

Building sustainable communities- project ideas

What does it mean?

Sustainable communities are places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. They are safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run, and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all.

Sustainable communities are:

- Active, inclusive and safe
- Well run
- Environmentally sensitive
- Well designed and built
- Well connected
- Thriving
- Well served
- Fair for everyone

Sustainable communities embody the principles of sustainable development. They:

- Balance and integrate the social, economic and environmental components of their community
- Meet the needs of existing and future generations
- Respect the needs of other communities in the wider region or internationally also to make their communities sustainable

Sustainable communities are diverse, reflecting their local circumstances. There is no standard template to fit them all.

Source: Department for Communities and Local Government

This page text, more details and a full reference can be found in the document '[What is a Sustainable Community?](#)'.

Key questions:

How does our curriculum making in geography lead to understanding and challenge of this framework?

What skills are developed in our teaching and learning to enable young people to engage with their communities?

Project Inspiration

Led by the Academy of Urbanism, the Urbanism Awards are their primary means of developing a strong evidence base for high quality, innovative and sustainable urbanism. The Awards process seeks to identify and recognise the best, most enduring or most improved urban environments at various levels of scale and to understand better the processes by which they are nurtured, used and enjoyed.

- The European City of the Year
- The Great Town - an urban settlement that is smaller than a city (including market towns and villages)
- The Great Neighbourhood - a recognisable part of a town or city
- The Great Street - a public road, way or thoroughfare.
- The Great Place - a public space, e.g. square, park, promenade, etc.

Urbanism Manifesto

The Academy's manifesto asserts [eighteen principles of urbanism](#). Can you identify evidence of the principles in your own community?

It might help to use [the Academy of Urbanism's criteria](#): How does this emphasis compare with the eight components of sustainable communities above? The current holders of the Urbanism Awards are cited with a response for each from Ian McMillan, Poet-in-residence. These could be used as inspiration for learners to generate a written expression about their own perceptions of this place or an aspect of their own communities.

What does the list of nominated and winning places suggest to you about the places themselves? Read more about the nominated locations using the Academy's publication [Space, Place, Life](#).

How do geographical skills lead to engagement?

The Egan Review (2004) called *Skills for Sustainable Communities*, 'looked at the skills and training required by professionals, planning authorities and developers and how they can work together in achieving measurable improvements to the communities they serve. It also considered how any skills gap can best be bridged.'

The review identified these generic skills:

- Inclusive visioning
- Project management
- Leadership in sustainable communities
- Breakthrough thinking
- Making it happen
- Stakeholder management
- Analysis - evaluation
- Communication
- Conflict resolution

The Egan Review, generic skills in more detail and the full reference are contained in the document [Definitions of Generic Skills](#). It also suggests some ideas of geographers' valued skill development for your consideration.

It is interesting to compare the list above with the proposed QCA 11-19 framework of personal, learning and thinking skills:

- Self-managers
- Team workers
- Reflective learners
- Creative thinkers
- Independent enquirers
- Effective participators

How do we most effectively plan for progression in geographical skills?

How do we ensure skills development is based on children's experience and geographical imaginations?

What are the learning opportunities for participation in local communities?

Westminster Education Forum

Angus Willson, who leads the Building Sustainable Communities project, attended the Westminster Education Forum event looking at '14-19 Preparing for Implementation'. His 'comment' contribution to the publication that followed is a strong statement in support of geography in the new curriculum arrangements. Read his contribution [here](#).

Living geography

Living Geography is how the GA is working to 'brand' a fresh approach to school geography. It captures geography which:

- Is current and future oriented
- Is local but set in wider (global) contexts
- Investigates change processes
- Evaluates change

Google Maps

View this [Google Map](#) to see different locations embraced by the Living Geography approach. The realities of how we choose to live have formed young people's experience before they start school. As they become more independent in their local community their actions determine these decisions. Learning in geography helps make sense of it all and provides the skills to take an active part. This leads to effective roles in their community, as individuals and through work.

Participation

This relates to [Every Child Matters](#) and, consequently, the OFSTED Self-evaluation Framework.

How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?

How well do learners develop skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?

For a more complete consideration see the online CPD Unit ['Places People Want' >>>](#)

Sounding board

The Sounding Board had a role in providing challenge and stimulation to the project and, therefore, related to qualitative outcomes. It kept the school curriculum focus in touch with academic and practitioner developments.

Members:

Alun Morgan - Institute of Education, University of London

Amanda Lane - Academy for Sustainable Development

Angus Willson - Project Leader

Catherine Williamson - Architecture Centre Network

Diane Swift - Geographical Association

Jeff Serf - Wolverhampton University

Maggie Smith - Open University

Peter Wright - Birmingham City Council and Royal Town Planning Institute

Roger Sutcliffe - consultant, project evaluator

Scott Sinclair - Tide~ Centre, Birmingham

Mike Raco - Kings College London

Project Evaluator

A Building Sustainable Communities Evaluator reviewed the project process and outcomes. The project activities all focused on the ASC objectives to:

- Raise awareness among young people of what contributes to a sustainable community
- Encourage young people to take an interest in and engage with their local communities
- Promote careers opportunities in 'Sustainable Communities' professions

The role of the Sounding Board, and the evaluator specifically, was to support the means of generating evidence from the teaching and learning to demonstrate achievement towards these objectives.

The project activities were:

1. Teacher-researcher groups
2. CPD events
3. Sounding Board
4. Website and further dissemination

The evaluator was asked to focus on five major areas:

1. How far did each project activity achieve its purposes in contributing towards the ASC objectives?
2. How did the project enhance geography teachers' capacity to make a contribution towards their curriculum change and to share it with others?
3. How did the project enhance the work of the GA and ASC nationally and in specific locations?
4. What lessons could be learnt from the initial phase of the project?
5. What were the generic lessons for future collaborative projects?

Useful documents

Teacher Guides:

Symmons, Gillian (2005) **Getting out there: Geography and Citizenship local safari guide**, London: Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment [Download](#)

Adams, Eileen (2006) **Getting out there: Art and design local safari guide**, London: Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment
[Download](#)

CABE (2006) **How places work: Teachers Guide**, London: Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment
[Download](#)

RTPI (2004) **Education for Sustainable Development: a manual for schools**, London: The Royal Town Planning Institute
[Download](#)

CABE (undated) **Making Places: careers which shape our cities, towns and villages**, London: Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment
[Download](#)

Government Sources:

The Egan Review (2004) *Skills for Sustainable Communities* can be purchased or downloaded from this [webpage](#).