
Sustainable Development and Waste Planning

The Underlying Issues

The concept of "Sustainable Development" formed a cornerstone of the framework agreement reached at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

Sustainable development has been defined by the World Commission on the Environment, 1987 (the Brundtland Report) as being: "Development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations to meet their own needs" (1).

It encompasses two key objectives for modern society:

- Economic development to secure higher standards of living
- Protection and enhancement of the environment

This clearly links the quality of life to both economic and environmental factors and implies that both aspects require equal attention in the decision making process.

A European Council declaration on the environment made in Dublin 1990 stated "the Community must use more effectively its position of moral, economic and political authority to advance international efforts to solve global problems and promote sustainable development...". This has subsequently been reaffirmed in UK (2) (3) (4) and EC policies (5) that re-emphasise the commitment to enhance economically driven resource conservation and management by long term, active intervention. The main aims of such intervention are to protect resources and reduce their rate of depletion while sustaining economic growth. Waste management is targeted in these policies as a key priority for future action to promote more sustainable practices.

1. The World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) Our Common Future. Oxford University Press
2. A better quality of life: a strategy for sustainable development for the UK (1999). Cm4345.
3. Sustainable Development the UK Strategy HMSO London 1994
4. This Common Inheritance Britains Environmental Strategy. HMSO London 1992
5. Council Communication COM(92)33 Final Vol III - Towards Sustainability A European Community Programme of Policy and Action in Relation to the Environment and Sustainable Development.