations from last night, and whether they feel the issues are relevant to the 'at home' area

[Handout: The Challenge]

Discuss responses (immediate reaction, initial thoughts, ideas)

What can be done about this problem? **[FLIPCHART]**

- What can you do?
- What can communities do?
- What can business do?
- What can government do?

What are the barriers to change though? What is likely to happen/not to happen?

[Use aspirations as counterpoint to any 'utopianism']

Group 3 and Group 4: Getting around

[Keep focused on car/public transport - avoid flying/holidays]

Discuss responses/issues raised by expert presentation

[Important] Explore views and perceptions around the role of driving's impact upon the environment, and what issues are caused by driving

Discuss briefly whether it has made them think about their aspirations from last night, and whether they feel the issues are relevant to the 'getting around' area

[Handout: The Challenge]

Discuss responses (immediate reaction, initial thoughts, ideas)

What can be done about this problem? **[FLIPCHART]**

- What can you do?
- What can communities do?
- What can business do?

- What can government do?

What are the barriers to change though? What is likely to happen/not to happen?

[Use aspirations as counterpoint to any 'utopianism' - especially any reference to having nice/big cars]

Group 5 and Group 6 - Holiday travel - flying

Discuss responses/issues raised by expert presentation

[Important] Explore views and perceptions around the role of flying impact upon the environment, and what issues are caused by flying

Discuss briefly whether it has made them think about their aspirations from last night, and whether they feel the issues are relevant to the 'holiday travel - flying' area

[Handout: The Challenge]

Discuss responses (immediate reaction, initial thoughts, ideas)

Explore people's opinions and feelings about the contribution of flying to climate change

What can be done about this problem? **[FLIPCHART]**

- What can you do?
- What can communities do?
- What can business do?
- What can government do?

Explore views to 1) taking the train instead 2) holidaying in the UK / going by train around Europe - response/reaction (compare to aspirations)

What are the advantages of the train? What are the barriers to taking the train rather than the plane?

What if flights costs more and trains cost less? How would that affect people's decisions on flying? In the UK, Europe and further afield?

If you had to choose and either keep only short-haul flights (UK and Europe) or long haul flights (everywhere else), which would you choose and why?

Group 7 and Group 8: Eating and Food

Discuss responses/issues raised by expert presentation

Discuss briefly whether it has made them think about their aspirations from last night, and whether they feel the issues are relevant to the 'eating and food' area

[Handout: The Challenge]

Discuss responses (immediate reaction, initial thoughts, ideas)

What can be done about this problem? [FLIPCHART]

- What can you do?
- What can communities do?
- What can business do?
- What can government do?

What are the barriers to change though? What is likely to happen/not to happen?

Group 9 and 10: Carbon use

Introduce the premise stabilising the levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere (and so eventually stabilising climate change) requires that only a certain amount of CO₂ can be emitted each year. It has been suggested that it is fair that everyone on the planet has an equal right to the same amount of emissions.

In terms of the idea that everyone has a limited 'pot' of carbon that they can 'spend' each year, what do you think?
Acceptable/unacceptable?

Participants go through 'carbon' software programme - moderator led

What choices do they make - what could they give up? What could they not give up? How do they resolve the difficulties?

What barriers might stop them from getting down below a certain level?

How do they feel about the idea of a 'carbon budget' now, now that it seems more tangible what they might have to do to stay within their limit? How does this interact with their life aspirations?

11:00-11:25

Coffee break

11:30-12:30

Topic 1: Responding to interventions

Group 1 and Group 2: At Home

We are now going to look at some ways in which we could hopefully meet our aspirations but also protect the environment

****MODERATORS SHOULD ALWAYS REFER BACK TO ASPIRATIONS FROM EVENING SESSION THROUGHOUT, AND ALWAYS EXPLORE INFLUENCE OF IDEAS ON BEHAVIOUR****

[Handout: Banding Council Tax]

What do people think? Good/bad things? Appealing/unappealing?

[Core questions] What do you think of the idea that people would pay less council tax if they had more energy efficient houses? Or would pay more if they had a house that used lots of energy? Would this be fair or not fair?

Would this be an incentive or not to fit energy efficiency measures?

[Handout: Variable Waste Charging]

What do people think? Good/bad things? Appealing/unappealing?

Explore different options

Explore views around fairness - and whether it would change behaviour (push back on aspirations)

Would it encourage you to think about throwing away less or recycling more? What would be the problems?

Compare level of favourability with the concept around linking council tax with energy efficiency

[Handout: Recycling Lottery]

What do people think? Good/bad things? Appealing/unappealing?

Do you see any problems with this?

Explore on whether it could change their behaviour

[Keep focused on the idea in principle, not the minutiae!]

Group 3 and Group 4: Getting around

We are now going to look at some ways in which we could hopefully meet our aspirations but also protect the environment

****MODERATORS SHOULD ALWAYS REFER BACK TO ASPIRATIONS FROM EVENING SESSION THROUGHOUT, AND ALWAYS EXPLORE INFLUENCE OF IDEAS ON BEHAVIOUR****

[Handout: Labelling]

What do people think? Good/bad things? Appealing/unappealing?

Explore views around fairness - and whether it would change behaviour (push back on aspirations)

[Core question] Explore whether it would change their car choice

Raise 'Minimum standards' idea - and views on impact on current models

Explore whether they view 'raised minimum standards' differently to 'banning everything below a certain standard'

Push back if needed later - Raised standards can lead to innovation and hence similar performance with lower impacts - so it wouldn't necessarily lead to high performance cars disappearing.

[Handout: Road user charging]

What do people think? Good/bad things? Appealing/unappealing?

Explore views around fairness - and whether it would change behaviour (push back on aspirations)

Explore different variants of scheme - different charges based on different roads OR car types

[Focus on broad principles rather than how implementation would work, but do record any concerns around practicalities]

[Handout: Car clubs]

What do people think? Good/bad things? Appealing/unappealing?

[Core questions] Can people imagine not having a car (or not having 2 cars) and joining a car club? Would it change their behaviour? What would be the incentives and disincentives?

What could make it more appealing? (what if car club cars got charged a lower rate under road user charging?)

Group 5 and Group 6: Eating and Food

****MODERATORS SHOULD ALWAYS REFER BACK TO ASPIRATIONS FROM EVENING SESSION THROUGHOUT, AND ALWAYS EXPLORE INFLUENCE OF IDEAS ON BEHAVIOUR****

Explore awareness/perceptions on fish stock - do they believe that fish stocks are running out?

Who holds responsibility for stopping people buy fish products?
Government, business or up to consumers? [probe: Explore 'free' consumers vs. government/business 'editing?]

Test people's reaction to a complete ban on selling fish that are not from sustainable sources or are endangered? [note to moderators: In practice this might conceivably mean a ban on cod]

[Handout: Fish]

Explore reaction to MSC logo, (Would they look for it, would they know what it means, would they care?) Would it potentially impact upon behaviour?

Discuss variables

Explore general views towards labelling schemes on food/products (helpful or not, motivating or not?)

[Handout: School Dinners - 1]

Before handout is shown

Explore premise around influencing habits early

Explore relationship between parents/schools in terms of responsibility

After handout

Explore reactions - positive and negative (probe any references to cost, but do not prompt)

[Handout: School Dinners - 2]

Give out new handout with information around costs (examples)

Explore reaction:

Probe the issues of whether people think that more should be spent; and who should spend it

Would they as parents be prepared to pay up to 40p more per day per child, or should it be funded through taxation and govt/local govt?

Group 7 and Group 8: Holiday travel - flying

****MODERATORS SHOULD ALWAYS REFER BACK TO ASPIRATIONS FROM EVENING SESSION THROUGHOUT, AND ALWAYS EXPLORE INFLUENCE OF IDEAS ON BEHAVIOUR****

[Handout: Demand Management]

What do people think? Good/bad things? Appealing/unappealing?

Explore views around fairness - and whether it would change behaviour (push back on aspirations)

After discussion has gone on for a while, raise the fact that currently aviation fuel is not taxed (whereas fuel for trains and cars is) - and explore reaction

Explore reaction to hypothecation - if any additional taxes and charges on flying were hypothecated (revenue goes to a specific area) to something in particular, such as subsidising train travel?

[Handout: Carbon offsetting]

What do people think? Good/bad things? Appealing/unappealing?

Explore preparedness around paying

What about if it was automatically assumed that you wanted to offset unless you explicitly opt-out? (So that it is assumed that you will pay the offset unless you tick a box saying not to)

Is this legitimate? Fair? Would it make you more likely to take it up?

British Airways have just launched a carbon offset option on their flights, which you *opt-into* after you've chosen your flights but before you pay, just like hotels or insurance.

Would you be likely to tick the box or click the button and opt-in? Would you be more or less likely to actively opt-in than to passively not opt-out?

Group 9 and 10: Carbon use

****MODERATORS SHOULD ALWAYS REFER BACK TO ASPIRATIONS FROM EVENING SESSION THROUGHOUT, AND ALWAYS EXPLORE INFLUENCE OF IDEAS ON BEHAVIOUR****

[Handout: Carbon credits]

Explore reactions to the idea of carbon credits - good/bad things?
Appealing or unappealing? Fair or not fair?

[Handout: ESCOs]

What do people think about the component bits of the service - e.g. micro-generation or energy audits? Do they sound attractive or not?

Would the ability to pay back upfront costs of micro-generation/insulation over time be desirable enough to be an incentive to buy such products?

Or is the cost still offputting? How would people feel about being locked into longer contracts as a way of paying off these upfront costs over time? Would it be fair?

12:30-13:30

Lunch

13:30-14:15

Topic 2: Challenges and Suggestions

Same flow as Topic 1 session in the morning

Groups 1 and 2: Getting around

Groups 3 and 4: At home

Groups 5 and 6 Carbon use

Groups 7 and 8 Going away - travel

Group 9 and 10: Eating

14:15-14:30

Breather....

14:30-15:30

Topic 2: Responding to interventions

Same flow as Topic 1: Interventions

Groups 1 and 2: Getting around

Groups 3 and 4: At home

Groups 5 and 6 Carbon use

Groups 7 and 8 Going away - travel

Group 9 and 10: Eating

15:30-15:50

Coffee break

15:50-16:20

Best ideas

Final wrap up session

- Each group to pick out their favourite 2 ideas from the day and explain why
- Each group to decided upon the one thing that business, government and consumers should do to ensure a more sustainable world [avoid generalities, and go for specifics/tangibles]

16:20-17:00

Present back

Spokesperson from each group presents back their ideas, and their 'three things'

Q&A

Andrew Lee to respond

Thank and close

****POST FORUM QUESTIONNAIRES****

Appendix B: challenges

THE CHALLENGE: AT HOME

There are a number of problems with how we currently use energy in our homes.

- Using electricity (produced by burning gas, oil or coal in power stations), gas and other fuels to heat and light our homes and to cook with and power appliances, creates carbon dioxide, a gas which contributes to climate change.
- According to Government figures, households are responsible for over a quarter (27%) of UK carbon dioxide emissions.
- Household emissions fell by 1% in 2003 but were still 13% higher than in 1990, and it is expected that they will rise.

There are also problems arising from the waste we produce and throw away in our homes.

- The Environment Agency reports that we produce 30 million tonnes of waste in our homes every year. This is the equivalent of 3 ½ million double-decker buses, a queue of which would stretch from London to Sydney in Australia and back.
- On average, each person in the UK throws away seven times their body weight (about 500kg) in rubbish every year.
- Most of the UK's waste currently ends up in landfill sites, large holes in the ground which, over time, are filled up with rubbish. The space available to create new landfill sites is now almost all used up, so we are going to have to think about something else to do with our waste.
- One of the main alternatives to landfill is incineration: burning waste. This is often used to make energy, for example to heat nearby homes and offices, but it also results in valuable resources going up in smoke. In the same way that people don't like living near landfill sites they also don't like living near to incinerators.

We can cut down the amount of waste we produce by:

- Reducing the amount of 'stuff' we have to throw away in the first place
- Reusing 'waste' items again or for new purposes
- Recycling and composting the waste that we do produce
- Throwing things away is a waste of the resources and energy which have been used to make the product. Many of those resources will eventually run out.
- Recycling also uses less energy than making things from scratch. For example, making aluminium cans from old ones uses only one twentieth of the energy needed to make them from raw materials. Every can made from recycled aluminium saves enough energy to power a TV for 3 hours.

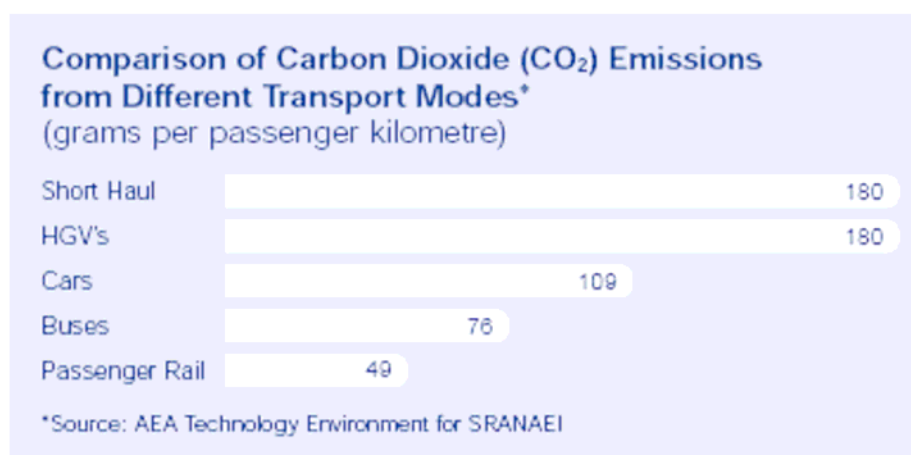
THE CHALLENGE: GETTING AROUND

There are a number of problems with how we currently travel: to work or school, to see friends, shop or for leisure.

- Traffic is partly responsible for local air pollution. In 1997, the Department of Health advised that *'air pollution is at present responsible each year for several thousand advanced deaths; for ten to twenty thousand hospital admissions, and for many thousands of instances of illness, reduced activity, distress and discomfort'*.
- The ways in which we get around also produce congestion. As well as being frustrating - and the CBI estimates the cost to business at £20 billion per year.

For the purposes of today's discussions, we are particularly concerned about transport's impacts on the environment.

- The Government says that in 2003 transport was responsible for 29% of carbon dioxide emissions (responsible for climate change) - 8% higher than in 1990.
- Different types of transport produce different amounts of carbon dioxide:



- Although on average cars produce more CO₂ than buses or trains, different types of car produce more or less:

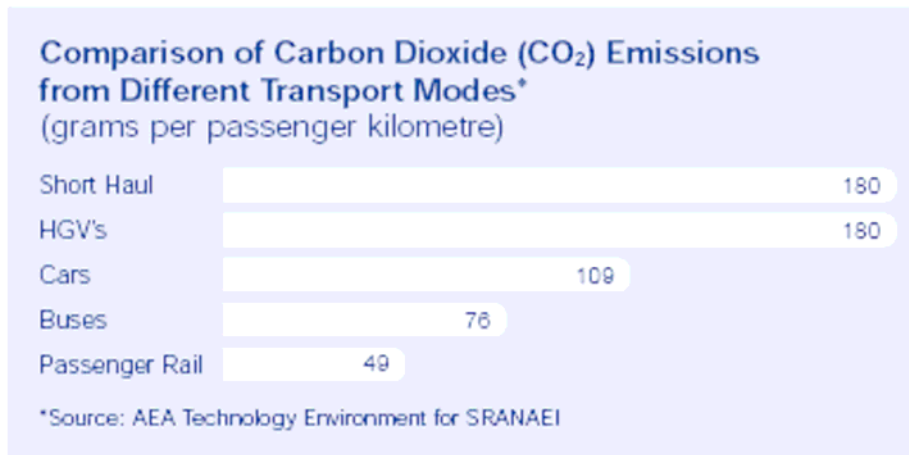
Lowest CO₂ emitting models in each market segment in the UK in 2004

Segment	Model	Fuel	CO ₂ g/km	Seg ave	Difference
Mini	Smart Fortwo	Petrol	113	136	-17%
Supermini	Citroen C2	Diesel	107	147	-27%
Lower medium	Honda Civic	Petrol/Electric	116	162	-28%
Upper medium	Toyota Prius	Petrol/Electric	104	176	-41%
Executive	Audi A6	Diesel	151	209	-28%
Luxury saloon	Mercedes S320	Diesel	204	286	-29%
Sports	Honda Insight (Vauxhall Tigra)	Petrol/Electric (Petrol)	80 (146)	232	-66% (-37%)
4x4	Toyota Rav4	Petrol	175	244	-28%
MPV	Fiat Doblo	Diesel	147	192	-23%

THE CHALLENGE: HOLIDAY TRAVEL - FLYING

There is a key problem with how our current demand for flights.

- Compared with other methods of transport, flying produces a very large amount of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide, that leads to climate change, for each kilometre that a passenger travels:



- This currently does not add up to a very big proportion of CO₂ emissions, but without further policy measures the Government expects that it will grow rapidly:

Aviation as a percentage of total UK CO₂ emissions

1990	2.7
2000	5.5
2010	7.6
2020	11.5
2030	15.3
2040	18.3
2050	21.2

- The government currently intends to expand aviation capacity and increase the number of flights substantially.

- Aircraft engines are only expected to become around 2% more efficient each year and planes are in service for a long time so changes affect the whole fleet only slowly. There are no alternative fuels likely to reduce emissions in the near or even medium term.
- Trains produce considerably lower emissions and in theory electric trains could be powered by electricity made from renewable energy sources such as solar panels or wind turbines, resulting in even lower (or even no) emissions.
- Particularly for short haul flights within the UK and the closest parts of mainland Europe, flying emits a huge amount more CO₂ compared with a train journey to the same destination. For example, London-Leeds by train produces 37.6g of CO₂ per passenger km; the same journey by plane results in 355g per passenger km.

THE CHALLENGE: FOOD AND EATING

There are a number of problems with how we currently consume food:

- Food ultimately contributes to at least 22% of UK carbon dioxide emissions (responsible for climate change). Some of this comes from the petrol and other fuels used in transporting food around the country - and into the UK from overseas.
- BBC research this year found that a third of the food in the UK goes to waste.
- Food production consumes a very large amount of water through irrigation and the fertilisers used pollute rivers.
- Our increasing reliance on processed foods and fast food is leading to concerns around obesity, particularly with children.

3 key problems:

- Meat and dairy products

One recent important study for the EU suggested that meat and dairy are responsible for 17% of EU carbon dioxide emissions.

Meat production takes up a huge amount of water: 100,000l of water to produce 1 kg of beef, compared to 900l per kg of wheat.

In the EU today we eat around one and half times the amount of meat that we did 40 years ago.

- The way food is distributed causes a lot of problems

The distance food travels to us can be thought about in terms of 'food miles' - and some food is transported a long way to us. For instance, some things simply can't be produced in the UK e.g. bananas, coffee, so they have to travel a long way.

But we also eat a lot of food that could be produced locally, but isn't. So we end up eating lettuce from Spain rather than a few miles away.

And we also eat a lot of food 'out of season' - we eat strawberries in January which means they have to be flown in from other parts of the world.

All the transport that this involves - trains, trucks, and particularly aeroplanes - produce a lot of carbon dioxide, contributing to global warming.

- There are particular issues with our over-use of fish. According to the UN, 52% of fish stocks are fully exploited, which means that they are being fished at their maximum biological capacity. 24% are over exploited, depleted or recovering from depletion. 21% are moderately exploited. Only 3% of the world's fish stocks are under-exploited. If fish stocks are over-exploited they eventually run out.

Appendix C: interventions

At home

Banding Council Tax

Many homes in the UK lose a lot of heat, through roofs, walls and windows. Insulation, in walls, lofts or in the form of double-glazing can considerably reduce the amount of heat that is lost. A well-insulated home needs less electricity or gas to heat it - it is 'energy-efficient' and reduces the cost of your utility bills.

There has been talk of linking the energy-efficiency of your home to council tax.

For instance, Essex home-owners in Braintree have received £100 off their council tax bill in the year that they install cavity wall insulation. They also receive a free Energy Audit and energy saving light bulbs, worth over £20.

<u>Sums: how does it work out for the home owners?</u>	£
Cost of installing cavity wall insulation:	175
Free energy audit and energy saving lightbulbs:	20
Amount saved on energy bill because house is energy efficient:	90
Amount saved on council tax bill:	100
Total Amount saved in first year:	35
Amount saved over 5 years:	395

Taking it further...

The Government is introducing Home Information Packs, which will have to be given to home-buyers when you sell your house. These will include an energy-efficiency rating for the house.

This rating could be used to give permanent council tax deductions to energy-efficient households - or give houses with a low rating a higher council tax bill.

Variable Waste Charging

Currently, council tax includes a fixed charge for waste disposal. A variable waste charging scheme would get rid of this fixed charge and make people 'pay as they throw'. There are a number of ways of doing this:

Ontario Bag Tags

Residents in Ontario, Canada buy 'bag tags', which are attached to all their bin bags before they are collected (there is a limit on how big the bags can be). Each bag tag costs between 50p and £1.

Some areas in Canada provide their residents with 52 free tags, to make people aware of how much waste they create.

Frequency based schemes

Residents in France choose how often their waste is collected and are charged accordingly. For a 120ltr bin, they are charged £51 for 39 collections and £1.50 for each additional collection. A standard UK wheelie bin has a capacity of 240ltrs.

Weight based schemes

During a pilot in Austin, Texas, bin lorries were fitted with weighing scales, which logged the weight of each house's waste and sent them the appropriate bill.

Volume based schemes

Each house in Seattle in the US picks a bin size and is charged accordingly. Sizes range from 'mini-bins' (30 litres) to larger containers (240 litres)

Content-based schemes

Citizens in Denmark are charged twice as much for 'grey' waste (rubbish that needs to go to the incinerator) as they are for 'green' waste (rubbish that is natural, or bio-degradable).

With all these programmes, recycling and composting are free and are made easier to do.

Recycling Lottery

In Norway there is a scheme to encourage Norwegians to recycle their drinks cartons - a form of packaging widely used there.

How it works...

- You flatten six cartons and fit them inside a 7th empty carton.
- You write your name and phone number on the outside of the 7th carton
- You put your cartons out for recycling along with your glass, tins and paper or take them to a recycling bank
- The names and numbers are entered into a prize draw
- Every quarter, one winner receives £14,000 and 20 runners-up receive £1,400

In the UK we use fewer drinks cartons, but we could apply the same idea to other types of waste material - such as batteries. Or it could be based on recycling as a whole, for example by writing your name on a tag on your recycling box, bin or bag.

Getting around

UCar labelling

New cars in the showroom are now labelled from A to F, depending on how much carbon dioxide (responsible for climate change) they produce. This is similar to the labels you may have seen on fridges and washing machines.

The more carbon dioxide they produce, the more road tax the owners will be charged. This became law this year.

Road Tax Calculator

Band	CO2 Emissions figure (g/km)	Petrol Car	Diesel Car	Alternative Fuel Car
A	up to 100	£65	£75	£55
B	101 to 120	£75	£85	£65
C	121-150	£105	£115	£95
D	151-165	£125	£135	£115
E	166-185	£150	£160	£140
F	Greater than 185	£165	£170	£160

Labelling: Taking it further...

Another suggestion is to raise the 'minimum standard' on Carbon Dioxide emissions and ban all cars in Class E and Class F. Examples of cars that would be banned as a result of such action include:

- VW Golf GTI (190 - 194 g/km)
- The new beetle (170 g/km)
- Ford Focus 2.5 (224 g/km)
- Bentley Continental GT (410 g/km)

However, these cars would still be permitted

- Ford Focus 1.6 (160 g/km)
- Peugeot 206cc (165 g/km)

Road User Charging

The Government is considering moving towards a scheme of road user charging.

It is estimated that a road pricing scheme could achieve a 40% reduction in congestion.

Road pricing works on a 'pay as you drive' concept. The driver gets charged a certain amount per mile driven.

The charges might be variable. So for example, you might pay more for driving on roads that get particularly congested (so rural roads might be very cheap, but clogged urban ones would be relatively more expensive), or you might pay a higher rate if you're driving a car which has higher emissions (so an F rated car always pays more per mile than an A rated one).

In addition, one possibility is that the tax burden might be lifted by scrapping the £65-£165 annual road tax. Instead people would pay for using their cars, a bit like moving from a contract mobile phone to a pay-as-you-go.

Car Clubs

There are a number of car clubs operating across the UK and in other countries. Instead of owning a car yourself, you join a car club, which owns a pool of cars in your local area. You can then book the car over the phone or web for slots from 15 minutes to 15 days or longer. The costs are generally lower than owning a car yourself. Car club membership means that you can walk, cycle or take public transport for some journeys, but still have access to a car when you need it.

This is how it works:

- A car is booked through a 24hr central office using the telephone or internet.
- Cars are located at designated parking bays less than 10 minutes walk from where you live or work.
- Keys are either kept at a nearby safe or in the car, which is accessed using a smart card.
- Drivers pay a monthly fee and are billed for hours hired and miles driven.
- Servicing and maintenance are taken care of for you.

One benefit of the car club is the choice of vehicles available. You can use a hatchback for city trips, an estate for removals, or a people carrier for outings with the family. Many clubs use cars less than a year old and have full breakdown cover.

Often, car club members pay lower fixed costs than car owners: the annual membership typically costs less than a tax disc. There are usually low-user membership fees for those doing only one or two trips a month. After that, you pay as you drive.

Research has shown that one car club car replaces between four and five privately owned vehicles, and members make significant changes to their travel behaviour.

Here are the costs from the Edinburgh car club

Tariffs		
Fixed Costs	Usage Rates* - dependent on vehicle	
Membership	Per hour#	per mile
£15/month		
£12 /month for members of affinity groups	from £2.80 - £3 / hour	17p - 18p / mile

* includes fuel, comprehensive insurance and VAT

no hourly charges at night (11.30pm to 7.30am) on bookings over three hours

Food and drink

Thinking about fish

The Marine Stewardship Council has an environmental standard to which fisheries can be certified as well-managed and sustainable. Products, (for example, fish fingers), from fisheries which meet the standard, can display a logo or 'eco-label' on the packaging:



Customer Licence Code
MSCI0251

www.msc.org

You may have seen it in the shops or in restaurants - there are over 280 MSC-labelled products lines in 24 countries. However, there are only 12 certified fisheries which have achieved certification, making up 4% of the world's marine wild fish supply.

School dinners

If we can change what school kids eat, we can change how future generations think about food and diet.

A more sustainable diet, which meets key nutritional standards for school meals, could include:

- More locally-sourced produce, and greater seasonality in menus
- Less, but better quality meat
- Moving away from serving white fish (such as cod and haddock), and moving towards serving oily fish (such as salmon or mackerel). And meeting but not exceeding the nutritional advice that oily fish is served at least once every three weeks.

School dinners (2)

Jamie Oliver's television programmes showed that in some schools the amount spent on school dinner ingredients is as low as 35p per meal.

The government has announced that it will provide extra funding to ensure spending on ingredients is boosted to 50p in primary schools and 60p in secondary schools.

Meeting strong, independently-agreed nutritional standards for healthy school meals is expected to require a spend of 70p on ingredients in primary schools and 80p in secondary schools.

In addition, preparing meals from fresh ingredients may require more money to fund kitchen equipment and more staff time. This cost might work out at around another 20p per meal.

Some schools have demonstrated that creating meals which are 'sustainable' as well as healthy need not cost any more than this additional 20-40p spend. Serving meat less often - but from, for example, organic suppliers; sourcing from local producers; and buying fruit and vegetables in season, are ways of keeping costs down.

School	Spend on Ingredients (p)	Cost of Meal (£)	Uptake (%)
All Saints Primary School, Ilkely	70	1.60	79
Lethbridge Primary School, Wiltshire	80	2.00	60?
Mornington Primary School, Notts	85	1.59	65
Southdown Infants School, Bath	75	1.50	80
St Peters School, Notts	70	1.75	83
East Ayrshire (11 schools in FFL pilot)	75	1.48	68
Thomas Fairchild Community School, Hackney	67	1.60	90 tbc

Getting away

Making flights cost more

One of way of reducing the environmental impact of travel is to discourage people from taking so many flights, particularly within the UK and the nearer parts of Europe, where trains are a possible alternative.

This might be done by increasing the costs of flying.

This could be done by:

- Not building any more runways, or any further capacity at UK airports: restricting the number of flights in this way is likely to push up prices in the long run.
- Adding additional tax onto flights, either by taxing fuel or adding an 'emissions charge', based on how much carbon dioxide (responsible for climate change) the flight produces.

Carbon Offsetting

When you fly, the fuel burned in the engines produces carbon dioxide (responsible for climate change). Carbon offsetting is the idea that if you *do* take a flight you can pay a certain amount of money to projects that will prevent an equivalent amount of carbon dioxide emissions being produced somewhere else.

For instance, a return flight from Manchester to New York produces 1.22 tonnes of carbon dioxide per person. If you pay to 'offset' these emissions, a company might use your money to produce renewable energy technologies or energy-efficient products. These reduce the amount of energy that is needed from fossil fuels and so prevent tonnes of carbon dioxide being released elsewhere.

For example, the company ClimateCare invests in stoves for Indian schools that run on crop waste rather than gas.



Carbon offsetting doesn't actively *reduce* climate change, but it can help us all to avoid making it worse.

It might add £5-£10 to a return Manchester-Paris flight, £30-£50 to the cost of a Manchester-Sydney flight.

Carbon budgeting

Carbon credits

Imagine that, as well as having a certain amount of money to spend each year, you only had a certain number of 'carbon credits' to spend.

Each time you bought fuel - such as petrol, gas or electricity - you would have to hand over a 'carbon card' which carries details about how many credits you have left for the year. Each gallon of petrol or each unit of electricity would be worth a certain number of credits. Flights might also be worth a certain number of credits too.

If you ran out of credits you would have to buy more from someone who had 'underspent'. If, on the other hand, you had plenty of credits to spare because you didn't use much fuel or electricity, you could make money by selling your carbon credits to other people.

Energy Services Companies (ESCOs)

Rather than simply providing energy, an ESCO ensures that it is supplied as *efficiently* as possible. So they might provide electricity, but also fit and maintain a mini wind turbine on your home to generate some of your electricity, perform an 'energy audit' on your home and fit energy-saving products like loft insulation.

By having a longer-term contract with an ESCO, you could pay back the (sometimes high) upfront costs of measures like insulation or a mini wind turbine, as part of your bill over a number of years. (But it would be more difficult to switch suppliers.)

Mini Wind Turbine - an example

A mini wind turbine can be fitted to your house to generate some of your electricity 'on site'. Turbines can have a life of up to 20 years but require service checks every few years to ensure they work efficiently.

British Gas will soon be launching a mini wind turbine that is expected to cost £1500 fully fitted. The turbine might nearly halve your electricity bill, perhaps saving £150 per year. So after 10-15 years you have saved the cost of the turbine in cheaper bills. After that you continue to enjoy half-price bills.

If you bought the turbine as part of a 10-year contract with an ESCO you could spread the upfront costs of £1500 over several years, and pay them back through your electricity bill.